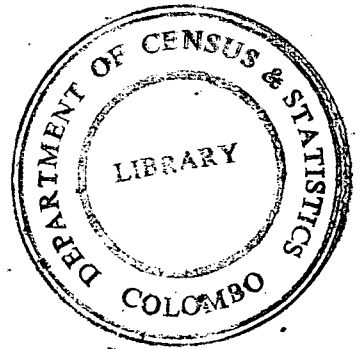


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POPULATION CENSUSES IN SRI LANKA



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POPULATION CENSUSES IN SRI LANKA

1. INTRODUCTION.

Sri Lanka is one of the few developing countries which can claim to possess a wealth of demographic data upon which a considerable degree of reliance can be placed. The first in its regular census series was taken in 1871, while the registration of vital events commenced in 1887. Information is also available on the movement of persons into and out of the country from the latter part of the last century. Thus, basic data exist to chart the course of Sri Lanka's demographic history over a period of more than 100 years. In addition, the several sample surveys carried out in the country in recent years provide an abundance of data on the demographic, social and economic characteristics of the people. It is therefore not surprising that Irene Facuber, the distinguished Demographer has referred to Sri Lanka as a "demographic laboratory".

2. HISTORY OF POPULATION CENSUSES IN SRI LANKA.

In Sri Lanka, the first known census enumeration was carried out in 1789 during the Dutch period. This census was confined to the inhabitants of the maritime territory of the Dutch East India Company in Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon). The count gave the total number of inhabitants of both sexes and all ages as 817,000. The population of the entire country was estimated to be 1.5 million.

A census of the maritime provinces seems to have been taken by the British in 1814 and a census of the Kandyan provinces in 1821.

The earliest enumeration, of which there is any record, was made in 1824, but the results were published three years later in 1827. It gave the population by sex, distinguishing those above the age of puberty from those under that age. The total population was shown as 851,940.

The first legislative provision for a census was made in 1869. The Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council was empowered from time to time, as he may deem necessary, to cause an enumeration to be made of the inhabitants of the island, or any portion thereof, and to

make the necessary arrangements. The first census under this legislative provision was taken on 26 March 1871. It was unique in more than one way. It was the first census coming within the modern meaning and scope of the "census" and was to be the first of a series of decennial censuses that followed.

The next two censuses, those of 1881 and of 1891, were taken under the provisions of the Census Ordinance No. 9 of 1880 which replaced the Ordinance of 1868.

The Census Ordinance of 1880 was considered to be defective in that it did not give census officers powers which were deemed to be necessary. Hence a new ordinance was passed by the Legislature in 1900. The censuses of 1901, 1911 and 1921 were taken under the provisions of the 1900 ordinance.

In view of the financial stringency prevailing at that time and the decision to curtail expenditure, the census of 1931 was limited to a detailed enumeration in the City of Colombo only, while in the estates, particulars in regard to total population, sex and race were obtained from the superintendents of estates. In the rest of the island, only a head count of the total population was made. The census due in 1941 was not taken until 1946 on account of the Second World War. The subsequent Censuses were taken at somewhat irregular intervals in 1953, 1963 and 1971.

Even though the Census Ordinance did not specify the years in, or the intervals at, which the censuses should be taken, the censuses were in fact carried out at regular decennial intervals until 1931. Although plans were made to carry out a census in 1951, this census had to be postponed to 1953 on account of a shortage of paper. The next census followed in 1963. However, the last census was taken in 1971, in order to restore the earlier tradition of taking the census in the years ending in 1 and with the expectation of maintaining the decennial interval in future. This is also in accordance with the United Nations recommendations that the censuses be taken in the year ending in 0 or 1.

The next census in the series will be taken in March 1981.

3. ITEMS INCLUDED IN THE CENSUS SCHEDULES.

a. Population Census.

The various items on which information was obtained at each census from 1871 are summarized in table 1. It will be observed that particulars relating to name, age, sex, principal occupation, religion and ethnicity (race or nationality) was collected regularly in all the censuses. In the 1963 and 1971 censuses, the date of birth was recorded in addition to age with a view to obtaining more reliable age data.

Information on the relationship to the head of the household was not obtained at any census from 1901 to 1931. Since these particulars are collected for purposes of checking the consistency of the information and not for the preparation of statistical tables, their omission does not affect the content of the tabulated data. Marital status (or conjugal condition) was included in the 1871 census schedule but was omitted from the schedules of the 1881 and 1891 censuses because there was considerable uncertainty at that time as to what constituted a legal marriage in the country. The information on conjugal condition was considered so untrustworthy that no tables were prepared from it. However, the item was reintroduced at the 1901 census because the Supreme Court of the Island and the Privy Council ruled that "cohabitation and repute raise a sufficient presumption of the marriage relation", and has remained on the schedules of all subsequent censuses.

The term "nationality" as used in the earlier censuses referred to ethnic group (or race as it was then referred to) of the native population and country of origin of the persons of foreign origin. At the census of 1901, a note was added to the heading of the column for nationality requiring that Low-country Sinhalese be distinguished from Kandyan or Highland Sinhalese. This distinction has continued up to this date. A similar distinction between Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils and between Sri Lankan Moors and Indian Moors was introduced in the 1911 census and still continues.

Information on literacy in any language was obtained for the first time in the 1881 census and has continued to be collected in all subsequent censuses. Additional information on literacy in English was obtained from 1901 onwards but this item was omitted from the 1971 census schedule. Information on ability to speak English was collected at all censuses from 1921 to 1963, and information on ability to speak Sinhalese or Tamil from 1946 to 1963; both these items were omitted in 1971. "Educational attainment" was an item introduced for the first time in 1953 while "school attendance" was added to the schedule in 1971.

Information on principal occupation has been collected at every census, but the question on subsidiary occupation was introduced only in 1901. It continued to be included in the schedules of the next two censuses held in 1911 and 1921, but was dropped from 1953 onwards. Information on dependency (i.e. means of subsistence of persons on whom the non-earners were dependent) was also obtained from 1901 onwards until 1953 but was discontinued in 1963 and 1971. The questions relating to industry and employment (or occupational) status were included for the first time in the 1946 census schedule and have been repeated in the subsequent censuses.

A question on salary or wages was asked in the 1946 and 1953 censuses only. This item has been omitted from subsequent censuses in view of the difficulty of obtaining or estimating the income of self-employed persons in agriculture.

With a view to distinguishing between the economically active population and the inactive population, a question on type of activity was included in the 1963 census schedule. But this information was obtained indirectly at the 1953 census by requiring that for dependants the principal occupation of the person on whom he depends should be stated under the column headed "Principal occupation" together with the letter S for student, H for housewife, U for unemployed and R for retired.

While the place of birth was asked at all the censuses with the exception of the 1881 census, questions on place of usual residence, duration of stay at usual residence, and place of previous residence were introduced only in 1971 census and that on a sample basis only. The length of residence in the country was asked only in 1946 and 1953.

Questions on nuptiality and fertility were included for the first time in the 1946 census schedules. In 1953 information on fertility was collected from a sample of the population while in 1963, questions on fertility did not find a place in the census schedules. In regard to marriage, the date of marriage was asked for in 1946 and 1953. While age at marriage and duration of marriage were asked for in 1971. The age of a woman at birth of the first child asked in 1946 and 1953 was also omitted in 1971. The questions on number of children living and date of last live birth within the past five years were introduced.

Information on infirmities, that is whether a person was blind, deaf, deaf-mute or crippled has been obtained at all the censuses from 1871 with the exception of the 1931 and 1971 censuses.

b. Housing Census.

Information on housing was not collected in the earlier census, except in 1871 and 1881 when information on the kind of building and number of rooms was obtained. However, this information was not tabulated. The 1946 population census schedule included a few questions on material of wall and roof, number of rooms, tenure and occupancy of the dwellings occupied by each household. A separate household schedule was introduced at the 1953 census to obtain information on housing and this schedule contained questions relating to rent and length of residence in the present dwelling in addition to the information asked for in 1946.

A housing census proper, introducing the concept of housing unit as recommended by the United Nations and using a separate housing schedule, was taken for the first time in 1963 along with

the population census. The enumeration was, however, done only in respect of a 10 per cent sample of the housing units, selected on a systematic basis from each urban and rural stratum in each of the 22 districts of Sri Lanka. At the 1971 census, the housing information was obtained in respect of all housing units in urban areas and in respect of the housing units in only 10 per cent of the census blocks in the rural areas. The housing items covered in the censuses since 1946 are shown in table 2.

c. Processing and Tabulation of Data.

The processing and tabulation of the data collected at the 1931 and earlier censuses were carried out manually. Conventional tabulating machines were used for the first time at the 1946 census. The 1953 and 1963 censuses too were processed using conventional tabulating machines. A considerable amount of coding was done in the Census Office before the data was punched on to cards prior to tabulation.

Processing and tabulation of the 1971 census data was done on a computer. The coded data was first punched on cards before being transferred to magnetic tapes for computer processing. A further innovation adopted at the 1971 census was the use of a census schedule which was designed to enable as much as possible of the coding to be done at the enumeration itself. Since the responses to the various questions were coded at the enumeration stage, the extent of office coding was considerably reduced. This method could not, however, be adopted in the case of information on education, occupation, industry and place of birth in respect of which the possible answers exceeded about seven or eight in number. In these cases the coding was done in the office after the enumeration.

d. Published Reports.

The published reports containing the results of each census have varied in scope and character. One single volume was issued in respect of each of the censuses of 1871 and 1881. The reports

consisted of more than one volume at the subsequent censuses. The contents of the reports relating to the various censuses are discussed briefly in the following paragraphs.

The report of the 1871 census contains a brief account of the circumstances leading to the taking of the first census, the procedures followed in the taking of the census and brief comments on the results. The statistical tables are given in the appendix to the report. Copies of the schedules and instructions are also reproduced in this report. The report relating to the 1881 census follows the pattern of the 1871 report with the statistical tables appearing in the appendix.

The report on the 1891 census consisted of the three volumes, the first being the general report, the second consisting of detailed statistical tables on the demographic characteristics of the population, and the third consisting of a list of towns and villages showing the number of houses, families and the population therein. It will be noted that detailed statistical tables which were included as an appendix in the report of the two previous censuses, were published in separate volumes at the 1891 census.

The results of the 1901 census were published in four volumes, the first being the general report, the second and third consisting of detailed statistical tables and the fourth containing town and village statistics. The general report, which was considerably bigger than its predecessors, also contained chapters on national features, the history of the country and its civil administration. It also gave a life table for the period 1893 - 1900 and annual vital statistics for the period 1871 - 1900. The total number of pages in all four volumes was 2,444 as against 762 contained in the three volumes of the 1891 census.

There were six volumes relating to the results of the 1911 census. All details concerning the preparation and actual census taking as well as tabulations are discussed in a separate volume. The report volume (as the general report was called) contained

a review of the results of the census. Additional features of this report volume included district histories, an account of the history of Colombo City and its development, chapters on "Changes in manners and Customs" and "Nomenclature". The chapter on "Races of Ceylon" also gave information regarding several of the minor, little-known races in the country. A separate chapter also dealt with the first complete census reported to have been ever taken in the Maldivé Islands.

The 1921 census results were published in four volumes. The first volume consisted of two parts. Part I contained most of the information, which according to the superintendent of census "is likely to be required for general reference", and Part II "dealing more particularly with certain aspects of the statistics with regard to age, sex and etc.". The general report of the 1921 census placed greater emphasis than the previous ones upon the statistical aspects, especially the relation between the population and vital statistics through the use of the balancing equation and this formed the central feature of this report.

The publication of a separate volume containing the detailed occupational statistics as in the case of the 1901 and 1911 censuses was not repeated in 1921. The information on occupation for the country as a whole was included in Volume IV: General Tables.

As noted earlier, in the 1931 census a detailed enumeration was limited to the City of Colombo and hence the detailed tabulations relate only to the Colombo City.

The information obtained in the 1946 census was published in four volumes. The first volume consists of two parts, the first part being the general report and the second part being the statistical digest. The statistical digest contains summary tables on all the items covered in volumes II to IV in addition to tables on occupation, infirmities and housing.

The results of the 1953 census were reported in four volumes. The first volume was the general report describing the organiza-

tion of the census and the salient results. The other volumes consisted of statistical tables. The second volume consisted of three parts while the third and fourth volumes consisted of two parts each. A supplementary report on housing was also published.

It is rather unfortunate that no general report was published in respect of the 1963 census. There were only two statistical volumes published based on 10 percent sample tabulation of the census data, one on general characteristics of the population and the other on the gainfully employed population. A supplementary report on housing was also published.

In regard to the latest census held in 1971, there were three preliminary releases and a preliminary report based on a tabulation of a 10 per cent sample of the schedules, followed by two volumes based on full tabulation of the data. The three preliminary releases give the population for each of the geographic areas mentioned, classified by (a) sex; (b) number aged under 18 years and number aged 18 years and over; (c) ethnic groups and (d) religion. In preliminary Release No. 3, these classifications are shown for wards of towns and Grama Sevaka (village headmen) divisions; but in the case of villages, only the total population is shown.

A set of district reports, one for each of the 22 districts was also released for limited distribution in mimeograph form. These were based on the 100% enumeration and also provided some information at the Grama Sevaka Division level.

4. THE USES OF THE POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS DATA.

The Population Census has served as the primary source of basic national population data required for administrative purposes and for many aspects of economic and social research and planning. One of the most important of the administrative uses of census data has been for the delimitation of parliamentary electorates. Detailed information on the geographic distribution of the population has been used for this purpose, as well as for the study and evaluation of economic and social problems on a geographic basis. Questions of employment and manpower, migration,

housing education, public health and welfare, social services have all been heavily dependent on census data for their study and formulation of policy and decision making.

Population and housing census data have been increasingly used in the national plans. More detailed census data for smaller administrative units will be required in the future with the proposal to establish District Development Councils and the transfer of many important development functions to these Councils. It is in this context that the proposed 1981 Census assumes greater significance.

5. THE SCOPE OF THE 1981 CENSUS.

The Census to be taken in March 1981 will cover population as well as housing. The list of topics on which information will be collected is as follows:

(a) Population.

1. Name
2. Relationship to head of household.
3. Sex
4. Religion
5. Ethnic Group
6. Citizenship
7. Physical infirmity, if any
8. Date of birth and age
9. Marital Status
10. Attendance at School
11. Educational attainment
12. Literacy
13. Principal activity during last 30 days
14. Did he/she seek work during the past 30 days
15. Period of search for work.
16. Reason for not seeking work
17. Principal occupation
18. Kind of industry

19. Employment status
20. Distance from usual residence to place of work or school
21. Principal mode of travel to place of work or school
22. Place of birth.
23. Place of usual residence
24. Period of stay in the town or village of usual residence
25. District of previous residence.

(b) Housing.

1. Description of the unit. i.e. whether housing unit or living quarters other than housing unit.
2. Type of structure i.e. whether single house, flat/annexe etc.
3. Number of households
4. Number of usual occupants
5. Year of completion
6. Principal materials of construction of (a) walls
(b) roof (c) floor
7. Number of rooms
8. Main source of drinking water
9. Toilet facilities.
10. Type of lighting
11. Fuel used for cooking
12. Tenure.

6. CHANGES FROM THE 1971 CENSUS

Important changes from the 1971 Census are the introduction of two items on the distance and mode of transport from usual residence to place of work in the case of employed persons and school in the case of students. These have been introduced in response to requests for such information for use in the planning of better transport services.

Under literacy it is proposed to ascertain which of the three languages viz. Sinhalese, Tamil and English a person is able to read and write. In the 1971 Census a person was merely recorded as literate or illiterate without mention of any specific language/s in which he was literate. This additional information is expected to help in assessing

and formulating policy with regard to national integration. In view of the recognition of the importance of English as a medium for acquiring technological knowledge and skills information on literacy in English should also prove useful.

Information on physical infirmity (i.e. total blindness, deafness, dumbness or crippling in arms or legs) is being re-introduced in 1981. It had been collected in the 1946, 1953 and 1963 censuses but was dropped in 1971. A special infirmities schedule will be used to record more details such as nature of infirmity, cause and age at which infirmity occurred, means of livelihood, etc. This item has been re-introduced in order to cater to the need for information on the disabled that is likely to be demand with 1981 being declared as the International Year of the Disabled.

An important omission is the set of questions on fertility that were collected in 1971 on a sample basis in 10% of the enumerator's areas. It was decided to omit this topic in view of the fact that the Sri Lanka Fertility Survey of 1976 provided much more information of fertility than can be obtained in a Census. Further the experience of the 1971 Census showed that questions on fertility need much probing in order to elicit reliable answers. The conditions of a Census do not permit such probing even when the questions on fertility are addressed to a sample of the population.

7. USE OF SAMPLING IN THE 1981 CENSUS ENUMERATION.

The topics on housing and items 22 - 24 on population will be canvassed from a sample of the population. The urban sector however will be covered on a 100% basis while in the rural sector (inclusive of the estates) these questions will be canvassed from the population in 10% of the Census Blocks (i.e. Enumerators' areas).

8. DATA PROCESSING.

As in the 1971 Census most of the information will be pre-coded or self-coded at the enumeration so that the need for subsequent coding

in office will be considerably reduced resulting in speeding up the release of the tabulations. Only the information on Occupation, Industry and a part of the information on educational attainment will need to be coded in the office.

A new computer (IBM 4331) has also been obtained with UNDP aid. This computer has a larger capacity than the one used in the 1971 Census will result in quicker and more detailed tables.

9. PUBLICATION.

Publication of the 1971 Census data was considerably delayed on account of lack of printing facilities. Many of the tables had to be typed and duplicated. The Department now has a Printing Press of its own and facilities exist for off-set printing directly from computer print-outs. Hence the 1981 Census results can be published expeditiously.

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Table 1 : Topics included in the Population Schedule at the Censuses in Sri Lanka,
1871 - 1971 and to be included in the 1981 Census.

Topics included in the Population Schedule	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931 ^{a/}	1946	1953	1963	1971	1981 ^{b/}
Demographic and Personal Characteristics												
Name	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relationship to head of family or household	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	X	X	X	X	X
Sex	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Date of birth	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	X	X
Age	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Marital status	X	-	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ethnic group or nationality	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Religion	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Citizenship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	X	X	X
Educational Characteristics												
Ability to speak Sinhala or Tamil	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	X	X	-	-
Ability to speak English	-	-	-	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	-
Literacy	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Literacy in English	-	-	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	X
Educational attainment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Xs	X	X	X
School attendance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	X

Table 1 : Topics included in the Population schedule at the censuses in Sri Lanka,
(Contd.) 1871 - 1971 and to be included in the 1981 Census.

Topics included in the Population Schedule	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931 ^{a/}	1946	1953	1963	1971	1981 ^{b/}
Economic Characteristics												
Type of activity	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	X	X
Principal occupation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Subsidiary occupation	-	-	-	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	-	-
Industry	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	X	X	X	X
Employment status	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	X	X	X	X
Salary or wages (income)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	XS	-	-	-
Dependency (means of subsistence of earner on whom dependent)	-	-	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	-
Period for which unemployed	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	XS	-	X	X
Migration and Residence Information												
Place of birth	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	XS	XS
Place of usual residence	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	XS	XS
Duration of stay at usual residence	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	XS	XS
Place of previous residence	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	XS	XS
Length of residence in Sri Lanka	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	X	-	-	-

Table 1 : Topics included in the population schedule at the censuses in Sri Lanka,
(Contd.) 1871 - 1971 and to be included in the 1981 Census.

Topics included in the Population Schedule	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931 ^{a/}	1946	1953	1963	1971	1981 ^{b/}
Nuptiality and Fertility												
Date of marriage	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	XS	-	-	-
If previously married, date of first marriage	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	XS	-	-	-
Age at first marriage	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	XS	-
Duration of first marriage	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	XS	-
If married more than once duration of subsequent marriages	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	XS	-
Age at birth of first child	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	XS	-	-	-
Number of children ever born	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	XS	-	XS	-
Number of children living	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	XS	-
Date of last live birth within last five years	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	XS	-
Other Topics												
Infirmity	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	X	X	-	X
Orphanhood	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	X	-	-	-

Notes: x denotes that the information was collected from all persons.
xs denotes that the information was collected from a sample only.
- denotes that the information was not collected.

^{a/} Obtained from all persons within the Colombo Municipality only.

^{b/} The proposed census of 1981 to be taken in March 1981.

Table 2 : Information on housing obtained at the censuses in Sri Lanka ,
1946 - 1971 and to be included in the 1981 Census.

	1946	1953 ^{a/}	1963 ^{b/}	1971	1981
Whether housing unit or other	-	-		X	X
Whether used for residence only or for business too	-	-	X	X	-
Whether occupied or vacant		-		X	X
Type of structure (house, flat etc.)		-	-	X	X
Material of walls	X	X	X	X	X
Material of roof	X	X	X	X	X
Material of floor	-	-	X	X	X
Year of construction	-	-	-	X	X
Water supply	-	-	X	X	X
Bathing facilities	-	-	-	X	-
Toilet facilities	-	-	X	X	X
Type of lighting	-	-	X ^{c/}	X	X
Number of rooms	X	X	X	X	X
Floor space	-	-	X	X	-
Availability of kitchen	-	-	X	X	-
Fuel used for cooking	-	-	X	-	X
Tenure (whether rented or owned)	X	X	X	X	X
If owned and mortgaged, race of mortgagee	X	-	-	-	-
Rent	-	X	X	X	-
Number of families in household - occupying unit	-	X	X	X	-
Number of persons in household - occupying unit	X	X	X	X	X
Length of residence in present dwelling	-	X	-	-	-

- Notes: ^{a/} At the 1953 census the enumeration was done on a "household schedule" in which the particulars were obtained regarding the dwelling or portion of a dwelling occupied by the household.
- ^{b/} The enumeration covered only private housing units i.e. excluding institutions, boarding houses, hotels etc.
- ^{c/} In 1963 the question was "Is the housing unit provided with electricity".