

## **Demands for Caste-Based Census**

### **What is the issue?**

- The Union Minister of State for Home Affairs recently indicated that the Government has decided, as a matter of policy, not to enumerate caste-wise population other than SCs and STs in Census.
- But the demands for caste-based census are continuing to come from different quarters of the country. Here is a look at the related aspects.

### **What data do Censuses generally provide on Castes?**

- Every Census in independent India from 1951 to 2011 has published data on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, but not on other castes.
- Before that, every Census until 1931 had data on different castes.
- In 1941, caste-based data was collected but not published.
- In the absence of a caste-based census, there is no proper estimate for the population of OBCs, various groups within the OBCs, and others.
- [The Mandal Commission estimated the OBC population at 52%.
- Some other estimates have been based on National Sample Survey data.
- And political parties make their own estimates during elections.]

### **Were there any similar demands earlier?**

- The demands for caste-based census come up before almost every Census.
- They usually come from among those belonging to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and other deprived sections.
- On the other hand, sections from the upper castes oppose the idea.
- The National Commission for Backward Classes too recently urged the government to collect data on the population of OBCs “as part of Census of India 2021 exercise.”

### **What has been the current 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.
- But in 2018, it was stated, “It is also envisaged to collect data on OBC for the first time.”
- This came following a meeting chaired by Home Minister that reviewed

preparations for Census 2021.

- But there were no further clarifications in this regard.

### **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.

### **What is the SECC data, then?**

- With similar demands, the earlier UPA government decided to go for a full-fledged Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC).
- With an approved cost of more than Rs 4,800 crore, the SECC was conducted by -
  - i. the Ministry of Rural Development in rural areas
  - ii. the Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation in urban areas
- The SECC data excluding caste data was finalised and published by the two ministries in 2016.
- The raw caste data was handed over to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- This formed an Expert Group under former NITI Aayog Vice-Chairperson Arvind Pangaria.
- It was tasked to classify and categorise the data.
- It is not clear whether it submitted its report; no such report has been made public.
- This time, the demand is that castes be enumerated as part of Census 2021 itself.

**Source: The Indian Express**



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