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Overview on the 1991 Census: Continuity and Change

THE 1991 Census is the fifth decennial Census conducted after independence of India.

Barring Jammu & Kashmir, it was conducted in all States/Union Territories from February 9, 1991 to March 5, 1991 with the sunrise of March 1, 1991 as the reference moment. Of course, the Census was conducted non-synchronously in some snow-clad and inaccessible areas of Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. In Jammu & Kashmir a comprehensive mini-Census was conducted in 1986-87 in connection with an ethnic survey and data generated in this mini-Census are proposed to be utilised for making estimates and projections for 1991.

The preparatory work for the 1991 Census commenced in the middle of 1987. It gathered momentum in 1988. The Census directorates in 30 States/Union Territories started monitoring the changes in the administrative jurisdictions which had taken place after the 1981 Census and also started preparing the upto date list of villages in consultation with the State Governments/ Union Territories updating the district and tehsil/C.D. Block maps etc. The preparation for evolving the questionnaires/schedules for collection of data in the 1991 Census of India together with the corresponding concepts, definitions and procedures were considered and discussed in the first conference of data users. The data-users included experts from Central Ministries, State Government Departments, research institutions and universities etc. and the views expressed by them were taken into consideration. Besides consultation with the data users, an Advisory Committee on Technical issues connected with the 1991 Census deliberated on various issues. Taking into account the past experience, views of the data users, recommendations of the Advisory Committee as well as the results of the first and second pretests in the field, the scope and content of the 1991 Census of India were finalised by the middle of 1989.

The Census of India is carried out under the Census Act of 1948. This Act makes it obligatory for a person assigned with census duties to perform these tasks faithfully. It also makes it obligatory for the public to answer all questions correctly and fully and guarantees confidentiality of information collected.

Between the two methods of enumeration, viz, canvasser method and householder method, the first one was continued in the latest census. The householder method of enumeration could not be adopted in our country due to the low level of literacy among our

population. Hence, the canvasser method of enumeration with what is called 'extended *de facto*' approach continued in our latest census. The extended *de facto* approach has been adopted in the Indian Census from 1941 Census onwards.

The Housenumbering and Houselisting Operation, which is a prelude to the main census was conducted during April-September, 1990 in different States and Union Territories according to a calendar. This preliminary operation is essential for conducting a census as this forms the basis for fixing census enumerator's block in such a way as to ensure complete coverage without omission or overlapping of census houses. The Houselisting Operation included house numbering and listing of buildings, houses and households so as to serve as an inventory for organising the main census operation in 1991.

As in the 1981 Census an "Enterprise List" was also canvassed alongwith the Houselisting Operation in the 1991 Census as a part of the Economic Census of the Central Statistical Organisation. In the Houselisting Operation of 1981, apart from minimum items needed for houselisting, information about the physically handicapped population was also collected. The same information was, however, not collected in the 1991 Census as the experience and the results of the 1981 Census showed that such a sensitive information could be collected successfully only by specialised enumerators. In the 1991 Census some of the questions contained in the Household Schedule of the 1981 Census on housing and amenities aspects were shifted to the Houselist Schedule and were canvassed during the Houselisting Operation. These are

(i) Predominant construction material of census house.

(ii) Does the household live in owned or rented house? (iii) Number of living rooms in the occupation of the household. (iv) Facilities available to the household like drinking water supply, electricity, toilet and fuel.

The sex of the head of the household and the information whether the head of the household belonged to a Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe were included in the 1991 Census houselist. This would enable us to have data on households headed by females and also the households of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and their housing conditions. The information on availability of toilet facilities has been collected in all areas in the 1991 Census whereas this question was canvassed only for urban areas in 1981.

There was a considerable amount of discussion both in the Data Users' Conference and in the Advisory Committee meetings as to whether the Individual Slip should be replaced by a Household Form. Field studies were conducted in this regard. It was decided to continue with the Individual Slip for each individual and the Household Schedule for each household. The main purpose of retaining the Household Schedule as well as the Individual Slip in the 1991 Census is that the former will be used for the manual tabulation while the Individual Slip will form the input for computer processing of data. Further, the first seven columns of the Household Schedule namely, Serial No., Name, Relationship to head, Sex (Male/Female), Age and Marital Status have to be filled in first by the enumerator in respect of a household. This was intended to ensure that all the members of a household to be enumerated are first listed completely.

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A new feature of the Individual Slip of the 1991 Census is that it contains a question on ex-servicemen and their status as pensioner or non-pensioner. In the 1981 Census, the children in the age-group 0-4 were considered as illiterates by definition. In the 1991 Census, the Department of Education in the Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Planning Commission suggested that instead of the age-group 0-4, the Census Organisation should consider children in the age-group 0-6 as illiterate since the ability to read and write with understanding is not generally achieved, specially in rural areas, until a child attains the age of 7 or more. Accordingly, in the 1991 Census, children of the age of 6 years or less were considered as illiterates even if the child was going to school and might have picked up reading and writing a few words.

For the sake of comparability, the concepts and definitions relating to economic questions in general and 'work' in particular adopted in the 1981 Census were retained in the 1991 Census. A sub-group of the Advisory Committee went into the formulation of the 1991 economic questions and accordingly questions were framed in such a way as to help netting the unpaid workers on farm or in family enterprise. In order to ensure that the economic activity of these categories (women and children are the predominant constituents of this workforce) is properly enumerated in the 1991 Census, the instructions to census enumerators were expanded and emphasis was laid on the need to ask probing questions regarding the work done at any time at all last year or any of the seasons of the reference period, in the case of women. Some of the valuable suggestions made by the women's organisations with regard to completely netting the economic activity of women were taken into account while drafting the instructions to the enumerators and in designing the training modules for them.

In order to provide more detailed tables on the economic activity of the population, it is proposed to process in the 1991 Census all the Individual Slips relating to main workers other than cultivators and agricultural labourers, marginal workers and those non-workers seeking/available for work on a 100 per cent basis. In the last census, these tables were based on 20 per cent sample of Individual Slips. The question on seeking/available for work was asked in the 1991 Census only in respect of non-workers and not for marginal workers also as was done in 1981 Census. Further, in case of those seeking/available for work, another question whether they had ever worked before was asked. This will help in knowing the number of fresh entrants to the labour force.

While collecting the information on reasons for migration, two more reasons, namely, 'business' and 'natural calamities like drought, floods etc.' were added in the 1991 Census by assigning separate codes.

A special form called "Post Graduate Degree Holders and Technical Personnel Schedule" (PGDHTP) was distributed to all the post-graduates and technical degree or diploma holders on behalf of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research to meet their needs for planning for technical and professional manpower. The census enumerators were asked to collect it back, failing which the respondent was requested to mail it. The processing of this schedule and dissemination of the data will be the responsibility of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

Evaluation Studies

A Post-Enumeration Check Survey and a Census Evaluation Study have been carried out closely following the 1991 Census in the major States and the Union Territory of Delhi. These evaluatory surveys are designed to have an idea of the level of accuracy of the Census count and also the validity of the returns regarding certain characteristics of the population. In other words, these surveys will help in estimating the coverage and content errors.

Processing of Census Data

As in the 1981 Census, a judicious mix of manual and computer tabulation would be used to bring out data as quickly as possible in the 1991 Census. The details of the tables to be generated are given below.

After the 1991 Census, it is proposed to release the following series of tables:

- A-Series General Population Tables
- B-Series General Economic Tables
- C-Series Social and Cultural Tables
- D-Series Migration Tables
- F-Series Fertility Tables
- H-Series Tables on Houses and Household Amenities
- SC-Series Special Tables for Scheduled Castes
- ST-Series Special Tables for Scheduled Tribes
- Special Table on Ex-servicemen
- Village & Town Directories

Some of the tables would be generated by manual tabulation of household schedules canvassed in the census. Most of the tables would, however be generated on computer, by processing the Individual Slips canvassed in the census.

Tables to be Generated Manually

The Primary Census Abstract (PCA) which is published for the smallest area (Village/Ward level) would be based on manual tabulation from the household schedules. Based on the figures in PCA, other tables of A-Series would be prepared. Tables relating to mother tongue, religion and household composition in C-Series would also be generated by manual tabulation. The PCA relating to Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes would also be generated from household schedules. All these tables will be based on hundred per cent processing of data,

Tables to be Generated on Computer

The individual slips of smaller States (population less than 10 million) and Union Territories will be processed on a hundred per cent basis on the computer. The processing for bigger States would be undertaken in three stages.

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In the first stage, a 10 per cent sample of Individual Slips will be used to provide the tables in F-Series and most of the tables in B, C and D-Series. In the second stage, all slips relating to Household Industries, Other Workers, Marginal Workers and those seeking/available for work will be processed on a 100 per cent basis for providing detailed tables on economic activity. In the third stage, all slips relating to Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes will be processed to generate the tables for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes.

The tables in B-Series will be generated in two stages. In stage one details relating to "workers" and "non-workers" would be given. Since there will be some time gap between the availability of the data from the two stages, it is proposed to bring out in stage one, some of these tables in condensed forms. The detailed tabulation of the same will be from stage two. This will provide the data users with estimates of important variables from stage one though not as detailed as in the second stage. The 1991 Census Tabulation Plan has been drawn carefully in consultation with data users in the second conference and the Advisory Committee.

Village Directory and Town Directory

The Village Directory gives the lists of villages, their area, population, amenities such as schools, drinking water, etc. available to them and land use. The Town Directory gives for each town the area, population in 1991 and in the past censuses, growth rates, density, sex-ratio, physical aspects of town, communication, municipal finances, civic, medical, educational and other amenities and trade, commerce, industry and banking facilities. The formats used in the 1981 Census have been adopted by and large in the 1991 Census.