



Primer

Caste Census in Bharat Policy, Politics & Social Justice

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Primer:

Caste Census in Bharat: Policy, Politics & Social Justice

1. Counting Everyone, Including the Excluded

Bharat's renewed push for caste based enumeration or census is not just a domestic administrative reform but a landmark moment in the global conversation around equality, representation and justice. After nearly a century since last comprehensive caste enumeration

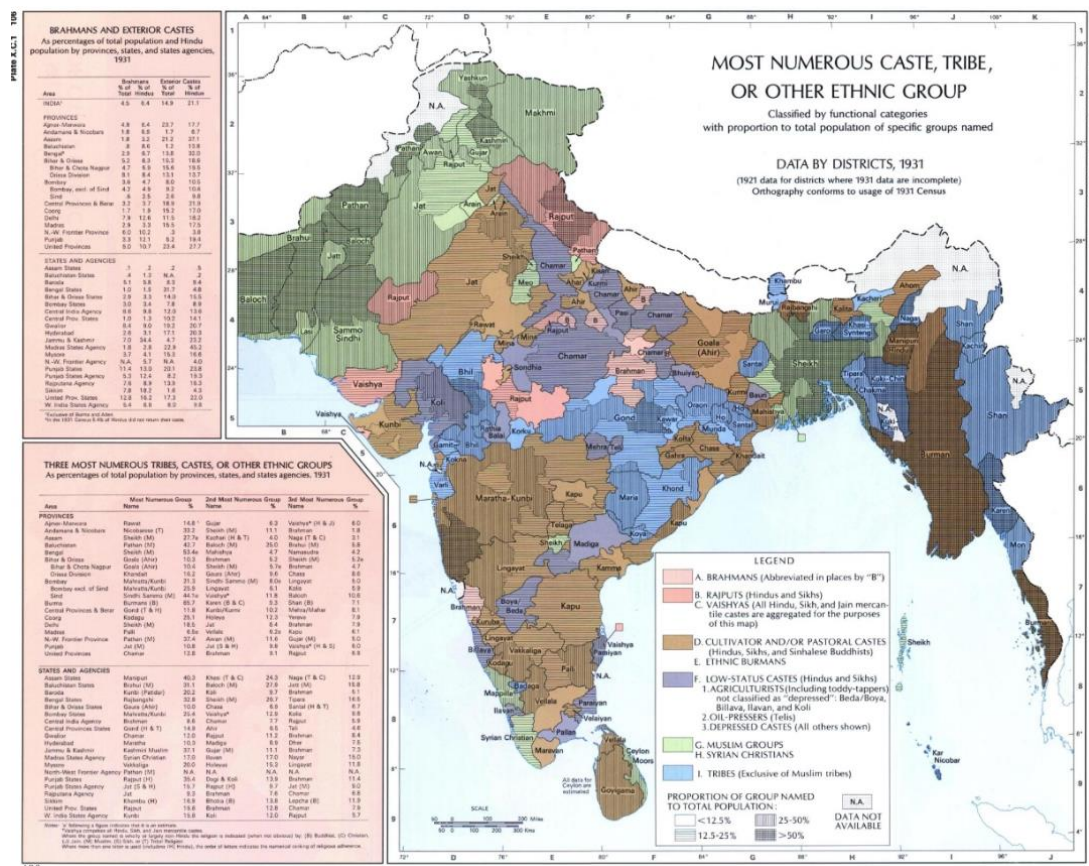


Figure 1 Most number caste according to 1931 Census

in 1931, the upcoming 2027 census promises to confront deep inequalities embedded in Bharat's social structure.

For international observers, understanding this move is essential to grasp realities of Bharat's democracy and development claims. It's like counting every single Sami person living in Europe stretching from Russia, Finland to Sweden.

Caste Census, Why & How?

A caste census aims to record caste identities of individuals in 1.4 billion plus Indian population. While Indian census routinely collects data on Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), it has consistently ignored broader caste ecosystem, particularly Other

Backward Classes (OBCs), whose share in government benefits and representation remains contested and unclear.

The lack of granular data has allowed dominant castes within these categories to corner benefits while hundreds of marginalized sub-castes remain invisible in policymaking.

The 2025 notification by Government of Bharat to initiate caste enumeration in 2027 marks a major policy shift. It also comes amid mounting political and social demands for a more equitable redistribution of state resources. Globally, as democracies grapple with questions of racial justice and systemic inequality, India's caste census resonates with similar initiatives like affirmative action in US or racial equity audits in the UK.

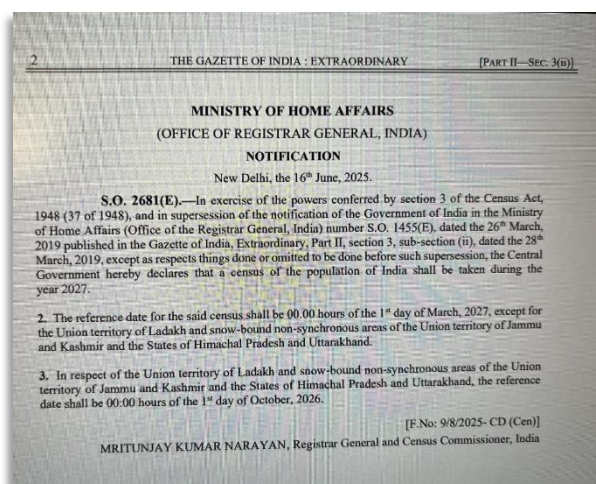


Figure 2 Gazette Notification of 16 June 2025 by MEA

Who Wants It and Why?

Bharat's political landscape is sharply divided on the caste census. **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**, in power heading the federal government at Centre, has avoided full-scale caste enumeration, citing national unity and social cohesion.

In recent years, however, BJP has signalled conditional support, framing census as a tool to ensure targeted welfare, not caste-based division. Prime Minister Modi's "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas" (together with all, development for all, trust of all) slogan continues to guide the party's narrative: that development should be inclusive, data-driven and above identity politics.

Meanwhile, **opposition parties like Congress, Janata Dal (United), Rashtriya Janata Dal, Dravida Munnetra Kazagam and Socialist Party** have positioned themselves as vocal champions of caste census. These parties argue that without updated data, affirmative action is ineffective. But critics point out their double standards as many of these same parties held power for decades without updating caste data, despite having constitutional authority to do so.

This contradiction has fuelled scepticism. For example, parties that once promoted family planning with coercive campaigns in the 1970s now demand representation based on sheer demographic numbers. This flip-flop has led many to conclude that the caste census is being used selectively as a political weapon rather than governance reform.

RSS push for social harmony

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a major cultural and ideological force in Bharat, has supported social harmony as a long-term vision. Its leaders have stated that they “do not oppose” a caste census, provided it is used for up-lift, not division. However, the RSS reference is often overstated. While RSS is just inspiring element of the BJP, it is not a policymaking body. Its role in this context is largely philosophical: advocating unity while recognising the need to correct historical injustices that played havoc.

Development Rhetoric to Reality Check

Bharat’s economic rise is often highlighted in global headlines, world’s fastest-growing major economy, booming startups, digital transformation. Yet, much of this growth bypasses Bharat’s caste-oppressed populations. While a handful of dominant communities managed to gained access to work opportunities, education, and financial resources, millions continue to be stuck in generational poverty. The caste census aims to expose these gaps with data, not anecdotes.

For Indians living abroad, especially in US, UK and Canada where caste-based discrimination has become a human rights concern and even a legislative issue (example, Seattle’s caste-discrimination ban in 2023), caste census in Bharat has direct implications. It challenges the sanitised diaspora narrative of “Indian success” by spotlighting social fractures behind economic headlines.

Global Relevance

As caste is seen as a recognised axis of discrimination in international law and state assemblies in countries like US pass caste-equity legislation, Bharat's caste census shed new light. Caste



Figure 3 California Passes SB 403 Anti-Caste Discrimination Bill

is no longer just an internal matter but painted as a human rights issue that global institutions, civil society organisations and diaspora communities are closely watching. Caste shot to fame internationally in recent years after Cisco fired people and there was talk of caste discrimination.

2. Data, Denial & Delayed

Last time Bharat conducted a full-scale caste enumeration was in **1931** under British rule. That data, nearly a century old, still forms the basis for most caste-based policy discussions today. For a democracy of 1.4 billion people to rely on pre-Independence numbers to frame its socio-economic policies, distribute resources, provide protective reservations cover and define backwardness speaks volumes, not about administrative incapacity but political intent.

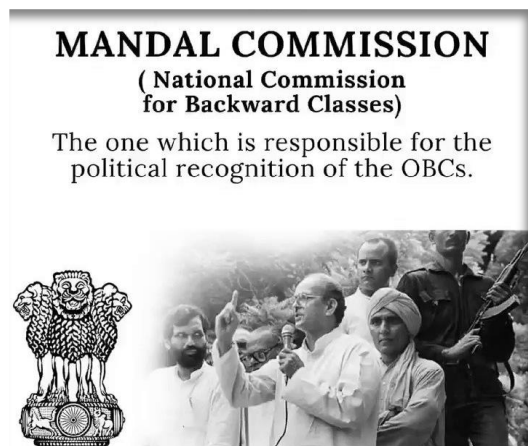
Silence on lack of Data?

After 1947, successive Indian governments, led mostly Indian National Congress – **grand old party of India** -- chose to abandon caste enumeration, claiming it would “fragment the nation.” In reality, this decision protected dominant caste interests. By freezing the caste database in time, most powerful groups within OBCs (Other Backward Classes) were allowed to monopolise benefits like education quotas, government jobs, socio-economic progression without challenge. This data vacuum allowed parties to build “vote banks” using assumptions, not accountability.

This wasn't administrative oversight rather it was political design. The Congress-led central governments used rhetoric of unity to suppress calls for justice especially when they came from non-dominant caste groups. In doing so, they turned a blind eye to rising disparities and enabled weaponization of caste identities during elections without any empirical check.

Dormant Data Was Pulled Out

Mandal Commission (established in 1979) tried to correct this grave anomaly by recommending 27 per cent reservations for OBCs. But even this landmark policy, implemented



in 1990 was based on **1931 data** as there was no updated caste census. The numbers were assumed, not measured. This allowed dominant communities like **Yadavs in states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, Kurmis in central Bharat and Vokkaligas in Karnataka** to corner most dole outs or benefits meant for entire OBC category.

Mandal moment did not usher in a wave of representation for backward communities in entirety. Instead, it created new elite among OBCs while hundreds of sub-castes communities remained underrepresented or unrepresented. This legacy still shapes Bharat's political landscape where parties pitch "social justice" but rarely move beyond a few vote-rich communities.

SECC, a missed opportunity

Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) of 2011 under United Progressive Alliance government headed by Congress was meant to fill this gap. But it collapsed under its own weight. Over **4.6 million** caste names were recorded due to lack of standardization. The data was so chaotic that it was never officially released. Once again, political will fell short.

This failure was not just bureaucratic; it was deeply political. UPA allies like **RJD, DMK** and **SP** made caste-based justice central to their messaging but when given the opportunity to clean and use the SECC data, these parties abandoned the task. The **Congress-led UPA** had the institutional machinery but lacked political courage to act.

For an international audience, this reveals a pattern common in many democracies: when identity data risks undermining entrenched power structures, ruling parties stall or sabotage. In Bharat, this tactic preserved some caste dominance within bureaucracy and skewed social justice programmes.

Diaspora Disillusionment

Many members of Indian diaspora, especially in technology, medicine and businesses view Bharat as a meritocratic rising power. But the ground truth is more layered. In Bharat, surnames still predict opportunity. The caste census challenges sanitised narrative many Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) grew up with, stories of hard work without caste privileges, gloss over how access was often inherited.

Caste-based issues in US cities like **Seattle** and **California** have been presented as civil rights concern. In reality, legislations in some US states were again politically oriented to frame Hindus and Hindutva as the cause of discrimination.

Political Divisions Today

Today, **opposition parties like Congress, JD (U), RJD and DMK** seek to brand themselves as ambassadors of the most deprived sections with demands for caste census but not necessarily out of conviction. For many of them, the goal is to reassemble broken voter coalitions with lure of proportional representation. In states like Bihar and Tamil Nadu where caste identities dominate politics, the census is a weapon to negotiate power and not always a path to justice.

BJP, on the other hand, offered cautious support. While it frames the exercise as a governance reform rather than identity politics, its hesitancy has drawn criticism from regional parties who accuse it of protecting upper caste interests. However, by commissioning **Rohini Commission** to investigate sub-categorization within OBCs



Figure 4 Rohini Commission Report

and pushing for **EWS (Economically Weaker Sections) reservations**, BJP attempted to address historical imbalances using law and not slogans.

From Avoidance to Accountability

Historical reluctance to count castes post-independence in Bharat is not just a bureaucratic lapse. It's a political strategy that preserved elite control. The global conversation around caste equity, racial justice and inclusive data demands that Bharat finally confronts its social reality. A caste census isn't just overdue, it's essential to update moral and statistical framework of the world's largest democracy.

3. Constitutional and Legal Basis

Bharat's Constitution offers a powerful legal foundation for affirmative action and caste-based welfare. Without accurate and updated data, the provisions risk becoming tools for political manipulation instead of instruments of justice. For both domestic and international observers, legal framework behind caste census reveals a key tension: **Bharat's laws are progressive but their implementation is patchy, uneven and often delayed due to political interests.**

What Bharat's Constitution says?

Constitution of Bharat, adopted in 1950 includes several provisions to address discrimination and uplift socially and educationally backward groups:

- **Article 15(4)** allows the state to make special provisions for advancement of socially and educationally backward classes (SEBCs).
- **Article 16(4)** empowers the state to make reservations in public employment for any backward class that is under-represented.
- **Article 340** mandates appointment of commissions to investigate and recommend steps



Figure 5 Constitution of India on OBC

for welfare of backward classes.

These articles are not symbolic, they create a **legal obligation** to identify, quantify and support historically disadvantaged groups. However, nearly every political party in power since independence has failed to carry out this mandate fully. The contradiction is glaring: the law demands evidence-based policy but policymakers have refused to gather the evidence.

Political Selectivity at play

Parties across spectrum have used these constitutional provisions selectively. **Congress**, which governed Bharat for most of the post-independence period, chose to uphold caste-based reservations for SCs and STs. But, the party never moved to collect comprehensive OBC data, even after recommending such a move via commissions like Mandal or Kaka Kalelkar. This delay entrenched the dominance of politically powerful OBC sub-groups while truly marginalized or vulnerable sections remained off the radar.

More recently, **BJP** has invoked constitutional provisions to justify **EWS (Economically Weaker Section) reservations** offering 10 per cent quota to financially disadvantaged citizens from unreserved categories. This was upheld by **Supreme Court** which noted that economic deprivation could also be a marker of exclusion.

However, critics argue that this move was politically calculated to address discontent among upper caste groups without touching OBC or SC / ST quotas.

RSS, the largest voluntary Hindu centric social organisation of the world has broadly supported this legalistic approach. Its recent public statements indicate support for caste data collection “if it leads to genuine up-lift.”

However, its emphasis remains on **unity and harmony** which is often interpreted as caution against identity-based mobilization. For this reason, the RSS position is nuanced but limited in operational terms—it defers to the state to implement justice without pushing hard for structural change.

Legal Demand for Granularity

The on-going work of **Rohini Commission** set up in 2017 to examine sub-categorisation within OBCs underscores legal necessity of more detailed caste data. Preliminary findings show that **just 25 per cent of OBC sub-castes receive over 95 per cent benefits** thereby leaving hundreds of groups without access to education, jobs or political representation.

Even this commission set up under constitutional powers has faced repeated delays. Its final report remains unpublished as of mid-2025. The delay suggests a political reluctance to disturb existing vote banks. No party wants to alienate the dominant castes who currently benefit from the status quo.

For international readers familiar with debates around racial justice and affirmative action, Indian case is eerily familiar: **laws exist, but political will decides who benefits.**

Endorsement from Courts

Bharat's judiciary has cautiously supported caste-based enumeration:

- In 2023, the **Patna High Court** upheld legality of Bihar's state-led caste survey, noting that privacy rights can be reasonably restricted for public interest and welfare.
- In 2024, **Supreme Court of Bharat** refused to stay release of Bihar's caste survey data, signalling that the exercise was both constitutional and in line with Bharat's developmental goals.

These rulings provide clear judicial endorsement: collecting caste data is **not violation of rights**, it is a tool to advance them.

Global Dimension

Internationally, caste is increasingly recognised as a form of structural discrimination. US universities like Harvard and UC Davis now include caste in anti-discrimination policies. Technology giants like **Google**, **Apple** and **Cisco** have faced caste bias allegations within their global Indian workforce.

In 2023, **Seattle** became first US city to ban caste-based discrimination with other cities and universities following suit.



Figure 6 Seattle Bans Caste-based Discrimination

In US, caste is used to frame Bharat, Hindus and Hindutva as ‘supremacist’ while the reality is diabolically opposite.

Bharat’s refusal or delay in collecting caste data raises questions abroad. How can a country claim to uplift marginalised communities without knowing who they are? The mismatch between Bharat’s **constitutional intent** and **practical action** makes global allies sceptical of its social equity claims.

For Indian-origin policymakers, activists and academics abroad, accurate caste data is not just about Bharat, it validates global caste equity campaigns. The caste census, therefore, is not merely a domestic policy tool; it is a **test of Bharat’s commitment to human rights**.

4. Opposition Hypocrisy

Not many political parties or formations in Bharat today speak louder about caste justice than the opposition. And yet, no group has done more to delay or dilute structural caste reform than these very same parties when they held power. Their track record is a blend of populist sloganeering, short-term vote-bank arithmetic and deep institutional neglect.

The call for a caste census, now loudly amplified by the **Congress, JD (U), RJD, DMK, SP**, and others, comes wrapped in the language of “social justice,” but the history tells another story.

More People, larger Share

In the 1970s and 1980s, **Congress** and its allies ran coercive family planning campaigns. Slogans like **“Bacche Do Hi Achhe” (Only Two Children is Good)** were plastered across walls, billboards and school textbooks. Sterilization drives, often forced and indiscriminate, particularly targeted poor and lower-caste families. Their promise? Those who limited their family size would have better access to state resources, jobs, and education.

Fast forward to today and the same political forces are demanding proportional representation based on **population share**, essentially rewarding larger population growth with greater political and welfare benefits. The popular rallying cry **“Jiski jitni sankhya bhaari, uski utni hissedari” (The larger your numbers, the bigger your share)** has been championed by opposition parties without addressing this core contradiction.

This policy flip-flop punishes communities—many from the upper backward castes and general category who complied with state-led family planning initiatives. States like **Kerala, Tamil Nadu** and **Maharashtra** which adopted literacy, gender parity and population control early, now find themselves politically penalised. In contrast, states like **Uttar Pradesh** and **Bihar** where population growth remained high, are poised to gain more influence under the proportional logic.

Populism without a Plan

For the opposition parties in India, caste census has become a **political bargaining chip** and not a policy commitment. Parties that once dismissed caste-based enumeration now embrace it to resurrect lost electoral bases. The **RJD in Bihar, SP in UP** and **DMK in Tamil Nadu** see the census as a way to reassemble fractured caste coalitions and reclaim relevance. Their goal is not necessarily justice, but **quantifiable electoral arithmetic**.

What these parties rarely mention is that their own tenure in power did little to address caste inequality in real terms. They built **“caste pyramids”** where dominant subgroups within OBCs were elevated while the most backward remained invisible. These parties mastered politics of **identity symbolism**, offering **caste tokens**—a leader from a specific caste here, a symbolic policy there but avoided genuine redistribution or granular data collection.

Who gained from rhetoric?

Much of opposition’s “social justice” rhetoric has failed to translate into equitable access.

- In **Bihar**, decades of Lalu Prasad Yadav led RJD rule invoked backward caste empowerment but left the state at the bottom of development pyramid.
- In **UP**, multiple SP governments promoted Yadav-centric politics without delivering broad-based reform for non-dominant OBCs.
- In **Tamil Nadu**, while the DMK pushed affirmative action, dominant backward castes like **Vanniyars** remained at the top of the ladder with Dalits and Most Backward Classes (MBCs) struggling for inclusion.

Caste justice without development is hollow. And development without accurate caste data only deepens disparities.

Caste weaponized for elections!

Most damaging hypocrisy lies in the way caste has been **weaponized** by political parties. Instead of promoting **inter-caste solidarity**, many parties have **institutionalised caste divisions**, turning communities into **electoral fiefdoms**. Candidates selection, party tickets, government schemes, police appointments are calibrated based on caste equations and not merit or equity.

Rather than dismantle caste order, political actors have entrenched it further. Caste identities are now insitutionalized during elections, only to be ignored in policy implementation. This creates a cycle where voters are identified not by rights but by **what vote-block they belong to** a model of governance. This reduces citizenship to community calculus.

Caste, a Global Irony

Outside Bharat, caste is projected by some as a civil rights issue. Conversations on caste also veer around ‘supremacist’ role of Hindutva and Hindus.

Countries like **US**, **UK** and **Canada** have amplified disproportionately caste-based discrimination. For Indian political parties especially those claiming to fight for social justice, this global attention should serve as a wake-up call.



Figure 7 Toronto Declaration 2025-Global Action to End Caste Discrimination

Opposition parties' narratives remain domestically insular, focused on **vote consolidation**, not universal dignity. They champion the caste census to score brownie points and end the malaise.

The opposition's sudden embrace of caste enumeration is riddled with contradictions:

- At one point of time, opposition parties once **enforced population control** but now reward population growth.
- These parties **delayed or sabotaged caste data** collection while in power.
- They continue to **favour dominant castes within backward categories**, reinforcing inequality.
- They turned **caste into a political weapon**, not a metric for justice, access to development or amenities

Until this hypocrisy is confronted, the caste census risks becoming yet another tool in the electoral playbook—deployed to win seats, not to redistribute power.

5. Data disparities conundrum...

In a democracy, data is power. And in Bharat, absence of accurate caste data has created a deeply distorted system where a small subset of dominant communities has captured lion's share of government benefits, while thousands of other castes, often more backward, remain statistically invisible and politically voiceless. The Rohini Commission's preliminary findings show just how unequal this distribution is. But even more striking is how long this inequality

has been allowed to continue, **in plain sight**, and under governments that claimed to be champions of backward classes.

Uneven OBC Pie

The OBC category which receives **27 per cent reservation in public jobs and education** is home to over **2,600 castes** across Bharat. But a central government-backed study found that **97 per cent benefits were being cornered by just 25 per cent of these communities**. This means that roughly **650 castes** dominate the space, while **remaining 1,950+** barely register in public service rosters or university classrooms.

The Rohini Commission, set up in 2017 to study this imbalance, revealed that in the last 25 years:

- Dozens of castes **produced no Group A or Group B government officers**.
- Hundreds of communities are **missing from job and education statistics** altogether.
- State-level data mirrors this trend: a few politically strong groups have consistently outperformed the rest due to better access, awareness, and lobbying power.

Who Dominates, Who Disappears

Across Bharat, certain caste groups have emerged as political and economic elites within the OBC bloc:

- **Yadavs** in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar
- **Vokkaligas** and **Lingayats** in Karnataka
- **Kurmis** in central Bharat
- **Thevars** in Tamil Nadu
- **Nairs** and **Ezhavas** in Kerala

These groups, while historically backward, have become the **new intermediaries of power**, securing representation in politics, bureaucracy, and public sector employment.

In contrast, castes like **Nayaks, Doms, Tantis, Kevats, Bind, Bunkars**, and dozens more remain on the margins. Despite numerical strength in many regions, they lack political voice and institutional representation. Their children are **first-generation learners**, often working in informal sectors, and disproportionately affected by unemployment, health crises, and poverty.

The tragedy is not just their exclusion—it's that their exclusion is **invisible** in the absence of granular data.

Overlooked Urban-Rural Divide

One major myth is that development has been caste-neutral. But even in urban Bharat, caste inequalities are stark. **Upper OBCs and dominant SC sub-castes** have better access to coaching centres, digital literacy and private education. The rest, particularly those in semi-urban and rural belts remain cut off from the “growth story”.

Meanwhile, in villages, caste still determines land ownership, housing, sanitation access and borewells or anganwadi services. The absence of caste-disaggregated data allows this inequality to masquerade as “development lag,” when it is, in fact, **a result of institutional bias**.

Diaspora Blind Spots: Who Speaks for vulnerable?

Many Indians abroad—particularly from dominant castes or upper OBCs, believe they represent "success" of post-liberalization Bharat. But what about the castes that never made it out?

People from lower OBC and Dalit backgrounds rarely make it to IITs or IIMs, and thus are severely underrepresented in the global Indian diaspora. Most NRIs, especially in tech or medicine, come from the same caste clusters that dominate Bharat's welfare pie. Their story is valid but not universal. The caste census is critical not just for domestic redistribution, but to **tell the stories of those who never had the chance to leave**.

Weaponized Development and Data Illiteracy

Political parties often tout welfare delivery like free housing, gas cylinders or cash transfers as evidence of caste-neutral development. But who actually receives these benefits?

Without caste-segregated tracking, it's impossible to know. That's by design.

By avoiding disaggregated reporting, parties can **claim universal success**, while **favouring specific castes under the table**. Welfare is often based on caste networks via village Pradhans, panchayats, local contractors making it vulnerable to manipulation.

The lack of transparency serves political ends. Dominant communities can still claim victimhood, while the truly poor remain trapped in silence.

Why This Matters Globally

For global audiences, particularly in human rights, education, and public policy sectors, this data distortion explains why **Bharat's caste problem is not over**, even as it becomes less visible. It's not enough for Bharat to say it is "post-caste" because of digital progress or economic liberalization.

Caste still decides access, dignity and opportunity. Without data to track it, any claim of inclusive development is a half-truth.

6. The 2011 SECC Fiasco: A Wasted Opportunity, A Political Choice

The 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) was supposed to be a landmark moment—a long-awaited attempt to update caste data for the first time since 1931. Instead, it became a cautionary tale of political reluctance, bureaucratic chaos and missed justice. More than a decade later, the **data was never officially released** and the communities it was meant to help remain in the dark.

For international audiences, especially those familiar with the rigor of US or European census systems, failure of SECC is more than just a technical blunder. It reflects how deeply caste politics is embedded in Bharat's institutional fabric—and how political survival often trumps social equity.

What Went Wrong?

The SECC was ambitious on paper. Conducted alongside the regular census, it aimed to gather socio-economic data across all households, including caste identification. But the execution was a disaster:

- Over **46 lakh (4.6 million)** unique caste names were submitted, many due to spelling variations, duplications, and lack of standardized lists.

- There was **no national framework** for caste verification or consolidation.
- Local-level officials, often untrained or under pressure, submitted unchecked data.
- Even the digitization was inconsistent, leading to massive data redundancy.

The final dataset was so messy that even after forming a dedicated classification committee, the government **refused to release caste-specific data**, citing “data quality concerns.” In other words: it was politically inconvenient.

Power tantrums play big!

Congress-led UPA government with support from backward caste-focused parties like **RJD, DMK and SP**, had both the mandate and the machinery to get it right. Instead, they pulled back. Despite pressure from activists and civil society, they **buried the findings**, issuing only partial socio-economic reports and side-lining the caste component entirely.

This inaction reveals core hypocrisy: the same political parties now loudly demanding a caste census were unwilling to own its consequences when in power.

The 2011 data would likely have revealed that **dominant sub-castes** were monopolizing benefits and that thousands of others—numerous but politically irrelevant, were being left behind. Publishing this truth would’ve forced a redistribution of power within their support base.

Trust Broken

Failure of SECC shattered trust of millions from marginalized communities. Many saw the census as their only chance to get recognized by the system to prove their exclusion, to seek entitlements or simply to be counted. Instead, the process reinforced what they already suspected: **they exist in Bharat but not in its data**.

The damage wasn’t just statistical. It was emotional, generational. In regions like eastern Uttar Pradesh, southern Bihar, and parts of Telangana, where many castes remain outside formal OBC recognition, hopes of upward mobility were pinned to the SECC. After 2011, those hopes vanished.

What's Caste elsewhere?

Imagine if US census asked about race but then refused to release Black or Latino demographic data as the answers weren't uniform. In a country like Brazil, with a history of colour, collected race data and then shelved it out of "sensitivity." That is exactly what happened in Bharat.

This is why **2011 failure matters globally**. It shows that **political will—not technical capacity—is the real barrier to transparency**. Bharat's IT systems are advanced to manage billion-scale programmes like Aadhaar, UPI and CoWIN. The SECC collapsed not due to tech limitations but political consequences of honest caste data were too high.

Deliberate Silence

Even after the mess, no serious attempt was made to clean up and reattempt SECC data. UPA passed the buck. The early years of BJP government also remained non-committal, though it later initiated **Rohini Commission** to study sub-categorization, a more targeted, less politically risky move.

What's the difference? SECC would have opened Pandora box on a national scale. It would have affected how quotas are distributed, how elections are fought, and who gets counted as backward. No major party was ready to face that fallout.

2011 Caste Census follies

The upcoming 2027 caste census, if done right, can correct this institutional betrayal. But only if it learns from 2011 experience:

- **Standardisation must be built in** from the start.
- **Verification protocols must be digitized and independent.**
- **Political interference must be minimized** through court oversight or independent commissions.
- Most importantly, **data must be released in full**, however uncomfortable the truths it reveals.

For those abroad, tracking caste equity, SECC stands as an example of how **data suppression is the new form of exclusion**. It's not enough to talk about diversity and inclusion—if you refuse to count people, you refuse to recognize them.

7. Reverse Marginalization?

Affirmative action is meant to correct historical wrongs. But in Bharat, flawed implementation of reservation policies, coupled with out-dated or non-existent caste data has led to new kind of injustice: **reverse marginalization**. Communities that were once self-sufficient, modest and aligned with the state's development goals now find themselves economically fragile, socially excluded and politically invisible.

These groups followed the rules. They prioritised education, practiced family planning, avoided dependency on state aid and participated in nation-building. Yet today, they are **outside every major welfare scheme**. This is not one accident, it's the result of **policy betrayal and systemic neglect**.

Across northern and central Bharat, several caste groups once considered “forward” or “upper caste” is now sliding into precarity:

- **Brahmin farmers** in eastern Uttar Pradesh
- **Thakur (Rajput) youth** in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan
- **Kayastha families** in Bihar and Jharkhand
- **Kshatriya subgroups** across Bundelkhand and Chhattisgarh
- **Marathas, Patels, and Jats** in states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Haryana now seek reservations under OBC or EWS categories

What unites these communities is not just their caste label but the fact that they were **historically independent of the state**, never relied on quotas, and complied with national development rhetoric. Today, their children face unemployment, their assets are depleted, and their identity has become a barrier to accessing welfare.

Development Betrayed

Post-independence, these communities aligned themselves with Indian state's vision of "modernity": small families, formal education, entrepreneurship, and self-respect. Many abstained from demanding caste-based entitlements, trusting that their efforts would yield results through merit.

But as dominant OBC and SC groups began cornering reserved opportunities—and as welfare schemes became linked to "social backwardness"—these communities found themselves outside the benefits system. **They were not poor enough to qualify for subsidies, and not backward enough to qualify for reservations.**

Today, many of them have no land, no jobs and no government protection. The **only way left to gain access is to claim backward status** not because of social discrimination but due to systemic exclusion. This perverse incentive where survival requires self-degradation is one of Bharat's most under-reported crises.

Caste Identity versus Survival

For the global reader, imagine if middle-class White or Asian American families in the U.S. had to falsely identify as underprivileged minorities just to access public college or healthcare. That is the dynamic at play in Bharat's rural belt, where **identity has become the new currency** for survival.

The **EWS reservation (Economically Weaker Section)** was a partial correction, introduced by the BJP-led government in 2019 to address this gap. It offered a 10% quota to economically weak but otherwise "forward" communities. Though constitutionally upheld, it remains narrow in scope and is seen by many as a band-aid, not a structural fix.

Meanwhile, hundreds of communities are now lobbying for inclusion in the OBC list, often staging protests and mass agitations, not for justice, but for parity in a rigged system. When even once-proud castes now seek to be labelled "backward," it signals that the development ladder is broken.

Parties Weaponise “Backwardness”

Political parties have not just ignored this crisis; they’ve actively exploited it. Rather than reform the quota system to reflect real-time caste realities, they use reservation promises to mobilise votes, selectively granting or denying inclusion based on electoral advantage. Examples:

- The **Patel agitation** in Gujarat (2015–17), led by a dominant land-owning community, was met with state resistance but later co-opted into BJP’s political strategy.
- The **Maratha reservation demand** in Maharashtra led to a convoluted legal battle, with multiple parties offering contradictory support.
- The **Jat protests** in Haryana turned violent yet yielded partial inclusion due to political pressure.

This cycle turns caste into a **negotiation tool**, not a justice issue. The real backward continue to wait; the politically loud get heard.

Global Parallels

Internationally, this crisis would be described as **policy cannibalisation**, where policies meant to uplift the marginalized begin to exclude others who need help but don’t fit the original category.

In the U.S., debates over “**model minorities**” or “**white working class**” **marginalisation** echo similar concerns. But in Bharat, because the state never gathered updated caste data, it has no mechanism to assess who is truly disadvantaged today. Policy is based on legacy assumptions, not current conditions.

A Crisis of Trust

The outcome of these distortions is a dangerous erosion of trust. Communities that once upheld the national vision now feel betrayed. Their children grow up disillusioned, not because of failure, but because the system no longer rewards effort. Worse, the state asks them to “**prove their backwardness**” often through humiliating documentation and false caste certificates.

This has created a perverse paradox: **merit without a quota is worthless, and backwardness without political clout is invisible.**

The Path Forward

The caste census is a critical first step in breaking this cycle. Only with real data can the state identify who is still disadvantaged, who has progressed, and who has been unjustly excluded.

- Policies must become **dynamic**, not static.
- Welfare must be based on **actual need**, not presumed identity.
- And development must **reward contribution**, not just political alignment.

8. Vision Rooted in harmony & Justice

Among all national political forces, **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)** is uniquely positioned at intersection of **governance, social equity and ideological consistency**. While many opposition parties have treated caste as a short-term electoral strategy, BJP has attempted to reframe the conversation **shifting from identity-based mobilisation to data-based governance**.

This approach aligns with the idea of "**Samajik Samrasta**" (**Social Harmony**) not as an abstract cultural slogan but as a framework for targeted, inclusive policy.

Symbolism to Structure

Where earlier regimes invoked caste justice through populist symbolism, appointing leaders from marginalised castes or offering last-minute reservation promises, BJP has focused on structural interventions:

- It **implemented EWS (Economically Weaker Section) reservations**, providing a legal and constitutional mechanism to assist economically struggling upper-caste and forward-caste groups.
- It supported the **Rohini Commission**, which aimed to investigate and sub-categorize the OBC list—acknowledging that a single monolithic category cannot serve the diversity within OBC communities.
- It has **signalled support for caste census** efforts though cautiously stressing that data must serve **developmental equity**, not deepen social fault lines.

This is a marked departure from usual vote-bank politics that dominate the caste discourse. BJP's core argument is this: **empowerment must be measured, not assumed**. In doing so, it seeks to balance the demands of social justice with the realities of governance.

Supporting Harmony, Cautiously

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has publicly stated its position: it **does not oppose caste enumeration**, as long as it is used to uplift the most marginalized and not to divide society further.

RSS chief **Mohan Bhagwat**, in a 2023 address, emphasized that caste census could be helpful if it leads to **“genuine upliftment”**, not “fragmentation for political gains.” He reaffirmed that the goal must be **unity through justice**, not division through entitlement.

RSS does not frame the policy but said that **community-level unity efforts**, such as temple entry campaigns, inter-caste dining and grassroots education initiatives be undertaken. For the purposes of governance, its influence is more philosophical than operational.

Beyond Traditional Politics

Critics often accuse BJP of favouring upper castes. But such claims ignore its calculated move to **build a broad social coalition** that includes non-dominant OBCs, Dalits and even marginalized groups within religious minorities.

The party's **expansion in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha** was not just powered by majoritarian sentiment rather it was driven by inclusion of **Pasmanda Muslims, non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits** who felt excluded by traditional regional caste parties like SP, BSP or RJD.

This approach is best described as **"intra-caste engineering"**, identifying neglected groups within broader caste blocs and integrating them into development pipeline. In policy terms, this has included:

- **Targeted welfare schemes**—housing, toilets, LPG connections, cash transfers, delivered without visible caste bias
- **PM Vishwakarma Yojana** to support traditional artisans, many from non-dominant backward castes

- **Dalit entrepreneurship funds and backward class skill development** missions

In global terms, this mirrors policies seen in countries trying to move from race-based quotas to **opportunity-indexed assistance**—where support is calibrated by need, not broad identity labels.

Global Implications

For international audiences, especially those working on racial justice or indigenous equity, BJP's policy logic reflects a shift from **“representation politics”** to **“empowerment logistics.”** The party argues that the focus should not be on how many people from a caste get a seat at the table, but whether those left out of development get **basic rights, access and voice.**

This approach has critics and limitations—especially the accusation that it glosses over deep-rooted systemic discrimination. However, it presents a real alternative to caste tokenism, offering a **data-driven pathway to redistribution.**

A Calculated Gamble

BJP's bet on **development, not caste appeasement,** will win long-term loyalty. That once benefits reach neglected households, regardless of caste, the demand for identity-based quotas will diminish organically.

But that bet hinges on transparency. Without a **credible caste census,** even the most efficient welfare state risks reinforcing old hierarchies unknowingly.

Which is why BJP's support for the upcoming 2027 caste enumeration is more than a bureaucratic checkbox, it's a **litmus test of its own inclusive governance model.**

9. Implementation Challenges

Conducting a nationwide caste census in a country as vast and socially complex as Bharat is no small task. The logistical, technical, and ethical challenges are real—but they are no longer insurmountable. The question is not **“Can it be done?”**, but **“Do political actors have the courage to do it right?”**

With 1.4 billion people, over 700 districts and more than **2,600 recognized OBC subgroups**, not to mention caste hierarchies embedded in Muslim, Christian, Sikh and tribal communities, the caste census is both **data infrastructure challenge** and **political minefield**.

But the tools exist. What's required is political will, not technological reinvention.

Challenges galore

The biggest issue with previous attempts like 2011 SECC wasn't data collection, it was data quality:

- **Lack of caste standardization** led to duplication. Over 46 lakh caste names were recorded, including spelling errors and local variations.
- **Unverified self-declarations** made it difficult to validate authenticity, especially among aspirant communities.
- **Low digital penetration** in rural areas led to manual errors during data entry and classification.

To avoid repeating those mistakes, 2027 caste census must build **smart verification mechanisms**, use **real-time digital systems** and **centralize classification protocols**.

This is where Bharat's recent technological transformation gives it an edge.

Bharat Is Ready

In the past decade, Bharat has built robust **digital governance infrastructure** that can support such a large-scale operation:

- **Aadhaar**: Over 1.3 billion Indians have unique biometric IDs, making household-level targeting more accurate.
- **Digital land records and DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer)** systems link economic identity to formal databases.
- **Machine learning tools** can now clean and cluster large data sets, avoiding duplication of caste entries.

- **Real-time dashboards**, already used in PM-Kisan, CoWIN, and Ujjwala schemes, can monitor progress and flag anomalies during the enumeration.

With this setup, Bharat can do what it couldn't in 2011—**collect accurate caste data, clean it algorithmically, and verify it institutionally.**

Governance Track Record

Under BJP leadership, Bharat has pulled off some of the **largest public programmes in the world:**

- **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan:** Over 100 million toilets built across rural Bharat.
- **PM-Kisan:** Over ₹2.8 lakh crore directly transferred to over 110 million farmers.
- **CoWIN platform:** Enabled the world's fastest mass vaccination rollout, fully digitized and trackable.

These projects demonstrate not just administrative will but **implementation precision** often down to the last village. If this machinery is activated for caste enumeration, the census can be completed **transparently and efficiently.**

But it's not just about logistics. If national leadership presents the caste census as a governance reform, not an identity war, it can shape how states and civil society respond.

Privacy and Consent

One concern often raised especially, in global discussions, is **privacy**. Critics argue that collecting sensitive caste data could violate individual autonomy or be misused for surveillance. But courts have already addressed this.

- In 2023, the **Patna High Court** ruled that **reasonable data collection for public welfare is constitutional** and does not violate privacy when done transparently.
- The **Supreme Court of Bharat** declined to stay caste data publication by Bihar, setting a clear precedent for **legally sound enumeration.**

Still, to align with global data ethics standards, the process must include:

- **Informed consent** protocols during data collection
- **Anonymity** of raw data before public release
- **Oversight bodies** to ensure non-discriminatory usage of data

This is essential, especially for Bharat’s global partnerships in tech, trade, and human rights. If the caste census is seen as ethical, data-secure, and socially driven, it will **bolster Bharat’s image as a data-responsible democracy**.

The Cost of Delay

Delaying or botching the caste census would not just be a political failure—it would be a **developmental disaster**. Policies would continue to be based on assumptions, not evidence. Marginalized groups would remain invisible. And dominant communities would continue to extract disproportionate benefits without oversight.

Every year without accurate caste data means **millions of citizens excluded from justice, welfare, and opportunity**.

For a global audience, this is not a uniquely Indian problem. In every democracy, from the U.S. to Brazil, **demographic denial** has been used to suppress redistribution. But Bharat’s caste census is a chance to lead by example—to **count what matters and correct what’s broken**.

10. Legal Sanction and Judicial Endorsements

One of the biggest myths surrounding the caste census in Bharat is that it faces legal or constitutional hurdles. In reality, **Bharat’s judiciary has already provided clear, unambiguous legal sanction for caste enumeration**—at both the state and central levels. The courts have recognized that identifying social inequality is not just legally permissible, it is essential for the state to fulfil its commitment to justice.

For a global audience accustomed to constitutional debates over race, affirmative action, and demographic privacy, Bharat’s legal position on caste data is remarkably aligned with **international human rights norms**—as long as the data is collected transparently and used responsibly.

Patna High Court: Endorsement with Safeguards

In August 2023, the **Patna High Court** delivered a pivotal verdict, upholding the legality of the **Bihar caste-based survey**. Petitioners had argued that the state government lacked authority and that collecting caste data violated the right to privacy.

The Court rejected both claims.

It ruled that:

- The survey was conducted **for a legitimate purpose**—to enable targeted development policies.
- **Reasonable restrictions** on privacy are constitutionally permitted when they serve **public interest**.
- The **state has the competence** under the Constitution to collect such data for social justice objectives.

In doing so, the court laid down a legal roadmap: as long as the state respects due process and transparency, caste enumeration is not just legal—it is necessary.

The Supreme Court: Silent Green Light

In October 2023, the matter escalated to the **Supreme Court of Bharat**, where opponents sought to stay the publication of Bihar’s caste survey data. The Court **refused to grant a stay**, signalling tacit approval.

Instead of blocking the data, the Supreme Court emphasized the need for **data transparency**, **public reasoning**, and **policy alignment** with developmental outcomes.

In legal terms, this is significant. The highest court of the land **did not object to the idea of caste data**—only that its usage should be in line with constitutional goals. That’s a green light in all but name.

Constitutional Provisions That Support Caste Enumeration

As discussed in Section 3, Bharat’s Constitution directly empowers the state to collect and use data for the upliftment of marginalized groups:

- **Articles 15(4) and 16(4)** enable affirmative action for socially and educationally backward classes.
- **Article 340** calls for commissions to investigate backwardness.
- **Article 46**, a Directive Principle, mandates the promotion of educational and economic interests of weaker sections.

Collecting caste data is not an overreach—it is a constitutional duty.

Legal Clarity Matters

For global observers—especially in the domains of **human rights, governance, and data ethics**—legal clarity is essential. Democracies that engage with Bharat, fund development programs, or work on minority rights need to know that the caste census is grounded in **legitimate legal authority**, not majoritarian coercion.

In fact, many countries already support demographic data collection to correct historic inequality:

- **The U.S. Census Bureau** tracks racial, ethnic, and economic data to guide federal affirmative action programs.
- **The U.K. Office for National Statistics** includes ethnicity, religion, and now caste in workplace anti-discrimination frameworks.
- **Canada’s Employment Equity Act** mandates tracking underrepresented groups in federal hiring.

Bharat’s caste census, done lawfully, fits within this international pattern—it aligns the world’s largest democracy with **global norms of evidence-based equity**.

Shield Against Political Misuse

Judicial endorsement also acts as a safeguard. While political parties may attempt to **weaponize caste data for electoral gain**, the courts remain gatekeepers to ensure that usage remains **developmental, not divisive**.

Any misuse, such as selective benefit allocation, community targeting, or communal profiling, can be legally challenged. This builds a layer of accountability into the system and can help the international community trust the process.

What Comes Next?

With legal barriers cleared, the focus now shifts to:

- **Implementing safeguards** for data privacy and individual dignity.
- **Ensuring equitable access** to benefits once the data is processed.
- **Creating independent oversight** mechanisms, perhaps even involving retired judges or civil society experts, to monitor use.

Bharat's judiciary has done its job. Now the onus lies on policymakers to respect the law, not by stalling, but by acting.

11. Global Context and Political Voices

National Leaders on the Record

Bharat's caste census is no longer a backroom policy discussion—it's front-page politics. Major political figures have staked their positions publicly, offering clarity and contradictions in equal measure.

- **Narendra Modi (Prime Minister, BJP):**

“Caste enumeration is an exercise to bring the marginalised sections... into the mainstream and make them the priority of development.” (May 2025)
Modi has reframed the caste census as a tool for governance, marking a shift from earlier BJP ambiguity.

- **Mallikarjun Kharge (Congress President):**

“In the absence of an updated caste census... a reliable database so very essential for meaningful social justice is incomplete.” Kharge has demanded both publication of 2011 SECC data and inclusion of caste in the upcoming census.

- **Rahul Gandhi (Congress):**

“Make the nation know how many OBCs, Dalits, and tribals are there.” He has called for caste census as part of a broader “X-ray of Indian society.”

- **M.K. Stalin (DMK):**

“Only a statutory census of Bharat would provide an appropriate platform for upholding social justice.” Stalin has emphasized national—not just state—enumeration to maintain credibility and consistency.

- **Nitish Kumar (JD(U), Bihar CM):**

“Caste data will help make better welfare schemes. The survey will benefit all communities.” Kumar's government carried out the first full caste survey by a state in recent history.

- **Jairam Ramesh (Congress Spokesperson):**

“The BJP notification is a damp squib; caste enumeration is absent. The pressure from Congress forced their hand.”

Together, these statements reveal a split: **regional and opposition leaders want immediate caste data release**, while the BJP prefers a **calibrated rollout tied to welfare planning**.

Caste and the World: A Global Civil Rights Issue

Caste is no longer confined to Indian borders. International institutions, cities, and corporations are now presenting it as a **global civil rights issue**. In reality, it's being marketed as an anti-Hindu tool and divisive weapon.

- **Seattle (USA):** Became first American city to purportedly ban caste-based discrimination (Feb 2023).
- **California's SB403:** A bill to outlaw caste bias in public and private institutions passed state legislature but was vetoed by governor on legal redundancy grounds sparking major debate.

- **Cisco Caste Discrimination Case:** Put caste bias on global tech radar, leading to policy revisions at Google, Microsoft, and Apple.
- **UK:** Considered legislation to protect against caste-based workplace discrimination, though action has been limited to judicial interpretations.
- **UN Special Rapporteur:** Described caste systems as “a hidden apartheid,” comparing its function to racial hierarchies elsewhere.

As caste becomes a protected characteristic abroad, **absence of credible caste data in Bharat weakens the country’s moral authority** in global anti-discrimination discussions.

Why This Moment Matters

For Bharat to maintain its standing as a pluralistic, democratic power, it must engage with caste, not avoid it. The caste census is not just about domestic policy rather it’s about aligning Bharat with the **international rights-based order**. It is about showing that inclusion is based on evidence, not appeasement.

12. Way Forward

Bharat stands at a critical juncture. With the caste census now legally cleared and technically feasible, the challenge is no longer *whether* to collect caste data—it’s about **how to use it without falling into the old trap of vote-bank politics**.

For over seven decades, affirmative action in Bharat has been applied through a **broad brush**. Communities were lumped together under SC, ST, or OBC labels without nuance or granularity. The result? **Dominant sub-castes harvested the benefits**, while the most marginalized remained in the shadows. This one-size-fits-all approach has exhausted its utility and legitimacy.

The caste census offers a way out. If done right, it can **replace symbolic gestures with surgical precision**, allowing policymakers to target help where it’s most needed, not where it’s most politically convenient.

Blanket Reservations to Targeted Justice

Rohini Commission's recommendation to sub-categorize OBCs into four groups is a strong starting point. It's rooted in one clear insight: **not all backwardness is equal**. Some castes have gained upward mobility and no longer need as much state support. Others, numerically smaller and socially isolated, continue to be left behind.

Once caste census data is available:

- **Quota caps can be adjusted** based on actual exclusion data—not out-dated assumptions.
- **Sub-caste-specific initiatives** can be launched in education, employment, and rural development.
- Schemes like **Eklavya schools, skill-building missions, and micro-loans** can be calibrated by deprivation index, not just by caste category.

This moves Bharat away from “**category-based politics**” and toward “**condition-based governance**.”

Rewarding Integrity, Not Just Identity

Another key principle for the future is **incentive correction**. The current system punishes compliance. Families that adhered to population control, paid taxes, educated daughters, and stayed out of protest politics are often the ones most excluded from welfare schemes.

That must change.

A smart caste census must link **performance and need**, not just demography. For example:

- States with better governance outcomes—literacy, maternal health, gender ratios, should be **rewarded**, not penalised, during resource allocation.
- Citizens who participate in formal education, tax filing, and voluntary service should be **prioritized for upward mobility schemes**.
- And within every caste group, **internal disparities**—between rural and urban, educated and illiterate, employed and unemployed—must guide policy.

This is what **justice with dignity** looks like.

Beyond Reservations: Structural Access

It's also time to admit that **reservations alone won't deliver equality**. A more robust support system must supplement them:

- **High-quality public education**, especially in tier-2 and rural regions
- **Transparent hiring pipelines**, particularly in state-owned enterprises and academia
- **Entrepreneurship ecosystems** tailored for backward communities—not just job seekers, but job creators

The caste census data can serve as a **diagnostic tool**, identifying where these gaps are widest and where intervention is most urgent.

Independent Monitoring and AI-Driven Tools

To avoid political interference, Bharat must build an **independent caste equity commission**—an autonomous body with data scientists, legal experts, and social workers.

This group should:

- Monitor implementation of caste-based programs
- Use **machine learning** to track benefit leakage or capture by dominant castes
- Regularly publish **inclusion audits**, similar to the racial equity audits seen in global corporate and public governance

Bharat has the digital capacity, what's needed is **political insulation** from opportunistic tinkering.

Bharat to the World

In a world increasingly focused on **intersectional justice**, Bharat's caste census can set a new global precedent. Just as nations track race, ethnicity, and gender to correct injustice, Bharat can pioneer the idea that **inclusion starts with knowing who's excluded**.

Beyond Electoral Optics

True justice demands going beyond counting heads. It demands a commitment to:

- **Redistribute benefits**, not just expand categories.
- **Correct data gaps**, not mask them with slogans.
- **Reward effort and compliance**, not just numbers.

This means acknowledging the reality: **some communities have advanced**, while others—despite being in the same category, remain stuck. And some, once self-reliant and thriving, are now being pulled into marginality by a broken incentive structure.

The caste census, if done right, can **reorient the welfare state away from appeasement and toward equity**.

Final Word

Bharat has always said it wants to be judged by its actions, not just its aspirations. The caste census will be that judgment. Let it not become another half-truth lost in political fog. Let it be the beginning of a new political era **from identity pandering to inclusive statecraft**, symbolic politics to **substantive justice**. Because real democracies count people and **include each one, they count**.

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