

Changing Demography of Buddhist Population in India: A Comparative Report

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Revival of Buddhism in recent past in Buddha's own land draws academic attention. The Census of India 2001 throws some light on the demographic trend and it also provides an insight into the trend.

However, more studies have to be made before any serious conclusion could be arrived at.

I take this opportunity to present some facts and figures based on the Census 2001 to this distinguished audience on Vesak celebration.

I regret it is not yet a research paper but I would like to present a comparative paper at a later stage.

Buddhist revival in India

- The Buddhist revival in India practically took shape under Anagarika Dhammapala (1864-1933), who established the Mahabodhi society in India in 1891.
- A definite turn to the Buddhist revival movement was given by Dr.B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) who embraced Buddhism, at an impressive and historic ceremony at Nagpur on October 14, 1956.

Buddhist Groups in India

- In modern India, both the Theravada and the Mahayana traditions of Buddhism are prevalent. Of about 94 percent follow the Theravada tradition, and the remaining 6 percent are Mahayanists.
- The Indian Buddhists can be further divided into four distinct groups.
 1. There are survivors from the Buddhist period. Mainly this type is represented by the Barua Buddhist of Bengal, the Chakma tribe of Tripura and Mizoram and the Buddhist of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh.
 2. There are the ethnic overlaps from Nepal, Thailand and Burma.
 3. Those who are attracted towards Buddhism as a result of the missionary movement spearheaded by the Maha Bodhi society in India.
 4. The followers of Dr. Ambedkar or the neo-Buddhists form the most dominant group.

Population by religious communities, India - 1961 to 2001
(In '000)

Religious communities	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
All	439,235	547,950	665,288	838,584	1,028,610
Hindus	366,527	453,292	549,779	687,647	827,579
Muslims	46,941	61,418	75,512	101,596	138,188
Christians	10,728	14,223	16,165	19,640	24,080
Sikhs	7,846	10,379	13,078	16,260	19,216
Buddhists	3,256	3,812	4,720	6,387	7,955
Jains	2,027	2,605	3,206	3,353	4,225
Others	1,499	2,186	2,766	3,269	6,640

1. Figures for 2001 exclude Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur.
2. All India figures for 1981 and 1991 exclude Assam and Jammu & Kashmir respectively as no census was conducted there.

**Percentage distribution (unadjusted) of population by
religious communities India - 1961 to 2001 Census
(without excluding Assam and J&K)**

Religious communities	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Hindus	83.4	82.7	82.6	82.0	80.5
Muslims	10.7	11.2	11.4	12.1	13.4
Christians	2.4	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.3
Sikhs	1.8	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.9
Buddhists	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8
Jains	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.4
Others	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.6
All	100	100	100	100	100

**Decadal growth rates (unadjusted) of religious communities, India – 1961 to 2001 Census
(without excluding Assam and J&K)**

Religious communities	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	1991-01
All	24.8	21.4	26.0	22.7
Hindus	23.7	21.3	25.1	20.3
Muslims	30.8	22.9	34.5	36.0
Christians	32.6	13.7	21.5	22.6
Sikhs	32.3	26.0	24.3	18.2
Buddhists	19.1	23.8	35.3	24.5
Jains	28.5	23.1	4.6	26.0
Others	45.9	26.6	18.2	103.1

**Population by religious communities
and residence India - 2001**

Religious communities	Total	Rural	Urban
All	1,028,610,328	742,490,639	286,119,689
Hindus	827,578,866	611,263,295	216,315,573
Muslims	138,188,240	88,794,744	49,393,496
Christians	24,080,016	15,893,958	8186,058
Sikhs	19,215,730	14,106,481	5,109,249
Buddhists	7,955,207	4,893,610	3,061,597
Jains	4,225,053	1,009,347	3,215,706
Others	6,639,626	6,002,468	637,158
Religion not stated	727,588	526,736	200,852

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**Percentage of population by religious communities
and their residence, India - 2001**

Religious communities	Total	Rural	Urban
Hindus	80.5	82.3	75.6
Muslims	13.4	12.0	17.3
Christians	2.3	2.1	2.9
Sikhs	1.9	1.9	1.8
Buddhists	0.8	0.7	1.1
Jains	0.4	0.1	1.1
Others	0.6	0.8	0.2
All	100	100	100

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Percentage of 0-6 population to total population by religious communities and residence, India - 2001

Religious communities	Total	Rural	Urban
All	15.9	17.0	13.1
Hindus	15.6	16.7	12.5
Muslims	18.7	20.2	16.1
Christians	13.5	14.6	11.2
Sikhs	12.8	13.4	11.2
Buddhists	14.4	15.2	13.2
Jains	10.6	11.5	10.3
Others	18.0	18.4	13.9

Literacy rate (Persons) by religious communities and residence, India- 2001

Religious communities	Total	Rural	Urban
All	64.8	58.7	79.9
Hindus	65.1	59.1	81.3
Muslims	59.1	52.7	70.1
Christians	80.3	74.5	90.9
Sikhs	69.4	64.2	83.6
Buddhists	72.7	66.9	81.6
Jains	94.1	87.5	96.1
Others	47.0	43.9	75.3

Literacy rate (Females) by religious communities and residence, India - 2001

Religious communities	Total	Rural	Urban
All	53.7	46.1	72.9
Hindus	53.2	45.7	73.9
Muslims	50.1	42.7	63.2
Christians	76.2	69.7	88.3
Sikhs	63.1	57.2	79.2
Buddhists	61.7	54.6	72.9
Jains	90.6	80.3	93.8
Others	33.2	29.5	66.5

Work participation rate (Persons) by religious communities and residence, India - 2001

Religious communities	Total	Rural	Urban
All	39.1	41.7	32.3
Hindus	40.4	43.0	33.0
Muslims	31.3	32.8	28.6
Christians	39.7	42.0	35.2
Sikhs	37.7	39.9	31.6
Buddhists	40.6	46.9	30.7
Jains	32.9	38.8	31.0
Others	48.4	50.1	31.7

Work participation rate (Females) by religious communities and residence, India - 2001

Religious communities	Total	Rural	Urban
All	25.6	30.8	11.9
Hindus	27.5	32.6	12.5
Muslims	14.1	17.5	7.7
Christians	28.7	32.6	21.2
Sikhs	20.2	23.9	10.0
Buddhists	31.7	42.2	14.8
Jains	9.2	20.1	5.8
Others	44.2	46.8	19.7

Parsi population, 1901-2001 India, Maharashtra and Mumbai

Census year	India	Maharashtra	Mumbai
1901	94,910	58,093	46,231
1911	100,096	63,860	50,931
1921	101,778	65,493	52,234
1931	109,752	71,627	57,765
1941	114,890	70,139	59,813
1951	111,791	79,606	68,660
1961	100,772	77,542	70,065
1971	91,378	72,266	64,667
1981	71,630	56,886	50,053
1991	76,382	60,501	53,794
2001	69,601	54,739	46,557

Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Parsi Population India - 2001

Population per household	3.0
Sex ratio	1050
Child sex ratio (0-6)	921
Proportion of child population	4.7
Literacy rate	97.9
Female literacy rate	97.1
WPR	35.2
MWPR	48.2
FWPR	22.8

Conclusion

- Buddhism in India is regaining much of its lost prestige. Besides the manifold increase in population, the Buddha and the Buddhist heritage now command respect and reverence, which was long their due.

References are drawn from..

- Census Report 2001, Government of India
http://www.censusindia.net/religiondata/presentation_on_religion.pdf
- <http://www.webindia123.com/religion/buddh/modern.htm>

Thank You

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