

The Interrupted Becoming of a City : Patna in the Census of India, 1901-31

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A City of Mean Streets

British officials in colonial India have always been harsh on Patna. ‘The inside of the city is disagreeable and disgusting,’ Francis Buchanan (later Hamilton) wrote in 1812, ‘and the view of it from a distance is mean’ (Buchanan 1922 [1812], 348). Buchanan, a botanist and the former superintendent of the Royal Botanic Garden of Calcutta, was aghast at the townspeople’s inexplicable desire to settle in this city of ‘unsightly and slovenly’ houses with very little public works: ‘This predilection for the city would be hard to explain, as it is difficult to imagine a more disgusting place’ (344).¹ Almost a hundred years later, in 1907, L.S.S. O’Malley’s account of the town assured readers, ‘Great improvements ... have been made since the days of Buchanan Hamilton’ (O’Malley 1907, 207). However, his narrative did not start on a positive note as such. ‘A closer view is disappointing,’ O’Malley wrote at one point, ‘as it shows Patna to be a city of mean streets’ (206–207). He did not state clearly which ‘great improvements’ changed the status of the city from ‘disgusting’ to ‘disappointing’, but one gets the sense that he was talking about the construction of such ‘modern’ buildings as the Patna College (1862), Patna Hospital (1902), the Bihar School of Engineering (1900) and the Oriental Library (1891) which had a huge collection of rare books, manuscripts and autographs of past Indian emperors (213–214). Even Buchanan marvelled at the elegance of a two-storeyed private building—obviously a ‘European house’—which made him admit that it was ‘undoubtedly the best private dwelling’ he had ever seen in India (Buchanan 1922, 346). The few natives’ residences which drew his attention belonged to the local zamindars. ‘This part of the town,’ he remarked, ‘seems to have risen in consequence of the European settlement...’ (345).

It is not surprising that colonisers such as Buchanan and O’Malley would feel this way about Patna. These accounts are not very different in spirit, or in language, from other contemporary descriptions of Patna (see Beveridge 1883).² The importance of the two

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1. On public works, he writes, ‘These with the roads and a few miserable brick bridges are all the public works that I have seen; except those dedicated to religion’ (350).
2. One of the most intriguing commentaries on Patna, however, comes from E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1924) which also describes Chandrapore (a thinly veiled Bankipore—the western extension of the city) as a town which ‘presents nothing extraordinary ... The streets are mean, the temples ineffective, and though a few fine houses exist they are hidden away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the invited guest’ (Forster 2010 [1924], 1).

accounts lies elsewhere—in their respective roles in the statistical mapping of British India. Buchanan was asked by the Court of Directors of the East India Company to conduct ‘a statistical survey of the [Bengal Presidency]’ in 1807 (cited in Prain 1905, xviii). At Lord Wellesley’s behest, Buchanan had already conducted a similar survey in Mysore, but this time it was going to be ‘a *real* survey, undertaken on the spot by a competent observer, not an assessment, by an officer at the head-quarters of a Government, of reports submitted by district officials, but derived, when their source is finally reached, from the often hardly responsible statements of the village watchman’ (xx; emphasis in the original). This is not the place to discuss in detail the historical significance of Buchanan’s survey which covered almost every aspect of the region and its people, ranging from topographical accounts and descriptions of agriculture, trade and commerce to appraisal of artistic advancements and demographic estimates. Suffice it to say that it inaugurated the possibility of countrywide censuses and district gazetteers in the coming decades.

Many such gazetteers were composed by O’Malley, a civil servant posted in Bengal, who produced two accounts of Patna district (including the city of Patna) in 1907 and 1924—the former as part of the Bengal *District Gazetteers* and the latter as part of the *District Gazetteers* of the newly formed province of Bihar and Orissa (O’Malley 1907; O’Malley 2005 [1924]). In both the accounts, O’Malley referred to Buchanan’s survey on many occasions, especially on the true estimates of the population of the city and its actual boundaries. Buchanan estimated that the total number of houses in Patna was around 52,000. With six people residing in each house on an average, the total population amounted to 312,000. Though the number seemed remarkably large for a city in such dismal condition in the early nineteenth century, Buchanan was confident that the calculations were not ‘liable to any considerable error’ (347). While talking about this estimate in 1907, O’Malley inferred that the number referred to an expanse of 20 square miles, ‘whereas the city, as now defined, extends over only 9 square miles’ with a population of 153,739, enumerated five months after the publication of the 1901 census (O’Malley 1907, 214). Before the countrywide census operations started in 1871, there were few other attempts at enumerating urban populations in India. Bernard Cohn mentions one such attempt in Banaras in 1801 where Zulficar Ali Khan, the kotwal of the city, submitted an estimate of 582,000 people based on the same technique of counting the number of houses and multiplying them with an average number of residents in each of them (Cohn 2004, 233–234).

Cohn points out that the overestimation of city population was recurrent in the early days of colonial census due to the Europeans’ warped perception of the Indian cities as unplanned and overpopulated:

This sense comes from the layout of the towns and cities, and from the architecture. Town plans in the nineteenth century were featured by many narrow lanes with even narrower paths leading off them. In cities such as Banaras

3. We must remember that the gigantic estimate of Banaras’ population in 1801 came from the city’s ‘native’ kotwal.

there were large brick and stone tenements which often seemed to the observer to be built without plan and to contain enormous numbers of people. Most European travellers described Banaras in terms of large numbers of people, crowded conditions, noise and tumult (233–234).

It is difficult to substantiate Cohn's conjecture about the link between the errors in enumeration and the colonialists' perception of dingy, overcrowded urban life.³ But the writings of both Buchanan and O'Malley corroborate the other point that he makes: the sense of irritation among the British officials at the congested nature of the cities. Buchanan wrote that there was only one 'tolerably wide' road in Patna and that road was 'very much crowded'. 'Every other passage is narrow, crooked and irregular,' he added (344). Although O'Malley was keen on correcting the erroneously inflated estimate of Patna's population, he was still disturbed by the paucity of open space in the city in 1907:

There is scarcely a single building which is not cramped for room or hidden by houses and shops. The Chauk is the only open space; the width of which approaches the limits necessary in such a large town; and there is scarcely a thoroughfare deserving the name of a street, with the exception of the main street running from east to west (O'Malley 1907, 207).

The word which is frequently used in this connection is 'mean': 'the view of [Patna] from a distance is mean' (Buchanan); 'a city of mean streets' (O'Malley); the 'streets are mean' (Forster), etc. Apart from referring to the crookedness of the streets, these intensely personal descriptions make one wonder about the possible dangers of walking on them.

It is not incidental that the suffocating thickness of urban congestion is so poignantly palpable in the dense narratives of these official accounts. In his introduction to his seminal work *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, Bernard Cohn argues that with the increasing reliance of the European states on officialising procedures such as surveys and censuses in making power visible, colonialism began to nurture a drive to investigate, enumerate and categorise the colony (Cohn 1996, 3–15). The cornerstone of these procedures was the concept of empirical fact. The 'facts' about the colony were produced through direct, sensory encounters with unfamiliar objects, terrains, sensibilities and life forms. Hence, a 'real' survey had to be conducted 'on the spot' and the descriptions must reflect the surveyor's concrete presence. The knowledge thus produced was translational in nature and the space thus colonised was territorial as well as epistemological: 'the British believed they could explore and conquer this space through translation: establishing correspondence could make the unknown and the strange knowable' (4). One of the ways of establishing this correspondence was by crunching numbers—exploiting their objective neutrality in acts of mediation—but, as Cohn suggests, the numbers alone never felt sufficient. Since the census was a model of the 'Victorian encyclopaedic quest for total knowledge', the numbers had to be accompanied by texts that made sense of them as social entities—some analytical narrative that would socialise the numbers. On the other hand, the narrative that was supposed to contribute to a sociological index of the colony became a tool of objective stratification, a means of producing essentialised knowledge.

It will be a mistake to assume that this modality of stratification did not allow any flexibility. In fact, the story of Patna provides a great example of how the texture of the narrative changes according to historical eventualities and governmental prerogatives. As we have seen, throughout the nineteenth century, Patna was described as the epitome of haphazard urbanity—a mesh of unattractive buildings, unpaved streets and unruly people. The outlook started to change some time after it was selected as the capital of the province of Bihar and Orissa in 1912. The same O'Malley, who found the city 'disappointing' and its streets 'mean' in 1907, devoted an entire chapter on 'The Capital of Bihar and Orissa' in his *Patna District Gazetteers* in 1924. About the main street of the city, he wrote, 'From Sherpore to Bankipore the road is suburban in character; but from the Barkerganj nala east of the Bankipore maidan to Jafar Khan's Bagh it is definitely a city street, the main highway of Patna' (O'Malley 2005 [1924], 186). The affection in these sentences about a newly minted capital seems as sincere as did the irritation in the earlier complaints about the lack of open space in the city. This remarkable change in tone indicates not only the flexibility of rhetorical strategies but also how certain entities are encountered and familiarised afresh under new circumstances and with different motives of categorisation.

With this modular framework in mind, let me articulate the main problematic I wish to address in this paper: how do these officialising procedures of categorisation define and regulate the movement of people and resources in an urban context? If we concur that these procedures, even with their sharp improvisations and endless flexibilities, are fixated on achieving some kind of stability or order in a world already familiar with them, what will be their strategies to ensure and sustain that stability at the moment of social transformation? A makeshift response to this enquiry is that they will develop a fresh repertoire of correspondence and a new regime of information to accommodate the change. In the next few pages of this paper, I shall try to assess the merit of this response by studying four census reports between 1901 and 1931 with a specific focus on the phenomenon of migration to and from Patna. The first two of them (1901 and 1911) were conducted before Patna became the capital of Bihar and Orissa, and the latter ones (1921 and 1931) after—a fact that allows us a comparative perspective.

The reason I chose the census as the primary object of analysis is twofold. First, by the end of the nineteenth century, the census became the principal domain of enumerative knowledge production in the colony. But more importantly, by virtue of being a repository of socialised numbers, it represented the encyclopaedic model of total knowledge. It is, therefore, imperative to investigate the modality of the census itself in order to understand how social categories such as 'migration' and 'urban' were produced within its ambit in the first place.⁴ Second, most of the accounts of urban history in India treat the census as a mere numerical source; they seldom care to explore how certain census concepts such as 'birthplace' or 'mobility' became so firmly inscribed in our collective social scientists' imagination. The point of this paper is not only to show if and how the rate of migration changed after the separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal. I hope

4. 'It is my hypothesis,' writes Cohn, 'that what was entailed in the construction of the census operations was the creation of social categories by which India was ordered for administrative purposes. The British assumed that the census reflected the basic sociological facts of India' (Cohn 1996, 8).

that this study will enable us to understand the process of normalisation of categories like migration and urban within an official knowledge regime that reinvents itself by making a correspondence between experience and data, narratives and numbers, movement and fixity. The censuses between 1901 and 1931 are significant in this respect as they contain a trajectory of transition within the paradigm of enumeration itself. And Patna, caught in a whirlpool of governmental activities in the first three decades of the twentieth century, presents a perfect opportunity for chronicling and contextualising this transition.

Standardisation of the Census

The census of 1901 is probably best known for its Commissioner Herbart Hope Risley who entered the Indian Civil Service in 1871 and joined the staff of W.W. Hunter's Statistical Survey of India as Assistant Director of Statistics in 1875. His selection was made easy by his keen interest in anthropology, linguistics and sociology: the three disciplines which formed the core of colonial knowledge in the late nineteenth century. Risley's command over these subjects was rewarded when Rivers Thompson, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in 1885, asked him to collect detailed information on the castes, tribes and sociology of Bengal. Based on the information on Eastern Bengal collected by James Wise, the Civil Surgeon of Dacca, Col. E.T. Dalton's materials on the 'jungle tribes of Chota Nagpur and Assam', and information provided by 'a large staff of correspondents, including Government officials, missionaries, planters and native gentlemen', Risley produced four humongous volumes titled *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* in 1892 (Crooke 1915, xiii). Risley stated in the Preface to the first volume, 'The following volumes contain the results of what is, I believe, the first attempt to apply to Indian ethnography the methods of systematic research sanctioned by the authority of European anthropologists' (Risley 1892). By 'methods of systematic research' he meant the new 'science' of anthropometry:

the science which seeks, by measuring certain leading physical characters, such as the stature and the proportions of the head, features, and limbs, to ascertain and classify the chief types of mankind, and eventually by analysing their points of agreement and difference to work back to the probable origin of the various race-stocks now traceable (xxvi).

The racial framework of anthropometry was crucial to Risley's understanding of the caste system as he was trying to make a correspondence—a translational relationship—between race and caste. This idea of correspondence was premised on a desire to explain the untimely existence of caste into some semblance of scientific order. The caste system, he thought, was not merely a social phenomenon reducible to 'a figment of the intolerant pride of the Brahman'; rather, 'it [rested] upon a foundation of fact which scientific methods confirm' (22). What is important here is the shift from the earlier survey modality where the 'fact' was self-evident: going to the 'spot' and recording it first-hand was all that was needed to term the method 'real'; no scientific confirmation was needed. Risley's insistence on the racial foundation of the caste system confirmed by the analysis of measurements of physical attributes marks a major point of departure in procedural dynamics. It remodelled the concept of fact and rearticulated the need to study 'social' phenomena within a laboratory space of measured calculations.

Much has already been written on Risley and the anthropometric turn of the colonial discourses on caste, and there is no point repeating those arguments (see Dirks 2001). For our purpose, however, it is important to bear this history in mind, for it was Risley who paved the way for the ‘modernisation’ of census activities in India by importing the same scientific rigour into its ostensibly disorganised structure. In order to understand how migration became a census concept that would strive to map the movement of people scientifically, we need to discuss the changes in the methods of enumeration introduced by Risley and his associates in the 1901 census. After serving as member and secretary of a commission enquiring into the working of the Indian police, Risley was called upon to take charge of the census in 1899. During his stint as the Census Commissioner, he received considerable help from Edward Albert Gait, a fellow administrator and the future Lieutenant-Governor of Bihar and Orissa (from 1915 to 1920). Gait was the Superintendent of Census of Bengal in 1901 and authored the census report for the province. He also co-authored the general introduction to the multi-volume census with Risley where he mentioned that the latter had drawn up a ‘Code of Census Procedure’, on the basis of which the provincial superintendents like Gait had prepared their own codes in accordance with local specificities (Gait 1902a, xiii-xiv). The method of enumeration was markedly different from the earlier abstraction sheets system where each enumerator was given a book of sheets divided into different headings such as sex or religion. The enumerators were supposed to enter the responses with tick marks in the respective columns, and the ticks were counted and totalled once the whole book was abstracted (xv). Risley made a change by introducing the ‘slip system’ (an invention by Georg von Mayr for the Bavarian Census of 1871) in which a slip or a card containing the necessary information about each individual was prepared and sorted for the final calculation. ‘It is much less complicated than the old method,’ Gait remarked, ‘the work is more easily tested, and by sorting at one time the slips for a large number of persons the operations previously known as tabulation was almost entirely dispensed with’ (xv).

The replacement of the old system was inevitable as this was the most extensive census done so far. ‘It covered for the first time the whole of the Indian empire with the exception of the Wa country in Burma and certain tracts in Baluchistan where there was a risk of kindling tribal disputes’ (Risley 1902, xviii). The desire to have a complete enumeration of the empire was so forceful that it made some of the native enumerators overzealous. While some of them demanded a solution to the problem of making a wandering ‘deaf and dumb lunatic’ respond to all the sixteen columns of the census schedule, others tried to think of alternative arrangements for the ‘ascetics under vows of silence’ (xviii). The most enthusiastic were the teaching staff and the senior students of Bombay’s Elphinstone High School who voluntarily offered their services to help conduct the enumeration in a plague-ridden city. Risley mentioned these incidents with some amusement at the ‘subtle ingenuity of the oriental mind’ which would turn the census instructions into verse and recite them repeatedly to learn them by heart (xviii), but Gait was insistent on maintaining this enthusiasm: ‘Special care has to be taken to obtain a full enumeration of the boat population, on the network of rivers in East Bengal, and of the wild tribes of the Chota Nagpur Plateau and other remote tracts’ (Gait 1902b, i). The dream of reaching the farthest corner of the colony to contain the wildest population was finally coming true and no means should be spared to achieve that dream.

Gait was tasked with the most challenging region. ‘Among the provincial Superintendents Mr. Gait stands a class by himself,’ Risley remarked. ‘His charge was the largest and the most populous and embraced the most varied physical conditions and the most heterogeneous races’ (Risley 1902, xxiv). Bengal in 1901 was divided into nine administrative divisions: five belonging to ‘Bengal proper’, two to Bihar, and one each to Orissa and Chota Nagpur (Gait 1902b, 13). Gait observed that the political divisions did not match the physical and ethnic diversity of the region:

There is no natural dividing line between the Patna and Bhagalpur Commissionships [the two divisions in Bihar], while the latter includes Malda, the greater part of which is in all respects similar to the adjacent districts of the Rajshahi Division to which it formerly belonged, and the Sonthal Parganas, which appertains both physically and ethnically to Chota Nagpur (14).

In view of this complicated, and often confusing, layout of the empire, Gait chose to arrange the subsidiary tables in the narrative report according to a ‘natural’ division of the province into West Bengal (the Burdwan Division), Central Bengal (the Presidency Division, excluding Khulna), North Bengal (the Rajshahi Division, Malda, Kuch Bihar and Sikkim), East Bengal (the Dacca and Chittagong Divisions, Khulna and Hill Tippera), North Bihar (Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Champaran, Saran, Bhagalpur, Purnea), South Bihar (Patna, Gaya, Shahabad, Monghyr), Orissa (the Orissa Division, excluding Angul), and the Chota Nagpur Plateau (the Chota Nagpur Division, the Sonthal Parganas, Angul, and the Tributary States of Orissa and Chota Nagpur) (14). If we look carefully, this ‘natural’ division planted a binary between the political and the physical/ethnic on the surface, which could be interpreted in terms of a more profoundly epistemic binary between the permanent and the temporary: the political division was a provisional distribution of space contingent on administrative whims, whereas the physical features and ethnic concentrations were thought to be permanent and provided a stable reference point for the future census operations.⁵ ‘After all a Census Report is, in the main, a work of reference,’ Gait wrote in the introduction, while complaining that the census superintendent had to analyse the figures himself in the absence of ‘professional statisticians ready and eager to pounce on the raw material provided for them at the Census, and to make the required deductions’ (Gait 1902b, v). One of the chief purposes of this analysis, including the choice of methods and arrangement of the figures, was to ensure that there was stability and scientific rigour which would transcend immediate political goals and produce an orderly framework to be followed in the years to come. If, for Risley, the stability appeared in the form of the racial foundation of caste, for Gait, the physical attributes of a region were more fundamental indices of referential constancy.⁶

5. As we shall see later, this ‘natural’ division was followed in all the censuses discussed here.

6. Gait was not much convinced of Risley’s theory about the racial foundation of caste. In a paper read before the Royal Society of Arts in 1914, Gait admitted his reservations: ‘The conclusions drawn from [anthropometric] measurements have been disputed by various writers, and a strong case has been made out for a re-examination of the whole question’ (Gait 1914, 631). However, the point is less about the accuracy of this theory and more about the spirit of scientific analysis inherited by Gait from Risley. Since Gait succeeded Risley as the Census Commissioner in the next census of 1911, the tradition continued. But more on that later.

The binary between the permanent and the temporary (non-permanent) did not remain confined in the supplementation of the political divisions by a natural division. In fact, it proved to be the most crucial technique in enumerating, classifying and analysing movements of people. The codification of mobility within the country and to other parts of the worldwide British empire in terms of the social category of ‘migration’ was one of the most ingenious contributions of the decennial census. As we shall see, it also framed the statistical concept of ‘normal’ in a more succinct manner than any other comparable category. But before that, let us move back to Patna and have a look at what the first census of the twentieth century said about it. As part of the Patna Division administratively and South Bihar naturally, the city of Patna did not seem to receive any exceptional treatment. However, if we look closely, even the brief note on its population revealed the strategies that the colonial state was keen to develop and exercise in all of their subsequent censuses.

The Patna Division had one of the best road-to-area ratios in the province (one mile of road for every two miles of area) but it also showed a very high rate of famines as evident from the following table:

| Division | Total area | Area liable to famine | Population of area liable to famine | Maximum number of persons likely to require relief in severe famine |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Burdwan | 13,949 | 7,449 | 3,130,634 | 164,507 |
| Presidency | 12,066 | 4,355 | 2,565,241 | 131,437 |
| Rajshahi | 17,356 | 9,853 | 5,143,794 | 287,097 |
| Patna | 23,686 | 16,795 | 11,091,272 | 710,382 |
| Bhagalpur | 20,511 | 13,629 | 5,702,598 | 339,680 |
| Orissa | 9,841 | 4,342 | 1,396,149 | 248,985 |
| Chota Nagpur | 26,963 | 26,963 | 4,900,429 | 287,476 |
| Total | 124,372 | 83,386 | 33,930,117 | 2,109,564 |

Table 1: Occurrence of Famines in the Different Divisions of Bengal Presidency. Source: *Census of India, 1901, Vol. VI, Chapter 1, p. 12*

Although it was not clearly mentioned how they arrived at the figures of the maximum number of people likely to require relief during famines, Gait observed:

the extent to which relief is needed varies considerably, according to the character and density of the population and the nature of the neighbouring country. The classes that suffer most are the landless labourers and the petty artizans [*sic*]; the actual cultivators have usually a reserve of grain sufficient to save them from starvation’ (Gait 1902b, 12).⁷

7. One of the reasons why this table did not have the natural division is that the concept was not yet introduced in the chapter.

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If we read the sentence carefully, we may observe that Gait was hinting at the possibility of moving to the ‘neighbouring country’ in the event of a calamity such as a famine. Another such calamity would be the plague that dramatically afflicted the city of Patna and decimated the population by either killing them or driving them away to other places. The fall in the population from the previous census in 1891 to the current one was 18 per cent (from 165,192 to 134,785) (31). ‘The Census thus,’ wrote Gait with an evidently tragic intonation, ‘entirely failed to afford a true indication of the normal population of the city at the present time’ (31).

The question that immediately seizes our attention is: what is the ‘normal’ population of a city? Ian Hacking argues that with the erosion of the deterministic models of natural sciences, the theories of statistical probability offered an alternative framework to explain human behaviour: by working out a concept of ‘normalcy’ from measuring the average frequency of any particular behaviour and the dispersions from there. This conceptualisation of an ‘average man’ was only possible by extrapolating what Hacking calls the ‘avalanche of numbers’: the immense pool of numerical information amassed by the census and other such activities (Hacking 1990). So powerful was the impact of this law of average throughout the nineteenth century on medicine, sociology, evolutionary biology, criminology and statecraft that a senior administrator like Gait was overwhelmed by its absence in the census of Patna. The degree of discontent was so high that a ‘fresh count’ was called upon five months after the general census ‘when the plague scare had passed away and the people had once more settled down’ (Gait 1902b, 31). The second counting recorded an increase of about 19,000 people which was less than half of the estimated number of people who had fled the city during plague.

| Census of | Population | | |
|-------------------|------------|--------|--------|
| | Total | Male | Female |
| March 1901 | 134,785 | 67,038 | 67,747 |
| July 1901 | 153,739 | 79,369 | 74,370 |

Table 2: Comparison between populations of Patna City in two enumerations in March and July of 1901. Source: Census of India, 1901, Vol. VI, Chapter 1, p. 32.

Although not convinced of the reasons for such an anomaly, Gait had to be content with the result: ‘On the whole, then, except for the loss due to actual deaths from plague, which according to the returns amounted to 4,688, the population may be assumed to have regained its normal strength at the time of the second enumeration’ (32). The notion of a normal population, therefore, is associated with the state of ‘settling down’, almost like the settling down of dust after a storm, a state of calm and stability, a stationary state after random disturbances cease. These disturbances, however, do not remain random for long. The power of the law of average lies in its technique of normalisation: the ability to deduce the normal from the measurement and containment of deviation. When Gait did not find any other reasonable explanation for the missing persons, he concluded:

The decrease due to causes other than deaths from plague which, allowing for an incomplete return of plague deaths is probably about 3 per cent, may be ascribed to the continued operation of the causes that led to a loss of population between 1881 and 1891, the chief of which was declining prosperity due to the gradual decay of the river-borne trade (32).

In this passage, not only did he hint at migration (people leaving due to the failing state of commercial activities) as one of the main reasons behind the loss of population, but also normalised it by calling it a ‘continued operation’—a recurrent practice witnessed by two consecutive censuses and, hence, an event that was not random any more. This was also the moment when migration became not only a tool of normalisation of demographic shifts but also a social phenomenon to be analysed in correspondence with sociological categories such as caste and family. In the next section I shall explore how migration was ‘socialised’ in the census of 1901 and the implications of this in the larger politics of census knowledge.

Socialisation of Migration

Migration appeared with some conceptual gravitas in the second chapter of the census of 1901: the chapter on ‘variation in the population’ where Gait reflected on the changes in the absolute number and percentages of growth in the population of Bengal since the first census of 1872. Apart from the variations due to the increasing accuracy of the censuses over time, Gait identified two reasons for the growth of population: ‘(1) the excess of births over death and (2) migration’ (Gait 1902b, 39). In this chapter, he did not discuss the impact of migration in great detail, as it would be the sole topic of the following chapter, but raised a very important point that would set the rationale of the whole discourse:

For the purpose of this enquiry permanent and non-permanent migrants must be considered separately; the permanent migrants again must be subdivided into two groups, those who had changed their abode before the commencement of the decade under consideration, and those who did so during the said period (41).

I shall argue that the distinction between permanent and non-permanent migrants followed from the earlier epistemic distinction between natural (permanent) and political (temporary) divisions of the region. First, the discussion of migration in this chapter of the census, and in the next one, tracked the movement of people across the natural divisions. Second, and more importantly, the whole point of devoting a great amount of attention to the phenomenon was to attain a stability or orderliness in the concept of variation akin to the scientifically endorsed notion of physical permanence which would work as a point of reference for the subsequent censuses. As in the case of accurate enumeration of birth and death rates, especially with faulty registration mechanisms and cultural differences between the natives and the colonialists over the notions of time and age (see Alborn 1999), the movement of population across regions added to the difficulty of having a uniform actuarial vision. It was quite expected then that the colonial state would try to merge the two sets of binaries together to arrive at a normal rate of variation. As we can see in the quoted passage, those who migrated before 1891,

and those after, were segregated among the class of ‘permanent migrants’. The first group, Gait made it clear, should not be enumerated as part of the district of their origin and ‘should be considered an integral part of the district of their adoption’ (Gait 1902b, 41). The second group was also to be treated similarly. The real problem were the so-called non-permanent migrants who were ‘usually males’, and who left ‘their wives behind them and return[ed] home themselves at frequent intervals’ (42). They created considerable discrepancies in the vital statistics provided by registers of births and deaths at the district level since their births were registered at the district of origin but deaths (if so happened during the period of migration) in the districts of destination. ‘Almost all the districts of Bengal Proper contain a large floating population from Bihar and the United Provinces who have no effect on the number of births, while the deaths that occur amongst them go to swell the mortality returns’ (42).

This discrepancy between the vital statistics and census data bothered Gait so much that he decided to add a separate chapter on migration in his report. While the second chapter in the report recorded the numbers of migrants in different districts, this chapter (the third, with the simple title ‘Migrations’) mapped the direction, character and reasons of migration with respect to the Bengal Presidency. In the earlier chapter, he passingly remarked on the discrepancy in the vital statistics of the Patna Division because of its usually high rate of out-migration and the unusual intensity of the plague epidemic (42–43). A few pages later, while taking stock of the variation in population of the natural division of South Bihar, he returned to this point and pointed out that the region recorded a loss of 148,425 persons from 1891 at the rate of 8.4 per cent. The decline among the immigrants was even more emphatic at 36 per cent.

| Population | 1901 | | 1891 | |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Actual Population | 804,583 | 820,402 | 868,026 | 905,384 |
| Immigrants | 32,262 | 50,178 | 57,468 | 78,024 |
| Emigrants | 73,982 | 68,334 | 72,717 | 69,327 |
| Natural Population | 846,303 | 838,558 | 883,276 | 896,687 |

Table 3: *Population Distribution in South Bihar. Source: Census of India, 1901, Vol. VI, Chapter 2, p. 83.*

We encounter two interesting terms in this table: actual populations and natural populations. In the beginning of the second chapter where Gait discussed the effects of migration on demographic variations, he defined natural population in the following way: ‘the district-born or natural population ... is arrived at by deducting from the actual population at the time of each census the immigrants from other districts and adding the number of persons born in the district who were enumerated beyond its borders’ (41). The natural population was improvised by the arithmetic induced by an interplay of immigration and emigration. A comparison between the natural and actual populations revealed which regions were hosting more migrants and which less: if the actual population was less than the natural one, it meant that the region was sending more people off to other regions than receiving from them. South Bihar, as the statistics

regions. However, the point of this table was also to establish that every region contained a population which could be ‘naturally’ associated with it, whatever be the ‘actual’ tally. This reference to the ‘naturalness’ of the number of people born in the district but living elsewhere indicates an epistemic strategy by which the census became more than a repository of numbers. It emerged as an analytical machine with a deeper, more foundational understanding of the people that it sought to enumerate: as if the natural truth of the census could not be found only in the impersonal tables, but in the elaborate analytical supplements which would break down the actual figures to reveal the basic facts beneath them.

In the following chapter, therefore, it became imperative for Gait to extend his deliberations on migration. Before, he had mentioned only two types of migration: permanent and non-permanent. Now he broke it down to five categories: casual, temporary, periodic, semi-permanent and permanent (127–128). While casual migration denoted the ‘accidental movement backwards and forwards across the boundary line between contiguous districts’, temporary migration was caused by the ‘demand for labour on roads or railways, journeys on business, pilgrimages and the like’ (127). Periodic migration occurred due to seasonal demand for labour mainly for agricultural work during harvesting seasons, or when there was no work at home like ‘the visits paid to Bengal by the Nunias and other labouring castes from upcountry during the cold winter months’ (127). The semi-permanent migrants were different from these groups in their constant to-and-fro movement between home and the place of work. The connection with the place of origin was never torn: they look forward ‘to the time when they [might] again live there permanently’ (127). The two examples given by Gait are curious: the Englishmen in India and the Marwaris in Bengal. The permanent migrants, on the other hand, settled in the destination for good, driven away from their own district by ‘overcrowding’ or induced by ‘the superior attractions of some other locality’ (128). Gait did not forget to add that there was another case of migration which was involuntary and ‘fictitious’, when the people were immobile but the border was mobile:

The alteration of district boundaries leaves the actual residence of the inhabitants unchanged, but it may often happen that a man born in a tract subsequently transferred from district A to district B may describe himself as having been born in district A and so go to swell the number of persons returned as born outside the limits of district B (129).

Once again, this observation put the practicality of using administrative divisions as future reference into question. However, this chapter, other than providing a definitive framework for classifying the migrant groups, identified the definite trajectories of migration—the direction of movement and the regularity with which it happened—within the province. ‘One of the most noticeable features is the great movement from Bihar to Bengal Proper in quest for work’ (140). In this great exodus of jobseekers, North Bihar’s Saran recorded the highest frequency of migration to Bengal Proper, with South Bihar’s four districts (Patna, Gaya, Shahabad and Monghyr) coming in second, and then, at some distance, Muzaffarpur. ‘The emigrants from South Bihar find their way chiefly to the metropolitan districts and especially to Calcutta’ (140).

| Division of birth | | West Bengal | Central Bengal | North Bengal | East Bengal | North Bihar | South Bihar | Orissa | Chota-Nagpur Plateau | Total |
|-------------------|------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|----------------------|--------|
| North Bihar | 1901 | 28136 | 66912 | 128731 | 32707 | ... | 75434 | 526 | 30105 | 360571 |
| | 1891 | 13567 | 53826 | 123900 | 30061 | ... | 152988 | 431 | 16130 | 390903 |
| South Bihar | 1901 | 50291 | 127104 | 26601 | 18640 | 111641 | ... | 990 | 87888 | 423135 |
| | 1891 | 29418 | 112108 | 22911 | 18222 | 143901 | ... | 726 | 90786 | 418072 |

Table 4: Migration from North and South Bihar to Different Natural Divisions in Bengal. Source: Census of India, 1901, Vol. VI, Chapter 3, p. 148.

From Table 4, we get to know where the people from North and South Bihar were going in their quest for work. The most popular destination for people from North Bihar was North Bengal, whereas people from South Bihar chose to go to Central Bengal whose natural boundary coincided with the administrative boundary of the Presidency Division. Although, as Gait noted, the migration from North Bihar to Bengal Proper was greater than that from South Bengal, the latter still surpassed the former in the total number of migrants, chiefly because many more people from South Bihar went to the Chota Nagpur Plateau where mining activities had begun to concentrate. Geographical proximity definitely played a role in choosing the destination, but what the table does not tell us is what happened to the migrants at the destination. The numbers alone do not establish migration as a social phenomenon; for that, we have Gait's supplementary sociological analysis. The sociological category that made a recurrent appearance in this context was caste and, as we know from our previous discussion, it was the most discoursed category in this census under Risley's leadership. Incidentally, Gait made no reference to Risley's anthropometric theories of caste; rather, in his narrative, it was a unit of sociality and communal life, an organising principle of both movement and settlement.

Gait began his account with a caveat that the 'general form of migration' among the people of Bihar and the United Provinces was different from that among the 'aboriginal tribes' from the Chota Nagpur Plateau (142). The difference was soon articulated in anthropologised rhetoric:

The aboriginal Munda or Oraon has, it would seem, no strong ties to bind him to his home and, in the case of semi-permanent migration, he is often accompanied by his wife and children ... [In Bihar and the United Provinces], [t]he people are Hindus, and a man who leaves his permanent home suffers from many disadvantages. He is cut from his old social group and he finds it very difficult, if not impossible, to enter a new one (142).

As revealed in the next few passages, it was caste that worked as the glue in the social group at home, and it also affected the migrant's life in the unfamiliar, foreign conditions: 'If he marries abroad he is in danger of finding himself looked upon as a sort of outcaste and of being debarred from intercourse with his own people' (140). But, sometimes, even the home moved with the migrant:

But it often happens that the visits to his home gradually become less frequent and that the presence of a large number of his caste fellows in the place where he has made his temporary home, or the acquisition of property there, or the securing of permanent employment or some similar cause, may lead him to give up all thoughts of going back to the harder life in his native country and induce him to send for his wife and children and make a new home in the land of his adoption (140).

Caste and family, therefore, appeared to be the most important elements in explaining migration as a social phenomenon. What is ingenious about this account is how Gait made a connection between these two concepts to present migration as an instrument of normalisation of demographic variance. 'The extent to which permanent settlement takes place varies a great deal according to circumstances and to the caste to which the migrants belong,' he wrote, explaining that upper-caste migrants like the Brahmins and Rajputs working as priests and policemen did not bring their wives with them: 'They may spend their whole life here, but they retain their connection with their homes, remit money regularly to their families and visit them at intervals' (140). On the other hand, 'those at the bottom of the social scale, the sweeper castes and the Chamars', were either imported by government agencies for the performance of civic duties or moved on their own volition with their entire family (143). With the coming of the railways, the journey with family became easy and thus the number of permanent settlements increased, but not everywhere at an equal rate: 'The proportion of women amongst emigrants from Bihar is greatest in the metropolitan districts whither the journey is an easy one, and smallest in East Bengal which, to an upcountry man, is the least accessible part of the Province' (143).

With caste and family structurally corresponding to migration, the latter became a social/sociological category and started to channel its transformative energy in the direction of the former. Gait ended his account with the remark that 'caste seem[ed] to impose very little restriction on [the] occupation' of the migrant men (143). The Brahmins whose traditional career was priesthood now worked as clerks, or 'as peons or in the police, as door-keepers, cooks and even as coolies and day labourers' (143). He also mentioned other castes like the Tantis and the Goalas who forsook their traditional business and settled as labourers in the big cities. Now the circle was complete. Migration was finally grounded in the firm soil of sociological categorisation, following from the modality of the colonial census which, as part of its encyclopaedic model of total knowledge, made way for an anthropological framing of the world it enumerated.

Gait had always been an expert of this total knowledge, a combination of historical anthropology and socialised numbers and, aside from writing census reports, authored a volume on the history of Assam. During his tenure as the Lieutenant-Governor of Bihar and Orissa from 1915 to 1920, he founded and remained the president of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society whose *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* reprinted Buchanan's account of Patna. As we have already seen, the 1901 census did not make much reference to the city of Patna except once when its plague-ridden state required an encore enumeration. The subsequent census reports on the new province of Bihar and Orissa, however, spent considerable time on the new state capital.

In the next section, I shall relate the discussion we have had so far to the urban context of Patna and see how another mode of socialisation was active in the census as regards the concepts of urbanity and urban transformation. As we shall see, the already established 'categorical sociality' of migration also had a role to play in inscribing the location of Patna in the statistical imagination of the colonial state of British India.

Normalisation of the Urban

The history of the separation of Bihar and Orissa from the Bengal Presidency in 1912 is beyond the scope of this paper. We shall have to be content with the information that, after an extensive movement by the intellectuals and common people on the issue of differences in the languages, cultures, geographical features and natures of people, a new province was born with a capital in Patna (for details of the Bihar movement, see Jha 2012). However happy a moment it was for the people of Bihar and Orissa, it presented a peculiar problem for the census administrators. The enumeration was done before the separation in 1911, but the publication of the census had to wait a couple of years more, by which time Bihar was no longer a part of Bengal. In this round, Gait was promoted to Census Commissioner of India and the charge of administrating the census in Bengal was given to L.S.S. O'Malley, civil servant and a fellow of the Royal Statistical Society, already familiar to us for his 'disappointment' with the city of Patna in his *Patna District Gazetteers* of 1907. Between 1901 and 1911, Bengal had already experienced a partition in 1905. O'Malley observed in the 'Preface' to his report that while the results were being prepared for the two provinces of Bengal and Eastern Bengal and Assam, 'the repartition was announced, and the figures both of the census of 1911 and of each census since 1872 had to be worked out afresh for the Presidency of Bengal and the new Province of Bihar and Orissa' (O'Malley 1913, i).⁸

Even amid all the excitement and confusions around the creation of a new province, one thing remained constant: O'Malley's discontent with Patna. Though he did not dismiss Bengal and its erstwhile parts like his predecessor as a 'distinctly agricultural country' and its towns as 'merely overgrown villages' (Gait 1902b, 27), he was more interested in lamenting the decline of the old capitals like Patna or Monghyr than in talking about how they were doing at the moment of the census. A brief account of Patna reiterated his earlier dissatisfaction: 'Patna, the capital designate of the new Province of Bihar and Orissa, is a decadent city' (O'Malley 1913, 33). The decadence of Patna was accelerated by two parallel events: the decline in the riverine trade due to the extension of the railways and the never-ending epidemic of plague. The population of the city in 1911 at 136,153 recorded a loss of 17,586 from the second count in 1901 (33-34). 'During the last ten years,' O'Malley observed, 'there have been no less than 17,384 deaths from plague, and the loss of population (17,586) recorded at the present

8. As expected, the administrative divisions in the new province went through few changes after the partition. The former Bihar Proper had two divisions or Commissionerships: Bhagalpur and Patna. A third division named Tirhut was added in 1908 by breaking Saran, Champaran, Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga from the Patna Division. By 1912, the whole province had five divisions, apart from the three already mentioned, Orissa and Chota Nagpur, and Orissa and Chota Nagpur Feudatory States.

corresponds with that figure' (34). This remark, quite casually made and without any consideration for other factors such as vital statistics and migration, points to the qualitative difference between Gait's and O'Malley's reports (although the latter's discussion on the movement of people between Bihar and Orissa and Bengal did evince some analytical ingenuity).

In 1911, the total number of Bengali migrants to Bihar and Orissa was calculated as a mere 165,000, whereas that from Bihar and Orissa to Bengal was eight times higher, at 1,252,000 (167–168). Still lacking in rigour compared to Gait's sociological analysis, O'Malley identified three reasons for this huge difference: racial character, climate and industrialisation. The 'difference in character' between a Bengali and a Bhojpuri was established by quoting George Grierson, the former Superintendent of the Linguistic Survey of India: 'As fond as an Irishman of a stick, the long-boned stalwart Bhojpuri, with his staff in hand, is a familiar object striding over fields far from his home' (168). The Bengalis, on the other hand, were 'less heroic' and always afraid of the Bihari darwans kept by their zamindars (168). The discussions of the other two points were both less poetic and racist. O'Malley observed that the harvest time of the winter crops in Bengal coincided with the season of fever in Bihar and Orissa, making the choice of emigration easier for the people (169). But the most significant observation was made on the industrial conditions in the two provinces: 'in Bengal industrial concerns employing 20 hands or more have a total labour force of over 606,000, whereas in Bihar and Orissa the number is only 180,000' (169). The lack of industrial development was forcing the people to leave home and seek jobs in an industrial town like Howrah which recorded 38,830 persons from Bihar and Orissa among its residents (32).

Howrah, in O'Malley's census report, was everything that Patna was not: 'a city which owed its development entirely to modern commerce' since the opening of the terminus of the East India Railway in 1850 (31). Ironically, what wreaked havoc on the riverine trades through Patna—the railways—turned an erstwhile resting place for broken ships into an industrial town bustling with engineering works, sugar factories, flour mills, cotton mills, jute mills and jute presses. So much so that people started to move there from Calcutta: 'The number of people born in Calcutta and enumerated in the city is double what it was in 1901' (32). But, more importantly, it represented to O'Malley a model of overnight urban transformation. 'Less than twenty years ago,' O'Malley exclaimed, 'the city was lacking in many urban amenities' (32). In 1889, it was described by the Sanitary Commissioner as the 'dirtiest, most backward and badly managed municipality' (32)—a description that reminds us of Patna in the nineteenth century. O'Malley remarked that many municipal and infrastructural activities had begun in the last decade, including opening of water works, regularisation of the drainage system, and construction of new huts; the overcrowded 'bastis' were opened up by new roads and improvement of their sanitation and drainage. On the whole, the picture was of a shanty town transforming into a hub of industrialisation by the magic touch of rapid infrastructural growth and population inflow from the neighbouring districts and provinces: 'More than two-thirds of the inhabitants were born outside the district, and in the last ten years the number of those born in the city or district has decreased by 10,000, or nearly 20 per cent ... The city is, in fact, ceasing to be a Bengali city' (32).

The Interrupted Becoming of a City : Patna in the Census of India, 1901-31

The census of 1911, therefore, identified the three keys to the great urban transformation: migration, infrastructural development and industrialisation. While Gait had tried to relate migration to the social circumstances, O'Malley navigated away from the earlier concept of urbanity based on the number of houses and population density, and focused on the presence of industrial activities and extent of infrastructural development. In a way, this was also an attempt to socialise urbanity (and migration) where the principal elements of analysis were politico-economic reasoning and municipal governance. This was even more evident in the following census for the province of Bihar and Orissa, that of 1921, superintended by P.C. Talents. Unlike the previous censuses, Talents' report tried to diffuse the impact of the movement of people, especially rural-to-urban migration, on the census statistics. Incidentally, his account mentioned two new techniques of enumerating migration which had not been tried before: village survey and railway statistics. Based on landlords' statistics collected in twenty-one villages in North Bihar, twenty-two in South Bihar and three in Chota Nagpur, it noted that Calcutta was still the most favoured destination with Puri being a close second due to its popularity as a pilgrimage centre (Talents 1923, 3).

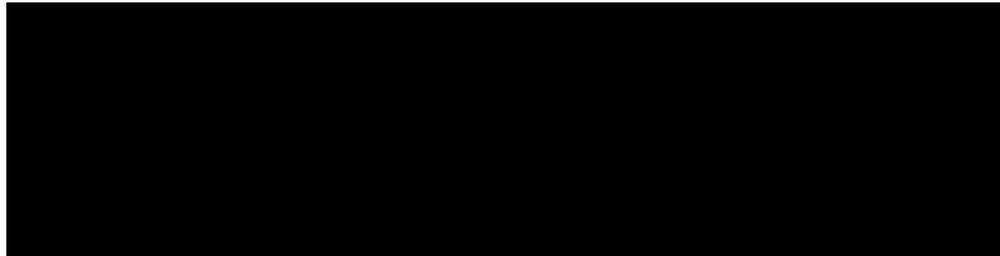


Table 5: Result of a Village Survey on Migration in Bihar and Orissa, 1921. Source: Census of India, 1921, Vol. VII, Chapter 1, p. 3.

As we can see, even the number of people migrating to Gaya was greater than that to Patna. Talents came to conclude from the survey that the people in Bihar and Orissa were practically 'immobile' (4). Better confirmation was found in the 'statistics of railway tickets taken' (4). The data was collected for two years, between September 1918 and August 1920. It was observed that the sale of tickets rose periodically, once in December to May, then in October and November:

for instance, in December 1919, 850,000 tickets were taken in North Bihar and 540,000 in South Bihar; the number then started to rise until in May 1920 the highest point of the period was reached and 1,500,000 tickets were taken in North Bihar and 1,000,000 in South Bihar, or nearly double the numbers taken in the preceding December (4).

Talents argued that, compared to the total population, the numbers would not seem that large, as only one in eleven persons in North Bihar and one in thirteen in South Bihar on an average bought a railway ticket every month. 'These figures,' a proud Talents declared, 'give perhaps as accurate an idea of the relative extent to which people travel

9. Sex was not specified for 141 people.

in the different parts of the province as it is possible to get' (4). The census, it seemed, was no longer satisfied with mere numbers; it needed to have a conclusive estimate of the direction of migration, a thorough idea of its trajectory and frequency. It was the propensity, and not absolute figures, which was required to lay the foundation of a socioeconomic analysis that would continue even in postcolonial times. If Gait and O'Malley codified how to estimate the number of permanent settlers in the big cities, Talents completed the circle by devising a way to map the previously elusive periodic movement of the population. Evidently, not much of this movement was directed towards Patna, now the provincial capital for eight years. Between 1911 and 1921, the population of Patna city decreased again by a little less than 12 per cent, at 119,976. The consistent epidemic of plague, and now the frequent visits of cholera, brought the population of the whole district down from the previous decade. However, two new towns in the vicinity of the old city found mention in the report: Bankipur with a population of 14,548 and the New Capital with 9,453 residents as part of the Sadr Subdivision (34). In the discourse on urbanity and urbanisation in Bihar and Orissa, the 1921 census was a significant contribution, for it included a separate chapter on the cities, towns and villages, and not simply as part of the general discussion as before. The towns were classified, for the first time, into six groups on the basis of their respective population sizes.

| Class of Towns | Number of Towns | Population | | Increase (+) or decrease (-) 1921 | |
|---|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| | | 1921 | 1911 | Number | Per cent |
| Total of places treated as towns in 1911 and 1921 | 73 | 1,349,957 | 1,306,374 | 43,583 | 3.3 |
| Class I 100,000 and over | 1 | 119,976 | 136,153 | -16,177 | -11.9 |
| Class II 50,000–100,000 | 5 | 298,507 | 245,098 | 53,409 | 21.8 |
| Class III 20,000–50,000 | 12 | 402,270 | 400,661 | 1,609 | 0.4 |
| Class IV 10,000–20,000 | 20 | 284,633 | 285,072 | -439 | -0.2 |
| Class V 5,000–10,000 | 31 | 227,860 | 218,243 | 9,617 | 4.4 |
| Class VI Under 5,000 | 4 | 16,711 | 21,147 | -4,436 | -21 |

Table 6: *Urban Population of Bihar and Orissa, 1921. Source: Census of India, 1921, Vol. VII, Chapter 2, p. 82.*

Although Patna's performance was lacklustre, the Class II towns did fairly well, with a solid increase of almost 22 per cent. However, almost 97 per cent of this growth was accounted for by Jamshedpur alone which recorded an astounding population increase of 51,688 out of the total rise of 53,409 among all the five towns in its class (82); the other four towns in the Class II category were Gaya, Bhagalpur, Cuttack and Puri. While O'Malley had been excited about the rapid growth of Howrah, Talents went ecstatic over Jamshedpur's meteoric rise: 'Its romance is a romance of the twentieth century' (89). We have already seen that, even in the census of 1901, the emigration to Chota Nagpur from South Bihar was quite high. It was around the same time that 'a series of romantic coincidences' led to the discovery of iron ore in different districts of the region and a Parsi businessman named Jamshedji Tata decided to build an iron and steel works project at Sakchi on 3,564 acres of land acquired by the British government

at a cost of Rs 46,332 (90). Talents' account of the industrial township that came up around the factory evinced a sense of wonder at the enormity of scale and the abruptness of speed of the whole operation which required a 'violent' confrontation between the east and the west, the ancient and the modern (90).

But Talents' surprise was not limited to the clash of the civilisations; it extended to its diverse demography: 'Persons born in every province of India from Burma to the North-West Frontier, from Nepal, Afghanistan, China and Ceylon, from seven different European countries, from the United States, Canada and Australia were enumerated in this town at the census' (90). What impressed him even more was the systematic settlement of this varied population in different housing arrangements: high officials in mansions with electricity, people with lower salaries in smaller houses, and coolies in 'coolie towns' where they could 'live their own lives without interference', of course 'subject to certain restrictions', most probably of movement within the town (90). The new town of Jamshedpur did not have any governmental municipal authority; 'the company [played] the part of the benevolent autocrat' (90). Unlike the company towns around the tea gardens in North Bengal, this industrial town had carefully laid parks and recreation grounds where the games of football, wrestling and baseball replaced the earlier rustic modes of entertainment like cock fights. Not only were the employees provided rice and cloth at controlled rates through the cooperative stores, they could also attend the 'cinema which the company [provided] free of charge for their benefit' (90). The paradise of industrialisation had finally landed on earth, and multitudes of men with their wives and children were knocking on its door. The fairy tale that was unfolding in front of Talents' eyes was not too different from the story of Howrah, except on one very important account: the efficiency of privately managed urbanisation. Talents was moved to see how easily such a diverse, migratory population could be managed by a carefully laid and strictly enforced regime of planning and zoning activities. O'Malley's account of Howrah gave a sense of rapid transformation, but it was not as comprehensive and uninterrupted as it was in Jamshedpur where entrepreneurial acumen met liberal governmentality and Haussmannian vision.

It was certain by now that the road to urbanisation must be pebbled with industrialisation and public infrastructure development. Patna, however, remained unaffected by all this clamour over industrial expansion, constant in its pale misery of unwholesome decadence, a city of mean streets, epidemics and abject sanitary conditions. Even after becoming the capital of the province, it was still 'the home of petty traders and artisans', and a patchwork of government buildings, private dwellings, small shops and huge acreages of cultivable land within the boundary of the city: 'in fact, so small are most of the buildings and so extensive is the cultivation that the traveller by rail from Patna City to Patna Junction has some difficulty in realising that he is passing along the boundary of a city containing over 100,000 inhabitants' (84). Talents' description emanated from the anxiety of the colonial officials about the absence of distinction between the urban and the rural, best captured in Gait's evaluation of the Indian towns as 'overgrown villages'. But what was earlier a casual observation was now a definite idea; colonial officials sought to conceptualise urbanity in terms of the scale of formal economic operations, riding on the experience of urban transformation in other mofussil towns. Thus, the census of 1921 included in one of its appendices an 'economic census

of Patna Bazaar’ by C.J Hamilton, a professor of economics of Patna College, and members of the Chankya Society, an intellectual club formed by the students of the same college. Hamilton is remembered in the history of economic thought in India as the founder of the Indian Economic Association in 1917 and the author of the voluminous *The Trade Relations between England and India (1600–1896)*, published in 1919 as a rebuttal to Ramesh Chandra Dutt’s theory of drain. Calling Dutt’s theory ‘one-sided and inaccurate’, Hamilton argued, ‘A dispassionate study of the facts ... must make it abundantly plain that India was never a great manufacturing country, except in respect of hand spinning and weaving’ (Hamilton, 1919, v). The same dispassion must have revisited him while conducting the census during the autumn of 1920 and the spring of 1921, as the results of the census tended to reconfirm his argument about India’s lack of manufacturing potential.

Hamilton’s report used the term ‘bazaar’ in a unique sense, as an interpretive nomenclature of the ‘main thoroughfare extending for rather over seven miles from the Bankipore Maidan to the other end of the Patna City’ (95)—the same street which was previously noted by Buchanan and O’Malley as the only proper road in the city. It is curious that Hamilton envisioned the direction of the street from Bankipore in the west to Patna city in the east, whereas the earlier accounts always described the street from east to west. Apart from the metaphorical association with the orientalist perspective of a British economist, the shift in the envisioning of the direction was inspired by the development of a new city centre towards the west of both the old city and Bankipore: the New Capital under the municipal jurisdiction of a newly founded Patna Administrative Committee. Hamilton’s census, however, did not extend to that part of the city, probably due to its strictly administrative character. Also, the report fell short of his original plan of covering the activities even on the side roads, as many of his student investigators left college amid the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1921, though he seemed unperturbed: ‘The area investigated is, nevertheless, sufficient to give an accurate idea of the kinds of things that are bought and sold, and to a less extent made, in a typical bazaar that serves the needs, primarily, of the resident Indian population and, secondarily, of the European population in a large mofussil station’ (95). Hamilton’s use of the term bazaar, as we have noted earlier, had an urban connotation as being located on the sides of a city thoroughfare. On top of that, it indicated a combination of production and commerce by his own admission. By grounding the bazaar in a specific locale, Hamilton ensured the practicable materiality of an ethnographic mode of enquiry, but the confounding nature of the bazaar still created a problem for him in the form of ‘the difficulty of classification’ (95). Hamilton and his team classified all the enterprises under their study into three groups—wholesale traders, retail traders, and manufacturers—and stumbled on the fact that many of them performed at least two of the mentioned activities. ‘In an Indian bazaar,’ a frustrated Hamilton remarked, ‘the division of economic function between wholesale and retail selling and between selling and manufacturing is far less clearly marked than, for example, is the case in an English city’ (95).

As has been clear from the beginning, the importance of the study in Hamilton’s mind lay in its potential as a representative study of all the Indian non-industrial mofussil towns, and one of his goals was definitely to prove beyond doubt that, in terms of the scale of operations, the colony was far behind the metropole—never a great

manufacturing country. Patna was, of course, a classic case of this lack in entrepreneurial ambition where no distinction could be made between selling and manufacturing—not in terms of scale, location or logistics—especially when the bigger shops were the suppliers to the smaller shops. In case of products such as sweetmeats, even the retailers were manufacturers themselves. Hamilton tried to rationalise this ‘uneconomic’ behaviour from the angle of customer base and dynamics of ownership, and not from the classical supply-side perspective, when he wrote, ‘A humble class of customers will hesitate to enter a “superior” shop but will resort to the neighbouring shop which caters for that particular class (95). The other difficulties of classification arose from the lack of specialisation and unusual combination of trades. Hamilton was surprised to find that ‘a bookseller and publisher, seeing a profitable opening, had started a coal godown from which he retailed coal imported from Jharia’ (96). Not much long-distance trade occurred in Patna by now, and even the adjacent cantonment town of Dinapore seemed a more frequented centre of trading than the once famous opium and indigo trade centre. Hamilton ended his report with the following despairing statement: ‘It is worthy of note that although Patna is the capital of a Province there is not a single shop financed or managed by European enterprise and not a single shop with a stock or mode of management comparable to that of a large store in an English town of any importance’ (97). This despair found an echo in Talents’ observation that ‘the industries of Patna conducted to-day for the most part on the same primitive lines as they were conducted a hundred years ago, at present show signs of failing as their product comes into competition with the output of other places’ (Talents 1923, 85).

| Enterprise | Number of people involved | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| Agricultural and Market Gardening | 26,373 | 22 |
| Industry | 22,708 | 18.9 |
| Trade | 21,854 | 18.2 |
| Professions and Liberal Arts | 7,339 | 6.1 |

Table 7: *The Working Population of Patna, 1921. Source: Census of India, 1921, Vol. VII, Chapter 2, p. 85.*

In the context of urbanisation, the trope of decadence was now associated with the lack of industrial growth, difficulties of classification of the commercial activities, and absence of good infrastructure and civic amenities. Talents did mention the New Capital as the location of the offices of the local government, the High Court and the university—both founded in 1917—but did not forget to add, ‘The occupation of Patna as a manufacturing and trading centre is in fact gone or at least according to present appearances going, and the substitution of the new occupation of being capital of a province is not going to restore the lost population’ (86). With hopelessness and cynicism abounding, Patna—with its almost non-existent capitalist motivation and a continued loss of population—was dismissed as a lost cause in the census universe.

A Happy Ending, Almost

The purpose of this paper, as stated before, is not only to chronicle the demographic changes in Patna in the first three decades of the twentieth century; my intention is to

show how the census as an encyclopaedic model of total knowledge was able to socialise numerical data by constituting correspondence between numbers, categories, opinions, disciplinary training, scientific expertise and statistical reasoning. The nuances of the modality of the census are often lost in obtuse expressions such as ‘manipulation of numbers’, as if the numbers themselves exist as pure entities in an untainted universe which, left to itself, will take us to knowledge. It is one of the objectives of this paper to argue that, rather than feeding into this ideal of objective truth, one may ponder how this objectivity is produced within a social order, and how that social order itself is designed and correspondingly sustained by way of objective stratifications. The correspondence between migration and caste, or urbanisation and industrialisation, proved to be so durable because they were normalised by both numbers and narratives, not separately but by their conjoined ability to socialise, fortified by a subtle combination of flexibility and force that allowed them to change course whenever necessary. In the final all-India census done by the British government in 1931, therefore, we find a sunny picture of Patna, albeit with some of the earlier ailments still present. The hints were strong in the second Patna *District Gazetteers* by O’Malley in 1924. The chapter on the capital of Bihar and Orissa, as I have mentioned earlier, was very different in tone from his earlier accounts of the city. Although he complained in the other chapters that the town did not improve in terms of industrial activities and health issues continued to persist, the chapters on education and the capital town were strikingly optimistic. Describing the New Capital as ‘the seat of the provincial government’, O’Malley listed all the important buildings in the area and congratulated the designer of the capital J.F. Munnings for considering ‘the necessities of modern systems of transport’—‘its roads have no dangerous turnings caused by old encroachments’ (O’Malley 2005 [1924], 195). No longer a city of mean streets, the New Capital was basking in a botanic glory as well: ‘At trijunctions of roads islands have been constructed, which have been fenced and planted with suitable shrubs, which already (1923) have grown considerably’ (195). Suddenly, the city had started to recuperate from the afflictions that had marred its reputation for such a long time. Although E.M. Forster, the author of *A Passage to India*, did not portray a sympathetic picture of the town at around the same time, the official narrative confirmed its healing process.

Not surprisingly then, eight years later, when a new census was taken under the supervision of W.G. Lacey, Patna recorded a population growth of 39,714 persons at a rate of 33.1 per cent (Lacey 1933a, 90). Calling this number ‘phenomenal’, Lacey offered four causes for this growth:

- (a) The rapid development of the New Capital area and the adjacent ward of Bankipore.
- (b) The extension of the University, with its associated colleges and schools, and the medical college in particular.
- (c) A large influx of immigrants and settlers from the mufassal.
- (d) An exceptionally high rate of natural growth among the resident population (90).

With the ‘virtual disappearance of plague and the greatly reduced mortality from Cholera’, the city, Lacey pointed out, was brimming with a healthy population, but the third cause (which was believed to have a connection with the first and second causes) received even more attention from him (90). Out of the increase of almost 40,000,

22,500 were either fresh immigrants or former emigrants who had now come back hearing all the good news (191). The population of the New Capital also rose from 9,453 in 1921 to 14,258 in 1931 (Lacey 1933b, Table IV). We may end on this happy note with this comeback story of an underdog town, deserted to fester in its decadence and gloom by the colonial state, discredited for its backwardness, and then, one day, revived from the ashes, revitalised by the gradual disappearance of epidemics, reinvigorated by the will of the people who refused to lose hope in its past glory. Sadly, most happy endings have a twist, and the twist in this story comes from the second cause of the growth of the city in the third decade of the twentieth century: education.

In 1935, the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council appointed a committee to look into the ways of reducing unemployment among the educated classes in the province. The report of the committee, published in 1936, summarised the causes of increasing unemployment in precise language:

With the progress of education an increasing number of young men from rural areas will flock to the towns although the scope for their employment is limited. Government service and the stereotyped professions have an undue attraction for our boys. The system of education is also defective, as it is creating a maladjustment between supply and demand (*Report of the Unemployment Committee, Bihar, 1935–36*, 1936, 25).

The unprecedented growth of the city, the resurgence of migration and vitality, which impressed the British officials and created an educated middle class proved to be yet another obstruction in the path of the development of the province. The urban dream is always beckoning but never fulfilled, as it thrives by multiplication of futuristic desires that conspire against the present. The point of this twist at the end is not to argue that Patna could never become the city that the colonialists wanted it to become, but the opposite. It served its purpose in the history of migration and urbanisation in India by presenting itself to be dissected and diagnosed repeatedly by the state and its interlocutors to the effect of normalisation of certain tendencies and categories, numbers and narratives. The end, therefore, marks another beginning for the new protocols of correspondence where we may think of writing histories of these always/already unfulfilled desires—histories of a city whose being is frozen in its interrupted becoming.

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