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 thanRs 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 categorisethe 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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