

Religion Data of Census 2011: II

The imbalance worsens

*In this second post on the religion data of Census 2011, we give the main national aggregate numbers about the changes that have taken place in the share of different communities during 2001-11, and try to put these in the context of the changes since 1951. Longer-term data on such changes is available in our book, *The Religious Demography of India*, mentioned in the previous post. The headline figure of the Muslim share increasing by 0.8 percentage points and a corresponding decline in the share of Indian Religionists is significant in itself and indicates an unabated continuation of the long term trends. But the real story of Census 2011 is to be found in the dis-aggregated data at the State and district levels, where we see extraordinary high increase in the share of Muslims and Christians in several pockets of the country on the one hand and, on the other, an emerging but widespread demographic resurgence of Hindus manifesting in their higher growth as compared to Muslims or Christians in many districts. We shall begin looking into these newer trends in the next post. The data below provides the background for that story.*

Rising share of Muslims

At the national aggregate level the most significant piece of information that emerges from the religion data of census of 2011 is the increase in the share of Muslims in the population of India from 13.43 percent in 2001 to 14.23 percent now. They have thus added 0.8 percentage points to their share in the population.

This increase is part of a continuing process

This level of increase in the share of Muslims is not insignificant. This is the third decade in a row when their share has increased by or above 0.8 percentage points.

The share of Muslims has been rising every decade since Independence and Partition. The quantum of rise, however, became rather large after 1981. That process of considerable increase in the share of Muslims has continued unabated during the decade of 2001-2011.

Rising Share of Muslims		
Census Year	Percentage Share	Decadal Increase in Share
1951	10.45	–
1961	10.69	0.24
1971	11.20	0.51
1981	11.75	0.55
1991	12.61	0.86
2001	13.43	0.82
2011	14.23	0.80

Increase in percentage points.

Gap in the Growth of Muslims and Others

Another way to understand this increase in the share of Muslims is to look at the difference in the decadal growth rates of Muslims and others, especially the Indian Religionists (IRs), among whom we include the Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and those in the Census category of Other Religions and Persuasions (ORPs).

The gap between the growth rates of Muslims and IRs widened to as much as 49 percent during 1981-91; it became marginally narrower in 1991-2001 and has widened again in the last decade. The commentators, who have been pointing out the decline of the Muslim growth rate from 29.69 to 24.65 percent as an indication of the halting of the religious imbalance, are wrong; because, the gap between the growth rates of Muslims and IRs has only widened.

Widening Gap in the Growth of Muslims and Indian Religionists

Census Decade	Growth of Indian R (percent)	Growth of Muslims (percent)	Relative Growth Gap (percent)
1951-61	21.16	24.43	15.45
1961-71	23.84	30.84	29.36
1971-81	24.09	30.74	27.60
1981-91	22.79	33.89	48.70
1991-01	20.34	29.50	45.03
2001-11	16.67	24.65	47.82

Difference as a proportion of Growth of Indian Religionists, including Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and ORPs.

The Muslims in the country have grown by nearly 50 percent more than the Indian Religionists for the third decade in a row. Such wide difference in the growth rates of one community compared to others is not sustainable in any society.

India likely to acquire the largest Muslim population in the World

Because of this sustained growth, Muslim population in India has grown to 17.22 crore in 2011 compared to 3.77 crores in 1951, implying a multiplication factor of 4.6. The population of Indian Religionists in the same period has multiplied only 3.2 times. India now hosts the second largest Muslim population of the world, behind Indonesia which has 19.1 crore Muslims in its population of 24 crore, but ahead of Pakistan, which has 16.7 crore Muslims in its total population of 17.4 crores in 2010. (These figures are from T. M. Johnson and B. J. Grim, *The World's Religions in Figures*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester 2013). Given the trends, most demographers agree that within two or three decades India shall be home to the largest Muslim population in the world.

Christian Share has remained nearly unchanged

The share of Christians in the population of India has declined slightly, from 2.34 percent in 2001 to 2.30 percent in 2011. The Christians during the decade have grown by 15.53 percent compared to the rate of 17.72 percent for the whole population, 16.76 percent for the Hindus and 24.65 percent for the Muslims. The growth of Christians was considerably higher than the Indian average in the first two decades after Independence; their share in the population had gone up from 2.33 percent in 1951 to 2.60 percent in 1971. Since then it has been slowly declining.

Share and Decadal Growth of Christians in India		
Census Year	Share (percent)	Growth (percent)
1951	2.33	-
1961	2.44	27.29
1971	2.60	32.60
1981	2.44	17.38
1991	2.32	17.70
2001	2.35	23.13
2011	2.30	15.53

This low aggregate growth of Christians during 2001-11 is partly because of very low growth rates in Kerala, Nagaland, Mizoram and Goa, four of the important Muslim majority States. Their rates of growth have also been low or negative in some of the large States like Gujarat, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, and in all of the Union Territories, except Puducherry. However, they have registered considerably high

growth in many States; the rise in their share has been particularly remarkable in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur in the Northeast and in Sikkim, in Darjeeling of West Bengal, in parts of Odisha and in Kanniyakumari district of Tamilnadu.

Decline in the Share of Indian Religionists

As a consequence of this continuing rise in the share of Muslims, the share of Indian religionists has been declining. In 2011, the share of Indian Religionists has come down to 83.48 percent; their share in 1951 was 87.22 percent. The process of decline in the share of Indian Religionists, like the increase in the share of Muslims, has continued since Independence and Partition and has become considerably faster after 1981. Between 1951 and 2011, the share of Indian Religionists in the population of India has contracted by nearly 4 percentage points, and the Muslim share has expanded by that amount. Census 2011 shows that this spurt in the Muslim growth and consequent decline of others has not subsided yet.

Decline in the share of Indian Religionists		
Census Year	Percent Share of IR's	Decadal Increase in Share
1951	87.22	–
1961	86.87	-0.35
1971	86.20	-0.67
1981	85.81	-0.39
1991	85.07	-0.74
2001	84.21	-0.86
2011	83.48	-0.73

Incidentally, in this and earlier Tables we have made appropriate corrections to take into account the fact that the Census could not be conducted in Assam 1981 and in J&K in 1991.

Decline in Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and others

Another significant figure that emerges from Census 2011 is that the share of Hindus in the population of India has now declined to below 80 percent; Hindus formed 80.46 percent of the population in 2001, they are 79.80 percent in 2011. In 1951, they had a share of 84.98 percent.

Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, ORPs and RNS, 2001-2011					
	Population in thousands		Share in Percent		Decadal
	2001	2011	2001	2011	Growth %
Total	10,28,610	12,10,855	80.46	79.80	17.72
Indian R	8,66,342	10,10,790	84.21	83.48	16.67
Hindus	8,27,579	9,66,257	80.46	79.80	16.76
Sikhs	19,216	20,833	1.87	1.72	8.42
Jains	4,225	4,452	0.41	0.37	5.37
Buddhists	7,955	8,443	0.77	0.70	6.13
ORPs	6,639	7,938	0.65	0.66	19.56
RNS	728	2,867	0.07	0.24	293.86

The decline in their proportion is thus somewhat bigger than the decline in the share of IRs, indicating the relative lower growth of Hindus as compared to others included in the category of Indian Religionist.

During the last decade, however, the Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists have grown much slower than the Hindus. Decadal growth of these three has been 8.42, 5.37 and 6.13, percent respectively, as compared to 16.76 percent of the Hindus. The share of Sikhs has consequently declined from 1.87 to 1.72 percent, of Buddhists from 0.77 to 0.70 and of Jains from 0.41 to 0.37 percent. This decline in the Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists is a significant phenomenon, which can have important sociological and political

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consequences. It needs to be analysed in detail; we shall take up the issue in subsequent posts.

The share of those counted in the census category of Other Religions and Persuasions (ORPs), who belong mainly to the various tribal religions of India, has marginally increased from 0.65 to 0.66 percent. They have recorded decadal growth of 19.45 percent compared to 17.72 percent of the total population and 16.76 percent of the Hindus. This is contrary to the trend of the previous decade of 1991-2001, when the proportion of ORPs in the population had increased sharply 0.39 to 0.65 percent. We shall look at the spread and growth of ORPs across different States of India.

The share of persons who have not stated their religion has suddenly increased from 0.07 to 0.24 percent; and, their numbers have nearly quadrupled from 7.3 lakh in 2001 to 28.7 lakh in 2011. This spurt in the number of persons in the category of "Religion not Stated (RNS)" is a new phenomenon, which we shall study in detail in a subsequent post. But, from the distribution of RNS across the States, it seems difficult to interpret this spurt as a consequence of the spread of atheism among the people, as it has been interpreted in certain circles.

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