
The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

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Abstract: The census is a very important programme to provide better government for the people of the country and it also helps to rule the country of the rulers. Not only has that it also becomes the determinant factor of social, economic and cultural affairs of the society. Using the data of census, various researchers can write their research book or research papers. The census data help to identify the different races people. But before the British government, no Indian rulers conducted the modern census. At first the British government conducted census of India. As a result, many unknown information came to light after the remuneration of population of India. Therefore, the period of paper started from the first census operations time and this paper also covers only the Colonial period.

Keywords:East Bengal, Identity, Linguistic, Kshatriya, Koch King, Namasudra, Rajbansi

Date of Submission: 16-10-2022

Date of Acceptance: 21-10-2022

Introduction

The census was one of the government programme. It was vast, challenging, and critical work, which helped to bring to the notice many unknown but important informations. It helped to launch many public development programme. In 1859, the British Parliament enacted Government of India Act and took over the affairs of India from Calcutta based East

The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

India Company. In this year, the British Parliament decided to conduct the census in India. In addition, it was decided that in India the census would in conducted in an interval of every 10 years.

Census before the British under the Koch King

At first, the King Sishya Singha, a king of Koch dynasty, conducted census of the population of Koch Behar kingdom, including Jalpaiguri. In this census, the population was divided into some numbers of groups. He appointed some officials for carrying out of the census. Some numbers of people among the various groups of people are given below:

Name of group	Thakuria	Shaikia	Hazari	Umra	Nawab
Number of people	20	100	1000	More than 3000	More than 60000

Source- Mandol, Satyendra Nath, History & Culture of the Bodos, edited by, Narzary, Bonny, Sailee, Kolkata: p. 63.

Census of Colonial period

The British government of India first time started to conduct the modern census. It was done more widely and scientifically. Before the advent of the Britishers, there were no such censuses in India. Fortunately, census once taken, tends to become a continuous process repeated every ten or five years. Therein lies the utility of such census counts.

According to Kingsley Davis “the modern census is defined as the total process of collecting, compiling and publishing demographic, economic and social data pertaining to all persons in a country or delimited territory at any specific point in time”. Indian census of colonial period was more or less as like the definition of Mr. Davis.

Here we select to discuss about different aspect of social aspect of people of few district of undivided Bengal in Colonial period.

The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

Various perspectives of Census

Census and race

Census revealed the different social classes of people. For example, the first Census of India in 1872 brought out the starting fact by exact number that the low caste Hindus, Muslims and tribes greatly outnumbered the higher caste Hindus. To see the result of remunerations, the deprived people raised their demand for proportionate legitimate privileges.

After the publication of the final report of census then it was revealed whether the number of people increased or decreased. If it is increased then the scholars tend to seek which determinant factors, which led to grow the population. If the number of population decreases then the causes of decrease are to be found out like wise causes of the population and if the number of people grew then it will be search of causes. If the migration acted behind the increase and decrease of population then the causes of migration one to be ascertained. The census revealed or discovered the small race of tribal people i.e. Toto people in Jalpaiguri.

It is necessary to say that since the enumeration of castes in the census was discontinued in 1931, for that we do not have the exact numbers of the different race of people.

Census and linguistic group of people

During the Census operations of 1891, Sir Herbert Hope Risley attempted the first ever classification of the people of India into different racial types. He classified the Indian people into the following seven types:

Turko-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Scytho-Dravidian, Aryo-Dravidian, Mongolo-Dravidian, Mongoloid, and Dravidian. Other scholars criticized this classification because Risley mixed linguistic categories (Aryan and Dravidian) with the racial categories.

During the census of 1931, B.S. Guha took anthropometric measurements in different parts of the country to determine the physical characteristics of different groups of people in

The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

Indian society. However, this classification is very significant evidence that the people of India are composed of various racial types. Guha's classification is as given below:

1. The Negrito
2. The proto-Australoid
3. The Mongoloid:
 - (i)Palao-Mongoloid
 - (a)Long-headed (Dolichocephalic)
 - (b)Broad-headed(Brachycephalic)
 - (ii)Tibeto-Mongoloid
4. The Mediterranean:
 - (i)Palaeo-Mediterranean
 - (ii)Mediterranean
 - (iii)Oriental
5. The Western Brachycephals:
 - (i)Alpinoid
 - (ii)Dinaric
 - (iii)Armenoid
6. The Nordic

From this classifications, it might be said that with the different classes of people, India came out as a multi-racial country.

The only point that can be mentioned with certainty is that Indian population is composed of various racial strains. Representatives of all the three major races of the world, namely Caucaoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid, are found in this country. The division of society into ethnic groups makes India a heterogeneous society.

Sex ratio

The census provide the sex ratio i.e. what was the ratio between male and female. The above sex ratio had always been unfavorable to women in India from 1901 to 1951. The western

The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

education spread and reformist picked up their voice against the discrimination policy until the sex ratio started declining from 1901. It is a cause of worry.¹

Census and rural information

It gives the number about the village, size of village, which are small and which were large etc.

It is obvious that the number of villages in a given state is dependent upon the size of the state and the proportion of population dependent on agriculture. In this context, it will be useful to understand two concepts, namely that of 'agriculture crowding, and 'village group'. Agricultural crowding means the number of persons dependent on agriculture per square mile of cultivated land. It also gives the information about the geography of the area. In dry or hill areas, agricultural crowding is expected to the least as compared to that of the plain areas. Because the cultivation of dry or hill area was not easy. It is also possible to classify village as tribal villages, single-caste villages, and multi-caste villages. It helped to reorganize the village and state and other administrative unit etc.

The next census of 1881 reported that 55% people of Bengal were Muslims and 25 % were untouchables. The depressed class people, both the Hindus and Muslims, demanded the proportionate representation in the governance and proportionate participation in administration. One of the leaders of the depressed class was Harichand Thakur, a Namashudra who raised the voice against the oppressions of Brahmana. The British Government decided to grant to untouchables, Muslims, tribal farmers, and peasants the rights of participation in legislation and administration. Consequently, many counter activities commenced among the Hindus.

The varies aspect of population increasing district of Jalpaiguri

Under the British rule, the first enumeration of the people or a survey of the Western Duars was made in 1865-67, and the survey officers in 1867AD published a rough census report. According to that survey the population of the Jalpaiguri Duars was 49620.² But census could

The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

not satisfy the authority. So in 1870 AD the deputy Commissioner of Western Duars conducted a special census.³ After that census operations, the population was at 100111.⁴ After the advent of Britishers some thinly populated forest area became inhabitation villagers and some industries and small factories also grew up.⁵

In Jalpaiguri Duars (11Duars) population went on increasing as witnessed in the table below:

Year	1867	1870-72	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951
Increase the total number of people in Duars	49620	90063	182687	296348	410606	519372	558971	661068	747356
Increase in percentage in Duars		81.50%	102.84%	62.21%	38.55%	26.49%	7.62%	18.26%	

Source- J.F. Grunning –*Eastern Bengal and Assam District gazetteers, Japaiguri*, Allahabad ,1911, Reprinted , Siliguri , 2008,paige-38; Abani Mohan Kusari and others ,*West Bengal District gazetteers , Jalpaiguri* , Calcutta , 1981,paige-68; Asok Mitra ,*Census, 1951,West Bengal ,District Handbooks, Jalpaiguri* ,Calcutta, 1951, Page-3.

From the above table it is proved that during the first two or three decade the population increased rapidly. In the first five years population growth was more the 81% and next ten years i.e. from 1872 to 1881 the growth of population was more than 102%; and in the next ten years it was more than 62%. The main causes of the decreased of percentage of people was the epidemic(two time cholera) and people migrating to neighbouring area.⁶ The main cause was that the land was fertile and the rate of rent was low.

The population of rural area of Jalpaiguri had gradually increased. A table of increasing population per denial is given bellow:

year	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951

The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

Total population	536475	651457	681133	722075	820075	850602
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Source: Kusari, Abani Mohan and others, *West Bengal District gazetteers , Jalpaiguri, Calcutta , 1981,p.71.*

From the above table it can be realize that the populations of the rural area was growing up. So with the increasing population the extra or more agricultural production required due to influx migrated people. So the cultivators tried to grow the surplus production. J. F.Grunning (a British Civilian) wrote, “The increase of population is the example of the prosperity of Duars area of Jalpaiguri between 1891 and 1901”

Some historians began to explain the cause of the increase of the population. The two factors also work behind the growth of population in Jalpaiguri district, one was ‘Push’ factor, and another was ‘Pull’ factor. The Push factor was active from Rangpur, Coochbehar, south Bnegal, East Bengal and other parts of India. The Pull factor was also a little active because the availability of fertile wasteland, and low rent which pulled down the people in Jalpaiguri district.⁷

Another point was that after the advent of the British rapid transformation in social life of this region took place.⁸ In this context, the changing demographic pattern was very significant. The new language and other new culture began to be encouraging in this area. So mixed culture also grew up.

The census revealed the character of inhabitant some/certain tribe who were very migrated. Like- the Mechs were very migratory. The census report confirms this statement. Another point was that it revealed the character of demography pattern. Because at first when the Britishers conducted census it was shown that the population increased more in 20th century. The population increased in the plain area of Jalpaiguri district, like, Falakata P.S., Maynaguri P.S., Alipurduar P.S. etc. So, it also showed that people migrated in these area were mostly cultivators.

1. Census and social Identity

The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

In 1872, when census was done some race/class of people aroused voice of protest on the question of identity. Like, Rajbansi people demanded that they were *Kshatriya*, when *Chandal* class of people raised an objection/protected.

Census and Kshatriya Movement

The racial identity was demanded during the time of census of *Kshatriya* race and it was demanded by Rajbansi community. The movement centered on the claim that the Rajbansi Hindu were *Kshatriyas* of Aryan origin, could be traced at least as far back as the beginning of the nineteenth century. The claim began to take the shape of a movement at the time of census of 1891. The census authority gave instructions to the effect that the Rajbansi is the same as Koch i.e. indirectly tribal. But some Rajbansi people protested against this initiative of the census authority. Among the leader of the *Kshatriya* movement was Haramohan Khajanji, *jotedar* or *zaminder* of Rangpur. He took initiative in voicing protest against the census authority and organized a '*Rangpur Bratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Bidhayani Sabha*'.⁹ They urged to F.M. Skrine, the district magistrate of Rangpur, to recognize Rajbansis not as a caste from the Koch and to allow them to be enumerated as *Kshatriyas* in the census.¹⁰ In 1901 the Rajbansis had lost their *Bratya Kshatriya* identity. Because some Varna Hindu opposed their demand of *kshatriya* hood and again began to write that the Rajbansis were Koch. So in the 1901 census ones more Rajbansis were bracketed with Koch.¹¹ Here also the census became the determinant media of the identity of Rajbansis.

According to Sukhbilas Barma the observation of the Britishers and non-Rajbansi Indian authors about the identity of the Rajbansis were not acceptable to the Rajbansi elite. Here Britishers and non-Rajbansi Indian authors observe that the Rajbansis originated from the Koches. The Indian authors influenced over the census data of the Britishers. The Census reports of 1872, 1881 and 1891 'enumerated Koch, Rajbansi and Paliya etc under one head Koch'. It is revealed from the subsequent Census Reports that these Reports recorded the Rajbansis in different manner. All sub-sections of Koch were recorded as Rajbansis in the Census of 1901. Interestingly, Paliays were recorded as Rajbansis in the Census Reports of 1911 and 1921. Sukhbilas Barma concluded that the Census Operations could not come to a decision about their identity and thereby generated social tensions in the region. The Rajbansi elite launched a movement for the recognition of their *Bratya Kshatriya* status.¹²

The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

In 1891, when F.A. Skyne, Magistrate of Rangpur, ordered that to write the Rajbansis as Koch, then the Rajbansi people protested against that decision. Somewhere riot started. Under the leadership of Harmohan Roy(khajanji) 'Rangpur *Bratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Bidhayni Sabha*' was established. According to the resolution of the organization a demonstration was shown would be organized to Skyne Shaheb.¹³ After those events, Mr. Skyne seeking the advice from religious intellectuals took decision that who desire to write *Bratya Kshatriya*. There were some protest against that decision, but finally on 8th May in 1898 a was ordered that the Rajbansi could write *Bratya Kshatriya* in all the government records.¹⁴ Another event was that in the Census of 1901, the census officer wrote the tern only Rajbansi about Rajbansi *Kshatriya*. Another protest movement was demonstrated on 1st February in 1901. For that the Census officers ordered, "On a recent reference to the superintendent of census operation, he has ordered that the men are to be classed Rajbansis and not *Bratya Kshatriya*. I therefore decline to reopen the matter."¹⁵ From the organization of Rajbansi *Bratya Kshatriya* it led to recognize to separate the Rajbansi from Koch. But the superintendent of Census replied that, "It is too late to issue a further order on that point." Therefore, the Koch and Rajbansi started to be treated as the same caste in the final report of census of 1901.¹⁶ As a result another movement was organized by the Rajbansi people where Thakur Panchanan Barma became the leader. Under the leadership of Thakur Panchana Barma, the unorganized Rajbansi *Bratya Kshatriya* movement was transmitted into a united movement.

Here it was observed that the Britishers were foreigners and they reported what they had seen. But some Indian community pressurized on them to write their identity what they had thought. It was the importance of census or it became the determinant factor or government record that the identity would be determined with regard to any caste or class. Another demand was arose from Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma that the census officers should recognize that the Rajbansi were as *Kshatriya*.¹⁷

Census and Movement of Namasudra

The '*Namasudras*' or showing disrespect called the '*Chandals*' were big part of mixed Bengali population of Bengal and constituted the largest Hindu caste in undivided eastern

The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

Bengal having occupations like cultivation, boat driving and fish catching. Their main inhabitant land was the delta of the rivers Padma and Meghna comprising low lands districts of six districts namely, Dacca, Faridpur, Bakargang, Mymensing, Jessore and Khulna. They were living in this area from the earliest times. The word '*Chandal*' first occurred in the Colonial Government's documents, in the Census report of 1871. In this census huge numbers of agricultural Hindu populations had been mentioned as *Chandals* and *Namasudras* had been used within brackets with the term *Chandals*. Both the term of *Chandals* and *Namasudra* were prevalent in before census of 1871. But in 1871 those terms at first recorded in the Government record. It was objectionable to the *Namasudra* people of Bengal. In such situation, the first unified protest movement of the *Namasudras* began in the beginning of 1873.¹⁸

In 1881, Guruchand Thakur, formed the '*Namasudra Welfare Association* and called its first conference at Duttadanda of Khulna District.¹⁹

According to Shekhar Bandhyopadhyay, the new name *Namasudra* originated in 1881 of Khulna district of the East Bengal. It was the most possible date of the emergence of new name from *Chandal* to *Namasudra*. But officially this name was recorded in the census of 1891. As a result, the colonial Government was forced to remove the disgraceful term *Chandal* and in the Census report of 1911 and they were recorded as a separate *Namasudra*.²⁰

The same expression was later incorporated for the census report of 1891, indicating wider popular acceptance of the new name and its official legitimizing. By 1900, it seems to have gained further social recognition and, as local officials reported from eastern Bengal, the members of this community would now strongly 'object to being called *Chandals*'. They seem to have constructed by now a new collective self-image which was radically different from that of the indolent boating or fishing *Chandalas*.

Namasudra, were not a single cast identity, there were many internal organizations. Even commensality between them was restricted, though in some areas taboos on smoking or drinking together were less rigidly followed. This information was confirmed with the words of E. A. Gait, the Superintendent of Census operations in Bengal in 1901 and others a number of district officials, both European and Indian who supported the statement of Mr. Gait.²¹ Another information also was got from Census that some *Namasudra* had changed their occupations and for that restriction were imposed by some lower caste.

The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

Before the census of 1901 there were question among the scholars about Jalpaiguri whether there were Namasudras in the Jalpaiguri district or not. But after the enumeration it was clear that in Jalpaiguri there were Namasudra people in this district. According to the census of 1901, in Jalpaiguri district under the Rajshahi Division there was 2558 soul of Namasudra people.²²

In areas beyond their main inhabitation zone, in western Bengal for example, the Namasudra were even worse off, living mainly as raiyats sharecroppers, day-labourers. They had among them a few rent receivers, but their number in 1911 was just 2,612 in the whole of central and western Bengal, a broad area that also included Jessore and Khulna, which we have identified as parts of the main Namasudra inhabitation zone. An average Namasudra in western Bengal, writes one of them, could not even imagine that land could be owned by any one else other than a high caste Hindu *bhadralok*.²³

Census and family

The Census give the family definition and size, character, type etc. According to Census the Definition of is that ‘All those living in the same house and sharing a common hearth are included in the definition of the family, but not of its composition in terms of kingship.

A comparison of the average household size between 1911 and 1951 were small. The there were no joint family. It was calculating according to number of the family member.²⁴

Census and educational statistic

Census given the statistic of the educational progress. Education was the vital subject for the development of the human life, human society, community, caste, race, religions etc. If any caste or people of any community or religious group of men is backward in education then the census data identified that and the education authority or the people of the groups would be aware/conscious about that and could take any necessary step to developed it.

Educational statistic of Rajbansi

For example, Thakur Panchanan Barma realized that educational statistics was very poor of the Rajbansi community. To realize that he advised the Rajbansi community that education

The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

was the backbone of any community. Therefore, he humbl made narration to the Rajbansi people to take or receive modern education.

Some educational statistics of Namasudra of Bengal

Later on, young members of the prosperous families of Namasudra of East Bengal became educated, though literacy rates remained rather low-3.3 per cent in 1901 and 4.9 per cent in 1911. Some of these young educated descendants of the Namasudra peasants eventually joined the higher professions and added further to the wealth of their families.²⁵ Here the profession and educational statistics were there taken from the census data.

Another statistic was given about the higher profession. From the census of 1911 it was informed that there was the record of only 3 gazetted and 187 non-gazetted employees in the public administrative service, 30 commissioned and gazette officers in the public force and 1,112 doctors, teachers and lawyers. Twenty years later, in 1931, this caste could boast of only 17 gazetted officers, 767 non-gazetted government employees and 4,263 lawyers, doctors and teachers. But in the meantime, the population of the caste had also increased from 1,908,728 in 1911 to 2,094,957 in 1931. Improvement in absolute numbers therefore did not indicate any significant betterment in proportions.²⁶ The facture of developments of any community or nation is clearly made available by the census data. The graph of development or position of any community in the society and for the comparable study the census data should be required.

It will not, therefore, be an exaggeration to say that this upwardly mobile section was of relatively moderate means and remained in a true sense a microscopic minority, being even less than 2 per cent of the entire caste population in 1911.²⁷

Conclusion

Census constitutes advance elements of nations because it covers the sensitive matter of local social matters.¹⁹ In this regard, the John I. Clarke's statements or opinions were very important. He wrote that the elements of populations remain interacting one with one another. The census covers the economic, psychological, cultural, political aspects of man census gives description of the birth include sex, age, race and other socially and economically

The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

determinant facts including residence, marital status, caste, religion, language, literacy, education, occupation, income, migrational patterns and their causes and results.

Therefore not only social, but it was the statistic of occupation of the people, like-agriculture, handicrafts etc. In cultural field it revealed the language of people etc. So the study of population history also has been making positive contributions to various aspects of population. Importance of census is two of dimensions; one it's a source of the work and another how the census plays an important role in changing the society.

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The Historical Importance of Census: A Case Study of few District of Bengal

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