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**THE ECONOMIC TIMES**Count caste in this census to annihilate it  
3 Jun 2010, 0628 hrs IST,ET Bureau**Satish Deshpande, Professor of Sociology, DSE, DU**

The single-most important lesson offered by the history of independent India is that caste awareness is the only viable route to the true abolition of caste. The new republic and its idealistic Constitution opted for a caste blind policy, treating the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as an unavoidable exception.

In order to succeed, caste blindness needed to be preceded by an all-out assault on caste privilege. Instead, Nehruvian India squandered a historic window of opportunity. By limiting itself to 'abolishing' caste formally, it turned a blind eye to the perpetuation and deepening of substantive caste inequalities.

Designed to fail, this 60-year experiment has done so in a spectacular fashion. Its crowning achievement is that the country is split into two warring camps. On one side is the upper caste elite, the minority group that has leveraged its caste privileges to maximum effect under the cover of caste blindness, and thanks to the same policy, now believes itself to be caste-less .

On the other side is the vast majority of the so-called 'lower' castes, which, having been massively shortchanged by six decades of supposedly caste-blind development, now insists that caste is all-important and all talk of abolishing caste is mere humbug.

Although both sides are products of the same fatally-flawed notion of caste blindness, they seem to have nothing else in common, least of all a mutually-comprehensible language that permits dialogue.

Nevertheless, both these sides inhabit the same nation and must learn, willy-nilly, to share it. In order to forestall further rifts in our social fabric, we must create a climate more conducive to debate and discussion across the two camps.

To do this, we need a decisive break with the naive caste blindness that insists on equating victim and beneficiary, urging them both to be silent about caste. Such naivete fosters the false and incendiary upper caste belief that caste awareness is steeped in the sin of self seeking 'politics' while caste blindness is an elevated 'ethics' without sin.

It is surely better to count caste than to cast stones. Census 2011 offers us yet another historic opportunity to make a fresh beginning in tackling the caste question. It can help us break out of the sterile deadlock in which 'caste' is reduced to 'lower caste' , and the latter to quota quarrels. To collectively acknowledge that all of us are marked by caste in different ways is the most important reason for a caste census, going far beyond the need to rationalise reservation policies.

We must count those who need no quotas and feel caste-less . Let them say they have no caste, or like Mr Amitabh Bachhan, claim to be of the Indian caste. The number and class composition of those who can afford this luxury will itself be educative.

The practical objections to a caste census are exaggerated. Caste is certainly complex, but not too complex to be counted. Only a minuscule proportion will be genuinely uncertain; for the overwhelming majority, the only problem will be with synonyms.

This can be tackled because the interpretation and tabulation of data comes at a later stage, by which time careful procedures for localised aggregation can be designed.

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## Census conundrum

**Seema Chishti** Posted online: Fri Jun 04 2010, 01:53 hrs

Supporting the inclusion of caste in the census, noted poet and editor of the daily Sahafat (published from Mumbai, Delhi, Lucknow and Dehradun) Hasan Kamal, in his May 24 column writes: "None of these opponents of recording caste has said that the caste system itself is a social disease and it should be eliminated. The important thing is that by recording caste in the census it would be known as to how many funds are required for the development of backward communities."

Equally supportive of inclusion of castes in the census is Delhi-based daily Jadeed Khabar. In an editorial on May 28, it writes: "The last time caste was recorded in the country's census was in 1931. It is not clear how much the British gained from the results of this census on the basis of caste, but it is obvious that when the Constitution of an independent India was prepared, provision was made for reservation for Dalits and oppressed castes and tribes against which there were no voices from any section of the society. Obviously if the census had not been conducted on the basis of caste, the founding fathers of the Constitution would have found it very difficult to determine the population of Dalits and oppressed castes and tribes and the percentage of reservation to be provided to them."

Taking a contrary view, the daily Akhbar-e-Mashriq, published from Delhi, Kolkata and Ranchi, says in an editorial on May 31 that the "caste system ( zaat-paat ) is the worst curse, and those pleading for it want to take the country back." Jamaat-e-Islami's organ, bi-weekly Daawat, in its front page lead article on May 7, has critically analysed the form being used for the current census. It reveals that in column 15 of the first set of 35 questions, entitled 'Census of India 2011: Houselisting and Housing Census Schedule' there is a query about the caste of the head of the family, with a note, "If SC, ST or Other; SC-1, ST-2, Other-3" (instructing how these details are to be numerically recorded). But there is no column for "religion", according to the paper.

Dawaat, as well as many other papers have criticised the absence of a query on "religion" and "language" from the census questionnaire form. Delhi-based daily, Hindustan

Express (May 22) reports from Deoband, the statement of the General-Secretary of All-India Mosques Coordination Committee, Maulana Abdullah Ibn-ul Qamar, exhorting the imams of the country's mosques to motivate people "to take full part in the census operation." But dwelling on the absence of "religion" as a column, he writes; "later on, there will be another round that will have a column for 'religion'. The government should clarify if it is true or not."

### The Maoist challenge

Expressing great concern over the rise in Maoist violence and disruption, Rashtriya Sahara in an editorial entitled, "Politics on train accident," (May 31), writes: "The spate of political statements about the Jnaneshwari Express tragedy is the result of the lowering level of our politics and the mental bankruptcy of our politicians.

These political battlelines prove that we are perhaps becoming insensitive and personal political gains are dearer to us even in the large-scale loss of human lives.”

Akhbar-e-Mashriq, in a May 30 editorial queries: “The Maoists have started targeting the common people. Will the government even now not deploy the army against them?... After all, are we not taking the services of the armed forces against and insurgency and separatism in Jammu and Kashmir and the North-East because of which situations there are getting considerably under control?”

A commentator in Delhi-based daily

Hindustan Express (June 1) writes caustically: “In fact the Maoists are also Indian citizens and it is said that their movement is for getting justice to the oppressed people of the society. Evidently, there is a clear difference between the terrorists and those involved in a struggle for their demands — that they are Muslims and Maoists respectively. In other words, it can be said that the Maoists cannot be terrorists because they not are Muslims.”

### **Science and God**

The success of the team of the American biological scientist, Dr Craig Venter in producing an artificial living cell has created a debate in religious and scientific circles around the world. Many Urdu papers have lauded Dr Venter’s achievement. The daily Sahafat (May 20) has described it as “the greatest invention of the century.” Describing the view of some religious leaders to the effect that Dr Venter’s achievement amounts to equating human beings with God as a “backward mindset”, the paper says: “How can human being compete with God? Human being is only knocking at the closed doors of mysteries of creation which should be welcomed.”

Hindustan Express (May 25) writes: “If we think seriously, this feat certainly does not amount to man’s equality with nature. Yes, it is getting to know some of the many secrets of nature and making use of the knowledge acquired and positive and negative uses of any knowledge are possible.”

*Compiled by Seema Chishti*



A census official with a family in a village in Assam

POLITICS: CENSUS

## Last Names And A Slow Reckoning

It's got detractors and fierce partisans, but a caste-based census can deliver final numbers

ANURADHA RAMAN

**W**hat exactly is it about caste that makes the political class and the educated elite both see red? The exclusion of caste from public discourse makes politicians froth and fume while its inclusion makes the educated elite raise the bogey of India marching retrogressively to the medieval age—especially at a time when the country is toasting impressive growth figures.

As the story of India is sought to be told in numbers in the 2011 census, there is a clamour from certain quarters to restore a chapter on caste census. The last detailed caste census was conducted in 1931, and 1951 on, only the SC/ST categories have been enumerated. But the exercise has run into rough weather and has led the Union cabinet to refer the matter to a Group of Ministers, likely to be headed by finance minister Pranab Mukherjee. It is also learnt the Census Commission of India has submitted a note to the home ministry (the nodal ministry) listing the pros and cons of a caste count. A senior official from the census office said they were awaiting a clear directive.

### For Caste Census



**Veerappa Moily**, Law minister



**Mukul Wasnik**, Minister, S. Justice



**Pawan K. Bansal**, Minister, P. Affairs



**Nitin Gadkari**, BJP, president

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### Against Caste Census

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**P.  
Chidambaram,**  
Home minister



**Anand  
Sharma,**  
Commerce  
minister



**Kapil  
Sibal,**  
HRD  
minister



**Mohan  
Bhagwat,**  
RSS chief

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The confusion in the government on counting or not counting caste stems from the dissenting note struck by ministers in Manmohan Singh's cabinet. While the Centre, under pressure from the Yadav lobby, had given its assurance about including caste in the 2011 census on May 7 on the floor of Parliament, it is evident that the cabinet is divided between the ayes and the nays. A notable votary for the inclusion of caste is law minister Veerappa Moily, who had conveyed to the PM way back in November last year his conviction in making caste a part and parcel of the census operation.

Moily, when contacted, refused to speak, saying cabinet deliberations should not be made public, but is said to have lent his voice to the chorus of supporters for a caste-based census. Others in favour were urban development minister Jaipal Reddy, social justice minister Mukul Wasnik, tribal affairs minister Kantilal Bhuria, textiles minister Dayanidhi Maran and parliamentary affairs minister Pavan Kumar Bansal.

Among those who raised concerns about technical difficulties involved in including caste at a time when the enumeration was under way was home minister P. Chidambaram. Apart from pointing out how enumerators were not equipped to ask the relevant questions required for cross-examination, the home minister even talked about the inclusion of caste in the third stage of the exercise. But the move has not cut much ice with the Yadav troika who spearheaded the demand for caste inclusion. Incidentally, the bjp is for a caste census, while the rss is opposed to it.

The latest debate on the issue has led Janata Dal (U) chief Sharad Yadav to conclude that the government is just temporising. "The government has assured us on the floor of the House that caste will be included, so where is the confusion? There is a central list and there are statewise lists. One has to only go by the lists," says Yadav. It is these lists (of castes) that are likely to create confusion, as there are glaring discrepancies. What's described as backward in one state may not be so in another and may not figure on the central list either.

R.S. Khare, professor of anthropology at the University of Virginia, says there are short-term and long-term outcomes of conducting such an exercise. "The long-term view is that it will actually open up society by making it inclusive. The way the younger generation is using caste to further its education is interesting to watch. Freedom of expression and action, when combined with caste, has a more positive outcome for society. The politics of caste would make for greater inclusiveness in society."

Shyam Babu, senior fellow at the Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, says that by accepting a caste census, "the state is in a way accepting its failure to eradicate caste through economic development, which is not wrong, as it settles the debate on whether caste is a reality or a fictitious term. Besides, politicians know the numbers down to the villages. What is wrong in a scientific view?"

Then there is a school of thought which says that if the caste exercise throws up challenges, it is time for India to accept them. Among the challenges that will have to be confronted are claims and counter-claims made by castes to claim backward status. Jats, Meenas, Gurjars—at war with each other to claim backward and scheduled caste status—are only the tip of the iceberg. But apart from caste, there are the income and education indicators in the census. Based on these enumerations, and after a head count, it will be possible to put a definite number to the people comprising the creamy layer among Other Backward Classes. This will decide the debate on reservation in jobs and education, where a 26 per cent quota has been fixed.

Major policies on education, jobs and welfare are premised around caste, with the special focus on OBCs. The figures for them as of now are only estimates, ranging from the Mandal number of 52 per cent to the nssso estimate of 41 per cent.

Already, census officials visiting homes are asking, rather politely, whether the family avails of reservation. It's time the question is well-defined, one that would put all speculation to rest and generate a definite number.

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## Census question over caste identity divides India

By TIM SULLIVAN (AP) – May 27, 2010

NEW DELHI — Bollywood's biggest star has an answer ready if census workers ask about his caste: "Indian."

"My father never believed in caste, and neither do any of us," Amitabh Bachchan wrote in his obsessively followed blog.

Comments like Bachchan's are common in modern India, which prides itself on how it has transcended some of its most rigid traditions — and those beliefs are being heard more often as the government debates whether the national census should delve into caste.

But Joseph D'Souza doesn't believe such talk for a moment.

"There's a lot of lip service to saying 'I'm an Indian first,' and 'I don't believe in caste,'" said D'Souza, a prominent campaigner for dalits, as India's "untouchables" at the very bottom of the caste system are now known.

"When it comes to sharing power, to interaction, to sharing social status, low-caste Indians are very much marginalized," he said, arguing the census could provide firm data about the vast divisions.

India's census, being held in stages over the next year or so, delves into the wealth, living conditions and other personal details of the country's 1.2 billion people. But still undecided is one question — "What is your caste?" — that has infuriated much of India's elite, energized caste-based political parties and left in doubt millions of government jobs and university slots.

The debate has also made very clear that caste, the Hindu custom that for millennia has divided people in a strict social hierarchy based on their family's traditional livelihood and ethnicity, remains a deeply sensitive subject.

"The biggest issue (with the census) is the inability of India to come to terms with this really ingenious form of discrimination," D'Souza said.

Bachchan, who has dominated Bollywood for decades, proudly says his family has married across India's vast geographic spectrum — with a Bengali, a Sindhi, a Punjabi and a Mangalorean. But D'Souza notes that none of those relatives are low caste and that the movie industry has not one dalit star.

The question's fiercest backers include India's most powerful caste politicians, who believe they could use the census data as fodder for votes and government funding.

Its bitterest opponents include much of the establishment. "At one stroke, it trivializes all that modern India has stood for, and condemns it to the tyranny of an insidious kind of identity politics," Pratap Bhanu Mehta, a prominent Indian commentator, wrote in the Indian Express newspaper.

The last Indian census that measured castes was in 1931, when colonial Britain still ruled.

The founders of modern India — nearly all high caste — were, at least publicly, staunch believers in a caste-blind society. While many would have been aghast if one of their children had married a dalit, they also fought hard for dalit rights.

Most felt that counting caste sizes in a census reinforced a tradition they wanted to fade.

It's an argument still heard today.

"No one denies that there are a lot of problems in India, that there is social discrimination," said Barun Mitra, who runs a New Delhi-based research center. But "this process of identifying caste with a census is unlikely to help."

Like many critics, he also worries about the rise of the caste-based politicians.

"What purpose would it serve by drawing and redrawing the identity one more time, particularly when it is politically motivated?" he asked.

In recent decades, some of the sharpest edges of caste traditions have been softened by urbanization and economic growth. Inter-caste marriages are now fairly common, and there are powerful low-caste politicians and businesspeople.

But caste also remains a deeply felt part of Indian life. Brahmins, the highest caste, still dominate everything from politics to journalism. Caste-specific marriage advertisements are newspaper staples. Studies show low-caste Indians and dalits face daily challenges for decent schools, medical care and jobs.

"Caste is part of every social agenda, every political agenda," said Shaibal Gupta with the Asian Development Research Institute. "Even when someone is considering a neighborhood, caste is an important consideration."

But caste calculations have become far more complicated, with jobs and university slots reserved for lower castes and a new generation of politicians learning to use their lower-caste backgrounds to create massive vote banks.

Laws give specific breakdowns of those reserved positions, but since the numbers are based on the 1931 census, their accuracy is questioned. And protests have been violent as caste leaders try to have their group's status officially lowered to be eligible for reserved jobs and school slots.

For some opponents, complexity alone makes caste an impossible census question. While there

**AP** Associated Press

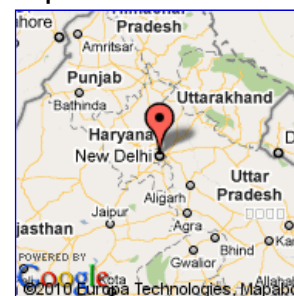
Photo 1 of 4



FILE - In this April 1, 2010 file photo, census worker Rumnima Das fills in information about Mahesh Shah, left, and his family as she conducts the national census at Ramsingh Chapori village, east of Gauhati, India. As India launches its 2010 census, a massive once-every-ten-year tabulation that delves into the jobs, income, living conditions and other personal details of the country's 1.2 billion people, a possible new question, "What is your caste?", has infuriated much of India's elite, strengthened caste-based political parties and left the fate of millions of government jobs and university slots in question. (AP Photo/Anupam Nath, File)



Map



are just four main castes, there may be more than 20,000 sub-castes. Then there are the sub-sub-castes, clans and a multitude of other variations.

But for proponents like D'Souza, such arguments prove the necessity of the question. In a country where caste is so important, he asks, how can India not know the facts?

"You can't hide it and put it under the carpet and say caste is not there," he said.

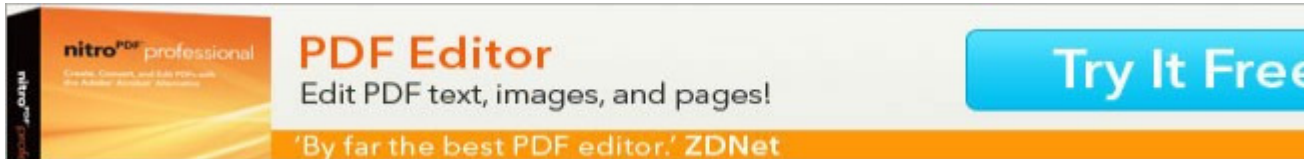
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# THE INDEPENDENT

May 14, 2010

## India in uproar over decision to include caste in national census

By Andrew Buncombe in Delhi

*Critics say traditional distinctions of class have no place in a would-be global power*

For the first time since the days of the British Raj, officials in India are to ask people their caste as part of the national census, the biggest of its kind in the world. It is a move that has triggered intense controversy about a painful, vexing subject that the country cannot leave behind.

Having initially chosen not to include caste, the Indian government apparently gave in to demands from opposition parties and decided that, for the first time since 1931, census officials would ask respondents to say what traditional Hindu grouping they belong to.

The decision has sparked fierce debate. Defenders of the move say it will provide up-to-date information about the size and needs of various groups that will be vital for providing grants and reserved jobs and college places for those at the bottom of the caste ladder.

Others are equally adamant that caste should have no place in a country seeking to throw off the shackles of poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy and looking to assume a position as a leading world power.

Among those who have strongly criticised the decision is Amitabh Bachchan, the near-legendary Bollywood actor considered the elder statesman of Hindi movies.

Writing on his blog, Mr Bachchan said that when census officials arrived at his house in Mumbai, he told them that his caste was "Indian".

"My father never believed in caste and neither do any of us," he added. "He married a Sikh, I married a Bengali, my brother a Sindhi, my daughter a Punjabi, my son a Mangalorean... in his autobiography he had [said] future generations of his family should marry into different parts of the country."

In traditional Hinduism there were four main castes and hundreds of sub-groups. In addition there were the "untouchables", who were considered to have no place in society and who are now more usually called Dalits.

For centuries, what job a person did, where they lived, what food they ate and where they were cremated depended largely on their caste. One of those who sought to reform the system was the independence leader Mahatma Gandhi, who, along with social campaigners such as Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, argued that caste had no place.



As India has developed, and as more people have moved to the cities, the rigid caste restrictions have loosened slightly. Yet although discrimination on the basis of caste is banned by the constitution, for hundreds of millions of people caste remains a defining, and often debilitating, label. Even now, English-language weekend papers carry pages of adverts for arranged marriages, all categorised under various castes. And a number of online sites cater exclusively to one caste.

Caste also remains hugely important in the world of business and finance. A recent study by the Indian economist Sukhdeo Thorat and Princeton University sociologist Katherine Newman found that having a low-caste surname significantly cut the chances of winning a job interview.

Caste can have deadly repercussions. Parts of northern India are blighted by so-called "honour killings", incidents in which a young woman is murdered by members of her family for having an affair, or eloping, with a man from the "wrong" caste or clan. In one recent high-profile case, police in Jharkhand arrested the mother of a young female journalist, Nirupama Pathak, who was found smothered to death.

The middle-class family, who were opposed to Ms Pathak's planned marriage to a lower-caste man, say she committed suicide. However, her boyfriend claims she was murdered. The young woman's father, a bank manager, told local reporters: "We were trying to convince her to marry within our own caste. That does not mean we killed her."

Despite its purported wish to move away from caste, India has repeatedly opposed including caste in UN guidelines against discrimination. It insists that it is an internal matter for India. At the same time, caste has increasingly become an important means of organising politically.

Kumari Mayawati, the so-called Dalit Queen who heads the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), has four times ridden to the position of chief minister of India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, with the support of its poorest and most downtrodden people.

Those who want to include caste in the census say the data gathered can be used to help those in need. Writing in the Hindustan Times Sagarika Ghose, a senior broadcaster, said: "The fight against caste is best fought when we know the enemy. Caste is an immutable, invisible and overwhelming reality in our daily lives.

"If we continue to act as if caste does not exist, or deny its existence, we would be failing to do battle with one of the most urgent social inequalities of our time."

Some Dalits fighting for empowerment also believe the information will help, especially if it is made publicly available. Pushpa Salaria, head of the Dalit Rights Protection Forum, said: "If we have a census which is centralised then we can have information about weaker sections and minority groups. It will help us know the majority of our country."

## India's Caste System

\* The caste system has existed for more than 3,000 years in India. In traditional Hinduism, there are four main castes.

\* At the top are the Brahmins, the teachers and priests. Next come the Kshatriyas, who are soldiers and administrators. The Vaishyas make up the trading class. The final group is the Sudras, the farming and peasant class.

\* In addition there were those considered outside of society and "untouchable" and who are now more usually called Dalits, or in Indian law, "scheduled castes".

\* Dalits face routine discrimination with a crime committed against a member of the group every 20 minutes, according to the Dalit Solidarity Network-UK, citing government figures.

\* However, the group said this was likely to be only a fraction of actual incidents since many Dalits did not lodge cases for fear of reprisals.



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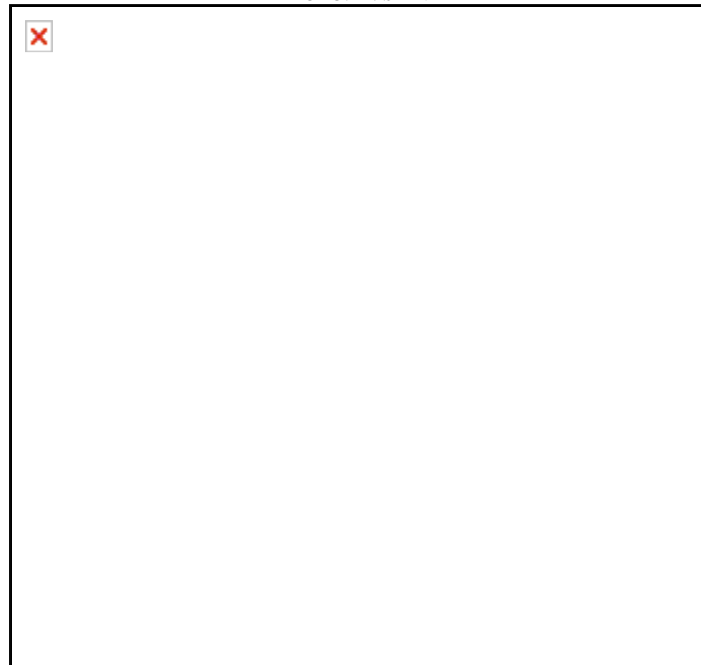
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## Why caste should be counted in

Yogendra Yadav

*Enumeration of the OBCs as part of the Census will help evidence-based formulation and monitoring of policies of social justice. It should have been done in 2001 itself.*

— PHOTO: M. SRINATH



### **FOR ROBUST EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE : A demonstration in Thanjavur favouring caste-based census.**

The United Progressive Alliance government has a knack of arriving at the right decisions for the wrong reasons. The latest announcement on counting caste in the Census is a case in point. In this instance, as in the case of Telangana, a policy measure that was long overdue has been made to look like a hasty decision. As in the case of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the government needed some arm-twisting to act in the larger national interest, and its own. The decision to count the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the coming Census is, and should have been, presented as a forward-looking and overdue policy announcement that would help evidence-based formulation and monitoring of policies of social justice. Instead, by presenting it as a reluctant concession to retrograde forces, the government has left itself open to needless and ill-informed criticism from the usual quarters.

The government's silence on what exactly the decision is, has only added to the confusion. Media headlines and parliamentary discussions have spoken of a "Caste Census." This gives the impression that the government has decided to resume the

colonial practice of enumeration, and often ranking, of all castes and sub-castes among Hindus. But Pranab Mukherjee's statement to the media indicates that the government proposes to do something more limited — to extend the current practice of recording the SCs and the STs to include the OBCs. In other words, the enumerators will ask everyone if they belong to an SC or an ST or an OBC (enumerators already do so in the case of the SCs and the STs), and if the respondents do, the enumerators will record the exact caste name. Others will not be asked about their caste name. This appears to be the most reasonable interpretation of the demand for a “caste-based census” in the present context.

There are some good arguments for a full caste-based Census, as those advanced by Professor Satish Deshpande. But we may not be ready for it at this stage of the current census operations and national deliberations. If we take ‘caste-based census’ to mean OBC enumeration, as I do here, this will not be a dramatic reversal of an 80-year-old policy, but only a logical culmination of many earlier attempts. Over the years, partial attempts have been made by several States — Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh — to collect this information with the help of specially appointed commissions. Karnataka is the pioneer and exemplar. The Mandal Commission used a sample survey to gather this information at the national level. But in the absence of its inclusion in the Census process, these kinds of evidence have remained partial and unverified.

#### Vital information

What do we get from such an enumeration? Quite a lot, if we care about putting policies of affirmative action on a sound, empirical footing and putting at rest endless disputes about the size and backwardness of various communities. 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. Specifically, the Census will now give us robust information about the numbers, demographics (sex ratio, mortality, life expectancy), educational data (literacy, ratio of school-going population, number of graduates and so on) and economic conditions (assets, working population and so on) of the OBC castes. The data will be available for each State and district, and for each caste and community within an OBC. These will become the basis for fine-tuning reservations and other schemes and for adjudicating politically sensitive disputes regarding inclusion or exclusion. It may not be sufficient to design policies of affirmative action — the Census does not record the upper end of salaried jobs as an occupational category — but it will still be a giant leap forward.

Enumeration of the OBCs is not an optional policy. No modern state has the option of not counting the social groups that it recognises in its law and policy. Thus, the policy of reservations for the OBCs in government jobs and educational institutions, besides a host of other schemes for the benefit of backward classes, mandates that this group be enumerated. The judiciary has repeatedly asked for robust empirical evidence for the formulation of any affirmative action policy. OBC enumeration should have begun in 2001, in the first Census after OBC reservations came into effect. Indeed, the then Registrar General had proposed it. It was shot down by the Home Ministry in the National Democratic Alliance government.

#### Question of timing

Is it feasible to undertake the exercise at this stage, now that Census operations have begun? No doubt this decision should ideally have come earlier, and it is perhaps too late for a full enumeration of all castes. But enumeration of the OBCs is not impossible even at this stage. The National Commission for Backward Classes has already prepared a list of “Socially and Educationally Backward Classes” — legal nomenclature for the OBCs.

This can be the basis of identification of these communities across the country. This can be supplemented by the list of all caste-communities in each State, compiled by the Anthropological Survey of India under the 'People of India' project. Listing of castes at the district level will, of course, pose some challenges. But that is no different in terms of either scale or complexity from similar problems encountered with other census categories, notably occupation and language. Objections on practical grounds are clearly misplaced, if not mischievous.

What about objections on grounds of principles? There is an understandable unease about giving caste primacy in public life. But it is unclear how counting of the OBCs is in this respect qualitatively different from counting the SCs and the STs. We have done this for more than half a century. It is true that official enumeration of any category tends to solidify its boundaries a little more than would be the case otherwise. But this subtle and long-term cost has to be weighed against the most evident and short and long term cost of official non-recognition of categories that everyone operates with. If the enumeration of religious communities has not led to the breakdown of secular order in India, and if enumeration of race in the U.S. has not made U.S. politics racist, it is unlikely that the enumeration of one more caste group would push the country into the prison of caste.

In any case, the way to transcend caste is not to close our eyes to it, but to look at it very closely, identify and neutralise its relationship with disadvantage and discrimination, and to discover how caste relates to other social divisions such as gender and class. That is what necessitates a caste-based census.

*( The author is Senior Fellow with the CSDS, Delhi. He is currently at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin.)*

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## COLUMNISTS

### Reviving the caste system

By Kuldip Nayar

Friday, 14 May, 2010 | 12:52 AM PST |

**Almost the first task undertaken by Jawaharlal Nehru after independence was to abolish caste. All government records, registers and application forms deleted the caste column. It had taken the nation some 88 years to rub off this stigma of discrimination.**

Ironically, the same Congress party, which was instrumental in throwing out the British, has announced that the next census in 2011 will include a caste column. The Manmohan Singh government was reluctant to introduce one because some cabinet members argued that caste was against the ethos of the freedom movement. But none of them appears to have a commitment to a casteless society, the prerequisite to a viable system of democracy.

Political parties in the opposition had their way because the government after putting up a brave front caved in. True, the ruling Congress does not have a majority in the Lok Sabha. But it could have mustered one if it had stood firm on principles. It did not have to placate the leaders of the Other Backward Classes (OBC) for the sake of staying in office.

The government does not seem to understand the repercussions of turning parochial. It should have at least held consultations with the National Integration Council which is meant to discuss such problems. Caste is something that will affect the nation as a whole. Parliament which does not represent more than 50 per cent of the electorate cannot push back the country into the dark ages.

Electoral politics have blinded the three Yadav leaders — Sharad Yadav of the Janata Dal's splinter group and the two former chief ministers, Mulayam Singh Yadav from UP and Lalu Prasad Yadav from Bihar. They have betrayed their mentors, socialist Dr Ram Manohar Lohia and Gandhite Jayaprakash Narayan, who propagated a casteless society. The Yadav leaders have argued that the OBC would be entitled to more reservations in employment and educational institutions after the census, which they expect will show their caste followers in larger numbers. They already enjoy a quota of 27 per cent, four per cent more than the scheduled Castes and tribes.

The supreme court has limited reservations to 50 per cent. If OBC leaders want more, they have to appeal to the court. The census will not give them more reservations. Nor can parliament. The forum is the supreme court which in its judgment thought that at least 50 per cent of jobs or admission to education institutions had to be on merit.

Where is the guarantee that the census would quantify the numbers accurately? There are risks of fudging. An enumerator goes to an ordinary person and asks him about his caste. The latter can say anything in reply. There is no authority or guidelines for the enumerator to verify the response. His job is merely to write what is told to him.

Traditions and customs have moulded India and the rest of the subcontinent in such a way that the caste system has also affected Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. Islam preaches equality and this is the reason given by Hindus as to why caste barriers should not be recognised among Muslims for reservations. A Karachi labour leader who met me in Delhi told me that even workers in Pakistan have come to be divided on the basis of caste (zaat).

In India, the Muslims belonging to OBC, for example, carpenters, weavers, etc., have been enjoying reservations like their Hindu counterparts. There is a demand to accommodate the Muslim 'dalits' in the quota given to the scheduled castes. The Sachar committee on the plight of the Muslims has also recognised that there are 'dalits' in the Muslim community.

My knowledge of law, however limited, tells me that a caste column would violate the basic structure of the constitution. The preamble says that the people resolve to constitute India into a "sovereign socialist democratic republic". In the Keshvanand Bharti case, the supreme court has said that objectives in the preamble contain the basic structure of the constitution which cannot be amended by the power that parliament exercises.

Caste is the antithesis of democracy or socialist ideology. Any action to reintroduce caste identities, which the

census will seek to do, is unconstitutional. Still, if the government wants to go ahead with caste categorisation, it should refer the matter to the supreme court. Since ultimately the matter will be decided by the supreme court, why not start the exercise now?

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) agreement to caste identification is surprising. The party is all the time going on about the country's emotional unity. Its support for something divisive is because of electoral considerations. It wants to be seen with the Yadav leaders who are trying to project the census of caste as a step towards progress. The BJP, like other political parties, knows that elections are increasingly contested on an appeal to sub-castes, not caste alone.

Poverty is not confined to the OBC. In a country where 40 per cent people earn less than a dollar, the concerted effort of political parties should be to extract people from deplorable economic conditions in which they are stuck. It is time to change the basis of reservations from caste to poverty. The criterion should neither be caste nor creed but how much a person earns.

Whatever the benefits of reservations, they have been primarily cornered by leaders belonging to the creamy layers of OBC and the scheduled castes and tribes. The supreme court has said more than once that the creamy layer should be defined so that the benefits go to the next generation. But the leaders of these communities, particularly the Yadavs, refused to do so because they want to appropriate the gains. How to end their monopoly is the real problem. They have to be curbed if India is to remain a casteless society.

The writer is a leading journalist based in Delhi.

<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/columnists/kuldip-nayar-reviving-the-caste-system-450>

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**THE TIMES OF INDIA**

## Caste census to boost caste politics

Faizan Ahmad, TNN, May 14, 2010, 04.40am IST

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PATNA: From birth to death, the only factor that counts is caste. From admission in educational institutions to jobs to contesting elections, this factor alone plays a decisive role.

Caste is still a big social reality and it largely determines many socio-political, economic and family issues. The political leaders may be clamouring that they consider caste factor the least and that the caste should no longer be an identity, but in reality, caste reigns supreme.

That is the reason why almost all the regional political parties, which are heavily based on caste, made a strong plea for a caste-based census. The Congress-led UPA government, which is also not averse to caste-based politics, has agreed to discuss the issue in the cabinet. "Caste is taken into consideration from politics to matrimonial deals on a day-to-day basis, then why not the actual reality of caste configuration be updated in the present census," argued social scientist Shaibal Gupta of Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI).

All the three top politicians of Bihar — chief minister Nitish Kumar of JD(U), RJD supremo Lalu Prasad and LJP chief Ram Vilas Paswan — have strongly advocated for caste census. Lalu and two other Yadav leaders, Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh and JD(U) president Sharad Yadav, compelled the UPA government in the Lok Sabha to concede their demand.

"The census should be held caste-wise to establish the correct strength of the backward and extremely backward castes," Nitish said. Pleading for the head count of OBC and EBC sections, the CM said it will pave the way for devising plan for their all-round development as was being done in the case of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Extremely Backward Caste Coordination Committee president Kishori Das said: "Under a political conspiracy, caste census could not be held for 80 years. The upper caste ruling class always opposed this."

Das and others estimated the backward classes population between 55 and 60%. About 3,743 castes had been identified as backward by the Mandal Commission. Of them, only 1,998 had been accepted by the Supreme Court since they were found common in the Mandal and state's list of OBCs, he added.

Senior JD(U) leader and party's Chetna Manch president Bheem Singh, MLC, said the head count on caste basis will also solve many unsolved issues. In higher educational institutions, the backward cannot get reservation as the figures of the castes could not be provided. In the Indira Sahn vs Union of India case, the Supreme Court judges observed that there had never been a caste census from where the 52% OBC population concept was derived.

Das said all the commissions like Kaka Kalelkar, Mandal and Venkata Chelliah had recommended caste census. Jawaharlal Nehru in the Constituent Assembly proposed: "Wherein adequate safeguard shall be provided for minorities backwards, tribal areas, depressed and backward classes of the society." In 1951, the then law minister, B R Ambedkar, in his resignation letter, pointed out: "I will now refer to another matter that had me dissatisfied with the government. It relates to treatment accorded to backward classes."

Gupta of ADRI said the 1931 census was outdated so a fresh caste census was needed. "The updated caste census will be a delight for researchers," he added.

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## Shy of asking caste, census enumerators just guess it!

TNN, May 15, 2010, 03.36am IST

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HYDERABAD: Census officials in the state are giving the caste column a miss with enumerators in the city shying away from asking the "what is your caste" question.

While there is an exclusive column marked as 'SC/ST/Others' in the census sheets, which has created much controversy across the country, the officials visiting households have taken to peering at name plates before entering the house, or simply guessing just what the caste of the resident would be and marking the column themselves.

Denizens who have been visited by census officials say that enumerators either filled the caste column on their own without asking for it explicitly or just ignored the detail altogether. Interestingly, some enumerators when probed by curious residents confessed that asking about a family's caste was 'awkward' and they were, therefore, not listing that information. "The enumerator, a government teacher, who came to my house said that he guessed my caste from my surname and asking it directly was neither necessary nor appropriate," said a resident of Begumpet.

In some cases, the enumerators even asked neighbours for this detail to avoid being in an "uncomfortable position". "When I asked the enumerator about the caste column, he blatantly told me that he had found it out from my neighbour as he was not sure if we would be comfortable answering that question," said another resident.

Whatever the reason, residents are worried with this 'caste-conscious' attitude of enumerators, pointing out it could lead to serious errors in this crucial exercise.

Said a resident of Hyderguda, "At first the census official gave the question a miss. Later, conversationally he asked whether I was SC or ST. It was evident that he did that with much effort." Besides, with many officials filling census sheets in Telugu, many non-Telugu speaking families resented that they could not even read what details were being filled about them.

Meanwhile, senior census officials said no such instructions had been given to enumerators and that confirming whether a family falls under the SC/ST or Others bracket was necessary. "We have directed our officers to list the caste of the head of the family alone. When the nation-wide census happens in February next year, then we shall be asking each and every person in the family their caste," said a senior officer of the census department.

He maintained that all enumerators were trained to ask all the 35 questions on the census schedule and caste was one of them. "In case people are not being asked they can register a complaint with us and we shall look into it," the officer said. That would mean a hell of a lot of complaints.

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