

Religious Composition of Punjab's Population

Changes, 1951-61

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The religious composition of Punjab's population has undergone significant changes during 1951-61

The excessive migration of the Sikhs to other States in India and to foreign countries has reduced their proportion in the total population in their own home State.

The Hindu population on the other hand, has slightly improved its relative strength because of excess of in-migration over out-migration.

Within Punjab, too, contrasting patterns of mobility of the two communities have been witnessed during the decade.

In the Sikh majority districts the population of the Sikhs increased very little or decreased while the rate of growth of the Hindu population was very high—higher than the rate of natural increase in many districts.

In the Hindu majority districts, by contrast, the numbers of the Sikhs increased phenomenally in certain areas while the Hindu population increased at about the rate of natural growth.

The Sikhs have shown greater mobility, both within and out of Punjab, in pursuit of economic opportunities than their Hindu brethren.

While the movement of the Sikhs is to a large extent from rural areas to rural areas, that of the Hindus is to urban places. In this movement religious and linguistic considerations have been generally disregarded.

These inter-regional shifts have set afoot a process of inter-mixing of Hindus and Sikhs. This is a healthy trend towards national integration and is a matter of threat political, social and economic significance.

MOST human geographers will concede today that few among the phenomena causing or reflecting regional differences in cultures are as potent and sensitive as religion. A study of the changes in religious composition in Punjab where several economic, social and political matters are directly or indirectly associated with religion assumes a special significance. Particularly in post-Independence Punjab, religion, language and politics have been so intricately mixed up as to create difficult problems both for the administrator and the planner. Hence, an investigation into the regional variations in the growth rate of major religious groups, their inter-regional shifts and changes in the relative proportion of population of each within various areas is desirable on both academic and practical grounds.

The recent demographic dynamism of Punjab would be evident not only from its unusually high rate of population growth, but also from the substantial migration of its peoples to other States of India, and at the same time a considerable amount of redistribution of population within the State, causing significant regional and intra-regional changes in the religious composition of the population.

Our attention would be focussed primarily on the Hindus and the Sikhs, who according to 1961 Census, form 97 per cent of the State's total population. During 1951-61, the Hindus in-

creased by about 30 per cent; while the State's estimated rate of natural increase was about 28 per cent. The Sikhs, on the other hand, increased only by 19 per cent.¹ Thus, assuming similar rates of natural increase for both the communities, the slightly higher than the natural rate of increase in the case of Hindu population is obviously due to an excess of to-migrants over out-migrants. The considerably lower rate of increase of the Sikhs is attributable to the excess of Sikh out-migrants over the Sikh in-migrants. In India as a whole, their population increased by about 23 per cent. Indeed there has been a considerable migration of the Sikhs to other States of India and abroad. The numbers of such migrants from Punjab to foreign lands and other States of India are esti-

mated at 240,000 and 220,000 respectively,

Sikhs

A comparison of the figures in Table 1 indicates that outside Punjab there has been some amount of inter-State redistribution of the Sikhs during the decade, leading to differentials in their rates of growth. However, the actual numbers involved in this re-distribution are very small. The spectacular increases in the Sikh population of a few States may directly be attributed to migrations from Punjab which, consequently, reduced the proportion of the Sikhs in the State's total population.

Although the Sikhs moving out of Punjab have spread over most parts of India in their search for economic opportunities, a very large majority of them have gone to the adjoining States of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and the Union Territory of Delhi, where their population has shown tremendous increases during the ten years (Tab 1).

The Terai region in Uttar Pradesh has witnessed unparalleled increase in the Sikh population. The explanation is not far to seek. Despite its agricultural potentialities, the region had been lying practically waste. The abolition of the landlord system of tenure soon after Independence threw this virtual wasteland open for development and attracted streams of Sikh peasants from the densely populated areas of Punjab,

1 If allowance is made for the burnt slips on a proportionate basis, Punjab's Sikh population in 1951 should have been larger by about 150,000 and its rate of increase during 1951-61 should be about 19 per cent (as against 21.8 per cent as given in Census of India Paper No 1 of 1963, page v). Similarly the corresponding growth rate of the Hindu population should be about 30 per cent.

2 Many people believe, however, that the rate of natural increase of the Sikhs is somewhat higher than that of the Hindus.

Similarly, the extension of canal irrigation in the Ganga Nagar District of Rajasthan has encouraged a rush of Sikh farmers from their home State, increasing the district's Sikh population by 95.19 per cent—from 110,095 in 1951 to 214,905 in 1961. The actual number of in-migrants can, however, be determined only after making allowance for the natural increase. In the Alwar District where there were 23,028 Sikhs in 1961, the decennial increase was no less than 76 per cent, mostly in rural areas. Although in a number of other districts the percentage increase was startling, the increase in actual numbers was only small. In Rajasthan as a whole, the Sikh population increased by 84.98 per cent—from 148,229 in 1951 to 274,198 in 1961.

There was also a trickle of Sikh farmers to the newly reclaimed areas in Madhya Pradesh, where in 1961, in a total population of 66,715 Sikhs, 19,755 were in rural areas. The over-all increase in Sikh population in the State was 64.6 per cent.

In several of the remaining Indian States the Sikh population increased appreciably, but in urban areas and in pursuance of non-agricultural activities, Delhi and Greater Bombay experienced particularly impressive increases. Only Bihar and West Bengal, where the Sikhs were already in large numbers, registered small increases.

This movement of the Sikhs from Punjab to near as well as far off Indian areas during 1951-61, as also earlier, demonstrates their keenness to avail themselves of economic opportunities, whether in rural areas or in towns, whether in the field of agriculture or in other sectors, against all linguistic and religious considerations. It also shows unmistakably their tendency toward dispersal to areas of economic potentialities anywhere in the country, rather than concentration in the Punjabi-speaking zone of Punjab. It is no doubt a very healthy trend toward national integration, and a matter of great political import.

Among the Hindus too, there has been considerable out-migration from Punjab to other Indian States, but the number of Hindu in-migrants to Punjab has exceeded the number of out-migrants. These in-coming people are mostly labourers who engage themselves in construction work, or ply as rickshaw-pullers. However, notwithstanding this small excess of in-migration, the proportion of the Hindus

to the State's total population has remained practically the same.

Changes in Religious Composition

The reverse pattern of imbalance between out-migrants and in-migrants of the two religious groups is not the only factor that has caused regional differences in the rate of growth of Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab. The considerable amount of redistribution of persons belonging to the two communities within the State has produced not only great contrasts in their rate of change within areas but also impressive inter-regional disparities in the growth of their populations. Of the two communities, the Sikhs have shown greater mobility within as well as out of Punjab. The resultant differentials in their rates of actual population growth have significantly modified the share of each community in

the State's total population! as also in the total population of each area.

Whereas the proportion of the Hindus has increased from 62.2 per cent in 1951 to 63.6 per cent in 1961, that of the Sikhs has declined from 35 per cent in 1951 to 33.3 per cent in 1961.

Within Punjab, very contrasting areal patterns have emerged in the growth of population of the two communities during the decade. The contrasts were particularly accentuated in the case of the Sikhs whose population decreased or increased very little in a number of districts, but increased spectacularly in others. The population of the Hindus, on the other hand, increased practically everywhere at rates not far above or below the rate of natural growth. The inter-district disparities in the rate of population growth of each community give a measure of its mobility within the State, and also

Table 1: State Wise Growth of Sikh Population 1951-61

State/ Territory	Sikh Population in		Percentage Increase During 1951-61
	1951	1961	
Andhra Pradesh	5,169	8,563	65.66
Assam	3,949	9,686	145.28
Bihar	37,947	44,413	17.04
Gujarat	7,029	9,646	37.23
Jammu & Kashmir	N.A.	63,069	N.A.
Kerala	308	822	166.88
Madhya Pradesh	39,914	65,715	64.64
Madras	2,386	2,567	7.59
Maharashtra	41,434	57,617	39.06
Mysore	3,951	3,287	-16.81
Orissa	4,163	5,030	20.83
Punjab	5,553,918	6,769,129	21.88*
Rajasthan	148,229	274,198	84.98
Uttar Pradesh	197,612	283,737	43.58
West Bengal	30,623	34,184	11.63
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	126	241	91.27
Delhi	137,096	203,916	48.74
Himachal Pradesh	5,019	8,437	68.10
L. M. & A. Islands	—	—	—
Manipur	50	523	946.00
Tripura	35	49	40.00
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	—	—	—
Goa, Daman & Diu	—	—	—
Pondicherry	—	14	—
N E F A	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Nagaland	158	255	61.39
Sikkim	18	72	300.00

Source: Census of India Paper No 1 of 1963—Religion, pp v-vii.

If allowance is made for the 1951-Census slips which were burnt in the Jullundur fire, the percentage increase comes to about 19.

the difference in the degree of mobility of the two communities

In nearly all those districts where the Sikhs were either in a majority or formed a large proportion of the total population, their numbers either decreased or increased by rates far lower than the rate of natural increase. This was due mostly to considerable out-migration from the rural areas. By contrast, the Hindu population in all of these districts increased by much higher rates which were above the rate of natural increase in most cases. The figures in Table 3 suggest some amount of in-migration of Hindus, most of which is to urban areas.

Table 3 reveals that in all the trans-Sutlej Sikh majority districts, the Sikh population increased very little during the decade. These are the districts where density of rural population is high, per capita cultivated land is small, and in some parts of which the menace of water-logging has been increasing alarmingly. The gradual deterioration of farm economy under the pressure of increasing population is inducing the peasants to seek economic opportunities elsewhere in the State as well as in other States of India or abroad. A sizeable proportion of the out-migrants have gone to those areas in Punjab where extensive wastelands have been reclaimed and brought under cultivation with the introduction of canal or tube-well irrigation, as in the Sirsa and Fatehabad tahsils of the Hissar district, Patiala and Rajpura tahsils of the Patiala district, Thanesar, Karnal and Kaithal tahsils of the Karnal district, and Jagadhari tahsil of the Ambala district. In most of these areas into which the Sikh peasants have moved the Hindus are in overwhelming majority. There has been considerable migration of Sikh farmers from the trans-Sutlej region also to the agricultural frontiers of the Terai in Uttar Pradesh and the Ganga Nagar district in Rajasthan. In addition, a large number of Sikhs have moved out for employment in the army, transport, industry and several other types of activities.

Large scale out-migration has practically neutralised the effect of high rate of natural increase in the population of the Sikhs in the Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Kapurthala districts; it has caused a 9 per cent decrease in their population in the Jullundur district from which there has been tre-

mendous emigration to the U K during the decade.

The Hindu population in nearly all the districts listed in Table 3, on the other hand, increased by very high rates — higher than the rate of natural increase, reflecting some in-migration. This increase took place mostly in urban places, the most spectacular increase being in the Bhatinda district where, during the decade, numerous towns sprang up as agricultural markets and centres of processing industries, based mostly on cotton and oilseeds, located along rail routes converging on Bhatinda. Most of the industrial and commercial activities here, as elsewhere in the state, are handled by members of the Hindu community.

The great differences in the rates of population growth of the two religious groups in the predominantly Sikh districts have caused significant changes in their relative strength, the most meaningful changes being in the Jullundur, Gurdaspur and Sangrur districts where the patterns of religious composition have been reversed (Table 4). With the exception of Patiala and Ludhiana districts where the relative position of the Sikhs in the total population has somewhat improved, the proportion of the Sikhs declined in all the Sikh majority districts, whereas that of the Hindus has slightly improved (Table 4).

However, any progress in diversification of rural economy by a quick process of rural industrialisation in the densely populated trans-Sutlej

plain will slacken this exodus. As the agricultural frontiers in the Terai and Ganga Nagar areas are fast closing, the rush of out-migration for farming is likely to peter out very soon. In future the out-migration of Sikhs will therefore be more and more for non-agricultural pursuits.

Table 2: Uttar Pradesh Districts with More Than 30 Per Cent Increase in Sikh Population During, 1951-61

District	Sikh Population in 1961	Percentage Increase in Sikh Population 1951-61
Chamali	33	3200.00
Nainital	46,537	563.96
Pilibhit	16,631	513.24
Kheri	12,564	467.48
Rampur	25,245	390.38
Shahjahanpur	6,560	192.99
Garhwal	422	187.67
Deoria	229	126.73
Mirzapur	1,806	123.79
Bareilly	9,936	104.70
Varanasi	2,516	95.80
Etawah	1,563	66.99
Pratapgarh	470	66.08
Basti	637	57.28
Gonda	1,202	49.32
Lucknow	12,113	45.71
Sultanpur	925	41.01
Kanpur	24,397	37.67

Source: Compiled from Census of India Paper No 1 of 1963 pp xxxi and 37-43.

Table 3: Differences in Growth of Hindu and Sikh Population in Districts of Punjab Where Either the Sikhs Were in a Majority or Formed a Large Portion of the Total Population in 1951

District	Proportion of the Sikhs in the Total Population in 1951	Percentage Increase in Population during 1951-61	
		Hindus	Sikhs
Amritsar	70.6	33.8	2.6
Gurdaspur	46.5	27.7	6.9
Kapurthala	63.5	34.5	6.69
Jullundur	56.4	47.3	-9.1
Ludhiana	61.6	21.0	29.3
Ferozepur	58.6	34.0	25.3
Bhatinda	78.4	74.4	23.5
Sangrur	47.9	39.7	16.8
Patiala	52.3	32.2	35.9

Source: Figures calculated from 1961 and 1951 Census data after making allowance for the 1951 Census slips burnt at Jullundur on a proportionate basis.

By contrast, in many of the Hindu majority district the Sikh population has experienced a phenomenal increase while the number of Hindus has increased only at about the rate of natural growth (Table 5).

In the Hissar, Karnal and Ambala districts the increase in Sikh population, both percentage-wise and in actual numbers, was particularly impressive. In the Hissar district the increase was 89.9 per cent—from 80,394 in 1951 to 152,719 in 1961; in the Karnal district, 84.7 per cent—from 96,458 in 1951 to 177,602 in 1961. In both the cases the rapid rise in Sikh population took place in those areas where the development of new irrigational means has made the reclamation of waste lands possible. The in-migrants to these areas have invariably come from the densely populated regions where hunger for cultivable land is great. Also, among these in-migrants are a fairly large number of former displaced persons who come from the canal colonies of West Pakistan.

It may be noted that this process of redistribution of population, from areas approaching some kind of a saturation level under the existing economy and technology to thinly settled areas of considerable agricultural potentialities, has greatly slackened, if it is not already over. The future does not seem to hold a bright promise for further reshuffling on this account.

In the Hindu majority areas the Hindu population, on the other hand increased appreciably only in the Hissar district where the last decade witnessed economic development at a quick pace. In the Kangra, Simla and Hoshiarpur districts their increase was far below the rate of natural growth, implying considerable out-migration. In the Simla district the main reason for the small increase in Hindu population and actual decrease in Sikh population was the shifting of the state Capital from Simla to Chandigarh. In the Kangra district, poverty of resources continues to push out the local inhabitants irrespective of their religion. In the Hoshiarpur district also where the disastrous action of the chos and the gradual increase of population over the last four decades have reduced the per capita cultivated land to less than half an acre, the process of out-migration has been continuous, particularly from the overwhelmingly Hindu-majority Una

tahsil where poverty is more acute than elsewhere in the district.

In view of the considerably large differential in the rates of population growth of the two communities in nearly all the Hindu majority districts

Table 4: Changes in the Percentage of Hindus and Sikhs to Total Population in Sikh Majority Districts, 1951-61 .

District	As Percentage of Total Population			
	Hindus		Sikhs	
	1951	1961	1951	1961
Amritsar	27.7	32.9	70.6	64.5
Gurdaspur	45.5	50.0	46.5	42.9
Kapurthala	35.4	40.9	63.5	58.2
Jullundur	42.6	53.9	56.4	44.8
Ludhiana	37.3	35.7	61.6	63.0
Ferozepur	38.4	40.6	58.6	57.9
Bhatinda	20.8	27.1	78.4	72.3
Sangrur	47.5	51.8	47.9	43.6
Patiala	46.6	45.7	52.3	52.9

Source; Calculated from 1951 and 1961 Census Data.

Table 5: Differences in Rates of Growth of Hindu and Sikh Populations in Hindu Majority Districts of Punjab, 1951-61

District	Proportion of the Hindu in the Total Population in 1951	Percentage Increase in Population during 1951-61	
		Hindus	Sikhs
Hissar	91.3	43.9	89.9
Rohtak	98.5	26.7	-18.5
Gurgaon	82.0	27.4	32.5
Karnal	90.3	32.8	84.7
Ambala	73.6	31.0	43.6
Simla	87.3	12.9	-49.4
Kangra	95.9	18.0	-51.8
Lahaul and Spiti	N.A.	24.6	3140.0
Hoshiarpur	73.2	4.6	33.5
Mahendragarh	98.9	23.9	-15.0

Source: Figures calculated from 1961 and 1951 Census data after making allowance for the 1951 Census slips burnt at Jullundur on proportionate basis.

Table 6: Changes In the Percentage of Hindus and Sikhs to Total Population in Hindu Majority Districts, 1951 61

District	Hindus		Sikhs	
	1951	1961	1951	1961
Hissar	91.3	89.1	7.7	9.9
Rohtak	98.5	98.5	0.7	0.4
Gurgaon	82.05	81.5	0.6	0.7
Karnal	90.3	86.7	8.9	11.9
Ambala	73.6	71.4	23.3	24.8
Simla	87.3	93.0	10.0	4.8
Kangra	95.9	98.2	2.0	0.8
Lahaul & Spiti	—	46.8	0.04	0.08
Hoshiarpur	73.2	67.7	26.2	30.9
Mahendragarh	98.9	99.2	0.5	0.4

Sources: Calculated from 1951 and 1961 Census data.

the share of each in the total population has been modified during the decade. Whereas the proportion of Sikhs has improved in the Hissar, Karnal, Ambala and Hoshiarpur districts, that of the Hindus has increased in the Simla and Kangra districts. The religious composition of the Rohtak, Gurgaon and Mahendragarh districts remains practically unchanged. (Table 6).

Muslims

With a population of 393,314, which is only 1.94 per cent of Punjab's total population, the Muslims are the third religious group in the State. Their number increased by 38 per cent during the decade. However, within the State there are marked regional contrasts in their rate of growth. In the border districts of Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Ferozepur their population decreased by 40.6, 43.3 and 0.8 per cent respectively.

In all the eastern districts of Punjab adjoining Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, there has been tremendous increase in Muslim population, partly due presumably to in-migration from that State (Table 7). These in-migrants work mainly as agricultural labourers and truck farmers.

In the Gurgaon district where 16.91 per cent of the total population was Muslim in 1951—the highest percentage in Punjab—there was further concentration of this community, raising their number from 163,663 in 1951 to 216,767 in 1961; and their proportion to total population to 17.47 per cent. Part of this increase is attributable to in-migration from the adjoining areas of UP.

By contrast, there has been considerable dispersal of Muslims from Malerkotla, which was another area of Muslim concentration in 1951, to the adjoining districts. This dispersal has been encouraged by the stability in the law and order situation. As a result, there was absolute decrease in the Muslim population of the Malerkotla tahsil, and tremendous increase in the adjoining districts of Patiala, Bhatinda and Ludhiana during the decade. In most cases the increase has taken place in the rural areas where the Muslims work as agricultural labourers.

In the Lahaul and Spiti district the Muslim population has increased from 2 in 1951 to 1210 in 1961. It is an exclusively male population. It should be interesting to find out in what economic activity these people are engaged.

Some migration of Muslims has

also taken place from the Kashmir Valley to the large towns and cities of Punjab during the decade. But the actual numbers involved in this movement are rather small.

Christians

With a population of 149,834, which is 0.74 per cent of the state's total, the Christians are a very small minority in Punjab. Their population experienced an increase of 51.56 per cent during the decade, mostly in the rural areas. About half of the increase seems to be due to conversions from among members of some of the backward classes. However, the numbers involved are so small that they have made no material difference in the pattern of religious composition of Punjab (Table 8).

The Buddhists, Jains and others represent only 0.32 per cent of Punjab's population. The population of the Buddhists increased from 1,660 in 1951 to 14,857 in 1961; that of the Jains from 45,096 to 48,754; and of the remaining religious groups decreased from 984 to 879. It will be clear

from the above figures that the pattern of growth of these minorities is hardly significant to the religious composition of Punjab's population.

Summary

The religious composition of Punjab's population has undergone significant changes during 1951-61. The excessive migration of the Sikhs to other Indian states and foreign lands has reduced their proportion in the total population of their home state. The Hindu population, on the other hand, has slightly improved its relative strength because of excess of in-migration over out-migration.

Within Punjab also, contrasting patterns of growth of the two communities have been witnessed during the decade. In the Sikh-majority districts, the population of the Sikhs increased very little or decreased, while the rate of growth of the Hindu population was very high—higher than the rate of natural increase in many districts. This trend has resulted in a reduction of the proportion of the Sikhs, and an increase in that of the

Table 7: Punjab Districts with More Than 30 Per Cent Increase in Muslim Population, 1951-61

District	Population of Muslims		Percentage Increase 1951-61
	1951	1961	
Hissar	3,312	6,203	87.29
Rohtak	2,562	7,349	186.85
Gurgaon	163,663	216,767	32.45
Karnal	3,646	14,159	288.34
Ambala	24,424	40,351	65.21
Lahaul & Spiti	2	1,210	60,400.00
Hoshiarpur	1,360	7,050	418.38
Ludhiana	3,357	4,686	39.59
Bhatinda	1,677	3,340	99.17
Patiala	5,597	11,714	109.29

Source: Census of India, Paper No 1 of 1963—Religion, p xxv.

Table 8: Punjab Districts with Rapid Growth in Christian Population During 1951-61

District	Christian Population in 1961	Percentage Growth of Christian Population During 1951-61
Karnal	2,094	328.2
Amritsar	33,739	128.6
Ludhiana	2,638	120.0
Hoshiarpur	7,207	78.9
Ferozepur	19,234	79.6

Source: Compiled from Census of India, Paper No 1 of 1963, pp xiii and 32.

Hindus in nearly all the trans-Sutlej areas. It has reversed the pattern of religious composition in the Gurdaspur, Jullundur and Sangrur districts.

In the Hindu-majority districts, by contrast, the numbers of the Sikhs increased phenomenally in some of the areas, while the Hindu population increased at about the rate of natural

growth.

Both within and out of Punjab the Sikhs have shown greater mobility in pursuit of economic opportunities than their Hindu brethren. While the movement of the Sikhs is, to a large degree, from rural areas to rural areas, that of the Hindus is to urban places. In this movement, religious and

linguistic considerations have generally been disregarded. The inter-regional shifts discussed above have set in a process of inter-mixing of people belonging to the two communities. It is a healthy trend toward national integration, and is a matter of great political, social and economic significance.

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