# SOCIAL STUDIES

## CHAPTER ON CENSUS OF INDIA

( FOR CLASS VIII )

**A census is a complete count of the population of a geographical unit, conducted at a regular interval by the Government of the area. Most countries follow the practice of taking a census once every ten years. India is one of them.**

### WHY IS THE CENSUS NECESSARY?

The census is essential to the functioning of a welfare state. Decisions regarding public welfare cannot be taken without knowing how many people are likely to be benefited or otherwise affected. This data comes from the census. Also, long term projects of all kinds need to know not only the present number of people living in a place but also the kind of people who live there, their lifestyle, and the likely growth in population. Such matters are part of the science of demography, and the answers to most demographic questions lie in the study of census data. Censuses are taken at fixed intervals- usually ten years to the day, in some countries once every five years- so that it becomes easier to measure rates of change overtime, for example the growth rate of population, change in literacy rates, etc.

The functioning of a democracy is also dependent on the census. This is because any legislative body is based on a system of public representation. In India, the number of seats in the Legislative Assemblies of the States and the number of seats in Parliament, and the geographical extent of the respective constituencies, is decided on the basis of the population distribution as per the Census.

For your information the latest delimitation of assembly constituencies was based on the Census-2001 figures

### HOW THE CENSUS IS CARRIED OUT

The first modern census in India was conducted in 1872; the first comprehensive one, in 1881. Since then, the Census of India has taken place very ten years in an unbroken chain. The last one took place in 2001, and the next one is to be taken in 2011which will be fifteenth in its continuous series.

The Census of India is a massive exercise, as is only to be expected with such a huge population and large geographical diversities. It is conducted by enumerators – persons who do the work of counting – who go from house to house over a period of three weeks in February. The reference date for the Census – that is the date for which the population is counted – is 1st March of every census year. The enumerators visit every house in the area assigned to them once more in the first week of March, to confirm that there is no change in the number of people residing there since they has last visited. In 2011, about 2.5 million enumerators are likely to be deployed!

To make sure that each and every house is covered, a prior exercise called Houselisting is carried out several months before the actual population count in February. Houselisting for the 2011 Census has already taken place all over the country in April-September, 2010. For this purpose also, enumerators visited house to house, making a list of buildings in their assigned area, and drawing a map of the area too. During this process, information regarding the buildings, such as their use (residential or non-residential),material

regarding the buildings, such as their use (residential or non-residential), material of construction, availability of water, electricity and sanitation facilities, etc. is collected from the occupants. In 2010, some new questions such as use of Computer, mobile phones etc. were also asked during Houselisting.

Thus, the data collected in the Houselisting operation gives a clear and detailed picture about housing stock and availability of amenities.

During the exercise in February, which is called Population Enumeration, the enumerators ask many more questions which directly reflect the lifestyle and quality of life of the people. Apart from the number of persons residing in the household, their age and date of birth, there are questions on literacy and educational qualifications, occupation, number of children born to mothers, mother tongue, disability, and migration. Each of these questions addresses a planning concern for the Government.

The enumerators record the response from each household in a specially designed form. The respondent is reassured that any individual person's information collected during the census is completely confidential by law and his or her signature or thumbprint is taken on the form.

The forms are scanned and their information is processed by special software. The basic data is tabulated and published within a few months, though detailed reports which require more processing take a year or more to be published.

## CENSUS PUBLICATIONS AND HOW THEY CAN BE USED

Immediately after a census, there is keen interest in the major findings in the media and in the minds of common people. Everyone wants to know the current population, the growth rate of population since the last census, and if the overall picture for the country is one of a better standard of life.

Often, some trends show up through census data which may have gone unnoticed without it. For example, the 2001 census brought out the alarming fall in the sex ratio in several states, which is dealt with in greater detail below. On the other hand, the substantial improvement in literacy over the decade 1991-2001 showed that the Government's efforts in that direction had indeed made a difference.

A good deal of census data is freely available on the Census of India website, *http://censusindia.gov.in.* More detailed tables can be purchased on CD at a nominal price.

Many reports are also published in print. The most important Census publication is the Primary Census Abstract, which gives the basic demographic information about a geographical unit based on the data of the latest Census. PCAs are published for the entire country, then for each State and Union Territory, then for each district, town, and village. Another important publication is the District Census Handbook, which gives complete details about all amenities available in the District. Since these publications are available at the lowest levels of Government, it is possible to utilize them to make well informed planning decisions at the grassroots level.

Since these reports are also available in to the general public, anyone can study the data and evaluate if the Government agencies are making appropriate decisions or not. This becomes a powerful tool for allowing the public to participate in democratic decision making.

## ANALYSING CENSUS DATA

(Illustration: See Data Sheet and State Map)

## Growth Rate of Population

> Know This
> The population Between 1911-21 declined due to impact of first world war, epidemics of Plague and famine

The census conducted so far reveals that population of the country has increased in each decade, except 1911-21, when it had declined slightly. As per the 1901 Census, the population of India was 238 million which rose to 1029 million in 2001 census. This is a four-fold increase! No wonder it is known as the Population Explosion. The pace of growth between two successive censuses has shown a declining trend after 1971. The growth of population between 1981-1991 was 23.87 per cent but between 1991-2001 the growth of population has declined to 21.54 percent.

## Density of Population

The geographical area of the country is fixed, and as seen from the above, the population has increased by over four times in a century. As a result, the concentration of population in any particular area has increased by the same ratio. This is known as the Density of Population, which is measured in terms of number of persons residing per square kilometer area:

$$\text{Density of Population} = \frac{\text{Total Population}}{\text{Area in Square Kilometer}}$$

The density of population of India rose from 77 in 1901 to 325 in 2001. The persons living in per square kilometer has increased by 21 persons in 2001 as compared to 1991. It is easy to see how this manifold increase in density has placed pressure on natural resources and public amenities.

## Urbanization

The tendency for cities and towns to keep growing in number and population, thus slowly converting more and more areas and people from rural to urban, is called urbanization. The population density in any urban area is always far higher than in the rural areas. As per Census 2001, the Rural population of India was 743 million, and the urban population was 286 million. The density in urban areas was 3,657 persons per square kilometer, compared to rural, where it was only 247 per square kilometer.

## Literacy Rate

The literacy rate in India was only 5.35 percent in 1901 which rose to 64.38 percent in 2001. The literacy rate for males was 75.3% and for female 53.7%. Though there is still a sharp gap in male and female literacy rate, it is encouraging to note that the decadal growth in literacy rate of females is more than the males. Amongst the States, the highest literacy rate of 90.9 was recorded in Kerala, and the lowest 47.0 was recorded in Bihar.

## Sex Ratio

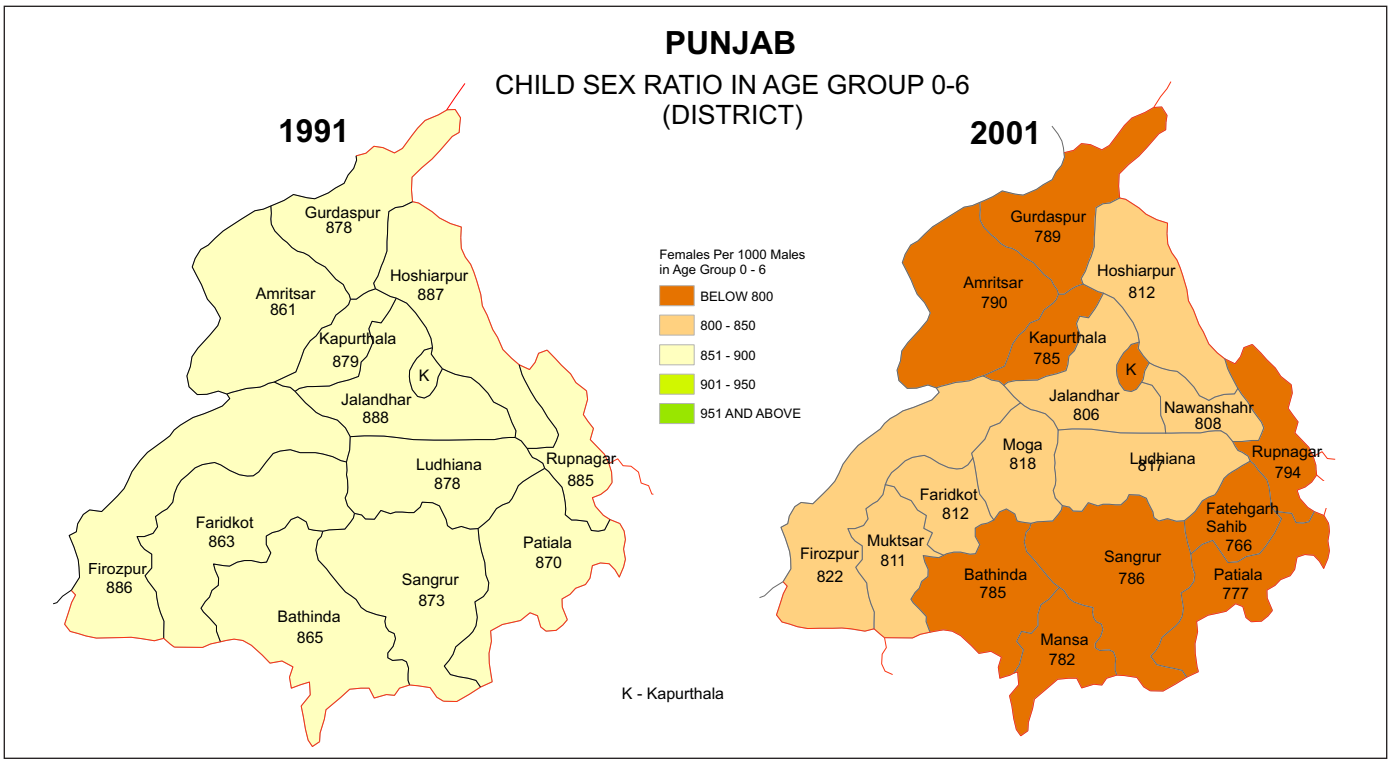
The sex ratio is defined as the number of females per 1000 males. It has been scientifically established that females have a natural tendency to live longer than men- thus favouring the number of females. On the other hand, the normal sex ratio at birth, i.e. total number of girls born to total number of boys born, all over the world is estimated to be 952 girls for every 1000 boys- thus favouring the number of males. In an equitable society, it is expected that these two trends would even out and the overall ratio would be quite close to 1:1.

However, the sex ratio in India has been steadily falling; though it was 972 in 1901, it fell to 927 in 1991, and in 2001 it was 933 per 1000. The child sex ratio that is the ratio of children from age 0-6 years, was 927 per 1000. In several districts, the ratio was less than 800 per 1000! What can this mean? No natural

phenomenon can explain such a low rate. In particular places, such as metro cities, the overall ratio could be affected by adult males leaving behind their families in the village and coming to the city to seek work. But no such explanation can hold for children from age 0-6.

The 1991 data had already shown alarming figures for the sex ratio. As a result, the PNDT Act was made into law in 1994, by which it became illegal for doctors to tell would-be parents the gender of an unborn child through any kind of test. However, the 2001 data showed that there was only marginal improvement in the country as a whole- 933 from 927, and, ironically, steep falls from 1991 to 2001 in several districts of Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Delhi- all economically forward states with higher-than-average incomes.

*(Illustration: Comparative maps for Punjab 1991 and 2001)*




This has been interpreted to mean two possible things, both of which could happen at the same time. First, a large number of girl children were not being allowed to be born, by finding out their gender through ultrasound tests and killing them before birth. Second, even if a girl child was born, she would not be looked after as well as a boy child, to the extent of being undernourished and neglected when she got ill, as a result of which a girl would be more likely to die than a boy. It is difficult to believe that such terrible things are happening around us in a fast developing, democratic country, but the Census figures prove that it is indeed true. It shows that economic prosperity, though very much necessary, is not sufficient without social advancement too.

## Exercises

1. How can Census data be utilized for proper distribution of public facilities?
2. When the census enumerator visits your house, how you can help him/her?
3. What were the reasons for the Population Explosion which took place in the last century.
4. The rising density of Population increases the demand on public facilities. This is especially true in urban areas. However, is there any advantage in having a high density in an urban area? Discuss.
5. What are the possible consequences of an abnormally low sex ratio for a state or country?