

History of census in India

Census:

A population Census is the process of collecting, assembling, analyzing and Distributing demographic, social, cultural and financial data relating to all persons in the country, at a specific time in ten years interval. The initial literature 'Rig Veda' reveals that some kind of Population count was maintained during 800-600 BC. Kautilya's Arthashastra, written around 321-296 BC, laid stress on Census taking as a measure of State policy for resolution of taxes. During the regime of Mughal king Akbar the Great, the administrative report 'Ain-e- Akbari' included broad data pertaining to population, industry, wealth and many other characteristics. In earliest Rome, too, census was conducted for purpose of taxation. Showing 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 cause for planners, research scholars, bureaucrats 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 history of Indian Census can be separated in two portions i.e. Pre Independence period and Post-Independence period.

Pre Independence history:

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 extension , based on this organization 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 accompanied in 1830 by Henry Walter in Dacca. In this Census the statistics of Population with sexual category and wide age group and also the houses with their comforts 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 journal stock taking of people was invested in Madras which was continued till the imposing census was ordered. These returns were taken during the official years 1851-52, 1856-57, 1861-62 and 1866-67 correspondingly. 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 combined in the imposing census of 1871. The Home Government of Government of India had looked-for, under Statistical Dispatch No.2 of July 23, 1856, that a general census of population might be taken in 1861, which was deferred in 1859 due to the rebellions. 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, 1866 in central provinces and in 1867 in Berar. The Census in Punjab area was taken in January 1855 and 1868 correspondingly. The Census of *Oudh* was taken in 1869. In the cities of Madras, Bombay and Calcutta census was taken in 1863, 1864 and 1866 correspondingly. A trial census of minor provinces of Bengal was prepared in 1869, which was finalized by H. Beverley, Administrator General. In 1865 the Government of India and Home Government had decided upon the principal that a general population census would be taken in 1871. In the year 1866-67 census was assumed by the actual including 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 well-ordered by the British. In this Census a House Register was campaigned with 17 questions. The statistics collected pertains to name, age, religion, caste or class, competition or nationality, attending school /college and able to read and write. These common questions were asked independently from males and females. A question on profession was campaigned for males only.

The **Census of 1881** which was undertaken on 17th February, 1881 by W.C. Plowden, Census Administrator of India was a great step towards a modern synchronous census. Since then, censuses have been undertaken successively once every ten years. In this Census, prominence was laid not only on complete attention but also on cataloguing 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 joining with the Government of India. However it did not comprises French and Portuguese colonial properties. However, a census of Portuguese colonial territories 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 campaigning same questions for males and females separately dropped. New question on marital status, mother tongue, place of birth and frailties 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 determined and in other cases evidence on Sect was obtained.

The second census was conducted from **26th February, 1891** almost on the pattern of 1881 census. In this Census, labors were made for hundred percent coverage and Upper part of present Burma, Kashmir and Sikkim were also included. Through 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 Maternal Tongue was achieved. The third incessant 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 managed by the Government of India and mediatized Native states were covered with the exception of a few thinly populated and unadministered areas on the confines of Burma and Assam. The census Schedule canvassed in this census limited 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 determined. 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 Well-educated in English". **1921 Census**, the fifth census in its incessant series was started on 18th March, 1921. In this Census the whole of region 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 comprises the same questions like 1911 but they were campaigned with small alterations. The group of Christians which was asked in 1911 was dropped and information on caste, tribe or race was collected from all regardless 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 accorded with a civil defiance movement. The census Schedule of 1931 Census contains 18 questions in its place of 16 questions of 1921 census. The two new questions added were- a) Stipendiary 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 determined 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 invention of 1941 census was to use chance sample and every 50th slip was marked to list the rationality of a sample in census. In place of census Schedule, an Individual Slip was campaigned which contains 22 questions. The creation of questions was modified to the countless extent. Following were the new queries 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:

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