

Caste-based Census

What is the issue?

There have been mounting demands on caste based census coming from different quarters of the country.

What is caste census?

- Caste census is the procedure of systematically acquiring and recording the caste-wise tabulation of India's population



TIMELINE OF CENSUS IN INDIA

800 BC

Rig-Veda has evidences for maintenance of some kind of population count



300 BC

Kautilya's Arthashastra prescribed the collection of population statistics



1590

Ain-e-Akbari included comprehensive data pertaining to population



1865

A modern population census was conducted non synchronously (at random intervals) in different parts of the country.



1872

"First population census of India" including questions pertaining to name, age, religion, caste etc. were asked but did not cover all territories possessed by the British.



1881

First synchronous census in India after which censuses have been undertaken uninterruptedly once every 10 years. After 1931 caste based censuses were stopped by the British.



1951

Independent India publishes separate data on SCs and STs but not on other castes.



2016

Socio-Economic Caste Census was conducted but it was not made public. SECC 2016 was conducted by Ministry of Rural Development in rural areas and the Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation in urban areas.



What is the need for such a demand?

- To justify the preservation of caste-based affirmative action programmes for better planning and targeting of welfare schemes
- To provide quantifiable data to support the existing levels of reservation as required by Supreme court for groups like OBC
- To favour the political parties if particular groups are established as dominant in specific geographies
- To debate on issues like disproportionate benefits from reservation by particular groups within each category
- To address the inequities in the society

What is the government's stand?

- The Union of India after Independence decided as a matter of policy not to enumerate caste wise population other than SCs and STs.
- The government cites that a census of the backward castes is administratively difficult and cumbersome
- Having caste as a part of census is so complex that it may jeopardise the decennial census itself.
- Very high number of castes and sub-castes with phonetic variations and similarities adds to the burden
- Even the Census of 1931 that included caste was not complete and accurate
- The caste census might evoke varying responses from different groups
- Government argues that caste-based census is against the idea of a casteless society

What are the gaps in the existing caste data?

- There is a Central list of OBCs and State-specific list of OBCs.
- Some States do not have a list of OBCs.
- Some States have a list of OBCs and a sub-set called Most Backward Classes.
- There are certain open-ended categories in the lists such as orphans and destitute children.
- Names of some castes are found in both the list of Scheduled Castes and list of OBCs.
- Scheduled Castes converted to Christianity or Islam are also treated differently in different States.
- The status of a migrant from one State to another and the status of children of inter-caste marriages, in terms of caste classification, are also

contentious.

How can the differences be accommodated?

- A preliminary socio-anthropological study can be done at the State and district levels to establish all sects and sub-castes present in the population
- These can be tabulated under caste names that have wider recognition based on synonymity and equivalence
- Thereafter, it may be possible to do a field enumeration that can mark any group under castes found in the available OBC/BC lists.

Source: The Hindu

