

Part I

Introduction

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Debating Numbers

Although the census is no alternative to self-determination, the local government employees must discharge their duties honestly to defeat the RSS–BJP [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh–Bharatiya Janata Party] designs to change the demography of Jammu and Kashmir.

—Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Tehreek-e-Hurriyat (*New Indian Express* 2010)

Who in the UT [union territory] doesn't know that the population of Jammu province is more than Kashmir and that the figures of all the censuses held in and after 1961 were fudged to ensure Kashmiri domination over Jammu province?

—Hari Om, former dean, faculty of Social Sciences, University of Jammu (Hari Om 2021c)

[T]he rulers of Kashmir are anxious to pass off the District [Ladakh] as a Muslim majority one.... [We fear] the Buddhists would be officially relegated to the position of a minority in the Census of 1961.

—Bakula (1953: ii)

Yesterday [Ghulam Nabi Azad] was proudly saying that earlier there were more Buddhists in Ladakh and now Muslims are more. I have to say with regret that you tried to finish off Buddhists in Jammu and Kashmir by misusing Article 370.

—Jamyang Tsering Namgyal, member of parliament, Ladakh (Lok Sabha 2019: 160)

The Buddhists of Leh feel that they are dominated by Muslims in the J&K [Jammu and Kashmir] state. But Kargilis feel the same discrimination. The state government thinks we are Muslims, but Shias. The centre thinks we are Ladakhis, but Muslims.

—Asgar Ali Karbalaie, former member of legislative assembly, Kargil (Donthi 2019)

The Kashmiri Pandits with their population of 75,000 are represented by a Minister and a Deputy Minister in the Government of the State and in the Indian Parliament too, they are duly represented. But to the Buddhists the Kashmir Ministry like the Indian Parliament is forbidden ground....

—Bakula (1953: vi)

If 80,000 Ladakhi Buddhists can be given a hill council, why 7 lakh Kashmiri Hindus cannot be given a homeland?

—Panun Kashmir (n.d.2: 27)

Numbers games begin in the teacher's mind. Kashmiri teachers are not serious about enumerating our [Gujjar and Bakarwal] community.... We do not trust [the] census.

—Gujjar activist (interview, 4 December 2019)

Our present population is about one lakh but we claim three lakh. If Gujjars and Bakarwals can claim 25 lakh, why can't we?

—Tribal leader (interview, 5 December 2019)

[T]here is a longstanding and honourable tradition of cooking up figures in J&K [Jammu and Kashmir].... Unless proved otherwise, I would always assume data from J&K is cooked.

—Retired civil servant (interviews, 4 January 2016 and 23 February 2016)

Lack of reliable numbers about our population has been a handicap to our planners, policy makers and scholars.

—Farooq Abdullah, chief minister, Jammu and Kashmir (Government of India [GoI] 2001b: v)

Sadly, few independent demographers in the State or outside it, have seen it fit to intervene in this debate. It is possible that if they did, no one would be listening.

—Praveen Swami, journalist (Swami 2000a)

Introduction

The sudden reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) into two union territories (UTs) after the repeal of Article 370 of the Constitution of India in 2019 triggered a vigorous debate on the political future of the erstwhile princely state. The potential threat of demographic change looms large in this debate.

Former chief minister Farooq Abdullah of the National Conference (NC) suggested that ‘the new domicile law was intended to flood the [Kashmir] Valley with Hindus and create a Hindu majority’ (Thapar 2020). Another former chief minister, Mehbooba Mufti of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), claimed, ‘They [the BJP] just want to occupy our land and want to make this Muslim-majority state like any other state and reduce us to a minority and disempower us totally’ (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC] 2019). Haseeb Drabu, the finance minister in the last PDP government, argued that Kashmir faced the ‘real possibility of the *demographic majority* being converted into a *political minority*’ within a generation (Drabu 2020b, emphasis added). The Concerned Citizens’ Group – comprising leading public figures, including former union minister Yashwant Sinha – which visited the state after the reorganisation, noted that Kashmiris ‘believe that Indian government wants to marginalise them if not annihilate them. This fear is expressed most vividly as fear of demographic change by creating new settlements for outsiders’, and that there ‘is also fear of [the] National Register of Citizens [NRC] and how it could be used to legitimise settlers’ (*Greater Kashmir* 2019). Such concerns predate the reorganisation of the state though. Two years before the reorganisation, *Greater Kashmir*, a Srinagar-based English daily, summarised the Kashmiri Muslim concern about demographic change in an editorial:

Be that the loss of fiscal autonomy, change of nomenclature from Sadré Riyasat to Governor ... all of them are reversible.... However, the scrapping of article 35-A is a different ball game.... To change the demography of a conflict zone under your control, where United Nations is yet to hold a promised plebiscite, is a concern.... Its fall-out will dissolve the case of Self-determination of the people of Kashmir.... In case this article goes, Kashmiris will be reduced to a minority by the influx of outsiders and the question of a possible referendum will be buried forever.... The whole emotion of opposing any dilution of article 370 or 35-A in Kashmir is not about maintaining diversity in India. It’s about preserving the resistance movement of Kashmir. It’s about being able to vote in a referendum in Kashmir. Let’s not hoodwink Indians by being hypocritical ... the idea of complete freedom from India is deep-seated and cannot be expected to wane. (*Greater Kashmir* 2017)

Greater Kashmir, too, did not put forward a new argument, though. In May 2010, in the run-up to the 2011 census, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the chairman of the Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, warned that a ‘change in the religious composition of the State may help the Government of India in case India is compelled to hold plebiscite in J&K’ (Bhat 2018: 181). As discussed later, this in turn was

a reiteration of the tension between *mardamshumari* (census) and *raishumari* (plebiscite) during the 2001 census (Riaz-ud-din 2000). The obsession with the religious composition of the population is, in fact, as old as the Kashmir dispute. It is therefore not surprising that every administrative measure is vetted for its potential demographic impact. Everything, including even photographs,¹ is parsed for statistical proportionality and clues about any demographic fallout. A photograph that ‘depicted [Lieutenant Governor Girish Chandra] Murmu holding a meeting with a battery of bureaucrats’ that caught the attention of social media in Kashmir is a case in point. ‘Of the 19 officials in the photo, there was just one *local* Muslim officer – Farooq Ahmad Lone, a former IAS [Indian Administrative Services] officer. This photograph, according to Kashmiri social media users, showed that the Union government was deliberately making demographic changes in the predominantly Muslim Kashmir Valley’ (I. A. Malik 2020, emphasis added).

Another controversy surrounding a website managed by the Industries and Commerce Department, Government of Jammu and Kashmir (GoJK), offers further insights in this regard. An earlier version of the ‘About J&K’ section of the website InvestJK.in suggested that ‘[b]e it the Kashmir region or Jammu the population *is* predominantly Hindu. This *explains* the presence of [a] number of temples in the state’ (GoJK 2020, emphasis added).² This section briefly described tourist destinations, including natural scenic attractions and temples. It evoked strong reactions in Kashmir amid ‘fears of a demographic invasion’. The website was seen as reflecting ‘the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] mindset that desires the erasure of Muslims’ and as ‘religiously motivated’ because ‘the Kashmir Valley is nearly entirely Muslim, [and] six of the ten districts of Jammu have Muslim-majority populations’ (Mir 2021). Moreover, it was argued that

Jammu province is not described in its entirety – it has a diverse geography and its largest area is inhabited by Muslims. Instead, the website focuses on the province’s capital, Jammu. The city is described as being adorned by its founding Dogra rulers ‘with numerous temples and shrines, [and is] now known as the city of Temples’. (Mir 2021)

The website mentioned Hindu places of worship across the state but not ‘any of the hundreds of [Islamic] religious places in the Kashmir Valley’ (ibid.). InvestJK.in seems to have been edited soon after questions were raised, and all religious and most of the demographic information were deleted. In Jammu, the hurried revision was seen as evidence of the presence of ‘elements in the establishment

who wilfully outrage the religious sensitivities of the Hindus' (Hari Om 2021a). While the initial post on the website was indeed blatantly flawed, there were other statistical errors as well that escaped the notice of *both* the sides. The website continued to mention incorrect estimates of the area and population of the UT of J&K. This episode highlights the narrow obsession with data on the religious composition of the population.³

The process of building inclusive and transparent democratic institutions that foster dialogue and reconciliation and ensure fair treatment of individuals and (minority) communities is slow, and its outcome is uncertain. The communal obsession with numbers pushes governments, political parties and people to resort to statistical proportionality as 'a favored legal and administrative tool' (Prewitt 2003: 16) and the ultimate arbiter of the fairness of institutions and policies. As a result, '[a]rguments about numerical quotas, availability pools and demographic imbalance become a substitute for democratic discussion of the principles of equity and justice' (Kenneth Prewitt quoted in Rose 1991: 680). In J&K, each side claims a majority within its territory of interest to justify its demand for a larger share of public resources and highlights divisions within rival camps even as it papers over its own internal differences. The debate in the parliament on the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, 2019, exemplifies this.

In a Rajya Sabha debate, Ram Das Athawale, a union minister, summed up the long-standing *national* perception of J&K's demography when he noted that 'in Ladakh there are more Buddhists, in Jammu there are more Hindus, in Kashmir there are more Muslims' (Rajya Sabha 2019b: 96).⁴ The speeches of Ghulam Nabi Azad,⁵ Hasnain Masoodi⁶ and Jamyang Tsering Namgyal⁷ in the parliament offered insights into the contesting *local* perspectives. Masoodi lamented that the union government 'had lost the trust of 1.25 crore people [that is, of J&K as a whole including Hindus, Buddhists and non-Kashmiri Muslims]' (Lok Sabha 2019: 142). Azad highlighted the divisions within Ladakh and Jammu but not Kashmir. He told the Rajya Sabha:

When I talk about Jammu, I refer to [the] region ranging from Rajouri [and] Poonch to Jammu, from Kathua and Samba, from Udhampur to Ramban, Banihal and Kishtwar. I don't talk about Jammu city, Jammu is not only limited to the Jammu city but it has 10 districts and ... Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains and Sikhs. (Rajya Sabha 2019b: 69)

Azad then commented on Ladakh's demography:

Do you know that there are two districts in Ladakh – Leh and Kargil [?]. Do you know that the population of Shia Muslims is 52 per cent and the

population of Budd[h]ists is 48 per cent in Ladakh?⁸... *The history that you read twenty years ago is changed now.* It is no more called a Budd[h]ist State, population has grown tremendously after that. Now the situation has reversed. Ladakh is now a [M]uslim majority State. Does any of you know that for last thirty years our Budd[h]ist brothers from Leh have been wanting it to be declared a Union Territory and the people from Kargil wanted to leave Ladakh and become a part of Kashmir province? (ibid.: 72–73, emphasis added; see also Asaduddin Owaisi, Lok Sabha 2019: 208)

Namgyal sharply criticised Azad and Masoodi. He first questioned Azad:

Yesterday [Azad] was proudly saying that earlier there were more Buddhists in Ladakh and now Muslims are more. I have to say with regret that you tried to finish off Buddhists in Jammu and Kashmir by misusing Article 370. Is this your demographic maintain [*sic*]? Is this your secularism?... In 1979, these families divided Ladakh and created Buddhist majority Leh and Muslim majority Kargil and made the two brothers fight till this day. (Lok Sabha 2019: 160)

Further, mimicking Azad's remarks on Jammu, Namgyal criticised Masoodi who had suggested that Kargil had shut down to protest the reorganisation (ibid.: 144). Namgyal said, 'These people have mistaken a road and a small market for Kargil. If you want to see Kargil, then go to Zaskar, go to Mulbek-Shargol there, go to Aryan Valley, see Derchiks-Garkon. Today, people of 70 per cent area of Kargil are welcoming this decision, this bill' (ibid.: 161). Asgar Ali Karbalaie⁹ pointed out that the parliament and the national media did not notice that Namgyal mentioned only the Buddhist areas of the Muslim-majority Kargil district and omitted the Shia-dominated areas (interview, Kargil, 20 September 2019).¹⁰

What perhaps troubled Karbalaie more was that Namgyal claimed almost three-fourths of Kargil for Buddhists who account for about 15 per cent of its population.¹¹ More generally, Karbalaie has been concerned about the portrayal of Ladakh as a Buddhist land by the government as well as the media: 'When you say Ladakh, it is seen synonymous to monasteries, gompas ... and Buddhists' (Donthi 2019).¹² Indeed, after the reorganisation of J&K, sections of the national media suggested that Ladakh was 'India's first Buddhist dominated union territory with a dominant Buddhist population' (Das 2019).¹³ The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president and former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati, noted that 'with Leh–Ladakh being declared as a separate Union Territory, the long pending demand of the Buddhist community in Jammu and Kashmir has been fulfilled. BSP welcomes this decision. From this decision, the whole country especially the

followers of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar who are Buddhist are very happy' (*Business Standard* 2019a). In fact, even Ranil Wickremesinghe, the then prime minister of Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka, tweeted, 'I understand Ladakh will finally become a Union Territory. With 70% of Ladakh's population being Buddhist, it will be the first Indian State with a Buddhist majority' (Srinivasan 2019).¹⁴ Amidst the euphoria around the inauguration of a 'Buddhist' UT, a Leh-based Sunni leader suggested that reorganisation was not bad as it created two Muslim-majority UTs (interview, Leh, 21 September 2019).¹⁵ Indeed, post-colonial censuses suggest that Buddhists never accounted for more than 54 per cent of Ladakh's population. Their population share has declined over the decades, and they no longer constitute a majority in Ladakh.

A similar divide was observed in the parliamentary debate on development.¹⁶ The supporters of the reorganisation argued that the repeal of Article 370 was essential for development. Amit Shah, the union minister of home affairs, claimed that massive federal funding did not translate into development:

In 2011–12, Government of India provided Rs 3,683 per head in India whereas in Jammu–Kashmir this amount was Rs 14,255 ... in 2017–18 Government of India has sent on an average Rs 8,227 per head in India and in Jammu–Kashmir per head expenditure was Rs 27,358. But this money is not percolating to the ground level because Article 370 has created a monopoly there.¹⁷ (Rajya Sabha 2019b: 136; see also Lok Sabha 2019: 250)

Masoodi responded, 'We do not need any development through revocation of Article 370. Our identity, our political aspirations, our autonomy is most dear to us' (Lok Sabha 2019: 151).¹⁸ He added that the state was 'well-off' as reflected in, among other things, the 'highest per capita [income] in the country' and an absence of starvation deaths and farmer suicides (ibid.).¹⁹ Contrary to Masoodi's claim, over the past half-a-century, J&K's per capita income has never exceeded 60 per cent of the highest per capita income of states in the country, with the peak being in the early 1980s before the onset of insurgency (Agrawal and Kumar 2020a: 265–73). Likewise, the state's very low poverty rate is partly an artefact of a large sample non-coverage in the National Sample Surveys (NSS) (ibid.). Otherwise, if we assume that the NSS data are correct, J&K supported a much higher level of per capita consumption relative to its per capita income than other states.

This discussion suggests that in J&K statistics serve as political weapons in ethno-regional, communal and scalar contests rather than as inputs to policymaking and administration. The statistical battles witnessed inside and

outside the parliament in the first week of August 2019 are part and parcel of everyday public debates in and on J&K. However, hardly any stakeholder pays attention to the (quality of) statistics at the heart of the many conflicts of the state. Kashmiris are not worried about the quality of census as long as it does not challenge Kashmir's electoral grip over the state, while Jammu's concern with data quality is limited to undermining the dominance of Kashmir. The government is indifferent to the problem, while the academia has not examined it either.

The large literature on various aspects of the Kashmir conflict recognises the key role played by demographic concerns, but it does not examine the sources of population statistics used by the parties to the conflict. During the 2001 census, Swami (2000a) lamented that 'few independent demographers in the State or outside it, have seen it fit to intervene in this debate'. Post-2001 census contributions such as S. Bose (2003, 2007), Schofield (2003), Behera (2006), Swami (2007), Chowdhary (2010b, 2016, 2019), K. B. Ahmad (2017), Snedden (2017), Devadas (2018), Bhatia (2020), S. Hussain (2021) and Jamwal (2022) discuss how demographic concerns affect the political conflict but do not examine how the headcount is itself a product of the conflict. Researchers discuss the use of statistics in communal propaganda, note how statistics used in popular debates deviate from government statistics and even hint that the statistics may not be reliable, but do not ask how partisan politics shapes statistics.

Exceptions include Swami (2000a, 2014), who discussed the difficulties in conducting the 2001 census in J&K. Two scholarly assessments followed the 2011 census. Bhatt (2011, 2018) analysed the 2011 census data on child sex ratio (CSR) and discussed the immediate context of the headcount in the state. In their analysis of fertility trends across districts of India, Guilmo and Rajan (2013) drew attention to the poor quality of the 2011 census data of J&K for the population aged 0–6 years. These analyses did not examine the quality of the larger body of census data of which the data on age and sex are a part. The mutually constitutive relationship between census data and their social and political-economic contexts was also left largely unexamined. This book analyses J&K's population statistics for the period 1951–2011. It unpacks the census data at different levels of aggregation and along different seams and tries to estimate coverage and content errors. In the process it uncovers a relationship between census statistics, on the one hand, and administrative, legal, social and political-economic processes, on the other, to arrive at a better understanding of how J&K's data deficit is shaped by, and shapes, the conflict and how the relation between state and statistics changes across tiers of government. J&K's experience is also compared with that of states such as Punjab, Nagaland and Manipur.

Debating Numbers 11

The remainder of this chapter delineates the scope of the book and elaborates the conceptual framework of the analysis. This is followed by an outline of the chapters and a note on terminology.

Scope and Framework

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, J&K’s decennial censuses reported unanticipated changes in the composition of the population, including a sharp decrease in CSR, an increase in child population share, a change in the relative population shares of the two main regions and religions of the state, a decline in the population share of Scheduled Castes (SCs), a contraction of the population of Shina speakers, a sharp increase in Kashmir’s slum population and a sharp contraction of Jammu district’s slum population (Figures 1.1a–1.1h). In addition, Ladakh reported very sharp changes in the population of the speakers of Tibetan, Ladakhi and Bhotia languages, whereas Gojri speakers were misclassified in parts of Kashmir. During the 1990s and 2000s, surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) revealed a sharp rise followed by a drop in urban monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE) of J&K relative to the rest of the country even as its per capita income had been steadily declining relative to the rest of the country (Agrawal and Kumar 2020a: 267). In addition, there were discrepancies between the estimates of poverty based on the NSSO surveys and those based on the state government’s below poverty line (BPL) survey (ibid.: 273). There were also discrepancies between the estimates of unemployment provided by the NSSO and those provided by employment bureaus

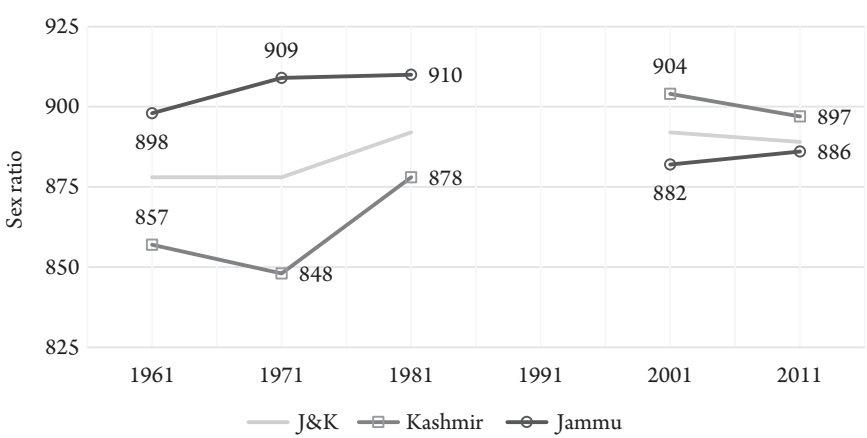


Figure 1.1a Sex ratio of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), 1961–2011