

Census 2001 & the Declining Sikh Population – An Appraisal

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THE RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION census data of country's population released by the Census Commissioner, on 6th Sept.04, with a revised version, is bound to cause 'red-alert' on Sikh identity. But, as expected, the Sikh leadership/institutions have yet to come out of their chronic slumber to appraise the causes of declining 6% Sikh population from 24.3% to 18.2% in 2001, as compared to 1991 figures.

The Sikh values are continuously being propagated by celebrating and spending lavishly on 'Shatabdis', building up/ renovating huge Gurdwara infrastructures and frequently holding 'Chetana Marches'; Nagar Kirtans, 'Langars', endless Kirtan Darbars', chains of 'Akhand Paths', 'Gurmat Samagams' and Seminars etc; yet our population is declining instead maintaining old balance without attracting new entrants. **Why?**

The "Why" can be briefly answered, according to my personal assessment, in these few words. The central principles of "Kirt Karna" and "Wand Chhakna" are being bypassed in preference to over emphasizing on varying forms of "Naam Japna" disproportionately. Additional infrastructures built-up in Guru's name by mushroomed Foundations/Societies Bhawans are meeting the vested interests of few. In historic Gurdwaras' thousands of acres of land, attached since the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, is partly being mis-utilised, instead of developing into socio-educational-economic Development Complexes and Counselling Cells for disseminating the heritage awareness. The Managements' frequent disputes, corruption and political interferences at all levels are reflecting badly on Sikh values. The list of causes can further include wide scale drugs/alcohol abuses, social/ritual evils, apostasy, female-foeticide, rural-illiteracy, large scale school drop-outs, low rate of literacy, large scale migration of peasantry and un-employment among youth, etc. Considerable literature has been published and seminars held in recent past about the historic contribution of Vanjaras/Sikligars/Satnamis, estimated between 6-8 crores, and showing concern for their poor living and conversion to other faiths. Each state of Nanak-Panthis concentration is believed to be having population of over one crore of such tribes. But the religion census figures are supposed having excluded them as well as 'Sehajdharis' for categorizing them under Sikh religion. Out of total 1.9 crores of Sikh population, except in Punjab (1,45,92,387) the total Sikh population in all other states is not more than few lakhs each (Maharashtra 2,15,337 – Delhi 5,55,602 – MP 1,50,772 – Rajasthan 8,18,420 – UP 6,78,059 – Jharkhand 83,358 – Andhra 30,998 – Karnataka 15,326 – Chandigarh 1,45,175). It can be concluded that Vanjaras/Sehajdharis classes are either ignored or enumerated as 'Hindus' or might have been converted to other sects. It is mainly due to discriminations being practiced by the Sikh leaderships/Parcharaks.

All Sikh institutions, including SGPC/DSGMC, and others outside Punjab were given a **call by the Trust for Welfare of Vanjaras, vide circular VT/Census-dated 28-11-2000**, in advance of start of census in Feb. 2001, to guide the tribes to enlist

themselves as Sikhs under religion column. Alas! The timely message and awareness drive carried out by the undersigned single handed during visits to these states in the year 2000-2001, remained ineffective. On the other hand, as per news report the Christians and Jains campaigned unitedly and brilliantly through their field volunteers to ensure enlisting of their followers by spot check of formats prepared by enumerators before signing by the members. These religions thus succeeded to establish their distinct identity with creditable growth rate and higher literacy rate. The Jains have successfully come out of Hindu fold by enlisting themselves a separate affluent religion for the first time.

I conclude with humble request to each of the Sikh leaders, Institutions, Missions, NGOs and every individual to ponder over the damage already committed. Without wasting time in blaming game, let us adopt new ways and means for consolidated joint efforts by practicing true Sikh values and conceiving fresh promotional programmes for attracting strayed youth, Nanak Panthis & Sehajdharis, etc, honourably back to Sikh mainstream. By future planning of priorities, spreading awareness through field Counselling and adopting backward villages and the weaker sections for their educational/economic rehabilitation the damage may be controlled before next census due in year 2011.

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