

# A First for Census Taking: The Third Sex

by Carl Haub, senior demographer. O.P. Sharma, PRB consultant in Delhi, contributed to this blog post.

From the beginning, questions on one's sex on census forms had two choices: male or female. But no more. In its upcoming decennial census, to be conducted in February, India offer the possibility of a third response – “other” (see partial facsimile of the census form below). The innovation has generated quite a bit of publicity in the Indian press. The group most affected by this change to the census form is usually referred to in India as transgenders/eunuchs, or *hijras*.

Location Particulars		State/UT	District:		Taluk/Taluka/ P.S./Dev. Block/ Circle/Mandal:	Census of India 2011							
		Town/ Village			Ward Code No. (only for Town)								
Q. 1	Name of the person start with head of household	Q. 2	Relationship to head write the relationship in full.	Q. 3	Sex Male ...1 Female 2 In case the respondent wishes to choose code than code 1 or 2 then give code '3' Other...3	Q. 4	Date of birth and Age 4(a) Date of birth (as per English calendar (as declared or estimated) Day- Month Year 4(b) Age Also write age on last birthday in completed years, in box against 4(b)	Q. 5	Current marital status give code from list below	Q. 6	Age at marriage In completed years 1 (not applicable for Never married)	Q. 7	Religion (Write name of the religion in full) Also give code in box if found in the list below For other religions, write name of the religion in full but do not give any code number

*Hijras* have a long tradition in South Asia. Their dancing and singing at births and marriages are seen as good luck by many as well as being somewhat annoying. They are given money on these occasions as well as in some holiday seasons. More attention has been focused on *hijras* since campaigns against HIV/AIDS got underway in India and they are usually considered a high-risk group. Much support and care for HIV-positive *hijras* has been provided by the Naz Foundation, headquartered in Delhi who welcomed the development as treating eunuchs as legitimate members of society.

The “third sex” is far from a recent concept in many parts of the world, having existed for thousands of years. References to a third sex (*triteeyaprakrti* in Sanskrit) appeared at least as early as the 2nd century B.C. In Pakistan in 2009, the Supreme Court ordered that eunuchs be given national identification cards identifying their special gender status. But the inclusion of a three-response question on sex in a traditional census enumeration must be a first. And, not long afterwards, Nepal announced that it will do the same in its 2011 Census, which begins in May.

All of this does lead one to wonder what census statistical tables would look like. Will all three sexes be shown? Or will male and female not quite add to the total? It will be an interesting year in many ways.

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