

Is the Caste Census a Useful Exercise?

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- Proportional Representation: A Flawed Approach
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Introduction

- The debate around conducting a caste census in India has gained momentum, with proponents arguing for its utility in determining caste populations to allocate resources, reservations, and policy benefits proportionally.
- However, historical experiences and current complexities suggest significant challenges in executing such an exercise.

Historical Context

- The history of caste censuses dates back to the colonial era:
 - **1871-72 Census:** The first detailed caste census was conducted, revealing arbitrary and inconsistent classifications across regions.

Name of Caste	1921 Census claims	1931 Census claims
Kamar (Kumar)	Kshatriya	Brahman
Sonar	Kshatriya/Rajput	Brahman/Vaisya
Sutradar	Vaisya	Brahman
Nai	Thakur	Brahman
Napit	Baidya	Brahman
Rawani (Kahar)	Vaisya	Kshatriya

Note: The change in caste claim was not influenced by reservation policies or any other form of government benefits

- **1931 Census:** Identified 4,147 castes but highlighted inaccuracies as communities claimed different identities in different regions.
- **Post-Independence:** The **Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011** recorded 46.7 lakh caste categories, with 8.2 crore acknowledged errors, exposing the complexity of caste classification.

Challenges in Conducting a Caste Census

- **Caste Mobility and Misclassification:**
 - **Upward Mobility:** Communities might report affiliation with higher castes for perceived social prestige.
 - **Downward Mobility:** Post-independence, some communities claim lower caste status to benefit from reservations.
 - **Similar-Sounding Castes:** Confusion arises from identical or similar surnames, leading to misclassification (e.g., 'Dhanak', 'Dhanuk', and 'Dhanka' in Rajasthan).
- **Enumerator Bias:**
 - Sensitive nature of caste questions often causes enumerators to make assumptions based on surnames rather than direct inquiries.
- **Data Accuracy:**
 - Historical records and current surveys, such as the **Bihar Caste Census 2022**, reveal inconsistencies, further undermining reliability.

Proportional Representation: A Flawed Approach

- The concept of proportional representation in caste-based reservations has been criticized as impractical:
 - **Reservation Mechanism:**
 - Reserved seats are distributed proportionally (e.g., every 4th position for OBCs at 27% reservation).
 - **Impracticality:**
 - India's population of 1.4 billion includes over 6,000 castes. The average caste size is 2.3 lakh.
 - Smaller castes, such as those with 10,000 members, would require over 1.4 lakh vacancies to secure one reserved seat, a scale unfeasible in recruitment processes like UPSC.

Implications of a Caste Census

- **Policy Implementation:**

- While proponents argue for equitable resource distribution, the data complexities risk exacerbating social divisions.

- **Exclusion of Minor Castes:**

- Smaller castes risk being excluded due to disproportionately low representation, undermining the objective of inclusivity.

- **Administrative Burden:**

- A caste census would require massive logistical and financial resources, diverting focus from other pressing developmental priorities.

Conclusion

- While the idea of a caste census is rooted in achieving equity, historical and contemporary evidence highlights significant challenges in execution, data reliability, and fairness.
 - Alternative approaches that prioritize socio-economic development and inclusivity without exacerbating caste divisions may offer more sustainable solutions.
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Q1. When was the term 'Creamy Layer' defined?

The Supreme Court of India defined the "creamy layer", quoting an Indian government office memorandum dated 8 September 1993. The term was originally introduced in the context of reservation of jobs for certain groups in the Indra Sawhney & Others v. Union of India case in 1992.

Q2. What percentage of the population in India is OBC?

Between 2019 and 2021, Other Backward Class (OBC) constituted the largest part of Indian households accounting for about 42 percent.

News: [Is the caste Census a useful exercise?](#)

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