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The Caste Census

The caste census

The government has decided to hold a caste census along with the upcoming Census. Data collected by the Census will impact boundaries of constituencies, reservation for women in elected bodies, and give a fillip to demands for more quotas and their sub-categorisation

SHYAMLAL YADAV
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

THE CABINET Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the enumeration of castes at the upcoming Census, bowing to a several decades-old demand and reversing the position that it formally articulated in Parliament four years ago.

"(The caste census) will strengthen the social and economic structure of our society while the nation continues to progress," Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said while announcing the decision on Wednesday.

Caste census demand

The data collected in Censuses since 1951 include the numbers of individuals belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), and of various religious denominations. But the members of caste groups other than SCs and STs have not been counted.

The most recent caste data available is from the Census of 1931. The 1941 Census, carried out during the War, collected data on caste, but they were never released.

Ahead of the first Census of independent India, the government chose to avoid the question of caste. Thereafter, demands for a caste census were repeatedly raised, especially by parties who had a base among Other Backward Classes (OBCs), primarily farming communities and artisans.

But no Indian government ever carried out a full count of caste memberships.

From Census to SECC

In 2010, as the decadal Census approached, then Law Minister M Veerappa Moily wrote to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asking that caste/ community data be collected during Census 2011.

The Prime Minister's Office forwarded the request to the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, which rejected it. In May 2010, responding to demands for a caste census by parties such as the BJP, SP, DMK, and JDU, and some OBC MPs of the BJP, House Minister P Chidambaram apprised Parliament of "a number of



Enumerators collect information from residents for the Bihar caste survey in August 2023. PTI/Ankur

logistic and practical difficulties" pointed out by the RGI "in canvassing the question of caste while conducting the Census".

Chidambaram argued that "enumeration" was different from "compilation, analysis and dissemination". The Census is meant to collect "observational data", for which 21 lakh enumerators, mostly primary school teachers, have been trained. "They have been trained to ask the question and record the answer as returned by the respondent. The enumerator is not an investigator or verifier," Chidambaram said.

Under continued pressure by UPA allies, however, Singh's government set up a Group of Ministers under then Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee to examine the issue. Based on the GoM's recommendations, the Union Cabinet decided in September 2010 on a separate Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC).

"The caste enumeration would be conducted as a separate exercise from the month of June 2011 and completed in a phased manner by September 2011 after the Population Enumeration phase to be conducted in February-March 2011) of the

Census 2011 is over," the government said.

This changed the game, and the political purpose of the demand for caste enumeration was defeated.

The SECC was carried out at a cost of almost Rs 4,000 crore. The data were published by the Ministries of Rural Development and Urban Development in 2016, but the caste data were excluded. The raw caste data was handed over to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, which formed an Expert Group under then NITI Aayog Vice Chairperson Arvind Pangaria for classification and categorisation. The data are yet to be made public.

Recent developments

Ahead of the Lok Sabha election of 2024, almost every party other than the central BJP came out in support of the caste census. In Bihar, even the BJP joined the clamour. Rahul Gandhi raised the issue of unequal representation of OBCs in prime positions in the government.

The Congress improved its position in the election, rising to 99 seats from the 52 it

won in 2019. On the other hand, the BJP lost its single-party majority of 2014 and 2019, suffering a major setback in states including Uttar Pradesh.

Of late, several state governments have sought to implement "quota within quota" by subcategorising OBCs based on their own caste censuses, calling them "surveys" because the Census is technically part of the constitutional mandate of the Centre.

Earlier, on April 1, 2021, the constitutional body National Commission for Backward Classes had urged the government to collect data on the population of OBCs "as part of Census of India 2021 exercise".

However, on July 20, 2021, the government told Parliament that it had been "decided as a matter of policy not to enumerate caste-wise population other than SCs and STs in Census".

Several petitions demanding a caste census are pending before the Supreme Court.

What happens now

The 2021 Census was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and has been on hold ever since. The exercise is understood to be imminent, but there are no dates for it as yet. Meanwhile, the pressure on the government to hold a caste census has increased steadily.

Operationally, the Census is a massive exercise that has two distinct parts: House Listing and Housing Census, and Population Enumeration. The Census questionnaire for 2021 had been finalised before the exercise had to be put off. In October 2024, the government extended the tenure of RGI Mithunaj Kumar Narayan until August 2026.

The data collected by the Census will impact government policy and boundaries of political constituencies. The full delimitation of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies, which has been on hold since 1971, is frozen until "the first Census taken after the year 2026".

The reservation for women in legislatures announced by the government is also dependent on the Census and delimitation.

And the caste census is certain to give a fillip to the demand for increased reservation for certain communities, and for sub-categorisation within caste categories, particularly among the OBCs.

- ❑ The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the **enumeration of castes in the upcoming Census**, bowing to a several decades-old demand and reversing the position that it formally articulated in Parliament four years ago.
- ❑ "(The caste census) will **strengthen the social and economic structure** of our society while the nation continues to progress," Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said while announcing the **decision**.

Caste census demand

- ❑ The data collected in **Censuses since 1951** include the numbers of individuals belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), and of various religious denominations.
- ❑ But the members of caste groups other than SCs and STs have not been counted.
- ❑ The most recent caste data available is from the **Census of 1931**. The 1941 Census, carried out during the War, collected data on caste, but they were never released.
- ❑ India continues to rely on outdated or sample-based estimates (like from the **Mandal Commission or National Sample Survey**) for assessing the population of OBCs, leading to uncertainty in policy formulation and resource distribution.

Caste-based census

YEAR	OUTCOME
1872	Classified population into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Rajpoots, other castes based on profession, native Christians, Aboriginal tribes, semi-Hindooised tribes
1901	1,642 castes
1931	4,147 castes
1941	Census curtailed due to World War II
2011*	Over 46 lakh caste names, sub-castes, surnames and gotras. Caste numbers withheld citing inaccuracies.

*socio-economic and caste census

Pre-Independence & Post-Independence Practice

- ❑ The last full caste enumeration took place in 1931. In 1941, caste data was collected but not published due to **administrative and financial constraints during WWII**.
- ❑ From **1951 to 2011**, the Census has included only SC and ST data, not other caste groups.
- ❑ The **Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC)** in 2011, conducted alongside the Census but under a different framework, gathered caste data—but that data has never been officially released.
- ❑ State caste surveys: Three governments — **Karnataka, Telangana and Bihar** — have conducted caste surveys so far. Karnataka is yet to release the survey report.

WHAT HAPPENED TO 2011 CASTE CENSUS?	
➤ Following all-party consensus, UPA govt in 2011 decided to conduct a Caste Census, the first since 1931	Parliament that raw caste data from SECC had been given to the social justice ministry, “who is to form the expert group for classification and categorisation of data”
➤ Nearly ₹4,900 crore was spent on the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC)	➤ One problem with the SECC data cited by experts is that it has thrown up 46 lakh castes, sub-castes, clan names and so on. Categorising these is a mammoth task
➤ In 2015, expert group was set up under then Niti Aayog vice-chairman to decide on classification and categorisation of SECC data	➤ To avoid this pitfall, enumerators in 2021 will be given a pre-decided list of castes so that they can ask households which of them they fall under
➤ In 2016, all data from SECC barring caste numbers was put in public domain. The caste data still remains unreleased	
➤ In July 2017, the govt told	

Why is there a demand for Caste Census?

- ❑ Accurate caste data is crucial for **implementing and monitoring reservation policies** in education, employment, and political representation.
- ❑ Supreme Court rulings (**Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992)**, **M. Nagaraj v. Union of India (2006)**, **J.K. Industries Ltd. v. Union of India (2007)**), have emphasized the need for detailed caste data to uphold and define backward class reservations.
- ❑ **Data for Targeted Welfare and Representation:** Without updated caste data, it's difficult to assess whether reservation policies, welfare schemes, and economic development programs are reaching the right communities.
- ❑ OBCs are estimated to be around **50-52% of India's population (Mandal Commission)**, but no official figure exists.
- ❑ Need for **Evidence-Based Social Justice:** Caste remains a powerful determinant of social and economic inequality in India.
- ❑ Many backward caste groups argue that caste data is essential to **ensure fair representation in education, employment, and politics.**
- ❑ **State-Level Initiatives:** Some states (e.g., Bihar) have already conducted their own caste surveys, creating momentum for a national-level enumeration.

Arguments Against Caste Census

- ❑ **Risk of Reinforcing Caste Identities:** Caste enumeration may further entrench caste divisions, which the Constitution aims to eliminate.
- ❑ They point to the vision of a **casteless society championed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**, warning that formalizing caste data could hinder long-term social cohesion.
- ❑ **Complexity and Classification Challenges:** Issues like overlapping caste names, state-specific variations, and the presence of open-ended or ambiguous categories (like orphans or converts) make data categorization highly challenging.
- ❑ Migrants, inter-caste marriages, and regional inconsistencies further complicate the classification process.
- ❑ **Politicization of Identity:** There is concern that caste census data could be misused for vote bank politics, electoral segmentation, and identity-based polarisation, rather than genuine welfare planning.

Natural Hydrogen and its potential as a future fuel

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- ❑ Hydrogen is seen as the **fuel of the future** — one that would **decarbonise world economy** and stop global warming.

- ❑ If harvested in a sustainable manner, natural hydrogen may provide a **clean and potentially low-cost fuel** to satisfy the world's increasing energy needs with a considerable reduction in carbon emissions as well.

Green	Blue	Turquoise	Grey	Brown
Electricity from renewable sources is used to electrolyse water H_2O and separate the hydrogen H_2 and oxygen O	Produced using natural gas via "steam reformation"; most of the greenhouse gas emissions are captured and stored	Produced using natural gas via "pyrolysis" by separating methane into hydrogen H_2 and solid carbon dioxide CO_2	Produced using natural gas via "steam reformation", but with no carbon capture and storage	Produced using coal instead of natural gas, but with no carbon capture and storage; this remains the cheapest form

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Produced using natural gas via "pyrolysis" by separating methane into hydrogen H_2 and solid carbon dioxide CO_2

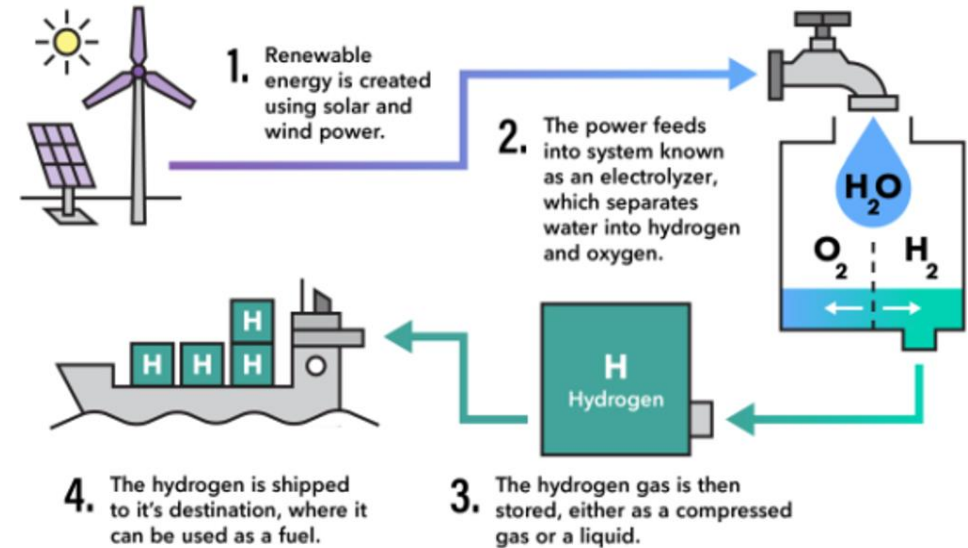
Produced using natural gas via "steam reformation", but with no carbon capture and storage

Produced using coal instead of natural gas, but with no carbon capture and storage; this remains the cheapest form

How is natural hydrogen extracted?

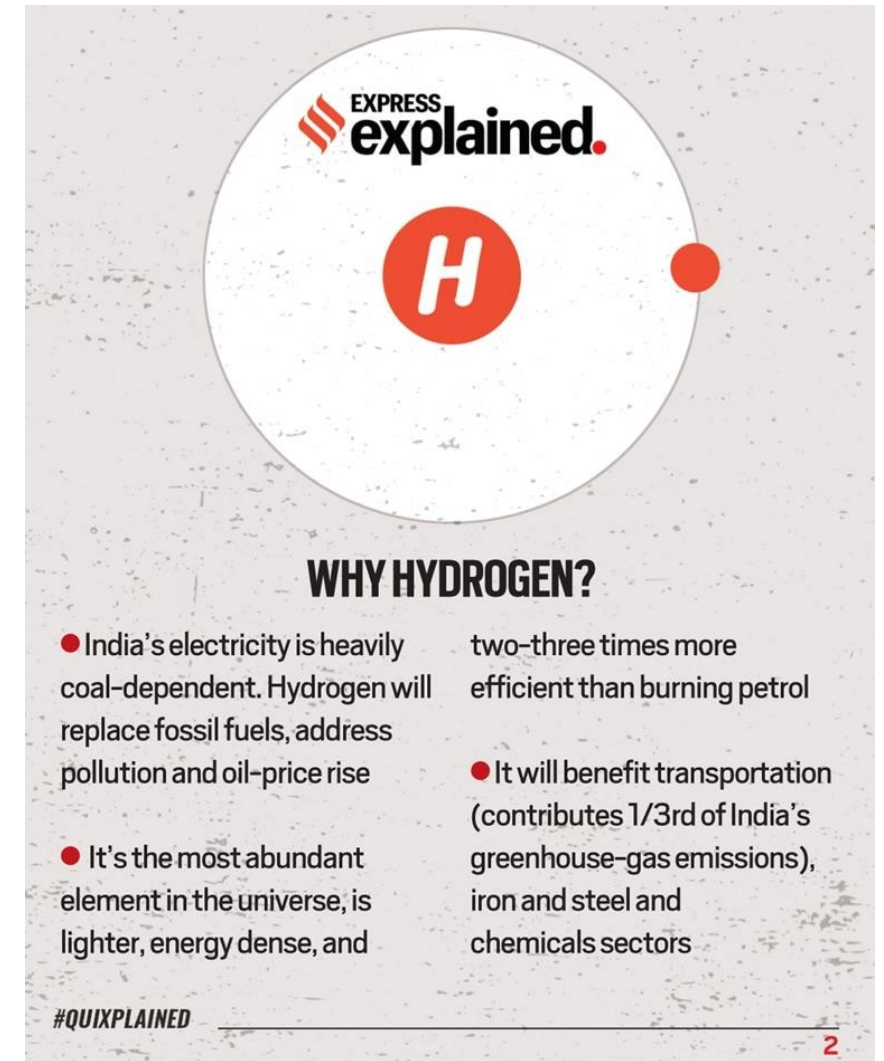
- ❑ Right now, hydrogen is manufactured mostly from natural gas through an **energy-intensive and polluting process**.
- ❑ Green hydrogen made with renewable electricity, on the other hand, is still **prohibitively expensive** and would require vast amounts of wind and solar power to work out at scale.
- ❑ Natural hydrogen occurs as a **free gas in geology**, produced by processes such as **serpentinisation (the interaction of water and iron-containing rocks)**, radiolysis of water by radioactive rocks, and from organic matter at depth.

How is Green Hydrogen Produced?



What about current reserves?

- ❑ Although the total size of worldwide natural hydrogen reserves is still poorly known because of a **lack of concentrated exploration**, recent discoveries and current research indicate considerable potential.
- ❑ In contrast to **conventional hydrocarbon exploration**, dedicated frameworks for natural hydrogen exploration are still evolving.
- ❑ In the Indian context, **natural hydrogen potential is mostly untapped** but found to be promising because of the existence of **favourable geological structures** like basaltic assemblages, Andaman and Himalayan ophiolite complexes, greenstone volcanic-sedimentary sequences in cratons (Dharwar, Singhbhum).



DIGITAL ACCESS PART OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

Digital access a part of fundamental right to life and liberty: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Inclusive and meaningful digital access to e-governance and welfare delivery systems is a part of the fundamental right to life and liberty, the Supreme Court held in a judgment on Wednesday.

A Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan, hearing a petition on how people with disability find it nearly impossible to complete the digital Know Your Customer (KYC) process, said that the state has an obligation to provide an inclusive digital ecosystem to the marginalised, underprivileged, vulnerable, disabled, and historically excluded sections of society. Amidst the "wave of digital progress" in India a crucial

Top court says access to digital welfare systems should be inclusive to all sections of society

aspect often overlooked is whether this technology is truly inclusive, the court said.

"The right to digital access emerges as an instinctive component of the right to life and liberty, necessitating the state to proactively design and implement inclusive digital ecosystems to serve not only the privileged, but also the marginalised," said Justice Mahadevan, who authored the judgment.

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Context

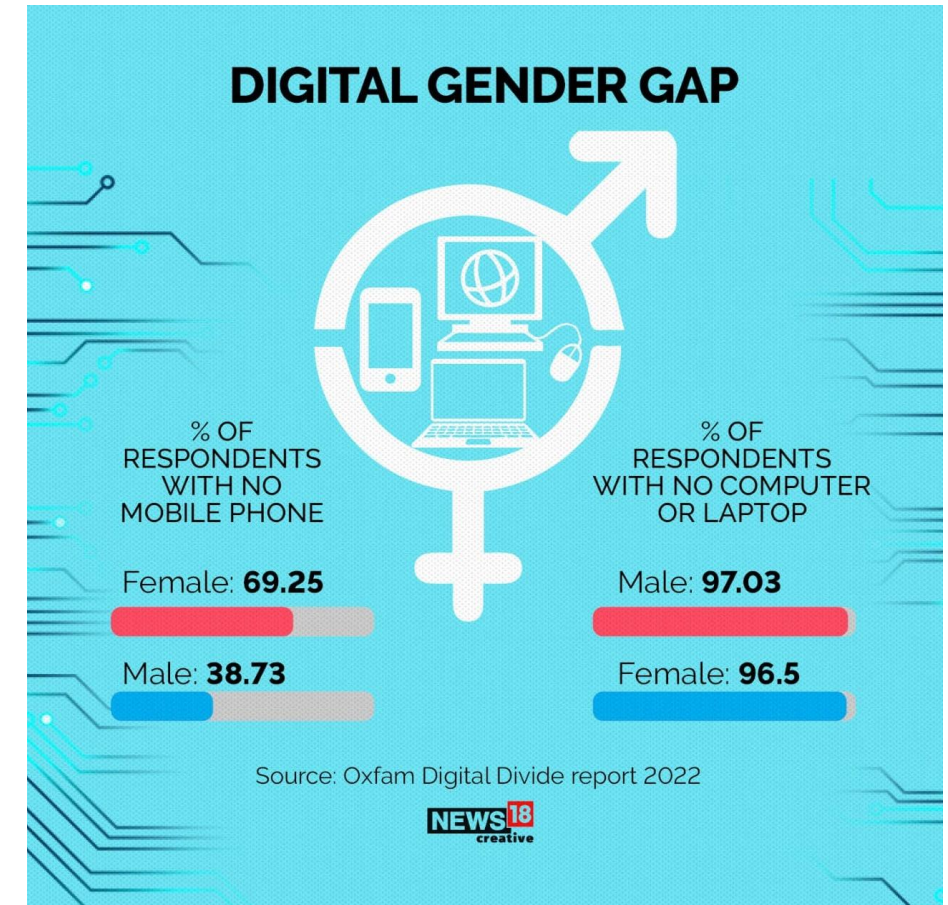
- ❑ The Supreme Court of India made a landmark declaration that the **right to digital access** is an intrinsic part of the Right to Life under **Article 21 of the Constitution**.
- ❑ This judgment came in response to a set of petitions demanding **easier digital access for acid attack survivors** and visually impaired individuals, particularly in essential services like banking and e-governance.

Key-takeways from the SC's Judgment

- ❑ The two-judge bench stated that In today's world, **access to services and entitlements** happens primarily through digital means.
- ❑ **Digital access is no longer a privilege**—it is central to living a life of dignity. Therefore, “**bridging the digital divide**” has become a constitutional imperative, directly linked to the **Right to Life and Dignity under Article 21**.
- ❑ The state's obligations under **Article 21**—read in conjunction with Articles 14, 15 and 38 of the Constitution—must encompass the responsibility to ensure that **digital infrastructure, government portals, online learning platforms**, and financial technologies are universally accessible.
- ❑ The Court noted that **exclusion from digital services undermines basic rights** like: Access to welfare schemes Financial inclusion Legal identity Public services (e.g., pensions, subsidies, healthcare)
- ❑ The judgment recognizes that **AI-driven assistive technologies** like Screen readers, voice commands, and gesture recognition, or Alternatives to biometric authentication (e.g., iris scans, text-based OTPs), can open up new possibilities for inclusion.

Digital Divide in India Digital India

- ❑ India's rapid **digitisation**, via Aadhaar, UPI, e-Governance portals, **DigiLocker, Jan Dhan accounts**, has enabled vast improvements in transparency and service delivery.
- ❑ However, digital readiness and access are not equal: As per **NFHS-5 (2019-21)**, only 33% of women in rural India use the internet.
- ❑ PwDs face severe barriers due to non-compatible websites, lack of assistive tech, and inadequate training.
- ❑ **Mandatory Aadhaar-based authentication**, e-KYC, and biometric requirements have excluded people with disabilities, old-age illnesses, and disfigurements from accessing banking, pensions, and healthcare schemes.





Thank you

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