

The Relevance and Ramifications of Census

The Indian Census has a rich tradition and enjoys the reputation of being one of the best in the world. Census 2011 is the fifteenth in an unbroken series since 1872 and the seventh after independence. It is remarkable that the great historical tradition of conducting a Census has been maintained in spite of several adversities like wars, epidemics, natural calamities, political unrest, etc. Very few countries in the world can boast of such a distinction. Participation in the Census by the people of India is indeed a true reflection of the national spirit of unity in diversity.

India is a welfare State. Since independence, Five Year Plans, Annual Plans and various welfare schemes have been launched for the benefit of the common man. All these require information at the grass root level. Contrary to the general perception that the Census is merely a headcount of the people, it is a veritable treasure house of information on Demography, Economic Activity, Literacy & Education, Housing & Household Amenities, Urbanization, Fertility and Mortality, Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes, Language, Religion, Migration and a host of such information. It is the only source of primary data at village, town and ward level and provides valuable information for planning and formulation of policies, effective Public Administration and is widely used by National and International agencies, scholars, business people, industrialists, and many more.

India is known the world over as the world's largest and most vibrant Democracy. There is an intimate link between the democratic processes and the Census. Delimitation of Parliamentary, Assembly and local body Constituencies is done on the basis of Census data.

Given this background, participating in the Census is tantamount to participating in the Nation building process. Little wonder therefore that our Census is our future.

Historically speaking, there are references to Census in the Rig Veda (800-600 BC), the Arthashastra of Kautilya, the Ain-e-Akbari of the Mughal King Akbar etc. However the first systematic Census in India was conducted during the British Raj in 1872. Since then it has been systematically conducted in the country every decade. Census 2011 is the 15th since 1872 and the 7th since Independence.

Census 2011 is being conducted in two phases, namely i) Houselisting and Housing Census and ii) Population Enumeration. During the first phase of Census-Houselisting and Housing Census, the buildings, census houses and households were identified and systematically listed during the period April to September, 2010 in different States/Union territories. Apart from listing of houses, useful data on the amenities available to the households as well as the assets owned were collected.

This phase has been successfully completed all over the country except for a few villages in the State of West Bengal and Chhattisgarh.

The field work of the second phase i.e., Population Enumeration will be carried out from 9th February to 28th February 2011. A revision round will be carried out from 1st March to 5th March 2011.

One of the essential features of Population Enumeration is that each person is enumerated and her/his individual particulars are collected at a well-defined point of time. The point of time, referred to as the census moment and the reference date for the Census of India 2011 will be 00:00 hours of 1st March, 2011.

The work of enumeration will commence on 9th February, 2011 and completed by 28th February, 2011. During this period, around 240 million households will be visited and every person living in these households will be enumerated. On the night of 28th February, 2011 the Houseless population will be enumerated. Thereafter, in order to update the population with reference to the census moment, a re-visit will be conducted from 1st to 5th March, 2011 during which period updating of births and deaths would be done.

The Indian Census is often billed as the largest peacetime mobilisation in the world. Apart from the fact that India has the second largest population in the world, two facts stand out. Firstly, the Indian sub continent has a large land mass spanning 35 States/Union Territories, 640 Districts, 5767 Sub-Districts, 7742 Towns and 608,786 Villages. In all more than 240 million Households will be individually visited. Secondly, almost 2.7 million functionaries will be involved in conducting it. It is indeed remarkable that many countries in the world do not have a population of this size! Add to this, the complexities of canvassing the Census Schedule in 18 languages and the preparation of Instruction Manuals in 16 languages! Truly a mind boggling exercise.

The logistics involved are to say the least, complex. The first challenge was the designing of the questionnaire. The Questionnaire being used in Census 2011 has been specially designed with unique features like special quality paper (unique specifications had to be evolved for this purpose), bar coding, unique form numbering, special drop-out colours and pre printing of certain data fields. These Schedules (34 Crores in number), have been printed in high-end Presses having state of the art equipment to carry out digital variable printing with consistent quality (a pre-requisite for accurate image recognition). Other material like Instruction manuals, training materials (54 lakhs) etc were printed in Government and private presses all over the country.

The second challenge was the dispatch of material from the Presses to 17,000 distinct locations across the country. An accurate database of the exact quantity of forms in different languages, precise packing, labelling of the boxes, correct addressing, loading and transportation to the exact location have all been accomplished with precision.

The third challenge was the imparting of a uniform standard of training to the 2.7 million functionaries. For this purpose, an elaborate training cascade consisting of 90 Trainers at the National level, 725 Trainers at the State level, 54,000 trainers at the District level has been designed. Each of these levels have been equipped with specially designed training aids like Instruction Manuals, Training Guides, PowerPoint presentations, e-Learning Modules, Role Plays and Practice sheets. A unique collaboration between the Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, UN Organisations and Non- Governmental Organisations has seen this challenge being overcome successfully.

Realising that accurate Maps at all levels are a pre-requisite for accurate Census, 16 workstations have been set up across India with skilled manpower and the latest hardware and software for creating a digital geographic database upto the level of the village boundary. Detailed mapping of 33 Capital Cities using Satellite Imageries has also been taken up and completed. At present the Census organization has the largest repository of Maps according to the latest administrative jurisdiction. This gives it the distinction of being the largest thematic map producer in the country.

The next challenge is to devise an effective publicity campaign to enlist the cooperation of all sections of society. A strategy has been planned with Mass media, Public outreach and use of Digital media as the main pillars. The focus of the campaign is inclusion. Special focus has been trained on the inclusion of the elderly, infants, disabled and females. Besides this, attention is also focused on accurately capturing female work participation. Celebrity endorsements by Sachin Tendulkar, the world renowned cricketer and Priyanka Chopra a well known film personality are also a significant part of the publicity campaign. The effort is to reach out to every section of society.

The challenges have been arduous and the efforts unsparing. The proof of the pudding however, is as they say in the eating. It is the people of India that will ultimately make the Census 2011 a success. We are confident that the people will rise up to make this national task, the Census 2011 a resounding success.

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