

Population of *Shia Ithna Ashri* community in India; case study of Lucknow

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Abstract: Shia Ithna Ashari (The Twelver Shias) Muslims are a large minority among India's Muslim population. There has been no particular census conducted in India concerning sects and division in Muslim society, readers should bear in mind that the figures given in this paper for the Shia Ithna Ashari populations are less precise than the figures for the overall Muslim population in India. Therefore, the figures of Shia Ithna Ashari Population reported here are expressed broadly and should be treated as approximate. The city of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh, being the heartland for Shia Ithna Ashari community acts the center for the community's activities; therefore the case study is related to Lucknow.

Keywords: Shia Ithna Ashari, Population, Lucknow, India

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I. INTRODUCTION

Having an exact population count of a group, community or a society, etc plays a crucial role in defining its influence and decision making power. Likewise the absence of a precise demographic data makes it very difficult to study and understand a community. This absence of demographic data acts as a barrier for a successful planning process for the development of that community. Therefore, to have a better understanding of *Shia Ithna Ashari* community in India- Lucknow, we must at least try to find out a vague- if not precise, population data of this community.

To have a better picture of population figures concerning the *Shia Ithna Ashari* community in India; Lucknow, we need to have the picture drawn on a bigger canvas to have a better understanding, as the *Shia Ithna Ashari* community is a minority within a minority. Therefore we will first find out the Muslim population in the world and the *Shia Ithna Ashari* population in the world followed by the Muslim population in India and the *Shia Ithna Ashari* population in India, hence the Muslim population in Lucknow- U.P, as a result the *Shia Ithna Ashari* population in Lucknow- U.P.

Preparing this paper with an analytic approach it was very difficult to collect data on the population issue, as no such report has been prepared yet. The method of data collection was internet sites, reports, interviews and personal experience related to ground works.

1.1 Meaning of *Shia Ithna Ashari*

It is also important to differentiate between the Islamic faiths and denominations when talking about the population and concentrations. Correct definition of the sect, plays a vital role in determining and examining the population figures. The world *Shis* today and apply on other schools of thoughts also but in this paper by the term '*Shia*' we mean *Shia Ithna Ashari* or the Twelver Shias.

Lexical meaning: *Shia* or *Shiite* written in Arabic as "شيعية" is an Arabic word, there for the Lexical meaning of the word *Shia* we turn to Arabic Dictionaries. In Arabic language word *Shia* means following and obeying one or many persons; also Helping or Aiding someone; also Accordance and Coordination of action and speech. Few instances from Arabic dictionaries are as follows:

1) FirozaBadi says:

Being a Shia of a person is being his Follower and Supporter, it is used for a Group and can also be used for Singular or Plural, Masculine or Feminine. (Fizorabadi)

2) IbnManzoor says:

Shia, is a group who gather on a matter, any group that would agree upon a single matter is Shia and every

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group that have a common cause and have chosen to follow each other are called Shia. (Ibn Manzoor)

3) Ibn Aseer says:

The word Shia originates from the meaning of Accompanying someone i.e. following somebody. (Ibn Aseer)

By thoroughly examining these Lexical meanings it can be said that the word Shia is confined into few main meanings which are; 1-Following and Obeying 2- Helping and Accompanying 3- Being in accordance with.

Terminological Meaning:

1) The word Shia has different terminological uses, but the terminological meaning which is famous and most commonly used is for "A group that has chosen Imam Ali (a.s) as Prophet Mohammad's (SAW) immediate successor."

Firouzabadi in Al-Qamoos :

And this name was dominantly used for everyone who Followed Ali (a.s) and his Household until it became a special name for them. (Fizorabadi)

2) One of the two main branches of Islam, followed by about a tenth of Muslims, especially in Iran, that rejects the first three Sunni caliphs and regards Ali, the fourth caliph, as Muhammad's first true successor. (Oxford Dictionary)

3) Syed Sharif Jurjani says: ...and Shias are people who follow Ali (SAW) and they say that Ali (a.s) is the Imam (Successor) after the Holy Prophet (SAW) and they believe that the Imamate belongs to Ali (a.s) and his Household (a.s) (Jurjani)

Therefore, we can conclude that the Word Shia / Shiite or better known as *Shia Ithna Ashari* is used to define the sect of Muslims who accept Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s) the paternal brother and son in law of the Holy Prophet (pbh) as the direct successor and the first Imam as he is the only eminent person amongst all the companions of the Holy Prophet (pbh) and believe that the Imamate and is confined only to his family and eleven other Imams after him i.e. the children of Prophet's daughter Lady Fatimah (s.a).

II. THE ISSUE OF DEMOGRAPHICAL DATA OF SHIA ITHNA ASHARI COMMUNITY AND PREVIOUS WORKS

Demography of a community is very important for accurate planning, which shows the statistical study of community's population especially with reference to size and density, distribution and vital statistics like births, deaths, marriages, dispersions, education, etc. (Merriam-Webster) The *Shia Ithna Ashari* community of U.P does not have any accurate demographical study. The census conducted by the government does not show Sunni- Shia data, rather it conducts an absolute study on the Muslim community.

2.1 Absence of accurate data; a weakness or an opportunity

The 'lack of demographical data' is a weakness for *Shia Ithna Ashari* community because many solutions, schemes, planning that can be offered for the development of a community is based on correct analysis of that community on the basis of accurate demographical data, which the community lacks. This- 'lack of demographical data' is one reason that many times the community itself does not understand its own strengths and weakness, and when welfare organizations, or policy making committees want to take steps for the development of the community they often end-up making the wrong decisions because of the lack of correct census data and the incorrect data in hand. Contrary to the above mentioned view, many argue that for the *Shia Ithna Ashari* of India the unavailability of accurate census is rather important and is an opportunity.

Below is the summarized result of the interviews on this issue with different seminary scholars and the *Shia Ithna Ashari* community social workers in Lucknow.

Their reasoning is that, this unavailability of census gives *Shias* the benefit of doubt, because in case of *Shia* population, the actual population of *Shia Ithna Ashari* in India is very much less than what is usually said.

One scholar said: "confusion on this issue is better than having a very accurate number, because the results will not be satisfying, thanks to the Azadari *Shias* seem to be in huge numbers in U.P but we know that the numbers are very low."

"Money, time, work force and other resources required for such a vast study is not worth it, whereas these resources can be utilized for the development of the community in other areas." said a community worker.

Another activist believed that, *these demographical studies are fruitful for those communities that are not a minority with in a minority, or if so, at least not be in a threatened position by the majority ruling class. Shias of U.P until few years back were living in a survival mode; it is only recently that they have settled enough to show their presence, but in many parts of India, Shias are supposed to look for their survival not for their greatness. These studies will pin-point Shia gatherings and will jeopardize their survival and development.*

In many parts Shia hide their faith to blend in with others for their businesses and education, they are not practicing *Taqiyyah*, but they also do not prefer to disclose their faith.

2.2 Previous Works

The unavailability of census, good or not, the merits of such study for a community is undeniable and prominent community leaders have taken the initiative. In July 27-2012, *Majlis-e-Ulema-e-Hind* announced to start an information collecting process from the second week of September that year.

A newspaper noted; *"The aim of this exercise is to assert for higher fund allocation in developmental schemes for minorities... Regarding how the enumeration work would be undertaken, members of the organization said, "Shia clerics (called imam-e-juma) in various mosques in the state will be roped in along with Anjumans (local Shia religious groups) for the census". There are some 5,000 imam-e-juma and an equal number of Anjumans in the state, each of whom would look after the survey work in their respective areas."* (TimesofIndia, 2012)

Similar data collection processes also kicked-off by the leaders of the Shia community in Delhi.

Unfortunately, the fate of both these exercises and similar to this, are still unknown.

Dr. R.Susewind, an anthropologist² has studied the city of Lucknow from many aspects; his works related to the *Shias* of Lucknow are very useful. When asked about, considering this community as a minority with in a minority, will the *Shia* census be of any help (if conducted)?

He replied; *"I think better and more accurate data is always helpful. More useful than the mere number of people would be to understand their social breakdown, though - 'are Shias doing well or not so well?' seems, to me, the more important question than 'how many Shia are there?'"*

Obviously, a thorough study on Shia concentrations and their social aspects will be more helpful than mere demographical data to ensure development and better future, but the community will need to set its priorities first.

III. POPULATION OF MUSLIMS IN THE WORLD AND IN INDIA; U.P –LUCKNOW

The current population of India is 1,333,571,501 as of Wednesday, December 7, 2016, based on the latest United Nations estimates. India population is equivalent to 17.84% of the total world population, it ranks second in the list of countries (and dependencies) by population. (worldometers)India has the world's largest Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Zoroastrian populations, and has the third-largest Muslim population and the largest Muslim population for a non-Muslim majority country. According to a recent study (based on the 2010 world population of 6.9 billion) by The Pew Forum, there are: 1,598,510,000 Muslims (23%), of which 87-90% are *Sunnis* and 10-13% are *Shia*. (Mapping the Global Muslim Population, 2009) Official figures at the census 2001 say, out of 1028 million population of India, little over 827 million (80.5%) have returned themselves as followers of Hindu religion, 138 million (13.4%) as Muslims or the followers of Islam, 24 million (2.3%) as Christians, 19 million (1.9%) as Sikh, 8 million (0.80%) as Buddhists and 4 million (0.4%) are Jain. In addition, over 6 million have reported professing other religions and faiths including tribal religions, different from six main religions. The Muslims professing Islam are in majority in Lakshadweep and Jammu & Kashmir. The percentage of Muslims is sizeable in Assam (30.9%), West Bengal (25.2%), Kerala (24.7%), Uttar Pradesh (18.5%) and Bihar (16.5%). (censusindia.gov.in)

DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION BY RELIGION

Religion	Number	%
All religious communities	1,028,610,328	100.0
Hindus	827,578,868	80.5
Muslims	138,188,240	13.4
Christians	24,080,016	2.3
Sikhs	19,215,730	1.9
Buddhists	7,955,207	0.8
Jains	4,225,053	0.4
Others	6,639,626	0.6
Religion not stated	727,588	0.1

Source : Religion, Census of India 2001

The District Census 2011 Handbook (DCHB) published by Census Organization in 16-06-2014, prepared by C. Chandramouli (Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India) showed the figures below: Total population of UP: **199,812,341** Total population of **Muslims in UP: 38,483,967** Total population of **Lucknow: 4,589,838** (Chandramouli, 2014) Total Population of **Muslims in Lucknow: 985,070** (census2011.co.in)

² See, <https://www.raphael-susewind.de/>

IV. POPULATION OF SHIA ITHNA ASHARI IN THE WORLD AND IN INDIA; U.P - LUCKNOW

One of the lingering problems in estimating the Shia population is that even though the Shia form a significant minority in a Muslim country, the entire population is often listed as Sunni. Shias are estimated to be 21–35 percent of the Muslim population in South Asia, although the total number is difficult to estimate due to the intermingling between the Islamic schools and branches and practice of *taqiyya* by Shias. There are many big and small towns and villages with a majority Shia Muslim population in India, prominent places in India with majority or considerable Shia Muslim population are Kargil, Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Hallaur, Amroha, etc.

Few Indian sources claimed the Shia population between 2014–2015 was between 35% and 38% of the entire Muslim population of India which accounts them in numbers between 80,000,000 to 90,000,000 plus of the then 227 million Indian Muslim population. (Wikipedia) The Pew Forum’s estimate of the Shia population (10-13%) is in keeping with previous estimates, which generally have been in the range of 10-15%. Some previous estimates, however, have placed the number of Shias at nearly 20% of the world’s Muslim population. An overwhelming majority of Muslims are Sunnis, while an estimated 10-13% are Shias. This report estimates that there are between 154 million and 200 million Shia Muslims in the world today. Between 116 million and 147 million Shias live in Asia, representing about three-quarters of the world’s Shia population (note that Iran is included in the Asia-Pacific region). (pewforum.org)

According to some national and international sources Indian Shia population is the world's second-largest after Iran. The *Shia* population was also acclaimed publicly as second largest by the 14th Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh quoted in the year 2005. The Indian express publish that interview where Dr.M.Singh said: “...Also I would say Iran is the largest Shia Muslim country in the world. We have the second largest Shia Muslim population in our country and I do believe that thanks to our unique history we can be a bridge.” (indianexpress.com) A WikiLeaks report said: “Though opinions vary on what the exact percentage of the Shia population is in India, experts believe that the number of Shias is somewhere between less than one percent to five percent of the total population, (Note: Making it the world's second largest Shia population)” (WikiLeaks) Shianumbers.com is another source that claims over 320 Million Shia People Live in over 100 Countries, and places India as the second largest in Shia population. (shianumbers.com) Rank of India by Shia Population: 2 Estimated Muslims Population in India: 190,510,000 Estimated Shia Muslim Population in India: 34,291,800-47,627,500 i.e 18-25% of Muslim population.

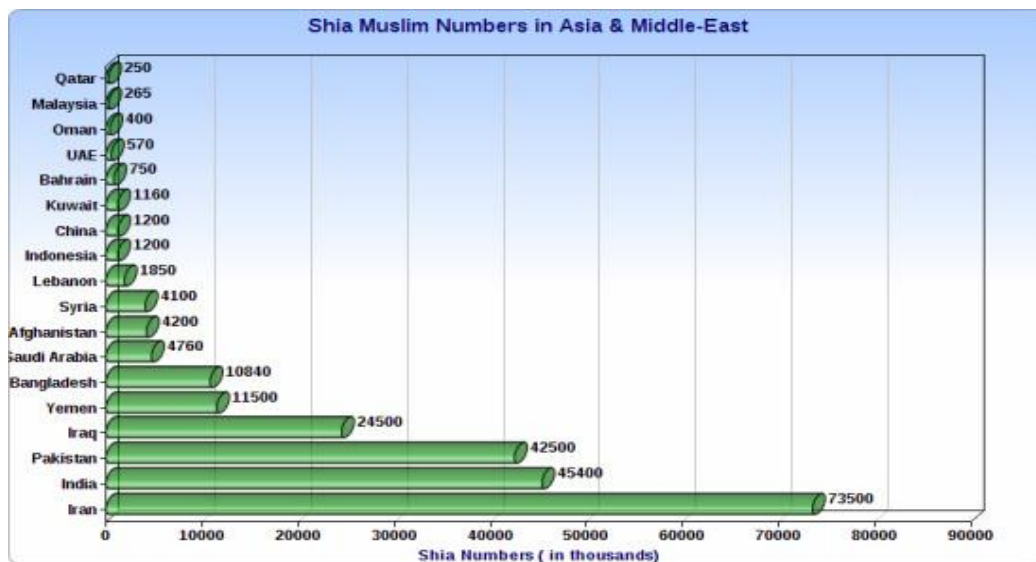


Image by shianumbers.com

Although few sources have placed the Shia population in India to be the world’s second largest, some have considered it to be the third largest after Pakistan to be the second largest with Shia population. According to Pew forum research in 2009, Shia population of India stood third after Iran being first and Pakistan being second see the table below:

	Estimated Shia Population	Approximate 2009 Percentage of Population that is Shia	Approximate Muslim Percentage of Shia Population	World
Iran	66 – 70 million	90 – 95%	37 – 40%	
Pakistan	17 – 26 million	10 – 15	10 – 15	
India	16 – 24 million	10 – 15	9 – 14	
Iraq	19 -22 million	65 – 70	11 – 12	

4.1 Shia population in Lucknow:

In the interviews conducted for this research with three prominent scholars of Lucknow, namely (in alphabetic order) *Maulana Syed Kalbe Jawad Naqvi*³, *Maulana Syed Liyaqat Raza Rizvi*⁴, *Maulana Syed Saif Abbas Naqvi*⁵; they commented on *Shia Ithna Ashari* population of Lucknow to be: between 300,000 to 350,000 (Naqvi S. , 2016) less than 400,000 (Rizvi, 2016) approximately 300,000 (Naqvi S. S., 2016) while the Total population of Lucknow announced by the census 2011 was: 4,589,838 (mentioned above) When asked *Dr. Raphael Susewind*⁶ about the Shia population in Uttar Pradesh and in Lucknow, he replied “*my estimate is about 30% of all Muslims in urban Lucknow are Shia (given the 2011 Census data, this means 30% of 21% of 4,589,838 people = 2,89,000 or so Shia within Lucknow district). For UP its very hard to say, but certainly (the percentage is) much less.*” (Susewind, 2017)

V. CONCLUSION

As mentioned previously the data collection on this issue is difficult as means and resources are very limited, hence the inexplicitly data collection can only result in vague results. Nevertheless have having no population data is better than having fuzzy idea of the population. Therefore, by statistically studying the above mentioned data we can roughly, conclude on population issue that in 2016: Total Population of India: **1,333,571,501** Total Muslim Population of India: 13.4% of total population of India = **178,698,581** Total Shia Population of India: 20% of total Muslim population = **35,739,716**– which is 2.68% of total population of India. Total Population of Uttar Pradesh: 16.4% of total population of India = **218,705,726** Total Muslim Population of Uttar Pradesh: 19.2% of total U.P population = **41,991,499** Total Shia Population of Uttar Pradesh: 22% of total Muslim population of Lucknow⁷ = **9,238,129** Total Population of Metropolitan Lucknow: 0.3632% of total India population = **4,84,39,49** Total Muslim Population of Lucknow: 21.46% of total Lucknow population = **1,039,511** Total Shia Population of Lucknow can be said to be = **300,000**

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³ Imam-e-Juma of Lucknow.

⁴ Experienced and a renowned scholar who has travelled all over India and abroad for Majalis and lectures in Muslim communities.

⁵ A distinguished aalim, founder of Hawze Abutalib (a.s), president of Shia moon-sighting committee, president of Maula Ali a.s orphanage and many other charitable religious organizations.

⁶ Dr Raphael Susewind | Lecturer in Social Anthropology & Development :www.raphael-susewind.de

⁷ MaulanaSyed K.Jawad; “22% population among Muslims comprises members of the Shia community. Still, they do not get adequate political and social representation.” (TimesofIndia, 2012)

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