

The Demographic Behaviour of a Primitive Tribe of Indian Central Himalaya

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ABSTRACT The Indian Central Himalaya spreading over the twelve hill districts of Uttar Pradesh supports more than six million people, out of which about 3.54 per cent are tribal people belonging to five tribal communities. The Raji, one of these communities, is the most under-developed, primitive as well as nomadic. Except a very few ethnohistorical and ethnological studies, nothing is known about this numerically small tribe. Further, the nomadic way of the life of the tribe, probably, prevented even a complete & true enumeration of its population, as studies carried out have reported difference in population for the tribe for a single period. It has been claimed that the tribe is facing serious declining growth rate and in near future may face the consequence of depopulation. This study, therefore, focuses on the demographic behaviour of the tribe and tries to establish the reality in the generally given statement on its growth rate and other issues. The study assumes importance from the point of view that it covers the entire families & population of the tribe.

INTRODUCTION

The Central Himalayan region of India comprising twelve hill districts of Uttar Pradesh State, i.e., Uttarakashi, Chamoli, Rudra Prayag, Tehri, Pauri, Dehradun, Pithoragrah, Champawat, Almora, Begeswar, Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar supports about six million people. Five tribal communities composing 3.54 per cent of the total population inhabiting the region are the Tharu, the Jaunsari, the Buxa, the Bhotia and the Rajis. The Rajis, socially and economically, are the most under-developed tribal community of the region. They were recognized as a scheduled tribe in 1967 and as a primitive tribe in 1975 by the Government of India. They are also described as Van Rawats (king of forest), Van Raji (royal people of forest) or Van Manush (wild man or man of forest) who claim themselves to be Rajputs and the original inhabitants of Central Himalaya (Trail, 1823; Atkinson, 1882; Crooke, 1896; Pande, 1991); though anthropologically they belong to Tibeto-Burman

family. Their average stature is 159.42 cm. which is the upper limit of the short type (Singh, 1994). They speak a language, which belongs to the Himalayan group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. They also speak the Indo-Aryan language, Kumaoni, with others. Very few among them speak also Hindi (Singh, 1994). Except few studies on ethnology (Atkinson, 1981; Crooke, 1896; Joshi, 1986; Bisht, 1997, etc.), ethnobotany (Shah, 1987; Bhatt and Gaur, 1991; Joshi and Pande, 1996; etc.), and habitat (Pande, 1991; etc.) the literature on the tribe is scanty. Hardly anything is known on demography. This study aims at a comprehensive understanding of the demographic behaviour of the tribe.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

All the 11 settlements covering the entire population of 531 distributed in 123 households were covered in the study. The entire village was taken as the universe of study. Efforts were made to interview the head or in his/her absence the seniormost member of the family and also female respondents. The birth & death record, maintained by the head of the village council, was used to confirm the age of the family members and to identify the head/seniormost member of the family. Primary data were collected using a structured Household Schedule. Interview (focused) and observation (participant & non-participant) were also other tools for primary data collection. In the process of interview for household survey, out of the 123 respondents, about 28 (23%) respondents were females. To estimate age at first marriage, fertility and other demographic issues 111 females, including the 28 for household survey, were interviewed. Secondary data were collected from sources like Censuses of India, District Statistical Handbooks, Records of Block Development

Officer & Tehsildar, Birth & Death Records of the Head of the Village Council and also from existing data from libraries, and other government departments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Rajis having only 123 families with a total population of 531 in the first quarter of 1997, are distributed in 9 settlements in the district Pithoragarh, 1 settlement in the district Champawat, a new district very recently carved from Pithoragarh and 1 settlement in the district Udam Singh Nagar, another new district very recently carved from Nainital in Uttar Pradesh (Table 1). Their mode of livelihood is primarily based on collection of wild edible plants, roots, tubers, hunting and fishing supplemented by manufacturing of wooden vessels. Few decades' back, they were completely nomadic and secluded. They survived through barter of wooden implements and utensils with neighbouring non-tribal Kumaonies. Their practice of barter was unique that it was invisible trading and for this practice they were known as the traders of the night (Pande, 1991). During nights they disguised themselves and went to nearby settlements of neighbouring communities carrying wooden implements and utensils, bamboo baskets and other forest produces. They used to keep these materials at the gate of the house or at doorsteps and disappear. These articles were collected and replaced by food grains, salt, sugar and other essential material by the household, which were collected by the

Rajis in the next night again. This trade of this nomadic people was completely based on mutual belief and trust. With the introduction of stringent forest laws restricting and often prohibiting use of forest wealth, the Rajis were compelled to change their economic pursuits and occupation. Through welfare schemes of both the state and union government of India, they are being allotted land for agriculture in addition to many other benefits. This has resulted in changing lifestyle and the community is gradually adapting to sedentary agriculture. However, their livelihood is more dependent on earning from daily wage labour and forest produce than agriculture. The agriculture is subsistence in the community and the production hardly meets the food requirement for few months, even in some villages for few weeks.

DEMOGRAPHIC BEHAVIOUR

The average family size is about 4.58. About 18.10 per cent of the total families have only 1-2 persons per family, as much as 35.34 per cent of total families have 3-4 persons per family and only 2.58 per cent of families have more than 10 persons per family. Age-group wise distribution of population revealed that 23.91 per cent of the population are below the age of 7 years while 15.34 per cent, 52.35 per cent and 8.4 per cent are in the age groups of 7-14, 15-50 and above 51, respectively. Oldest male member of the family is the head of the household. The rule of inheritance is male equigeniture.

The effective literacy (population above age

Table 1: Distribution of settlements and population of Raji tribe

District	Settlement	Number of Households	Population			Sex Ratio
			Male	Female	Total	
Pithoragarh	Kimkhola	25	70	54	125	786
	Ganagoan	13	34	26	60	765
	Chifaltara	7	11	9	20	818
	Madanpuri	8	18	18	36	1000
	Katyula	6	12	8	20	667
	Kantoli	14	39	30	69	769
	Kuta Chaurani	14	27	28	55	1037
	Altari	10	26	20	46	769
	Kauli	4	11	8	19	727
Champawat	Khirdwari	20	35	28	63	800
Udam Sing Nagar	Bilhari	2	9	9	18	1000
Central Himalaya	Raji Tribe	123	292	239	531	818

Source: Primary Survey, 1997-98

of 7) rate was 35.06, being 50.68 for males and 16.66 for females by the first quarter of 1997. The crude literacy (entire population) rate was 26.74 recording 38.01 and 12.97 for males and females, respectively. This achievement was enormous for a tribe which was complete nomad about 3-4 decades back.

Sex Ratio

The Raji tribe has a sex ratio (females for 1000 males) of 818 which was lower than that of UP Hills (954), Uttar Pradesh (882), tribal India (982) and India (929). The sex ratio varied in different age groups and was acute for the age group above 50 (Table 2). Low sex ratios at early age groups, i.e., 716 for the age-group 0-7 and 707 for the age group 8-15 were the reflections of high female infant and child mortality.

Table 2: Sex ratio in different age groups

Age-groups	Males	Females	Sex Ratio
0-7	74	53	716
8-15	58	41	707
16-30	73	78	1068
31-40	35	32	914
41-50	24	20	833
51-60	17	8	470
60+	11	7	636
All age-groups	292	239	818

Source: Primary Survey, 1997-98

The reason for this low sex ratio in case of the Rajis may be viewed from perspectives like higher emigration of females than males and or larger immigration of males, more male births than females or favourable sex ratio, higher female mortality than male mortality, greater undercount of females in current Censuses than the previous ones and shorter life span of female, etc. (Premi, 1991; Samal et al., 1996). It is also possible that the decline in sex ratio among the Rajis could be because of incomplete and under-enumeration, female infanticide, pre-sex selection (amniocentesis test), less medical attention to female child and adoption of family planning methods once the ideal family size tending to favour sons is reached (Samal et al., 1996).

To prove conclusively role of many of these

factors for low sex ratio among the Rajis is difficult in the absence of data. Studies carried out in Central Himalayan region of India had proved that incomplete and under-enumeration were often found in the Census data recorded in the villages in Central Himalaya (Samal et al., 1994; Samal et al., 1996). This had been effected by difficult geo-climatic and terrain specificities of the region. Obviously, comparison of data of border villages from one census year to another, displays inconsistency in some parameters, particularly in human demography. Studies had also proved that biologically there are more male births than female births in Central Himalaya. In this region, out of every 100 surviving children there are 52.43 males against 47.57 females (Samal et al., 1996). The general claim that biologically there are more male births than female births (Premi, 1991) appears to be true with Rajis. The sex ratio also started declining after the age-group 41-50 and became acute in the age group 51-60 (470). The factors which would have effected low sex ratio among the Rajis are more male births than female births, higher female mortality, greater under count of females in the recent Censuses than previous ones, incomplete and under enumeration, less medical attention to female child and shorter life span of females. The probabilities in improving sex ratio lie in improving the quality of life through improved social services like maternity care, assuring economic security through improved agriculture and job opportunities.

Marriage and Pregnancy

Mean ages at first marriage for male and female were 21.8 and 17.28, respectively. About 5.4 per cent of the females were married below the age of 13 while 38.80 per cent were married at the age of 13-16 and 36.93 per cent were married at the age of 17-20. About 8.5 per cent of the females were below the age of 16 at the first pregnancy while about 60 per cent of the females were between the age 16-21 at their first pregnancy. This particular demographic behaviour, along with others like mean age of females at first marriage, is worth admiring, considering the primitive way of life and economic backwardness of the community.

Fertility

Average number of pregnancies for an ever married female (EMF) was 4.28 and the number of children born for an EMF was 3.88. The general fertility rate (GFR) of the tribe is about 198 against India's 145.2. The general marital fertility rate (GMFR) was as high as 226. The total fertility rate (TFR) is 6.595 against India's 4.0 and the total marital fertility rate (TMFR) was 7.52. The age specific fertility rate (ASFR) and the age specific marital fertility rate (ASMFR) were 1.319 & 1.504, respectively (Table 3)

Table 3: Fertility among the Rajis

Age-groups	Children born in 1996	Total women in the age-group (15-49)	Total married women of child bearing age	ASFR	ASMFR
15-19	4	27	14	0.140	0.285
20-24	6	23	20	0.260	0.300
25-29	8	21	21	0.380	0.380
30-34	3	15	15	0.200	0.200
35-39	3	16	16	0.187	0.187
40-44	1	10	10	0.100	0.100
45-49	1	19	19	0.052	0.052
All age	26	131	115	1.319	1.504

Source: Samal et al., 1997

Population Growth

The decennial growth rate for tribes of Central Himalaya (from 1981 to 1991) was about 15.47 against 25.67 for tribal India and 23.79 for the country. It was 10.19 point less than the decennial growth rate of Uttar Pradesh (25.66). The growth rate of the tribe is declining, though the absence of Census data makes it difficult to analyse and give conclusive finding. The most of the Raji settlements are new and general population data for these settlements are not available even for the Census year 1971. Even data for few settlements are not available in the Census of 1991. Despite these limitations, effort was made to collect the available demographic data from various sources for perspective analysis on population growth. According to Census of 1971, the Raji population was 277 distributed in six settlements. Population of the tribe in the year 1981 was 371 (Harijan and Social Welfare Department, 1991) and in 1991

was 494 (Min. of Social Welfare, 1997). The decennial growth rate of the tribe for the decade 1971-1981 was 33.93 and for 1981-1991 was 33.15, which was much better than that of many other tribal communities of Central Himalaya (Table 4). The annual growth rate for the tribe was 3.39 during 1971-81 which has declined to 3.31 during 1981-1991 and very disturbingly this has sharply declined to 1.24 from 1991-1996. Interestingly, the decline growth rate was in contrast to the high fertility behaviour of the tribe. Crude birth rate of the tribe was 49.42 against India's 30.5, Crude death rate for the tribe is 29 against India's 10.2 (Table 5) and infant mortality rate (IMR) for the tribe was 192 against India's 91.

Table 4: Decennial Growth Rate of Raji tribe (1981-91) in comparison to others

Community/Territory	Absolute Population (numbers)		Decennial Growth Rate
	1981	1991	
Raji	371	494	33.15
Bhotia	24029	23410	(-) 2.58
Buxa	34194	42027	22.91
Jaunsari	63710	64948	1.94
Tharu	88854	118558	33.43
UP Hills (Tribes)	211158	249437	18.36
UP Hills (Total)	4835712	5926146	22.55
UP Total	110862512	138760417	25.16
Tribal India	51628638	67760000	25.67
India (Total)	683329097	83390861	23.50

Source: For tribal communities – Draft Tribal Sub-Plan, 1995-96, Department of Tribal Development, Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow. For territories – Census of India, 1981, Series 22, UP, Part IIA and Census of India, 1991, Series 1, Paper 2 of 1992, Final Population Totals.

CONCLUSION

The economy of the Rajis is primarily built around the forests though the tribe is gradually taking to agriculture. However, the agriculture is in its rudimentary form. Poverty is rampant and the quality of life is substandard. This quality of life has influenced the demographic behaviour of the tribe. Food insecurity, improper caloric intake and hard life had shorten the life span of the females influencing the sex ratio. The matter that concerns most is the declining growth rate of the tribe, particularly from

1991-1997. However, this particular behaviour needs to be monitored.

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