Importance of Census 2027

Mains: *GS I - Population and associated issues*

Why in News?

Recently, the process of census 2027 has begun and it has several implications on the developmental process of India.

What is a Census?

- **Census** – It is a comprehensive process of systematically collecting, compiling, analyzing, and disseminating demographic, social, and economic information relating to every individual within a country or a specified geographical area at a particular point in time.
- **Nodal Agency** – The decennial Census is carried out by the *Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner*, India, functioning under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Prior to 1951, a separate Census organization was constituted temporarily for each Census operation.
- **Constitutional basis** – Population census falls under the *Union List* and is placed under *Entry 69 of the Seventh Schedule*, read with Article 246 of the Constitution, thereby giving the Union Government exclusive authority over census operations.
- **Legal Backing** – The Census in India is conducted under the provisions of the Census Act, 1948.
- This legislation introduced by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who served as India's Home Minister at the time.
- **Census 2027 –** It is India's *8th Census since Independence,* assumes exceptional importance as it comes after a gap of 15 years instead of the usual decade due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent electoral processes.

What is the importance of census 2027?

- **Foundation of Evidence-Based Governance –** Census 2027 will generate updated information on population size, age composition, literacy, employment, housing conditions, migration patterns, and access to basic amenities.
- Such data is essential for the following functions:
  - Planning public infrastructure and services.
  - Designing welfare programmes.
  - Assessing developmental gaps.
  - Monitoring Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

    - Formulating long-term economic strategies.
- Without accurate demographic data, governments risk misallocation of resources and inefficient policy implementation.
- **Strengthening Inclusive Development –** One of the most important functions of the Census is to identify disparities and developmental deficits across regions and communities.
- Access to food security, housing, healthcare, education, sanitation, drinking water, and employment opportunities depends heavily on population data.
- The Census enables governments to do the following:
    - Identify vulnerable and marginalised populations.
    - Improve targeting of welfare schemes.
    - Estimate future demands for schools, hospitals, and housing.
    - Allocate resources according to actual needs.
- In a welfare-oriented state like India, developmental interventions can only be effective when beneficiaries are accurately identified.
- Census 2027 will therefore play a crucial role in ensuring inclusive and equitable development.
- Furthermore, the findings will assist institutions such as the Finance Commission in determining the distribution of financial resources between the Union and the States, thereby influencing fiscal federalism and regional development.
- **Democratic Representation –** Democracy fundamentally rests on the principle that every citizen counts.
- The Census operationalises this principle by ensuring that representation reflects population realities.
- A major significance of Census 2027 lies in its implications for delimitation—the process of redrawing electoral constituencies.
- Electoral boundaries are periodically adjusted to reflect changes in population distribution and ensure fair representation.
- The Census will influence:
    - Allocation of parliamentary and legislative assembly seats.
    - Delimitation of constituencies.
    - Reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).
    - Implementation of women's reservation in legislatures.
- The recently enacted Women's Reservation framework is expected to be linked to delimitation based on updated Census figures.
- Thus, Census 2027 will directly shape the future architecture of representative democracy in India.
- By ensuring that population shifts are reflected in political representation, the Census strengthens democratic legitimacy and political inclusion.
- **Significance of the Caste Enumeration –** A defining feature of Census 2027 is the inclusion of caste data.
- The demand for a caste census has been a major political and social issue for several years.
- India's reservation policies and social justice framework require reliable data regarding disadvantaged groups.
- Existing data on caste composition is either outdated or incomplete.
- Census 2027 can provide a factual basis for policy debates that have often been driven

by estimates and political narratives.
- The availability of credible caste-related information may facilitate a more informed discussion on representation, inclusion, and distributive justice.
- **Digital Census –** For the first time, India is incorporating extensive digital technologies into Census operations.
- Online self-enumeration has been introduced, allowing households to submit information electronically before the physical visit of enumerators.
- The digital approach offers several advantages:
    - Faster data collection and processing.
    - Reduction in human errors.
    - Improved accuracy and transparency.
    - Real-time monitoring of progress.
    - Better integration with digital governance platforms.
- Digital enumeration can also generate highly disaggregated data, enabling policymakers to identify localised developmental challenges more effectively.
- At the same time, the government has retained traditional door-to-door enumeration to ensure inclusiveness, particularly for populations with limited digital access.
- This hybrid model seeks to combine technological efficiency with social equity.
- **Safeguarding Privacy and Individual Rights –** In an era of increasing concerns regarding data security and surveillance, the protection of personal information is essential.
- Census authorities have assured citizens that information collected during the Census will remain confidential.
- The Census Act, 1948, provides legal safeguards against the disclosure of personal data.
- Individual responses cannot be used for taxation, law enforcement, or other administrative actions against citizens.
- The introduction of online self-enumeration further empowers citizens by allowing them to directly submit information while maintaining control over personal data.
- Such measures are crucial for building public trust and encouraging participation.
- A successful Census depends not only on administrative efficiency but also on citizens' confidence that their information will be handled responsibly.

What are the challenges before census 2027?

- **Logistical Challenges –** India's vast geographical diversity, ranging from remote Himalayan villages to densely populated urban slums, makes enumeration a complex task.
- **Migration and Urbanisation –** Tracking migrant populations and temporary residents remains difficult but essential for accurate population estimates.
- **Data Accuracy –** Ensuring truthful responses and avoiding duplication or omission of individuals require meticulous verification mechanisms.
- **Political Sensitivities –** Issues such as caste enumeration, delimitation, and population-based representation may generate political debates and controversies.
- **Digital Divide –** Although technology enhances efficiency, disparities in digital literacy and internet access may affect participation in self-enumeration.

What lies ahead?

- Census 2027 is far more than a population count; it is a foundational exercise that will shape India's developmental trajectory, democratic institutions, and social justice framework for the coming decade.
- Accurate and comprehensive data will enable evidence-based policymaking, equitable resource allocation, effective welfare delivery, and fair political representation.
- As India emerges as the world's most populous nation and aspires to become a developed country by 2047, the importance of reliable demographic information cannot be overstated.
- Every household counted and every individual enumerated strengthens the foundations of governance, development, and democracy.
- Just as every vote matters in an election, every individual count matters in a Census. Census 2027 is therefore not merely a governmental exercise—it is a collective national responsibility and a democratic right.
- Ensuring universal participation will help realise the true objective of the Census: leaving no citizen behind in India's journey towards inclusive growth and development.

Reference

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