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Q7(b)

Caste remains a vital axis for political mobilisation in India. How would the caste census address the aspirations of people? Discuss

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 1 · 20 marks · Indian Nationalism

Indian Nationalism: Political Strategies of India's Freedom Struggle; Perspectives on Indian National Movement; Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Ambedkar, and the socialists.

Core demand of the question

- State how caste remains an axis of political mobilisation
- Explain what a caste census is and what aspirations it is asked to address
- Discuss representation, welfare targeting, and the risks of reification
- Keep the answer on mobilisation plus census, not a general essay on caste

Revision summary

Caste remains a mobilisation axis because it still structures dignity, land, and access to the state, as Kothari, Mandal, and bahujan politics show.

Parties already count jatis; the demand is that the official **Census** should too, beyond SC and ST.

Aspirations include fairer reservation design, targeting of welfare, and recognition after the unpublished 2011 SECC caste data.

Risks include reification of identity and a pure percentage war that forgets class, gender, and **Ambedkar's** horizon of annihilation.

A democratic census would publish usable aggregates while protecting persons and keeping constitutional individual rights at the centre.

Introduction

Caste remains a vital axis of Indian political mobilisation because it still organises marriage, land, dignity, and the queue for the state. Parties speak the language of development; they count jatis at the booth. A caste census is demanded as the statistical twin of that politics: if caste is how power is lived, the republic should know the numbers on which quotas, schemes, and tickets rest.

Body

Mobilisation

From the **Non-Brahmin** movement and **Periyar** through **Lohia's** backward-caste socialism, the **Mandal** moment of 1990, and the BSP's **bahujan** project under **Kanshi Ram** and **Mayawati**, caste has been a language of both hierarchy and revolt. Upper-caste consolidation, OBC federations, and Dalit assertion are modern ways of claiming the vote, the job, and the police station, not pre-modern leftovers. Every alliance in Bihar or Uttar Pradesh remains a caste arithmetic.

Aspirations are a share of education and jobs, protection from atrocity, and dignity in temples and streets. **Rajni Kothari** still holds: politics processes caste; it does not erase it. Parties already count jatis at every booth; the demand is that the official **Census** should too.

What a caste census is asked to do

The last full caste count was 1931, apart from SC and ST. The 2011 SECC caste table was not released. Advocates say Indra Sawhney's ceiling, the Rohini fragmentation of OBC quotas, and welfare targeting fly blind without numbers. The census is asked to rebalance reservation, check elite jati capture, and recognise a structure the republic otherwise names only at elections.

Risks and a democratic handling

A census can freeze identities and turn justice into a percentage auction that forgets class and gender inside a jati. **Ambedkar** wanted annihilation of caste, not its eternal administration. Used as a tool of honest equality, with private records and public aggregates, the count can still be a first step of seeing. Mobilisation will not wait for the table; the table may civilise it or intensify it. A democratic handling therefore keeps constitutional individual rights at the centre even while it counts groups for welfare and representation.

Flow diagram

Caste mobilisation -> Vote job dignity
Caste census -> Numbers for quota and welfare
Numbers for quota and welfare -> Aspirations: share and recognition
Numbers for quota and welfare -> Risk: freeze and auction
Caste mobilisation -> Caste census

Conclusion

Caste mobilises because it still distributes power. A caste census is asked to match that fact with public knowledge, so that reservation and welfare rest on evidence rather than on the loudest federation. It can serve equality if it is a tool of justice; it will harm equality if it becomes a permanent auction of percentages without a horizon beyond caste.

Facts & figures

Census 1931

The last comprehensive all-India caste enumeration in the colonial **Census**; later Censuses counted SC and ST but not the full jati table.

SECC 2011

Collected caste data that were not released as an official, usable national caste census for policy.

Indra Sawhney, 1992

The Supreme Court's Mandal judgment structured OBC reservation and a 50 per cent ceiling debate that census advocates say needs fresh social data.

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