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CASTE CENSUS

Caste Census
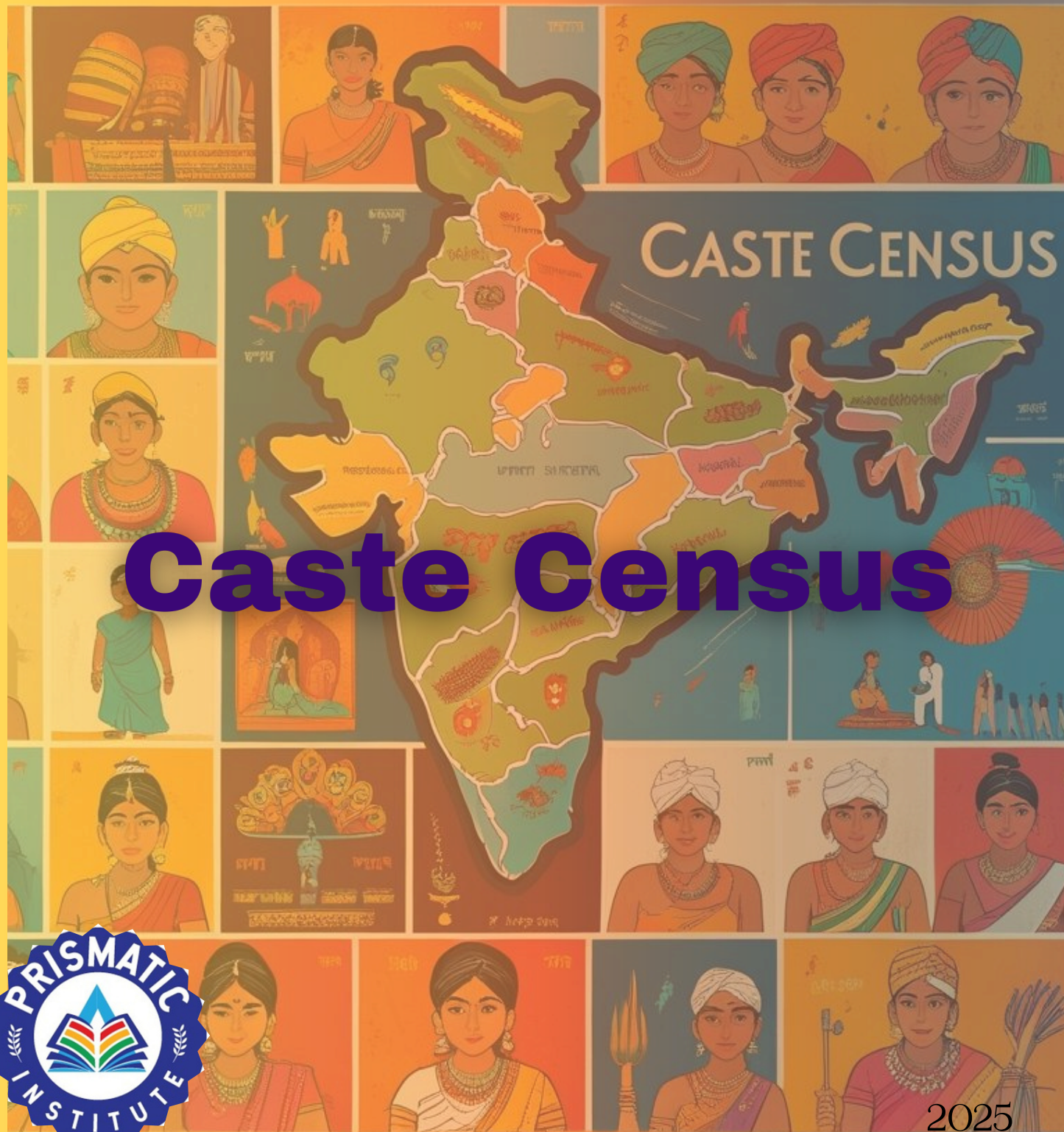
Caste Census

- **Definition:** A Caste Census involves the collection and tabulation of caste-based data within the broader census exercise. It aims to provide detailed statistics on the population segmented by caste, which is crucial for addressing issues of discrimination and for informed policymaking.
- **Current Practice:** The Indian Census, conducted every ten years by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner (under the Ministry of Home Affairs), collects data on demographics, culture, economic structure, and more. Traditionally, this has included a variety of socio-economic data, but caste-wise enumeration beyond Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) has not been included in recent censuses.

Historical Background

- **Colonial Era:** The British colonial administration first introduced caste census in 1881, which continued until 1931. The 1931 Census recorded 4,147 castes in India, in addition to the depressed classes or untouchables.
- **Post-Independence:** After India gained independence, the government discontinued full caste enumeration. The concern was that such detailed data might entrench caste divisions and perpetuate the caste system. Since the 1951 Census, only the caste data for SCs and STs has been officially recorded and published, alongside information on religions, languages, and socio-economic status.
- **2011 Census:** Caste data was collected in the 2011 Census but was not released publicly. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 faced criticism for issues related to data accuracy and underreporting.

Importance of Caste Data

- **Policy and Quota Implementation:** Caste data is used to inform policy decisions and to manage reservation quotas. For instance, the Mandal Commission Report of 1979, which led to the reservation of 27% of government jobs and educational seats for Other Backward Classes (OBCs), was based on data from the 1931 Census. This data helped estimate the population of OBCs and justify reservations under Article 15(4) of the Indian Constitution.
- **Historical Basis:** The Mandal Commission used the 1931 Census data to determine that OBCs constituted about 52% of the population, which supported its recommendations for reservations.

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Caste Census Latest News

- ✓ The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs has approved the inclusion of caste data in the upcoming population census. The 2021 Census was postponed due to COVID-19 and remains indefinitely delayed.
- ✓ This decision reignites the ongoing debate over the role of caste-based enumeration in governance, policymaking, and politics.

Constitutional and Legal Backing for Census in India

Constitutional Provisions

- ✓ **Union List (Seventh Schedule, Entry 69):** The population census is enumerated as a subject under the Union List of the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This means that the responsibility for conducting the Census is exclusively a Union (central) government function.
- ✓ **Article 340:** This Article mandates the appointment of a commission to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes. Although it does not specifically mandate a caste census, it supports the need for detailed investigation into the conditions of these classes, which can be facilitated by such data.

Legislative Framework

- ✓ **Census Act, 1948:** The Census Act provides the legal framework for conducting the Census in India. It outlines the procedures for the collection, compilation, and publication of census data, ensuring that the process is carried out systematically and legally.
- ✓ **Collection of Statistics Act, 2008:** This Act permits states and local bodies to collect necessary data, even though census data collection is a Union responsibility. This provision has enabled states to conduct their own caste censuses or related surveys, as seen in Karnataka (2015) and Bihar (2023). The Act provides a framework for states to gather and use statistical data, supplementing the Union Census data when needed.

Examples of State-Level Caste Censuses

- ✓ **Karnataka (2015):** Karnataka conducted its own caste census to gather detailed data on the socio-economic status of various castes within the state. This was an attempt to understand and address local issues more effectively.
- ✓ **Bihar (2023):** Similarly, Bihar conducted a caste census to update and improve its data on different castes, which was used to inform state-level policies and programs.
- ✓ The Census in India is a constitutional obligation governed by the Union List of the Seventh Schedule and the Census Act of 1948. Article 340 emphasizes the importance of investigating conditions of backward classes, which indirectly supports the need for comprehensive data, including caste-wise data. The Collection of Statistics Act, 2008,

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enables states to gather additional data, such as through state-level caste censuses, enhancing the overall understanding of demographic and socio-economic conditions.

Why Is a Caste Census Required?

A caste census is crucial for several reasons, spanning social, administrative, moral, and legal dimensions. Here's a detailed overview:

Social Reasons

- ✓ **Comprehensive Understanding of Diversity:** Caste remains a significant social structure in India. A caste census provides a detailed picture of the diverse caste dynamics in society, helping to address social inequalities and understand the true nature of social stratification.
- ✓ **Low Inter-Caste Marriages:** As of 2011-12, only about 5% of marriages in India were inter-caste, indicating entrenched caste boundaries.
- ✓ **Caste Surnames and Marks:** Prevalent caste-based identifiers and residential segregation underscore the persistent role of caste in societal organization.
- ✓ **Avoiding Wrongful Inclusions/Exclusions:** Accurate caste data helps prevent the inclusion of undeserving castes in reserved categories and the exclusion of deserving ones. This is crucial for ensuring that affirmative action reaches the intended beneficiaries.
- ✓ **Guard Against Dominant Castes:** Prevents dominant castes within reserved categories from crowding out other deserving castes.
- ✓ **Sub-Categorization:** Helps in creating sub-categories within reserved groups to ensure fair distribution of benefits.
- ✓ **Targeted Welfare Schemes:** Enables the design of welfare schemes and affirmative action policies based on precise demographic data, ensuring that resources are allocated equitably.
- ✓ **Income/Wealth Criteria:** Determines the income or wealth criteria for identifying the creamy layer within backward classes, ensuring that benefits are targeted at those truly in need.

Administrative Reasons

- ✓ **Designing Policies:** Accurate caste data is essential for designing effective welfare schemes and policies, including reservations in education and employment.
- ✓ **Equitable Distribution:** Helps in distributing resources and opportunities more fairly based on social and economic indicators like education level, employment status, and income.
- ✓ **Election and Representation:** Influences choices for elections and cabinet positions, which can be affected by caste considerations. Accurate data helps in ensuring fair representation and decision-making.

Moral Reasons

- ✓ **Correcting Inequities:** Lack of caste data has allowed elites among upper castes and dominant OBCs to disproportionately control national assets, income, and power.
- ✓ **Fulfilling Constitutional Mandates:** Ensures compliance with constitutional mandates related to social justice, equality, and welfare for all citizens.
- ✓ **Income Disparities:** Addresses issues like the disproportionate distribution of national income, where the richest 1% control 22.6% of national income while the poorest 50% receive only 15%.

Legal Reasons

- ✓ **Constitutional Policies:** Enables effective implementation of constitutionally mandated policies of social justice, such as reservations in education and public employment.
- ✓ **Supreme Court Rulings:** Supports legal claims of backwardness based on caste data, as the Supreme Court has recognized caste as a relevant criterion for defining social and educational backwardness.
- ✓ **Updating Historical Data:** Corrects and updates historical data on caste demographics, which may have evolved over time, ensuring that policies reflect current realities.

Opposition to Caste Census

Reasons for Opposition

- ✓ **Fuels Demand for Increasing Reservation:**

  - ° **Potential Revelation:** A nationwide caste census could reveal that the population share of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) is greater than the 52% estimate by the Mandal Commission. This could lead to increased demands for raising the 27% reservation quota currently allocated to OBCs, potentially escalating political and social tensions.

- ✓ **Non-Feasibility:**

  - ° **Complex Classification:** Including a caste-related question in the census would result in a vast number of caste entries, including various clan, gotra, and sub-caste names. The complexity of tabulating and classifying this data could be challenging, especially given that census enumerators are part-time workers without specialized training in caste classifications.
  - ° **Delay Issues:** The difficulty in properly categorizing and tabulating this data could lead to significant delays in the release of census results.

- ✓ **Absence of Constitutional Mandate:**

  - ° **Lack of Requirement:** Unlike the data collection for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), there is no constitutional mandate for including caste data for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) or Backward Castes Communities (BCCs) in the census. This makes it a contentious issue without a clear legal obligation.

- ✓ **Reinforcement of Caste Identities and Social Division:**

  - ° **Political Manipulation:** There are concerns that caste data could be exploited by politicians for electoral gains, leading to increased caste-based and vote-bank politics, and reinforcing social divisions rather than fostering integration and unity.
  - ° **Social Impact:** The focus on caste might perpetuate existing divisions and lead to further stratification of society.

- ✓ **Privacy and Stigmatization:**

  - ° **Potential Harm:** Publicly identifying individuals by caste could exacerbate stigma and discrimination, particularly against lower or marginalized castes. This could conflict with the principle of treating all citizens equally, regardless of their social background.

What is Caste Census and Why Is It Important for India?

The caste census is a count of people based on their caste in India. It will be part of the 2025 national census. This data will help the government understand the needs of different groups and make better plans to support poor and backward communities.

Caste Census in India: Casteism has been a fixed part of India's social fabric for ages, influencing access to resources, education, and opportunities.

The country's made some headway in pushing for fairness, but caste-related gaps still show up in plenty of areas. Getting a grip on how wide these gaps are is key to making policies that work.

A caste census counts people based on their caste groups. India's last full-scale caste count happened way back in 1931. Since then, we've been short on solid numbers for different caste groups.

The next Census in 2025 might be the first in many years to include in-depth caste data.

What Is a Caste Census and How Does It Work?

A caste census is an official survey that collects data on the caste identities of people across India. It aims to provide a detailed picture of the population's caste composition, helping policymakers understand the social and economic conditions of different communities.

When Was the Last Caste Census Conducted in India?

India's last full caste census was conducted in 1931 during British rule. Since independence, the decennial census has only collected caste data for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

Other caste groups, especially Other Backward Classes (OBCs), have not been officially counted in recent national censuses.

In 2011, the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) attempted to gather such data, but the results were not officially released due to concerns about accuracy and completeness.

Caste Enumeration in India's Upcoming Population Census

In April 2025, the Indian government approved the inclusion of caste data in the upcoming national census, which was delayed from 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This decision marks a significant policy shift, aiming to collect comprehensive caste information after nearly a century. The upcoming census will be India's first digital census, utilising mobile apps and online portals for data collection.
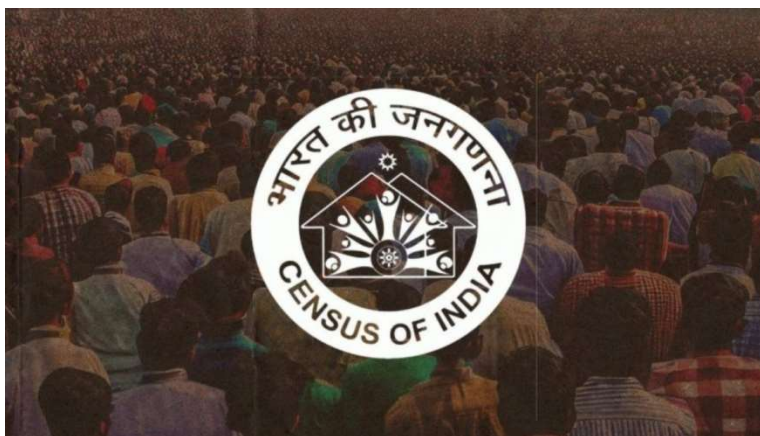
Why Is a Caste Census Important for India?

Here are key reasons why conducting a caste census is crucial for India's development and social justice:

1. To Tackle Social Inequality

Caste-based discrimination still exists in many regions of India. A caste census helps identify marginalised communities that need more support. With accurate data, governments can design targeted schemes to uplift those who are socially and economically disadvantaged.

2. To Ensure Fair Allocation of Resources

Without reliable numbers, it's hard to distribute public resources equitably. A caste census provides clear insights into the population size and living conditions of different caste groups. This helps in allocating resources like education, healthcare, and employment benefits more effectively.

3. To Evaluate Affirmative Action Policies

Policies like reservations for OBCs and other backward classes aim to ensure equal opportunity. But to assess whether these policies are working, we need accurate caste-based data. A caste census helps monitor their impact and allows for better planning and adjustments.

4. To Understand India's Social Structure

Caste plays a major role in shaping India's society, economy, and politics. A caste census gives a deeper understanding of the population's composition. This helps researchers, social scientists, and policymakers analyse how different communities interact and where inequalities lie.

5. To Fulfill a Constitutional Purpose

The Indian Constitution supports the idea of identifying backward classes. Article 340 empowers the government to appoint a commission to examine the conditions of socially and educationally backward groups. A caste census is a step in fulfilling this constitutional directive.

Previous Attempts at Conducting Caste Census

- ✓ **2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC):**

  - ° **Parliamentary Resolution:** In 2010, a unanimous resolution was passed by Parliament to include caste enumeration in the 2011 Census.

- ✓ **Conduct Issues:** The SECC-2011 faced several issues:

- ○ **Legal Framework:** It was not conducted under the Census Act, 1948, as no amendment was made to include caste enumeration.
- ○ **Implementation:** The census was conducted by the Union Ministries of Rural Development and Urban Development, which lacked experience in sociological and anthropological surveys.
- ○ **Questionnaire Design:** The questionnaire was poorly designed with open-ended questions about caste, leading to confusion among enumerators.
- ○ **Data Classification:** Enumerators struggled to distinguish between genuine castes, alternative caste names, larger caste groups, sub-castes, surnames, and clan names.

Way Forward

- ✓ **Amend Census Act 1948:**

  - ○ **Mandatory Enumeration:** Amend the Census Act to make caste enumeration a mandatory part of the census. This would ensure that caste data is collected systematically and legally.

- ✓ **Integration with Socio-Economic Surveys:**

  - ○ **Comprehensive Database:** Integrate caste data collection with broader socio-economic surveys to create a comprehensive database addressing multiple dimensions of social and economic inequality.

- ✓ **Utilize Existing Data Sources:**

  - ○ **Alternative Data:** Consider that existing surveys, such as the National Sample Survey (NSS) and previous SECC data, might provide sufficient information for policymaking without requiring a full caste census.

- ✓ **Improve Data Collection Methods:**

  - ○ **Census Commissioner Responsibility:** Collect caste data as part of the regular Census by the Census Commissioner, incorporating specific questions about sub-castes, caste names, and surnames.
  - ○ **Expert Consultation:** Involve sociological and anthropological experts to develop a draft list of castes specific to each state and consult the public before finalizing the list for enumerators.

The case for a caste Census

- ✓ A caste Census is crucial for four reasons — one, it is a social imperative. Caste continues to be a foundational social construct in India. Only about 5% of Indian marriages were inter-caste as of 2011-12. The use of caste surnames and caste marks is still widespread. Residential segregation by caste persists. Choices of candidates for elections and ministers for Cabinets continue to be dictated by caste considerations.

- ✓ Two, it is a legal imperative. Constitutionally-mandated policies of social justice which include reservations in electoral constituencies, education and public employment cannot be pursued effectively without detailed caste-wise data. Even though the Constitution uses the word class instead of caste, various rulings of the Supreme Court have held caste as a 'relevant criterion', 'sole criterion' or 'dominant criterion' for defining a backward class, and have demanded detailed caste-wise data for upholding reservation policies.

- ✓ Three, it is an administrative imperative. Detailed caste-wise data is necessary to avoid/correct wrongful inclusions of undeserving castes and exclusions of deserving castes, and to guard against a few dominant castes in a reserved category crowding out others. It is also needed for sub-categorising castes within a reserved category and to determine the income/wealth criterion for the creamy layer.

- ✓ Four, it is a moral imperative. The absence of detailed caste-wise data has helped a coterie of elites, among upper castes and dominant Other Backward Classes (OBCs), to corner a disproportionate share of the nation's assets, incomes, and positions of power.

- ✓ Censuses in British India between 1881 and 1931 enumerated all castes. In the first Census conducted after Independence in 1951, the Government of India (GOI) ordered that caste should not be enumerated. However, an exception was made for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) which have been enumerated in every Census since 1951. In 1961, the GOI advised States to conduct their own surveys and draw up State-specific OBC lists if they so desired. There was no reservation for OBCs in the Centre and its undertakings then.

The arguments against caste Census

There are multiple views against the caste Census. These include:-

- ✓ First, that it is socially divisive. India's social divisions predate Census efforts by nearly 3,000 years. The Census counts of the SCs and STs since 1951 have not led to any conflicts among these castes or tribes. Further, India's Census enumerates religion, language, and region which are as divisive as caste, if not more. Casteism will not wither

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away by not counting caste in the Census, any more than communalism, and regionalism will disappear by not enumerating religion, language and region.

✓ Second, that it is an administrative nightmare. Unlike race which is a fuzzy concept, but is still enumerated in many countries such as the U.S., there is little or no ambiguity about anyone's caste. The GOI has been able to smoothly enumerate 1,234 castes in the SC category and 698 tribes in the ST category. Therefore, it is difficult to understand why the enumeration of the 4,000-odd other castes, most of which are State-specific, should pose an intractable problem.

✓ Third, that it would fuel demands for increased reservations. On the contrary, the availability of caste-wise Census data would help curb arbitrary demands from caste groups and capricious decision-making by governments. Policy makers would be able to objectively debate and address the claims of, say, the Marathas, Patidars, Jats, or any other groups for reservations. But governments prefer fuzzy data because it gives them the latitude to implement reservations arbitrarily for electoral considerations.

The case for OBC inclusion in Census

✓ Like the SCs and STs, the Constitution permits reservation for the OBCs in education (Article 15(4)) and public employment (Article 16(4)). After the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations, the OBCs enjoy reservations in the Central government and its undertakings as well. In the *Indra Sawhney* case (1992), the Supreme Court ruled that the OBC list, based on the 1931 Census, should be revised periodically.

✓ The OBCs do not have reservation in electoral constituencies for MPs and MLAs like the SCs and the STs. But after the 73rd and 74th amendments (1993), the Constitution provides for reservations in electoral constituencies in panchayats and municipalities not only for SCs and STs but also for OBCs (Articles 243D(6) and 243T(6)). For this, caste-wise, area-wise Census data of the OBCs is essential. Therefore, the GOI should have enumerated the OBCs at least in the 2001 Census. But it did not.

✓ Whenever States like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Odisha and Jharkhand tried to implement reservations for the OBCs in elections to local bodies, the High Courts and the Supreme Court stayed the same, on the ground that there was no caste-wise data of OBCs. While one arm of the State — the judiciary — demands caste-wise data to uphold reservations, another — the executive — has avoided enumerating the very same data.

✓ However, the 10% reservation for economically weaker sections (EWS) among those other than the OBCs, SCs and STs (effectively, the upper castes) was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2022 despite the absence of any supporting empirical data. In view of

the EWS reservation, the Census should now enumerate all castes including the upper castes as it did till 1931.

✓ While Census is a Union subject, the Collection of Statistics Act, 2008 empowers States and even local bodies to gather the necessary statistics. So, individual States can always do Caste surveys like Karnataka (2015) and Bihar (2023) did. But Census data carries more authority and is less contested. The government's reluctance to enumerate caste as part of the Census is legally indefensible and administratively unwise.

How an attempt at caste Census failed

✓ After considerable lobbying by OBC leaders, in 2010, the Parliament passed a unanimous resolution (with both Congress and BJP on board) calling for caste to be enumerated as part of the 2011 Census. As per the 1931 Census when caste was last enumerated, there were 4,147 castes in India apart from the depressed classes/untouchables (as they were called then). Unfortunately, the Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC)-2011 was poorly designed and executed, throwing up a ludicrous figure of 46 lakh castes and the results were never released.

✓ The SECC-2011's failure was because of the fact that it was not conducted under the Census Act, 1948 as the Act was not amended to include caste as a parameter. It was conducted through the Union Ministries of Rural Development and Urban Development which did not have prior experience of conducting sociological/anthropological surveys. Additionally, the questionnaire was poorly designed and asked open-ended questions about caste. The enumerators couldn't distinguish between genuine castes, alternative caste names, larger caste groups, sub-castes, surnames, clan names, gotras, etc. In contrast, the Bihar government's Caste Survey in 2023, provided enumerators the list of 214 caste names specific to Bihar, with the 215th category labelled "Other Castes" and came up with better results.

✓ Despite the unanimous Parliamentary resolution of 2010, the Central government announced in 2021 that it would not enumerate caste as part of the next Census. It reiterated this stand before the Supreme Court in a case filed by the Maharashtra government seeking a direction to the Centre to enumerate OBCs in the 2021 Census. The Supreme Court judgment dismissing the Maharashtra government's plea in December 2021 is questionable, considering its own past rulings. Being a legal imperative, this is not 'a policy matter in which Courts should not interfere' as claimed by the Centre in that case.

Purpose of the Caste-Based Census

The idea behind conducting a caste-based census stems from social, administrative, and political objectives aimed at addressing persistent inequalities in Indian society. The key purposes include:

1. Accurate Data for Policy-Making:

A caste census aims to provide precise demographic and socio-economic data on various caste groups, particularly Other Backward Classes (OBCs), whose population has not been officially enumerated since 1931. The Mandal Commission (1980) estimated OBCs at 52% of the population, but this figure is outdated. Updated data will help tailor welfare programs, reservations, and resource allocation to address disparities in education, employment, and access to resources.

It aligns with constitutional mandates, such as Article 340, which calls for investigating the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes to recommend upliftment measures.

2. Strengthening Affirmative Action:

Reservations in education and government jobs for SCs, STs, and OBCs are based on historical data (e.g., 1931 Census for OBCs). A new census will provide current data to evaluate and reform these policies, ensuring fair representation for marginalized groups. For instance, the Justice Rohini Commission (2017–2023) highlighted the need for sub-categorization within OBCs to ensure equitable distribution of reservation benefits, which requires accurate caste data.

3. Addressing Socio-Economic Inequalities:

Caste remains a significant determinant of socio-economic deprivation in India. Data from Bihar's 2023 caste survey showed that OBCs and Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) constitute 63% of the state's population, with many groups like Musahars and Bhuiyas facing exclusion from opportunities. A national census could uncover similar disparities, enabling targeted interventions to improve access to education, healthcare, and employment.

4. Social Justice and Inclusive Development:

Proponents argue that caste data will promote social justice by identifying historically disadvantaged groups and ensuring equitable resource distribution. Activists emphasize that

caste-based structural inequalities intersect with region, religion, and economic status, necessitating detailed data for inclusive policies.

5. **Political and Electoral Strategy**:

The decision responds to growing political demands from opposition parties (e.g., Congress, Samajwadi Party) and regional leaders like Nitish Kumar, who have pushed for a caste census to align policies with caste realities. The opposition sees it as a tool to mobilize backward classes and counter the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Hindu unity narrative, making it a significant electoral issue.

Potential Fallout of the Caste-Based Census

While the caste census is intended to address inequalities, it is a contentious issue with potential social, political, and administrative consequences. The fallout can be categorized as follows:

Positive Impacts

1. **Data-Driven Governance**:

Comprehensive caste data will enable evidence-based policymaking, replacing estimates (e.g., Mandal's 52% OBC figure) with accurate numbers. This could lead to better-targeted welfare schemes, improved representation, and periodic revision of reservation lists, as mandated by the Supreme Court's Indra Sawhney judgment (1992).

It could debunk myths about caste populations (e.g., exaggerated claims about certain castes' numerical strength, like Lingayats in Karnataka), fostering objective policy debates.

2. **Empowerment of Marginalized Groups**:

By identifying disadvantaged castes, the census could strengthen affirmative action, ensuring that benefits reach the most deprived, such as EBCs within OBCs. Bihar's 2023 survey, for instance, prompted demands for proportional reservations, highlighting its potential to empower marginalized communities.

3. **Social Awareness and Reflection**:

A caste census could spark a national conversation about caste's role in perpetuating inequality, challenging upper-caste notions of a "casteless" society, and encouraging collective reflection on social justice.

Negative Impacts

1. **Reinforcement of Caste Identities**:

Critics argue that enumerating castes could entrench caste divisions, countering efforts to create a casteless society as envisioned by leaders like B.R. Ambedkar. Urban youth, increasingly detached from caste identities, may be forced to identify with a caste, potentially reversing progress toward social cohesion.

The census could harden caste-based loyalties, especially in rural areas, where recent elections show caste identities prevailing over development issues.

2. **Political Polarization**:

The census is likely to intensify identity politics, with parties leveraging caste data to mobilize voters. Opposition parties, like the INDIA alliance, aim to use it to weaken the BJP's Hindu unity (Hindutva) agenda by emphasizing caste-based grievances. This could lead to a revival of Mandal-style politics, polarizing voters along caste lines.

Upper-caste groups may oppose the census, fearing reduced influence if reservations are expanded, while dominant OBC castes may resist sub-categorization that benefits smaller, more deprived castes.

3. **Administrative and Logistical Challenges**:

Enumerating castes is complex due to India's thousands of castes, sub-castes, and regional variations. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011, which reported an implausible 46 lakh castes, failed due to poor design and open-ended questions, highlighting the difficulty of accurate classification.

Respondents may misreport castes for perceived benefits (upward or downward mobility claims), complicating data reliability. The 1931 Census noted similar issues, with communities shifting identities for prestige or benefits.

4. **Social Tensions and Legal Challenges**:

The census could trigger demands for higher reservations, potentially breaching the Supreme Court's 50% reservation cap, leading to legal battles. Groups like Marathas, Patidars, and Jats have previously sought reservations, and new data could fuel similar claims, risking social unrest.

The central government's exclusive authority over censuses (under the Census Act, 1948) has led to legal disputes, as seen in Bihar's 2023 survey, which was challenged for violating privacy and overstepping state powers. Similar challenges may arise nationally.

5. **Risk of Misuse**:

Caste data could be manipulated for electoral gains, with parties using it to stoke divisions rather than promote justice. State-level surveys, like Bihar's, have been criticized for lacking transparency, raising concerns about the national census's credibility if not conducted rigorously.
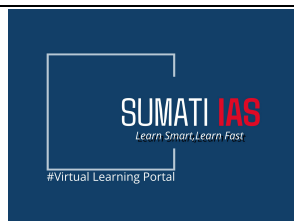
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