

SECC of 2011: When caste data was collected but not published

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

The most recent data on the populations of individual castes and tribes in India were collected between 2011 and 2013 as part of the Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC), 2011, an exercise

that followed the Census of 2011.

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The wartime Census of 1941 collected data on individual castes, which were, however, not released. Censuses in independent India have never collected disaggregated caste data.

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As such, the most recent publicly available data on caste populations at the national level are from the 1931 Census, which will serve as the baseline for the caste data that the government has now decided to collect as part of the upcoming, pandemic-delayed Census 2021.

SECC 2011 & Census 2011

SECC 2011 was a study of socio-economic status of rural and urban households, and allowed the ranking of households based on predefined parameters.



The Union Ministry of Rural Development began the SECC on June 29, 2011 through a nationwide door-to-door enumeration exercise. It was mainly carried out in 2011 and 2012, but in a few states, enumeration and verification went on until 2013.

The data, which were to be used for policy, research, and the implementation of various development programs, were compiled from 24 lakh enumeration blocks, each containing around 125 households.

The caste census was under the administrative control of the Ministry of Home Affairs, through the Registrar General of India (RGI) and Census Commissioner of India.

Census 2011 was carried out before the SECC, between February 9 and February 28, 2011. Personal data collected in the population Census are confidential.

But all personal information in SECC is open for use by government departments to grant and/ or restrict benefits to households.

Questions in exercises

COMMON QUESTIONS: Many questions were common to the Household Schedule of the population Census — which collects data on broad demographic characteristics and economic activities of households and their members — and SECC 2011.

These included questions on gender, marital status, religion, literacy, date of birth, and relationship to the head of the family. However, the SECC 2011 sought some additional specific details on economic conditions. (See below)

HOUSEHOLD SCHEDULE: The questionnaire for the Household Schedule in Census 2011 had 29 questions. They sought information on mother tongue, other languages known, migration characteristics and reasons for migration, surviving children (daughters and sons), children ever born alive, and number of children born alive over the previous year, among other things.

DISABILITY & ILLNESS: The questionnaire for the Household Schedule only asked about disability. The SECC sought more details on the nature of the disability — sight, hearing, speech, movement, mental retardation, mental illness, multiple disability, other disability — as also additional information about diseases such as [cancer](#), TB, and leprosy.

Specific caste groups

The Household Schedule 2011 asked if the person belonged to a Scheduled Caste (SC) or a Scheduled Tribe (ST), but not the name of the caste or tribe within the larger SC/ ST tent. It did not ask respondents if they belonged to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) or to the “general category”.

The SECC sought disaggregated details of caste. It asked for the respondents’ “Caste/ Tribe Status”, choosing from “SC” (Code 1), “ST” (Code 2), “Other” (Code 3), and “No Caste/ Tribe” (Code 4), and for the “Name of Caste/ Tribe” if the respondent belonged to any of the first three categories.

The SECC clarified that “SC can be only among the Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists”, while “ST can be from any”. This follows from a Government Order from 1990, which says: “No person who

professes a religion different from the Hindu, the Sikh or the Buddhist religion shall be deemed to be a member of Scheduled Caste.”

Additional details in SECC

ECONOMIC STATUS: The SECC asked for information on housing/ dwelling, such as ownership and the predominant material of wall and roof (grass/ bamboo/ wood/ mud/ brick/ stone, etc). It also collected information on household amenities such as the source of drinking water and lighting (electricity/ kerosene/ solar etc), latrines, waste water outlets, and availability of a separate kitchen, and on assets such as refrigerator, telephone/ mobile phone, computer, motorised vehicles, ACs, and washing machines.

IN URBAN AREAS: The SECC sought the names of both father and mother, and main source of income — from begging/ ragpicking to street vending; domestic, construction, shop, transport, etc work; to “non-work” (pension/ rent/ interest) and no income.

IN RURAL AREAS: The SECC sought to know if any member in a household belonged to a primitive tribal group, was a legally released bonded labourer, or a manual scavenger. It collected details of the main source of household income — cultivation, manual casual labourer, foraging, begging, etc — and of land ownership and availability of mechanised agricultural equipment, etc.



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