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Opportunities for Sociological Research from the Indian Census Data

INDIA has a fairly long history of unbroken censuses in the modern period. Starting from 1872, the 1991 census was the thirteenth in the series and the fifth since Independence. These population censuses through the various publications have provided very rich data not only on size, distribution, and growth, but more so on the socio-economic characteristics of the people in the country. The Census Commissioners have, over time, introduced several innovations in order to reflect the changing socio-economic reality in the country by adding new questions as well as new schedules and by expanding tabulations. As a result, over the decades, census has become a major source of sociological data for both macro and micro level requires. Moreover, being a census, it provides an important sampling frame for carrying out other studies.

I

The 1961 census was a major departure from the earlier censuses in introducing innovations, new tabulations, and making certain concepts more realistic. During the house listing operations which precede the actual census count and help in carving out the enumerators' blocks, a houselist schedule was introduced wherein information was collected on the use to which a census house was put, the material of the walls and the roof, the number of members in the household, the number of rooms, etc. (Census of India 1961,1964:18-19). At the time of actual census operations, two new schedules, one called the 'household schedule' to collect information on land tenure and household industry, and another relating to 'scientific and technical personnel' for having detailed information on scientific and technical manpower were introduced (Census of India 1961,1964:24-25). There were some new questions on migration in the 'individual slip' which collected information on the rural or urban character of the birthplace, district, and state, and duration of residence at the place of enumeration. Further, the concept of work was changed from 'income' approach to 'work' or 'labour-input' approach and the 'worker status' was given preference over other statuses. In order to bring uniformity in the application of definition of urban areas in different states, it was made more specific and more stringent (Srivastava, 1983 :124,280-81,320).

While serious attempts were made in the 1971 census to maintain continuity and uniformity with the 1961 census, certain changes were introduced. Instead of continuing

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emphasis on land holdings and land tenure the emphasis shifted to collecting detailed information on industrial establishments of all sizes wherein information was obtained on the nature of product manufactured or serviced, extent of employment, type of energy source, etc. (Srivastava, 1983 : 128). The scope of the schedule on 'scientific and technical personnel' was enlarged by covering all degree holders and technical diploma holders after completion of the high school (Srivastava, 1983 : 137-39). A question was added in the 'individual slip' on the 'place of last residence' besides 'birth place' and 'duration of residence at the place of enumeration'. The question on literacy and education was split into two parts to record whether the person was literate and the exact level of educational attainment. In order to estimate fertility of currently married women, questions on 'age at marriage' and 'any birth in the last one year' were introduced (Srivastava, 1983 :132). The question on work was modified significantly to have more realistic estimate of the 'workforce' by recording main activity of each person as to whether he/she was a worker or a nonworker. Besides the main activity, if a person was engaged in some other activity also which he regarded as work, it was recorded as 'secondary activity' and necessary details were obtained in this regard (for more details, see Srivastava, 1983 : 79-85,97-102).

The 1981 census had three schedules: The Houselist, The Household Schedule, and the Individual Slip (Census of India 1981,1980:259-266). Another schedule—The Enterprise List—was also canvassed on behalf of the Central Statistical Organisation (Srivastava, 1983: 1985). Identification particulars of each census house, the use(s) to which it was put, the number of persons in each household, and the number of physically handicapped persons, if any, were recorded in the houselist. Information on household size, number of couples living in the household, number of living rooms, housing condition and amenities available to the household, tenurial status, land possessed, and household cultivation was collected in the first part of the household schedule while part II obtained information on the list of members of the household and their demographic, economic, and social characteristics (Srivastava, 1983:183-92).

The 1981 census Individual Slip was divided into two parts—universal items which were canvassed for every person, and a set of sample items relating to (i) fertility, and (ii) migration which were canvassed only in 20 per cent of the enumerator blocks. Under the universal items, a new question on 'school attendance' was added. From the economic viewpoint, the total population was divided into three categories — main workers, marginal workers, and non workers depending on whether a person worked at all during the year and if so, was it for six months or more, or less than six months. A new item on 'seeking/available for work' was added to the economic questions to get an estimate of unemployment (Srivastava, 1983:193).

In the sample part of the individual slip, questions on 'number of children everborn' and 'number surviving' by sex breakdown for ever-married women were introduced. Similarly, a new question on 'reasons for migration' was introduced to make migration information more comprehensive (Srivastava, 1983 :194).

In the 1991 census, part I of the household schedule of the 1981 census was combined with the 'houselisting' schedule. Additional information was collected therein on 'type of

fuel used for cooking' but questions on the handicapped were deleted. Thus the houselisting schedule covered items like predominant material of the wall, floor, and roof, purpose for which the census house is used, male or female headed households, scheduled castes/scheduled tribes households, number of persons in the household, number of living rooms, tenure status, and amenities. Part II of the household schedule of the 1981 census was made an independent schedule basically meant to provide the information of the individual slip on a household basis (Census of India 1991,1991:257-59).

The 1991 census individual slip basically remained the same as in the 1981 census, however, additional information was collected on the employment seekers as to 'whether they ever worked before* ? At the instance of the Ministry of Defence, a question was added to find out information on pensioners among the ex-servicemen (Census of India 1991,1991: 261-62).

The Indian census materials are published at three levels: (1) All India reports (forming series 1 of the Census of India series), (2) State and Union Territory reports (series 2 to 33), and (3) District Census Handbooks for each district. While the all-India reports present census data at the national, state and in some tables, at the district level, the state reports give information at the state, district, and tehsil/taluka level; and the District Census Handbooks give important details for each revenue village for the rural population, and for each enumerator block of the urban population.

The published volumes of the earlier censuses have provided the most accessible data on general, demographic, economic, and social characteristics of the people of India at regular intervals. The expanded tabulation programmes since the 1961 census have been very useful for planning purposes. There has been further addition of new tables with addition of new questions and for having more detailed cross-classification of the existing questions. The "Data Users Conferences" have played an important role in this regard. Accordingly, for all-India and for each State and Union Territory, the census tabulations and reports will be published according to the plan given in Appendix I.

The tabulation programme of the 1991 census has been broadly similar to the 1981 census tabulation plan. This has been done so as to permit temporal analysis of the changes in the Indian society, if any. For any further analysis it is understood that the Registrar General's Office would provide the sample data except on religion and language to the users at the cost of preparing floppies/tapes. Consequently, researchers can generate their own tables.

II

If we examine the Tabulation Plan of the 1991 census (or, for that matter, of the earlier censuses as well), besides the 'Social and Cultural Tables', migration tables, fertility tables, tables on houses and household amenities, special tables on scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, certain economic tables also provide very important sociological information on specific aspects. It would not be possible here to cover all those tables even from one census and discuss as to how they become important social documents for understanding the Indian reality. The scope of this reality can be vastly enlarged if cross tabulations with religion or mother tongue are generated with respect to educational attainment, school attendance and

work participation etc. Similarly, instead of individual as the unit of analysis if household is taken as the unit of analysis, a lot of new insight can be had from the census data. In view of the above, I would limit myself to the following four issues :

1. Women's status;
2. Urban studies;
3. Household composition and household characteristics;
4. Special tables for the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes.

Women's Status

In recent literature, women's status has been considered as a very important variable affecting the contraceptive use and the overall fertility. While it is recognised that it is a highly complicated qualitative variable, but in majority of studies, educational attainment and work participation outside agriculture and outside home, have been used as proxy variables particularly because these two variables are available from the population census at the district level; and if one considers educational attainment in terms of literacy level only, the information is available down up to village level. However, in a society where sending girls to schools involves high opportunity cost, those who have attained some level of education are regarded as having higher social status, hence women's education becomes an important indicator of their status.

The census provides information on educational attainment by recognised levels of education for 'all areas' and urban areas by sex and age. Because of a very small number of graduates in rural areas, the highest category for all areas is 'graduate and above' but we have more detailed classification for urban areas.

As educational attainment indicates an important social dimension, so is the case with work participation in activities outside agriculture and household industry. Persons engaged in white collar jobs have a much higher social status than those in blue collar jobs. Although, most often employment in white collar jobs is a result of higher educational attainment but many women do not enter into the labour force, hence, these two variables are generally considered as independent variables.

Fairly detailed data are available on economic activity of women by age or educational level, marital status, etc. Data are also available by age or by educational level attained for those who are seeking work or are available for work (categorised as unemployed). A recent analysis of the 1981 census data indicated fairly high unemployment rates for educated women (Gangopadhyay, 1991).

1. These levels of all areas are illiterate, literate (without educational level)—(i) nonformal, (ii) formal; primary, middle, matriculation/secondary, higher secondary/intermediate/pre-university/senior secondary, non-technical diploma or certificate not equal to degree, graduate and above. In case of urban areas, the last category is extended further into:

- (1) graduate degree other than technical degree,
- (2) post-graduate degree other than technical degree,
- (3) technical degree or diploma equal to degree or post-graduate degree, namely,
 - (i) engineering and technology, (ii) medicine, (iii) agriculture and dairying, (iv) veterinary, (v) teaching, and (vi) others. (Census of India 1991, 1991: 79).

III

Urban Studies

Census has been found as the most important secondary data source to carry out various urban studies whether it is with a sociological perspective, geographical perspective or the economic perspective. The Chicago School (Park, Burgess, and their associates) started conducting various types of urban studies and provided theoretical formulations on city structure etc. (Park, 1936; Park, Burgess and Mckenzie, 1925; Burgess, 1925, 1928; McKenzie, 1926). Sociologists all over the world have constantly been concerned with the urban process, development of slums, life in slums, urban social organisation, migration to cities, fertility and mortality differential among the rural and urban populations, etc.

Soon after the publication of the 1991 census results in August 1991, several researchers started looking at the urbanization process in the country. The Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi held a one-day workshop on "Urbanisation in India" in October that year. Later, the Indian Association for the Study of Population devoted a full session on 'urbanisation' in its XV Conference held at Thiruvananthapuram during December, 19-21, 1991. Some of the selected papers presented at that conference were later published in *Demography India* (Premi, 1991; Samuel, 1991; Puri, 1991; Tyagi, 1991; Krishnakumari, 1991).

The 1991 census indicated a slowing down of the urban growth in the 1981-91 decade compared to the 1971 -81 decade although, similar to 1971 -81 decade when about a thousand new towns to the stock of urban settlements were added, there has been a net addition of 856 new urban settlements during 1981-91 decade. A preliminary analysis of the comparative decadal urban growth of 1961-71, 1971-81, and 1981-91 indicates a slowing down of the net rural-to-urban migration in the last decade (Premi, 1991 : 48). An analysis of the components of urban growth of the major states (for which 1981-90 natural growth rates of urban population are considered more stable and reliable) indicates wide fluctuations in both—the share of natural increase and the share of new towns. In Bihar, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the share of these two components exceeded 100 per cent. These data imply very substantial emigration from urban areas, the inter-state urban outmigration and/or interstate net urban-to-rural migration (Premi 1991:49-50). These aspects need further examination to understand the process of urbanisation in different states.

Although data on slums in different cities were not published in the 1981 census, those were compiled and are still available. In the 1991 census also these data giving the number of literate and educated persons, population of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes, workers classified into nine industrial categories, marginal workers, and nonworkers would be available soon. In fact, these data would be available at the enumerator's block level for each city/town. These become important sociological data for social area analysis and to understand the changing ecological structure of the cities and towns.

The 1971 census introduced a new concept of 'standard urban area' which is defined as the projected growth area of a city or town (with population of 50,000 and over in 1971) as it would be in 1991 taking into account not only the towns and villages which would get merged with the central city in the next twenty years and also the intervening rural spaces.

Such tracts include all extra-municipal urban growth such as the suburbs (both residential and industrial), railway colonies, civil lines, cantonments, and those villages and towns which are likely to be urbanised by 1991 (Census of India 1971,1975 :3). Studies based on the data for the 1971,1981 and 1991 decades along with that contained in the primary census abstracts and the housing tables may prove very rewarding from the viewpoint of city planning and suburbanisation.

It is often said that the rural push has transplanted the rural poverty in the slums and squatter settlements of the cities and metropolises. My own analysis of the migration data for Rajasthan from the 1971 and 1981 censuses indicates that a large proportion of interdistrict immigration and outmigration of both males and females is from the bordering districts. Further, it was highest in the rural-to-rural stream and was followed by urban-to-rural, rural-to-urban, and urban-to-urban streams. Females migrated in substantially greater proportion from (or to) the neighbouring districts than males supporting the view that female migration is mostly short-distance migration (Premi, 1989:289).

Districts with high to very high values of immigration from and outmigration to the neighbouring districts are generally surrounded on all sides by other districts of the same state. They do not have strong economic base to attract long-distance migrants. In contrast, districts having low proportion of interdistrict migration to and from the neighbouring districts generally had varying proportions of their borders common with other neighbouring states. Only those districts which had strong economic base attracted migrants from longer distances (Premi, 1989 :291).

Consequently, it would be useful to determine the nature of the migrants to metropolises and cities, from where they come and what for. Our analysis of the 1971 census data indicated that 49 per cent of the lifetime migrants to million plus cities migrated from rural areas, 43 per cent from other urban areas, and the rest 8 per cent were immigrants. Of the rural lifetime migrants, only one-third were interstate migrants, the rest having moved within the district of enumeration or from other districts of the same state. The proportion of lifetime interstate rural migrants to other class I cities declined sharply, being just about one-tenth of the total migrants (Premi and Tom, 1985 : 24).

Census provides other important dimensions like educational attainment, occupation and industrial category, and age and marital status of the migrants to cities and also a useful laboratory to understand the migration phenomenon.

As said earlier, a large number of new towns are added on the eve of every census. In contrast, a few towns are declassified and some are merged with the nearby major city/town and their identity is lost. This aspect of urbanisation may be studied since Independence to analyse the role of developmental planning in the evolution of new towns.

Unlike the 1981 census, the 1991 census would provide classification of main workers into nine industrial categories. These data would provide an important base for the functional classification of cities and towns. One can also analyse the changes therein if the same methodology is adopted as in the 1961 and 1971 censuses.

The census has been providing information on the availability of certain types of social amenities in each village in its 'village directory' and for each town and city in the 'town

directory'. This information over time can be utilized to generate indicators of social and economic development in a dynamic frame.

It is well known that rural and urban classification is one of the basic dichotomy into which almost all census data are divided. One can, therefore, still list a large number of studies which can be conducted as pan of urban studies.

IV

Household Composition and Household Characteristics

Data have been collected in both 1981 and 1991 censuses in the Household schedule on the composition of each household. The 1991 tabulation plan is much simpler and straightforward compared to that of the previous census (Appendix II). Since the tabulation on household composition will be based on 'full count' it will take a long time before we could get the same for our use. The table would, however, provide separate information on male and female headed households by their size and structure for each district for rural and urban areas and for each city of 100,000 and above population. This would be very important sociological information. The type of households will be classified as nuclear or subnuclear, collateral joint or lineal joint family, and others, etc. These data could be analysed for the regional variations in the household structure.

Although suggestions were made at the Second Data Users Conference held in early 1998 to cross-tabulate certain data on economic characteristics by the type of household, but the final tabulation plan does not indicate any such programme. Here, one may raise a question: Is women's economic activity in any way related to the structure of the household, the number of male members who are already working and the number of children below the age of 5 or 6, etc.

The household series tables will provide useful information on the quality of housing stock in the country for rural and urban areas as also for all cities with population of 100,000 and over. Another table would give information on number of household members, tenure status and number of living rooms which indicates the nature of congestion of the people with only one or two living rooms. These data would be available separately for the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes and would provide very useful information. Then there is cross-tabulation of source of drinking water with electricity and with toilet facilities. These data can be used to analyse the availability of proper housing in different parts of the country and for different sections of the population and for development of social indicators for each district and for each city.

V

Special Tables for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes

Besides the general tables, there would be special tables for the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes (some of them will be for each caste and tribe separately) presenting information on the economic activity of the main and marginal workers, non-workers seeking/available for work and those, among them, who never worked before classified by age, sex, and educational level; occupational classification of main and marginal workers other than cultivators and agricultural labourers; age, sex and marital status; age, sex and

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level of education, school attendance and economic activity; and some tables relating to fertility performance. These tables would provide caste/tribe wise comparisons on the one hand and between scheduled castes/scheduled tribes, and non SC/ST population on the other hand. These tables would further promote our understanding of present Indian reality, specially social reality.

VI

Confining to the census data specially of sociological importance this paper has made suggestions for a number of research proposals which, it is hoped, would invite attention of social science researchers in India. This list is in no way exhaustive. Many of the suggestions given here can become topic for census monographs.

The censuses of other countries in the South Asian region have their own tabulation programmes. Based on the availability of data in different countries of the region, some of the research issues may emerge from cross-country studies.

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Appendix-I

Plan of Tabulations and Reports

<i>Part No. and subject covered</i>	<i>Sub-part No., if any, and the topics covered</i>
Part I — Administration Report	Part LA- Administration Report Enumeration Part IB- Administration Report Tabulation
Part II — General Population Tables	Part HA — General Population Tables A-Series Part LIB — Primary Census Abstract
Part III — General Economic Tables	Part IIIA-B-Series tables of first stage which will be brought out on 10% sample in respect of major states and on full count in respect of smaller states and union territories. Part IIIB-B-Series tables of second stage which will be brought out on full count. The data relating HHI, OW, Marginal workers and Non-workers seeking/available for work will be entered on full count basis.
Part IV— Social and Cultural Tables	Part IV A-C- Series tables of first stage covering age, sex and marital status composition of population, single year age returns. educational levels. school attendance and bilingualism. Part IVB-C - Series tables covering mother tongue, religion of population and household composition.
Part V— Migration Tables	Part VA-D-Series tables of first stage covering tables based on 10% sample in respect of major states and on full count in respect of smaller states and union territories. Part VB-D-Series tables of second stage covering occupational classification of migrant workers. These tables are based on full count.
Part VI— Fertility Tables	F-Series tables of first stage which will be brought out on 10% sample in respect of smaller states and union territories.
Part VII — Tables on Houses Household Amenities	H- Series tables covering census houses and the uses to which these are put, construction material of wall, roof and floor of the census houses occupied by households, tenure status of the house occupied and number of living rooms, household size, housing facilities like drinking water, electricity and toilet available to households and the fuel used by the household for cooking. These tables will also cover tables on scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. This volume will contain analytical notes also.

Appendix-I (contd. from p. 93)

<i>Part No. and subject covered</i>	<i>Sub-part No., if any, and the topics covered</i>
Part VIII— Special Tables on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes	This part will contain SC and ST series of tables for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes respectively. The data relating to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes will be entered on full count basis in the third stage and SC/ST tables will be processed on the computer on full count. These will cover population of each scheduled caste/tribe, industrial categories of main and marginal workers, non-workers seeking/available for work and those who never worked before, educational level, school attendance, age, sex and marital status, composition of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. In addition to these, the fertility tables relating to SC/ST are also covered. These tables also cover for scheduled tribes, their composition by religion, mother tongue and bilingualism.
Part IX — Town Directory, Survey Report on Towns and Villages	Part DCA- Town Directory. Part KB- Survey Report on selected towns. Part IXC- Survey Report on selected villages.
Part X	Ethnographic notes and special studies on scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.
Part XI — Census Atlas	Union and State/Union Territory Census Atlases.
Part XH — District Census Handbook	Part XII A- Village and Town Directory. Part XII B- Village Town-wise Primary Census Abstract.

APPENDIX II

Census of India 1981 C-10 Households by Composition and Size

<i>State/ District/ City</i>	<i>Total/ Rural/ Urban</i>	<i>Total No. of house- holds</i>	<i>Head of household</i>			<i>No. of households by size comprising</i>			
			<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Single member</i>	<i>Head and spouse</i>	<i>Head and spouse with unmarried children</i>		
							<i>Total</i>	<i>3-5 members</i>	<i>6 members and above</i>
<i>(1)</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>	<i>(4)</i>	<i>(5)</i>	<i>(6)</i>	<i>(7)</i>	<i>(8)</i>	<i>(9)</i>	<i>(10)</i>
<i>No. of households by size comprising</i>									
<i>Head without spouse but with unmarried children</i>			<i>Head and spouse with or without unmarried children but with other relations who are not currently having spouses</i>			<i>Head without spouse but with other relations of whom only one is having spouse</i>			
<i>Total</i>	<i>2-5 members</i>	<i>6 members and above</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>3-5 members</i>	<i>6 members and above</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>3-5 members</i>	<i>6 members and above</i>	
<i>(11)</i>	<i>(12)</i>	<i>(13)</i>	<i>(14)</i>	<i>(15)</i>	<i>(16)</i>	<i>(17)</i>	<i>(18)</i>	<i>(19)</i>	
<i>No. of households by size comprising</i>									
<i>Head and spouse with or without unmarried children but with other unmarried/ separated/divorced/ widowed relation(s)</i>					<i>Head and spouse with married son(s) daughters) and their spouses and 1 or parents with or without other not currently married relation(s) /Head without spouse but without least two married son(s) daughter(s) and their spouses and/or parents with or without other not currently married relations)</i>				
<i>Total</i>	<i>3-5 members</i>	<i>6 members and above</i>			<i>Total</i>	<i>4-6 members</i>	<i>7 members and above</i>		
<i>(20)</i>	<i>(21)</i>	<i>(22)</i>			<i>(23)</i>	<i>(24)</i>	<i>(25)</i>		
<i>No. of households by size comprising</i>									
<i>Head and spouse with married brother(s) and their spouse with or without other relations) (including married relation(s)/Head without spouse but with at least two married brother(s)/sister(s) and their spouses with or without other relations)</i>						<i>Other households not covered by size</i>			
<i>Total</i>	<i>4-6 members</i>		<i>7 members and above</i>			<i>Total</i>	<i>3-5 members</i>	<i>6 members and above</i>	
<i>(26)</i>	<i>(27)</i>		<i>(28)</i>			<i>(29)</i>	<i>(30)</i>	<i>(31)</i>	

Appendix n (contd. on p. 96)

Appendix-II (*contd. from p. 96*)

1. Single person household.
2. Nuclear family: a couple with or without unmarried children.
3. Supplemented nuclear family : a nuclear family plus one or more unmarried, separated or widowed relatives of the parents, other than their unmarried children.
4. Subnuclear family: a fragment of a former nuclear family. Typical examples are the widow with unmarried children, or the widower with unmarried children, or siblings-whether unmarried, or widowed, separated, or divorced-living together.
5. Supplemented subnuclear family: a group of relatives, members of a formerly complete nuclear family, plus some other unmarried, divorced, or widowed relative who was not a member of the nuclear family. For example, a widow and her unmarried children plus her widowed mother-in-law.
6. Collateral joint family: two or more married couples between whom there is a sibling bond-usually a brother-brother relationship-plus unmarried children.
7. Supplemented Collateral joint family: a collateral joint family plus unmarried, divorced, or widowed relatives. Typically, such supplemental relatives are the widowed mother of the married brother, or the widower father of an unmarried sibling.
8. Lineal joint family: two couples between whom there is a lineal link, usually between parents and married son, sometimes between parents and married daughter.
9. Supplemented lineal joint family: a lineal joint family plus unmarried, divorced or widowed relatives who do not belong to either of the lineally linked nuclear families; for example, the father's widower brother or the son's wife's unmarried brother
10. Lineal collateral joint family: three or more couples linked lineally and collaterally. Typically, parents and their two or more married sons, plus the unmarried children of the three or more couples.
11. Supplemented lineal collateral joint family: a lineal collateral joint family plus unmamed, widowed, separated relatives who belong to none of the nuclear families lineally and collaterally linked, for example, the father's widowed sister or brother, or an unmarried nephew of the father.
12. Others: those not covered in any type mentioned above at SI. Nos. 1 to 11.