

Religion Data of Census 2011: VIII

The Declining share of Sikhs in the population of India

During 2001-11, the Sikhs have grown at a much lower rate compared to the Hindus; who themselves have grown slower than the total population of India. Sikhs have recorded decadal growth of 8.42 percent as against 16.76 percent of the Hindus and 17.72 percent of the total population. The rate of growth of Sikhs outside Punjab has been merely 4.42 percent. The data indicates not only a decline in the share of Sikhs, particularly in the Punjab and its neighbourhood, but also a widespread contraction of the absolute number of Sikhs in several States and a large number of districts across the country. The decline in the share of Sikhs has been happening for a while now, but the widespread contraction that has happened during 2001-11 seems new. The spread of Sikhs beyond the Punjabi neighbourhood is not as big as is popularly believed; now the footprint of Sikhs across the country seems to be contracting. This contraction of a community that is religiously valuable and strategically sensitive ought to be a matter of serious concern.

Number and Share of Sikhs, 1951-2011

In the Table here, we have compiled the number of Sikhs as counted in the seven decennial Censuses since 1951. Up to 1981, the Sikhs in India were growing considerably faster than the Hindus and the total population; their share in the population of India in this period rose from 1.74 percent in 1951 to 1.97 percent in 1981. After

Number and Growth of Sikhs (counted), 1951-2011

Census Year	Persons in '000s	Percent Share	Growth Sikhs %	Growth Hindus %
1951	6,219	1.74	—	—
1961	7,845	1.79	26.15	20.73
1971	10,379	1.89	32.30	23.68
1981	13,078	1.97	26.00	21.27
1991	16,260	1.94	24.33	25.09
2001	19,216	1.87	18.88	20.35
2011	20,833	1.72	8.42	16.76

1981, however, the rate of growth of Sikhs began to lag behind that of the Hindus and the total population; and, the share of Sikhs in the population of India began to slowly decline. During the last decade of 2001-11, the gap between the growth of Sikhs and the rest of the population has become very wide and their share in India has now reached below their share of 1.74 percent recorded in the first Census after Independence and Partition.

The decline of Sikhs has happened only after 1991

The number of Sikhs in 1991 in the Table above is under-estimated because it excludes the considerable number of Sikhs in Jammu and Kashmir where the Census could not be held during that year. In the previous year, the Census was not conducted in

Number and Growth of Sikhs (Corrected), 1951-2011

Census Year	Persons in '000s	Percent Share	Growth Sikhs %	Growth Hindus %
1951	6,219	1.74	—	—
1961	7,845	1.79	26.15	20.73
1971	10,379	1.89	32.30	23.68
1981	13,092	1.93	26.14	24.06
1991	16,423	1.95	25.44	22.70
2001	19,216	1.87	17.01	19.94
2011	20,833	1.72	8.42	16.76

Assam, though the number of Sikhs there is not very significant. If we correct for these exclusions by interpolating the numbers for these two censuses, then we get the

figures as shown in the Table here. From this Table, it is seen that the rate of growth of Sikhs remained above that of the Hindus even during 1981-1991. It is only during the last two decades that they have begun to grow at a slower pace than others; in these two decades, their share in the population of India has come down from 1.95 to 1.72 percent. The decline during 2001-11 has been much sharper than in the previous decade of 1991-2001. In the following, we try to document the various dimensions of this decline.

The decline of Sikhs is more pronounced outside Punjab

The major part of the decline in the growth of Sikhs is, of course, contributed by Punjab, where more than 75 percent of the Sikhs of India live. Their rate of growth in Punjab was fairly high up to 1991; after that there has been a rapid decline. But what is remarkable in the data compiled in the Table here is the

Growth of Sikhs and in Rest of India, 1961-2011

Census Year	Sikhs in Punjab in '000s	Rate of Growth in %	In Rest of India in '000s	Rate of Growth in %
1961	6,178	—	1,667	—
1971	8,160	32.08	2,219	33.11
1981	10,199	24.99	2,893	30.37
1991	12,768	25.19	3,655	26.34
2001	14,592	14.29	4,624	26.52
2011	16,005	9.68	4,828	4.42

sudden and sharp decline in the rate of growth of Sikhs outside Punjab. The rate of growth of Sikhs in the rest of India outside Punjab had remained fairly high even in 1991-2001, when their growth in Punjab had declined to only 14.29 percent. But in the last decade of 2001-11, the growth of Sikhs outside Punjab has declined to just 4.42 percent from 26.52 percent of the previous decade.

Proportion of Sikhs residing in Punjab has increased for the first time

This is the first time since the creation of the current reorganised State of Punjab, when the Sikhs outside Punjab have grown slower than those in Punjab. The number of Sikhs residing in Punjab as a proportion of the total Sikhs in India had been declining continuously since 1961; it came down from around 79 percent in 1961 to 76 percent in 2001. It has now risen, for the first time, to around 77 percent.

Proportion of Sikhs Residing in Punjab (in%)

1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
78.75	78.62	77.90	77.75	75.94	76.82

Distribution of Sikhs across India

To understand this extraordinary decline of the Sikhs both in and outside Punjab, let us begin by looking at the distribution of Sikhs across India. In the Table below, we have compiled the number, proportion and growth rates of Sikhs in 1991, 2001 and 2011 for all the major States of India with more than 0.10 percent of Sikhs in their population. The 14 States listed here account for all but about 2.34 lakh Sikhs in the country. We also show the district-wise numbers of Sikhs counted in 2011 in Map VIII-A.

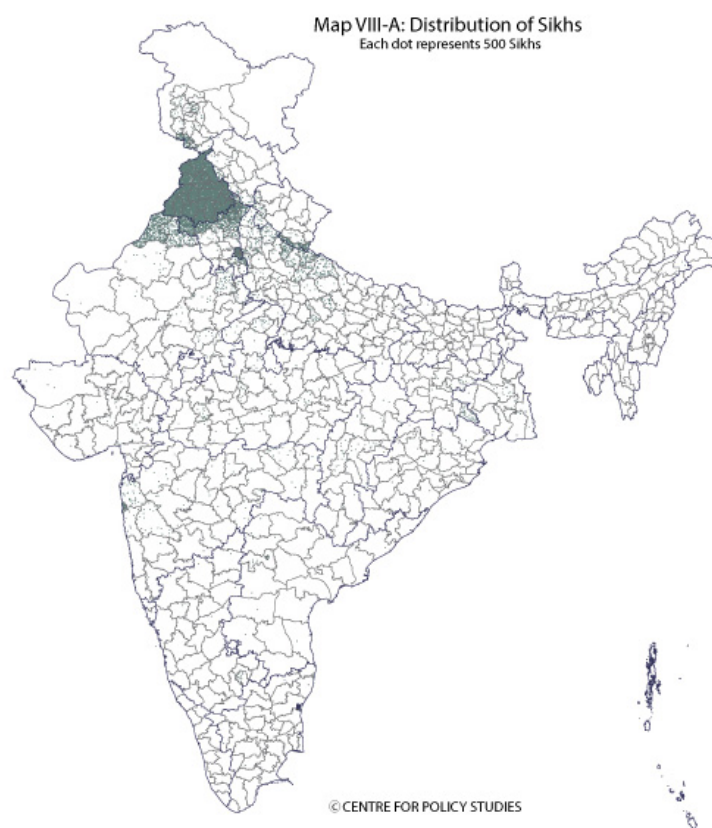
Nearly 90 percent of all Sikhs are in the Punjab and its immediate neighbourhood

A striking features of the Table and the Map below is the concentration of Sikhs in the Punjab and its neighbourhood. Of 2.08 crore Sikhs enumerated in the country in 2011, 1.60 crore are in the Punjab alone. Of the remaining 48 lakh Sikhs, 14.6 lakh are in Haryana, Chandigarh and Himachal Pradesh, which formed part of the Punjab prior to its reorganisation in the sixties. Another 11 lakh Sikhs are in the neighbouring States

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of Jammu & Kashmir and Rajasthan. Thus the immediate neighbourhood of Punjab accounts for about 26 out of the 48 lakh Sikhs outside Punjab. Sikhs in Punjab and these adjoining States together form 89.2 percent of all Sikhs in the country.

	Number of Sikhs			Percentage Share			Growth Rate %	
	1991	2001	2011	1991	2001	2011	1991-2001	2001-2011
INDIA	1,64,22,546	1,92,15,730	2,08,33,116	1.95	1.87	1.72	17.01	8.42
PUNJAB	1,27,67,697	1,45,92,387	1,60,04,754	62.95	59.91	57.69	14.29	9.68
Haryana	9,56,836	11,70,662	12,43,752	5.81	5.54	4.91	22.35	6.24
Chandigarh	1,30,288	1,45,175	1,38,329	20.29	16.12	13.11	11.43	-4.72
Himachal P	52,209	72,355	79,896	1.01	1.19	1.16	39.01	10.42
J&K	1,62,802	2,07,154	2,34,848	2.11	2.04	1.87	27.24	13.37
Rajasthan	6,49,174	8,18,420	8,72,930	1.48	1.45	1.27	26.07	6.66
NCT of Delhi	4,55,657	5,55,602	5,70,581	4.84	4.01	3.40	21.93	2.70
Uttar Pradesh	5,11,739	6,78,059	6,43,500	0.38	0.41	0.32	32.50	-5.10
Uttarakhand	1,64,036	2,12,025	2,36,340	2.77	2.50	2.34	29.26	11.47
Madhya P	1,10,506	1,50,772	1,51,412	0.23	0.25	0.21	36.44	0.42
Chhattisgarh	50,605	69,621	70,036	1991	0.33	0.27	37.58	0.60
Jharkhand	65,758	83,358	71,422	1.95	0.31	0.22	26.76	-14.32
Maharashtra	1,61,184	2,15,337	2,23,247	62.95	0.22	0.20	33.60	3.67
Gujarat	33,044	45,587	58,246	5.81	0.09	0.10	37.96	27.77



Within these neighbouring States, the Sikhs are concentrated largely in a few districts adjoining Punjab. Of 12.4 lakh Sikhs in Haryana, 4.9 lakhs are in the western Sirsa and Fatehabad districts, and another 6.2 lakhs are in the six northern districts of

Panchkula, Ambala, Yamunanagar, Kurukshetra, Kaithal and Karnal, which adjoin Punjab and have a strong Punjabi presence. There are only about 1.3 lakh Sikhs in the remaining 13 districts of the State. Similarly, in Himachal Pradesh, the Sikhs are concentrated mainly in Una, Solan and Sirmour districts. In Jammu and Kashmir, half of the Sikhs in the State are in the Jammu district alone. Of 8.7 lakh Sikhs in Rajasthan, about 6 lakhs are in Ganganagar and Hanumangarh districts that border the southwestern districts of Punjab.

Sikhs beyond the immediate neighbourhood of Punjab

Another 14.5 lakh Sikhs are in the somewhat farther neighbourhood of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The distinct presence of Sikhs in Delhi is a consequence of the Partition, when a large number of Punjabis, who were forcibly uprooted from western Punjab, took shelter in Delhi and its neighbouring regions of Haryana. In Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, the Sikhs are concentrated in a contiguous belt comprising Udham Singh Nagar of Uttarakhand and the adjoining Bijnor, Rampur, Pilibhit, Shahjahanpur and Kheri pocket of Uttar Pradesh. Of 2.4 lakh Sikhs in Uttarakhand, 1.8 lakh are in Udham Singh Nagar and the adjoining parts of Nainital. Of 6.4 lakh Sikhs in Uttar Pradesh, 3.5 lakhs are in Bijnor, Rampur, Pilibhit, Shahjahanpur and Kheri districts. The high presence of Sikhs in these *tarai* districts along the border of Nepal is a consequence of a planned effort to establish agriculture in this forested region. The remaining Sikhs in Uttarakhand are in Dehradun-Hardwar region, which is another pocket where many Punjabis found shelter after the Partition. Sikhs in this larger neighbourhood of Punjab form about 7 percent of all Sikhs, thus leaving only about 4 percent of the Sikhs in the rest of the country.

Sikhs in the farther States

Of about 8 lakh Sikhs beyond this larger neighbourhood of Punjab, 5.7 lakh are in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand of central India and in Maharashtra and Gujarat of western India; only about 2.3 lakhs Sikhs are in the remaining parts of India.

Sikhs are not very widespread in the country

Thus contrary to the popular perception, the Sikh presence in India is not really very widespread. Much of their presence outside Punjab, both in the Punjabi neighbourhood and in the farther States, represents the Punjabi diaspora of Partition. There indeed are some Sikhs in far off regions like Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar, etc., but there they form one among many other communities that have migrated to these regions from different parts of India. There are also older historical Sikh communities in far off places, like in Bidar of Karnataka or Dhubri of Assam; but the numbers there are insignificant. Some impression of the limited presence of Sikhs outside Punjab can be had from the fact that the 2011 Census counts less than 3 thousand Sikhs in the huge metropolis of Chennai and about a thousand in Coimbatore.

The popular impression about the presence of Sikhs everywhere is probably a result of their higher visibility in general and their extraordinary ability to form a disciplined and vibrant religious community even in far off places with rather small numbers.

Presence of Sikhs has declined everywhere

The other remarkable feature of the data compiled in the Table above is that during the last decade the growth rate of this distinctive community has declined rather drastically almost everywhere, and in many places they have registered negative growth. As we have remarked earlier, this decline in growth is much more pronounced outside Punjab, though it is not insignificant in Punjab also. Below, we give in some detail the changes that have occurred in the Sikh presence in different parts of India.

Punjab

In Punjab, the share of Sikhs rose significantly between 1961 and 1971, perhaps as a consequence of the reorganisation, and again between 1981 and 1991. During the last two decades, however, their share has been declining; since 1991, they have lost more than 5 percentage points in their share of the population. During 2001-11, their presence has declined in every district of the State, and quite substantially in some of them. In Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Shahid Bhagat Singh Nagar (Nawanshahar) districts, they now form less than one third of the population; and they are in a minority in Gurdaspur and Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar (Mohali) districts.

Share of Sikhs in Punjab

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
	55.48	60.22	60.75	62.95	59.91	57.69

Haryana

Unlike Punjab, the share of Sikhs in Haryana has been declining continuously since the formation of the State. But the decline registered during 2001-11 is the highest since 1961. In this decade, the Sikhs in Haryana have grown by only 6.24 percent; this is to be compared with the growth of 18.84 percent of the Hindus, 45.88 percent of the Muslims and 85.24 percent of the Christians. The share of Sikhs has declined in every district of the State except in the rapidly growing Gurgaon. In several districts of the State, including Kaithal, Panipat, Sonapat, Jind, Hisar, Bhiwani, Rohtak, Jhajjar, Mahendragarh and Mewat, the Sikhs have registered negative growth. In Rohtak, their numbers have declined by as much as 22 percent; there were 5,079 Sikhs counted there in 2001; in 2011, the count is 3,916.

Share of Sikhs in Haryana

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
	6.81	6.29	6.21	5.81	5.54	4.91

Chandigarh

In Chandigarh, the Sikhs have registered negative growth during 2001-11; their numbers have come down from 1.45 lakhs in 2001 to 1.38 lakhs now. The share of Sikhs in this Capital town has been declining continuously since 1971; the decline has been rather rapid during the last two decades. They now form 13.11 percent of the population, compared to 25.45 percent in 1971 and 20.29 percent in 1991. The share of Hindus has correspondingly gone up from 75.84 percent in 1991 to 80.78 percent now. Incidentally, the Muslim share here has also increased from 2.72 to 4.87 percent in these two decades; in 1961, their share was only 1.22 percent.

Share of Sikhs in Chandigarh

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
	23.62	25.45	21.12	20.29	16.12	13.11

Himachal Pradesh

In Himachal Pradesh, the decline of Sikhs is not that remarkable. During 2001-11, their growth at 10.42 percent is only slightly below the growth of the total population

at 12.94 percent and that of Hindus at 12.63 percent. In Una district that accommodates 26 thousand of 78.6 thousand Sikhs in the State, the difference between the growth of Sikhs and Hindus is much larger at 11.28 and 16.40 percent, respectively. The proportion of Sikhs in the district has therefore declined from 5.21 to 4.99 percent. In Sirmaur and Solan, the other two districts with significant Sikh presence, their share in the population has somewhat improved over 2001. In Mandi, Bilaspur, Shimla and Kinnaur districts, however, the Sikhs have registered negative growth.

Jammu and Kashmir

In Jammu and Kashmir, the Sikhs are in the same boat as the Hindus. As we have seen, 1.14 lakh of 2.35 lakh Sikhs in the State are in Jammu district; and in this district, the growth of Sikhs during 2001-11 at 11.89 percent is somewhat higher than that of Hindus at 11.19 percent. Muslims in this Hindu dominated district have grown by 55.27 percent. In the State as a whole, the growth of Sikhs at 13.37 percent has been lower than that of Hindus at 18.68 percent; but both have registered much lower growth than the Muslims at 26.12 percent and the Christians at 75.53 percent.

Rajasthan

In Rajasthan, the growth of Sikhs has declined sharply from 26.07 percent in 1991-2001 to 6.66 percent in 2001-11. During the last decade, they have actually registered negative growth and their absolute numbers have declined in all districts except Ganganagar, Hanumangarh, Alwar, Bundi and Udaipur. But even in these five districts, their rate of growth is considerably lower than that of the total population and of the Hindus. These five are among the few districts where the Sikh presence is relatively high. Ganganagar and Hanumangarh, as we have mentioned earlier, accommodate nearly 80 percent of all Sikhs in Rajasthan. It seems that there has been a great decline in the few Sikhs who were scattered in various other districts of the State.

NCT of Delhi

Delhi, as we have seen, accommodates a fairly large number of Sikhs. Their share in the population, however, has been declining from decade to decade. They formed 7.67 percent of the population in 1961; in 2011, they are only 3.40 percent. During 2001-11, they have grown by merely 2.70 percent, while the total population of the Capital has grown by 21.21 percent and that of Hindus by 20.73 percent. The decline in the share of Sikhs in Delhi can probably be attributed to the influx of large numbers from the other States of India. But, that does not explain the rather low growth of only 2.70 percent in the Sikh population during the last decade.

Share of Sikhs in the Delhi						
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
	7.67	7.16	5.46	4.84	4.01	3.40

Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand

The presence of the Sikhs in these two States was slowly rising as seen in the Table here.

Share of Sikhs in Uttar Pradesh (including Uttarakhand)						
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
	0.38	0.42	0.41	0.49	0.51	0.42

It had increased from 0.38 percent in 1961 to 0.51 percent in 2001. During the last decade, their share has suddenly come down to 0.42 percent. In the two States together, they have recorded negative growth of -1.15 percent compared to the

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considerable growth of 31.71 percent during 1991-2001 and of 47.34 percent during 1981-91.

In Uttarakhand, the Sikhs have recorded an overall positive growth of 11.47 percent; but their growth has been negative everywhere except the four districts of Dehradun, Hardwar, Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar, in which they have a significant presence. In Udham Singh Nagar, which accommodates two-thirds of all Sikhs in the State, Sikhs have grown by 15.06 compared to the growth of 32.62 percent of the Hindus, 46.33 percent of Muslims and 56.29 percent of Christians. Their growth in the other three districts is also considerably lower than the other communities.

In Uttar Pradesh, Sikhs have recorded a negative growth of -5.10 percent; Census of 2011 has counted 6.43 lakh Sikhs in the State compared to 6.78 lakhs in 2001. This decline of Sikhs is spread across the whole State; in 61 of the 71 districts in the State, the number of Sikhs counted in 2011 is lower than their number in 2001. Their growth has been indeed positive in Pilibhit, Kheri, Rampur and Bijnor, four of the districts in which they have a significant presence. But in these districts also Sikhs have grown much slower than the other communities, and their share in the population has contracted everywhere. During the decade, they have recorded the highest growth of 36.25 percent in the rapidly expanding district of Gautam Buddha Nagar adjoining Delhi; but even in that district, their growth is somewhat lower than that of the total population at 37.11 percent. The detailed figures for the State clearly indicate a widespread contraction of Sikhs; the contraction here is even more pronounced than in Uttarakhand and Rajasthan.

Farther States

In Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, Sikhs had recorded fairly high growth during the previous decade of 1991-2001. During 2001-11, they have grown by less than 1 percent in both States. Consequently, there are several districts in these States, where the number of Sikhs counted in 2011 is less than their number in 2001. In Jharkhand, their number has declined by more than 14 percent between 2001 and 2011; and their growth has been negative in all but two districts of the State. In West Bengal, another State with a significant presence of Sikhs, their number has declined from 66.4 thousand in 2001 to 63.5 thousand in 2011.

During 2001-11, the Sikhs have recorded negative growth in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and Andaman & Nicobar Islands also. In fact, the share of Sikhs has declined in all major States, except Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. They have also improved their share in some of the smaller States like Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Goa and Puducherry; but in these States, the total numbers involved are small.

Gender Ratio and Migration

The decline in the share and numbers of Sikhs, especially during 2001-11, cannot be easily explained. It does not seem related to either the lower Gender Ratio of the Sikhs or their migration out of India; these two often get mentioned as the possible causes.

Migration

The Sikh diaspora outside India is not as large as it is thought to be. According to an authentic compilation of the religious demography of the world, edited by Johnson and Grim, there are 1.6 million Sikhs in the world outside India in 2010, and they form 7.28 percent of all Sikhs. According to the same source, there are 54.9 million Hindus outside India forming 6.15 percent of all Hindus. Thus, in relative terms, the size of Sikh diaspora is not much larger than the Hindu diaspora. The number of Sikhs and Hindus migrating out of India as a proportion of their population is probably not very different. Migration therefore cannot explain the relative decline of Sikhs in India.

Gender Ratio

The all-India average of the female-male ratio of Sikhs is indeed lower than the other major communities. The ratio is 903 females per 1000 males for the Sikhs compared to 943 for the total population of India, 939 for the Hindus and 951 for the Muslims. But this is because the Sikhs are concentrated in Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi region, where the gender ratio of all communities happens to be rather

Female-Male Ratio of Different Communities, 2011

	Sikhs	Hindus	Muslims	Total
INDIA	903	939	951	943
Punjab	906	879	862	895
Haryana	903	876	895	879
Chandigarh	940	803	721	818
Delhi	938	865	855	868
Himachal P	925	975	856	972
J&K	767	795	935	889
Rajasthan	900	926	946	928
Uttarakhand	912	976	901	963
Uttar P	885	907	937	912
Madhya P	885	929	945	931
Chhattisgarh	906	990	952	991

low. Within this region, the gender ratio of Sikhs is in fact much better than that of other communities, as seen in the Table here. In Punjab, the ratio for the Sikhs is 906 compared to 879 for the Hindus and 862 for the Muslims; in Haryana, it is 903 for the Sikhs compared to 876 for the Hindus; in Chandigarh, it is 940 for the Sikhs compared to 803 for the Hindus and 721 for the Muslims; and, in Delhi, it is 938 for the Sikhs compared to 865 for the Hindus and 855 for the Muslims.

The female-male ratio for Sikhs is low in other States. In J&K, compared to the Muslims, it is low for both Sikhs and Hindus; it is indicative of the precarious situation of both communities there. In other States, the lower female-male ratio of Sikhs probably indicates their status as a migrant community, among whom men often dominate.

But in their home region of Punjab and its neighbourhood, the female-male ratio of Sikhs is considerably better than others. This, therefore, cannot be the reason for their declining share, at least in this region.

Summing up

The analysis above shows the following:

1. The share of Sikhs in the population of India, which was slowly rising up to 1991, has begun to decline during the last two decades, and the decline during 2001-11 has been much larger than the previous decade.
2. The share of Sikhs has declined both in Punjab and outside Punjab; but the decline has been more pronounced among Sikhs outside Punjab. During 2001-11, Sikhs in

Punjab have grown by 9.68 percent; those outside Punjab have a registered a growth of just 4.42 percent.

3. In Punjab, the share of Sikhs was continuously rising up to 1991. In the two decades since then, their share has declined by more than 5 percentage points, from 62.95 percent in 1991 to 57.69 percent in 2011.
4. In Haryana the share of Sikhs has been declining since 1961 and in Chandigarh since 1971. In Haryana, their share has come down from 6.81 percent in 1961 to 4.91 percent in 2011; in Chandigarh, it has declined more drastically from 25.45 percent in 1971 to 13.11 percent in 2011. But during 2001-11, not only there has been a decline in their share, but also their absolute number has declined in Chandigarh and in as many as 10 of the 21 districts of the State.
5. In Delhi also the share of Sikhs has been continuously declining and has come down from 7.67 percent in 1961 to 3.40 percent in 2011. During 2001-11, Sikhs in Delhi have grown by merely 2.70 percent.
6. Outside Punjab and its neighbourhood, the share of Sikhs has declined everywhere except in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.
7. Even the actual number of Sikhs has declined in several major States, including Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Assam.
8. In Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, though the number of Sikhs in the State as a whole has not declined yet their numbers have declined in a very large number of districts within these States.
9. The district-wise data seems to indicate that the number of Sikhs has contracted particularly in those districts where their presence is not very high.

The data thus shows a picture of a community undergoing severe contraction in places where its presence is scarce and losing its share in the population where its presence is significant. Notwithstanding the general impression of Sikhs being present everywhere, their presence outside the Punjab and its neighbourhood is not very high. Now the share of Sikhs in Punjab itself is declining and their limited presence outside Punjab seems to be undergoing a sharp contraction. It was happening for a few decades, but the phenomenon has become considerably pronounced now.

Such contraction in the demographic presence of a religiously valuable and politically sensitive community should be a matter of a great concern. It is important to seriously study the phenomenon, look into the causes of decline and take appropriate steps to ensure that the community retains its significant place both in and outside Punjab.

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