

Caste census and social justice in tune with times



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Voices have started increasing at the political level to conduct a caste census. They have become inevitable in view of the parliamentary elections drawing closer. Against this background, why caste census is important should necessarily be studied from the social, political and economic perspective.

Influence of British census

There has never been a situation in history wherein there has been no hassle-free and smooth-sailing attainment of goal of integrated social development. Several sociologists have written a lot on removing the obstacles to growth. Though their guidance is followed, the obstacles could not be removed because the

obstacles have consistently and patiently been established and their justification is based on the majoritarian outlook.

It is quite customary in social dynamics that obstacles are formed and changes happen through uprising against those obstacles. However, the 'changes' do not happen that easily. At the end of the 19th century, voices like that of Iyothee Thass started resounding at the political level for representation in education and employment. Before that, those voices had been confined to regions, remaining part of fringe groups' perspectives. The then British government could understand the reason behind the voices only when they reverberated in the mainstream political arena. Consequently the rulers thought of effecting changes in the administrative procedures. For the purpose, scientifically analysed datasets were necessary and hence the government moved towards population census.

The census at every move not only renewed itself but also adapted itself. For instance, the British government kept increasing the number of questions in every census form and made the questions complex and subtle gradually in order to delve into private features of individual life. The reasons for deletion, change and addition of questions can be seen in the forewords to the census reports.

Renewal and adaptive approach

Risley, one of the officers involved in the 1901 census, in his article 'The Study of Ethnology in India,' said, "If the questions over the tribes' needs and the responses from the tribal people to the queries had been approached critically, greater changes would have been brought in their lives." This statement should be

viewed in the context of the present-day need for a caste census. As the British census officials had a subtle understanding of the issue, they employed a renewal-oriented and adaptive approach to every census. It was this approach which helped the British government at the beginning of the 20th century understand the cultural psychology of Indians. On the basis of the understanding, the British government brought about changes in its administration which rendered justice to the sections of the people long denied representation in the local politics. This was a significant political miracle centred round the census during the British rule. Its influence on the Indian society has continued to be felt to this day.

Post-Independence representation

When the country attained Independence, the concept of representation had gained stronger traction than ever before. The perspective was propagated by several regional leaders of national parties. Making an allowance for the situation and reason, Ambedkar clearly defined the need and reason for representation in the Constitution. That has till now given opportunities to the oppressed sections of the society.

In the present circumstances marked by population explosion and the swelling number of employable people, the existing political representation system and reservation for jobs must be modified. At the same time, the metrics of how much for whom are also important. Prof. Gail Omvedt's remark, "The caste census will provide useful instruments for removing the centuries-old caste discrimination," is worth consideration. The reasons for caste census, which she had elaborated in her article, "Caste in population census", are still in existence now.

The recent caste census conducted in Bihar showed the fluctuations in population and inadequacy of their representation. On the basis of the caste census, the need for changes in distribution of opportunities has become a major national topic that several people have been currently talking about.

Caste census seems set to begin from Nov. 15 in Andhra Pradesh. The state government has announced that it will implement development schemes for the oppressed sections after identifying them in the census. This will rub off on other states too, it is expected.

Filling of job vacancies and social justice

The number of job vacancies in all government departments has been increasing. They are not instantly filled. There are several reasons cited by the government for not filling the vacancies, .

In Feb. 2023, Haryana fully removed all vacancies that had arisen after 2020, disappointing those waiting for government job for years together. Such examples can be cited from each state. As the government job vacancies are not filled, the people have to turn to private companies for low-paying jobs. As the private sector does not comply with provisions of reservation law, several first-generation graduates and SCs, though fully qualified, find it quite difficult to land jobs even in the private sector. Even those employed in private companies are struggling much to sustain themselves. This trend will hardly help the society attain

an integrated growth. That is why the demand for introducing reservation in the private sector too has been gaining traction.

Reports are pouring in that lakhs of vacancies are mounting in the union government departments also. Filling of these vacancies does not spell just giving job opportunities. That is related to social justice. When a job is given to a person from a community, it means that the government takes part in the community's development. Of course, a community's economic progress happens through several means. But the government can fill its job vacancies and thereby chip in with its contribution to the community's economic self-reliance.

Today human resources have increased. The number of the educated has also gone up. But the number of people with stable income and permanent jobs has come down. In order to understand this situation, every individual's and family's needs and fulfilment rate must be collated and analysed. On the basis of the study, schemes must be drawn up. That will pave the way for an integrated growth based on social justice.

The outlooks about social justice and laws, in existence till now, have not been sufficient to free the people from the clutches of feudalistic perspectives. Social justice must be reviewed in tune with times and laws redesigned accordingly so that people progress regardless of divisions and barriers. Lots of datasets are necessary for the mammoth exercise. Only a caste census can provide the required data.

Translated by V. Mariappan.