Census of India, 1931
(BIHAR AND ORISSA)

Introduction:

A very brief description may be given here of the manner in which the census was actually taken. There has been practically no change since 1921 in the main organization and machinery of the enumeration. Each district is divided into a number of charges, circles and blocks, the block being the smallest of these units and containing as a rule from 30 to 50 houses. An enumerator is placed in charge of each block, and his immediate superior is the circle supervisor. A circle usually comprises some 10 to 15 blocks. The number of circles included in a charge varies a good deal but seldom exceeds 20, and the charge is ordinarily co-terminus with the jurisdiction of a police-station. In most cases the duties of charge superintendent were carried out by the local sub-inspector of police; the supervisors and enumerators were, almost without exception, non-officials. They are recruited from the most intelligent and literate portion of the population and are placed under a statutory obligation to perform their duties as census officers. At the present census there were 219,380 enumerators and 16,916 supervisors. Apart, therefore, from the charge superintendents (950 in number) and the various Government servants employed in the sub-divisional, district and provincial offices, the enumeration staff in this province included not less than 21/4 lakhs of unpaid non-official workers, many of whom were actually put to some personal expense in carrying out the tasks assigned to them.

After the formation of blocks, circles and charges has been completed, the work of numbering the houses is taken up. Every house likely to be occupied on the night of the census is marked with a number and entered up in a list. Special importance attaches to the preparation of these lists, as they form the basis on which the number of census forms required is estimated. Thereafter the staff are trained in the correct manner of filling up the census schedules, which contain as many as 18 columns. The difficulty of securing uniformity as well as accuracy in these manifold entries is far greater than might be supposed. Then, some weeks before the night of the actual census, the writing up of the preliminary record is taken in hand. First on plain paper, and subsequently- after the enumerator’s entries have been checked by the circle supervisor-in the printed schedules, the requisite particulars are recorded for all persons found in residence at the time when this preliminary enumeration is carried out. During this period charge superintendents and superior officers are required to be moving about continually, testing as many entries as possible and satisfying themselves that the instructions have been
properly understood and put into effect. Consequently, the final enumeration on the night of the 26\textsuperscript{th} February amounted to little more than a revision of the record already prepared. Between the hours of 7 P.M and midnight on that date each enumerator visited all the houses in his block; persons who had left the place after the preliminary count were struck off, and newcomers were added to the record. In view of the immobile nature of the population in India it is generally found that at least 90 per cent of the original entries hold good. Special arrangements had to be made for the enumeration of persons travelling by road, rail, or water on the census night and for persons watching in their fields or assembled in fairs, camps and so forth; and precautions had to be taken to ensure that such persons were not counted twice over. In a few localities, which are particularised in the first chapter of this report, an absolutely synchronous count was not possible, and the enumeration was spread over a complete day or even longer.

At dawn on the 27\textsuperscript{th} February the striking of provisional totals began. The enumerators added up the number of males and females in their blocks, and these figures were consolidated for the circles by the supervisors, who then despatched them post-haste to the charge superintendents. The charge totals were conveyed by trains, motor car, bicycle, runner, telephone, or whatever other means might secure the greatest expedition, to the sub-divisional headquarters, and then a report was forwarded to the headquarters of the district. The district figures were reported by telegram to the provincial Superintendent and the Census Commissioner for India. As usual, there was keen competition among districts and states to get their figures in first, and I received the provisional totals of seven states and one district (Balasore) before retiring to bed on the 27\textsuperscript{th} February. The achievement of Mayurbhanj State, whose figures were handed in at the incredibly early hour of 2-20 p.m. on that date, was particularly meritorious. The returns from the last district of all were received on the night of the 4\textsuperscript{th} March, and the consolidated figures for the whole province were telegraphed to the Census Commissioner the next day. The provisional totals so telegraphed differed from the finally checked and published figures by 0.2 per cent.

The first stage in the abstraction and compilation of the statistics was carried out at the headquarters of each district. It consisted in copying out on to a separate slip of paper the entries relating to each one of the 42,329,583 persons in the province. Papers of different colours were used for the different religions, and sex was denoted by printed symbols. This work, which was performed by paid copyists, was accomplished in most districts in a period of six or seven weeks; when work was in full swing as many as 3,669 copyists were employed, and on the average they turned out about 420 slips each per diem. They were paid at piece-rates and worked long hours, but it was only an exceptional copyist who could earn as much as Rs. 20 in a month—from which it may be inferred that the rates of pay were not excessively liberal. None the less, they were appreciably more generous than on the occasion of the previous census. When the slips had been copied and arranged by sex and religion for each circle, they were despatched to the central offices, five in number, where they were sorted by hand for the different tables and the results compiled by districts. Altogether, nearly 1,500 sorters were at work in these offices, their remuneration being slightly in excess of that prescribed for the slip-copyists. The final tabulation of the figures was carried out in the headquarters office.
On the present occasion, however, there were one or two factors which served to excite spasmodic displays of interest in the operation. Among the more educated classes, particularly in urban areas, some appreciation was shown of the bearing of the census figures on the impending constitutional changes. The prospect of the creation of a separate Orissa province and the question whether such a province should include the whole or any part of Singhbhum district were responsible for a lively concern in the returns of caste, language, etc., in that locality. The anxiety of many of the lower castes all over the province to improve their social status by the adoption of more impressive caste names attracted considerable attention of the schedule. And, lastly, for the second time in succession the census operations happened to coincide with a political campaign of non-co-operation. In this province no serious attempt was made to organize a boycott of the census, and comparatively little active opposition was encountered from individuals. But political principles were not in frequently advanced as a convenient excuse for declining to undertake the irksome duties of a supervisor of enumerator, and ground that it was their duty not to assist the Government in any shape or form. This made the difficult task of enrolling the requisite number which was manifested by considerable sections of the population throughout the conduct of the operations. Sometimes false rumours were set about regarding which the numbers painted on houses by the census staff were obliterated. But refusals to answer questions put by an enumerator were very rare, and the direct effect of this political agitation on the accuracy of the census returns cannot be appreciable. Indirectly its effect was more serious in that sub-inspectors of police (who, as already explained, occupied an important position in the hierarchy of census officials) were so pre-occupied with the civil disobedience movement that they had little time to spare for other duties. And for the same reason District Officers were unable to take such an active interest in supervising the progress of the census work as they would normally have done.

A few words may be added regarding the cost of the census operations. At the time of writing the accounts have not been finally closed, but the outstanding items (of which the most important is the cost of printing the report) are few and can be estimated with reasonable accuracy. The gross expenditure incurred by Government will, when the last bill has been paid, amount to approximately Rs.4,69,500. In estimating the cost per mile of the population it is fair to confine the calculation to British territory only, because, although the States were not invited to make any contribution towards superintendence charges or towards the preparation of the report itself, the recoveries made from them cover almost all the extra cost incurred over the actual enumeration of their inhabitants and the compilation of the figures. It may therefore be said that the cost to Government works out at Rs.11-4-0 per mille of the population in British territory. At the census of 1921, if the same method of calculation be adopted, the corresponding figure was Rs.10-4-8 per mille. It would therefore seem that the present operations were slightly more expensive. But the increase in cost is more apparent than real, being due to the different method of accounting adopted at the present census. Mention may be made of two important items which were affected by this change of procedure. (1) In 1921 charges on account of travelling allowance and contingent expenditure incurred in district offices, were not ordinarily debited to the census grant at all, but were treated as a part of
the cost of general administration. The reversal of this practice on the present occasion threw upon the census budget an additional liability of about Rs.23,500. (2) Most of the printing work connected with the census is carried out by the local Government Press, which in 1921 charged the Government of India nothing for this service over and above the actual labour cost. This time the ordinary overhead charges were levied. Moreover, the 1921 accounts did not include the cost of printing the report itself. The result is that the present expenditure on Printing is heavier by about Rs.30,000 than it was ten years ago. If the unreal additions represented by these two items be left out of account, the cost of the operations in 1931 is less by about 7½ annas per mille of the population than it was on the last occasion—and this in spite of the fact that appreciably higher rates of pay were allowed to the copyists, sorters, compilers and other temporary employees.

One more point may be made clear in regard to the cost of taking the census. The figures so far quoted cover the entire pay of all permanent Government servants who were deputed to census work as whole-time officers, and in consequence they convey a somewhat exaggerated idea of the net additional expenditure incurred by Government on account of the operations; for in the case of such officers the additional expenditure is limited to the cost of the arrangements made for carrying on their ordinary work during their absence on deputation. It is not possible to give exact figures of the reduction in total cost that may be ascribed to this circumstance; but judging from the figures worked out in 1921, it would be in the neighbourhood of Rs.65,000. It remains to convey my thanks to those—and they are many—without whose assistance and co-operation this report could not have been written. As Mr. Tallents justly remarked ten years ago, so long as the census is run on the present lines, the first and greatest debt of thanks will always be due to the great multitude enumerators and supervisors, of whose names there is no record and who at best can look only for a printed certificate as the reward of their labours. To the district census officers I am under a very special obligation.

X X X X X X

And this is a fitting opportunity to pay tribute to the initiative, keenness and efficiency displayed by the Feudatory States in carrying out the enumeration of their people.

X X X X X X

W.G.LACEY

N.B. These extracts, from census report 1931, provide a feel of the census prior to formation of separate state of Orissa and appreciation of magnitude of operation and type of census administration then.