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## TODAY'S IMPORTANT CURRENT AFFAIRS

### UPSC MAINS

**Date: 13.05.2025**

### CASTE CENSUS AND RESERVATION

**Source:** The post is based on the article published in “The Hindu” on 11.05.2025.

**In News:** Why India must get the caste census right?

**Syllabus:** Mains – GS I, II (SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITY)

#### **Caste census and reservation**



Caste census is the systematic collection of data on individuals' caste identities during a national census exercise. In India, where caste shapes social, economic, and political life, such data helps understand the demographic distribution and socio-economic status of various caste groups, informing policies on affirmative action and social justice.

#### **Is There a Defined Caste Census in India?**

Caste enumeration was a regular part of the decadal census during British rule (1881–1931). After independence, from 1951 onwards, the Indian government discontinued full caste enumeration except for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). States were allowed to conduct their own OBC surveys from 1961, but there was no national caste census until the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) in 2011.

## Need for a Caste Census

Provides accurate, up-to-date data on caste composition, crucial for evidence-based policymaking and effective targeting of affirmative action.

Helps address data gaps and ensure social justice for underrepresented and marginalized groups.

## History of Caste Census in India

- ❖ **Colonial Era (1881–1931):** The first detailed caste census was conducted by the British in 1871-72. From 1881 to 1931, caste enumeration was a regular part of every decadal census, categorizing the population by caste, religion, and occupation. The last full caste census was in 1931, recording over 4,100 castes.
- ❖ **Post-Independence (1951 onwards):** After independence, the Indian government discontinued the practice of collecting caste data in the national census, except for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). This was done to avoid reinforcing caste divisions and promote national unity.
- ❖ **State Surveys (1961):** In 1961, states were permitted to conduct their own surveys to identify and compile lists of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), but no national caste census was conducted.
- ❖ **Mandal Commission (1980):** The Mandal Commission, which recommended 27% reservation for OBCs, relied on the 1931 caste data as no updated national caste figures existed.
- ❖ **Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011:** The SECC 2011 was the first caste-based census since 1931. It collected both socio-economic and caste data, but only the socio-economic findings were made public; the caste data has not been officially released.
- ❖ **Recent Developments:** Amid renewed social and political demands, the government has approved caste enumeration in the upcoming national census, marking the first such exercise in nearly a century.

## History of Reservation in India

### Pre-Independence:

- ❖ The idea of reservation began before independence, with early efforts by rulers like Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur (1902) and the Justice Party in Madras Presidency (1921) introducing quotas for non-Brahmin and backward classes.
- ❖ The 1933 Communal Award by the British established separate electorates and reservations for various communities, later modified by the Poona Pact (1932) between Gandhi and Ambedkar.

## Post-Independence:

The Indian Constitution (1950) provided reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in education, jobs, and legislatures to address historical injustice and ensure representation.

The First Constitutional Amendment (1951) reinforced the legality of caste-based reservations.

## Why Reservation is Given in India?

To correct historical and social injustices against marginalized communities.

To ensure fair representation of all castes in government, education, and legislatures.

To provide equal opportunity and promote advancement of backward classes.

## Constitutional Articles Related to Reservation

**Article 15(4) & 15(5):** Allow the state to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes, SCs, and STs.

**Article 16(4):** Permits reservation in public employment.

**Article 330 & 332:** Reservation of seats for SCs and STs in Parliament and State Assemblies.

**Article 340:** Empowers the President to appoint a commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes (basis for Mandal Commission).

## Mandal Commission and Related Reports

- ❖ **Mandal Commission (1979):** Established under Article 340, it identified OBCs using 11 social, educational, and economic indicators, reporting that they made up about 52% of India's population.
- ❖ **Key Recommendations:** 27% reservation for OBCs in government jobs and education, introduction of the "creamy layer" concept to exclude affluent OBCs, and various welfare measures
- ❖ **Implementation:** In 1990, the V.P. Singh government implemented the 27% OBC reservation. The Supreme Court (Indra Sawhney case, 1992) upheld this but capped total reservations at 50% and excluded promotions for OBCs.

## Current Reservation Status

Category	Reservation Percentage
Scheduled Castes (SC)	15%
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	7.5%
OBC	27%
EWS (General)	10%

Total reservation: Capped at 50% by the Supreme Court, except for EWS (Economically Weaker Sections) which was added in 2019.

## Way Forward: Blueprint for a Successful Caste Census

- ❖ **Legal Backing:** Amend the Census Act, 1948 to mandate caste enumeration, protecting the process from political shifts.
- ❖ **Expert Institution:** Assign the exercise solely to the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, not ministries lacking domain expertise.
- ❖ **Standardized Questionnaire:** Use closed-option questions with dropdown menus for sub-caste, caste, aliases, and surnames, plus unique digital codes to avoid duplication.
- ❖ **State-Specific Caste Lists:** Draft lists in consultation with state governments, sociologists, and community leaders; publish online for public feedback before finalizing.
- ❖ **Enumerator Training:** Provide region-specific training with clear instructions and mock examples to ensure accuracy.
- ❖ **Digital Tools:** Equip enumerators with handheld devices preloaded with validated caste lists, restricting data entry to predefined options.
- ❖ **Representative Staffing:** Deploy diverse enumerators in areas where they have no conflict of interest to ensure data integrity.
- ❖ **Independent Oversight:** Set up district-level committees to audit and monitor data quality.
- ❖ **Pilot Testing:** Trial the methodology in diverse states before nationwide rollout to refine the approach.

This comprehensive, transparent approach can finally close India's caste data gap, making social justice policies more effective and inclusive.