

# O HERALDO

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## Caste census – A Pandora’s box or a tool for justice?

India’s decision to include caste enumeration in its upcoming decennial census, announced on April 30, 2025, is a high-stakes gamble. Promising data to tackle deep-rooted socio-economic disparities, the census could empower marginalised communities and refine affirmative action policies. Yet, it risks opening a Pandora’s box, potentially igniting a divisive ‘Mandal II’ scenario akin to the caste-fuelled upheavals of the 1990s. As Congress and the BJP execute ideological U-turns to back this move, India faces a critical question: can it harness this exercise for inclusive development, or will it deepen divisions in a nation already fractured by caste tensions?

The census’s most significant impact could be its ability to deliver precise data to address inequality. Caste remains a persistent barrier — Dalits face discrimination in employment and housing despite qualifications, and dominant Other Backward Classes (OBC) sub-castes often monopolise reservation benefits. Granular data could ensure resources reach marginalised sub-castes, refining policies on education, jobs, and political representation. For instance, Bihar’s 2023 survey, which found 63% of its population as OBCs and Extremely Backward Classes, led to a 65% reservation quota, showing how such data can shape policy.

However, the risks are real. The census could entrench caste identities, sparking a ‘Mandal II’ scenario where communities demand higher quotas, challenging the Supreme Court’s 50% reservation cap. The Mandal Commission’s implementation in the 1990s triggered protests and reshaped politics; a repeat could inflame tensions, especially in caste-sensitive states like Bihar. Categorising thousands of castes and sub-castes is a logistical nightmare, as seen in the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census, which reported all kinds of errors. Respondents may misreport caste identities to gain benefits, undermining data reliability. Rising reservation demands could empower regional parties to mobilise OBCs, deepening political polarisation and diverting focus from universal development goals like poverty eradication and educational reform.

The BJP, historically opposed to caste enumeration to preserve its Hindutva narrative of Hindu unity, has reversed its stance — likely under pressure from allies like Nitish Kumar and with Bihar’s elections looming

The ideological shifts by India’s major parties add complexity. Congress, once anchored in Nehru’s vision of a casteless society, has embraced caste census under Rahul Gandhi, framing it as a tool for proportional representation to woo OBC and Dalit voters. This shift risks alienating its broader base while betting heavily on caste-based mobilisation. The BJP, historically opposed to caste enumeration to preserve its Hindutva narrative of Hindu unity, has reversed its stance — likely under pressure from allies like Nitish Kumar and with Bihar’s elections looming.

The pragmatic pivot aims to counter Congress’s narrative but could backfire if census data fuels widespread quota demands, fracturing the party’s coalition. Both parties’ U-turns reflect electoral calculations more than long-term vision, risking the entrenchment of caste-based politics over national cohesion.

Caste, after all, is a uniquely Indian phenomenon — deeply embedded in the country’s social fabric but also a relic of inequality. While there is no merit in pretending it doesn’t exist, neither should its revival as a political tool be celebrated as progress. Even the Constitution’s framers visualised affirmative action as a time-bound corrective — not a permanent framework. Dr Ambedkar warned that caste should not define public life. A caste census that ends up reinforcing social divisions risks undoing decades of effort to build a more egalitarian society.

The caste census’s success hinges entirely on its execution. Robust methodology — including unambiguous questionnaires, trained enumerators, and transparent data processing — is essential to avoid the errors of previous attempts. Public trust must be earned to pre-empt accusations of political bias, as seen in some state-level surveys. The broader implications — from delimitation to women’s reservation — will rest on the quality and credibility of the data. A poorly executed caste census may harden identity lines and weaken national unity. But if carried out with integrity and used judiciously, it could serve as a tool to fine-tune social justice — enabling marginalised groups to access opportunity and dignity without reinforcing old hierarchies.

India stands at a crossroads. It cannot afford another divisive conundrum. A well-executed caste census could illuminate pathways to equity, but if mishandled, it risks fuelling discord and political opportunism. The legacy of this exercise will depend not just on what is measured — but on how the nation chooses to act upon it.

### comment



Portuguese sailors and scientists promoted this attitude from the 15th Century, with clear indications of preparing saplings in one place to take to all others where the vessels would go to see how they behaved in the following places, their exuberance, production, etc



could enter this field deeply, spreading the new improved seeds or plant varieties with the corresponding saplings around the country.

All the advancements would be patented, and the varieties of saplings would be sold according to the value they would add to the new owner. It would be an extraordinary service to all those practicing agriculture, allowing them to improve their earnings regularly through continuous research.

**Innovative private groups:** Must establish several Centres of R&D in the whole country, for example:

- in zones with usually high temperatures and very dry;

- in high altitude zones, where the temperature is fresher, with some humidity;

- In low altitude zones, in coastal locations,

- In high altitude zones in the North and North East of the Country;

- Other zones to consider.

The group must establish a centre in each zone with competent researchers who graduated in agronomy, chemical sciences, biochemistry, etc., not many, but very practical and creative. They must be much more oriented to research results, accelerating the outcomes.

In the first phase, all the fruits and vegetables produced in that zone would receive particular attention to improve their quality and productivity, eventually adding new characteristics, nutrient effects and vitamins to deliver more value.

This exercise of amelioration would be extended to all the eatable and edible items, such as fruits and vegetables, to give the farmers better products to take to the market. I would provide great importance to the contents of such plants and fruits to give a clear indication to the consumers of the usefulness and benefits of their consumption to one’s health.

In the second phase, all the fruits and vegetables not produced in the region would deserve attention to see if they can adapt to the climate conditions or if there is a need to grow them in greenhouses during a specific period to take them to open space later, or to develop the whole lifetime in greenhouses.

**There will be surprises:** Many other plants may be prone to grow and give pleasant fruits in places they were not yet planted, only because no one had thought of such.

In the third phase, of all the species, choose those with high market value to make saplings available to those farmers who want to plant and obtain reasonable profits. And look at many other fruit trees you never thought would be productive in India. Pears in India are not abundant, and I feel they could do well alongside apple trees as in fresh-climate countries.

See also the behaviour of saplings of blueberries or strawberries, and the variety of fruits today becoming common, as avocados, dragon fruits, custard apples, pineapples, and pomegranates, which are now becoming very frequent in Indian marketplaces, as gradually more planted in India and well sold.

I have great expectations of the olive trees. The new varieties

in Portugal and Spain are low shrubs and plenty of leaves, beginning with olives production very soon.

In Portugal, alongside vineyards, there are vast plantations of olive trees. Where grapes are planted today in India, the growing of olive trees will probably be feasible and expand thereafter. It is essential to try diverse varieties of olive saplings to choose the best one.

In all agro-production fields, it is essential to train people to plant the trees respecting the economic distances among them for the best productivity, using manure or natural fertilizers obtained by composting and also using natural pesticides made of extracts of a wide variety of leaves with properties of scaring away the agents provoking diseases in the plants.

**Flowers planting:** It is a vast field of learning and doing and is much more likely to provide much money. Today, their production is growing, and still, when the domestic use is very high, their export is low or stagnant, and there is room to grow, paying well all those working in such activity.

For export, long-lasting flowers are much in search as the orchids and roses. Also, long-duration flowers, such as sterilitia (or bird of paradise), Anthuriums, etc., are much appreciated for their long duration. They grow near the Sea in sunny places.

India has fragrant flowers like jasmine, tuberose, gardenia, etc., and young girls use a vast quantity of them as permanent perfume and beauty accessories.

**Mushroom production:** The scientific curiosity of discovering if this or that new species goes well is to applaud! Until some time back, the mushrooms were collected in the hilly and mountainous zone, with particular risks of picking some poisonous species.

When one produces through selected varieties of microscopic spores, it gives the certainty that there are no poisonous ones. The consumption of mushrooms is growing very fast because they are nutritive and tasty when accompanying some popular dishes.

It seems there is an enormous possibility of producing much more. At the same time, a good campaign highlighting its health benefits could foster its consumption by all families since it is a nutritious vegetable.

*(The Author is Professor at AESE-Business School (Lisbon), at I.L.M. Rohtak (India), author of The Rise of India)*

## Private R&D is effective, India needs more intensity

people’s *edit*

### THE TROUBLE WITH “THEY SHOULD...”

JOHN MALVINO ALFONSO

She walked into the church office, clearly upset. “You know, those children threw a ball at me! Don’t they have any manners?” she said with frustration. A Brother who was sitting there gently asked her to take a seat. “Why should I sit? I’ve come to complain! Where is the Parish Priest?” she asked, still angry. “The Vicar will be here soon,” the Brother said calmly. “He’ll come? But when?” she asked sharply. “It would be nice if you could sit for a while,” he said kindly. After a moment, she sat down, but her anger hadn’t gone.

In our daily lives, we carry expectations. We plan, hope and assume that things will go a certain way. But when life doesn’t follow our plan, we feel disturbed. Our moods shift and often, so does the way we speak and act. Like changing outfits, we suddenly switch our tone and attitude. At times, we blurt out words we don’t mean. We stop trying to understand others and focus only on our own disappointment.

Take Jenita’s story, for example. She was her mother’s only daughter, working in a city call center. Her mother sent her to college with love and many pieces of advice. She hoped Jenita would follow a good path. But Jenita fell in love, left home, and broke her mother’s expectations. Shocked and hurt, her mother filed a police complaint and brought her back home. But instead of talking calmly, she scolded her harshly and said things in anger. As a result, Jenita left home again—and this time, for good. Her mother was left feeling abandoned and heartbroken.

What went wrong? Just expectations. We all want our children to have a good future. That’s natural. But sometimes, we push our own dreams onto them. We forget that they also have their own hopes and choices. When they don’t do what we expect, we get angry or disappointed. But is that fair?

Both the stories above teach us something: when our expectations aren’t met, we often react badly. The mother in Jenita’s story wanted her daughter to follow her way of life. But when that didn’t happen, she didn’t know how to handle it.

Having expectations is not wrong. But holding on to them too tightly can hurt us—and others. What if someone behaves differently from what we expect? The situation itself may not be a problem. The real issue is how we respond. Our minds tell us, “They should act like me.” That stubborn thinking leads to pain.

We need to train our minds to accept that people are different. Many of us think, “They should do what I say.” But shouldn’t we also try to be understanding, to adjust, and to spread happiness? If we are willing to change, and if we are open to asking for help—like from a counsellor—we give ourselves a chance to grow and feel better.

Everyone wants to be happy. But we often block our own happiness by building walls made of judgment, pride, and expectation. We think we’re always right, and in doing so, we ignore others’ feelings. To stay mentally healthy, we need to be open—not just to being understood, but to understanding others too.

In the end, we must ask ourselves: Is our attitude helping us—or hurting us?

### May Himanshi’s tribe increase!

While we are struggling to come out of the unbearable sorrow due to the death of 26 innocent people in the dastardly and unpardonable terrorist attack in Pahalagam, we are further saddened to learn that the hard core right wing elements are attacking the Kashmiri students in different parts of the country and also the hapless Muslims who are in no way connected to the terrorist attack in Kashmir.

It is said that unable to bear the torture given to them by the right wing goons and to save their lives, many Kashmiri students have already returned home. It is alleged that the police who have to maintain law and order remain a mute spectator to the atrocities committed by the lumpen.

In this context, it is really adorable that Himanshi who lost her husband Navy Officer Lt Vinay Narwal whose forlorn figure next to her slain husband became the face of the Pahalagam massacre has appealed to people to stop spewing hatred against any community. She insisted that we should only strive for peace and advised the hard core elements not to harm Muslims or Kashmiris. Even her loss is substantially irreparable, Himanshi’s love for others who are also innocent like her husband who was slain by the terrorists is beyond appreciation. As she wished, may her husband’s soul rest in peace. And as per our wish, may her tribe increase!

Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai

## letterstotheeditor

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needs to be of one level in order to prevent people from slipping and falling. This aspect needs to be looked into by the authorities in future.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

### Laughter tonic is the best of all

Life without laughter is like a flower without fragrance. Laughter can firmly put both physiology and psychology of a person in top gear. Retaining the ability to laugh at oneself, someone or something can be one of the most precious qualities of a man or a woman.

It is a line that separates laughter and pain, happiness and sadness, comedy and tragedy. For enjoying life and keeping vibrancy of life alive, nothing can beat laughter. Give a person the uncanny sense of humour, even the wry one, there is no way he will slip into grief.

To keep apprehension, tension and depression at bay, to keep friendship and relation intact, to disentangle from a tricky and tight situation, the “laughter tonic” can help. Plenty of human emotions are described as mankind’s blessing to people, and humour is counted as one.

Studies and statistics have their own value; but individuals’ intricate faculty to loosen their facial muscles, let out a guffaw and go gaga transcend

learning, research and scholarship. “World laughter day” observed on May 4, was founded in 1998 by India’s Madan Kataria, a physician and founder of Laughter Yoga.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

### Vietnam victory over US

The Vietnam War, which ended 50 years ago with the fall of Saigon in 1975, holds enduring lessons for the world—militarily, politically, and morally. The victory of the Vietnamese over the Americans was seen as that of David against Goliath, the small nation against the big one.

The ‘Napalm Girl’ is a famous photo that shocked the US public in 1972 about the terror of the Vietnam War. For many Vietnamese, the war wasn’t just about communism vs. capitalism—it was a fight for independence and national reunification after decades of colonialism. That deep-rooted nationalism gave the Vietnamese resistance unmatched resolve, which foreign military power could not erode.

Vietnam’s victory teaches that wars are not just about who has more weapons, but about who has more resolve, legitimacy, and understanding of the terrain—both physical and human. It remains a cautionary tale about the dangers of extreme pride and the need

for humility in global affairs. Vietnam is a major reason why a country like the US, which has been at war throughout its existence, is today reluctant to invade other countries to make them follow its writ.

Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai

### Rare earth minerals are of importance

The US & Ukraine have signed an agreement on the rare earth minerals that are available in the latter country. It is a bilateral agreement and has got nothing to do with India. Therefore one is not able to understand the news reports that say it will be beneficial for India. We should have some self-respect and some shame not to be a hanger-on at the tables of the US and Ukraine and wait for their leftovers or chew on the bones that they drop while they partake of the choice meat. The rare earth minerals are of strategic importance in the automotive, electronics, defence and space industries. There are some deposits within India and we have a private entrepreneur prospecting and mining for it under licence in some African country. Thus if we have to acquire the rare earth minerals we should do it on our own steam and not as a camp follower of the US and pick up leftovers as a consequence of the US-Ukraine agreement.

Srinivas Kamat, Mysore