

NEXT IAS

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

Time: 45 Min

Date: 11-07-2024

Table of Content

- The Case For a Caste Census
- Divorced Muslim Women Entitled to Maintenance
- Technology Upgradation Need for MSMEs
- Thirty Meter Telescope

NEWS IN SHORT

- Financial inclusion Index
- Israel's Hannibal Directive
- Mitochondrial Donation
- Pearl Spot
- Durand Cup Tournament

THE CASE FOR A CASTE CENSUS

Context

- Recently, it was found that there is a **need to amend the Census Act of 1948** to make enumeration by caste mandatory, instead of leaving it to the whims of the Union Executive.

About

- India, with its rich cultural diversity, has a complex social structure that includes various castes and communities.
- Caste-wise enumeration** was introduced during **British Colonial Rule (1881-1931)**.
 - However, independent India abandoned full caste enumeration due to concerns about perpetuating caste divisions.

Census Authority

- Union Subject:** While **Census is a Union subject**, the **Collection of Statistics Act, 2008** empowers States and even local bodies to gather necessary statistics.
- Caste Surveys:** Individual States can conduct caste surveys (e.g., Karnataka in 2015 and Bihar in 2023), but Census data carries more authority and is less contested.

Imperatives for a Caste Census (Why a Caste Census Matters)

- Social Imperative:** Caste remains a foundational social construct in India. As of 2011-12, only about 5% of Indian marriages were inter-caste.
 - The use of caste surnames and caste marks persists, and residential segregation by caste continues. Choices of candidates for elections and ministers for Cabinets are still influenced by caste considerations.
- Legal Imperative:** Constitutionally-mandated policies of social justice, including reservations in electoral constituencies, education, and public employment, cannot be effectively pursued without detailed caste-wise data.
 - Although the **Constitution uses the term 'class' instead of 'caste'**, Supreme Court rulings have consistently emphasised caste as a relevant criterion for defining backward classes and upholding reservation policies.
 - The Supreme Court **dismissed Maharashtra's plea** to enumerate OBCs in the 2021 Census. This decision is questionable, given the Court's past rulings. **Caste enumeration is a legal imperative**, not merely a policy matter.
- Administrative Imperative:** Detailed caste-wise data is necessary to avoid wrongful inclusions of

undeserving castes and exclusions of deserving ones. It helps prevent a few dominant castes in a reserved category from crowding out others.

- ♦ **Sub-categorization** within reserved categories and determining the income/wealth criterion for the creamy layer also require such data.
- ♦ **Moral Imperative:** The absence of detailed caste-wise data has allowed a coterie of elites, including upper castes and dominant Other Backward Classes (OBCs), to disproportionately control the nation's assets, incomes, and positions of power.

Case for OBC Inclusion in Census

- ♦ **Constitutional Provisions:** Education and Employment Reservations: Similar to SCs and STs, the Constitution permits reservation for OBCs in education (**Article 15(4)**) and public employment (**Article 16(4)**).
- ♦ **Mandal Commission Recommendations:** After the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations, OBCs enjoy reservations in the Central government and its undertakings.
- ♦ **Periodic Revision:** In the Indra Sawhney case (1992), the Supreme Court ruled that the OBC list, based on the 1931 Census, should be revised periodically.

Electoral Constituencies

- ♦ **No Reservation for OBCs:** Unlike SCs and STs, OBCs do not have reservation in electoral constituencies for MPs and MLAs.
- ♦ **73rd and 74th Amendments:** However, after the 73rd and 74th amendments, the Constitution provides for reservations in electoral constituencies in panchayats and municipalities not only for SCs and STs but also for **OBCs (Articles 243D(6) and 243T(6))**.
- ♦ **Essential Data:** For this purpose, caste-wise and area-wise Census data of the OBCs is essential.

EWS Reservation

- ♦ **10% Reservation for EWS:** Despite the absence of supporting empirical data, the Supreme Court upheld the 10% reservation for economically weaker sections (EWS) among those other than OBCs, SCs, and STs.
- ♦ **Call for Enumeration:** Given the EWS reservation, the Census should now enumerate all castes, including the upper castes, as it did until 1931.

Arguments Against Caste Census

- ♦ **Social Divisiveness:** India's social divisions have existed for nearly 3,000 years, well before the Census efforts.
 - While caste counts of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) since 1951 haven't led to conflicts among these groups, critics argue that casteism won't disappear by excluding it from the Census.
 - Religion, language, and region, also enumerated, can be equally divisive.
- ♦ **Administrative Challenges:** Some view caste enumeration as an administrative nightmare. Unlike the fuzzy concept of race, caste identity is clear-cut.
 - The Indian government has smoothly enumerated 1,234 SC castes and 698 ST tribes. Enumerating the remaining 4,000-odd castes, mostly State-specific, shouldn't pose an intractable problem.
- ♦ **Reservation Demands:** Contrary to fears, caste-wise Census data could help address reservation claims objectively.
 - Governments could debate and decide on reservations for groups like the Marathas, Patidars, and Jats.
 - Fuzzy data, however, allows arbitrary implementation for electoral considerations.
- ♦ **Legal Challenges:** When States like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Odisha, and Jharkhand attempted to implement reservations for OBCs in local body elections, the judiciary (High Courts and Supreme Court) stayed the same due to the absence of caste-wise OBC data.
- ♦ **Contradictory Stance:** While the judiciary demands caste-wise data to uphold reservations, the executive arm of the State has avoided enumerating the same data.
- ♦ Demanding a caste census often comes from the victims of discrimination, while vested interests resist it. Germany's census, for instance, does not enumerate people by race, which disadvantages its Black population.
 - Applying **Cicero's test of 'Cui Bono' (who benefits?)**, we recognise that collecting caste data is crucial for addressing historical injustices.

Issues With Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC)-2011

- ♦ **Poor Design and Execution:** Unfortunately, the SECC-2011 was poorly designed and executed. It was **not conducted under the Census Act, 1948**, as the Act was not amended to include caste as a parameter.

- ♦ **Union Ministries Conducted Survey:** The SECC-2011 was conducted through the **Union Ministries of Rural Development and Urban Development**, which lacked prior experience in sociological/anthropological surveys.
- ♦ The **questionnaire asked open-ended questions** about caste, leading to confusion among enumerators. They struggled to distinguish between genuine castes, alternative caste names, larger caste groups, sub-castes, surnames, clan names, and gotras.
- ♦ **Ludicrous Figure:** The SECC-2011 results threw up a ludicrous figure of 46 lakh castes, and the data was never released.
 - The last time caste was enumerated (1931 Census), India had 4,147 castes apart from the depressed classes/untouchables.

Way Forward for Caste Enumeration in Census

- ♦ **Census Act (1948)** should be **amended** to mandate caste enumeration. Leaving it to the whims of the Union executive is inadequate.
- ♦ **Census Commissioner's Role:** Caste should be enumerated as part of the regular Census by the Census Commissioner.
 - ♦ **Pertinent Questions:** A few pertinent questions about caste should be added to the questionnaire.
- ♦ **Expert Involvement:** The government should enlist sociological/anthropological experts.
 - Experts can draw up a draft list of castes specific to each State.
 - ♦ **Public Input:** The draft list should be published online, inviting suggestions and comments from the public before finalising it.
- ♦ **Streamlined Enumeration Process:** Enumerators should be provided with a specific list of castes (based on the finalised draft).
 - ♦ The questionnaire should ask for sub-caste names, caste names, larger caste groups, and caste surnames of respondents.
 - ♦ Internet-enabled handheld devices preloaded with caste details will make enumeration easy and foolproof.
- ♦ **Legal Review of 2021 Judgment:** Interested States should move the apex Court to review its 2021 judgement.
 - ♦ Implementing OBC reservation based on **1931 Census data** and EWS reservation without empirical data is farcical. The next Census must enumerate caste.

Conclusion

- A caste census is not merely a capitulation to identity politics; it is a necessary step toward a more equitable and just society. It is a reflection of our commitment to social justice and equitable development.
- **Amending the Census Act, 1948**, to make caste enumeration mandatory would be a significant stride in this direction.
- **Peter Drucker** famously said, "Only what gets measured gets managed." This adage holds true when it comes to addressing the problems faced by historically discriminated social groups.
 - ♦ Whether it's based on caste, race, religion, gender, or disability, collecting data on group identities is essential for informed policy-making and inclusive development.

Source: TH

DIVORCED MUSLIM WOMEN ENTITLED TO MAINTENANCE

Context

- The Supreme Court held that a divorced Muslim woman is entitled to a claim of maintenance under **Section 125** of the **Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973**, against her former husband.

Background

- The Telangana High Court directed a Muslim man to pay ₹ 10,000 interim maintenance to his former wife.
- However the husband contended that the provisions of the Muslim Women (**Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986**, being a special law, should prevail over **Section 125 of the CrPC**.

Evolution of law on Maintenance

- The law governing maintenance for destitute wives, children, and parents has been codified under **Section 125 of the CrPC**.
 - ♦ It stipulates that if any person "having sufficient means neglects or refuses to maintain" his wife, then a magistrate of the first class may, upon proof of such neglect or refusal, order such a person to make a monthly allowance for the maintenance of his wife at a monthly rate as the magistrate thinks fit.
- **The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986**, is a religion-specific law that provides for a procedure for a Muslim woman to claim maintenance during divorce.

- ♦ **Section 3 of the Act** guarantees the payment of maintenance only during the period of iddat — a period, usually of three months.
- It was enacted to essentially nullify the Supreme Court's 1985 decision in the case of **Mohd. Ahmad Khan v. Shah Bano Begum** which upheld a Muslim woman's right to seek maintenance from her divorced husband under Section 125 of the CrPC.

Supreme Court Verdict

- SC said that **Section 125 CrPC** was introduced as a measure of social justice to protect women and children.
- It pointed out that the provision manifested the commitment under **Article 15(3) of the Constitution** towards special measures to ensure a life of dignity for women at all stages of their lives.
- The ruling reiterated that maintenance under **Section 125 CrPC** exists in addition to the provisions for maintenance under the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 (MWPRD Act), not against it.

Source: TH

TECHNOLOGY UPGRADATION NEED FOR MSMEs

Context

- Recently, the Union Minister for MSMEs gave six pillars as focus areas for the growth of the MSME sector and its green transition.

About

- The areas identified are;
 - ♦ Formalization and access to credit,
 - ♦ Increased access to market and e-commerce adoption,
 - ♦ Higher productivity through modern technology, enhanced skill levels and digitalisation in the service sector,
 - ♦ Support to Khadi, Village, and Coir industry to globalize them, and
 - ♦ Empowerment of women and artisans, through enterprise creation.

What are MSMEs?

- MSMEs or Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises are businesses that are defined by their **investment and turnover levels**.
- They are considered an important sector of the economy as they create jobs, generate income, and promote entrepreneurship.

Existing & Revised definition of MSMEs			
Existing MSME Classification			
Criteria : Investment in Plant & Machinery or Equipment			
Classification	Micro	Small	Medium
Mfg. Enterprises	Investment<Rs. 25 lac	Investment<Rs. 5 cr.	Investment <Rs. 10 cr.
Services Enterprise	Investment<Rs. 10 lac	Investment< Rs. 2 cr.	Investment<Rs. 5 cr.
Revised MSME Classification			
Composite Criteria : Investment And Annual Turnover			
Classification	Micro	Small	Medium
Manufacturing & Services	Investment< Rs. 1 cr. and Turnover < Rs.5 cr.	Investment<Rs. 10 cr. and Turnover < Rs.50 cr.	Investment< Rs. 20 cr. and Turnover < Rs.100 cr.

Contribution of MSMEs

- **Contribution in Economy:** MSMEs are often called the backbone of the Indian economy; they account for more than 11 crore jobs and contribute around **27% of India's GDP**.
- **Employment Generation:** The sector consists of around 6.4 crore MSMEs, with 1.5 crore of them registered on the Udyam portal and employs around **23% of the Indian labor force**, making it the **second-largest employer in India after agriculture**.
- **Output and Exports:** They account for **38.4% of the total manufacturing** output and contribute **45.03% of the country's total exports**.

Challenges faced by MSMEs in India

- **Access to Finance:** MSMEs struggle to secure capital due to a lack of collateral, limited credit history, or inadequate access to formal financial institutions.
- **Bureaucratic Red Tape:** Navigating complex regulations and bureaucratic procedures can be time-consuming and costly for MSMEs, often diverting resources away from core business activities.
- **Increased Competition:** MSMEs face stiff competition from larger, more established companies that have greater resources and market influence.
- **Lack of Technological knowledge:** Many MSMEs lack the technical expertise needed to modernize their operations, adopt new technologies, and stay competitive in the market.
- **Marketing and Networking Opportunities:** Limited resources and networks prevent MSMEs from effectively marketing their products and services, making it difficult to reach new customers and grow their businesses.
- **Lack of Formalization:** Many MSMEs operate informally or are unregistered, which limit their access to government support, financial services, and other benefits that are available to formally registered businesses.

Government initiatives to promote the MSME sector

- **MSME Champions scheme:** The objective of the scheme is to modernize MSMEs' manufacturing processes, reduce wastages, encourage innovativeness, sharpen business competitiveness and facilitate their National and Global reach and excellence.
- **Udyam Registration:** It is an online registration process to simplify the registration of MSMEs. The primary objective is to provide MSMEs with a streamlined process to avail themselves of various benefits and incentives offered by the government.
- **Section 15 of the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act, 2006**, and newly enacted **Section 43B(h) of the Income-tax Act** says that businesses must pay these MSME Registered Enterprises within 15 days, or up to 45 days if they have an agreement.
- **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE):** This scheme provides collateral-free credit to micro and small enterprises through a credit guarantee mechanism.

Way Ahead

- For MSMEs to sustain and grow in the current challenging situation, the **non-performing asset (NPA) timeline** must be extended to **180 days from 90 days**. It will provide relief to the sector as many MSMEs are struggling because of this.
- **The Interest Equalisation Scheme** which supports exports must be extended for a period of five years.
- For the textile and garment sector, which is dominated by MSMEs, the **Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products** and **Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies schemes** should be extended for another five years for the sector.
- Therefore, with schemes that provide funds for **infrastructure creation, technology upgradation and climate change adaptation**, the MSME sector will be able to contribute even more for the economy.

Source: TH

THIRTY METER TELESCOPE

Context

- Recently, Indian scientists developed an **open-source tool** to generate infrared star catalogue for **Thirty Meter Telescope**.

About the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT)

- It is a groundbreaking international scientific project that aims to revolutionise our understanding of the universe.
- It will be the world's most advanced ground-based optical, near-infrared, and mid-infrared observatory.
- It integrates cutting-edge innovations in precision control, segmented mirror design, and adaptive optics.
- At its core lies a segmented mirror composed of 492 individual hexagonal segments, forming a single light-collecting surface.

Key Features

- **Mirror Size:** When operational, the TMT's light-collecting primary mirror will be the largest in the Northern Hemisphere. Its 30-metre mirror surpasses other planned extremely large telescopes.
- **Segmented Mirror:** The mirror consists of 492 hexagonal segments, each measuring 1.4 metres. These segments work together to create a powerful light-gathering surface.
- **Location:** The TMT is proposed to be built on **Mauna Kea**, an iconic site on the **island of Hawai'i**.
 - ♦ Mauna Kea's **high altitude** and clear skies make it an **ideal location** for astronomical observations.

Mission and Values

- TMT operates based on the values of respect, inclusion, and mutual stewardship. It embraces a community model of astronomy, recognizing its responsibility to support and engage with local communities.
- The observatory seeks to advance scientific knowledge while fostering connections among partner countries and their citizens, representing over half the world's population.

Future Prospects

- As the TMT project progresses, it promises groundbreaking discoveries across various fields of astronomy.
- Its **segmented mirror technology, adaptive optics, and precise control systems** will enable unprecedented observations of **distant galaxies, exoplanets, and cosmic phenomena**.
- **India** is a key partner in the TMT project, with India TMT Center at **Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA)** leading the national collaboration.

Source: PIB

NEWS IN SHORT

FINANCIAL INCLUSION INDEX

Context

- The Financial inclusion index, capturing the extent of financial inclusion across the country, rose to **64.2 in March 2024**, showing growth across all parameters.

What is RBI's financial inclusion index?

- In 2021, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** launched a Financial Inclusion Index (FI-Index) to track the process of ensuring access to financial services, timely and adequate credit for vulnerable groups such as weaker sections and low-income groups at an affordable cost.
- The index incorporates the **details of banking, investment, insurance, postal, and pension sectors** in consultation with government and respective sector regulators.
- The FI-Index has been constructed **without any 'base year'**. The FI-Index is **published annually** in July.

Range and Parameters of FI-Index

- The index captures information on various aspects of financial inclusion in a single value ranging between 0 and 100, where **0 represents complete financial exclusion** and **100 indicates full financial inclusion**.
- The FI-Index comprises three broad parameters, **access (35%), usage (45%), and quality (20%)**, with each of these consisting of various dimensions, which are computed based on a number of indicators.

Source: TH

ISRAEL'S HANNIBAL DIRECTIVE

Context

- As Hamas raided southern Israel, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) activated the "Hannibal Directive".

About

- **The Hannibal Procedure or Hannibal Protocol**, is an Israeli military policy that stipulates the use of maximum force in the event of a soldier being kidnapped
- The use of force is carried out **even at the risk of killing a captive soldier**.
- The doctrine was formulated as a response to the Jibril Agreement of **1985** in which 1,150

Palestinian prisoners were exchanged for three Israelis who had been seized in Lebanon by the Syria-based militant group Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC).

Source: IE

MITOCHONDRIAL DONATION

Context

- Recently, a new **In vitro fertilisation (IVF)** procedure known as **Mitochondrial Donation** gave families affected by certain forms of **Mitochondrial disease (or Mito)** hope that they can have children who are genetically related to them without Mito.

About the Mitochondrial Donation

- It is an **IVF-based assisted reproductive technology** designed to prevent the transmission of mitochondrial disease from mothers to their biological children.
- It ensures that only healthy mitochondria are passed on to embryos, minimising the risk of severe mitochondrial disease.
- It involves several techniques **aimed at creating embryos** with healthy mitochondria.
- Severe mitochondrial disease can have devastating effects on families, including premature child mortality, debilitating suffering, and poor quality of life.

Working

- **In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF):** The process begins with IVF, where eggs are fertilised outside the body.
- **Nuclear DNA from Both Parents:** The embryo contains nuclear DNA from both the prospective mother and father.
- **Mitochondria from a Donor:** Healthy mitochondria are introduced by using an egg donated by another woman (the mitochondrial donor).

Significance

- **Prevent Transmission:** Mitochondrial donation reduces the risk of mothers passing on mitochondrial disease to their children.
- **Alleviate Suffering:** Children born with healthy mitochondria will be spared the suffering caused by this life-threatening condition.

Source: BS

PEARL SPOT

In News

- Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (Kufos) is preparing to launch a genome editing mission to boost Pearl Spot production

About Pearl Spot (Etroplus suratensis)

- It is commonly known as "Karimeen" in Kerala and is an indigenous fish extensively found along the east and south-west coasts of Peninsular India.
- It is a euryhaline species that inhabits mainly brackish water and river mouths.
- It is distributed in the coastal regions of peninsular India and Sri Lanka.
- In India, the wild populations have been recorded from the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
 - ♦ There are also populations in Goa, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal
- **IUCN Red List Status** Least Concern.

Source: IE

DURAND CUP TOURNAMENT

Context

- Recently, the President of India has unveiled the **Trophies of the Durand Cup Tournament 2024**.
 - ♦ The Trophies unveiled include the **Durand Cup, the President's Cup and Shimla Trophy**.

Durand Cup Tournament

- Organized by the Indian Armed Forces, it is **Asia's oldest** and the world's third oldest football tournament.
- Inaugurated in Shimla in 1888 as an Army Cup and only open to British Indian Army troops in India, later opened up to civilian teams.
- It is named after its founder, **Sir Mortimer Durand**, Foreign Secretary of British India.
- **Mohun Bagan Super Giant** are the defending champions, having won the tournament for a record 17th time, the most by any team.

Source: PIB

