Caste-based Census in India: An urgent need for inclusive Development

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Abstract

Understanding the people of a region or a nation is very important to understanding the social composition of its population. For this purpose, every country enumerates its people frequently in a systematic manner. This will help provide essential information on their spatial distribution, age and sex structure, and other critical social and economic characteristics. In Indian society, caste is a fundamental social component and has always formed the basis for public policy. Structurally, the society is built on Caste, which has functional value. Functionally, it is a complex and culturally unique social system that combines some aspects of descent based on hereditary occupation and strictly follows endogamy. Socially, it ascribes the social class, social identity, and hierarchy which exclude each other and decides power and authority in the society. Based on Caste, Indian culture has been divided into thousands of strict and closed stratification groups. Unless the pattern of Caste and hierarchy is understood, it is not easy to frame a comprehensive social policy. Since British rule, Caste has been the primary criterion for understanding the basic structure of India. After Independence, the public policy related to development focused on Caste, a conflicting point of social development. Reservation in educational institutes and government jobs are provided based on caste identities. Those who support caste-based reservations support caste enumeration in the Census, and those who oppose caste quotas are opposed to caste censuses. But sociologically, the detailed population data is essential to designing welfare and development programs, and understanding the Caste is crucial for creating an inclusive social policy.

Index Terms: Caste, OBC Population, Census, public policy, Social Inclusion

I.   INTRODUCTION:

In Indian society, caste is a fundamental social component and has always formed the basis for public policy. Structurally, the community is built on caste, which has functional value. Functionally, it is a complex and culturally unique social system that combines some aspects of descent based on hereditary occupation and strictly follows endogamy. Socially, it ascribes the social class, social identity, and hierarchy which exclude each other and decides power and authority in the society. Based on caste, the Indian society has divided into thousands of strict and closed stratification groups, affecting the world's vast population.

Since British rule, the caste has been the primary criterion for understanding the basic structure of India. After Independence, the public policy related to development focused on caste, which is a conflicting point of social development. The castes' notion of superiority and inferiority has been the source of discrimination and exclusion in India for generations. The Constitution of India (1950) recognized caste and caste-based discrimination as a severe issue and provided several measures for equality among the people. To understand the social composition of India, a frequent and systematic enumeration of the population based on socio-economic data is crucial. However, India decided to avoid the caste count in the Census for over 90 years. Intellectuals, academia from social science disciplines, and policymakers have been stressing the need for comprehensive caste data for several decades. Interestingly, political parties across the country are also urging for a Caste-based census to understand the country's people. Almost all the country's political parties say they are for caste enumeration, but the issue is not crossing legal hurdles.

Recently, the Bihar government announced they would undertake a socio-economic survey of all castes and communities. Such a survey was conducted for the first time by a newly formed Telangana State in 2014, immediately after the State was created. (Ghanta, Reddy, 2014) On 19 August 2014, the Telangana Government conducted a one-day survey of its entire population. Socio-economic data of nearly four crore population of Telangana was gathered in a one-day intensive household survey, claimed to be the first exercise of its kind anywhere in the country. The Government engaged four lakh employees to collect the details in the door-to-door survey. However, the data is not published because of the legal interventions. The Bihar government has already initiated a similar exercise in their way. There are demands from states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Odisha, and Tamil Nādu to have a countrywide caste-based census.

II.   WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CASTE CENSUS?

Over a decade, a consensus emerged among the political parties, demographers, planners, and other policymakers on the caste census. They strongly feel that the socio-economic data would only benefit the country in India. According to them, for social policy, the State should have an authenticated enumeration of its people is essential for this the count of every category of citizens is the only option. For any social policy, particularly in India, social equality cannot be a success without the data, and a caste census would help fix that.

The issue became necessary because of the changing political climate, where Other Backward Classes gained importance across the country. The Mandal Commission Report, which the Government implemented in August 1990, estimated the OBC population at 52 percent, while others pinned the OBC population from 36 to 65 percent. Yogendra Yadav, an Indian Social Scientist, puts it: The Census would 'besides resolving the needless mystery about the size of the OBC population, census enumeration would yield a wealth of demographic information (sex ratio, mortality rate, life expectancy), educational data (male and female literacy, ratio of school-going population, number of graduates) and policy-relevant information about economic conditions (house-type, assets, occupation) of the OBCs.' Another important argument is that the Caste-based census count could bring a measure of objectivity to the debate on reservations, a kind of favorable discrimination policy in the country.

III.   THE HISTORY OF THE CASTE CENSUS

In India, the first head count based on caste was held in 1872 by the colonial rulers of that time to know better the subjects it ruled over. One of the primary criteria under which data was collected was caste, and this practice continued till 1931. The count of Other Backward Classes was shown to be 52 percent.

Caste-based data, however, was gathered but not released in 1941 due to the world war. But after India got its Independence, it limited this activity. Since 1951, only Dalits and Adivasis have collected their caste information, meaning that more than three-fourths of Indians have not had their caste information gathered. In response to calls for a caste census, the then-Congress-led United Progressive Alliance decided to conduct the nation's first independent caste census in conjunction with the socio-economic Census to measure levels of deprivation in 2010. Although the data was not revealed, OBC politicians like Lalu Prasad, Mulayam Singh Yadav, and Nitish Kumar endorsed the plan.

Caste census has recently come up frequently; it is filed before every Census. This problem is typically brought up by OBCs and other impoverished or deprived groups. According to rumors, G Mallesh Yadav of Hyderabad requested a caste census in a court filing, and the Supreme Court responded by sending notices on 26 February 2021. A caste-based census has recently been advocated by Ramdas Athawale, the Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, Nitish Kumar, and Jitan Ram Manjhi, the past chief ministers of Bihar. Similar demands were voiced by the BJP earlier this year when Pankaja Munde, the party's national secretary brought them up. Other noteworthy events include the Maharashtra Assembly's adoption on 8 January of a resolution pleading with the Centre to conduct a caste-based census in 2021. The National Commission for Backward Classes requested that data be gathered on the OBC population "as part of the Census of India 2021 operation" on 1 April. Nityanand Rai, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, rejected the possibility of a caste census in response to a question in the Lok Sabha. "The Government of India has chosen not to enumerate caste-wise population other than SCs and STs in Census," he stated in the House.

Veerappa Moily, the former law minister of UPA-II (in 2010), requested in a letter to the then-Prime Minister that caste information be gathered for the 2011 Census. Then Home Minister P Chidambaram stated on 1 March 2011, in the Lok Sabha during a brief discussion, "There is a federal list of OBCs and a State-specific list of OBCs. Some states do not maintain a list of OBCs, while others have and include a subset referred to as Most Backward Classes. Orphans and needy children are two examples of specific open-ended categories in the lists that the Registrar General has highlighted. Both the Scheduled Castes list and the list of OBCs contain the names of several castes. The treatment of Scheduled Castes who converted to Islam or Christianity varies from State to State. Other complex issues include the caste classification of children of intercaste marriages and the status of migrants moving across states. The then-Prime Minister assured the House that the Cabinet would make a decision soon despite the commotion around the matter. Additionally, a group of ministers was formed under the direction of the late Pranab Mukherjee, the country's finance minister. The Government decided to conduct a Comprehensive Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) on their advice.The Ministry of Rural Development handled the SECC in rural areas, and the Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation held it in urban areas. Later, in 2016, these Ministries finalized and released the SECC data. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment received the raw caste data. They forwarded it to an Expert Group established by former NITI Aayog Vice-Chairperson Arvind Panagaria to analyze and categorize it. It is unknown, however, whether the Expert Group has produced a report of this nature. Although there is not much information available about how the Government has used the SECC data, it can be inferred from the description provided to the Lok Sabha Speaker by the Parliamentary Committee on Rural Development on 31 August 2016, which stated that "The data has been examined, and 98.87 percent data on individuals' caste and religion is error-free.

Out of the 118,64,03,770 people that make up the SECC population, the Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India (ORGI) has observed the occurrence of inaccuracies in about 1,34,77,030 people. States have been urged to implement corrective actions. OBCs made up 52% of the population, per the Mandal Commission report. Political parties and caste-based organizations also offer estimates during elections, while data from the National Sample Survey suggests various figures.

Furthermore, without a caste census, it is impossible to accurately estimate how many OBCs and other underprivileged members of society there are. This makes it challenging to develop effective socio-economic policies and to improve governance so that it is more inclusive, humane, and development-oriented. Therefore, it was advisable to conduct a caste census in 2021 in the interest of good management and a public policy regime.

IV.   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 endless rest 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 essential information about the numbers, demographics (sex ratio, mortality, life expectancy), educational data (literacy, the percentage of the school-going population, number of graduates, and so on), and economic conditions (assets, working people and so on) of the OBC castes. The data will be available for each State, district, 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 affirmative action policies – 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 recognizes 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 to formulate any affirmative action policy. OBC enumeration should have begun in 2001, in the first Census after OBC reservations came into effect. Indeed, the Registrar General proposed it, and the Home Ministry shot it down by the National Democratic Alliance government.

Not only the OBC population, the SC and ST population are also not on the 'Caste'-'sub-Caste' wise, rather it is only based on the broad group, classification wise as Scheduled Caste and Scheduled tribe In the past years, but three different socially significant demands from a large section of people were also deferred by the judiciary in India citing the reason that there is no reliable and scientific data on the present social, economic, and educational status of people in the country. The reason is not related to 'justice' but the technical details. The courts questioned the validity and reliability of the population data depending on which Governments have made the policies.

In the case of Scheduled Castes (SC), the Government of Andhra Pradesh classification into A, B, C, and D categories. Responding to the demand of Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS), the Government of Andhra Pradesh notified the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes (Rationalization of Reservation) Ordinance on 9 December 1999, categorizing the SCs into four groups of castes to subdivide the 15 percent reservation available to them in Government jobs. Madigas, despite constituting the most significant chunk of the population in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, lag far behind the Malas in economic and social status. Malas benefited from the reservation and other government policies because they were comparatively well-off and more educated in the southern State. The Supreme Court quashed the Ordinance on 5 November 2004, as there is no precise sub-caste-wise data of SCs. Census record SC population data in the broad Caste Category as Scheduled Caste, not sub-caste. (Supreme Court of India 1994). As well as in the case of including Muslims in the Other Backward Castes (OBC) list, the 1931 Census was the baseline. Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly passed a bill providing four percentage reservations for Muslims in educational institutions and Government services on 5 October 2005. The State Assembly became the first in the country to give legislative backing to reservations for Muslims. The earlier attempt by the State Government to extend the reservation through an executive order became controversial, and the Andhra Pradesh High Court struck it down. (NCHRO-2006).

Similarly, in the case of Reservations to Other Backward Castes (OBC) in the Central Government's Higher Education Institutions and Jobs, the Government of India has entirely depended on the 1931 Census. The Government of India introduced a 27 percent quota for Other Backward Classes in IITs, IIMs, and other Central educational institutions by amending the Constitution (93rd Amendment) Act, 2005, which came into effect on 20 January 2006. The issue has attracted public attention after several petitions were filed in Supreme Court. On 29 March 2007, the Supreme Court issued an interim order staying the implementation the Act. Finally, the Constitution Bench Supreme Court upheld the constitutional amendment law on 10 April 2008 and cleared the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act.

In all three cases, the petitioners raised serious objections over the population data's validity, particularly in the Constitution (93rd Amendment) Act, 2005 for providing OBC Reservations in IITs and IIM; the Supreme Court of India raised serious objections for depending on the 1931 Census.In fact, for all practical purposes, the governments in India have been considering the 1931 Census as the base. All the welfare programs, budget allocations, and annual national and regional plans are based on the same data. Still, it became an issue, and nobody questioned the sanctity of 1the 931 censuses in the past 60 years. Debate in the media and the arguments in Supreme Court during hearings in the OBC Reservations Case strongly suggest the need for the caste-based Census in India. Caste-based Census is emerging as the only solution to confusion and questions about the sociological characteristics of the population to implement the public policy. Ten years later, the British Government did not conduct an extensive survey in the wake of World War II. However, in 1950, the then Home Minister Sardar Patel's Government of India decided that there would

be no caste-based census. Since then, no enumeration of backward classes has been done. Only figures of valid Constitutional castes — Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes — are provided in the Census.

V. OBC POPULATION: VARIATIONS

The arguments during the court hearings posed several questions to the State and the researchers, social scientists, and public intellectuals theorizing social justice, social exclusion, and inclusive policies. Though there are several limitations to the 1931 headcount, social science research considers the 1931 Census as a benchmark for the socio-cultural aspects of the Indian population. Hutton (1969), the Census Commissioner for the 1931 Census, stated that the tabulation of data on individual castes was limited. On a broad basis, the Census divided the castes into three groups, exterior castes, primitive castes, and other castes in general groups. Exterior castes were mostly today's Scheduled Castes, and primitive castes were tribal castes. The castes included identification of persons based on occupations like business or those performing religious duties for livelihood and functional castes like Rajputs. In all, 51 racial groups were identified based on 18 different characters. However, a section identified as the depressed class (Report on the Census of India, 1931) was also pointed out in the court that the 1931 Census, on which the Government based its 27 percent OBC reservation, was not caste-wise enumeration or tabulation. Government officials convey that the Government identified the castes based on the common castes on the Mandal Commission (1979) list and the state government lists.The number of castes in the OBC list is 2,293 compared to 3,700 in the Mandal Commission list. Unlike any other census in India, the 1931 census had a unique feature — identifying people based on their skin color and body configuration. The Census found that most Tamil Brahmans had better facial features than the lower castes, whereas a distinction was also made between those considered Aryans and non-Aryans. The Census had also enumerated most of the languages spoken in India, an exercise never repeated in independent India. The 1931 Census of 28 volumes was of large India, including present-day Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, with the country divided into three parts --- Himalaya, River plan, and Deccan India. At that time, the Population of unified India of 1.80 crore square kilometers was 35 crores. As per the 2001 Census, India's Population is over 140 crores. The absence of exact caste-wise figures led the Supreme Court to question the Government's decision to reserve 27 percent of the seats for the OBCs in centrally aided higher educational institutions. The Supreme Court, during the hearing, raised a 'genuine' question about the validity of the 1931 Census for implementing 27 percent OBC reservation in 2008. Moreover, there is much confusion within the governing bodies over the present status of the OBCs.

Mandal Commission's figure was based on a back-of-the-envelope calculation by the remainder method and has not been backed by any social scientific evidence. Since then, the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC), a statutory body set up on the orders of the Supreme Court, takes the decision about which caste or community and in which State (or sometimes region within a state) should be given the legal status of an OBC. In the absence of any specific data on the exact population of various non-SC/ST/minorities categories, agencies have either extrapolated the 1931 census data (as the Mandal Commission did) to make out rough estimates of the exact numbers of OBCs and the upper castes or relied upon information gathered by extra-governmental bodies (such as research organizations) to arrive at the precise population of various caste groups.

On the other hand, the National Family and Health Survey projects the Population of OBCs as 33.5 within Hindu families (NFHS-2 India: Main Report 1998). The Mandal Commission estimated that 54 percent of the total population (excluding SCs and STs) belonging to 3,743 different castes and communities were 'backward ('Bhattacharya, Amit. 2006). The figures for the caste-wise population are not available beyond 1931. So the Mandal Commission used 1931 Census data to calculate the number of OBCs. The Commission also did a rigorous exercise to validate the data by following calculations.

1. The Population of Hindu OBCs was derived by subtracting the Population of SC and ST and the forward Hindu castes and communities from the total population of Hindus, approximately 52 percent (Ramaiah. A, 1989). Assuming that roughly the proportion of OBCs amongst non-Hindus was of the same order as amongst the Hindus, the Population of non-Hindu OBCs was also considered as 52 percent.

2. Assuming that a child from an advanced class family and that of a backward class family had the same intelligence at the time of their birth, it is evident that owing to vast differences in social, cultural, and environmental factors, the former will beat the latter by lengths in any competitive field. Even if a backward class child's intelligence quotient was much higher than the advanced class child, chances are that the former will lag far behind the latter in any competition where selection is made based on 'merit.'

3. In fact, what we call 'merit' in an elitist society is an amalgam of native endowments and environmental privileges. A child from an advanced class family and that of a backward class family are not 'equals' in any fair sense of the term, and it will be unfair to judge them by the same yardstick. The conscience of a civilized society and the dictates of social justice demand that 'merit' and 'equality' are not turned into a fetish, and the element of privilege is duly recognized and discounted when 'unequal' is made to run the same race.

4. To place the amalgams of open caste conflicts in proper historical context, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences Bombay study observes. "The British rulers produced many structural disturbances in the Hindu caste structure, which were contradictory in nature and impact.

Thus, the various impacts of the British rule on the Hindu caste system, viz., near monopolization of jobs, education, and professions by the literate castes, the Western concepts of equality and justice undermining the Hindu hierarchical dispensation, the phenomenon of Sanskritization, genteel reform movement from above and militant reform movements from below, the emergence of the caste associations with a new role set the stage for the caste conflicts in modern India. Two more ingredients that were very weak in the British period, viz., the politicization of the masses and universal adult franchise, became powerful moving forces after the Independence. Yogendra Yadav of the Centre for the Study of Developing Studies, Delhi, who is in favor of reservations for OBCs, agrees that there is no empirical basis for the Mandal figure: "It is a mythical construct based on reducing the number of SC/ST, Muslims and others and then arriving at a number." He says the most robust estimate is anywhere between 40 to 44 percent. (Yadav, Yogendra 2006)

The Mandal Commission estimations are considered relatively scientific because the Commission consulted a wide range of experts from different social science disciplines before reaching its conclusion. In particular, it appointed an expert committee headed by the outstanding sociologist M N. Srinivas, with 14 other social scientists as its members, to prepare schedules and questionnaires to be sent out to all the states and 30 Central Government departments. It ordered systematic surveys of all residents in randomly selected samples (two villages and one urban block) in every *country district*. The expert's committee derived 11 indicators of social, and education, economic backwardness and identified 743 communities as "backward" and worthy of support through affirmative action. Contrary to a widespread impression, caste was just one of many criteria. Others involved dependence on manual labor, low educational status (percentage of matriculates at least 25 percent below the state average), high dropout rates, young age of marriage, etc. Social indicators were given three points each; educated hands two points; and economic indicators one point each. Quotas were only one of the Commission's dozen recommendations, including land reform and educational and economic upliftment programs.

Sociologically the issue of validity may not stand because the entire debate about the OBC population size is irrelevant to the current reservation scheme. The figure of 27 percent has nothing to do with their population estimate. This figure is dictated by the Supreme Court judgment that prohibited more than 50 percent of reservations. (AIR 1993 SC 477). Since the SC and ST reservations already accounted for 22.5 percent, the maximum permissible for any other group was 27 percent. If everyone agrees, which they do, that the OBCs are more than 27 percent of the population, the dispute about their share of the population has no relevance to their reservation quota.

With the above argument, all the upper castes (all those from any religion who do not currently qualify for SC, ST, or OBC quota) are about 33 percent of the population. Even after the OBC reservation is introduced, at least 50 percent of the seats in higher education will still be open to them. So, strictly in the narrow caste-share calculations, it is unclear how the upper castes are being deprived of 'their' due.

V.   CASTE, JUDICIARY, AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Whenever the issue of caste-based reservations comes to judicial scrutiny, the lawyers take the role of social scientists and pose questions about the rationale of caste-based reservations. However, they do not discuss the fundamental causes of discrimination, exploitation, and exclusion while arguing. Of course, some try hard to prove that economic criterion is more appropriate; they should try to understand the essential nature of Indian society and the genesis of social exclusion in the country before raising such arguments.

The arguments over the issue in Supreme Court suggest a new and complete caste-based enumeration of the Indian population. The ideas such as inclusive growth and corporate social equity are emerging as essential principles internationally. Now the demand for reservations in the private and corporate sector on the lines of 'positive discrimination' adopted in the United States is gaining momentum across the country, and social inclusion is emerging as a fundamental right. In this context, the enumeration of 'Caste-based Census' appears as the only solution for emerging socio-economic demands.

Moreover, the 'judicial activism' is time and again questioning the validity of the reservations by raising the issue of lack of data. Some judges' passing comments and of-the-record statements lead to unnecessary social unrest over sensitive societal issues. For instance, the Supreme Court Bench comprising Justices Arijit Pasayat and Lokeshwar Singh Panta indirectly said as much when it stayed the law providing 27 percent reservation for OBCs in higher educational institutions such as the IITs and IIMs for 2007-08. It rejected outright the Government's argument that in the absence of caste data after 1931, the only alternative was to project the population proportion of socially and educationally backward classes and OBCs from the next best source — the Census of 1931. The judges said, "What may have been relevant in the 1931 census may have some relevance, but it cannot be the determinative factor" Such comments may be technically correct but scientifically may not reflect justice.

In another instance, Justice Ratnavel Pandian in the Indra Sawhney case (1996) noted that no caste-wise statistics had been collected after the 1931 census. He, however, upheld the constitutional validity of the 27 percent reservation for OBCs in public services in 1992 on the ground that identification of classes by the Mandal Commission was based on realities prevailing in 1980 and not 1931. In the absence of absolute data on backward classes and other castes, the Government cannot take up any welfare or development activity to meet the constitutionally envisaged social justice. To avoid such comments and conclusions, a caste-wise census could be the way to streamline the reservation.

In 2012 the Government of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh had asked the State BC Commission to revise the list of communities enjoying reservation. The revision was to identify and list groups that had overcome social and economic backwardness. The order kicked up a controversy when it was suggested that the communities of Padmashali, Goud, Munnurukapu, and Mudiraj, influential in the Telangana region, should be deleted from the OBC list. Members of these communities embarked on the path of agitation, and finally, the State OBC Commission issued a clarification stating that no such move was planned. The Backward Classes Commission is wary of touching these issues without current, accurate, and reliable data on their socio-economic-educational profiles. With more castes seeking inclusion and the courts disallowing reservations beyond 50 percent, revising the list of OBCs based on a census becomes imperative.

In some cases, the same caste was known by different names in different parts of the State. Conversely, the same word denoted different castes in other places. Besides, the terms of two entirely different castes could have the same suffix leading to investigators wrongly classifying the caste. For instance, Nayee Brahmins (barbers) and Viswa Brahmins (goldsmiths and blacksmiths) were mistaken for sub-castes of Brahmins. Koppula Velama, a backward community only found in the Vizianagaram district, was wrongly construed as a sub-caste of the Velamas, a forward assembly. Keeping this ambiguity in view, the Andhra Pradesh Backward Classes Commission approached the State Government to fund a caste-wise survey. In fact, under Section 11 of the AP Backward Classes Act, the Commission is expected to revise the list of Backward Classes once every ten years, which is not done so.

One should remember that unless continuous data collection and revision of the groupings are done, the reservation formulations may not achieve their desired objectives. Hence, keeping the caste situation static is not appropriate, and there is a need to have time-series data on the nature of mobility that is taking place across castes, both in employment and in business, particularly from non-corporate to corporate business.

An argument advanced against the collection of caste data in the Census is that it is against the provisions of the Constitution. Let us consider the two relevant Articles in this regard. Article 15 refers to the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, with clause (2) providing that no citizen "shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition." Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State, with clause (2) laying down that no citizen "shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office under the state." Thus, the Constitution prohibits discrimination based only on caste or other grounds specified and not any collection of caste data.

VI. CONCLUSION

Census plays a vital role in planning and development. Every country in the world periodically collects the data of its people systematically. The Census is not just headcount; it includes the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the people of the land, which serves as the basis for the Government's implementation of welfare and development programs. India stopped collecting caste-wise data, a fundamental requirement for social policy. Recently, political parties favorably responded to the demand, but the judiciary is raising its doubts and objections over the caste-based Census. One should remember that unless continuous data collection and revision of the groupings are done, the reservation formulations may not achieve their desired objectives.

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