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# Census of India 2011 and the issues of national security: a dangerous gambit

*Saroj Kumar RATH<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

The 2011 census will be the 15<sup>th</sup> edition of Indian National Census and 7<sup>th</sup> after independence. After conducting six decennial censuses in the independent India, suddenly Government of India wakes up to add two new hitherto unknown columns in the census of 2011. Decennial census is considered as a progressive toll for generating data to be used by the state and its agencies for developmental purpose. The inclusion of caste in the census and preparation of National Population Registrar (NPR) along with it is fraught with social, political, economic and religious consequences. Caste census was first started in 1972 and dropped in 1931 by the colonial rulers of India. The founding fathers of India wanted an end to the very existence of caste and hence discouraged caste from every sphere of public policy. What is dominated but hidden beneath the demands of caste census is the consideration of caste quotas. The inclusion of NPR along with the census for the purpose of preparing the Unique Identification Number is another sensitive issue which needs threadbare interpretation.

*Keywords: census; caste; national security; job reservations; backward caste politics.*

## **Introduction**

Decennial census of India since 1951 is being used as a progressive tool for generating data to be used by the state and its agencies for developmental purposes. Census data collected by the government is singularly the most important and most efficient indicator of human resources, their problems and their progress. It also helped the social science to further its research on various dimensions of the Indian populace. This article empirically deals with the twin subjects – a)

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inclusion of caste in the census of 2011 and b) incorporation of National Population Registrar (NPR) along with the census of 2011. As a background the paper try to answer questions revolved around the caste based census in India. At the outset the paper make a threadbare analysis of caste in India, how caste based census started by the colonial rulers, and what objective it achieved during the operation of the process. The paper also answer to the question why caste based census was discontinued during the period of colonial rulers. The paper deals with the new challenges throw by the rise of backward castes and the politics of reservation in the context of analyzing the census. The paper is historically descriptive and empirically analytical and after dealing with the background issues it analyses the inclusion of caste in the 2011 census and the incorporation of NPR along with the census.

### **Caste Census: A Threadbare Analysis**

There is a difference of opinion among scholars with regard to the origin of the caste system although it is admitted on all hands that it is a very ancient institution. References are made to the tenth Mandal of the Rig Veda called the Purusha Sukta to trace the origin of the caste system. It asserts that the Brahmana was born out of the mouth of Brahma, the Kshatriya from his arms, the Vaishya from his stomach, and the Sudra from his feet (Mahajan, 1979:87). Due to the Vedic sanctity, caste and division in Indian society is attributed to divine ordinance. However, in the early days the caste system was flexible and the fourth class was not condemned. The Rig Veda mentions the word 'shudra' only once and is of a doubtful etymology (Basham, 1999:143). The context where it occurs is the Purusha Sukta of the tenth mandala which is considered a late interpolation by many scholars. One of the hymns of the Atharva Veda states, 'O Lord, make me beloved of (or dear to) the gods, the kings, the shudras and the nobility' (Madok, 1993: 19.62.1). In the epic Mahabharata it is said, 'O King Janaka, the Brahmin scholars of Vedas compares the shudras with Brahma; but I see the shudras as the Lord of the world, God Vishnu' (Vyas, 1990: 296.28).

Although hereditary castes did not exist during the ancient period of Indian History, there were non-hereditary classes. It was easy to cross from one caste to another. As time went on, these castes became very rigid and crossing over became impossible. These were regarded to be by birth and not by the work that one did. Later on, the four castes came to be divided further into many sub-castes, each with a definite status and position in the bigger caste-group. Caste taboos crept in during the later Vedic society. The fifth class, the untouchables, born during the later Vedic period. The smriti literature like Manu-smriti was composed much later, sometime after the seventh century. In the later Hindu period, the institution of caste developed further. The Muslim invasions further increased the rigidity of

the caste system. When the European missionaries landed in Southern India, they were amazed with the caste system. They did not see any possibility to convert the Brahmins but they found the untouchables vulnerable for conversion. When the colonial rulers entered into the Indian scene, they exploited the caste to divide the society for the purpose of stretching their empire and to rule the country.

In ancient India profession of a person was the determinant of his caste. A young boy born out of a maiden mother, who should be an outcaste, went to a teacher Haridrumata Gautama to receive education. When Gautama enquires about the family and caste of the boy the boy replied, 'I asked my mother. She answered me: In my youth, when I went about a great deal serving as a maid, I got you. So I do not know this, of what family you are. However, I am Jabala by name: you are Satyakama by name. So I am Satyakama Jabala, Sir' (Aurobindo, 1972: 4.4, 1-5). The boy was admitted into the school and become a legend.

The first ever attempt, to count the population of India by the colonial rulers, was made in 1861. But this effort could not be succeeded because of the dislocations caused by the First War of Independence (the great rebellion of 1857-59). The second attempt started in 1871, was spread out over two years due to political reasons and financial constraints and completed in 1872. Even though the census is basically a demographic exercise in India, it has been influenced by political developments and has, in turn, heavily impacted national and state politics.

Debating on the rationality of Article – 18 (Right to Equality, abolition of Titles) of the constitution of India, Mr. Algu Rai Shastri, member from United Province informed the Constituent Assembly that 'The sole interest of the government in the illusory web of the census lies in seeing a balance in the population of the communities so that these may continue to quarrel among themselves and thereby strengthen its own rule' (Shastri, 1947). The apprehension raised by the Hon'ble members at the constituent assembly was not an isolated or narrow interpretation, as the Britishers often alleged, but a manifestation of public opinion exhibited way back in 1881 during the second census of India. The Census Commissioner of Central Provinces remarks was interesting. The Census Commissioner said 'Among the people there was a widespread suspicion that the inquiries of the Census were preliminary to fresh taxation of some kind, and this suspicion would linger on in some minds despite all asstirance to the contrary' (Plowden, 1893: 3-4). The careful inquiries of the enumerators about the occupations of the people had strengthened such apprehensions. In Berar it was recorded that people were passive and apathetic to the process of a correct census.

At the enumeration of 1872, it appeared that, beyond being possessed by a vague feeling that the census might be the herald of some new form of taxation, the public were not alarmed, nor was there time for any alarming rumor to get afloat. Mr. Copleston, the Census Superintendent of Burma reported, 'The prolonged preparation, and the fact that the final counting was to be done by night,

gave opportunity for absurd rumors to arise and spread among a credulous and superstitious people; and while generally the ideas related only to an additional tax in some parts of the country, and these not the wildest or least civilized, it was evidently feared that personal injury would be done to the inhabitants' (Plowden, 1983: 3-4).

The introduction of caste census was started in 1971. There was an unspoken agenda behind the case census, which was intended to divide India to neutralize threat to British Empire. The grouping or arrangement of various castes for administrative, political, and social purposes reached its culmination in Census 1901 under the guidance of Sir Herbert Risley.

The census of 1881 was the first synchronous enumeration which has been attempted for all India. The Indian were very much alert to the divisive agenda of the Britishers. The enumerators found it difficult to count caste. The difficulty was added when Hindus refused to accept untouchables in the Hindu fold. The Census of 1881 said, 'The same difficulty with regard to the definition of Hindoo was felt at the last Census, and, in fact, the absence of some such rule as that which was followed on the present occasion, rendered the figures of the previous Census almost meaningless, nearly six per cent of the whole population being classed under other religions, and no two districts following the same rule, if indeed any rule at all was observed anywhere'. The documents said, 'It is a matter of opinion whether the Chuhra, the Chamar, the Sansi can properly be called a Hindoo or not, and, short of ranking the various tenets of each of the lower castes and tribes as a separate religion called after the name of the caste, the nearest approach to truth is probably arrived at by classing them all as Hindoo, leaving the caste table to tell its own tale' (Plowden, 1983: 22).

The colonial rulers were using caste census for the twin purposes of first understanding the society and then dividing the society. The Census officer reported that 'A wider view of caste is here meant the perpetuation of status or function, by inheritance and endogamy' (Baines, 1893:185). The census documents revealed that caste is a development of the special tendency to which the social atmosphere of India is abnormally favourable. The census officers proved their point by way to emphasizing the fact that even lower caste people also want to protect their lower caste identity. The census reports noticed the political ramification of caste in India. The report said, 'Of castes of political origin instances have been already given. The most striking example, however, seems to be that of the Hill tracts of the Punjab, where the Raja is the fountain of honour to an extent unprecedented, probably, in other parts of India, for by his word he creates, enlarges, and restricts the castes of the population of his realm. Elsewhere, the process of creation is, as a rule, confined to the two upper classes, Brahman and Rajput (Plowden, 1893:22)'.

The 1911 census, which was considered as the first most elaborate caste census, confronted with a number of problems. The census report recorded that caste in India is classified as per Manu's fivefold division of the people into Brahmans, Kshatriya, Vaisyas, Sudras, and out-caste. However, the census officers found that only Brahmans are more or less recognized across India. About other castes the report says 'whatever be a Kshatriya in Northern India, he in Madras, despite recent large accessions to his ranks, remains a singularly elusive personage. Of Vaishya, with recollections of sundry perfervid deputation still fresh in my mind, I fear to express an opinion; but their existence among us has been doubted by many, of whom at least one ingenious writer extends his skepticism to the case of the Sudras' (Molony, 1911:157).

The slow disappearance of caste structures was noticed by the census enumerators in the 1911 census. During this time old caste Panchayats have started losing sanctity in the society and people found modern court more attractive. The report said, 'The son of a priest is not always himself of priestly character; that the descendant of a hundred sweepers is not necessarily so excellent in the quality which he should profess, as one who comes to the sweeping with a mind open and unfettered by tradition. Restrictions on intermarriage persist it is true; but despite their persistence there are not wanting present signs of their recognition as the now needless survival of old time strategy, rather than as part of a scheme which looks to the future (Molony, 1911:157)'.

The 1911 census had attempted to tabulate castes on the basis of social precedence. Khan Ahmad Hasan Khan, the Superintendent for Punjab expressed doubt about the claim of people about their caste. Reporting about the caste enumeration he wrote, 'This attempt could not be expected to succeed in view of the fact that nearly all castes consider themselves to be most exclusive and high-born. Nais urged that they be counted as Brahmans or Rajputs; Mirasis claimed they were really Quereshis; the Lohars and Tarkhans claimed they were Dhiman Brahmans' (Census of India, 1931:322-24). Over the time the census become an official document to criticize untouchability and recommendations have started pouring to exclude caste from the headcount exercise (Molony, 1911:158).

The 1921 census was full of apprehension on the subject of caste enumeration. The census report said, 'Classification by castes is not, even now, very easy, but to evolve order out of the tangle of fancy names that are then likely to crop up would be a mighty task'. The Superintendent of Census Operation V.R. Thyarajaiyar questioned the very basis of caste census. He asked 'Why then it might be asked and it has been asked should we have this return made at each census?' Even he suggested boldly abolishing it. Thyarajaiyar said, 'It is anomalous that a Christian Government should perpetuate caste differences. It is true of course that the recording of caste by government in the course of the census has somewhat the look of government supporting the institution as it exists at present and of

perpetuating inequality of social status among the people' (Thyrajaiyar, 1921:114).

In a prophetic tone Thyrajaiyar said, 'Whether caste is a good institution is a question not yet out of the region of controversy and whether it is more alive than dead or more dead than alive, it is certainly not yet so inactive a principle in the life of the people as to be altogether ignored'. He visualized a casteless society and its slow death in 1921 when he written 'In journeying by trains, in the bustle of city life in reformed and progressive circles it may seem nearly extinct, but it is still there an institution forming the people into groups for the purposes of daily life which through at times provoking bitterness that does not seem native to it has on the whole certain conveniences; and till the mass of the people outgrows it a very real demological interest attaches to it and it is worth the while alike of the government and of the people to gather material for the study of its effects on the growth society' (Thyrajaiyar, 1921:114).

Among those who were highly dissatisfied by the initiation of caste census by Herbert Risley in 1901 was J.H. Hutton, the Census Commissioner of 1931. Hutton said, 'All subsequent census officers in India must have cursed the day when it occurred to Sir Herbert Risley to attempt to draw up a list of castes according to their rank in society. He failed, but the results of his attempt are almost as troublesome as if he had succeeded, for every census gives rise to a pestiferous deluge of representations, accompanied by highly problematical histories, asking for recognition of some alleged fact or hypothesis of which the census as a department is not legally competent to judge and of which its recognition, if accorded, would be socially valueless' (Radhakrishnan, 2010:7-8).

By the time the decennial census started in 1931, the enumerators were exasperated on the question of caste based census. They have realized the fact that caste based enumeration was fraught with the possibility of an unsound outcome. Caste mobilization was largely responsible for it. This is evident from the statement of the Census Superintendent of Madras who said, 'Sorting for caste is really worthless unless nomenclature is sufficiently fixed to render the resulting totals close and reliable approximations' (Census of India 1931:521). The fluidity recorded was amazing. The 227,000 Ambatans of Madras province in 1921 have become 10,000 in 1931. Similarly Navithan, Nai, Nai Brahman, Navutiyan, Pariyari claim about 140,000 in 1931 – all terms unrecorded or unstipulated 1921. There were some more glaring examples also available. The number of Marathasin Central Provinces and Berar increased from 93901 in 1911 to 206144 in 1921. This more than 110% increase in number can only be explained by mass scale mobilization of Kunbis to Marathas. Enumerators found that individual fancy apparently has some part in caste nomenclature. A census official recorded that an extremely dark individual pursuing the occupation of waterman on the Coorg border described his caste as Suryavamsa, the family of the sun.

The race then was to become upper caste in the caste hierarchy. ‘Every Hindu who claims to be Hindu at all would claim to be either Brahman or Kshatriya. Even castes of Chamars in the United Provinces have dropped their characteristic nomenclature at this Census and returned themselves as Sun- or Moon-descended Rajputs’ (Hutton, 1933:430). There were several factors that were eroding the distinctions between castes. The best instance of such a tendency to consolidate a number of castes into one group is to be found in the grazer castes which aim at combining under the term Yadava, Ahirs, Goalas, Gopis and Idaiyans. ‘The desire of the artisan castes in many parts of India - to be returned by a common denomination such as Vishwakarma or Jangida, usually desiring to add a descriptive noun implying that they belonged to one of the two highest varnas of Hinduism, either Brahman or Rajput (Hutton, 1933:430).’

The fluidity of castes can be judged from the varying claims of same people, as shown in table-1, in each of the proceeding census. The change of caste was frequent with an upwardly mobility.

Table 1. Changing Castes

Old Name	1921 Claims	1931 Claims
Kamhar	Kshatriya	Brahman
Sonar	Kshatriya Rajpur	Brahman Vaishya
Sutradar	Vaishya	Brahman
Nai	Thakur	Brahman
Napit	Baidya	Brahman
Rawani (Kahar)	Vaishya	Kshatriya
Muchi	Baidya Rishi	-
Chamar	-	Gehlot Rajput (Shourie, 2006:40)

The census noticed that ‘In every single instance, the claim was that the caste deserved to be enumerated as a higher caste – Ahar as Yadava, Yadava as Kshatriya; Aheria as Hara Rajput; Ahir as Kshatiryas of varied superscripts; one after the other, sixty three castes, the list alone taking three full pages. The point here is that each of them was aspiring to be and demanding to be elevated to a higher place in the social hierarchy (Hutton, 1933:528-532).’ It is obviously impossible for the Census authorities to do anything other than accept the nomenclature of the individuals making the return, since to discriminate and to allot to different groups would involve entering into discussion on the basis of largely hypothetical data. Experience at this census has shown very clearly the difficulty of getting a correct return of caste and likewise the difficulty of interpreting it for census purposes.

The report from the Nizam of Hyderabad’s dominions spoke of a ‘caste upheaval’. The census report said, ‘Besides social and religious upheavals, there are equally powerful economic forces at work, slowly undermining the Hindu caste

system. The introduction of machinery and labor-saving devices has revolutionized the theory that caste is essentially a functional division on the lines of medieval Western grade guilds. Education and means of communication have played no small part in making the caste system flexible and adaptable (Shourie; 2006:247, 254-255).’

Census Report for Bihar and Orissa documented that ‘There has been a distinct weakening of caste government and a development of toleration. Many of the castes have abandoned traditional occupations and all classes are found working together in an industrial process (Shourie, 2006:266).’ The report further said, ‘dissatisfaction with the traditional calling has thrown on the market thousands of men and forced them to take to occupations for which they have had no ancestral bent. This tendency has become a potent influence for disintegrating caste restrictions (Shourie, 2006: 412)’.

### ***End of Caste Enumeration in 1941: Why?***

Enough heat on caste had been generated by the time the 1941 census was conducted by the Her Majesty’s Government in India. The 1931 census coincided with the civil disobedience movement, which occasioned a good deal of localized trouble to certain superintendents particularly however in Bombay. ‘1940-41 saw also political influences on the census but in opposite direction; since whereas the difficulty in 1941 was to defeat an excess of zeal’ (Yeats, 1941:1).

The 1941 census was under taken under a strange circumstance. Infact the 1941 census had a telling resemblance of what India is witnessing in 2011 although the scale of confusion is different in 2011 than in 1941. The biggest question British India faced in 1940, in the backdrop of the looming World War II, was whether to have a census at all? It was not till February 1940 that the Her Majesty’s Government decided whether to have a census or not. The question on how far to go with tabulation was not settled until after the enumeration was over. M.W.M. Yeats, an iron willed British Census Commissioner undertaken the decision to carry out the Census of India in 1941 even without a mandate from the government. A path breaking decision, to discontinue caste enumeration, was taken by the Census Commissioner.

Although there was limitation and confinement under which the census exercises of 1941 was undertaken, decision on the caste census was firm that ‘There would have been no all India caste table’. With a thorough conviction Yeats said, ‘Even in 1931 it (caste census) was severely limited for financial reasons; the time is past for this enormous and costly table as part of the central undertaking and I share Dr. Hutton’s views expressed ten years ago’. The census officers of 1941 lead by Yeats were well aware of the worthlessness of caste census. There was an increasing realization to take other indices of human development into account. Yeats wrote that ‘With so constricted a financial position and with so many fields

awaiting an entry there is no justification for spending lakhs on this detail. This represents an important departure and one of the most interesting developments of the 1941 census' (Yeats, 1941). A firm administrator and benevolent Census Commissioner, Yeats was determined to include vital statistics on human development indices. He said, 'The elements which the center must indefeasibly carry are age, means of livelihood, community, civil condition, literacy, birthplace and mother tongue, where it is decided to produce tables on these matters.' Finally Yeats said, 'I have stressed the fact that rationalization of the census is overdue'.

In 1941, the caste census was given to rest after a seven decade of incessant practice. Independent India stopped counting castes but keep the tradition of counting the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The former is considered as the modern classification of untouchables and the latter is the list of nomadic citizens of India. However, the practice of caste never ceased from India and the reflection of the same has been witnessed by governmental policies. Today, according to the Government of India, the original four castes have multiplied to such an extent that there are as many as 6,000 castes in India. Curiously, all the 6,000 castes (National Commission for Backward Classes, 2010) belong to the fourth category Shudra only, which excludes the numerous sub-castes formed under the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya.

### ***Genesis of Caste Quota, Backward Class Politics and Census in Independent India***

When modern ideas started permeating into Indian societies, people started questioning the old arrangement of caste. Societal domination by a couple of castes was refuted. Each of the castes, especially the backward castes and the untouchables formed groups and started demanding share in every sphere of public life, especially governance. The mobilization of the lower castes happened in the context of measures initiated by the British to further their colonial project. These include the development of modern means of communication, the strengthening of a class of bureaucrats and officials, the spread of modern education among the non-Brahmins, and the efforts to enumerate and classify the castes from 1871 onwards. In 1901, the Census Commissioner Risley decided to rank the jatis according to their position in the varna, an arguably very delicate exercise. This caused the caste groups to form associations to petition the government to improve their rank in the census. These became much stronger when the British began to use the census classification, for instance, to determine which castes were 'manly' enough to provide recruits for the colonial army. The caste associations were interest groups to lobby for jobs and official status, and mutual aid societies functioning as cooperatives and running schools for their caste (Jaffrelot, 2003:148-149).

One of the first recorded instances of reservations or quota by a state ruler in India is that of Shahu Maharaj, the heir of legendary Maratha ruler Shivaji. When Shahu Maharaj ascended the throne in 1895, he determined to include as many non-Brahmins as possible in his administration. He demanded separate electorates instead of reserved seats, as he feared that the malleable Marathas would be used by the Brahmins. The British in 1919 reserved seven seats for the Marathas at the Bombay Legislative Council and 28 of the 65 seats of the Madras Legislative Council for non-Brahmins, a category created by grouping the untouchables and the shudra castes to combat Brahminic hegemony (Irschick, 1969:369).

Some early efforts regarding reservations were made by the Maharaja of Mysore, who was from the Wodeyar or Urs caste, a Shudra community. In fact, the first Backward Classes Commission in India namely Miller Commission was set up by the Maharaja in 1918. The Miller Commission submitted its report in 1921. It recommended that persons from the Backward Classes, which meant groups other than the Brahmins, Europeans and Anglo-Indians, should, for the next 7 years, be granted 50% of the highest posts and 33% of the lowest grades in the administration. These recommendations were at once accepted and implemented by the Maharaja. In the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, the Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims obtained representation in 1936. In 1937, they got a quota of 8 seats in the state assembly. Thus, where the British or the local rulers had a strong say in the administration, reservation policies enabled the backward communities to get a good presence in the bureaucracy before 1947 (Mani and Ranjan, 2005:318; Jaffrelot; 2003:148).

Some of the earliest recorded attempts to offer reservations were undertaken by the administration in Madras. The Madras Revenue Board passed the Standing Order No. 128 as far back as in 1851, instructing all district collectors to ensure that appointments are not dominated by a few influential families. Powerful anti-Brahmin social and political forces were unleashed in the Madras Presidency in the early 1900s. The Brahmins then enjoyed an almost total domination of the public and administrative space. According to the 1901 census, they constituted about 3% of the population, but accounted for 94% of the Civil Service. While 80% of them were literate, only 4% of the others were. The Justice Party was formed on an anti-Congress, anti-Brahmin plank, but had an uphill task in capturing the political power in the Legislative Council. The Justice party came in power in 1920, and issued a series of Communal Government Orders (GO). Using the British mapping of Indian society based on the Brahmin-non-Brahmin classification, the Justice Party (led by the dominant Vellalar, Chettiar, and Kapu castes) issued first communal GO and issued the following order: 'In order to increase the proportion of posts in Government offices held by Non-Brahmins, the Government direct that the principle prescribed for the Revenue Department in Board's Standing Order No 128 (2), on the subject of the distribution of the appointments among various castes and communities, should be extended to appointments of

all grades in the several departments of the Government' (Madras Record Office, 1921). The Heads of the Department were further instructed to maintain the information of employees according to 6 different communal categories.

The second Communal GO declared that the government concurred entirely in the desire of the members of the Legislative Council for information on the 6 categories set out in the First Communal GO, not only for new appointments but for all government employees, including personnel in 'permanent, temporary, or acting appointments, and those appointed either for the first time or promoted' (Madras Record Office, 1922).

The Justice party started decaying in mid 20s and most of its leaders joined the Congress. The Justice Party lost power in 1926 and was replaced by an independent ministry (supported by Congress). Though the Justice Party had lost power, Non-Brahmin movement was still strong through independents and congress, and hence another GO was brought in 1927.

A clear cut reservation procedure, as shown in Table No-2, was laid down by the order of 1927 (Madras Record Office, 1927). It provided the following compartmental reservations:

*Table 2. Division of Reservation in the erstwhile Madras Province*

Communal Category	% reservation
Non-Brahmin Hindu	42%
Brahmins	17%
Muslims	17%
Anglo Indians	17%
Others including Depressed classes	7%

In the Tamil areas of Madras, the 1927 GO, represented a victory for the Vellala castes, particularly the Modaliars. In these areas, they had provided the leadership of the Justice Party, although there were leaders from other Non-Brahmin castes as well. The Justice Party leaders were drawn from the landed classes and were not much keen on broadening their base by including the landless castes within their ranks. In fact, they began to show a marked disinclination for social reforms and amelioration of the condition of other weaker and backward castes. There was growing discontent among backward Hindus and Depressed classes. The leaders of Backward Classes League wrote to the Executive Council that the appointments reserved for non-Brahmin Hindus all went to a few forward communities. They felt that Communal GO was not giving protection to those who needed it most. They also claimed that the said Communal GO was doing communal injustice to the major part of the population.

Following persistent demand by the Backward Classes League, SCs, and Other associations, the Government revised the communal GO in 1947. For the first time Non-Brahmin Backward Hindus were separated from Non-Brahmins Hindus

(Madras Record Office, 1947). This bifurcation was done on the basis of the then existing list, as shown in Table No-3, of backward castes for educational concessions.

*Table 3. Division amongst the Hindus in Post-Independent Tamil Nadu*

Communal Category	% reservation
Non-Brahmin Hindu	43%
Brahmins	14%
Muslims	7%
Anglo Indians	7%
SCs	14%
Backward Non-Brahmin Hindu	14%

Census became an important document for the varying castes to claim representation in government jobs and in legislative assemblies. Census figures on percentage of various castes were used to decide on the percentage of allocation to various castes for government jobs and seats in the legislative assemblies. This new development forced people to claim and get backward status during census enumeration, and subsequently become eligible for government schemes on quotas. The trend shown at Table No-1, where people use to claim higher caste status in the proceeding census was replaced by a new trend where people started claiming to belong lower or backward castes.

### **Post-Independence Phase**

In post-independent India, the country's first constitutional amendment was motivated by caste consideration. Champakam Dorairajan was a Brahmin girl from the Madras state. In 1951, she could not get admission in a medical college even though she had scored sufficient marks due to a Communal GO issued by the government. The above system had been in place for a few years. The Communal GO did not mention backwardness in anyway. So it can be safely assumed that most of the seats were filled based on caste basis, and it was the most forward of the non-Brahmin castes that filled the big quota out of the 6 categories as mentioned at Table No-3. The communal GO just distributed seats based on an idea to 'cap' particular communities.

Champakam moved to the Supreme Court and claimed that she had been discriminated only based on her birth (caste). The court agreed and struck down the entire GO. Major agitations broke out in Tamil Nadu - leading to political and social upheaval. India had just been formed, the Lok Sabha had not even met, and the government was forced to amend the constitution for the first time, due to the quota situation in the Madras state. The amendment added a 'clause 4 to Article

15' of the constitution. Clause 4 of Article 15 reads: 'Nothing in this Article or in Clause 2 of Article 29 shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes'. After the first amendment the following reservation scheme, as shown at Table No-4, was implemented in September 1951:

*Table 4. Constitutional Sanction to Reservation*

Category	Percentage
Open Competition	60%
Backward Classes	25%
SCs	15% (In 1954, the quota for SCs was raised to 16%)

The constituent assembly had taken the responsibility of India from the Britishers to device the Indian constitution and rule of law for India. All subjects including caste were debated at length. Speaking at the Constituent Assembly Dr. Ambedkar asked, 'Will history repeat itself? It is this thought which fills me with anxiety. This anxiety is deepened by the realization of the fact that in addition to our old enemies in the form of castes and creeds we are going to have many political parties with diverse and opposing political creeds. Will Indian place the country above their creed or will they place creed above country? I do not know. But this much is certain that if the parties place creed above country, our independence will be put in jeopardy a second time and probably be lost forever' (Ambedkar, 1949). Ambedkar said, 'The castes are anti-national. In the first place because they bring about separation in social life. They are anti-national also because they generate jealousy and antipathy between caste and caste' (Ambedkar; 1949).

Caste in India which existed with tenacity for many years could not have been abolished by mere legislation. So, the framers of the Constitution sought to ignore in public life; make it socially iniquitous, outrageous, stigmatic, and seemingly discriminatory aspects illegal; and allow it to have a natural, albeit slow, death. The decision to abolish caste enumeration in the census as a national policy was an important step in that direction. There has been no caste census since 1951 but a limited one. A list of backward classes was prepared by the Ministry of Education with the assistance of State Governments. 'The Census of 1951 was not entirely casteless and caste was recorded with certain restrictions in the slips and in the National Registers kept in the villages. Special instructions were issued regarding the enumeration of backward classes specified by State Government. The Census department has posted a special officer with backward class commission and the data about backward classes was officially communicated to the commission.

According to this compilation, the total of OBC population represented 19.9% of the total' (Gopaldaswami, 1951: vii).

The constitution of India never mentions backward castes; it always maintained backward class. The only time the constitution uses caste is to recognize scheduled caste. If there is a mention of caste in the constitution it is mentioned for non-discrimination on the ground of caste. The pious objectives with which the founding fathers decided and embarked upon the framing of the Constitution – Secularism was one of the guiding principles. Secularism entails not just religious but also casteless egalitarian society. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru said, 'After all the whole purpose of the Constitution as proclaimed in the Directive principles is to move towards what I may say a casteless and classless society'. The Hindu society may be a caste society but the Indian constitution is not a caste constitution. In fact it forbids governance on the basis of caste, religion place of birth and language.

The present debate and political maneuvering on caste based census is an effort to stretch the already overstretched quota limit. The most vociferous proponents of caste based census are the backward caste leaders of India. Strangely there is no curiosity on the part of the upper caste people to know their numbers during the census of 2011. This was in opposition to their earlier position when in 1941 the upper castes paid to the Census Commissioner to count their heads. The 1941 Census Report says, 'Persons interested in the Maithili form of Bihari or in the numbers of Maithila Brahmins were told that they could have these figures extracted provided they deposited in advance the estimated cost. This they did' (Census of India, 1941).

The Indian constitution allow census of SCs and STs only to provide them political representation under Article 330, which talks about the reservation of seats for SCs and STs in the House of People as per the proportion of their numbers in State and Union Territory of India. Article 332 (1) makes similar provisions in the Legislative Assemblies. The emergence of Other Backward Classes (OBC) after the implementation of Mandal Commission Report produced strong votaries of caste politics. A nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court allowed OBC reservations in services and education in 1993 along with the directive of removing the creamy layer and constitution of a commission to look into the OBC population; about its inclusion, status and exclusion for the quota benefit. Since then the quota question is hunting each sphere of public life.

However, the inclusion of castes in the list of OBC has now become a matter of politics causing strain in the society. The First Backward Classes Commission (Kaka Kalelkar Commission) anointed 2399 (Kalelkar, 1956) castes as backward castes. The Second Backward Classes Commission (Mandal Commission) enlisted 3743 (Mandal, 1970) castes as backward castes. The National Commission for Backward Classes listed more than 6000 (National Commission for Backward

Classes, 2011) castes as backward castes. The Chairman of First Backward Class Commission, Kaka Kalelkar, pleaded that the reservations and other remedies recommended on the basis of caste would not be in the interest of society and country (Kalelkar; 1955, 122). In the Memorandum of Action on the report of First Backward Class Commission, at the time of tabling it before the Parliament, it was pointed out that the caste system is the greatest hindrance in the way of our progress to egalitarian society and that in such a situation recognition of certain specified castes as backward may serve to maintain and perpetuate the existing distinctions on the basis of caste' (Pant, 1952). Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru in his letter to the Chief Ministers dated 27 June 1961 wrote, 'It is true that we are tied up with certain rules and conventions about helping the scheduled castes and tribes. They deserve help but, even so I dislike any kind of reservation, more particularly in Services. I react strongly against anything which leads to inefficiency and second-rate standards. I want my country to be a first class country in everything. The moment we encourage the second-rate, we are lost. But if we go in for reservations on communal and caste basis, we swamp the bright and able people and remain second-rate or third-rate. This way lies not only folly, but disaster' (Parthasarathi, 1968:456-457).

Criticizing the Mandal Commission Report former Prime Minister and then leader of Opposition Rajiv Gandhi in his speech in the Parliament said, 'The Constitution very clearly differentiated between Scheduled Castes and backward classes. Why did our Constitution makers make this distinction? They had something in their minds. Why have we lost that distinction today? Sir, do we still have that goal of a castiest society. If you believe in a casteless society, every major step you take, must be such that you move towards casteless society and you must avoid taking any step which takes you towards a caste-ridden society' (Gandhi, 1990: 481-532). But despite the opposition and conviction of founding fathers, the policies of independent India have been guided and dominated by caste considerations. Independent India was afflicted with caste considerations against the vision and direction of the founding fathers. This study has done the painful academic soul searching on the material evidences, available in the public domain, on how each government at the province level as well as at the federal level consistently harping on the issue of caste mobilization and spreading limited benefit in the name of reservation. Independent India has witnessed as many as 38 provincial commissions and two national commissions to map backward castes, backwardness of the castes and then recommend benefit in jobs and in admission in educational institutions.

All data related to various caste commissions have been collated at Table No-5. This is the first of its kind analysis where all the state commissions' reports, recommendations and outcome have been tabulated and discussed briefly. In the hindsight the analysis of Table No-5 confirm the hypothesis of this study that all the commissions were political ploy of the contending leaders of the day to corner

political benefit and the recommendations of the commissions, except a few were, not intended for the real benefit of the so called backward castes. Analysis of the data on provincial and federal backward castes commissions produces peculiar and stunning outcome. As indicated in Table No-5, out of the 38 provincial backward commissions and two federal commissions, only five reports were accepted in entirety. One provincial report (U.N. Sinha Commission Report, 1994, Bihar) and one federal report (Kaka Kalelkar Commission Report, 1956) were not accepted by the government of the day. One provincial commission (R.C. Mankad Commission Report, 1987, Gujarat) never submitted its report to the government. Out of the 38 provincial backward caste commissions, only five remained unchallenged at the court of law. The recommendations of 18 provincial commissions' reports and one federal commission report (Mandal Commission Report) were challenged at the court. 25 provincial commissions' reports and one federal commission report were either stayed or modified by either the provincial courts or the federal court.

Considering the government's posture on reservation policies, which instituted forty provincial and federal commissions; the reaction of the public, which challenged twenty six provincial and federal reports; and the viewpoint of the court of law, which either stayed or modified twenty-six reports of provincial and federal commissions, the reservation system of India has been proved a poor form of affirmative action. All these backward castes commissions, as envisioned and established by the leaders of post-independent India, met limited success to ameliorate the condition of the backward classes. This study recommends a serious relook into the entire policy of reservation in India.

As per a note submitted by the British bureaucracy to the Queen, the British started the census with the intention of civilizing the subjects. Later it must have occurred to the colonial rulers that collection of data, especially related to religion, caste and language would help in serving the interests of the Raj. Professor M. N. Srinivas and Professor G.S. Ghurye raised two very important questions: 1) Why did the British official record the caste of individuals? 2) Was it curiosity or was it part of the design of the British, as some nationalists believed, to keep alive the numerous divisions already present in Indian society? (Cohn, 1987: 241) Census in India, after her independence, is being carried out according to the Census Act of 1948. As per the act, 'The central government may by, notification in the Official Gazette, declare its intension of taking a census in the whole or any part of the territory to which this Act extends, whenever it may consider it necessary or desirable so to do and thereupon the census shall be taken' (Government of India, 1994).

Table 5. Details of all Provincial Other Backward Classes Commissions

Details of Provincial Other Backward Classes Commissions					
S. No.	State	Year	Committee/commissions	Recommendations	Status
1.	Andhra Pradesh	1968	Manohar Prasad Commission	30% reservation in Govt. Service among four categories of OBCs i) Aboriginal tribes, Vimukta Jatis, Nomadic and Semi nomadic tribes (7%), ii) Vocational groups (13%), iii) Harijan Converts (1%)and other classes (9%). Govt. reduced it to 25%.	Challenged
		1975	Veerapa Committee	25% reservation	Challenged
		1970	K.M. Anantharaman	Basing on the recommendations of Anantharaman Commission, dated 23-9-1970 vide G.O.Ms.No.1793 Education Department have issued orders communicating the list of Social and Educationally Backward Classes, concessions with regard to reservations in Educational Institutions, Services etc.	State's G.O. based on the report of the Anantharaman Commission was upheld by the Supreme Court in Balram case.
		1982	Murlidhar Rao Commission	44% reservation	The Modified list of OBCs based on the report of Murlidhara Rao Commission was upheld by the A.P. High Court but the increased quantum of reservation from 25% to 44% was struck down (judgment of 5.9.1986)
2.	Bihar	1951	Govt. of Bihar	A List of 109 castes prepared to give them benefit of scholarships.	Accepted
		1971	Mungeri Lal Commission	24% seats in medical and other professional institutions, 26% in Govt. and Semi-Govt. jobs.	Not challenged
		1978	Karpoori Thakur Commission	20% reservation in Govt. service.	Challenged
		1994	U.N. Sinha Commission	Not accepted.	
3.	Gujarat	1972	A.R. Bakshi Commission	82 castes identified 10% reservation in medical/engineering and other professional institutions/Trg. Cum production centres. 10% reservation in Class III and IV posts and 5% in Class I and II posts.	Challenged
		1981	C.V. Rane Commission	28% reservation in posts and seats	Challenged
		1987	R.C. Mankad Commission	Report not submitted	
4.	Haryana	1991	Gurnam Singh Commission	27% reservation in Govt. service	Not challenged
5.	Himachal Pradesh	1951	Govt. of H.P.	Followed the list of OBC declared by erstwhile stat Punjab	Accepted
		1970	Govt. of H.P.	Economic Criteria	Accepted
		1993	Govt. of H.P.	20% for OBCs	Challenged
6.	Jammu and Kashmir	1967	P.B. Gajendragadkar Commission	Recommended for high powered Committee to identify castes and communities	Not challenged
		1969	J.N. Wazir Committee	42% reservation for OBCs	Challenged
		1976	A.S. Anand Committee	42% of Govt. jobs and seats in technical institutions and other institutions.	Challenged
7.	Karnataka	1918	Sir L.C. Miller Commission	Special facilities to backward communities with regard to education and recruitment in State	Challenged

## **Census 2011: Threats, Challenges and Opportunities**

The sagely counsel on caste by the founding fathers has been facing political onslaught immediately after independence. Nearly all spheres of public life in India are dominated by caste and quota considerations. Census was more or less protected from caste consideration till 2001 when then Home Minister L.K. Advani started the clamor for caste enumeration with a proposal in the context of the 'millennium census'. Mr. L.K. Advani's party plea that implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations had made caste enumeration imperative was hogwash. J.K. Bantia, then Registrar General of Census admitted that he had difficulty in dissuading Advani from undertaking a caste census (Radhakrishnan, 2010:7). But the restraint did not last long.

During the month of September 2010, the Union Cabinet of India has taken a path-breaking decision that in the decennial census of 2011, 'Caste of all persons as returned by them would be canvassed'. The decision of the Union Cabinet, which was due for some time, has shaken India. The Union Cabinet also clarified that 'The caste enumeration would be conducted as a separate exercise from the month of June 2011 and completed in a phased manner by September 2011 after the Population Enumeration phase (to be conducted in February-March 2011) of the census 2011 is over' (Press Information Bureau, 2010). Caste-wise enumeration had been given up as a matter of policy after independence. The last census when caste-wise data was collected, tabulated and published in detail was the 1931 census. The Government of India had taken this decision in response to the demands for enumerating castes other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Census 2011 raised inside Parliament as well as by various groups outside.

Fierce debates dominated India for long before the fateful decision of counting caste arrived. The demand of enumeration of caste was mostly influenced by the bait that distribution of national resources could be done on the basis of caste. It is argued that caste is a vital aspect of Indians, and needs the most thorough elaboration. The votaries argued, a caste census will settle the dispute 'about the size and backwardness of various communities' (Yadav, 2010:13). One lawmaker of India argues, 'it is said that the caste census was discontinued because it was divisive. It is a funny argument. India was divided because of religion, not because of caste, but the religion continued' Yadav, 2010:9). However, cynics pointed out to the inherent danger attached to the caste. 'The call to enumerate caste in the census is nothing but a raw assertion of power bearing the garb of social justice, and ideological projection of Indian society masquerading under the color of social sciences, and a politics of bad faith being projected as a concern for the poor' (Mehta, 2010:13). The politicians are the usual suspect. 'Politicians, who are interested in the caste census data, are not as interested in advancing the living

standards and the status of the traditionally disadvantaged as they are in organizing them into vote-banks' (Subramanian, 2010: 12).

Decennial census of India is considered as the mother of all surveys and the only reliable macro and micro level data on India. Census data shed light on the state of the nation every ten years. It also cautions the government about the areas which needed urgent governmental attention. Over the period of time the census has become a gigantic exercise tracking data on demography, economic activity, literacy & education, housing & household amenities, urbanization, fertility and mortality, language, religion, migration, disability and many other socio-cultural indicators. Curiously census is the maiden source of primary data about the nook and corner of the country. Business decision, formulation of policies for Central & State Governments, delimitation/reservation of constituencies for Parliamentary/Assembly/Panchayats and other local bodies and reviewing the country's progress in the past decade, monitoring the on-going schemes of the Government and plan for the future are made on the basis of census data. The census is the moment of reckoning of the balanced development for the national and is essentially an apolitical act.

### **Dangerous Gambit: Counting Together for Census and NPR**

The census 2011 is entrusted with the task of collection of data for the preparation of NPR. The NPR would be a register of usual residents of the country. The NPR will be a comprehensive identity database that would help in better targeting of the benefits and services under the Government schemes/programmes improve planning and help strengthen security of the country. All usual residents will be eligible to be included irrespective of their nationality. Each and every household is given an acknowledgement slip at the time of enumeration. The data will then be entered into computers and once this database has been created, biometrics such as photograph, 10 fingerprints and probably Iris information will be added for all persons aged 15 years and above. This will be done by arranging camps at every village and at the ward level in every town. In the next step, data will be printed out and displayed at prominent places within the village and ward for the public to see. Objections will be sought and registered at this stage. The lists thus authenticated will then be sent to the Unique Identity Authority of India (UIDAI) for de-duplication and issue of Unique Identification Numbers. All duplicates will be eliminated at this stage based on comparison of biometrics. Unique ID numbers will also be generated for every person. For those below the age of 15 years (for whom biometrics is not available), the UID Number will be linked to the parent or guardian (Census 2011 and NPR, 2011).

Normally collection of data under the decennial census comprises two phases of work. In the first phase, the census organization makes a list of census houses

and the households (Apart from listing the house, the first phase includes data on the condition and facilities of houses.). The second phase of census is known as population enumeration phase (This phase is very significant as it enlist the total number of person in each house, gender, age, religion, SC or ST, education, occupation, marital status, language and migration to mention a few). The census 2011 added a new hitherto unknown schedule called NPR schedule. The NPR is scheduled along with the house listing schedule. This task is almost as voluminous as the main phase (second phase) of the regular census (However, the author's interaction with the enumerators during month of May 2010 was a quite affair where the enumerator asked only a couple of questions to fill the 14 column NPR questionnaire. Either the enumerators assumed many column or they are inadequately trained).

The process is fraught with technical as well as security risk. The census enumerators are expert in head count and also to some extent knowledgeable in their enquiry to enlist the social as well as economic status of the respondents. But they cannot verify anything falsely claimed by the respondent. The verification of nationality status is a police job and not that of the enumerators. The census of the country is a cumbersome process and very useful for the simple reason that all the policies, programmes and schemes of the government are framed on the basis of the conclusions drawn from the Census.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs raised several valid points regarding the clubbing of NPR with the Census. The report said, 'The Census information is collected under the Census Act, 1948 which guarantees complete confidentiality of the individual and household data collected. This confidentiality clause is known to be a key-stone that ensures accuracy and sanctity of the Census Data; and the NPR information is to be collected under the Citizenship Act, 1955 read with the Citizenship (Registration and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003 and the data collected are not confidential and are meant to be used for identifying individuals and household. These make the purpose, objectives and the process of the two exercises different and, hence, it is important to keep the two exercises separate in order to maintain sanctity of both' (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2010:92). Not only this, 'With regard to the confidentiality of the Census Data, the Committee apprehends that it would be difficult to hold back information contained in the Census Schedule in view of the RTI Act, 2005. It is quite likely that even if exemption clause is invoked under RTI Act, 2005, the CIC, the Supreme Court or the High Courts may pass orders for disclosure of information' (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2010:92). Till date the census of India is the most credible source of information on India since 1872. The census officials are enumerator and not verifying authority. Forcing them to verify the veracity of the claimants on caste and nationality is fraught with danger.

## Conclusion

Caste is essentially fragmentary in nature and therefore works as a deterrent in achieving the goal of social change. During colonial rule, the British patronized some castes, pitting one against the other in order to suppress dissenting voices. The multitude of caste in Indian society is a major stumbling block against any unified transformatory struggle of the poor. That is why the founding fathers endeavoured for a casteless society to achieve the goal of social equality. The clamour for caste for the first time in independent India is nothing but a failure of transformatory politics and paucity of vision. Knowing well the fact that the data on caste would be used for affirmative action, there is the lurking danger that people may deliberately misrepresent about their caste. There is every possibility that the outcome of a caste based census may be societal Balkanization.

India during the 340-290 BCE under the influence of Kautilya, the ancient law giver, laid down stringent provisions for becoming citizens of the Mauryan Empire. Passport was introduced to regulate the foreigners. Enlisting people living inside India in 2011 irrespective of their nationality along with the citizens of India under the NPR is a strange and dangerous deviation of age old policy of India.

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