

## **Our Census, Our Future, Our Caste**

**Dr K C Mittal**

Professor,  
Dept. of SMS, Punjabi University, Patiala

**Rekha Dahiya**

Assistant Professor,  
Delhi School of Professional Studies and Research, New Delhi

**Anmol Soi**

Assistant Professor,  
Delhi School of Professional Studies and Research, New Delhi

**Nisha Jindal**

Assistant Professor,  
Delhi School of Professional Studies and Research, New Delhi

### ***Abstract***

*"Our Census, Our Future" is the slogan of census 2011, but we thought as government has decided to include caste of an individual so the right slogan should be "Our Census, Our Future, Our Caste". The decennial Census is the chief source of a variety of statistical information on different characteristics of the people of India. The history of census can be dated back to the year 1872, when the first census was carried out in India non-synchronously in different parts. The responsibility of conducting the decennial Census rests with the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India under Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. A controversy has exploded over the coverage of 'caste' in the 2011 census, after a long gap of seven decades as it was first included in 1931 by the British.*

**Key Words:** *Census, Caste, OBC.*

### **Introduction**

Some time back we got an e-mail from our friend. The title of the mail was "who is an Indian?" In the mail, a story of an American who visited India was narrated. The story was like this after visiting India, when the American reached back to USA, his Indian friend asked him, "how did you like India?" He said, "India is great, rich in minerals, having historical buildings, lot of greenery and extremely beautiful." Then his Indian friend asked how did he like Indians.

He answered he didn't meet any Indian there in India. His Indian friend was shocked to get such an answer. He said there are more than a billion people and you didn't meet even a single Indian. He said he didn't meet any Indian there in India, but met people who were Gujarati, Sindhi, Punjabi, Marathi etc.

This was just an e-mail so we can't comment about the authenticity of the story, but one thing is for sure that we Indians in India are being recognized by the

place where we are born or by the caste, not by our citizenship. We are applauded to be super power by 2050 backed by splendid economic growth, large and qualified pool of human resource and enviable powerhouse of intellectual potentiality, but behind this sparkling picture there is stark reality that depict an all together different face of our country that makes us bow our heads in sheer shame. The people here in India are made to realize that this is the land where one's identity is defined not by one's profession or one's talent but by one's caste. Caste is the distinct feature of our society and it has great relevance in India. Till date the so called open-minded and modern men opt for caste based marriages and our newspapers are filled with caste based matrimonial advertisements. Now inclusion of caste in 2011 census will not only strengthen this belief but may also open Pandora of problems and controversies for the government.

### **Objectives of Research**

- To know the history of caste system in ancient India.
- To study the caste system in modern India.
- To analyze the role of various committees and commissions formed for backward classes in India.
- To study the rationale behind inclusion of caste in census
- To elucidate the potential benefits of caste enumeration in census.

### **Research Methodology**

**Type of Research : Descriptive Research**

**Sources of Data Collection:** The secondary data

was collected by Internet, Magazine, Articles from news papers and Journals etc. and summarized relevant information has been presented here below under various heads.

### **Ancient India and Caste System**

According to our ancient Indian scriptures, our society was composed of four "varnas" only. i.e. Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and shudra. Actually these four varnas denoted the specific roles played by different people constituting a society. Brahmins (priests) were engaged in acquiring and imparting knowledge, Kshatriya were responsible for ruling, administration and defense, vaishya (merchants and peasants) were engaged in trade and commerce and shudras (servants) did other necessary jobs for living. The category shudra included a number of professions, so it outnumbered all the people belonging to other categories. These divisions were not based on birth but based on qualifications. There was no binding and a person belonging to a lower category had the option to rise to a higher category by enhancing the skills required for it. According to the Bhagavad Gita this system broke down in India over three thousand years ago at the time of Krishna. Hence after three thousand years this system of determining natural aptitude has degenerated into the caste system.

### **Modern India and Caste System**

Today a person who knows Indian history may find difficulty in digesting the information given by Mandal commission that listed 2300 "other backward classes" alone. Originating primarily in four groups today there are about 3,000 castes, divided further into about 25,000 sub castes. Both the Constitution and the

political process after Independence were committed to the uplift and empowerment of backward classes. Under the Indian Constitution, caste discrimination and the practice of untouchability are prohibited. However, under Article 340, the government is encouraged to appoint commissions to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes, and make recommendations on steps that should be taken to improve their living conditions.

Leaders of India after independence were quite creative and were able to foresee the impact of caste enumeration on the democracy of the country. Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, then prime minister in 1955, rejected the recommendations of Kaka Kalelkar commission in which the commission urged for giving reservation to the backward classes of the society in employment and educational opportunities. Mrs. Indira Gandhi was also of the opinion that caste enumeration in census, politics or any other sphere will bother the harmony of the country. So, she demonstrated no urgency to implement the Mandal Commission's recommendations even if the commission gave its report in 1980 itself. But by that time a new generation of political leaders was getting

its foothold in the political field for which the caste became an inexpensive weapon for their political benefit. In 1990, when Mr. V.P. Singh became the prime minister, the recommendations of Mandal commission were implemented assuring 27% reservation for OBC, just to get his political means right and beat Mr. Devi Lal. This led to communal riots and large number of people committed suicides.

Supreme Court has tried time and again to break this myth of associating caste with backwardness by limiting the reservation maximum to 50% and keeping creamy layer out of this reservation. Supreme Court of India has also outlined that along with caste other parameters like education, income and employment also be included while determining the backwardness of a particular class. The best possible method of determining backwardness should be based on economic and social condition of an individual rather than the caste.

Here is given the detail of various commissions and committees formed till now regarding the backward classes and their findings and recommendations. (Table 1.1)

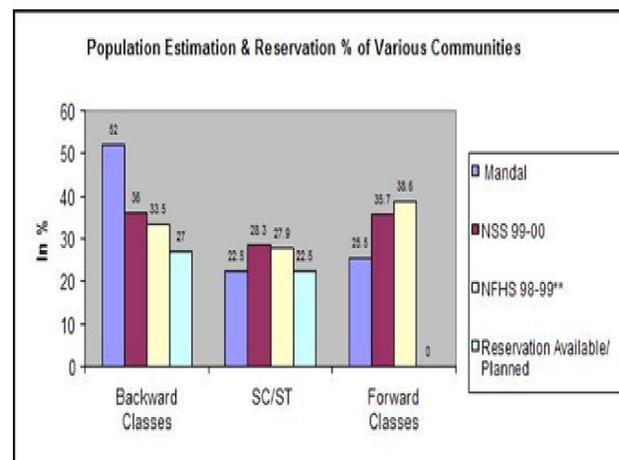
<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Name of the Commission /committee</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Findings and Recommendations</b>
1	Kalelkar Commission Or First Backward Classes Commission	1955	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommended Caste-wise record of the population in the census of 1961</li> <li>• Treatment of "caste as the criteria" to determine backwardness.</li> <li>• 2,399 backward castes or communities, of which 837 had been classified as the "most backward".</li> <li>• Treated all women as backward.</li> </ul>

*Our Census, Our Future, Our Caste*

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The commission recommended reservation of 70 per cent seats in all technical and professional institutions for qualified students of backward classes.</li> </ul>
2	Mandal Commission	1980	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>54 per cent of the total population (excluding SCs and STs), belonging to 3,743 different castes and communities were 'backward'.</li> <li>The proportion of OBCs amongst non-Hindus was of the same order as amongst the Hindus.</li> <li>The commission recommended reservation of 22.5% for SC and ST in all services and public sector undertakings under the Central Government.</li> <li>50% reservation for OBC.</li> </ul>
3	National Sample Survey	2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-Muslim OBC number may be around 32 per cent of the population.</li> <li>Muslim OBCs are around 4 per cent.</li> <li>Population of OBCs is around 36 per cent.</li> </ul>
4	The National Family Health Statistics (NFHS) survey	1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Population of OBCs (non-Muslims) is around 30 per cent.</li> </ul>

Mandal commission was one of the most significant that led the path of reservation of SC/ST and OBC in state and central government. Mandal formula of the 1980s that recommended reserving 50 per cent of the seats in government service and educational institutions for Other Backward Castes, is based on the Census data of 1931. The Census process was affected by the World War in 1941, and from 1951 on caste, data are not collected (except that pertaining to Scheduled Castes and Tribes) as it was felt that these numbers may not further the aim of creating a casteless society. The assumption of Mandal commission that 52% of the population belonged to OBC was confronted by the survey of NSS and

NFHS. (Table 1.2). Government didn't accept all the recommendations of Mandal commission but it gave 27% reservation to OBC .



**Same Caste Different Treatment**

Till recently India was scorching badly with the reservation policy and now this enumeration of caste in census had spurred the controversy even more. Even if we ignore the operational difficulties in getting the task done, then also there are too many problems that make this exercise cumbersome. What worsens the situation of caste system in the country is the different treatment of caste in different states. Some castes considered backward in one state are considered forward in another state and castes considered forward in one state are considered backward in another state. For example "Vanjara" is an OBC in Maharashtra, an SC in Karnataka and ST in Andhra-Pradesh. Even now and then people agitate and demand a particular's caste enclosure into SC and ST because according to them people belonging to SC/ST avail themselves a lot of benefits.

**Potential Benefits of Caste Enumeration**

As pointed out earlier as well that only and the first caste based census was done in 1931 by British. Later on it was discontinued because it was considered "divisive." As government has decided to include caste in the 2011 census so there must be some constructive contribution towards the society. So far we haven't got the correct headcount of various classes in the society so hopefully this time we will be able to know the correct percentage of various sections in the society. It may be useful to have a detailed caste-wise census to look at the actual numbers. After knowing the correct picture of the status of various groups in the society it will be easy for the government to effectively plan and implement formulate further schemes for the backward class of the people in a

better way so that the disparity between the rich and the poor can be rooted out.

Today caste-based reservation is a political issue; so survey data is needed to monitor welfare programmes for these castes. If the census is equipped to collect meaningful data for all castes, exclusion or inclusion from the OBC list can be made easier. It is also possible that the minority who enjoy the majority of opportunities may not get their advantages as they had earlier after the census. Moreover it doesn't make sense to base all the reservation schemes on the basis of 1931 census as demographics have changed dramatically in these seven decades. An enumeration of the OBCs will not only settle disputes about their numbers but also yield vital information about the socio-educational and economic conditions of the communities. It not only paves the way for the development of the downtrodden but also puts at rest endless disputes about the size and backwardness of various communities.

Apart from that what would be the real benefits of this caste census would be too early to predict but the benefits for the political parties can be easily anticipated. The supporters of the caste system are not the individuals but the same political parties who base their politics on the very base of caste. The significant example is of Ms. Mayawati, CM, UP who is a strong supporter of the caste census and one doesn't need to recall that her political campaign is based on caste only. According to Ms. Mayawati this caste enumeration would help in the socio-economic and educational upliftment of OBC.

**Why Caste Enumeration?**

We don't understand why caste enumeration in census is required by a country like India? We define India as a democratic country where no discrimination is made on the basis of any caste, creed, place of birth, and religion on one hand and on the other hand we ourselves conduct a census where we discriminate people on the basis of the caste that they belong to. On one hand we talk about the teachings of Gita Vasudev Kutumbakam which means that the entire world is a big family and on the other hand we talk about the census and ask people about their castes. It is entirely baseless.

What exactly this caste enumeration in census would do? This is quite possible that leaders like Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav may now seek reservation for Muslims. They may also advocate that reservation should be given to OBC in private sector also. There is total work force of around 40 - 45 crores. The private organized sector employs maximum 1 crore people. Hence, the policy of reservation will create a maximum of 25 lakh jobs if it is assumed that no SC/ST is employed in the private organized sector. This number is too small vis-à-vis the total demand. In the unorganized sector, legislated reservation will not help as not even the Minimum Wages Act can be enforced.

How far does the social hierarchy in terms of caste explain the relative economic strengths/weaknesses of related groups? We assume that the upper castes traditionally had more access to education and productive resources and wielded economic strength as well. But numbers tell the different story. An economic Census of the Central Statistical

Organization in 1998 reveals that out of 31 million enterprises nearly 12 per cent were owned by SC/STs and 33 per cent by OBCs. Hence, the assumption that weaker sections are only employees or employment seekers may not be correct.

As far as educational uplift of backward classes is considered, on that front too OBC/ST/SC is not behind. They are rubbing their shoulders with the general or forward class. For instance, data pertaining to medical admission in Tamil Nadu, which has had reservations for decades, reveal that a substantial number of "open seats" are obtained by students nominally belonging to "backward communities". According to a report in *The Hindu*, in 2004, students belonging to the Backward Class (BC) or Most Backward Classes (MBC) took 952 of the 1,224 seats in 12 government medical colleges in the State (77.9 per cent). The first 14 ranks in the medical admissions went to BC/MBC students. Even in the open competition category, five Scheduled Caste candidates got into THE MBBS course this year.

**Change in Attitude is Required**

Instead of sticking to the poor vote bank politics and dividing India on the basis of caste on the name of caste census, there is need to have a renewed outlook towards the society. There is need to change the mind set of the people regarding caste system by running movement at the religious and social level. People should be made realize this thing that discrimination on the basis of caste is against their religion. They are Indian first and we all ultimately belong to only one caste that is 'humanity.'

We should strive hard for the social justice of

oppressed and backward people of the society. Rather than fighting for the rights of a particular caste, we should fight for the fundamental rights of the unprivileged. There should be no caste constitutionally.

### **Conclusion**

Democracy is supposed to hold back the tangible aspect of casteism. It is only the leaders with conservative views who prefer casteism to determine their position in elections. The caste based census can be justified in only one way that 1931 census can't be the base of reservation to OBC in various schemes providing employment and education. Apart from that it can't be denied that once the data of caste census will be revealed, the politicians will play their useless game just for their own benefits. Let us all rise, join

hands and do not restrict ourselves with the all bondages of caste and state

### **References**

- [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/aboutus/Census\\_Organisation/about.html](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/aboutus/Census_Organisation/about.html)
- "Significance of caste in Census" from Business Line, Friday, May 14, 2010
- "Reservations: Let down by weak data" from Business Line, Friday, May 18, 2010
- "Is caste-based census justified?" from Deccan Central, Tuesday, July 06, 2010
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandal\\_Commission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandal_Commission)
- "Is a caste census at all sensible?" from Financial Express, Wednesday, July 07, 2010
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalelkar\\_Commission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalelkar_Commission)
- [www.indianetzone.com](http://www.indianetzone.com) > ... > Hinduism