

Introduction

01. Religion is one of the oldest basic socio-cultural characteristics associated with the mankind and civilizations created by them over thousands of years of known history. Different communities and people perceive religion in their own unique way. For some, religion has evolved as an established set of beliefs, rituals and traditional practices and worship of one Supreme Being or deity that may be their own caste/tribe deity, village deity. At the same time, some other people worship a number of gods and goddesses. Still there are others who practice and perceive religion in their own way and these beliefs are codified in various scriptures or inherited and handed over from one generation to another. Only a handful few claim to be atheist. However, despite deviations in manifestation of their expressions of belief, people generally believe in one or the other divine power that created the universe and is taking care of all human beings. The large numbers of religion returns encountered at each census in India confirm that different people understand and express religious identity in their own way. The population census provides people collectively an opportunity to express their individual faith/ belief freely, in small or large numbers, which ultimately enter and find place in the official records.

02. Religion returns in Indian census provide a wonderful kaleidoscope of the country's rich social composition, as many religions have originated and certain other religions of foreign origin have flourished to a great extent here. India has the distinction of being the land from where certain important religions of the world namely, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism originated. Our country is also the origin of some of the indigenous faiths/tribal religions that have survived the influence of many major religions for centuries and are still holding ground firmly. Regional co-existence of several religious groups in the country makes it unique and the epithet 'unity in diversity' is brought out clearly in the Indian Census.

03. Ever since its inception, the Census of India has been collecting and publishing information about the religious affiliation as expressed by the people of India. Population Census in India has the rare distinction of being the only instrument that collects the individual information on this diverse but most common characteristic of the Indian population but keeps it confidential except for aggregating it at certain minimum geographic level. Religion being one of the basic socio-cultural characteristic of any society, due emphasis and care has been given on collection of this attribute with regard to the followers of various religions including the minor religious beliefs, faiths and persuasions. The information collected through census questionnaire is tabulated and presented in the form of religion tables. The religion data gathered and disseminated at the decennial census generates immense interest in various ways among all sections of the society and reflects the social composition and dynamics at a particular point of time.

Efforts in earlier Censuses for recording of religion returns

04. For convenience of the data users salient features with regard to the nature of recording of religion returns in the earlier Censuses are given in the subsequent section of this volume. The main source of this set of information are the various Census reports of various census years and provinces and other publications brought out by the Census Organization from time to time. It will be noticed that over the years

though the precise names of various religions might have been expressed a bit differently, by and large there is complete consistency in the expressions used to signify a particular religion, though its scope of inclusion may vary marginally while tabulating and publishing data on this important characteristic.

Pre-Independence period

1872 Census

05. The religion of each person was recorded, e.g. Hindu, Muhammadans, Jain, Buddhist, Christian, Parsees, Jew, etc. In case of those persons who believed in the divinity of Christ, name of the particular sect or church to which they belonged was recorded such as Armenian, Baptist, Greek, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Wesleyan etc. Native converts to Christianity were shown as Native Christians. The term 'Protestant' was not used. The sect of Mohammedans, e.g. 'Sunnis' and 'Shias' was also ascertained along with the main religion. Persons who returned their religions such as Brahmos, Buddhists, Chinese, Jains, Jews, Parsees, Sikhs etc., were recorded without any further sub-division.

1881 Census

06. The main religion to which each person belonged as Hindu, Mahomedan, Christian, Sikh, Jain, Brahma or others religious sub divisions of Hindu, Buddhist, Jews, Parsees, Satnami, Kabirpanthi, Nat Worship, Kumbhipattia was recorded. If a person belonged to some aboriginal or non-Hindu tribe, the name of the tribe as Garo, Khasi etc., was recorded as their religion.

1891 Census

07. The religion of each person was returned as Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Zoroastrian (Parsi), Musalman, Christian, Jew, Minor Religion (including Deists, Atheists, Freethinker, Agnostics, Positivists and No Religion) etc. was recorded. Sects were also recorded for those who returned themselves as 'Christians'. If the sect of the Christians was not reported, the entry 'Not returned' was made. The term Animistic was adopted comprehensively for the religions of forest tribes who do not accept of Hindu system and have not been converted to Christianity or Islam.

1901 Census

08. The religion as returned by the person was recorded. In case of Christians, the sect was also recorded. It was left optional to the provincial governments to decide whether the sect of other religions was to be recorded or not. In provinces where sect was recorded, the instructions were as follows:-

'For Hindus the sect was added in the case of the larger sect. In respect of the Jains, it was enquired whether the respondent belonged to 'Digambar or Shwetambar' or 'Dhondia'. For Sikhs enumerator was asked to clarify what sort of Sikh is she or he. Enquiries were made in case of Parsees whether they were 'Shahenshahi' or 'Kadmi' and for Musalmans whether they were 'Sunni or Shia' or belonged to any other sect of Musalman.

For persons who claimed to belong to special non-Christian religions such as Brahma Samaj or Arya Samaj and who wished their denomination to be separately recorded the religions to which they said they belonged was recorded. In case of

forest tribes who said that they were not Hindus but could not name their religion, the name of the tribe was recorded.'

1911 Census

09. The religion of each person as reported was recorded. If a person belonged to an aboriginal tribe and had no recognized religion e.g. Hindu, Musalman, Christian, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, Zoroastrian, Jew etc., the name of the tribe was entered. All persons who said they were Hindus, Musalmans or Christians, etc., were recorded as such. Those who did not profess belonging to any recognized religion were entered under the name of their caste or tribe. In the course of tabulation all such persons were treated as Hindus if they belonged to a recognized Hindu caste, however, low it might be. Those who belonged to jungle tribes outside the caste system, e.g., Bhils, Khonds, Garos, Todas, etc., were classified as Animists. It was specially laid down as a part of the instructions to the enumerator that the answer that each person gave about his religion was to be accepted and duly entered.

1921 Census

10. The religion of each person who returned himself as Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Musalman, Jew, Tribal Religion etc., was recorded. In case of Christians the sect was also entered. In the case of aboriginal tribes who were not Hindu, Musalman, Christian etc., name of the tribe was entered as a response against this question.

11. These instructions were adapted, expanded and explained according to the local requirements of each province. It was, for example, generally thought desirable to obtain statistics for the two main divisions of the Musalmans viz. the 'Sunnis' and the 'Shias' and in some provinces certain sects of Hindus and Jains were also asked for.

1931 Census

12. Religion as given by each person e.g. Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, Jews, Tribals etc., was recorded. In case of tribals who did not belong to any recognized religion, the name of their tribe was recorded as the name of their religion.

1941 Census

13. The individual religion professed by each person for example being Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Christian, Brahmo, Agnostic, Confucian etc., was recorded. If the tribal name was given, it was also recorded.

Post –Independence period

1951 Census

14. In the first Census after independence, actual religion name as reported by the respondent e.g. Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Jew, Other Religion (Tribal) and Other Religion (Non-Tribal) was recorded for each and every individual.

1961 Census

15. The actual religion viz., Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jain, Buddhist, and Sikh was recorded in respect of each person as stated by him. For others the actual name as returned by the respondents was recorded. Those who did not return their religion or returned names of nationalities such as "Iranian", "Israelite", etc., were put under the category 'Religion Not Stated'. The information on religion of each individual was enquired under Question Number 5 (b) of the Census Schedule.

16. The instruction to enumerators on the mode of filling the question 5 (b) was:

"For	Hindu	--	write 'H'
	Muslim	--	write 'M'
	Christian	--	write 'C'
	Jain	--	write 'J'
	Buddhist	--	write 'B'
	Sikh	--	write 'S'

For others write the answers actually returned."

1971 Census

17. At the 1971 Census the enumerator had instructions to record the religion as actually returned by the respondent. For the sake of convenience of recording the responses as well the following abbreviations were prescribed for major religions as 'H' for Hinduism, 'I' for Islam, 'C' for Christianity, 'S' for Sikhism, 'B' for Buddhism and 'J' for Jainism and in respect of others the actual religion as returned was recorded. Where a person said that he had no religion it was recorded accordingly. However while tabulating, the data was presented for Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains etc.

1981 Census

18. The question on religion was included in the Individual Slip filled in for every person and the Household Schedule filled in for a household. In Question Number 8 of the Individual Slip, the religion of the person enumerated was recorded as returned by the respondent. In Question Number 2 of Part I of the Household Schedule, the religion of the head of the household, as returned was filled in. The religion data was tabulated as returned by the of the head of the household.

19. Thus, the data presented in religion table were based on the information on the religion of the head of the household in respect of normal households and the households of houseless population i.e. all households barring institutional households and (2) information on the religion of each individual as returned for Question 8 of the Individual Slip in respect of individuals in the institutional households.

20. The instructions to enumerators for filling up the response to the question on the religion of the head of the household in the Household Schedule are given below:

“ You have to record the religion of the head of the household as given by him against this question. While writing the religion, you have to write the abbreviations as follows on the line against this question and not in any of the dotted boxes provided at the end of the dotted line against this question:

For Hindus -- write H

For Muslims -- write M

For Christians -- write C

For Sikhs -- write S

For Buddhists -- write B

For Jains -- write J

For ‘Others’ record actual religion as returned fully. If a person says that he has no religion, it may be recorded accordingly. If a person refuses to state his religion, you may write ‘religion not stated’. You should not enter into any argument with the household for filling up this question. You are bound to record faithfully whatever religion is returned by the head of the households. For institutional households put ‘X’ against this question”.

1991 Census

21. In Question Number 8 of the Individual Slip for each person, the religion of the person enumerated was recorded as returned by the respondent. The enumerators were instructed to copy the returns regarding religion of an individual from Question Number 8 of the Individual Slip to Column 9 of Household Schedule. The instructions to enumerators for filling up Question Number 8 on religion are given below:

‘In answering this question use the following abbreviations:

H for Hindus

M for Muslims

C for Christians

S for Sikhs

B for Buddhists

J for Jains

For ‘others’ record the actual religion as returned fully. If the person says he has no religion the answer may be recorded accordingly. For the persons entered in column 2 of the Household Schedule, check if H, M, B, J, C and S or actual religion returned by the person has been recorded in question 8 of the Individual Slip. If so, copy the same in column 9 of the Household Schedule’.

Census of India 2001

22. As in the previous Censuses, the information relating to this important characteristic of all individuals was collected as reported by them. Since the provision of Individual Slips was done away with in Census 2001, the individual responses to the question on religion were recorded in the Household Schedule only (Question No. 7) for each member independently. The actual question canvassed in the Household Schedule and the instructions issued to the census enumerators are reproduced below:

“Q. 7: Religion (write name of the religion in full)

For following religions, also give Code number in box

Hindu	1	Sikh	4
Muslim	2	Buddhist	5
Christian	3	Jain	6

For other religions, write name of the religion in full but do not give any Code number.

You have to record the religion of each member of the household as returned by the respondent in reply to this question. Six religions together with their code numbers are listed below this question. While recording the response under this question, you have to write the name of religion and also enter its code number in the box appearing at the right hand side.

While making entry for any religion other than Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and Jain, record fully the actual religion as returned for the person under this question. In such a case no entry needs to be made in the box meant for recording Code number. If the person says that she/he has no religion, record ‘no religion’. In this situation too, the box provided at the right of this column would be left blank for use in the office at a later stage. You should not enter into any argument with the household for recording entry under this question. You are bound to record faithfully whatever religion is returned by the respondent for herself/himself and for other members in the household.

It is not necessary that all the members in the household profess the same religion. Therefore, enquiry should be made for each member of the household independently. We should not presume that the religion of the head or the respondent is necessarily the religion of every member being enumerated in the household.

You should not mistake religion for caste names and also not try to establish any relationship between religion and mother tongue”

23. The response to the question on religion was not an abbreviated alphabet but was numeric due to the requirements of form designing in view of the new technique used for tabulation of census data. It must also be remembered that in Census 2001, the respondents were provided for the first time in Indian Census history, to look at the information collected from them and recorded by the enumerators and affix their signatures after satisfying themselves that all the

responses have been correctly recorded as reported. This unique procedure itself is expected to have lead to improvement in data collection specially on religion, mother tongue etc.

Working Group on Religion- Quality Assurance

24. With a view to streamline the methodology of classification/ merger/grouping of numerous religion returns that appeared at the past decadal censuses, a 'Working Group on Religion' under the Chairmanship of the Registrar General of India was constituted in the year 2001(see Annexure A). The Working Group met twice to suggest ways for improving the quality of religion returns and their presentation. Among other recommendations, it also finalized a code list of religion after taking into account as many as 1700 religion names that had appeared in the Censuses of 1971, 1981 and 1991 and forwarded by the census directorates to the Social Studies Division of the ORGI for suggesting their classification in the appropriate main religion. Each religion return of the past censuses was deliberated upon at length in the Working Group meeting before putting it under the appropriate main category. The Data Processing Division of ORGI later improved upon the code list suggested by the Working Group and the same was used as the 'Dynamic Directory' at each data center in the fifteen directorates for on the spot classification of religion names returned by the respondent if these existed in the code list. New returns were given additional codes at each data center and subsequently examined centrally at the headquarters in New Delhi.

Data Processing.

25. A quantum leap was made on the technology front while processing the Census 2001 data both for House-listing and Population Enumeration. The Census Schedules for both the phases were scanned through high speed scanners in fifteen data centres across the country and hand-written data from the schedules were converted into digitized form through Intelligent Character Reading (ICR) software for creation of ASCII records for further processing. The designing and formatting of the Household Schedule had to be done very carefully using specialized software so as to ensure uniformity, which was an essential pre-requisite for scanning. The selection of appropriate state-of-art technology in data processing has made it possible to produce the Census tables on a hundred percent basis and no sampling was resorted to. For Census 2001, about 202 million schedules consisting of about 1028 million records were scanned and processed within a span of only 10 months starting October 2002. For editing, checking and classification of religion returns, an on screen Computer Assisted Code structure was prepared that facilitated editing, checking and classification of bulk of the religion returns at the Data Center level itself.

Task Force on classification of new religion returns of Census 2001

26. After the data is processed, it is expedient on the part of the data-producing agency to satisfy itself about its quality before putting the same in public domain. This has to be done mainly through the process of internal consistency, comparison with similar data of the past and also through validation with likewise data if available, from external sources. Quite often the local knowledge and perception has to be brought into play to understand both the existing and the

emerging trends of religious affiliation and the social matrix as well. Despite having created a comprehensive 'Dynamic Directory' of religion names based on the returns from earlier census, a large number of new religion names were encountered at various data centers that required additional coding and classification under appropriate category. With a view to overcome this problem a 'Task Force on Classification of New Religion Names' comprising of officers from Census Division and Social Studies Division of the ORGI was constituted (see Annexure- B). The main task of the Task Force on Religion was to merge or group the new responses encountered uniformly and consistently and classify it into the appropriate religious community based on available literature and local knowledge.

27. An unbiased consistent approach was adopted so as to ensure that religion return gets appropriately classified. All the religion names returned from various Data Centers along with the remarks of the local directorate were first examined at the Social Studies Division and were brought before the Task Force for its approval. The Task Force looked into each and every proposal very carefully and each return was deliberated upon intensely before being approved. The contribution of the Directorates of Census Operations too was noteworthy in providing clarification pertaining to their local area.

28. The issue of consistency of classifying religion returns within the Census 2001 and across the earlier Censuses as a whole was a truly daunting task specially as certain tribal populations had an inclination to return their religious affiliations in terms of their tribe name, localities or even as a regional name or mother tongue. The sensitivity attached to the response for the question on religion is in a way the attempts of the people of India, particularly very small groups, to express their keen desire of maintaining their unique identity in the social order. Census of India provided once again the opportunity to the people of India to exercise their right and get into the official records. This also served as an opportunity for the government to know officially of the new cults/faiths, which are emerging, or being adopted by the people in small or big numbers. Various social and political movements prior to each census greatly affect the quality of returns for that particular Census which may or may not sustain till the next census. For example, in Census of India 2001, various movements in the newly created state of Jharkhand exhorting people to record themselves as following 'Sarna' religion and in Karnataka the rejuvenated movement for recording 'Veershaiva/ Lingayat' are clearly reflected in the tables on religion. There are similar examples from other parts of the country as well.

29. In the past there has been a pressing demand from various agencies for the religion data cross-classified by socio-economic characteristics of the religious communities so as to assess the level of development achieved by them in the social and economic spheres of life. In doing so, the Census Organization has often been criticized for not publishing the religion data cross classified by various socio-economic characteristics of the religious communities. It is pertinent to point out here that in the Censuses of pre-Independence period, the data on certain social characteristics of the religious communities like education, civil condition such as age and marital status was published by the Census Organization. However, after attainment of independence, religion data in Census of India was provided by sex and residence only.

30. The National Minority Commission has been suggesting that religion data be cross-classified by various socio-economic characteristics of the religious

minorities to assess the social and economic status attained by these groups. Their requirement is therefore being fulfilled by the Census Organization.

31. The National Statistical Commission 2001 too has been advocating for the need of Census data on various aspects including religion data cross classified by socio-economic variables. The Commission in volume II (P. 225) of its report for the year 2001 observed that data on religion, caste and language, cross-classified by literacy, work and workers category and migration is not published. These data would throw considerable light on the state of development of people belonging to different religious groups. This publication therefore meets the recommendation of the National Statistical Commission also.

32. The present volume, thus, attempts to fulfill the demands made by various data user agencies both within and outside the government. It is now for them to come out with plans and policies for the welfare and empowerment of various sections of the society making appropriate use of the religion data on socio-economic variables.

33. The present table on religion provides absolute numbers of the followers of six main religious communities and a combined group consisting of all 'Other Religions and Persuasions' by sex and place of residence. The details of the last group will be published shortly as a part of the regular tabulation plan. The absolute number of literates, workers and non-workers, categories of workers etc., at India/state and district levels for all the religious communities are also being provided for the first time in the Indian Census. It may be noted that the census results for Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur were cancelled due to administrative and technical reasons although a population census was carried out in these sub-divisions also as per schedule.