THE POLITICS OF THE COUNT:

Caste in Contemporary India

By

Trina Vithayathil

B.A., Carleton College, 1998

M.P.P., Harvard University, 2002

M.A., Brown University, 2010

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Sociology at Brown University

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

MAY 2014

This dissertation by Trina Vithayathil is accepted in its present form

by the Department of Sociology as satisfying the dissertation requirement for the degree

of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date_____ _____

Leah K. VanWey, Advisor

Recommended to the Graduate Council

Date_____ _____

Patrick Heller, Committee Member

Date_____ _____

José Itzigsohn, Committee Member

Date_____ _____

Paget Henry, Reader

Date_____ _____

Gregory Elliott, Reader

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date_____ _____

Peter M. Weber, Dean of the Graduate School

VITAE

Trina Vithayathil, born in St. Louis, MO, attended parochial and public schools before completing her B.A. in Geology at Carleton College in 1998. After working for two years at the U.S. Geological Survey's National Earthquake Information Center in Golden, CO she completed an M.P.P. in political and economic development at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government in 2002, where she was a Public Service Fellow. She then spent several years working in Bangalore, India at the Public Affairs Centre and in New York City, NY at the Program on Forced Migration and Health at Columbia University, among other places, during which time she taught as an adjunct lecturer in the Political Science Department at Hunter College. Based on her experiences teaching at Hunter, she decided to return to graduate school to complete a Ph.D. with the hopes of being able to continue doing research while teaching full time. During her doctoral studies in Sociology at Brown University, she was affiliated with the Population Studies and Training Center and the Graduate Program in Development. Her training and research was funded by the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship Program, National Institutes of Health pre-doctoral demography traineeship, Fulbright Hays Program, NSF DDRIG, and several grants from Brown University. She also has had affiliations with the Program on Science, Technology and Society at Harvard University and the Institute for Social and Economic Change in Bangalore. She has published articles in *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Rural Sociology* and *Asian Population Studies*. Upon completing her Ph.D. in Sociology in 2014, she will join the faculty at Providence College and teach in the Department of Global Studies. She lives in Providence, RI with her husband and two sons.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APL: Above Poverty Line

AHL: Abridged House Listing

BCC: Backward Classes Commission

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party

BPL: Below Poverty Line

Congress: Indian National Congress Party

DBA: Data Base Administrator

DEO: Data Entry Operator

GoM: Group of Ministers

JD-U: Janata Dal United Party

MLA: Member of Legislative Assembly [state government]

MP: Member of Parliament

NDA: National Democratic Alliance coalition government

NPR: National Population Register

NSS: National Sample Survey

OBC: Other Backward Classes

PMK: Pattali Makkal Katchi Party

RGI: Registrar General of India

RJD: Rashtriya Janata Dal Party

RSS: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

SC: Scheduled Caste

SECC: Socio-Economic Caste Census

SP: Samajwadi Party

ST: Scheduled Tribe

UPA: United Progressive Alliance coalition government

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

THE 🦁🦅 HINDU

WEAVERS WANT UNIFORM CASTE NAME IN CENSUS

Special Correspondent

The Federation of Weavers has appealed to all members of the community across Karnataka to register their caste name uniformly in the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), which is being conducted to identify the prospective beneficiaries under various schemes and programs based on deprivations.

Speaking to presspersons here on Saturday, federation president M.D. Lakshminarayan said that there were 26 sub-sects in the community and all of them had been appealed to prefix the word "Nekara" to their sub-sect names. "We have asked communities like Devanga, Padmashali, Togataveera and others to prefix 'Nekara' to their caste names," he said.

Mr. Lakshminarayan said that the leaders of the community had done a door-to-door campaign to educate members of the community and would do a second round of campaigning ahead of the second phase of census as well.

Mr. Lakshminarayan claimed that there were about 50 lakh people of the weaving community in Karnataka according to their own estimation. The census, he said, would confirm that they are significant in numbers.

The Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC), 2011, is being carried out in all the States/union territories in a phased manner taking into consideration their preparedness. It is expected to be completed by January 2012.

In Karnataka, 16 districts are being covered in the first phase of the census and the rest will be covered in the second phase.

Source: www.hindu.com

The Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) involves the first nationwide enumeration of caste in India's post-colonial history.[1] Data from the SECC will inform the redistribution of state affirmative action and welfare benefits. The Federation of Weavers in the south

---

[1] There are several thousands subcastes, or jaatis, in current day India. The Anthropological Society of India completed a massive ethnographic project in 1992 entitled "People of India" in which it published 43 volumes of information about the 4,635 communities that it found and verified within India, based on seven years of fieldwork. Within many of the identified communities, there are multiple jaatis divisions, such that the number of subcastes in India is greater than the total number of communities. http://www.ansi.gov.in/people_india.htm last accessed: May 3, 2014.

Indian State of Karnataka is one of a handful of caste associations that mobilized in advance of this heavily contested census. The Federation hopes that tens of thousands of households will add the *Nekara* [weaver] prefix to their subcaste identity to allow for the possibility of generating a separate count for a pan-weaver category as part of the SECC. For Federation President Lakshminarayan, a senior member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Karnataka, the caste census is a chance to create an official count for the weaving community and, in doing so, help to expand the Federation's organizational base and political power both within the BJP and in state-level politics more widely. The broader *Nekara* category appeals to individual subcastes, or *jaatis*, because of its potential to expand access to resources for groups that are otherwise too small in number to make effective political demands. The central government's enumeration of caste provides an opportunity to strengthen the self and external identification of *Nekara* as a social and political category.

The category of *Nekara* brings together numerous weaver subcastes that are on Karnataka's state-specific list of *Other Backward Classes* (OBC). OBC is a national-level administrative and political category that determines affirmative action eligibility for thousands of subcastes that fall into neither an advantaged or 'forward caste' category, nor a historically untouchable or isolated group, such as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).[2] SCs and STs are national-level administrative and political categories that consist of groups that have been eligible for affirmative action since 1950. National-level categories, such as depressed castes, backward classes, forward castes,

[2] The categories of SC and ST emerged and took hold over the course of several decades in the early to mid twentieth century. For more on the 'invention of SCs,' see: Galanter, Marc.1984. *Competing Equalities*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes emerged as part of the expansion and entrenchment of a centralized bureaucratic apparatus during the colonial period. In the aftermath of India's independence, SCs and STs and a wider category of *backward classes* were recognized in the Constitution. For example, Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and includes an addendum stating that "nothing in this article or in clause 2 of article 29 shall prevent the State from making any provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes."[3] While *backward* is not clearly defined in the Constitution, caste and tribal identities have become key categories around which the government conceptualizes and measures backwardness. In contrast to those groups identified as "backward," the forward caste categories consist of subcastes that have held disproportionately high status, power, and material benefits.

The mobilization by the Federation of Weavers follows a post-colonial trend in the political emergence and strengthening of the OBC category and the subsequent extension of central government affirmative action benefits to OBCs in the 1990s. Much of the recent demands to collect updated caste data have emerged in response to the expansion of affirmative action benefits to OBCs, which remains highly contested. In August 1990, the Government of India, upon the recommendation of the Mandal Commission, decided to reserve government jobs for 'socially and educationally backward classes.' Riots and legal stays in parts of urban north India followed this

---

[3] Article 29 focuses on the 'protection of interest of minorities,' and clause 2 states: "no citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the state or receiving aid out of the state funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them."

announcement. The reservation of government jobs for OBCs finally took effect in September 1993. In order to estimate the size of the OBC population, policymakers and researchers have used projections from 1931 decennial census data and data from recent sample surveys. These projections have helped to inform the quota of 'reserved seats' for OBCs in government jobs.

As this dissertation traces, OBC leaders and regional political parties played a key role in forcing the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government to collect nationwide caste data, and in doing so led to the reversal of more than six decades of post-colonial policy. The production of data during the recent caste enumeration is embedded in the wider story of OBC politics and the ongoing deliberation over if, how, and to whom the state should administer a targeted program of redistributive justice in the 21st century.

The example of the Federation of Weavers highlights how caste is an active site of mobilization by the state and civil society. Caste is a dynamic political and social identity in contemporary India, and it continues to structure where people live, the type of work that they do, where they worship, and whom they marry. Caste as a social institution operates as a localized system of stratification that is sustained and evolves in relation to a political history. Within each ethno-linguistic region of India, there are hundreds of castes and subcastes that are specific to that region. Usually a person living in one region of the country has intimate familiarity with castes in their locality, but a limited understanding about caste categories and relations in other ethno-linguistic regions. The strengthening of caste as a political identity coincides with the emergence of broader categories around which caste associations and political parties do their daily

work of mobilizing constituencies in an effort to access resources and power. Civil society and social movements have also organized across jaatis (sub-castes) to address and improve discrimination and inequalities based on caste in private organizations and public settings. As such, the recent enumeration of caste is embedded in formal politics, civil society activism, media representations, social norms, and a range of political actors and encounters. The strengthening of caste as a political institution and the changing nature of caste as a social institution are interwoven processes in contemporary India.

This dissertation provides a critical account of the production of caste data by examining the social and political processes involved in *census making*, which sociologist Bruce Curtis defines as "the process of identifying political subjects and centralizing knowledge."[4] As a sociologist, I was drawn to examine this event that suddenly made visible the messiness of social knowledge-making processes and the political institution of caste. Drawing upon interviews, newspaper coverage, parliamentary records, and secondary sources, I trace the network of actors who publicly pressured the UPA government to agree to conduct a caste count as part of the decennial census, and the subsequent central cabinet decision to count caste as part of a separate state project. By contextualizing the current caste count within a longer historical timeframe, this work seeks to understand how this policy reversal is part of existing institutionalized practices and relationships. I also examine a more localized story of how data are generated. From my observations of caste census operations in Karnataka, which consist of ground level social and political processes and practices (enumerator trainings, census interviews,

---

[4] Curtis, Bruce. 2001. *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics and the Census of Canada 1840-1875.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 24.

mobilizations by caste associations and the relative silence of the media), I am able to trace a coherent story about power and the production of official state data on caste.

The next section focuses on the national-level debate over whether and if the state should collect caste data. In doing so, it highlights how the controversy surrounding the caste count is deeply interwoven with the politics of reservations, or affirmative action, in India. Section two describes three competing explanations for the production of social data, Section three situates this project in the inter-disciplinary literature on caste and politics, the subsequent section discusses the project's methodology, and the final section provides a chapter overview for the dissertation.

1.1. The Politics of the Count: *Meera Jaati Hindustani*[5] [6]

In the lead up to the 2011 decennial census, an active debate over whether or not to collect caste data took place in the opinion pages of India's national newspapers. Prominent public intellectuals spoke out against a caste census, while aligning themselves with the liberal democratic tradition, which emphasizes a nationalist identity over traditional community or caste identities. Nationally renowned TV journalist Barkha Dutt wrote an editorial in the week following the May 2010 *Lok Sabha* (Lower House of Parliament) debate over the caste census:

> Caste confuses me. Perhaps it's because till I became a journalist, I had no notion of it at all. For most of us who were brought up on a staple diet of Nehruvian wisdom, you disowned caste much before you rejected institutionalized religion. It took graduating from the cocoon of liberal education and being thrown into the deep end of Indian

---

[5] "Meera jaati Hindustani" translates to "My Caste is Indian."

[6] I am an Indian-American with family origins from the South Indian State Kerala. This history shaped my interest in this project and aided in completing this research. My family is Christian and our caste would be Syrian Christian. Syrian Christians have a high position in the social hierarchy in Kerala and considerable political power within the state.

politics for me to finally understand how insidious the influence of caste is in our country. I also had to confront the uncomfortable fact that I represented a privileged minority where caste often coincided with class. I could grandly say that caste didn't matter to me, perhaps because I had never lived on the margins of socio-economic development. Nor had I ever known the prejudice that was the constant fellow-traveler of ancient social hierarchies. Over the years—while my own personal disbelief in caste as a marker of identity has only got stronger—I have had to grudgingly accept that caste-based politics has forced a certain amount of egalitarianism into the political system…The problem arises when caste-based politics becomes a short-cut for quota propaganda. Since V.P. Singh first rolled the Mandal dice to more recently, when Arjun Singh forced India's best institutions into the quota regime, 'equality' has become a political euphemism for perpetuating reservations. And reservations, as we all know by now, are the perfect way for a State to abdicate its responsibility to its poorer citizens—substituting real deliverables with ineffective largesse. It's also the reason why the two major political parties—the BJP and the Congress—are so divided on the decision to include a caste-count in the census but are too politically meek to come out and say so…The truth is that the decision to include a caste-count in the census was pushed through in a hurry, and has hardly been thought through. Till just before the Prime Minister indicated his assent to it in Parliament, the Congress had, in fact, been divided on the issue. Pressure from the Yadav allies may have swung the pendulum in a certain direction. But it's a path that could take India back by decades. So, when the census official comes knocking on your door, do what Amitabh Bachan did. Say: "My caste is Indian [Meera jaati Hindustani]." I wonder whether they have a separate column for that.[7]

Dutt articulates a position promoted by India's national media, cosmopolitan middle and upper classes, and subset of public intellectuals.[8] From this perspective, the caste census is a regressive step in policymaking and a ploy by OBC politicians to cement or expand the OBC reservation quota; it fails to move the state closer to its responsibility of providing for those most in need. In this account, caste and class "coincide" at times to compound privilege and disadvantage. While Dutt acknowledges that certain types of caste-based politics have helped to improve long-standing inequalities, the caste census

---

[7] Dutt, Barkha. 2010. *The Hindustan Times,* May 14.

[8] The following essays articulate the position held by intellectuals opposed to a caste census, which otherwise differ in important ways: Teltumbde, Anand. 2010. "Counting Castes: Advantage Ruling Castes." *Counter Currents*, July 14. Sundar, Nandini. 2010. "Will Counting Caste Help to Reduce Inequality?" *The Hindu*, May 11. Gupta, Dipankar. 2010. "And Now They Want a Caste Census." *India Today*, May 10.

represents all that is negative with the politicization of caste. In an editorial published that same week, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, a political theorist who leads one of India's premier independent research and policy institutes, similarly emphasizes his ideological opposition to a caste count based on the ideals of democratic India:

> The decision to, in principle, enumerate caste in the Census is a monumental travesty. At one stroke, it trivialises all that modern India has stood for, and condemns it to the tyranny of an insidious kind of identity politics. The call to enumerate caste in the Census is nothing but a raw assertion of power wearing the garb of social justice, an ideological projection of Indian society masquerading under the colour of social science, and a politics of bad faith being projected as a concern for the poor. It is not news that India is deeply structured by hierarchies of various kinds, including caste. These hierarchies still appallingly define structures of opportunity and oppression. But the vision of a just and modern India was founded on an aspiration to promote justice without falling into the same pinched up identities that had kept us narrow and bigoted for so long. The premises of a caste census reproduce the very things we had so long laboured to fight. The precise contours of the Census are still not clear, and much of the debate has been on the practical difficulties of this exercise. But there is little doubt how enumerating caste will condemn us in a normative sense.[9]

Citing notions of "freedom, agency and dignity," Mehta vehemently opposes a caste census on normative grounds; because caste should not matter in a modern democracy consisting of political equals, the state should not count and reinforce this traditional and hierarchical identity. Later in his editorial, Mehta distinguishes OBC reservations from similar measures for *Dalits*, or members of historically untouchable castes who are administratively categorized as SC, by asserting that "designing remedial measures for Dalits, including addressing discrimination does not require a census" and that "politically assertive groups like OBCs…hijacked the Dalit discourse on deprivation to their own ends."[10] Like Dutt, Mehta sees the caste count as an unnecessary political

---

[9] Mehta, Pratap Bhanu, 2010. *The Indian Express,* May 12.

[10] The categories of SC and *Dalit* are often used interchangeably to represent historically untouchable castes. Yet, *Dalits* who have converted to Islam or Christianity often still experience the discrimination of belonging to a historically untouchable subcaste, but are no longer administratively classified as SC.

project that seeks to expand OBC affirmative action benefits; India's democratic ideals should instead focus state policy on universalizing basic provisions and empowering the disempowered, which the census and OBC reservations fail to do. Mehta and Dutt align themselves with the ideology of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who sixty years earlier rejected the colonial category of caste and limited both the census enumeration of caste and affirmative action benefits in order to improve the extreme social marginalization of SCs and STs.

Several influential political officials, ministers and party leaders within the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance coalition government similarly opposed an expanded caste count. However, they tended to publicly express their disagreement in technical terms, instead of taking a stance over whether or not the data should be collected. Former Home Minister (and current Finance Minister) P. Chidambaram framed the debate as such during his speech in the Lok Sabha:

> There are two questions here. The first question is, 'whether it is desirable to enumerate the caste of each member of the household?' The second question is, assuming that it is desirable to do so, 'is the census the vehicle to carry out the enumeration?' I do not wish to enter into a debate on the first question. There can be different views on the subject and we must respect each other's views. In fact, Hon'ble Members who said that "caste is a reality" also acknowledged that caste is a divisive factor and that we are nowhere near establishing a casteless society. It is the second question that is relevant for the present discussion. The Registrar General has pointed out a number of logistic and practical difficulties in canvassing the question of caste while conducting the census.[11]

Chidambaram and technocrats within the Registrar General of India (RGI), the agency within the Home Ministry that oversees decennial census operations, raised a range of logistical concerns related to counting caste: a lack of enumerator training and

---

[11] Ministry of Home Affairs. 2010. "Chidambaram Emphasizes Need to Maintain Integrity of Census" *Press Information Bureau,* May 7.

knowledge, thousands of localized subcastes which makes the process of collecting and categorizing caste data extremely difficult, the existence of separate OBC lists at state and central government levels, and ambiguity over how minorities such as *Dalit* Muslims and Christians should be enumerated.[12] As the next chapter shows, this approach by senior government leaders to focus on technical challenges became a justification for separating the publicly agreed upon caste count from the 2011 decennial census. The divorce of the caste count from the decennial census majorly impacted the operation and execution of caste data collection in a negative way.

In contrast to these oppositions, those ideologically in favor of a caste count argue that the Indian state is in dire need of updated caste data. Policymakers have been using projections from historical census data and more recent sample surveys to estimate the size of historically advantaged, or forward castes, and OBC populations. Those in support of a caste census argue that revised data would clarify the actual size and distribution of different groups and their relative socioeconomic standing, and would show if and how caste continues to structure life outcomes and the types of policy measures that could help ameliorate caste-based inequalities.[13] While OBC leaders have publicly spearheaded the recent successful push for a caste census, this call is anything but new. MP Mulayam Singh Yadav, who spoke in favor for the caste count during the May 2010 Lok Sahba debates, later discussed the effort within a longer timeframe:

It is a demand that has been raised systematically for over two decades by parties

---

[12] Teltumbde, Anand, 2010. "Counting Castes: Advantage Ruling Castes" *Counter Currents*, July 14.

[13] K. Satyanarayana 2010, "Will India Become a Caste Society if Caste is Counted?" Deshpande, Satish & Mary John. 2010. "The Politics of Not Counting Caste" *Economic & Political Weekly*, June 19, p 39-42. Desai, Sonalde. 2010. "Caste and Census: A Forward Looking Strategy," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. XLV No. 29: 10-13.

from all parts of the country, including the SP and the RJD as well as South Indian parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhakam and the Pattali Makkal Katchi. However, the Congress and the BJP have not been able to understand the importance and relevance of the demand. Now, they too have realised its relevance and the government has decided to take appropriate measures. As stated often, nobody can stop an idea whose time has come and caste-based census is certainly an idea whose time has come…The primary theoretical argument against caste-based census was that it promoted casteism in society and promoted caste divide. You have refrained from having caste-based census for over six decades. Has this brought down casteism or caste divide?...Our contemporary society is such, that even educated girls are subjected to honour killings for the crime of falling in love with lower-caste boys. In fact, it is those who are against caste census who want to perpetuate inequalities in society. They do not want to confront the real size of backward people in the country and take remedial measures to uplift them. It is this mental block that has been obliterated now through the government's readiness for caste-based census.[14]

As Singh Yadav argues, regional political parties in the north and south of India have demanded a caste census for several decades. As caste continues to structure social life in severe ways, data on caste are required to implement and access policies designed to reduce the harmful effects of caste. Ongoing efforts over the past sixty years to identify and improve the conditions of *backward classes* have been accompanied by calls from courts, political parties, caste associations and special commissions to collect expanded caste data as part of the decennial census. A recent request for this data came from the 2007 Supreme Court order against reserved entry for OBCs to educational institutions, citing a lack of 'reliable data.'[15]

Among those supporting an expanded caste count, some favored a full count enumerating all castes, while others argued that an OBC category should be added to the existing practice of enumerating SCs and STs in the decennial census. Yogendra Yadav,

---

[14] Mulayam Singh Yadav quoted in Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, May 22, 2010, "The Caste Factor," *Frontline*.

[15] Multiple court decisions have challenged the practice of projecting group size based on 1931 data.

a long-time Indian elections scholar, and more recently a leader of the Aam Aadmi Party,

argued for this incremental step:

> There is an understandable unease about giving caste primacy in public life. But it is
> unclear how counting of the OBCs is in this respect qualitatively different from
> counting the SCs and the STs. We have done this for more than half a century. It is
> true that official enumeration of any category tends to solidify its boundaries a little
> more than would be the case otherwise. But this subtle and long-term cost has to be
> weighed against the most evident and short and long term costs of official non-
> recognition of categories that everyone operates with. If the enumeration of religious
> communities has not led to the breakdown of secular order in India, and if
> enumeration of race in the US has not made US policies racist, it is unlikely that the
> enumeration of one more caste group would push the country into the prison of
> caste.[16]

Yadav highlights that while the decennial census has not counted OBCs, the category has

become widely recognized and used in politics and state administration. For those

pushing for a caste census, data on the size of different subcastes and their relative social

and economic standing are seen as crucial to inform the development and administration

of state programs to reduce caste-based social and economic inequalities.

This research project inserts itself into the public debate surrounding an expanded

enumeration of caste, while it sets out to study why and how caste data are being

collected at this moment in India's post-colonial history. My research is heavily

influenced by an interdisciplinary body of research that takes censuses as an object of

research, including studies by anthropologists Bernard Cohn, Nicholas Dirks and Arjun

Appadurai on colonial censuses in India; political scientist Melissa Nobles on censuses in

the US and Brazil; sociologist Bruce Curtis on 19th century Canadian censuses; and

---

[16] Yadav, Yogendra. 2010. "Why Caste Should be Counted." *The Hindu.* May 14, 2010.

sociologist Mara Loveman on colonial censuses in Puerto Rico.[17] These historical studies

of census making show how the individual and organizational practices of census

officials and other state experts,[18] private elites,[19] local enumerators[20] and civil society[21]

play a role in the production of data on race and caste.[22] This project builds upon this

existing literature by taking a holistic view of census making. It stays attuned to the

---

[17] Appadurai, 1993; Cohn, 1987; Curtis, 2001; Kaviraj, S. 1992. "The Imaginary Institution of India" in P Chatterjee and G Pandey (eds.), Subaltern Studies VII, Delhi: Oxford University Press; Loveman 2007; Nobles, Melissa. 2000. *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

[18] While census bureaus and statistical agencies within the state are responsible for designing survey instruments, other actors within the state also shape the data. Research by Nobles, Curtis and Loveman shows how the state is not a monolithic actor during census making. Inter-agency politics, negotiations across various tiers of government, and discrepancies in worldviews between local and central state actors and among politically appointed officials, civil servants, and elected leaders, all influence the processes through which questionnaires are developed, surveys are canvassed, and census data are aggregated and published. This project finds that disentangling power struggles within different parts of the state, which in democratic societies are heavily shaped by mobilizations outside the state, is central to tracing the production of census data.

[19] Colonial censuses commonly put individuals into categories that had little meaning in their daily lives (see Benedict Anderson's discussion of colonial censuses in *Imagined Communities*). These imagined communities were largely the products of colonial officials and local elites, and it took time for these categories to permeate and take hold locally.

[20] In her study of census making in Puerto Rico, Loveman finds that census enumerators played an active role in the island's 'whitening' in the first half of the twentieth century, reflecting an expansion in local understandings of whiteness in response to the perceived and actual costs of being seen as nonwhite by the colonial state (Loveman 2007; Loveman and Muniz 2007).

[21] Civil society also plays an active role in the making of data in plural and democratic societies such as India. Nobles traces how the multiracial social movement in the US applied pressure on the state in the lead up to the 1990 census to include certain questions and answer options for the question on race. Decisions about what questions to ask and how to ask them involve a contested process across different sections of the state and civil society, in which the construction of the census instrument becomes an active site of politics. Along with shaping the process by which state actors create the census instrument, civil society may directly influence the private sphere, including household perceptions and self-definitions. Paschel argues that the black movement in Colombia played a major role in increasing self-identification of 'black' and, in turn, influenced the results of the 2005 census. In the accounts of historical caste counts in India, newspapers and caste associations play an active role in shaping household perceptions about caste immediately preceding the census, and caste associations actively lobby census officials regarding caste categories and rankings. This project traces how the media and caste associations influence the contemporary making of official caste data.

[22] While caste and race refer to distinct and dynamic systems of social stratification that operate in unique ways within specific socio-historical contexts, a long scholarly and activist tradition has thought comparatively across race and caste to better understand how privilege and disadvantage operate to structure life opportunities and outcomes in specific contexts.

actors and processes that previous studies of censuses have found important, and additionally focuses on spaces and processes that historical studies of censuses could not examine. [23] By exploring how the interactions and perceptions of actors largely invisible in historical records, such as the back and forth between data collectors and respondents during the census interview, shape the caste data, this project traces how power operates through the entire process of creating official caste data.

While engaged in this research, I have tried to see the different sides of the caste census debate and remain critical to the politics surrounding the production and circulation of these data. Yet, my own history makes me predisposed to the perspective of those who want the caste data to be collected. As a trained social demographer with a public policy degree, I view the availability of caste data as an effective way to measure, understand and provide convincing evidence about processes of structural inequality.[24] In much of policymaking and social science scholarship, including my own previous research, census and survey data are widely used because they are easy to decontextualize, analyze, and compare. I also sympathize with those who pushed for a caste census because I believe that affirmative action programs should exist as one of many efforts to increase access for historically marginalized groups to previous spaces of exclusion. Both in India and the US, I have heard many thoughtful arguments about why

---

[23] With the exception of Curtis' study (2001), the census literature tends to focus on a specific aspect of the making of census data (i.e., of the questionnaire or the tabulation of the collected survey data). Past accounts suggest the importance of attention to a differentiated state (Cohn 1987; Nobles 2000), a multi-tiered state (Cohn 1987; Curtis 2001; Loveman 2007), social elites (Dirks 2001; Curtis 2001), civil society (Nobles 2000; Curtis 2001; Paschal 2013), processes of enumeration (Curtis 2001; Loveman 2007) and broader state-making processes and conceptions of nation and citizen (Appadurai 1993; Curtis 2001) to understand how census data are produced.

[24] For example, I have used decennial census data to look at patterns of urban residential segregation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Vithayathil, Trina and Gayatri Singh. 2001. " Spaces of Segregation: Residential Segregation in Indian Cities" *Economic and Political Weekly* XLVII (37): 60-66.

targeting is either wrong or ineffective, but in my experiences affirmative action

problematizes the routine practices and norms of exclusion that historically marginalized

groups have faced and continue to face. While the actual numbers of people who directly

benefit are often quite small, the debate is vociferous because to accommodate previously

excluded groups the institutions and individuals who compose them must be transformed

in small and large ways. At the same time, equally important towards the goal of building

more equitable societies is the provision of basic needs and services (i.e., food/water,

shelter, health care, and education) for all. I see targeted efforts to correct historical

wrongs and universal access to basic services as complementary and cornerstone policies

for plural contemporary societies.

Censuses and surveys are a key source of data to inform and revise programs of

affirmative action, as well as other state welfare programs and policies. As the next

section shows, the production of census data is anything but straightforward, but instead

is deeply shaped by politics and power.

1.2. Censuses and the Production of Knowledge

In the introduction to a recent edited volume titled *Social Knowledge in the Making*,

sociologists Charles Camic, Neil Gross and Michelle Lamont argue:

> ...vast expanses of the dense forest in which the making of social knowledge occurs
> remain still to be illuminated from the perspective of the "turn to practice"—a telling
> lacuna in a historical era when social knowledge, academic and nonacademic, is of
> increasing salience and consequence in many areas of social life. This lacuna
> provides the point of departure for the present book, which is concerned with the
> practices by which a diverse range of social knowledge forms are produced,
> evaluated, and put to use.[25]

---

[25] Camic, Charles, Neil Gross and Michele Lamont. 2011. *Social Knowledge in the Making*. Chicago:
Chicago University Press: 1.

The authors argue that the production of social knowledge, which they define as the

"descriptive information and analytical statements" about human beings or their

collectivities,[26] is under-studied and theorized, and to address this gap their collection of

essays focus on the study of knowledge practices, or "the ensembles of patterned

activity… by which human beings confront and structure the situated tasks with which

they are engaged."[27] This work is similarly attuned to the practices of knowledge

production. Camic, Gross and Lamont also assert "social knowledge practices occur in

concrete social locations that are relatively porous."[28] By "relatively porous," they

elaborate "that sites of social knowledge making have boundaries that are selectively

open to different factors in different times and places" and are "arenas where factors that

sociologists ordinarily associate with different levels [e.g., macro and micro] combine."[29]

As the subsequent chapters in this work show, sites of knowledge making in the

production of caste data have a logic and organization distinct from the network of

---

[26] Their full definition for social knowledge is as follows: "By 'social knowledge' we mean, in the first instance, *descriptive information and analytical statements* (italics in original) about the actions, behaviors, subjective states, and capacities or human beings and/or about the properties and processes of the aggregate or collective units—the groups, networks, markets, organizations, and so on—where these human agents are situated. In some instances, social knowledge statements may contain significant "nonsocial" referents (as, e.g., in studies of the impact of climate changes on the welfare of the population in a certain region), but these referents constitute only one component of those statements. We omit from this definition fictional and fabricated material that might otherwise seem to fit our conception, reserving 'social knowledge' for data and statements that seek to advance empirically based and empirically warrantable claims about the present, the past, or the future, though we include two further elements as well. These are (1) *normative statements* that draw on descriptive information to recommend or condemn certain courses of human conduct, programs for collective action, and so on; and (2) the *technologies and tools* of knowledge making—that is, the epistemic principles, cognitive schemata, theoretical models, conceptual artifacts, technical instruments, methodological procedures, tacit understandings, and material devices by which descriptive and normative statements about the social world are produced, assessed, represented, communicated, and preserved." (Camic, Gross and Lamont, 2011: 3)

[27] *Ibid*. 7.

[28] *Ibid*. 27.

[29] *Ibid*. 27; Footnotes 19 and 20.

16

relationships and practices that form knowledge, yet these spaces are fluid with relations

connecting to other organizations and places where knowledge is also produced. While

the authors' synthesis of the findings of their edited volume offer several important

insights about social knowledge production—that it is multi-sited and the practices are

monolithic and porous—markedly absent in their study of social knowledge making is a

theory of power. Their limited attention to power puts them in a surprisingly similar place

with positivist accounts of knowledge production, which dominate the mainstream social

science literature and policymaking. This section begins with a more detailed look at

positivist views of knowledge production, and then turns to the works of Michel Foucault

and Pierre Bourdieu to unpack two competing theories of knowledge production that are

embedded in very different views of modern power.

Positivism

In much of the social science literature, the making of census and survey data remains

relatively taken-for-granted. [30] While the humanistic-oriented social science literature

explores the political and contested nature of social categories,[31] a positivist view of

surveys underlies much of contemporary social science research and policymaking.

Censuses and surveys are conceived of as scientific projects that extract pre-existing facts

[30] This is not to suggest that survey researchers are not careful about their data collection. Survey researchers devote considerable attention to data collection processes, including the development of a sound instrument; the wording and sequencing of questions; the design of a culturally appropriate instrument; the training of data collectors; the pre-test of the instrument and data collection processes; and the modification and finalization of the instrument and related data gathering procedures.

[31] Anthropological demographers and socio-cultural anthropologists have written extensively in this area. Some examples include: Cohn, Bernard. 1987. "The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia" in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays.* Delhi: Oxford U. Press; Kertzer, David and Dominique Arel. 2002. *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses.* Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press; Urla, Jacqueline. 1993. "Cultural Politics in an Age of Statistics: Numbers, Nations, and the Making of the Basque Identity," *American Ethnologist* 20(4): 818-43.

from individuals or households. Even for contentious and politically-charged social categories such as race, class, or gender, the production of accurate data is believed to be possible if a competent enumerator or interviewee carefully administers a thoughtfully-constructed questionnaire. The mainstream sociological and demographic literature upholds this extractive view and takes social categories as given, apolitical and ahistorical, which allows for clean comparisons across time and space.[32] In this view, a "population," such as a subcaste, "is thought to be an empirically existing entity susceptible to scientific discovery,"[33] and power is not actively theorized as part of the process by which data are produced and facts are extracted.[34]

This positivist view of knowledge making not only dominates the social sciences, but is the widespread cognitive frame of most contemporary political states, including India.[35] I regularly encountered a positivist account of the production of census data in my conversations with bureaucrats, managers of census operations, and data collectors. Positivism remains the dominant frame in the production and utilization of census and survey data in India and throughout the world.

---

[32] My own previous research falls within this body of social science literature.

[33] Curtis, 2001: 24.

[34] To collect data from or about 'vulnerable populations' or marginalized groups, additional thought is often given to ensure that the interview process is safe and that the questions are not unnecessarily invasive and do not create additional harm.

[35] In India, survey and census data informs all aspects of centralized policymaking and planning. Decennial census data have been regularly collected since the 1870s and these data, complemented by discrete sample surveys, have been central administrative tools used by the colonial and post-colonial state. India's Planning Commission, chaired by the Prime Minister, has created twelve successive five-year plans to coordinate the policies, resources, and spending by the central and state governments. In developing these national plans, census data and counts of particular populations (e.g. rural versus urban, casual versus attached agricultural workers, females per 1000 males) have helped to provide a 'social map' from which government officials design and administer policies and track changes over time. Targeted censuses or sample surveys, such as the National Sample Survey (NSS) and Below Poverty Line (BPL) Survey, have been simultaneously developed to provide data in policy areas where the decennial census is insufficient. The production of data through surveys and censuses by the state is ongoing and expanding.

Governmentality

While positivism dominates policymaking environments and much of the scholarship in the social sciences, Foucault's theory of governmentality influences the interdisciplinary literature on census making and provides a second view of surveys and the data production.[36] In contrast to the absence of a theory of power in positivism, much of the contemporary humanistic and philosophical scholarship builds upon theories of governmentality to make sense of the knowledge/power nexus.

Foucault theorizes a pervasive normalizing power in modern forms of knowledge and discipline. Within this context, governmentality refers to the wide range of techniques applied to control the self, households and populations. The normalizing judgment of power simultaneously differentiates individuals (based on their deviations from the norm) and imposes conformity. Foucault asserts that to understand modern power we need to look in the periphery and understand the micro-technologies of power, instead of envisioning a hierarchical, top-down model of state power. Modern disciplinary power is invisible, diffuse, agentless and active but "produce[s] reality."[37] He argues that states try to 'globalize' disciplinary techniques and in doing so make such forms of knowledge-power useful.

From this perspective, instead of censuses capturing pre-existing facts, they are disciplining techniques. Under modern power, "discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space" and makes "possible the supervision of each individual and the

---

[36] Foucault, Michel. 1991. "Governmentality" in Graham Burchell et. al. (eds.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[37] Foucault, Michel, 1979. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. New York: Vintage Books: 19.

simultaneous work of all."[38] James Scott's empirical account of how modern state actors

"codify local practices" and "make the local situation legible to an outsider" reveals how

the censuses measure, order, and classify populations to produce knowledge and control

at the household and individual levels.[39] Disciplinary practices of governmentality "tie

individuals to places within an administrative grid and then hold them steady so that they

may become objects of knowledge and government."[40] Technological improvements

allow the efficiency and economy of modern power to be continually deployed and

developed. The ubiquitous form of modern power limits opportunities for agency,

prevents the space for civil society and social change, and relegates opportunities for self-

legibility to the periphery. However, within the politics of everyday life, there are active

sites of struggle and resistance that "can be integrated into global strategies" for rupture.[41]

Governmentality and its close relatives inform much of the critical literature on

censuses and production of administrative knowledge. Many of the most detailed works

in census making, including research by anthropologists Bernard Cohn, Nicholas Dirks

and Arjun Appadurai on colonial censuses in India, focus on the colonial state. They

highlight the particular techniques through which subjects and knowledge are jointly

created. Across successive colonial censuses, "bodies [were] counted, homogenized, and

bounded in their extent," creating a classification system that fueled communal politics

---

[38] *Ibid.* 141, 19.

[39] Scott, James. 1998: *Seeing Like a State*. New Haven: Yale University Press: 37, 45.

[40] Curtis 2001: 26.

[41] Foucault, Michel. 1980. "Power Strategies" in *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and other Writings*. Edited by Colin Gordon: 142.

and supported colonial rule.[42] While these works have been seminal in helping to identify important actors and networks in the production of caste data, I encountered a far more differentiated and democratic society during this research project. Here, an efficient and pervasive normalizing power seemed quite absent. The vision and reach of the centralized state and its global strategies was internally contested and continuously mediated by external actors. Instead, the politics and contestations of democratic politics, including the politics of affirmative action, played a prominent role. As such, the governmentality literature inadequately accounts for the census making that I observed during this project.

Partha Chatterjee builds upon notions of governmentality to argue that in "most of the world" with a "relatively long experience of European colonial rule," the technologies of governmentality predated the formation of nation-states, which leading to the creation of populations "with the status of subjects, not citizens."[43] While many nationalist leaders embraced the idea of republican citizenship, most post-colonial states were overtaken by a developmental state "which promised to end poverty and backwardness by adopting appropriate policies of economic growth and social reform."[44] In doing so, "classificatory criteria used by colonial government regimes continued into the postcolonial era, shaping the forms of both political demands and developmental policy."[45] Chatterjee delineates between the formal, legal structure of the post-colonial state "founded on popular sovereignty and granting equal right to citizens," in which civil

---

[42] Appadurai 1993.

[43] Chatterjee, Partha. 2003. *The Politics of the Governed*. New York: Columbia University: 36-37.

[44] *Ibid.* 37.

[45] *Ibid.*

society is possible and extensive, and the post-colonial pervasiveness of *political society*, which he defines as a space "connecting populations to governmental agencies pursing multiple policies of security and welfare."[46] In India, civil society exists but "it is demographically limited," while political society is expansive in its reach:

> Most of the inhabitants of India are only tenuously, and even then ambiguously and contextually, rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution. They are not, therefore, proper members of civil society and are not regarded as such by institutions of the state. But it is not as though they are outside the reach of the state or even excluded from the domain of politics. As populations within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, they have to be both looked after and controlled by various governmental agencies. These activities bring these populations into a certain political relationship with the state. But this relationship does not always conform to what is envisaged in the constitutional depiction of the relation between the state and members of civil society. Yet these are without doubt political relations that may have acquired, in specific historical defined contexts, a widely recognized systematic character, and perhaps even certain conventionally recognized ethical norms, even if subject to varying degrees of contestation.[47]

By bringing the post-colonial state and democratic theory into contact with governmentality, Chatterjee theorizes a limited space for civil society in India (unlike in Foucault's theory of power where the ubiquitous nature of modern disciplinary power precludes a space for civil society), and simultaneously argues that most people operate in political society, where the techniques of governmentality and colonial patterns of classification have continued into the democratic period to develop and mobilize populations. Not surprising given his specific focus on India, Chatterjee's revision on governmentality and how it operates in the post-colonial state provides an important theoretical foundation for this work.

---

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] *Ibid.* 38.

Classificatory Struggles

In contrast to more conventional forms of positivism and governmentality, I find that the

production of caste data in India is part of a broader classificatory struggle. Of critical

importance to this project, Bourdieu argues for greater attention to the symbolic power of

the state, including how it "inculcates common forms and categories of perception and

appreciation, social frameworks of perceptions, of understanding or of memory, in short

state forms of classification."[48] This project follows Bourdieu's approach to the social

construction of knowledge and his attention to the mechanisms through which social

orders are reproduced by situating social relations and power within fields.[49] [50] All

classifications are relational and their production emerges and makes sense in a particular

field, in a specific historical context. The social position of an individual depends on his

or her position both within a specific field and across fields. Within this context, a

person's habitus, or the space in which an individual's body and mind are shaped,

---

[48] Bourdieu 1999: 66.

[49] Building upon Marx's conception of classes, which define social position in relation to a system of economic production, Bourdieu defines class based on daily practices, which are both material and cultural. For Bourdieu, inequality persists in all spaces and disadvantaged and subordinated groups are continuously silenced, such that power and capital continue to accrue to those with advantage. Taste is the mechanism that matches up consumption and production. Bourdieu's (1985) theory of social space "is multi-dimensional" and includes "an open set of fields that are relatively autonomous." Meaning is constructed within the context of a specific field and therefore the meaning of an object depends upon "the system it is placed in and the conditions it operates in." Within the fields in social space, there are types of power or capital that are current in the field and a field values certain capital over other. Capital is not an objective social fact but instead "capital is a social relation" such that it "only exists and only produces its effects in the field in which it is produced and reproduced (Bourdieu 1984: 113)." Fields need to be legitimized; they only matter because individuals compete within them. If people stop struggling for what is at stake, the stake would have no value. Absent the struggle for legitimacy of the field, it is gone.

[50] Bourdieu, Pierre. 1985. "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups." *Theory and Society* 14: 723-744. P. 736. Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 13,113.

matters.[51] Individual intentions or even "direct interactions among the agents" fail to fully

capture the "objective power relations that impose themselves on all who enter the

field."[52] Across multiple fields in social space, the "position of a given agent" is defined

by the positions that individual "occupies in different fields" based on the "distribution of

the powers that are active within each of them."[53] There is a "homology of position" such

that "positions within different fields" are aligned.[54] The homology across fields and the

pervasiveness of power within a field prevents the possibility of operating outside of a

structuring environment or a public space, such as civil society.[55]

For Bourdieu, the creation and imposition of categories of thought reproduce the

social order, while also helping to create the appearance of legitimacy. The dominant

group is enabled "to perceive their way of being or of doing things as the realized

ideal."[56] Perception of the social world is the result of a "double social structuration."[57]

'Misrecognition' often occurs within these spaces as social hierarchies get reproduced

and perpetuated, with the complicity of the dominated. Bourdieu views most 'change' as

---

[51] Bourdieu (1984: 170-171) describes habitus both as "as structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perceptions of practices, but also a structured structure." Habitus shapes both individual dispositions that generate practice and meaning and "the principle of division into logical classes."

[52] Bourdieu 1985: 724.

[53] *Ibid*.

[54] *Ibid*. 737.

[55] Within the process of cultural reproduction, "the mechanisms responsible for this monopoly keep excluded [the common people] much more effectively than any 'ideological state apparatuses'" (Bourdieu 1984: 398). Fields do not have 'public spaces' and therefore there is no civil society in his theory of cultural reproduction.

[56] Bourdieu 1984: 384.

[57] The objective side is structured because "the properties attached to agents or institutions do not offer themselves independently to perception." The subjective side "is structured because the schemes of perception and appreciation available for use at the moment in question, especially those that are deposited in language, are the product of previous symbolic struggles and express the state of symbolic power relations." (Bourdieu 1985: 727).

simply reproducing inequalities and social structures. Within Bourdieu's theory of social

reproduction there are limited possibilities for change. Although different forms of

inherited capital serve as an advance, social structures are not just 'out there' but are

constantly being appropriated and used; there is a dynamism involved in the

appropriation of cultural code, and change is possible. Within each field, "the occupants

of the dominated positions are constantly engaged in struggles of different forms." [58] As

the process of classification is necessarily relational, there may be room for agency in the

act of classifying. In the gap between words and things, or in the "relative independence

of the structures of the system of classifying" and the "structure of the distribution

capital," there appears a "space for symbolic strategies aimed at exploiting the

discrepancies between the nominal and the real."[59] The active struggle inherent within

and across fields means that classification and the generation of meaning is an active

process and there is the possibility of a new outcome. Bourdieu takes the act of

appropriating seriously, such that within the appropriation of cultural capital there is

room for maneuvering and jockeying. In addition, though fields govern the rate of

conversion of capital, this does not occur perfectly so there is room for gaming. Most

importantly, perhaps, the need to continuously reproduce domination invites resistance.

Through practices and conversion strategies, the act of appropriation is active and

reproduction is not perfect. Political change usually reinforces cultural domination, such

that events or movements that are commonly viewed as political progress could also be

viewed as "a submission to the dominant values and to some of the principles on which

[58] *Ibid.* 724.

[59] Bourdieu 1984: 481.

the dominant class bases its domination."[60] He associates "the most radical challeng[e] of political legitimacy" with "the specific logic of cultural domination" and suggests that much of the focus on universal suffrage or universal education fails to recognize that "one of the social effects of primary education" or of broader political rights is to make the working class "subject, in culture and language, to the dominant norms and values and therefore deeply sensitive to the effects of authority imposition which every holder of cultural authority can exert."[61]

As the subsequent chapters illustrate, this project finds that the production of census data involves ongoing struggles over classification across multiple fields. Social elites wield power and capital across multiple fields, such that limited victories from below in a particular field are offset through a combination of subsequent moves in the same field and related fields. Through intentional and unintentional actions of both those in power and those actively resisting, systems of classification are reproduced, which help maintain dominant relations and hierarchies both in caste data and social relations more broadly.

1.3. Caste in Contemporary India

More than forty years ago, political theorist Rajni Kothari suggested that a central research question for scholars of contemporary India is not whether caste is disappearing, but "what form is caste taking under the impact of politics, and what form is politics taking in a caste-oriented society?"[62] Several findings are noteworthy in this regard and

---

[60] Bourdieu 1984: 395.

[61] *Ibid*. 396.

[62] Kothari, Rajni. 1970. *Caste in Indian Politics*. New York: Gordon and Breach.

intersect with this project's interest in how caste as a political identity has increased in significance in India's post-independence history.

First, numerous scholars have traced the relationship between caste and competitive electoral politics. Caste associations and political parties introduced the practices and values of political democracy to a newly enfranchised, largely illiterate population in the aftermath of independence.[63] Caste networks also became a common basis for mobilizing electoral participation.[64] Political parties often conceived of 'vote banks' in terms of caste and religious identities and they rallied the electorate by selecting candidates with a shared caste identity and providing resources and eliciting support through caste networks and leaders. Based on their research in the decades immediately following independence, political scientists Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph argue that caste loyalties were "revived and extended" in the post-colonial political sphere as caste associations worked to influence who was in political power, during the same period when *jaatis* were loosening their grip on social life.[65] Political parties have been strongly affiliated with a specific caste or group of castes at the regional level, although these relationships are dynamic and evolve over time. The trend of political parties wooing an electorate based on caste, and of caste leaders remaining closely linked to political parties and elected leaders, has continued into the 21st century, with caste remaining a central category around which political parties organize and elections are won. As the next

---

[63] Rudolph, Lloyd and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph. 1967. *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Most caste associations have the structure of a voluntary organization, with officers, membership, publications and periodic meetings both for the leadership and broader membership. However, a shared sense of status and culture often creates a strong solidarity.

[64] Kothari 1970; Weiner 2000.

[65] Rudolph and Rudolph 1967.

chapter shows, the changing composition of political leaders and the emergence of regional and national level OBC leaders and their related vote banks played a key role in the central government's decision to count caste.

The politicization of caste is not limited to the sphere of formal electoral politics; it also affects the everyday experiences of citizens and the local state. The ability for individuals and groups to make formal demands on the state often relates to their caste. In many regions of the country, state institutions are deeply interconnected with localized caste networks and, as a result, the provision of public services runs along these relationships.[66] The composition of the administrative bureaucracy is important in this regard, as low and mid-level government workers often become a tangible link and entry point to the state for other members in their caste network. In the case of Bangalore (the state capital of Karnataka), where I conducted most of the fieldwork for this research, the porous local bureaucracy allows poor groups—including low caste communities—to shape policies and implement processes in their favor through their collaboration and alliances with local government, while elites tend to collaborate with more "efficiently" run parastatals for mega projects and high quality infrastructure, services, and surplus generation in a global context.[67] Local projects of the state—whether they are development projects, elections or national censuses—are entrenched in localized social hierarchies in most regions of the country. As such, this project examines how the workings of the local bureaucracy and caste networks shape the production of caste data.

---

[66] Witsoe, Jeffrey. 2013. *Democracy Against Development*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[67] Benjamin, Solomon and R. Bhuvaneswari. 2006. "Urban Futures of Poor Groups in Chennai and Bangalore" in *Local Governance in India* edited by Niraja Gopal Jayal, Amit Prakash and Pradeep Sharma. Delhi: Oxford U. Press.

The rise of caste as a political identity has transformed India's social institution of caste. Kothari summarizes this trend:

> Within the social structure of caste, a whole variety of new alignments took place which undermined the rigidity of the system—both the splitting and federating of caste along secular political lines, enabling them to bargain with political parties and adopt organizational forms in keeping with the demands of the latter. Ideologically, there took place a basic shift from hierarchy to plurality, from ordained status to negotiated positions of power, from ritual definitions of roles and positions to civic and political definitions of the same.[68]

In India's post-colonial history, major changes to localized caste systems have taken place and national-level categories have strengthened or emerged, as *jaatis* have aligned and merged in the process of mobilizing around politics. In an effort to access state resources, castes have changed their own boundaries and actively worked to revise their positions in the social and ritual hierarchy. The strengthening of national-level categories from above for the purposes of successful state administration and the emergence of social movements from below, which have realigned caste boundaries and relationships for shared political and material ends, have changed the localized nature of caste as a system of social stratification. Whether caste can emerge and persist as a basis for shared opposition to oppression, instead of being politically instrumental and socially hegemonic, is contingent on broader processes of democratization in political and social life; these processes of democratization must continue to transform the nature of caste itself. By studying the production of caste data, this project contributes to our understanding of the evolving role of caste as a political identity and the changing role of caste in democratic politics.

---

[68] Kothari 1997: 444.

1.4. Methodology

I approached this caste census as an extended case study to understand how a plural democratic society produces official state data on a contentious political and social identity. The case study methodology examines a historical episode, or an aspect of a historical episode, to develop or test explanations that may be generalizable to other events.[69] The extended case study methodology, which is an extension of the case study, sets out to observe the world from the participants' standpoint without losing the ability to explain intricacies in more generalizable terms and while being reflexive about the researcher's own role.[70]

Research Sites

This project follows the production of caste data starting with debates in Delhi in May 2010 that led to the historic decision to collect nationwide data and ending with the completion of ground level census operations in Karnataka in early 2013. Similar in population size to the United Kingdom, with about three-fourths the geographic area, Karnataka is home to the majority of India's Kannadigas, or Kannada-speaking population. I studied census operations in urban Karnataka, both because of my prior familiarity with the region and because Karnataka has a long history of trying to deal with 'backward' communities, beginning in 1919, during the colonial period. Since independence, Backward Classes Commissions (BCC) in Karnataka have sought to define and redefine who is socially and educationally backward and therefore eligible for

---

[69] George, Alexander and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

[70] Burawoy. Michael. 1998. "The Extended Case Method" *Sociological Theory* 16(1): 4-33.

affirmative action benefits within state institutions. Karnataka's model status in this

regard led the central government to allocate funds to Karnataka's BCC in 2005 to

conduct a pilot caste census within the state. Due to the politics surrounding this count,

the BCC has not yet conducted the census but is expected to do so later in 2014.

Politics in Karnataka shares similarities to other parts of the country where

"dominant castes" control formal politics.[71] Two groups (with numerous internal *jaati*

divisions)—the Vokkaligas and the Lingayats—have controlled much of the formal

political power and material benefits in the state since it was created in 1956.[72] The

inclusion of these two castes in Karnataka's Backward Classes list, which determines

eligibility for 'reserved' government jobs and seats in educational institutions, reflects the

political power of these two groups and not simply their economic and social

'backwardness.'[73] Chapter three discusses in greater detail the Karnataka case, while the

conclusion discusses relevance of my finding to other regions of India and beyond.

Methods

This project draws upon data from observations, interviews and document review.

Approaching the same census making process from multiple vantage points is helpful for

triangulating what is happening and for examining how a variety of context-specific

---

[71] Srinivas, M.N. 1962. *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays.* London: Asia Publishing House. M.N. Srinivas coined the term "dominant caste" in his essay "Social System of a Mysore Village" and the term is used to refer to a caste which "wields economic or political power and occupies a fairly high position in the hierarchy." These castes are accorded high status and position in all fields of social life. The people of other lower castes look to them as their 'reference group' and try to imitate their behavior, ritual pattern, custom and ideology.

[72] Manor, James. 1989. "Karnataka: Caste, Class, Dominance and Politics in a Cohesive Society" in Frankel Francine R. and M.S.A. Rao (eds.) *Dominance and State Power in Modern India,* Vol. I, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

[73] Natraj V.K. 1990. "Backward Classes and Minorities in Karnataka Politics, in Roy Ramashray and Richard Sisson" (eds.) *Diversity and Dominance in Indian Politics,* Vol. 2, New Delhi, Sage.

actors and processes interact, unfold, and have consequence. For example, information about challenges during enumeration processes may be omitted during interviews with senior bureaucrats, but freely discussed in conversations with government workers in the lower levels of the bureaucracy and observed during census interviews.

I conducted fieldwork during five trips to India ranging from three weeks to two months in length between July 2011 and February 2013. This fieldwork began at the start of the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SEC Census) data collection effort and ended with re-enumeration exercises in select regions of Karnataka. Censuses in India still involve a door-to-door enumeration of every household in the country. I spent a total of six months in India during my research trips.

My first research trip was in July and August 2011, as SEC Census operations were beginning in select regions of the country. During this trip, I visited Bangalore and Delhi to understand how the census was unfolding in Karnataka and how centralized processes related to the census were occurring in the nation's capital. In this trip and my subsequent research trips, I interviewed and talked to government officials, including senior bureaucrats, consultants and lower level civil servants, public intellectuals, civil society leaders, private sector employees involved in data entry, and private citizens. In total for this project, I have transcripts from about 90 semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A and B for more information). During these interviews, I took detailed notes but did not use a recording device, as doing so would likely have restricted the types of questions that I could ask and the types of answers that respondents would provide. Therefore, all my material is a close approximation of the interview, not a direct transcription.

I made two subsequent trips to Bangalore when the main census operations were occurring in late 2011 and early 2012. During the first trip in December 2011, I observed the setup of data processing centers, participated in enumerator trainings, and accompanied data collection teams while they interviewed households in two enumeration blocks in a ward in the city's periphery. I returned to Bangalore in February and March of 2012 when census operations were in full swing and observed household interviews in four enumeration blocks in a ward in the city center. Across these two trips, I observed approximately 300 household interviews in six different neighborhoods in two wards in Bangalore. After observing about 20 census interviews in December 2011, I designed a semi-structured interview protocol for interviewing families after they had been enumerated for the SEC Census. I had a research assistant in Bangalore conduct 30 interviews with enumerated families between January and May 2012, while I continued observations of the SEC Census. She purposively selected families across religious, caste and socio-economic lines in Bangalore Urban and Rural Districts.

I made two additional research trips after the main census operations were complete. In July 2012, I returned to Bangalore to observe data processing. During this trip, I visited neighborhood data processing centers, interviewed senior government officials involved in census operations in Karnataka, and interviewed caste association staff. In my conversations with individuals in these organizations, I learned about the general history and practices of the organization and explored if and how they tried to mold household or public perceptions, participation and responses in relation to the enumeration of caste. I also collected caste association magazines and newsletters for the period surrounding the census, when available. Finally in January and February 2013, I

observed the re-enumeration of 100 households in a fourth neighborhood in Bangalore.
A complete re-enumeration of select census blocks in Bangalore took place when the
total population for the block based on SEC Census data was less than the 2011 decennial
census count, which was generated in February 2011.[74]

The primary archival documents related to this project come from two main
sources. The first set of documents includes government-produced materials connected to
the caste census. This includes training manuals; census schedules; the data entry
program for the SEC census; government circulars and memoranda; and additional
census documents. The second source of documents comes from the media: English,
Kannada, Tamil and Hindi newspapers. Three India-based research assistants catalogued
all caste and caste census related articles for a one-year period surrounding the census.
Shalini Jamuna, who interviewed the thirty enumerated families in Karnataka, also
created an archive of the *Prajavaani* (Kannada) paper; Arasi Arivu created an archive of
the *Dhinathanthi* (Tamil) newspaper from the neighboring state of Tamil Nadu;
Devanshu Singh created the *Dainik Jagran* (Hindi) news archive, which is read in the
Hindi-speaking regions of North India. I created a similar archive for several Indian
English newspapers: *The Hindu*, *Times of India*, *Indian Express* and *Deccan Herald*.

1.5. Chapter Framework

The chapters in this dissertation examine important knowledge making sites in the
production of census data. The first empirical chapter takes a more macro look at the
census and asks broader questions about why caste data were being collected and how the

---

[74] Re-enumeration was extremely limited. For example, in Bangalore's East Zone, only 5 out of 3,241
enumeration blocks were re-enumerated.

caste count took the organizational form that it did. The subsequent two empirical chapters focus on the more localized production of caste data in Karnataka. Within each chapter, I describe in greater detail the types of data that I use.

Chapter Two examines the recent government decision to enumerate the population of India by caste within a broader historical context, focusing on two inter-related empirical puzzles. First, why after 60 years of post-colonial policy does the central government reverse its position and decide to conduct a full enumeration of caste? Second, why does the caste count become divorced from the 2011 decennial census? In this chapter, I explore how the central government's internal decision making practices and politics, along with its ongoing encounters with other organizations and groups, shape caste data.

Chapter Three looks at the nuts of bolts of the caste census within the context of ground-level operations in Karnataka. In doing so I describe the local environment in which caste data are produced. Theoretically, this chapter unpacks the politics of translation. How does a project envisioned by the centralized state take form within a particular location? Who are the actors and objects that play a role in this process, what do they do (or fail to do), and how does this influence the data? What are the politics of knowledge making at the local level? This chapter examines how several inter-related local knowledge making sites—including state government agencies, the local media, caste associations, the company responsible for data entry, and enumerator trainings—influence caste data, both through their concerted efforts and inaction.

Chapter Four explores the role of the census interview in the production of caste data. Drawing upon observations of hundreds of census interviews, it unveils how

enumeration practices shape caste data and focuses on the work of several data collection teams in their routine encounters with households. In this chapter, the household interview is the primary knowledge making site examined.

The final chapter returns to the theoretical framework outlined in the introduction and discusses it in greater detail based on the empirical findings. It begins with a synthesis of the politics of knowledge making as discovered in this project and the contributions I make to the literature on caste and politics. The conclusion then engages with the practical question of "so what?" and outlines future plans for research related to this project.

CHAPTER 2: WHY COUNT CASTE?

"The forthcoming census is the first census of a Free Republican India. Formerly, there used to be elaborate caste tables which were required in India partly to satisfy the theory that it was a caste ridden country and partly to meet the needs of administrative measures dependent of caste divisions. In the forthcoming census, this will no longer be a prominent feature and we can devote our energies and attention to the collection and formulation of basic economic data…of the individual and the state."
--Sardar Vallahbhai Patel, Deputy Prime Minister of India, February 1950[75]

In the lead up to the 1951 Census, India's Congress Party leaders removed a full caste count from the country's first post-independence census. Caste had been a central administrative category in colonial India, with decennial censuses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries generating detailed caste tables. Patel, Prime Minister Nehru and other Congress leaders envisioned a more restricted role for caste in post-colonial state administration and their vision limited data collection efforts around caste for more than six decades. Then, in 2010, Congress Party reversed this position and publicly agreed to conduct a nationwide enumeration of caste. The decision to introduce a full caste count in the 2011 decennial census was both a break in long-standing post-colonial policy and a reemergence of practices of the colonial state. Why did the current Congress-led coalition government reverse six decades of state policy? This chapter seeks to make sense of this policy change within a longer historical timeframe, which is necessary for understanding the genesis of the caste census.

While the decision to conduct a nationwide enumeration of caste may now seem as though it was inevitable, it is unlikely that even those most ardently pushing for a caste

---

[75] As quoted in Natarajan, Dandapani. 1972. *Indian Census through a Hundred Years*. Delhi: Registrar General of India: 266.

census between 2008 and 2010 actually believed they would be successful. Several

factors at the time suggested that an expanded caste count was unlikely in the lead up to

2011 decennial census: the ideological opposition of India's two national-level political

parties (i.e. Congress and BJP), including the party formally in power through a coalition

government (i.e., Congress); senior bureaucrats in the Home Ministry, which housed the

census bureau, were opposed; the widespread rhetoric of India's economic growth; and

the related view of 'modern' India, particularly among India's urban elite and national-

media, in which caste 'is no bar' in the 21st century. From the vantage point of activists

and public intellectuals pushing for an expanded caste count, the odds were stacked

heavily against them. As one proponent for the caste census explained,

> "We should be surprised, because I'm not sure if the demand from below was more in
> 2011 than 2001. Also, in both cases the Home Minister was unwilling. It was a
> contingent moment of politics where there was a sudden alignment, but while this
> alignment was not arbitrary it also could have not taken place. That this would occur
> was not inevitable at all."[76]

As this chapter will show, a series of factors came together in early 2010 that forced

the Congress Party to change its position, even as Party leaders and the public voices

of the bureaucracy remained opposed. Census officials in the Registrar General of

India (RGI) showed no interest in a full caste enumeration, unlike in the lead up to

the 2001 decennial census when Census Commissioner Vijayakunni spoke out in

support for a full caste count during his five year tenure which ended in 1999.

Demands for data on OBCs had repeatedly emerged from sections of civil society

and the judiciary, with some recent high court decisions calling for 'objective data'

---

[76] Personal Interview, June 13, 2013.

on the population of OBCs to inform the legal debate over reservations.[77] This

chapter seeks to understand the factors that led Congress Party leaders to reverse its

long-standing post-colonial position.

This chapter also examines the related question of how the caste data collection

became separated from the decennial census. In India's post-colonial history, attempts to

expand the enumeration of caste have always been tied to the decennial census, which is

a widely respected and long-standing source of data. Most recently, proponents of the

caste census pushed to have the data collected as part the 2011 decennial census. Yet,

after initially agreeing to do so, Congress Party leaders eventually decided to include the

caste count as part of a different government project. In a series of behind-the-scenes

political moves over the course of a year, the caste count became part of the 2011 Socio-

Economic Caste (SEC) Census, which is the fourth in a series of 'below poverty line'

(BPL) surveys used to identify rural families eligible for food distribution programs and

other state welfare benefits.[78] Therefore, the two-part empirical puzzle this chapter

addresses is: *why after 60 years of post-colonial policy did the Indian state reverse itself*

and decide to enumerate caste; then only to divorce the enumeration of caste from the

widely respected decennial census?

---

[77] The need for a caste census has been bolstered by the recent Supreme Court judgment in a reservation case in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where the government has been given time to prove the need for reservation beyond the stipulated 50 percent. The judgment in fact is a message to the central government to go ahead with a caste census, so that reliable and accurate data is made available for the judiciary and can inform cases related to reservatins, among other matters.

[78] The Ministry of Rural Development, through respective state governments, has conducted BPL surveys in 1992, 1997 and 2002. Compared to the Indian Decennial Census, which is widely respected, policymakers and researchers alike have criticized the BPL survey. The BPL survey has been systematically critiqued for not identifying those households most in need of food aid and other welfare benefits. The process of distributing BPL cards and related welfare benefits is also extremely politicized in some locations, with cards and program benefits distributed as a tool to garner poliitcal support.

This chapter seeks to theoretically situate the contemporary caste count within the scholarly literature on state classifications by race. Race and caste are distinct, historically specific, systems of social stratification and relations; each emerges within the context of a particular time and place. Like race, there is no biological foundation for distinguishing people by caste. There is a long history of comparisons between race and caste, with critical perspectives on caste helping to improve understandings of race, and research on race informing research and activism on caste. B.R. Ambedkar, the author of Indian Constitution and leader of India's Untouchables, highlights this connection in a letter written in 1946 to W.E.B. Du Bois:

> Although I have not met you personally, I know you by name as every one does who is working in the cause of securing liberty to the oppressed people. I belong to the Untouchables of India and perhaps you might have heard my name. I have been a student of the Negro problem and have read your writings throughout. There is so much similarity between the position of the Untouchables in India and of the position of the Negros in America that the study of the latter is not only natural but necessary.[79]

Ambedkar writes Du Bois to ask him for information about a petition that the National Negro Congress submitted to the United Nations in an attempt to secure minority rights through the U.N. Council. Although the Indian state has refused to join international treaties that equate racism and caste based discrimination, this project follows a scholarly and activist tradition that sees important parallels between the two and looks to the literature on censuses and classifications by race to help make sense of why this contemporary enumeration of caste occurred.

---

[79] Ambedkar, B.R. July 31, 1946. Personal letter. Accessed at the South Asian American Digital Archive: http://www.saadigitalarchive.org.

The comparative research on censuses finds several explanations for why states classify populations by race. First, the census has long been a tool of race-based rule by a hegemonic state. In several historical contexts, classifications by race have helped to consolidate and expand particular systems of domination and enslavement. In her comparative historical study of censuses in the US and Brazil, Melissa Nobles traces the category of mulatto to show how census officials worked with southern politicians to develop census policies that reinforced a system of citizenship and property rights based on evolving racial categories.[80] Racial classification in pre-civil rights era United States involved a dynamic system of classification that was interwoven with a racially differentiated set of political, social and legal rights.

In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson argues that census classifications helped colonial states create a complete and unambiguous imagination of their subjects.[81] Citing Charles Hirschman's study on racial and ethnic census categories in colonial Malaysia, Anderson describes the top-down nature of these categories and suggests "it is extremely unlikely that in 1911, more than a tiny fraction of those categorized and sub categorized would have recognized themselves under such labels."[82] Research on colonial caste counts in India suggests that practices of classification by caste and religion were embedded within systematic efforts to maintain and expand state power and more efficiently extract human and material resources.[83] In particular historical contexts,

---

[80] Nobles 2000.

[81] Anderson. 1991.

[82] *Ibid*. 165.

[83] Cohn 1987. Appadurai 1993. Dirks 2001.

census classifications have helped to create and sustain systems of differentiated citizenship by concepts of race.

A second explanation privileges the role of internal social movements in shaping when and how states classify by race. Civil society efforts to collect data on race are often embedded in struggles for equal rights by groups that have faced historical wrongs or continue to experience ongoing discrimination. Research by Melissa Nobles on the multi-racial movement in the US and by Tianna Paschel on the black moment in Colombia show how each social movement played a key role in shaping census classifications and census results in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.[84] In these accounts, conflicts between civil society and various spaces within the state heavily influence how concepts of race and related systems of classification evolve. Scholars have used both of these explanations to understand the policies of a particular state at different points in time. For example, Nobles links these perspectives by arguing that in some historical moments state actors play a leading role in imposing racial categories, while at other times the same state is more open to influences from civil society.[85]

A third view emphasizes direct and indirect pressure and influence from the international community to explain why and when states classify by race. International forces have increasingly shaped the enumeration of race, as international bodies and researchers seek to secure standardized racial and ethnic data.[86] This results in both direct pressure for the availability of certain types of data and normative isomorphism through

---

[84] Nobles 2000. Paschel 2013.

[85] Nobles 2000.

[86] Morning, Ann. 2008. "Ethnic Classification in Global Perspective: A Cross-National Survey of the 2000 Census Round." *Population Research and Policy Review* 27(2): 239-272.

trainings of social science researchers and bureaucrats. In her comparative historical

study of racial classification across twenty countries in Latin America, Mara Loveman

finds that over and above domestic politics, states classify their populations in response to

changes in international criteria for how to construct modern nations and promote

national development, which results in internal pressure to be 'modern.'[87] She also finds

that a country's position within the global economy shapes how international criteria and

external developments impact the domestic collection of data on race.

This chapter finds that in the 30 to 40 year period leading up to the Congress'

policy reversal several necessary conditions emerged. The category of *Other Backward*

Classes solidified administratively and politically first at the regional level and later in

center. An important aspect of the initial regional development of the administrative

category was the emergence of local and regional political leaders and parties with a

constituency that identified as OBC, both internally and externally. During this period,

attempts to push for a caste census from sections of civil society and national

commissions were ineffective; an 'OBC constituency' was not sufficiently mobilized at

the national level to pose an electoral threat to the Congress or BJP. The crucial

difference in the lead up to the 2011 decennial census was the entrance of a new political

elite, not from the upper caste origins, who were seen as national-level OBC leaders with

a sizable constituency. Against a recent history of 'missing the Mandal bus'[88] and the

---

[87] Loveman, Mara. 2014. *National Colors: Racial Classification and the State in Latin America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[88] This phrase refers to the extension of reservation benefits to OBCs based on a 1980 report by the Mandal Commission and the fact that the Congress party, which was in power at the time when the Mandal report was published, stalled to implement the committee's recommendation. In fact, during the short windows of time when non-Congress governments have been in power, the impetus was taken to provide affirmative benefits to OBCs.

electoral ramifications of not taking emerging OBC political demands seriously, Congress felt considerable internal pressure to acknowledge the demands made by OBC political leaders and related civil society groups. As this chapter traces in greater detail, several leading Members of Parliament (MPs) and OBC leaders, including Mulayam Singh Yadav (Samajwadi Party, hereafter SP), Lalu Prasad Yadav (Rashtriya Janata Dal, hereafter RJD) and Sharad Yadav (Janata Dal United, hereafter JD-U) took to the floor of the Lok Sabha, factionalized the Congress-led coalition government, and drew the support of the leading opposition party, which made the Congress even more vulnerable and led it to capitulate.

After explaining how OBC politicians and civil society forced Congress to agree to a caste count, this chapter explores the subsequent divorce of the caste enumeration from the decennial census. The ideological position of the Congress leadership and leading factions of power within the state bureaucracy carefully steered the decision of how to collect the caste data. Given the highly respected nature of the decennial census, the relegation of the caste count to the BPL survey, which has come under systematic criticism, allowed the Congress to politically benefit from collecting these data, while diminishing their potential status and worth.

This chapter draws upon newspaper archives, Parliamentary records and semi-structured interviews with public intellectuals, civil society leaders and government officials. I used online databases for several English language newspapers (i.e. *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *The Times of India* and *The Hindustan*) between 2009 and 2011, and created an archive for a one-year period surrounding the caste census for a leading Kannada, Tamil, and Hindi newspaper, as discussed in the introduction. I

examined transcripts from the Lok Sabha during debates surrounding the caste census in May and August 2010. I also conducted thirty-four semi-structured interviews with public intellectuals, government bureaucrats and civil society leaders. These data were coupled with secondary sources including government reports, circulars, and scholarly publications.

The organization of the chapter is as follows. Section one provides a historical overview to show how the colonial Indian state undertook a series of unwieldy attempts to classify census data by caste as part of the broader apparatus of expanding and maintaining colonial rule. The subsequent four sections look at caste enumeration in the post-colonial period. Section two of this paper examines how the Indian state changed its practices of classifying by caste after independence and how these policies evolved in the post-colonial period against repeated calls for an extended caste count. Section three describes how the Congress leadership finally agreed to a caste enumeration as part of the 2011 decennial census following a targeted public attack on the floor of the Lok Sabha in May 2010. The fourth section explores how Congress leaders changed their position and shuffled the caste enumeration into the BPL Census. The fifth and final section examines the implications of these findings on the production of caste data during the contemporary count. Together, these five sections aim to contribute to our understanding of the relationship between state classifications, civil society movements, and political power against a backdrop of various attempts to expand and dismantle a state-sponsored system of affirmative action. This chapter moves across multiple knowledge making sites within the central state, including the administrative bureaucracy, Central Cabinet, Lok Sabha, and national commissions. At the same time, these spaces remain relatively

porous and influenced by one another and other organizations, including coalition and opposition political parties, the lower tiers of government, and civil society.

2.1. Counting Caste in Colonial India

Throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, the colonial government generated considerable data on caste through censuses, local surveys, community studies and ethnographic research. As the English East India Company worked to consolidate its new territorial gains in the early 19th century, "the acquisition of detailed social knowledge had become essential to the Company's operations," including "feeding the still insecure colonial state with such data as could be used to tax and police its subjects."[89] Leading sociologists and anthropologists of South Asia, including G.S. Ghurye, M.S. Srinivasan, Bernard Cohn, Arjun Appadurai and Nicholas Dirks, argue that the colonial obsession with classification by caste and religion was deeply intertwined with the English determination to "divide and rule."[90] Although most of the initial efforts to collect caste data were decentralized, this pattern slowly changed following the Mutiny of 1857,[91] after which time the central state began to implement its plan to develop more comprehensive and systematic

---

[89] Bayly, Susan. 1999. *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 98.

[90] Appadurai 1993. Cohn 1987. Dirks 2001. Ghurye, G.S. 1932. *Caste and Race in India.* London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Company, Limited. Srinivas, M.N. 1962. *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays.* London: Asia Publishing House.

[91] The mutiny began as a rebellion of sepoys within the East India Company in the city of Meerut and spread throughout the upper Gangetic plain and parts of current day Madhya Pradesh. It took more than a year for the East Indian Company to quell the rebellion. Although other territories under company rule did not experience rebellion, the mutiny led the British to reorganize the army and the financial and administrative systems, and bring the territory directly under the rule of the British Crown.

knowledge about the colonized populations in India.[92] By the mid-19th century, the

colonial state began to centralize an extensive census apparatus, which produced

hundreds of tables, monographs and books about caste in India. As Bernard Cohn argues:

> Most of the basic treatises on the Indian caste system written during the period 1880
> to 1950 were written by men who had important positions either as census
> commissioners for all of India or for a province…It would not be an exaggeration to
> say that down until 1950 scholars' and scientists' view on the nature and structure and
> functioning of the Indian caste system were shaped mainly by the data and
> conceptions growing out of the census operations.[93]

W.W. Hunter, the first director-general of statistics for the Government of India and later

director general of gazetteers, centralized the activity of district statistics and in the 1872

census "sought to generate all-India procedures, standards, and categories for

enumeration."[94] Colonial administrators, such as Hunter, felt that precise data on a range

of factors was key to the successful rule of India.

> Hunter counted roads and railways, manufactures and commerce, newspapers and
> famines, agricultural implements and land tenures, fruit trees and domestic animals,
> wages and prices, the work of the courts, the reach of the schools, the capacity of the
> jails, and the effects of efforts to improve sanitation and control disease. Additionally,
> numbers could be used to generate information concerning the caste composition of
> discrete areas of imperial control in relation to military recruitment, police control,
> land settlement operations, market intervention, and legal policy.[95]

 In nine decennial censuses between 1871 and 1941, the colonial administration set up

individual census commissions to classify the entire population within the colonial

---

[92] By the mid 1850's, the colonial state began to plan for an all-India census in 1861. However, the Mutiny
both delayed this effort (to quell the potential for further unrest) and confirmed the need for better data on
colonial subjects. (Dirks 2001: 200)

[93] Cohn 1987: 242.

[94] Dirks 2001: 199.

[95] *Ibid*. 199-200.

territory by religion and caste.[96] Many British officials believed that knowledge on

religion and caste were "the sociological keys to understanding the Indian people" and

data on caste and religion also fed into army recruitment, balancing the proportion of

Hindus and Muslims in the public service, education policy and theories about how

certain castes "were organizing to supplant British rule."[97]

Imperial Censuses in India were far more detailed in scope than the domestic

censuses being carried out in Britain during the same period. Census-makers in Britain at

this time were reluctant to collect data on religion, while in the Indian census religion and

caste were two of its fundamental categories. In the 1872 Census report, more than a

fourth of the content focused on religion and caste data.[98] [99] In the 1882 Census, the

proliferation of caste names in the collected data led to the simultaneous publication of

"caste index" volumes, along with the main census report.[100]

Considerable variation in how the colonial state tried to collect data on caste

within and across the early synchronous decennial censuses highlights the state's struggle

to create a map of society useful for centralized state administration. Across successive

censuses, and through a messy process of sorting and re-sorting, census officials

---

[96] The first non-synchronous census occurred in 1871-2, while the first synchronous census took place in 1881. In the 1941 Census, the collected caste data were never tabulated or made public due to the hasty collection and compilation of data as a result of WWII.

[97] Cohn 1987: 242-243.

[98] Waterfield, Henry. 1875. *Memorandum on the Census of British India of 1871-72.* London: H.M. Stationery Office.

[99] The Imperial Census of 1872 census was both incomplete—it failed to cover all territories controlled by the British—and non-synchronic, as data from several providences used returns collected during a three to six year window. Although a uniform schedule was used for most of the data collection, it was not centrally supervised.

[100] Plowden, W.C. 1883. *Report on the Census of British India taken on the 17th February 1881*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode.

developed and tested national-level categories.[101] In the 1872, 1881 and 1901 censuses,

the colonial state used *varna*, the four broad categories of Hindus, as the primary

principle of classification. The 1872 census report states that "in all modes of

classification, the first rank is held by the Brahmin or priestly caste…" and later "next in

rank come the Kshatriyas, Rajpoots of warrior caste."[102] The report continues, "the third

of the primitive castes was the Vaisyas, who were occupied in agriculture and trade,

while the great majority of the Hindoo population was indiscriminately thrown together

into fourth, namely, the Soodra or servile class."[103] In regionally specific summaries

within the main census report for 1872, the *varna* system is not used given its limited

utility and relevance at the local level. Different regions had their own approaches to the

collection and tabulation of caste data. Data from the Madras Province consisted of a few

large categories, according to their occupation. In contrast, other provinces generated

detailed caste tables. Census Commissioner Waterfield writes, "the number of separate

tribes and caste which have been found to exist in Bengal does not probably fall short of

a thousand."[104] For the 1881 census, Census Commissioner W.C. Plowden instructed

that the caste tables should list information for all castes and tribes that contained more

---

[101] The early census forms of the 1871-1872 Census included three religious categories: "Hindoo," "Mohomedan" and "others" (Natrajan 1972). Provincial governments, including British Burma and the Madras Province, sought to change the classification to include categories such as "Buddhists," "Sikhs" and "Christians" (Hume 1871). In the end, the first imperial census included a question on religion, caste or class, and race or nationality. During the 1881 Census, information on caste was ascertained from Hindus and data on sect was obtained from all other religious groups. The 1891 census modified the questions on religion and caste. With regards to religion, a question on 'main religion' was canvassed and there was follow up question on 'sect.' With regards to caste, two questions were asked. The first question inquired about the 'caste or race of main religion' and there was an additional question on the 'subdivision of caste or race'. The 1901 census, headed by HH Risley, collected data on the caste of Hindus and Jains, and in the case of other religions, the name of tribe or race was recorded.

[102] Waterfield 1875: 22.

[103] *Ibid*.

[104] *Ibid*. 21.

than 100,000 people and asked all Provincial Census Commissioners to assign each caste to one of five categories: Brahman, Rajput, Castes of Good Social Position, Inferior Castes, and Non-Hindu or Aborginal Castes. Provincial Census Commissioners struggled with Plowden's proposed system of classifications, which did not nearly match up with more localized caste categories.[105] Given the disconnect between the *varna* system and how the caste system locally operated, Census Director Plowden abandoned the use of *varna* census classification in the 1891 census. However, when H.H. Risley took over control of the census in 1901 he not only returned to rely on the *varna* system but his preoccupation with the relative status of castes resulted in the first colonial ranking of caste in the 1901 census. The re-adoption of the *varna* system began the construction of all-India caste categories. While previously individuals from one region of the country had little understanding about caste names and relationships in a different region of the country, the administrative adoption of the *varna* system in the early 20th century created a top-down, all-India system of classification in which people began to slowly and occasionally conceptualize themselves in relations to others. As Cohn argues, "from the beginning of the census operations it was widely assumed than an all-India system of classification of castes could be developed."[106] In the early twentieth century, 'depressed classes' emerged as the official (colonial) state term for the most socially and economically disadvantaged. Census returns for the 1921 Census reported the population of depressed classes.[107] The introduction of this broad term "opened the possibility of

---

[105] Cohn 1987: 245.

[106] *Ibid*.

[107] Galanter 1984: 25.

visualizing the problem not as that of a congeries of depressed groups, but as a stratum of all-India dimension with shared characteristics."[108] The 1931 Census used the term 'exterior castes.' In the 1930s, the colonial government created the term 'Scheduled Castes" to denote those historically outcaste and untouchable groups who would enjoy special electoral arrangements.[109] In the 1950 Indian Constitution, the terms Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) became codified as state categories, and all subsequent decennial censuses have enumerated these two groups. The changing nature of religion and caste categories across successive colonial census highlights how the census schedule contains and helps to produce a particular, historically specific, *social map of society*. In the colonial period, this map was contested initially among colonial administrators and elite Indians, who administrators solicited, but over time caste associations and other Indian organizations approached state agencies in an attempt to shape the social map in the census questionnaire and the resulting data.

While the collection of caste data during the early colonial period was pushed by the state, two regular types of engagement with Indian subjects emerged. A group of elite Indians played a role in the production of caste data and helped to create a particular social map, which was bolstered by references to religious texts. In the 1881 Census, Rajendra Lal Mitra, a leading Sanskrit scholar at the time, helped to determine how to rank castes in Bengal based on "the textbooks of the Hindu."[110] Indian elites became important intermediaries in the creation of colonial state knowledge. In the 1901 census,

---

[108] *Ibid.*

[109] *Ibid.* 34.

[110] Mitra, Rajendra Lal, 1881, as quoted in Cohn 1987: 245.

Census Commissioner H.H. Risley relied almost entirely upon the opinions of Brahmins and other higher castes to develop a ranking of castes.[111] The Brahmanical perspective of other castes—particularly with regards to who to accept food and water from; the ritual proximity of groups in relation to Brahmans; and origin stories concerning duties and obligations of other castes towards Brahmans—became the basis of the official census ranking of caste.[112] Elite Indians played a key role as experts in the production and ranking of caste categories and their respective social maps disproportionately shaped the production of caste data.

At the same time, civil society began to mobilize in response to census enumerations by caste. The Arya Samaj, a religious movement aimed at developing a more revived and purified Vedic religion in Northwestern India, came to reject the label of Hindu and wished to be identified as Aryas.[113] In the two years leading up to the 1891 census, the Arya Samaj newspapers instructed their followers to answer 'Arya' instead of 'Hindu' for the religion question. In addition they also pressured census official to accept and record "Arya" as the religion.[114] Forty years later, in the lead up to the 1931 census the Arya Samaj was continuing its mobilization[115]. The Arya Samaj in Lahore widely distributed the following handbill:

---

[111] Previously in Bengal in the 1880s, Risley created a hierarchical list of castes, on which he solicited feedback from numerous Indian experts. As Cohn (1987: 247) explains most of the Riley's correspondents cited sacred text and legends to defend their positions and "the most frequent validation for altering Risley's list was reference to learned pandits and Sanskrit scholars." As a result of their opinions, Risely listed castes and tribes alphabetically in the resulting publication in 1891.

[112] Dirks 2001.

[113] Jones, Kenneth W. "Religious identity and the Indian Census" in Barrier, Norman Gerald . (ed.) 1981. *The Census in British India*. New Delhi: Manohar.

[114] *Ibid*.

[115] Cohn 1984: 250.

An immediate effect of the colonial ranking by caste in the 1901 census was a proliferation of caste organizations, writing on caste, and petitions for higher status. The 1901 census became "the official record of social status" and caste-based organizations and related groups lobbied and argued to change the relative ranking of castes in the census results.[116] A proliferation of caste based organizations in the early 1900s led to efforts by many of these organizations to shape the production of caste tables through census-related publicity and direct efforts to lobby census officials. Many of the largest caste based organizations that still exist in Karnataka started in the first decade of the twentieth century. In the early 20th century, and in particular in the aftermath of the cast ranking in 1901, the census office became a site of political mobilization.

Colonial censuses and the collection of caste data can be viewed as tool of rule by a hegemonic state. The motivation for collecting religion and caste data as part of colonial censuses was to produce a more detailed social map that allowed for more efficient tax collection, military conscription, and the implementation of other policies

---

[116] Dirks 2001: 206.

and programs at the heart of colonial rule. At the same time, an important and perhaps

unintended effect of caste enumeration and rankings was the proliferation of caste based

organizations and census-related organizing by private groups. In addition, the colonial

state repeatedly tried to create national-level caste categories as a means of making sense

of the thousands of subcastes that make up localized systems of stratification found

throughout India. These national-level categories allowed for central government policies

based on caste. They also continued to evolve as members of these groups mobilized and

created complementary categories and identities such as Dalit (i.e., SC) and Adavasi (i.e.

ST). Far from being the international standard at the time, the massive colonial effort to

enumerate the population by caste and religion reflects the state's attempt to make sense

of and create governable subjects.

2.2. Counting Caste in Post-Colonial India

> The 1951 Census was not to concern itself with questions regarding races, castes
> and tribes, except in so far as the necessary statistical material relating to special
> groups was to be published and certain other material related to backward classes
> collected and made over to the Backward Classes Commission. On the other hand it
> was enjoined that the maximum possible attention should be paid to economic data.
>
> ---1951 Census Report, Registrar General of India, p.10

Following independence, the newly elected Congress Party leaders made the ideological

decision to stop the colonial practice of census enumeration by caste. Prime Minister

Jawaharlal Nehru and his administration argued that colonial caste counts had reinforced

casteism and, in doing so, facilitated colonial rule through an emphasis on internal

community divisions. Instead, the leaders of independent India wished to develop a

national identity against the backdrop of multiple forms of internal diversity, including

religion, language, caste and class.[117] In the Constituent Assembly Debates when the

Indian Constitution was being finalized, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Chairman of the Drafting

Committee for the Constitution, and a leader of India's outcaste or 'untouchable'

communities, discussed the challenges of forming a nation:

> I am of [the] the opinion that in believing that we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion. How can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation? The sooner we realize that we are not as yet a nation in the social and psychological sense of the world, the better for us…In India, there are castes. The castes are anti-national in the first place because they bring about separation in social life. They are anti-national also because they generate jealousy and antipathy between caste and caste. But we must overcome all these difficulties if we wish to become a nation in reality. For fraternity can be a fact only when there is nation. Without fraternity, equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paints.[118]

For Ambedkar, the challenge of nationhood meant the state should actively work to

destroy the caste system, abolish untouchability, and create reservation benefits for

outcaste groups. When Ambedkar's earlier push for a separate electorate for untouchables

in 1920s-1930s had come into clash with Gandhi, who pushed for a gradual reform to the

caste system, Gandhi threatened to starve until death and started his fast until a

compromise was reached.[119] Most Congress Party leaders took a less extreme position

---

[117] The Partition and formation of two nation states suggested that religion was already a divisive line---delineating those who were Indian from those who were Muslim and Indian. The linguistic diversity of the country remained an immense challenge for centralized administration, as there simply was no language that more than 1/4th of the population spoke in common. Nehru dealt with the linguistic challenge by allowing state governments to operate in the local or vernacular language, while Hindi and English became official national languages. The country was overwhelmingly rural and poor at the time of independence; as series of central government programs targeted improving the plight of the rural poor through land ownership and titling, farm subsidies, a public distribution (food and staples) system, expanding government school system, and a series of public health programs.

[118] Constituent Assembly Debates. 1949. *Official Reports*. New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat: 11: 977-81.

[119] Jaffrelot (2003:22-25) summarized the long-standing diverging view over caste and social change between Gandhi and Ambedkar. Ambedkar was trying to dismantle the caste system rapidly through conversion to Buddhism, inter-marriage, inter-caste dining, and separate electorates to create an organized mass movement against untouchability, led by untouchables. In contrast, Gandhi's paternalistic view was to protect the 'Hindu family' and he stressed the unity of all Hindus and pushed for gradual social reforms and the expense of equality for untouchables in the immediate period.

and sided with Gandhi; while hoping that the salience of caste and other traditional

identities would steadily decline over time and a unifying Indian identity would emerge.

As such, they supported very few radical reforms to destroy it. Ambedkar, frustrated with

the slow pace of reform, resigned from the central cabinet in 1951 and one of the reasons

he cited was a delay in the implementation of Article 340 in the 1950 Constitution, which

was the appointment of a commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes.

As Prime Minister Nehru stated at a Tribal Conference in Delhi in 1952:

> After the achievement of independence, the basic problem of India, taken as a whole
> is one of integration and consolidation. Political integration is now complete but that
> is not enough. We have to do something much more intimate than political integration
> and that process takes time. It is not a matter of law. It grows. You cannot force it to
> grow just as you cannot force a plant or flower to grow. You can only nurture it and
> produce conditions where it grows. So the greatest problem of India today is
> psychological integration and consolidation, to build up a unity which will do away
> with provincialism, communalism and various other 'isms' which disrupt and
> separate.[120]

India's first generation of post-colonial leaders embraced the liberal democratic tradition

in which the individual was the primary unit of democracy, and hoped to create a society

where the key collective identity was a nationalist identity, which overrode caste, religion

and other communal identities.

While Nationalist elites dismissed caste and other 'provincial' identities as

potentially integrative structures, [121] they were in a unique position to do so. Following

the trend of a disproportionately upper caste Congress leadership in the colonial

period,[122] India's post-colonial political leaders were overwhelmingly from an upper

---

[120] Nehru, Jawaharlal as quoted in Shrikant, L.M. 1956. *Report of the Commission of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.* New Delhi: Manager of Publications: 226.

[121] Rudolph and Rudolph 1967.

[122] Jaffrelot 2003.

caste and well-to-do economic background. For example in 1953, over 70 percent of

senior administrators were from forward castes, as were most of the Ministers and senior

political leaders of the Congress Party.[123] During the colonial period, they had received

good educations and served in various political and administrative positions in the

colonial government. In fact, India's colonial government was overwhelmingly Indian,

with Brahmins and other upper caste Indians holding most positions in the upper ranks.

In the early 1890s, more than 50 years prior to independence, the civil administration in

India was "carried on by native agency, supervised by a small body of Englishmen."[124]

At the start of the twentieth century, there were only 750 British officials in the

covenanted civil services, excluding the police. Out of the 2,600 officials in the higher

judicial and executive services, approximately 35 Englishmen were domiciled in India.[125]

Most government servants were Hindu, of which half were Brahmin, and about a fifth

were Muslim. In the lowest, or subordinate civil services (of approximately 110,000

position), 97 percent were Indian.[126] In the post-independence period India's social elite

also held the top elected and appointed positions previously held by Englishmen.

Therefore, the major personnel change between the pre- and post-independence periods

occurred in the highest tier of the administration, which also provided the political

ideology for a new India. Unlike in the colonial period, this group now had social,

administrative and political power.

---

[123] The proportion of forward castes is difficult to estimate given that the last nationwide caste count occurred in 1931. The Mandal Commission estimated the proportion of forward castes to be 25% of the population. More recent sample surveys, such as the National Family Health Survey and National Sample Survey have estimated a significantly higher proportion of forward castes, in the 35% range.

[124] Chesney 1894.

[125] Austin 1901.

[126] *Ibid*.

The ideology of India's 'founding fathers' translated into a series of changes with regards to state classification by caste. While the extensive data generating apparatus of the colonial state continued into the post-colonial period, several important changes occurred. First, as already mentioned, decennial censuses in independent India no longer involved a full enumeration of caste. With the passage of the 1949 Census Act, the government created a permanent office for the Registrar General and Census of India (RGI) within the powerful Home Ministry.[127] The RGI scaled back the collection of caste data during the first decennial census after independence in 1951. In this census, they only collected data on 'special groups,' consisting of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), and limited data collection on other backward classes and Anglo-Indians. These data were seen as necessary for the administration of India's affirmative action program, as stated in the Constitution. The 1950 Indian Constitution had codified and extended the system of reservations that developed during the colonial period, in which a proportion of government jobs was reserved for "backward" groups such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe—equal to their proportion in the population. The term backward appears in three articles of the Indian Constitution. Article 15 states that "nothing shall prevent the State for making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favor of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented, in the Services under the State."[128]

At the same time, data on religion also remained part of the post-colonial census. While Muslims and Christians had reservations during the colonial period through a

---

[127] The Home Ministry is at the center of the Indian bureaucracy, with the Home Minister seen as the most powerful minister, only second in command to the Prime Minister.

[128] 2011. *Constitution of India as Amended by Constitution Act 2009*. Delhi: Kamal Publishers: 6.

system of separate electorates, reservations in legislative seats for these two groups were dismantled after independence.[129] The Indian Constituent Assembly's Advisory Committee on Minorities and Fundamental Rights considered continuing Muslim reservations into the post-colonial period, but the communal politics that led to the partition manifested itself in a particular view of secularism in which India's secular state was incompatible with reservations for Muslim or Christian minority groups, which were viewed as non-indigenous religion.[130]

The stated justification was to correctly enumerate SCs, as a 1950 Order of the President restricted the classification of SCs to Hindus and later expanded it to include Sikhs in 1956 and Buddhists in 1990. Starting with the 1961 Census and continuing to the present day, the Registrar General of India has classified the population of the country by SC and ST, and everyone else was enumerated as 'other' or 'non-SC/ST.' For the administrative categories of SC and ST, the decennial census further classifies individuals by subcaste based on state-specific lists for SCs and STs. The central government established independent units and commissions to deal with these historically marginalized groups.

While the collection of caste data was scaled back in post-colonial decennial censuses, data collection related to caste did occur in other less-powerful parts of the bureaucracy. Caste became an identity that peripheral parts of the bureaucracy that studied it from cultural standpoint (i.e., to understand the rich diversity of India from a more ethnographic perspective) or to administer India's system of affirmative action (i.e.,

---

[129] Wright 1997.

[130] Jenkins 2003.

identify communities that should have SC or ST status). The Department of Culture was one place within the administrative bureaucracy where large amounts of qualitative data on caste were generated. The Anthropological Survey of India, which was established in 1945, became the main research arm of the Department of Culture and it has played a key role in mapping thousands of communities across India (see footnote 1). This research flowed from the long-standing tradition of community and village studies, which flourished during the colonial period and continued many of the traditions of Census Commissioner Risley, who believed that caste had a biological basis. The largest of these projects was the People's of India Project, as described on the website for the Anthropological Survey of India:

> In our compilation of the lists of communities of India under the People of India project we drew upon ethnographic surveys, the lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes drawn up by the Government of India, the lists of backward classes prepared by Backward Classes Commissions set up by various state governments, and the list that exists in the Mandal Commission Report. We were able to put together about 6748 communities at the start. This list was taken to the field, tested and checked, and finally 4635 communities were identified and studied.[131]

While the 43 volumes that this project has created are extensive and encyclopedic they remain largely a research and cultural resource, and are not directly integrated into the routine practices of the state. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, in conjunction with state level offices, was created to maintain and update each state's list for SCs and STs. As part of these efforts, members of the Commission at the national- and state-levels periodically conduct field visits, interview experts, hear testimonies from community leaders, and review social science research and

---

[131] http://www.ansi.gov.in/people_india.htm last accessed: May 3, 2014.

administrative data on specific castes and communities to make determinations about

whether a group should be added or removed from an SC or ST list.

Unlike the categories of SC and ST, the category of 'other backward classes' was

administratively and legally ambiguous, as explained in the first report of the National

Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes:

> In the matter of Scheduled Castes, the criterion is clear. Untouchability is the criterion and it being peculiar to the Hindus [and Sikhs and Jains]. Those Hindu castes that were regarded as untouchable by society are included in that particular Schedule. Non-Hindus cannot be included in it.
>
> The Scheduled Tribes can also be generally ascertained by the fact that they live apart in hills, and even where they live on the plains, they lead a separate excluded existence and are not fully assimilated in the main body of the people. Scheduled Tribes may belong to any religion. They are listed as Scheduled Tribes because of the kind of life led by them.
>
> In the matter of other backward classes the criteria have to be very carefully determined. These "other backward classes" are said to belong alike to Hindu, Muslim and Christian and other denominations. They are to be found both in the rural and urban area. They follow a variety of professions. Their backwardness, therefore, is due to a variety of causes.[132]

To deal with this ambiguity, the President of India appointed a Backward Classes

Commission in 1953 to identify backward communities, which were not SC or ST.[133] The

first Backward Classes Commission (BCC) chaired by Kaka Kalelkar, who was a

Brahmin and a Gandhian, had a mandate to:

---

[132] Shrikant, L.M. 1956: 224.

[133] The 1950 India Constitution allowed for the appointment of a national level commission "to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes within the territory of India" and "to make recommendations as to the steps that should be taken by the union or any state to remove such difficulties and as to improve their condition" (Article 340(1)). The Backward Classes Commission drew upon existing sources of data on caste within the central- and state- bureaucracy and also generated their own data on caste through interviews, field visits to communities, and surveys, to address it stated mandates. Over time, a decentralized government apparatus related to other backward classes (OBCs) grew, with most data on OBCs being generated at the state or local level.

Determine the criteria to be adopted in considering whether any sections of the people in the territory of India (in addition to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes specified by notifications issued under Articles 314 and 342 of the Constitution) should be treated as socially and educationally backward classes; and in accordance with such criteria, prepare a list of such classes setting out also their approximate numbers and territorial distribution…and make recommendations as to the steps that should be taken by the Union or any State to remove such difficulties or to improve their conditions.[134]

The Commission gathered existing data within the administrative bureaucracy, conducted field visits throughout India, and also sent out a detailed questionnaire to state governments.[135] [136] One specific area of inquiry on the questionnaire related to the inclusion of case in the decennial census.[137] The Commission tried to get caste data from the RGI, as well as the Education Department and NSSO, but found that these data were insufficient:

Figures supplied to us by the Census Department gave the aggregate number of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and of a limited number of communities in Other Backward Classes group. This could not help us to decide about the approximate population of each community. Moreover, there was no authoritative list of Other Backward Classes. The Ministry of Education had one list. The Census assumed another, and it was entrusted to us to supply an authoritative list, in the absence of which the figure for the Other Backward Classes given either under Census or by the Ministry of Education, could not, by the very nature of the case, be authoritative or accurate.[138]

---

[134] Shrikant 1956: 219.

[135] Several other members of the eleven-person committee were from lower caste backgrounds.

[136] The questionnaire sent to state governments consisted of 24 areas of feedback, including criteria by which to define 'backwardness;' the population, geographic locations, occupations (with individual subsections on government service and agriculture), and socio-economic, health and educational status of backward classes within the state; organizations working to bring about "political consciousness" and state agencies "working for the uplift" of backward classes; and, possible revisions to the lists of SCs and STs (Shrikant 1956: 228, 240).

[137] The Commission asks state government the following question: "Do you think that the abolition of the mention of caste or sub-caste in the census of 1951 has been useful or otherwise for determining the condition of backward classes? What procedure would you recommend for adoption in the future censuses?" (Shrikant 1956: 226)

[138] Backward Classes Commission. 1955. *Report, 3 Volumes*. Delhi: Manager of Publications: 11.

Due to the difficulty in finding existing administrative data that could help them define a community of other backward classes, the first recommendation of the BCC in its 1955 report, titled "Census and Caste," called for a full caste-wise enumeration of the population as part of the 1961 decennial census:

> Before the disease of caste is destroyed all facts about it have to be noted and classified in a scientific manner as in a clinical record. To this end we suggest that the 1961 Census be remodeled and re-organized so as to secure the required information on the following lines: (1) The Census operations should be conducted as a well-equipped continuous organization competent to supply information on various topics of sociological importance (2) The Census officers must have permanent ethnologists and sociologists, in addition to the economists attached to them. (3) As long as social welfare and relief have to be administered through castes, classes or groups, full information about these groups should be obtained and tabulated. [139]

Underlying its call for a complete caste count in the 1961 census, the Backward Caste Commission asserted an ideological difference with the administration; if the state was to play an active role in helping to destroy the caste system, complete data on caste were required at regular intervals. In its report, the BCC identified 2,399 backward classes, which accounted for approximately 32 percent of the population. It used the following criteria for these classes, including 837 as the 'most backward': (1) low social position in the traditional caste hierarchy of Hindu society; (2) lack of general educational advancement among the major section of a caste or community; (3) inadequate or no representation in government services; (4) inadequate representation in the field of trade, commerce and industry.

The Congress-led central government ignored BCC's recommendation to include a full caste count in the decennial census, along with most of the Kalelkar Commission's

---

[139] *Ibid*. 159.

other recommendations.[140] The publicly stated position was that the Commission had not applied objective tests for its identification of backwardness and, therefore, its identification of who was backward was suspect as were the recommendations of how to improve the conditions of these communities. At the same time, the wide-reaching nature of the report, including measures that would have transformed rural property holdings throughout India, could not have been met favorably by Nehru and his cabinet who had crafted development programs based on gradual and limited income redistribution, instead of an overhaul of rural relations.[141] In addition, the vast number of communities that the Committee found backward (i.e., 32 percent of the population), was seen to undermine its usefulness.[142] Supporting the Congress Ministers' wide dismissal of the 1956 report was a lengthy cover letter written at the last minute from Chairman Kalelkar to Nehru, in which he repudiated the report. Kalelkar dissented from the report that he had signed for fear that caste-based quotas would "destroy the unity of the nation and narrow down the aspiration of the people." [143] He argued, "it would have been better if we could determine the criteria of backwardness on principles other than caste," and that the "caste test was repugnant to democracy."[144] The only Kalelkar Commission

---

[140] The committee's recommendations included: (1) undertaking caste-wise enumeration of population in the census of 1961; (2) relating social backwardness of a class to its low position in the traditional caste hierarchy of Hindu society; (3) treating all women as 'backward'; (4) reserving 70 per cent seats in all technical and professional institutions for qualified students of backward classes; (5) minimum reservation of vacancies in all government services and local bodies for other backward classes on the following scale: class I = 25 per cent; class II = 33½ per cent; class III and IV = 40 per cent. In addition, the Kelelkar Commission made several recommendations outside the traditional scope of the reservation discussion, including a massive intervention in the agricultural economy through a system of rural price supports, protection for smallholders on insecure tenancies and large-scale land distribution (Bayly1999: 290).

[141] Bayly 1990: 291.

[142] Galanter, 1984: 173.

[143] Backward Classes Commission 1955: vi-xiii.

[144] *Ibid*.

recommendation that the central government implemented was the suggestion to build upon decentralized efforts to serve backward classes, which already existed in several southern states. For example, by the 1950s, the provinces and princely state found in current day Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra already had reservation benefits in place for OBCs, for recruitment into educational institutions and government jobs. [145] [146]At the same time, limited educational concessions were made for OBCs in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh beginning in the late 1940s. The central government delegated the task of identifying and improving the conditions of OBCs to state governments. The Minister of Home Affairs, in a strong critique that accompanied the report when it was put before Parliament in September 1956, argued that the Kalelkar Commission had failed to find "positive and workable criteria" and recommended that state governments "give all reasonable facilities…in accordance with their existing lists and also to such others who in their opinion deserve to be considered as socially and educationally backward in the existing circumstances," and undertake occasional surveys to identify Backward Classes.[147] The Commission's report remained on the table and was not taken up by Parliament until 1965. Thus, the identification of backward classes and the question of affirmative action benefits for groups other than SCs and STs went back to state governments.[148]

---

[145] Galanter 1984: 155-168.

[146] The definition of OBC varied across these provinces; colonial-period committees had helped to define 'depressed,' 'backward,' and 'non-Brahmin' classes in particular regions, beginning with the Millers Committee in Mysore (current day Karnataka) in 1918 and continuing into the 1920s in several other states in the South and Bombay Providence (part of current day Maharashtra). *Ibid*.

[147] Ministry of Home Affairs. 1956. Memorandum on the Report of the Backward Classes Commission. Delhi: Government of India Press: 3-5.

[148] Galanter 1984: 172-3.

Over the next several decades, state governments began to expand their organizational apparatus for identifying and serving the needs of Backward Classes. In the case of present day Karnataka, reservations had existed in the region (previously known as Mysore). The Miller Commission, which submitted its report in 1919, had classified all non-Brahmins as Backward Classes. Beginning in 1921, Backward Classes had a 75 percent reservation in government service and this continued until 1959.[149] The first post-colonial Backward Classes Commission, headed by Dr. R. Naganagowda, submitted its report in 1960. It prepared separate lists for groups deemed socially backward, educationally backward, and lacking adequate representation in state jobs. Unlike the Miller Commission, the Naganagowda Commission's definition of Backward Classes did not include SCs and STs, who had their separate central government lists and reservations quotas in central and state government institutions. Under Article 15(4) of the Constitution, the Naganagowda Commission recommended a reservation in educational institutions for groups found on both the socially and educationally backward lists.[150] This population accounted for approximately 57 percent of the population, and had 22 percent reservation in educational institutions. SCs and STs had a reservation quota equal to their proportion in the state population: 15 percent and 3 percent, respectively. The Commission also recommended that "all those communities which are backward an are not adequately represented in Government Services should be considered as the 'Other Backward Classes' in the State for the purpose of reservation in

---

[149] Unpublished summary table of Karnataka's History of Reservation. Attained from from Karntaka's Backward Commissions Office in July 2011.

[150] Karnataka Backward Classes Commission. 1960. *Report*. Bangalore: Government of Karnataka.

posts in Government Service under Article 16(4) of the Constitution."[151] A 25 percent

reservation was set aside for OBCs in state government jobs, and again the SC and ST

quota was equal to their proportions in the state population. The Commission strenuously

complained that it lacked sufficient data and:

> …very strongly urges the State Government to move the Government of India to record in the Census report the figures relating to literacy, economic conditions, etc., in respect of every caste and community in the State. If the Government of India is not willing to do so, the State Government will have to undertake the work.[152]

In advance of the 1961 decennial census, the Naganagowda Committee urged the State

Government to pressure the center to collect detailed caste data, which would give them

caste-wise data on literacy and other socioeconomic indicators. This started a consistent

and early trend from commissions, High Courts, caste associations, and state

governments in the south requesting more extensive caste data from the RGI.

In the absence of centralized data, states conducted ad hoc surveys and, in a few

cases, detailed censuses to help create and maintain their list of OBCs. Both Karnataka

and Kerala conducted a socioeconomic caste census to update their state-specific OBC

list. Some of the practices and politics of colonial period re-emerged in these efforts. For

example, those in formal political power mediated the decision of which groups should

belong on Karnataka's list of OBCs. As mentioned previously, the Vokkaligas and the

Lingayats have controlled formal politics in Karnataka since it was created in 1956. In

addition, these groups along with all other non-Brahmin castes were used to having

access to reservations since 1921 and until 1959. As such, the inclusion of these two

---

[151] *Ibid*. 22.

[152] *Ibid*.

castes on Karnataka's Backward Classes list in the aftermath of the 1984 socioeconomic caste survey reflects their power within state government and the continuation of colonial era policies and views of backwardness.[153]

During this period between the 1960s and 1980s, demands for the re-introduction of a full caste count in the decennial census sprung up from regional political parties and social movements hoping to defend or extend state-level reservations, and often in relation to legal cases concerning affirmative action programs. As stated previously, most of these early demands for a full caste count came from activists and politicians in the south. The southern States of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka, in particular, had an earlier history of social movements for the eradication of caste or caste-based discrimination, of state-level reservations in government jobs and educational institutions, and of political leaders and politicians from lower caste backgrounds, which in some instances paralleled a broader change in the distribution of social and political power across groups within the state. The decentralized demands for a caste census that occurred between the 1960s-1980s paralleled a political mobilization of other backward classes within particular regions of the country and the expansion of state-level agencies and commissions to address the needs of OBCs. Many of demands for more detail data on caste came from organizations—either political parties or caste associations— representing specific groups who believed that they were not getting their fair share of the reservation quota. Individuals and organizations representing groups who were excluded from reservation challenged the state reservations in several landmark cases, which put

---

[153] Personal Interview, July 2011.

additional pressure on state agencies to develop objective and legally-defendable criteria on how they determined backwardness.[154]

While reservations for OBCs flourished at the state level, affirmative action benefits remained restricted to SCs and STs in central government jobs, educational institutions and legislative bodies. Twenty-four years after the first Backward Classes Commission came out with its report, Prime Minister Morarji Desai of the Janata Party (which was the first non-Congress Party in power at the national level in India and followed on the heels of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's unpopular Emergency period) appointed a second national-level Backward Classes Commission in early 1979. The Commission, chaired by B.P. Mandal, was charged with the task to develop criteria to identify 'other backward classes' and was also asked to apply these criteria to develop a nation-wide list of OBCs.[155] The second Commission took special care to tap several independent sources of data in developing its criteria, in light of the long-standing critique of the first Committee's findings.[156] The Mandal Commission, as it became popularly known, developed eleven indicators to measure backwardness (4 social, 3 educational and 4 economic). Unlike the first BCC, the Mandal Commission could draw

---

[154] In the case of current-day Karnataka, three such legal cases, *Ramakrishna Singh v. State of Mysore*, *Partha vs. State of Mysore*, and *Balaji vs. State of Mysore*, put ongoing scrutiny on how OBCs should be defined and whether the state's classification of the category along caste lines, versus defined groups along other identities, was acceptable.

[155] The mandate of the Second Backward Classes (Mandal) Commission was to (1) determine the criteria for defining the socially and educationally backward classes; (2) recommend the steps to be taken for their advancement; (3) examine the desirability or otherwise for making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in their favor; (4) present a report setting out the facts found by the commission.

[156] The sources of data that the Mandal Commission drew upon included: (1) a seminar of sociologists on social backwardness; (2) three sets of questionnaires to State Government and the public; (3) extensive touring of the country by the Commission, taking evidence of legislators, eminent public men, sociologist; (4) a country wide socio-educational field survey organized under the panel of experts; (5) preparation of reports on some important issues by specialized agencies; (6) caste study, village monographs and study of legal and constitutional issues; (7) analysis of census data.

upon the twenty-five plus years of post-colonial attempts to define backwardness using a range of measurable criteria. In addition, the Commission appointed a panel of experts, chaired by prominent sociologist M. N. Srinivas, to carry out a field survey on the socio-educational status of caste communities throughout the country. After the Commission compiled data from the survey and existing administrative sources, each community was assigned a total value based on a weighted combination of the eleven indicators. [157] The Commission developed a cutoff measure; communities above the cutoff were designated as 'backward' and those below the cutoff were designated as 'advanced.' Then the Commission used projections based on 1931 census data to estimate of the total size of the communities identified as backward (52 percent), and based on this estimate recommended the proportion of reservations for OBCs (27 percent). Since Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Indian Constitution legally obligated the government to keep the reservation quota under 50 percent (a law that several states violated in their reservation quotas), and because the reservation for SCs and STs was 22 percent (in proportion to their total in the population), the Mandal Commission recommended a reservation quota of 27 percent for OBCs. Along with recommending the extension of reservation benefits,

---

[157] The four social criteria had a weight of 3 points each: (1) castes/classes considered as socially backward by others; (2) castes/classes which mainly depend on manual labor for their livelihood; (3) castes/classes where at least 25 per cent females and 10 per cent males above the state average get married at an age below 17 years in rural areas and at least 10 per cent females and 5 per cent males do so in urban areas; (4) castes/classes where participation of females in work is at least 2 per cent above the state average). The three educational criteria had a weight of 2 points each: (5) castes/classes where the number of children in the age group of 5-15 years who never attended school is at least 25 percent above the state average; (6) castes/classes where the rate of student drop-out in the age group of 5-15 years is at least 25 per cent above the state average; (7) castes/classes amongst whom the proportion of matriculates is at least 25 per cent below the state average. The four economic criteria had a weight of 1 point each: (8) castes/classes where the average value of family assets is at least 25 per cent below the state average; (9) castes/classes where the number of families living in kuccha houses is at least 25 per cent above the state average; (10) castes/classes where the source of drinking water is beyond half a kilometer for more than 50 per cent of the households; (11) castes/classes where the number of households having taken consumption loans is at least 25 per cent above the state average.

the Commission also stated that it was necessary to re-introduce a full caste count as part of the decennial census, both to help inform the quota size for OBCs and to help maintain the central government's list of OBCs. [158]

By the time the Mandal Commission report was published in 1981, Indira Gandhi had returned to power. Over the subsequent decade while she and her son, Rajiv Gandhi, were the Prime Minister and leaders of the Congress Party, the Commission recommendations were ignored. Following in Prime Minister Nehru's tradition, his daughter and grandson formally distanced themselves from a full caste enumeration and an expansion of central government reservations based on criteria that focused on caste-based identities.

Another challenge facing the extension of affirmative action benefits in the 1980s was the political mobilization of SC/STs, who feared that their portion of reservations could be restricted or dismantled as part of, or in response to, the expansion of central government reservations to OBCs. In addition, the history of social movements that worked to improve the condition of SCs and OBCs was quite mixed. In some historical moments political parties had prioritized the mobilization of a broad constituency of backward classes consisting of SCs, STs and OBCs (i.e. early DMK victories in Tamil Nadu) or built a class-based movement that cut across caste communities (i.e. Community Party victories in Kerala).[159] At the same time, SCs and STs also felt marginalized in many of these efforts and eventually either splintered off to form their

[158] Backward Classes Commission. 1981. *Report:* 7 Volumes. New Delhi: Controller of Publications.

[159] Jaffrelot, Christophe and Sanjay Kumar. 2009. *Rise of the Plebeians? The Changing Face of Indian Leislative Assemblies.* Delhi: Routledge.

own political parties or, in some cases, joined in unlikely coalitions with forward castes or other minority groups.[160]

It once again took a change in central party leadership for OBC policies to progress. Soon after Prime Minister V.P. Singh of the Janata Dal came to power in 1990 as part of the National Front coalition government, he issued an order to implement a portion of the Mandal Commission recommendations.[161] Singh's policy to extend affirmative action benefits to OBCs through a 27 percent reservation in central government jobs created quite a controversy, including riots in parts of urban north India.[162] In the south, where state-level reservations had a 30 to 40 year history, there was relative silence. Along with considerable public backlash in parts of north India, several petitions were filed before the Supreme Court questioning the legality of the policy and to stay its operation. After a two year stay, in November 1992, the Supreme Court of India gave a landmark judgment in favor of implementing the 1990 order and directed the central government of India, state governments, and administrations of Union Territories to constitute a permanent body to entertain, examine and make recommendations regarding inclusion, exclusion, and under inclusion in the list of OBCs.[163] The

---

[160] *Ibid.*

[161] The order (Memorandum No. 36012/31/90-Estt. (SCT) dated 13th August 1990) specified that Socially and Educationally Backward Classes eligible in the first phase would include the castes and communities which are common to both the lists in the report of the Mandal Commission and the State Governments.

[162] Add information on riots. Prime Minister Singh was equally controversial in his stance against demolishing the Babri Mosque. He had BJP party president LK Advani arrested on the charges of disturbing the peace and increasing communal tension after Advani toured through the north on a bus that looked like a chariot to rally support for the construction of the Ayodhya temple at the Babri Mosque site. Singh prevented the demolition of the mosque and building of the temple in Oct 1990 by stationing troops, which led to the suspension of the BJP support of the National Front. Singh fell from power soon after this move.

[163] Writ Petition (Civil) No.930 of 1990 – *Indira Sawhney and Others Vs. Union of India and Others*.

Government of India was also directed to specify socioeconomic criteria to exclude socially advanced individuals or groups from the OBC category, who are officially called the 'creamy layer.'

During the legal debate, both those for and against the Mandal Commission's recommendations called for more survey data on caste. As argued by A. Ramah, a dissenter of the Mandal Commission Report:

> The government should make a national level survey immediately and list out all the caste groups including that of the forward castes, and their socio-economic and educational status. The survey should take notes of all the technical errors found in the various criteria adopted by Mandal and formulate more rational criteria and scientific approach toward identifying the really deserving people within the castes and communities of each stratum of our society.

Since the expansion of central reservations to OBCs, the calls for updated data on caste have persisted. Courts, government commissions, political parties and caste-based organizations have made demands for "objective" data on caste. In several legal decisions in the aftermath of the partial implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations, the Supreme Court of India stated that updated data on caste were needed if states wanted to make further extensions to OBC reservation policies. For example, in M. *Nagraj & Ors v. Union of India* and *Suraj Bhan Meena v. State of Rajasthan*, the Supreme Court decided that within the existing system of reservations for OBCs, the state was not legally bound to promote SCs and STs to fill reservation quotas "but if it wished, it could collect quantifiable data touching backwardness of the applicants and inadequacy of representation of that class in public employment for the purpose of compliance with Article 335 of the Constitution," which discusses the legal claims of SCs and STs to government posts.

With the legal extension of centralized reservation benefits to OBCs, along with ongoing demands from the courts for more data, other parts of the government called for a caste count in the lead up to the 2001 census. During his five-year term, which ended in 1999, Census Commissioner Vijayakunni argued that the RGI had the technical expertise to undertake the task and available technology could ease the burden of collecting and aggregating data.[164] An attempt was also made by the Ministry of Social Justice to include an expanded caste count during the 2001 census. However, the Home Minister at the time, A.K. Advani, was staunchly opposed to a full caste count. The National Democratic Alliance Government – led by the BJP—also did not want to implement this change.[165] The ideological position of the BJP emphasized the unity of all Hindus, while intentionally de-emphasizing caste divisions and promoting a vision of a Hindu India. Senior BJP leadership opposed the move and blocked further debate on the subject within the government. Therefore, in the first decennial census after the expansion of OBC reservations, the caste and religion questions remained unchanged.

For a sixty-year period following India's independence, the enumeration of caste remained limited. However, beginning in the south in the decade after independence a set of state-level government Backward Classes Commissions were established and reservations for OBCs began or continued from the colonial period. At the national level, two Backward Classes Commissions were established, the first in the early 1950s soon after Ambedkar's resignation from the Central Cabinet and the second in the early 1980s

---

[164] Personal Interview, May 2013.

[165] *Ibid*.

after the first non-Congress Party came to power.[166] But, the Kalelkar and Mandal Commissions' recommendations to collect detailed data on caste and create centralized reservations for OBCs were ignored by the Congress Party leaders, who were in power when the official BCC reports were issued. In the lead up to the 2001 Census, a push to collect detailed caste data emerged from within the RGI and Ministry for Social Justice, along with requests for objective data from the courts, but these demands were put to rest by the powerful Home Minister and the senior BJP leadership, who refused to collect the data. The findings from this period suggest that neither efforts from civil society (i.e., particular caste associations or political parties) seeking to change census policy through the courts or by applying pressure on the RGI, nor the recommendation to conduct a detailed caste count from voices within the bureaucracy (i.e., two centrally-appointed Backward Classes Commissions or senior bureaucrats such as the Census Commissioner) were sufficient to force the Congress leadership at the center to change its long standing position against counting caste.

Yet, a crucial precondition occurred during this period. The solidification of OBC as a bureaucratic and political category occurred at the provincial level. Backward Classes Commissions created and maintained state-specific OBC lists and implemented OBC reservations in state institutions. While reservation benefits were initially concentrated in the south of India (beginning in the pre-independence period), by the mid-to-late 1970s several states had some type of reservations for backward classes.[167] However, states varied considerably on the type of reservation (i.e., government job,

---

[166] Galanter 1984.

[167] *Ibid.*

75

educational), size of the quota, and specification of whether there was an income ceiling to limit access to reservations. For example, in the late 190s the four southern states of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh had 30 to 40 percent reservations in government positions, while other states such as Gujarat, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Maharashtra had 4 to15 percent reservations in government jobs. [168]

Paralleling this change in lower tiers of government was the politicization of the OBC identity, as regional political parties with a sizable OBC backing mobilized, contested elections and even came to power in several provincial governments. These decentralized efforts also made an impact on the center. During two periods when neither the Congress nor BJP led the central government, crucial advances in the expansion of reservations to OBCs occurred. In the first instance, Prime Minister Morarji Desai of the Janata Party appointed a second BCC, which produced the Mandal Commission report. In the second instance, Prime Minister V.P. Singh of the Janata Dal partially implemented some of the Mandal Commission recommendations. While the expansion of central government reservations to OBCs in the 1990s and the related demands for updated caste data were still not sufficient fodder for the an expanded caste count in the 2001 decennial census, when the BJP was in power, they laid the groundwork for the caste count that took place in 2011.

2.3. The 2011 Decennial Census

In the period leading up to the 2011 decennial census, the Congress-led coalition government shared an ideological leaning with the first generation of post-colonial

---

[168] *Ibid*. 181-182.

leaders who removed the detailed caste enumeration from the census. In addition, and perhaps much more importantly, over the course of 60 years of electoral politics, Congress had repeatedly come to power with Brahmin, Muslim and SC vote banks.[169] Neither Sonia Gandhi, the widow of Nehru's grandson and President of the Congress Party, nor her hand-selected Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh had any desire to re-introduce the a full caste count. In addition, the Home Minister also strongly opposed reintroducing a caste count as part of the decennial census. Against this backdrop, the lead up to the 2011 census seemed an unlikely time for a successful mobilization to change a long-standing state policy.

Still, as with previous decennial censuses, several civil society organizations in south India filed legal petitions to include a full caste count in the decennial census. Most of these efforts were spearheaded by caste-based organizations, which sought to improve a particular group's share of the reservation quota. In Tamil Nadu, a long-time campaign by the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and its leader S. Ramadoss continued to increase the proportion of the Vanniyar community's reservation within the affirmative action quota for OBCs.[170] In April 2009, the Supreme Court of India declined to entertain the PMK's demand to enumerate caste as part of the 2011 census. Chief Justice K.G. Balakrishnan, sitting with Justice P. Sathasivam, stated that no such direction could be given in policy matters and permitted the counsel to withdraw the petition with liberty to pursue the matter with the government.[171] The Chief Justice said

---

[169] Jaffrelot 2003.

[170] Special Correspondent. 2009. "Ramadoss Seeks Caste-wise Census." *The Hindu*. September 19, 2009.

[171] *Ibid*.

> We can't give any direction in matters of policy. This [caste-based census] may cause immense caste strife. It has serious implications. That is why it has not been done for the last 60 years. You represent to the government.[172]

When the counsel argued that several representations had been filed with the government but no decision had been made, the Chief Justice replied with humor "Wait for the new government. You may be in that." [173] In the months that followed, a broader coalition led by Advocates Forum for Social Justice (AFSJ) based in Chennai backed this effort and on October 15, 2009 the AFSJ filed a writ petition before the Madras High Court seeking a direction to the central government to conduct an OBC enumeration as part of the 2011 decennial census.[174] AFSJ President K. Balu argued that under Article 15(4) of the Indian Constitution, the state could make special provisions to advance backward classes, but to improve their welfare more information was required about these groups. In its October 2009 decision, the Madras High Court decided in favor of AFSJ's petition:

> When it is the position that after 1931 there had never been any caste-wise enumeration or tabulation and when there cannot be any dispute that there is an increase in the population of SC/ST/OBC manifold after 1931, the percentage of reservation fixed on the basis of population in the year 1931 has to be proportionately increased by conducting caste-wise Census by the government. [175]

Several months later, in early 2010, with no response from the central government, advocate R. Krishnamurthy filed a Public Interest Litigation taking the issue before the Madras High Court again. The Court passed an order in support of the petition and directed the Census Commissioner in Delhi to take measures to conduct a caste-wise census—arguing that several state governments had introduced new categories such as

---

[172] *Ibid*.

[173] Venkatesan, J. 2009. "Supreme Court declines to Entertain PMK's petition" *The Hindu.* April 10, 2009.

[174] *Ibid*.

[175] "Court Directs Government to Conduct Caste-wise Census. *The Hindu.* May 13, 2010.

"other backward classes" and "most backward classes" and required updated data for successful implementation of state-level reservations.[176] Similar to legal petitions coming out of Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh during this period, the Supreme Court of India failed to intervene. While the Indian judiciary had made repeated requests for updated and objective data on caste in decisions since the partial implementation of the Mandal Commission report, the Supreme Court was not willing to impose a caste enumeration on the RGI as part of the upcoming decennial census.

Paralleling these efforts to change state policy through the courts, a subset of public intellectuals also tried to change the RGI policy by private lobbying. Beginning in late 2008 and early 2009, Satish Despande and Yogendra Yadav, two research scholars and public intellectuals based in Delhi, wrote and circulated a memo arguing for a caste enumeration in the 2011 census among the Congress Party leaders.[177] Their efforts resulted in a meeting with Rahul Gandhi, who listened to their rationale. Based on this meeting and other conversations with the political leadership, Yadav and Despande were left with the impression that similar to the BJP in the lead up to the 2001 census, Congress had little interest in pursuing this course of action. [178] By mid 2009, they gave up their efforts.

Unlike the lead up to the 2001 census, there was no strong advocate for an expanded caste count within the administrative bureaucracy. Former Census Commissioner Vijayanunni remained a staunch and public advocate for a caste census.

---

[176] Venkatesan. J. 2010. "Apex Court Moved for OBC Census" *The Hindu.* April 15, 2010.

[177] *Ibid*.

[178] Personal Interview, May 2013.

He wrote articles and blogs on the topic, co-signed an open letter to the Cabinet

Ministers, and participated in several conferences related to the caste census. In one such

article, Vijayanunni argues:

> "The census of India is the biggest operation for collecting the population data of the country and the next census due on 1 April 2011 has entered the final preparation stage. The questionnaire to be canvassed during the census enumeration will be finalized soon by the census organization with the approval of the government of India and the time has come to decide about resuming caste data collection during the census. While the census of India generates a wide range of social, economic, ethnographic, linguistic and demographic data, the biggest omission or missing link is the caste-wise data of the entire population." [179]

While Vijayanunni was a strong and articulate supporter for an expanded enumeration of

caste he was now retired and a similar advocate for an expanded caste count did not exist

within the Home Ministry. Home Minister Chidambaram, as would become apparent in

Lok Sabha debate in 2010, was opposed to the RGI taking up the task, similar to his

predecessor during the 2001 census.

In late 2009, Janhit Abhiyan, a local civil society organization in Delhi working

for promotion of social justice for OBCs began organizing efforts in favor of a caste

census. Raj Narayan, the convener of Janhit Abhiyan, publicly argued for a full caste

count:

> [A] caste-wise census is necessary for collecting reliable and accurate data relating to economic, social, educational, and political status of different castes. Since no such exercise has been taken in independent India, fruits of development and benefits of the government schemes are not able to reach the targeted sections. It is not a question of collecting data about the status of only backward castes but also relating to economically poorer sections among the upper castes. The government can redesign its welfare schemes based on the latest data. We have already started a

---

[179] Vijayanunni, M. 2009. "Collect Caste Data in Decennial Census." *The New Indian Express*. September 21, 2009.

debate on it among various sections of the society, including MPs, social workers and youth. [180]

Over the next several months the organization began to meet regularly in Delhi to mobilize a broader constituency in support of an expanded caste count. In early 2010, the leaders of Janhit Abhiyan met with several key MPs to build a base of support among the OBC political leaders. MP Sharad Yadav became a key supporter of the issue and throughout the following year repeatedly spoke out in favor for a caste census in Parliament and other public venues.

As a member of India's new political elite, Yadav was part of a massive change in the Indian democratic landscape. At the time of Independence throughout most of India, with the exception of Tamil Nadu, Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) were overwhelmingly of upper caste and social elite origins. While this trend has continued in some regions of the country, many states have experienced a dramatic shift. Taking the case of India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, the percentage of MLAs from forward castes steadily decreased from 64 to 33 percent between 1952 and 2004, while the percentage of OBC MLAs during the same period increased from 4 to 25 percent.[181] Bihar state shows a similar progression. Accompanying these trends was a shift from Congress Party-led state governments to opposition political parties, such as the SP-BSP, RJD and JD-U, taking control of state governments through the political mobilization of an OBC constituency. The rise of a

---

[180] Kumar, Vijay. 2009. "Demand for Caste-Wise Census in 2011." *The Hindu*. December 24, 2009.

[181] Jaffrelot 2009.

new group of political leaders, who took power of India's largest provincial governments, shifted the political landscape in the lead up to the 2011 decennial census.

Building on the organizing efforts of Janhit Abhiyan, several MPs brought the caste census debate to the floor of the Parliament in early May 2010. The MPs sought to put political pressure on the UPA Congress-led coalition government and force the Cabinet to change its position. In advance of the Lok Sahba debate, the Cabinet held an internal discussion on May 4th. Media reports describe three clear positions within the cabinet, revealing fault lines within the Congress Party's long-standing position to limit data collection on caste. First, several ministers, including Law Minister Veerappa Moily, Urban Development Minister Jaipal Reddy, Minister for Overseas Affairs Vayalar Ravi, and Telecom Minister A Raja, argued that caste data should be collected as part of the decennial census. Law Minister Veerappa Moily later said in a statement to the media, "What we want to build is a casteless society. But it cannot be done ignoring reality."[182] In contrast, Commerce Minister Anand Sharma and Social Welfare Minister Mukul Wasnik were two strong voices against enumeration by caste. It is likely that Prime Minister Singh himself belonged to this position, given the government's recalcitrance to change the status quo in the absence of considerable external pressure. A third contingent focused on logistical challenges to include an expanded caste enumeration as part of the decennial census. This faction skirted whether they ideologically supported or opposed a caste census, but instead argued that the decennial census was not the 'ideal instrument' for this task. Explicit in this position was the depiction of the decennial census as the most widely respected and apolitical source of data in India, and that caste data was too

[182] Venkatesan, J. 2010. "Moily Defends Caste-Based Census" *The Hindu.* May 21, 2010.

politically polluted to be included. Home Minister Chidambaram expressed logistical

concerns articulated by the Director of the RGI during the Cabinet meeting and argued

that as a social-scientific tool the decennial census should remain separate from the

politics of caste.[183] In his statement before Parliament, he emphasized several points

regarding the logistical and technical challenges to enumerating by caste:

> It has been pointed out that the census is meant to collect 'observational data.' Twenty-one lakh [2.1 million] enumerators, mostly primary school teachers, have been selected and 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. And it must be clearly understood, that the enumerator has no training or expertise to classify the answer as OBC or otherwise. As Hon'ble Members are aware, there is a central list of Other Backward Classes and State-specific lists of Other Backward Classes. Some States do not have a list of OBCs; some States have a list of OBCs and a sub-set called Most Backward Classes. The Registrar General has also pointed out that there are certain open-ended categories in the lists such as orphans and destitute children. Names of some castes are found in both the list of Scheduled Castes and list of OBCs. Scheduled Castes converted to Christianity or Islam are also treated differently in different States. The status of a migrant from one state to another and the status of children of inter-caste marriage, in terms of caste classification, are also vexed questions. The Registrar General has also pointed out that, assuming that it is desirable to canvass the question of caste, further issues will arise regarding the methodology, avoiding phonetic and spelling errors, stage of canvassing, maintaining the integrity of the enumeration, doing an accurate headcount of the population etc.[184]

Chidambaram and other Ministers who did not want an expanded caste count in the

decennial census argued that the task should be left to state-level Backward Classes

Commissions.[185] This position of technical opposition to a caste count fell in line with the

---

[183] Mehdudia, S. and S. Varadarajan. 2010. "Government Not for Caste Census." *The Hindu*, May 5, 2010.

[184] Press Information Bureau, Government of India Ministry of Home Affairs. 2010. "Chidambaram Emphasizes Need to Maintain Integrity of Census." May 7, 2010.

[185] Mehdudia and Varadarajan 2010.

long-standing Congress Party position to leave the issue of OBC reservations and data collection on caste to lower tiers of government.

Following the early May Cabinet meeting, several days of discussions took place on the floor of the Lok Sabha. Nearly all of the MPs who spoke during this time were in favor of expanding the caste count in the decennial census. Several recurring themes emerged during the Lok Sabha debate. First, the MPs overwhelmingly stated that caste continues to be an axis of inequality in contemporary India. An excerpt from MP Gurudas Dasgupta's speech on the floor of the Lok Sabha on May 6th summarizes this common view:

> Mr. Chairman, I join unhesitatingly the unanimity of the House that the identification of a person should be on the basis of social status, that is, caste. I agree with it totally. The fact of the matter is that the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and Muslims are subjected to social atrocity all over the country and nobody can deny it. We have not been able to break poverty; nor have we been able to bring about economic empowerment of the people. It is a reality that the most poor people of this country belong to this section. Who are the most poor people? They are the Dalits, they are the Adavasis, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, the Muslims and the Tribals. If it is so, then what is wrong in identifying them on the basis of their own identification status, that is, caste?... Therefore, I do not want to go into any jargon, any politics, anything at all. The social system is based on caste system. Therefore, it should be taken into account while the census is done. This is my submission in unity with the cross- section of the opinion that has been reflected in the House.[186]

In addition, MPs repeatedly made the case that given the historic and ongoing discrimination that occurred along caste and religious lines, government policies needed to work to ameliorate the position of groups and that information on these groups was necessary for the successful implementation of policies. MP Sameer Bhujbal from Nashik argued this position during his speech on the floor of the Lok Sabha:

More importantly, as long as the Government offers affirmative action for groups that

---

[186] Dasgupta, Gurudas. 2010. *Lok Sabha Transcripts.* May 6, 2010. Delhi: Government of India.

are backward for historical reasons, it must gather as much information about them as possible. It also would help the policymakers in identifying more precisely just which groups are disadvantaged and to what extent. This is essential because policy can then deal with facts rather than impressions, as is the case now in the absence of any authoritative data. In fact, inclusion of 'Caste' in the census will help allocations to be made for OBCs and other marginalized groups.[187]

While most of the speeches emphasized why the data should be collected, a few MPs also suggested how to collect this data. Perhaps foreseeing the Cabinet's soon-to-be publicly stated position that it would be too difficult to collect the data as part of this decennial census, an MP from Tamil Nadu pointed out that additional caste data could be collected as part of the population enumeration phase of the decennial census, which was scheduled to occur the following February:

> Sir, therefore, I would plead that caste-based census is necessary. It is not that time has run out. The house-to-house census will start. Since time is short, I am not going into all those details. It can be added in the forms, which every member has to fill up through the enumerator. It starts on 1 February, 2011. The enumeration which has started today is the first phase. Actual enumeration will start next year. I am not going into the information which I have. I am not privy to what happened in the Cabinet. There are differences of opinion. But I would also like to state one more point because the subject under discussion today is the methodology. I would plead before this Government to include caste-based census. [188]

In his speech on the floor of Parliament, Bhujbal also suggested that data on OBCs could be collected as part of the decennial census with a minor modification to the existing census schedule:

> There is only a minimum change, which is required to be done. It is not a very difficult matter to collect the caste details in the Census operations. As a matter of fact, the necessary columns are already there; and no structural alterations are required in the forms and schedules. For example, in the 2001 Census operations, in the household schedule of the social demographic study of villages, column 2.2, Section 2: general characteristics of the household reads: "To which caste/community does the head of the household belong. Name.......... (Register Code in case of

---

[187] Bhujbal, Sameer. 2010. *Lok Sabha Transcripts.* May 6, 2010. Delhi: Government of India.

[188] Mahtab, B. 2010. *Lok Sabha Transcripts.* May 6, 2010. Delhi: Government of India.

SC/ST)" Here, after 'Register Code in case of SC/ST' we may add the word '/OBC'. This is the only thing, the Ministry has to do, the Government has to do. Let the truth come out in front of the country as to what is the number of people living under the OBC category.[189]

As part of the chorus of MPs that spoke out in favor of the caste census, one notable voice within this group was MP Gopinath Munde, who was also party deputy leader of the BJP. In an event the month prior in Maharashtra, both Bhujbal and Munde showed their support for an OBC count and Munde even suggested boycotting the census if it did not collect this data: "Cattle, fowl and other animals will be counted, but the OBC won't be. If the 52 percent of the OBCs boycott the Census, whom will they count?" [190]

In response to the widespread support for counting caste as part of the decennial census, Home Minister Chidambaram responded by trying to reframe the debate. He argued that what is at stake is to protect the integrity of the decennial census:

> Let me reiterate that the main objective of the population census is to do an accurate de-facto headcount of the usual residents in India on the deemed date i.e. 00.00 hours on March 1, 2011. Based on universally applied scientific demographic tools, we have an estimate of what the population of India will be on that day. However, it is necessary and desirable to make an accurate headcount. Hence, the Census. I am sure Hon'ble Members will agree with me when I say that nothing should be done that may affect the accuracy of the headcount or the integrity of the population census. [191]

By suggesting that the enumeration of caste would harm the decennial census, Chidambaram put forth a seemingly apolitical argument and one that "non-expert" MPs would have difficulty refuting. Opposition members lead by Mulayam Singh Yadav (SP), Lalu Prasad Yadav (RJD) and Sharad Yadav (JD-U) showed the power of their position,

---

[189] Bhujbal, Sameer. 2010. *Lok Sabha Transcripts.* May 6, 2010. Delhi: Government of India.

[190] Staff Reporter. 2010. "Chhagan Bhujbal, Gopinath Munde Pitch for OBC Census." *The Hindu.* April 11, 2010.

[191] *Ibid.*

by forcing adjournment of the Lok Sabha after Home Minister Chidambaram's speech, and held a private meeting with Finance Minister Pranab Mukerjee. The widespread cross-party strength of MPs in favor of an expanded caste count put considerable pressure on the Congress-led UPA government to reverse its position. Given the regional success of political parties with an OBC leadership and the potential threat of these parties forming an alliance with the BJP, Congress feared standing in opposition to an organized OBC vote bank. In addition, the lack of public dissenters from other political parties during the Lok Sabha debates made it difficult for Congress to oppose the public demands.

As part of this trend, the BJP came out publicly in favor of the caste census. Sushma Swaraj, BJP MP and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, argued that a caste-based survey would not aggravate casteism.[192] She went on to explain that since caste was already the basis of job applications and admissions to schools and colleges, data on caste are needed. Neither the BJP nor the Congress wanted to lose in this area to the other national party and Congress was hesitant to have a BJP-BSP-JD-U coalition form around this issue.

In response to the heated debate in the Lok Sabha and the emerging block of MPs across party lines that was in favor of an expanded caste count, the Congress leadership was trapped. In his brief statement before Parliament on May 7, 2010, Prime Minister Singh made a commitment at the matter. He said, "I am aware of the views of the Members of Parliament belonging to all sections. I assure you that the Cabinet will take a

---

[192] Vyas, Neena. 2010. "No Harm in Caste-Based Census: BJP." *The Hindu*. May 5, 2010.

decision shortly."[193] Singh's statement before the Lok Sabha was interpreted by many as

the Congress agreeing to collect caste data as part of the decennial census, including MP

Lalu Prasad:

> Inclusion of caste in census has to happen. It will happen. How can you not do it? We will get it done. After all, this is a commitment made by the Prime Minister before Parliament and the nation. [194]

During the subsequent cabinet meeting on May 26, 2010, those present acknowledged

that there seemed to be support for a caste census across the political spectrum and to

resist it would place the UPA coalition government in an unfavorable and isolated

position. Home Minister Chidambaram continued to argue that the caste data should not

be collected as part of the population enumeration phase of the decennial census in

February 2011. Instead, he suggested that it could be collected during the biometric

capture phase of the National Population Register (NPR) scheduled to occur after the

decennial census figures were collected and tabulated. However, given the divided

opinion within the Union Cabinet over how to proceed, and with powerful minsters both

for and against it, the cabinet decided that a Group of Ministers would look into the

question of "the enumeration of caste, other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes,

in Census 2011" and to submit the report "expeditiously" to the Prime Minister.[195] The

Union Cabinet made a commitment to the caste count, although it left vague the details of

how the data collection would occur. In doing so, the Congress reversed its post-colonial

---

[193] Singh, M. 2010. *Lok Sabha Transcripts.* May 7, 2010. Delhi: Government of India.

[194] As quoted in: "Prasad Declines to Budge on Caste in Census, Women's Bill" *The Hindu*. June 25, 2010.
[195] *Ibid*.

position and gave the go ahead for the Group of Ministers (GoM) to determine how to collect the data.

Public pressure by the leaders of a sizable regional OBC voting block and with widespread support across opposition and coalition members forced the Congress leadership to agree to a caste count. Yet, as the next section will explore, the leadership's ongoing ideological and political distain for expanding caste enumeration left them to exert their power and beliefs in the particular way that the data would be collected.

2.4. Don't Pollute the Census with Caste

The Congress Party leadership took several steps to make sure that there was widespread consensus for the full caste enumeration. It wanted to be sure that rival political parties would not later use caste enumeration against them. Prime Minister Singh appointed Finance Minister Mukherjee to head the Group of Ministers (GoM) tasked with determining the modalities of a caste census.[196]

The GoM had three meetings between July and August 2010. The first meeting was held on July 1st and, of the seven members who were present, Finance Minister Mukherjee, Social Justice Minister Wasnik, and Minister of State for Minority Affair Khurshid spoke in favor of the caste census.[197] Wasnik pointed out that Prime Minister

---

[196] The Group of Ministers was headed by Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee and had 10 other members who are all Congress partners in the UPA government: Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar, Defence Minister A.K. Antony. Home Minister P. Chidambaram, Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee, Law Minister M Veerappa Moily, Renewable Energy Minsiter Farooq Abdullah, Textiles Minister Dayanidhi Maran, Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal, Social Justice Minister Mukul Wasnick and Minister of State for Minority Affairs Salman Khurshid.

[197] One of the Ministers, who had previously voiced strong support for the caste census, Law Minsister Moily, left halfway through the 90-minute GoM meeting—stating he had an appointment with the Prime Minister and Congress President Sonia Gandhi in connection with his new book. Three GoM members did not attend the meeting (Agriculture Minister Pawar, Energy Minister Abdullah and Railway Minister Banerjee). (PTI. 2010. "GoM Divided over Caste Census." *The Times of India*. July 1, 2010.)

Singh had already made a commitment on the floor of Parliament to include a caste enumeration in the decennial census. In contrast, Defense Minister AK Anthony, Home Minister Chidambaram, and Human Resources Development Minister Kapil Sibal spoke out against a caste-based census. The GoM failed to reach a conclusion during this meeting and instead decided to seek the views of other political parties through a written questionnaire to ensure that there were no dissenters at a later stage. Finance Minister Mukerjee wrote to all the political parties and in his letter specifically asked each party to respond to two questions. The first question posed, "Whether 'caste' should be canvassed in the ongoing Census/ National Population Registrar (NPR) exercise?"[198] The wording of the question suggested that the 2011 Decennial Census and NPR were inter-changeable options through which the RGI could collect the data. In actuality, the two efforts were legally distinct. Decennial census data are confidential and collected under the 1948 Census Act. The full data set is made available for policy and research use after identifying information are removed and data for individual variables are aggregated at the village, ward or district levels. Given the confidential nature of the decennial census data, the RGI canvassed a separate NPR questionnaire to create an electronic system of national identification.[199] In connecting the two projects, the first question posed to political parties helped to create leeway for the mechanism by which the RGI could collect caste data.

---

[198] Vyas, Neena. 2010. "BJP Ducks Firm Response to Pranab Query on Census." *The Hindu*. August 7, 2010.

[199] The government planned to issue a new biometric ID card to each resident of India under the provisions of the Citizenship Act 1955 and the Citizenship Rules, 2003.

The GoM posed a second question to the political parties, "If the answer to this [i.e., the first question] is in the affirmative, whether your party agrees that the caste of the respondent should be canvassed in such a manner and at such a stage that it does not affect the integrity of the headcount (census)?"[200] Even if a political party believes that caste data should be collected, it is unlikely that it would argue that the 'integrity' of the decennial census should be affected. Therefore, the wording of second question makes it difficult for political parties to answer this question in the negative. Together, the questions reveal three options under consideration by the GoM: to collect the data as part of the decennial census, the NPR, or in a separate exercise. In addition, if political parties assented to both questions it would give the Singh government additional scope in how to collect the caste census. The GoM asked political parties to reply in writing by August 7, which was just prior to the start of the Monsoon Session of Parliament.[201]

During the month of July while the GoM waited for responses from the political parties, Finance Minister Mukherjee met with the leaders of coalition and opposition parties.[202] The Samajwadi Party, Janata Dal-United and Rashtriya Janata Dal (or 'OBC Parties') stood behind their support for the caste census, as articulated on the floor of the Lok Sabha.[203] In contrast, the BJP's position seemed to waiver back and forth. On July 2, a top BJP leader categorically said the Party would reiterate its support for a caste

---

[200] *Ibid.*

[201] *Ibid.*

[202] For example, two days after the first GoM meeting, Mukherjee met with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi of the regionally-powerful DMK. Later in the month, on July 19, Mukherjee met with NDA convener and Janta Dal United leader Sharad Yadav and askedYadav to convince colleagues in the NDA, especially BJP, to give their response soon. Later that same day, he met with BJP leaders LK Advani, Susma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley.

[203] During a June 13 meeting in Pata, Lalu Prasad, leader of the RJD, argued that he could mobilize sufficient MPs to bring down the government on this issue (PTI, June 13, 2010).

count.[204] But, later in the month, BJP leader Nitin Gadkari publicly spoke out against a caste census. The position of the BJP remained unclear to the public and Congress leaders in the period leading up to the GoM deadline.

Outside of the formal political sphere, there was a parallel organizing effort to push the Singh Government to follow through on its May 2010 commitment. Once again, Janhit Abhiyan organized MPs, activists and public intellectuals to speak out in favor of a caste count. On July 25, Janhit Abhiyan convened a conference on the caste census across party lines to try and drum up support and push Congress leadership to collect the caste data as part of the decennial census. In addition, leading public intellectuals, such as Yogendra Yadav (CSDS), Satish Despande (Delhi University), M. Vijayanunni (former Census Commissioner), and Chandra Gowda (National Law School Bangalore), sent information to MLAs and MPs to inform them about the contours of the debates and why caste data are necessary.[205] They had individual meetings with MPs, the Home Minister and the Prime Minister to answer questions and provided them with information and arguments for why caste data should be collected as part of the census. In a well-publicized conference at the National Law College in Bangalore in July 2010, scholars and practitioners came together to discuss why caste data should be collected, the challenges in doing so, and the best approach for moving forward.[206] Several other

---

[204] Vyas, Neena. *The Hindu*. July 3, 2010.

[205] Personal Interview, February 20, 2013.

[206] Special Correspondent. 2010. "Experts for Caste Census." *The Hindu*. July 24, 2010.

national universities and regional colleges also organized talks and conferences related to the caste census.[207]

Early in the start of the Monsoon Session of Parliament, OBC leaders took to the floor of the Lok Sabha during the noon 'Question Hour' to find out how the government was planning on proceeding with the caste census. Shailendra Kumar argued that before the decennial census proceeded caste data should be included as part of the data collection and that the government needed to make its position clear as the majority of MPs had already come out in favor of a caste-based census." Raghuvansh Prasad Singh also pushed the government to respond on their position. Mulayam Singh Yadav led his party members in a walkout after there was no response from the Treasury Benches (i.e., where government reps usually sit), and the RJP MPs soon joined them in the walkout.[208]

The following day, during a BJP Party meeting, MPs Sushma Swaraj and Gopinath Munde argued that the BJP should support a caste count, while MP Murli Manohar Joshi opposed it.[209] Party leader L.K. Advani decided that the Party would make a final decision after its core group met to discuss its response to the GoM on August 6, which was one day in advance of the deadline. [210]After the August 6 meeting of the BJP leadership, MP Sushma Swaraj wrote a letter to Mukerjee stating that the BJP assented: "We agree that caste should be canvassed in such a manner and at such a stage that does

---

[207] For example, on June 15, 2010, a talk "Proposed Caste-Based Enumeration in Census 2011" was held at the Madras Institute for Development Studies.

[208] PTI, 2010. "SP, RJD Demand Caste-Based Census, Stage Walkout," *The Hindu.* Aug 2, 2010.

[209] Pathak, Vikas. 2010. "BJP to Discuss Caste Census Repsonse in Friday Meet." *Hindustan Times.* August 4, 2010.

[210] *Ibid*.

not affect the integrity of the headcount."[211] While no political parties came out against

the caste census, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist

organization, applied considerable pressure on the BJP to oppose the caste count. [212] Even

with this widespread political support from coalition and opposition parties, the Congress

leadership remained reluctant to include the caste count within the decennial census.

As political parties were finalizing and submitting their responses to the GoM, a

member of the GoM articulated the pending options for how to collect the caste data:

> If we do it at the second stage when the census figures are being tabulated we can link
> quality of life with community, and that would make the exercise more meaningful.
> However, what looks more likely is that it will be at the third state, during the
> biometric capture phase (when photographing, finger printing and iris mapping of
> citizens for the NPR will be done). At that stage we will just get the numbers.[213]

Prior to the official response from all of the political parties, the Congress leadership was

leaning towards excluding the caste count from the decennial census despite recognizing

the advantages of collecting the caste data with other socio-economic data.

Two days after the deadline for political parties to submit their response, the

Congress leadership met to discuss the issue. Party President Sonia Gandhi headed the

meeting, which also included Prime Minister Singh. The widespread written support from

political parties to collect the caste data left the Congress leadership with no option but to

go ahead with the caste census, while a sizable faction with the Party still remained

opposed to the caste count. However, consensus across the political parties that "the

integrity of the decennial census data should not be affected" allowed Congress to push

[211] Vyas, Neena. 2010. "BJP Ducks Firm Response to Pranab Query on Census. *The Hindu*. August 7,
2010.

[212] *Ibid*.

[213] Gupta, Smita. 2010. "Deadline Nears for Parties to Take Stand on Caste Census." *The Hindu*, August 2,
2010.

for a different method of collecting the data. Two days later on August 11, when the GoM met for the second time they gave a unanimous seal of approval for inclusion of a full caste count during the biometric phase of the NPR (i.e. collection of iris data and finger printing).[214]

In the days following the GoM announcement, an effort was mounted to sway the Cabinet's decision. On August 12, OBC leaders Mulayam Singh Yadav and Lalu Prasad led another outburst in the Lok Sabha and refused to let the 11am 'Question Hour' begin. Mulayam Singh shouted, "They are fooling us." Lalu Prasad argued that the biometric process will take "100 years and will still not be completed."[215] Sharad Yadav also joined the protests and urged Speaker Meira Kumar to allow them to discuss the matter and ask the Singh Government to explain its position. Kumar asked them to hold their questions for later in the afternoon but the SP, RJD and JD-U members refused and she adjourned the Lok Sabha early.[216]

Public intellectuals involved in the July conference at the National Law College in Bangalore also wrote an open letter to the GoM, which was printed in the *The Hindu*. They strongly objected to the recommendation to conduct caste enumeration at the biometric data capture stage. They argued that the RGI "is the only competent agency in the country with the necessary expertise and experience to undertake this gigantic task."[217]

---

[214] Gupta, Smita. 2010. "GoM Approval for Caste-Based Census." *The Hindu*. August 11, 2010. Chibber. "GoM Unanimous Yes to Caste in Census." *The Indian Express*. August 12, 2010.

[215] *Ibid*.

[216] Dhar, Aarti. 2010. "Caste in Census: Cabinet to Decide on Modalities." *The Hindu*. August 12, 2010. HT Correspondents. 2010. "Call on Caste Census by Cabinet." Hindustan Times. August 19, 2010.

[217] "Letter to the Group of Ministers on Caste Census" *The Hindu*. August 13, 2010.

A third GoM meeting was held to decide how to respond to the growing unrest.[218] During a cabinet meeting on September 9, the Union Cabinet decided to collect the caste data in a separate exercise. Home Minister Chidambaram publicly announced the decision to reporters after the cabinet meeting, stating, "After considering various options, the option that we have approved is, based on the responses of various political parties, that caste must be canvassed and the integrity of the headcount must not be affected."[219] While the RGI would be responsible for field operations to collect the caste data, the central government would constitute an expert group to classify the caste data. "A separate house-to-house enumeration of caste will be done during the period June 2011 to September 2011," the Home Minister told reporters in Delhi. "This satisfies all the various requirements that have been projected and discussed and debated extensively."[220] After several months of wavering back and forth, the Congress leadership finally decided that the data collection would not occur as part of the decennial census, but as a separate census beginning three months after the second phase of the decennial census was complete.

Throughout these multiple debates, a clear technocratic position emerged and was repeatedly articulated by senior government officials as the 'need to protect the integrity' of the census. Home Minister Chidambaram was the most consistent and public face of this position. This line of reasoning put forth that collecting decennial census data and caste data in the same exercise would 'taint' or 'pollute' the most authoritative, long-

[218] Gupta, Smita. 2010. "Caste Census: GoM to Write to Parties." *The Hindu*. August 20, 2010.

[219] Gupta, Smita. 2010. "Centre Clears Caste in Census 2010." *The Hindu*. September 9, 2010.

[220] *Ibid*.

standing source of survey data in India. Since the collection of caste would be embroiled in politics, they did not want the messiness surrounding the caste data to discredit the other data. The neutrality and objectivity of the decennial census needed to be protected. A related point, though not explicitly articulated, was that collecting caste data as part of decennial census would give the caste data considerable importance and authority.

Between September 2010 and March 2011, the Singh Government remained relatively silent on the details of how the caste data would be collected in a separate exercise. In February and March 2011, the second and main round of the 2011 Decennial Census questionnaire was canvassed. Soon after the conclusion of data collection activities related to the decennial census, the central government made the public statement that the caste data would be collected as part of a 'Socio-Economic Caste Census' led by the Ministry of Rural Development, which had previously been referred to as the 'Below Poverty Line' (BPL) survey. In the announcement, the stated timeline for the project was July-December 2011.[221] Three previous BPL surveys in 1992, 1997 and 2002 have taken place in rural India and for these rural censuses the state-level Departments of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (PDPR) collected data to identify beneficiaries of food distribution and related welfare programs. M. Vijayanunni, the former Census Commissioner and Registrar General of India, spoke out in public against this decision:

> It is idle and futile to expect that a BPL survey will, just by giving it the bombastic misnomer "Socio-Economic and Caste Census 2011", become one. Census is an exclusively central subject (entry 69 in the Union list under the seventh schedule of the Constitution). It is only the Centre that can, by notification in the official gazette under Section 3 of the Census Act, authorise a census, and, without such a statutory

---

[221] Press Information Bureau. 2011. "BPL Census to be Conducted along with Caste Census" May 19.

backing, this poverty survey (rightly called a BPL survey) conducted by the state governments cannot be passed off as a census. This exercise has no socio-economic data coming out of it except bare poverty statistics, and, with just a question asking for caste inserted into it as a fifth wheel, it does not become a "caste census" by any standards, nor does it generate a caste-wise socio-economic profile of the population of India as required by the Supreme Court in the caste-reservation case...this exercise defeats the whole purpose of a caste census."[222]

But leading party officials did not respond to this dissension and continued on with their plan. As part of this plan, the central government expanded the BPL survey to include both rural and urban areas. The Ministries of Rural Development and Urban Development were formally tasked with overseeing the entire project, although in practice Rural Development remained the lead agency as it had been doing preparatory work for this fourth round of the BPL for several years. Beginning in May 2011, the two ministries began issuing a series of notifications to create the legal precedence for collecting these data throughout the territory. The RGI played a supporting technical role, by provided the required maps, household listings, enumerator training materials, and NPR data.

The relegation of the caste enumeration to the SEC Census created a new set of challenges. On the heels of the decennial census, the SEC Census could not use the same enumerators—overwhelmingly government schoolteachers—and therefore state governments needed to identify a new cadre of workers to serve as the massive ground staff to canvass the survey. In addition, a survey that was supposed to be carried out in rural India, as it had been done three times before, now needed to also be administered throughout urban India. As part of this process, a new urban questionnaire was developed. For the first time in a nationwide census, the government decided to enter the

---

[222] Vijayanunni, M. 2011. *Economic Times*. July 31.

data "real-time" during the household interview. This decision created a logistical and financial challenge to supply enough tablets to ground-level staff and to ensure that data collectors were sufficiently trained to use the data entry program and tablet computers. Finally, the stated timeline for completion (i.e., by the end of 2011) was a monumental and impossible feat given the size and scope of the exercise.

2.5. Larger Implications on Production of Caste Data

This chapter shows how the central cabinet's decision to collect caste data was forced upon them by an outcry during the May 2010 Budget Session of the Lok Sabha. A coalition of MPs representing the SP, JD-U and RJD leadership but including MPs across party lines, including the leading opposition party, put public pressure on the Congress leadership to change its position. This debate in Parliament was buttressed by a broader civil society effort, which similar to earlier efforts tried to change the position of the Congress leadership through open letters, legal proceedings, private meetings, and public campaigns and conferences. Yet, the success of these efforts was only possible because of several decades of prior political mobilization that forced the Congress and BJP to view their current and future electoral success as contingent on the support of OBC dominated political parties and their related vote bank, which had emerged as a constituency with political power at the regional and national levels.

Embedded in the post-colonial story of the emergence and uptake of the OBC category is an ongoing struggle for lower caste groups to be recognized, and have access to education and jobs. In an unequal society that is highly democratic, politics congealed around a series of classification struggles in the electoral and bureaucratic fields. National political elites rejected the colonial category of caste, and pushed the responsibility of

addressing the needs of OBCs to the state governments. The center shirked recognition of these groups because it could and found a compromise in the bureaucratic field. Congress's electoral domination was rarely called into question at the national level during this period and its Brahmin/ upper caste, Muslim, and Dalit (SC) vote backs were consistent and large enough to keep it in power. For instrumental reasons, along with the ideological motivations of Nehru, Congress did not want to expand central government reservations. To do so would anger upper castes, who would have access to a smaller 'unreserved' proportion of government jobs and seats in state educational institutions, and Dalits, who would worry that their portion of reservations could decrease as the 'pie' got divided up and that the general disfavor towards expanded reservations could lead to a challenge of the SC and ST quotas. Local electoral politics led to the emergence of OBC leaders and political parties in local and state governments. At the same time, state level bureaucracies helped to institutionalize the category of OBC. Within the context of democratic politics, the bureaucratic fields and electoral fields pushed back on the political elites in the center. The changed social composition of elected leaders in several of India's most populous states helped to force Congress to agree to what the Kalelkar Committee had recommended 60 years earlier: extend reservations to a broader category of Backward Classes and reintroduce a full caste count in the decennial census.

    After publicly agreeing to a caste count, far from public view, Congress maneuvered a solution more complementary to its ideological and instrumental position in the bureaucratic field. Publicly the Congress' position was articulated as logistical considerations of technocrats with census expertise, but these technical challenges gave the Congress leadership a different path to complete a caste enumeration. Between May

2010 and May 2011, India's political leadership pushed the caste count out of the decennial census into the NPR, then out of the NPR and into separate census exercise, and finally out of a separate census exercise and into a newly renamed BPL/SEC Census. These shifts slowly and systematically moved the data collection out of the central government jurisdiction of the RGI and into the responsibility of rural development departments within respective state governments. The eventual decision to collect the data as part of a revamped BPL Census could either be seen as a watered down compromise or as an intentional effort to de-legitimize the caste data, but in either case not an outcome desired by those advocating for the caste count. As in the aftermath of the Kalelkar Commission report, the Congress leadership pushed responsibility for the identification of OBCs out of the powerful Home Ministry and into a more peripheral location. This chapter argues that the motivation for keeping the caste count separate from the decennial census was political and coordinated; it allowed the Congress to enjoy the political gains of authorizing a caste census, without giving the subsequent project the weight or authoritative status of decennial census data. The narrative within this chapter tells a story of a new political elite working to win a public battle but then in effect losing the outcome that they desired in the less visible spaces of the upper tiers of the Indian bureaucracy.

Returning to Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, in the first several decades after independence, the social elite also controlled the electoral and bureaucratic fields. They developed a voter base, which allowed them to be in political power without having to make major transformations to the economic, social or bureaucratic systems. They made small concessions (i.e. reservations to SC/ ST) that neither challenged their political

dominance nor socioeconomic status. Yet, over time and starting in the South and then moving to parts of the North, democratic politics challenged their power regionally. OBC reservations were implemented in central government institutions because non-Congress and non-BJP parties were elected into the center for short windows of time. One strategy by the political elite was to offset electoral challenges through gaming in the bureaucratic field. But, over time, and with the existence of more extensive reservations in state government institutions, these bureaucracies have undergone a slow compositional change. This chapter shows how when Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction comes into contact with highly active democratic politics, classification struggles play out in the electoral and bureaucratic field.

CHAPTER 3: A LOCAL VIEW OF THE CENSUS

The State, Private Sector and Civil Society in Karnataka

Most social scientists conceive of national censuses as central government projects designed and executed by census bureaus and their partner agencies. This macro view of censuses, similar to my approach in the previous chapter, tends to highlight the role of senior officials and other highly visible efforts within the state and civil society. Chapter 2 traced how highly public contestations, backed by an electorally and politically powerful emergent OBC constituency, forced the Congress leadership to agree to a caste count. Subsequently, the Congress leadership pushed back within the less public spaces of the Indian bureaucracy to include the caste enumeration in a BPL survey—named the Socio-Economic Caste (SEC) Census. In contrast, this chapter scales down its approach and focuses on the local operations of the SEC Census in the south Indian State of Karnataka. Most of the time, resources and human energy involved in the production of census data occur far outside the purview of national census bureaus. In India, the overwhelming majority of 'census workers' are local government employees that take on census responsibilities for a period of time as they continue to do their other work as municipal government employees, schoolteachers, revenue collectors, etc. Enumerators form the backbone of this operation, but their supervisors and their supervisors' supervisors play a crucial role in bringing the plans and practices designed in Delhi to thousands of communities throughout the country. This chapter examines the processes of translations from when the central government orders the execution of a project to

when/how the project comes to life in a variety of organizational contexts. This chapter

also aims to provide a view of the local backdrop against which data collectors visit

households and conduct census interviews, which is the focus of the next chapter.

Together, chapters 2 and 3 will provide a more localized view of the production of caste

data and provide insights on how the interactions across local government employees,

state government bureaucrats, private sector managers, the media, caste associations, data

collectors, and households mediate centralized processes and politics.

Theoretically, this chapter seeks to understand how local institutions play a role in

the production of centralized state knowledge. Previous empirical studies on censuses

have shown how local intermediaries are crucial in conveying the logics of the central

state to communities. For example, research by Bruce Curtis and by Michael Rodríguez-

Muñiz show how census bureaus engage with local leaders to help publicize the census

and ensure widespread participation in the state project.[223] Local leaders are called upon

to mobilize support and to help mediate unexpected problems that arise during the

collection of data. In her study of census making in Puerto Rico, Mara Loveman finds

that local census enumerators played an active role in the island's 'whitening.' [224] In his

studies of Canadian censuses, Bruce Curtis discusses the types of 'infrastructural work'

that local state and civil society actors are involved in, and which bring the census to life

in specific places.[225] This infrastructural work emerges within the context of local politics

and is shaped deeply by it. These findings suggest that local intermediaries and

---

[223] Curtis 2001. Rodríguez-Muñiz, Michael. "Cultivating Consent: State Legibility, Latino/a
Spokespersons, and the 2010 Census."

[224] Loveman 2007.

[225] Curtis 2001.

institutions are the visible face of the census and as they are engaged in considerable work to bring these projects to life their practices and worldviews mediate and influenced the production of data.

In this chapter, I draw upon my observations of ground level census operations, interviews with leaders and members of caste associations, and an archive of news coverage of the SEC Census. My ground-level observations of SEC Census operations occurred in the Bangalore metro region during a non-continuous six-month period, which included the pre-enumeration preparatory work in July-August 2011, the canvassing of the census in December 2011 and February-March 2012, data entry in July 2012, and re-enumeration exercises in Feb 2013. I spent time in 6 neighborhood data processing centers, where I observed the backend operations that supported 'real-time' data entry. I attended an enumerator and supervisor training in December 2011 and received copies of all the training materials. Throughout this process, I visited a municipal office which coordinated the distribution of census related materials, staffing and management of neighborhood data processing centers, and information flow to the private sector company involved in data entry for one region of the city. I also interacted with and observed the work of the private sector company responsible for data entry during the SEC census operation in Karnataka. This chapter also draws upon interviews with 12 leaders of caste associations in Karnataka and a newspaper archive of all census-related articles in high circulation Kannada, Tamil and English language papers for a one-year period around the census.

Unlike previous censuses, this chapter shows how the private sector played a major role in SEC Census operations and was responsible for all aspects of data entry.

Enumerators continued to have a thorough centrally-developed training, as has been the case for all recent decennial censuses, and their role was envisioned as central to the data collection process. Yet, for the first time they would share data collection responsibilities with a data entry operator, who was responsible for 'real time' data entry. This chapter shows how both of these data collectors were trained to think about caste, within different institutional contexts. In addition, and in contrast to the 2011 decennial census, the local TV and print media remained rather quiet and state-initiated publicity around the SEC Census was minimal. A few caste associations did some mobilizing in advance of the SEC Census in Karnataka, but the largest and most resourced organizations remained silent. The local history of caste politics is crucial to understanding the limited extent to which caste associations and other civil society groups organized, and the related coverage in the media. The findings from this chapter suggests because of the minimal publicity surrounding the SEC Census and the introduction of 'real time' data entry, the role of the data collectors, and the DEOs in particular, became elevated during the household interview. They were left to convey the purpose and import of the census. This chapter shows how local environment shapes understandings of what is at stake in a particular state project and how multiple knowledge-making intersect to create the backdrop against which the production of data occurs.

This chapter unpacks the local politics of the census, by looking at the practices of government officials and workers, private sector employees, the media, and caste associations. The first section provides a brief background to caste and politics in Karnataka and the role of caste associations in the SEC Census. This chapter's focus on the local politics of the SEC Census must be contextualized within the ongoing politics

surrounding reservation in Karnataka. Section two reviews the overall timeline and

organizational structure of SEC Census operations, as well as a discussion of the specific

caste-related questions on the questionnaire. Section 3 discusses the role of the media and

publicity around the SEC Census. The fourth section explores the role of state and local

governments in Karnataka, with particular attention on the training of enumerators.

Section five talks about the role of private companies in local data entry operations. The

final section summarizes the implication of these findings on the production of caste data.

3.1. Caste and Politics in Karnataka

This section highlights in broad strokes some key trends in caste and politics in

Karnataka. In general, people in Karnataka have tended to vote political leaders who

share their own caste identity, even if that requires shifting parties.[226] As such, in a

district with a majority Muslim population, the leading political parties (except the BJP)

will field a Muslim candidate to try and capture the 'Muslim vote.'[227] In the post

independence period, electoral politics have congealed around four sizable communities,

which are fragmented internally to differing degrees: Lingayats (15 percent), Vokkaligas

(11 percent), Dalits (17 percent), and Muslims (12 percent).[228] As dominant communities,

the Lingayats and Vokkaligas have controlled the state government for much of the post-

independence period by having the majority of Chief Ministers and senior political

---

[226] Shastri, Sandeep. 2011. *Karnataka Politics*. Kanankapura: Jain University Press.

[227] Jafri, Syed Amin. 2013. "Lessons from Karnataka Polls" *Times of India.* May 13.

[228] The figures are rough approximations based on data from 1984 and found in the following BCC report: Reddy, O. Chinnappa. 1990. *Report of the Karnataka Third Backward Classes Commission*. Bangalore: Government Press: 45.

leaders from their communities. Chairman Chinnappa Reddy describes these two groups

in his report of *Karnataka's Third Backward Classes Commission*:

> The Vokkaliga community along with Lingayat Community is one of the two
> principal agricultural communities of the State. They occupy a high position in the
> social hierarchy in Karnataka. Along with the Lingayats, they are the principal
> landowners. Along with the Lingayats, they share most of the political power. The
> statistics pertaining to appearance at and passing the S.S.L.C [10th standard]
> examinations, admission to professional and post-graduate colleges, show that as
> Caste-groups they are well advanced, that is, much more advanced than the vast
> majority of the Hindu castes. They cannot therefore be classified as Socially and
> Educationally Backward Caste groups.[229]

While this Report made a decision to exclude Vokkaligas from Karnataka's OBC list,

previous and subsequent reports placed subcastes within the broader Vokkaliga category

on the OBC list, as will be described below.

Congress, Janata Dal and BJP are currently the three leading political parties in

Karnataka politics. In the early post-independence period, Congress dominated

Karnataka's political scene. The Janata Dal formed in 1977 and became the key

opposition party to Congress. In the 1983 Assembly Elections, the BJP entered the

political scene. The Lingayats and Vokkaligas combined forces against Congress and its

pro-poor policies (which challenged their landholding patterns) in the 1980s and 1990s,

and voted for the Janata Dal.[230] More recently, Lingayats (and Brahmins at 3 percent of

the state's population[231]) have tended to vote for the BJP, and helped to elect the first

BJP-led coalition government into power in 2004. Vokkaligas are more internally

fragmented with regards to their political leaning and have been splitting their vote

---

[229] *Ibid.* 120.

[230] Maramkal, M.B. 2012. "Lingayats and Vokkaligas Rule the Roost in Karnataka Politics." *Times of India.* July 10.

[231] Reddy 1990.

between the Janata Dal and Congress in the last several elections.[232] Dalits are the most

internally fragmented of the mentioned 'vote blocks' in Karnataka. Muslims have

historically voted for the Congress or Janata Dal, both of which have consistently fielded

Muslim candidates for the Assembly Elections. In the most recent state-level elections in

2013, the Muslims were internally coordinated and voted for Congress, which helped

bring it back to power for the first time in nearly a decade.[233]

      With regards to reservations and caste in Karnataka, the creation of the OBC list

is a key site of a classification struggle across social groups, political parties and

bureaucratic agencies. A state administrator discusses how groups are added to the OBC

list:

> In Karnataka there are 776 groups that are classified as Backward Class. There are
> multiple categories: 1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b. These groups receive two types of benefits:
> education and employment. Reservation in Karnataka is restricted to 50%: 18% for
> SCs and STs and 32% for OBCs. Castes in category 1 for BCs are on par with SC/ST.
> There is no creamy layer and there is no income limit. For groups in 2a, 2b and 3
> there is a creamy layer and income limit. With regards to the BC list, inclusions,
> exclusions and synonyms are an ongoing process. So many groups change their
> position. Castes shift their categories and new castes become included. In Karnataka,
> the state government can recommend any caste based on recommendation of the
> Backward Classes Commission (BCC). The data that the BCC uses is based on the
> 1984 Socioeconomic Survey. Most representations are made before the government
> by caste organizations established by a specific caste. A group coming under 3A for
> which there is a small quota may want to move to group 2A where there is a bigger
> reservation (15%). After the recommendation is made, the BCC will give the group a
> questionnaire to complete. Based on the completed questionnaire the government will
> make a decision on whether or not it is necessary to conduct a hearing. If there is to
> be a hearing, a notice is placed in the paper and there is a court hearing where people
> talk for and against the proposed change. The hearing is open to the public and
> anyone can attend. Some people will say that this group should be included and
> others may object. Based on the hearing and visits to the community, as well as a
> local survey/ community survey, the BCC makes a recommendation to a Government

---

[232] Shastri 2011.

[233] Jafri 2013.

Secretary. The Principal Secretary on Social Welfare presents to the Cabinet and then if it approved issues an order. [234]

The administrator is describing the current form that OBC reservations take in Karnataka. Within this context, groups struggle to get on the OBC list and to be in the most advantageous category within the list (which for most groups is to be recognized in the most disadvantaged category, or category 1). There are at least two reasons why groups want to be in the most disadvantaged category that is possible. They have fewer restrictions and greater potential benefits. For example, individuals belonging to groups in category 1 can access to reservation benefits without any income restriction. In addition, they are less likely to get 'crowded out' when they are competing for 'reserved' jobs or educational seats, as fewer highly competitive candidates are likely to compete in category 1 given the history of disadvantage facing members in these groups. The greater relative access to educational resources and higher social standing for subcastes within category 3, as well as the increased likelihood that the castes within this reservation category are politically well-connected makes it more difficult for members of subcastes that are relatively worse off to access reservation benefits.

A related area of struggle is the boundary-making between groups. If related subcastes fall within different reservation categories, then there may be another type of classification struggle. Those groups with no or limited reservation benefits may desire to define the group broadly, to encompass those who are more disadvantaged for the purposes of creating a sufficiently 'backward' group, while relatively disadvantaged

---

[234] Personal Interview, July 18, 2011.

communities will desire to define their group narrowly to ensure continued access to reservation benefits.

The inclusion of subcastes that fall within the Lingayats or Vokkaligas on Karnataka's OBC list has been highly contested. As the two dominant non-Brahmin subcastes, Lingayat or Vokkaliga subcastes have been excluded from the OBC list created by some Backward Classes Commissions, while other Commissions have afforded them reservation benefits.[235] Because of the stronghold of these groups in the state assembly, they have challenged the approval of Backward Classes Commission Reports and have made revisions to the OBC lists before they are finalized. In recent years, several of the subcastes within these two communities, but not all, have been included in on Karnataka's OBC list. Applying the first type of classification struggle to this case, more disadvantaged subcastes in the reservation category have an incentive to try and move to another category for more destitute communities. Due to the political connections and powerful networks of the Lingayats and Vokkaligas, subcastes from within these communities have a greater likelihood of being able to access reservation benefits once they are eligible for them. The second type of classification struggle suggests that there are likely to be internal battles over the degree to which differentiation within the two communities should persist and where the boundaries for particular subcastes are drawn.

---

[235] Reddy 1990: 68-113.

Caste Associations

The historical literature on colonial censuses in India puts forth that caste associations have played an active role in the production of caste data. As mentioned in section one of the previous chapter, H.H. Riley took over control of the 1901 Census and, along with returning to reliance on the *varna* system, applied his personal interest in the relative status of castes led him to create the first colonial ranking of caste using census data. An immediate effect of the colonial ranking by caste included the proliferation of caste organizations, explosion of writing on caste, petitions for higher status.[236] The 1901 Census became "became the official record of social status" and caste associations and related groups lobbied and argued to change the relative ranking of castes in the census results. [237]

In the current day, caste associations play a variety of functions in Karnataka. They hold religious services and cultural activities, provide free medical checkups, sponsor educational scholarships, help to arrange marriage, and liaise with local political leaders. Larger caste associations own and run wedding halls, banks, hospitals, schools and colleges. These organizations also lobby political leaders and state agencies to access resources and state benefits for their members. Caste associations play a key role in submitting applications and providing evidence for the inclusion of specific groups to Karnataka's Backward Classes lists, as well as attempts to move a particular group from one category to another within the OBC list.

---

[236] Dirks 2001.

[237] Dirks 2001: 206.

Two of the largest caste associations in contemporary Karnataka—the

Vokkaligara Sangha (i.e., organization for the Vokkaligas/ Gowdas) and the All India

Veerashaiva Mahasabha (i.e., organization for the Lingayats)—were created in the years

immediately following the publishing of the first colonial caste ranking. The Vokkaligara

Sangha was established in 1906 by elderly and literate members of the community and

formally registered in 1907 under the Mysore Societies Act.[238] The purpose of the

organization was to help uplift "the economically backward class namely Vokkaligas

who are the backbone of the agricultural sector of the old Mysore that existed before and

is now called as 'Karnataka.'"[239] When the organization started it consisted of about a

hundred members and by the end of the 20th century it had approximately 4,000-5,000

members. The Vokkaligara Sangha has a very large complex in Bangalore, with several

hospitals and colleges in the complex. In the last 3 to 4 years there has been a dramatic

rise in the organization's membership, as the present leadership make a concerted effort

to open up membership to every individual belonging to the community and 18 years of

age. As a result, by July 2012, approximately 275,000 members of the Vokkaliga

Community have voluntarily joined the organization.[240]

Similarly the All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha started in 1904. The organization

includes "Lingayath, Lingawanth, Lingadhar and Others called by any other name/s and

ordained as members of the community."[241] Currently, the organization has 82,000

---

[238] Vokkaligara Sangha Constitution: 3.

[239] *Ibid*.

[240] Personal Interview, July 28, 2012.

[241] Constitution of Mahasabha 2004:1.

members and it also saw a large increase in membership in the last 10-20 years.[242] While

both of these organizations have a large current membership and represent two dominant

groups in Karnataka state politics, neither group organized in advance of the SEC

Census. In a review of the quarterly magazine of the Vokkaliga Sangha for a one-year

period surrounding the SEC Census, there was no mention of the Census. After I spoke

with a senior administer, he wrote in response to my questions about the SEC Census

(about two months after the data collection was complete):

> Vokkaliga Sangha organization is in fact interested in collecting socio-, economic-
> and caste-based data for identifying members into most backward and forward
> classes, besides educationally forward and not forward…If any organization would
> come forward to take up this type of census perhaps the Vokkaligara Sangha
> Administration and Management may encourage.[243]

The Veerashaiva Mahasabha has been involved in organizing related to the decennial

census, but was not involved in any mobilization of its membership in the lead up to the

SEC Census. A senior administrator for the All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha described

how the organization has been working for 20 years to have Veerashaiva Lingayat listed

as a separate religion on the decennial census. The organization is currently continuing its

correspondence with the central government and RGI to ask them to add Veerashaiva

Lingayat to the existing categories for religion on the next decennial census form. I

thought the SEC Census would be of particular interest to them as the religion question is

not categorical and therefore individuals could answer Veerashaiva Lingayath to the

question on religion. However, similar to the administrators at the Vokkaliga Sangha,

leaders of the All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha explained they did not participate in any

---

[242] *Ibid*. 3.

[243] Personal Correspondence, July 26, 2012.

organizing in advance of the SEC Census and, in fact, seemed to have little knowledge

about the SEC Census.[244]

Given the dominant position of these groups and their powerful position within the

state, it is likely that the SEC Census was not used as an opportunity to mobilize their

constituencies because such a mobilization would neither improve their position or access

and might in fact reveal internal fracture. As one public intellectual explained, "for the

leading OBC leaders the caste count is not helpful—it could remove their groups from

current lists." [245] The inclusion of these two dominant castes in Karnataka's Backward

Classes (BC) list reflects the political power of these two groups and not their economic

and social 'backwardness.' A state administrator explained as much:

> In Karnataka, there was a Socio-Economic Survey in 1984 when 4 lakh [400,000]
> people were surveyed regarding caste and other socioeconomic details. It is the only
> major survey of this kind that has been carried out by the state... Based on this 1984
> data, Lingayats and Gowdas were to be kept apart and not included on the BC list.
> But, eventually they were included by the political party.[246]

At the same time, it is important to note that for both Vokkaligas/Gowdas and Lingayats,

this overarching caste category consists of multiple subcastes and communities. Certain

subcastes within feel disadvantaged compared to other subcaste and are less likely to feel

that membership to an overarching 'Gowda' or 'Lingayat' caste identity benefits them.

For example in October 2011, prior to the start of the SEC Census in Karnataka, the

Karnataka State Banajiga Welfare Association urged Banajiga Lingayats should "to seek

a separate caste identity by having themselves recorded as 'Banajiga,' and not just as

---

[244] Personal Interview, July 22, 2010.

[245] Personal Interview, February 27, 2013.

[246] Personal Interview, July 18, 2011.

Lingayats or Veerashaivas, in the coming caste census."[247] At stake for this organization was the loss of its separate backward class status, as the subcaste has become identified as part of the larger Lingayat community. In order to avail the reservation benefits that the community believes it is entitled to, leaders actively mobilized members of the community to specify they are 'Banajiga' during the SEC Census.

Another example of a group challenging the broader trend of standardization is leaders of the Madiga. The former Congress MLA and activist H. Anjaneya urged members of the Madiga community to specify they are 'Madiga' along with being classified as Scheduled Caste. Mr. Anjaneya who is a Congress leader framed the SEC Census as an effort of the Congress-lead central government to frame caste-specific reservation policies:

> Since more than 100 communities have been categorized as Scheduled Caste, the mentioning of caste as Madiga will help in knowing the exact population of this community. This will further help the government frame specific policies for the welfare of this backward community.[248]

As the enumeration of SC also requires the data collectors to record a specific subcaste, this reminder was unnecessary, but it did inform community members about the purpose of the upcoming SEC Census.

A few other caste based associations in Karnataka also mobilized to varying degrees in advance of the SEC census. The groups that did organize tended to have an active political agenda, in which data from the caste census could contribute to an existing cause. In the case of the Kodava caste, the Codava National Council (CNC) urged both the RGI India and Director of Census Operations in Karnataka "to ask the

[247] Staff. 2011. "Record caste as Banajiga in census." *The Hindu.* October 19.

[248] Staff. 2011. *The Hindu*. "Dalits Told to Mention their Caste as Madiga during Census." November 21.

enumerators to enter the caste of Kodava people as 'Kodava' in the enumeration sheet in the upcoming caste census…"[249] The specific request to record individuals as 'Kodava' and not 'Kodagaru' or 'Kodaga' or 'Coorgi' was part of a larger 20 year struggle of the CNC to fight for an autonomous Kodava homeland in Kodagu (Coorg being the anglicised former name of the geographic region). In multiple settings, CNC President, Mr. N.U. Nachappa, made direct appeals to the Deputy Commissioner of Kodagu District to direct the local census official to follow this request.[250] The census data was seen as one small part of the larger battle in the construction of a Kodava identity, along with the establishment of a Kodagu Central University (with a World Kodavology Study Center), official state recognition of the Kodava language, and other efforts to justify the fight for a separate Kodova homeland.

Leaders of the Kunchitigara Sangha caste association similarly made public appeals to community members to provide the answer of 'Kunchitiga' to the question on caste, instead of providing a more particular subcaste, and to answer 'Hindu' for religion. In doing so, the President of the Sangha H.R. Kallesh argued that with a sizable 'Kunchitiga' population enumerated in the SEC Census the community would improve its likelihood of getting reservation benefits that other backward classes have accessed.[251] Part of the creation of a 'backward class' is the emergence of a countable population with sufficient political power to demand access to reservation benefits.

---

[249] Staff. 2011. "Enter Caste of Kodavas as 'Kodava' during Census." *The Hindu*. September 18.

[250] *Ibid*. Jeevan, Chinappa. 2012. "Serving the Kodava Cause." *The Hindu*. September 8.

[251] Staff. 2011. "Appeal," *The Hindu.* December 17.

Two other appeals in the lead up to the SEC Census came from senior politicians, who pushed for the enumeration of a caste category which would be broad enough to make political demands. Former Chief Minister of Karnataka Yeddyruppa's Secretary B.J. Puttaswamy made a public statement in December 2011. He asked members of the 'Ganiga' community to simply state 'Ganiga' as their caste identity instead of providing particular subcaste.[252] In doing so, he actively sought to ensure that all individuals and subcastes that could fall under the classification of Ganiga did so during the collection of data. Puttaswamy explained in a newspaper interview that the BJP recognized his importance in the party after a massive rally of the Ganiga community at the Palace Grounds last year. He argued that with a population of 1-1.2 million in Karnataka, the Ganiga community and its enumeration in the caste census would help to strengthen his political power.[253]

Similarly M.D. Lakshiminarayan, a leader of the BJP in Karnataka, as discussed in the opening news article to Chapter 1, made a public appeal when he was president of the Federation of Weavers that all members of the weaving community should add a common 'weaver' prefix to their subcaste for the SEC Census.[254] In advance of the first phase of the caste census in Karnataka, the Federation of Weavers completed a door-to-door campaign to ask households to prefix 'Nekara.' With potentially 26 subcastes across Karnataka falling under the category of 'Nekara,' Lakshiminarayan is hoping that this

---

[252] Staff. 2011. "Enter as 'Ganig' Only" *Vijaya Karnataka*. December 26.

[253] Staff. 2012. "B.J. Puttaswamy Offers to Quit on Yeddy's Orders." *Daijiworld*. July 16.

[254] Staff. 2011. "Weavers Want Uniform Name in Census." *The Hindu*. December 11.

broader category will help to enumerate a 'Nekara' category approximately 5 million

people strong.

Puttaswamy and Lakshiminarayan are working to define a political base through

the enumeration of caste. Each leader is communicating to members of several

communities that their potential shared identity is the category of importance for this

particular census and if they are collectively enumerated as such they will have improved

access to state resources. At the same time, in doing so, each politician is trying to

increase his own political power and importance within the BJP.

In contrast to these efforts, neither the two largest caste associations in the state

(as discussed earlier), nor most of the several hundreds of smaller caste associations did

any visible mobilization in the lead up to the SEC Census. For example, in interviews

with leaders of caste organizations for the Vishakarma and Ediga castes, the leadership

was not even aware of the caste enumeration prior to when it took place. The secretary

for the Vishwakarma Samaja Vedike explained:

> I have not heard about the caste census. Most of the time I am at home, but no one
> came for the caste census. This is an important matter that our organization would
> have definitely discussed in a meeting, if we knew about it. But I came to know about
> it because of you.[255]

Similarly an active member of the Sri Guru Narayana Samiti, a caste association for the

Janardhana Poojari caste, relayed that during caste association meetings and in the bi-

annual newsletter the organization's leadership "did not speak or tell us anything about

the caste census. I would have come to know if such a discussion happened in a meeting

---

[255] Personal Interview, May 15, 2012.

or within the organization."[256] As will be described later in this chapter, the extremely

limited publicity around the SEC Census created a situation where most individuals and

organizations did not know that a central government sponsored enumeration of caste

was going to occur. Now we turn to examine how the SEC Census operations unfolded.

3.2 The SEC Census Timeline, Organization and Questionnaire

PRESS RELEASE
Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development

"….The BPL Census and Caste Census would be held in the second half of this year during June to December 2011. Earlier in the day, decks were cleared by the Union Cabinet as it gave its nod to conduct the Below Poverty Line (BPL) Census in rural and urban areas. It has been decided that the Census would be conducted jointly by the Ministry of Rural Development, Registrar General of India (RGI) and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (HUPA). The six month long exercise for the BPL population would be undertaken with the help of state Government personnel who would collect the door-to-door information in the first phase which would subsequently be collated by the Ministry Of Rural Development, the Office of RGI and HUPA. Subsequently Ministry Of Social Justice and Ministry Of Tribal Affairs would classify the data into categories for the beneficiaries of the targeted welfare programs of the Government. It will be a paper-less exercise which would be carried out with the help of low-cost hand-held devices to be manufactured by state-run Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL). All relevant households which have been enumerated would be revisited, with the enumerators, mostly from the state Governments, going door to door. The identification of urban poor is being carried out for the first time as earlier only the rural population was enumerated to help them avail targeted BPL benefits…. The enumeration of castes will also be done simultaneously along with the BPL census. The process will go a long way towards meeting the inclusive growth agenda of the Government."[257]

In May 2011, the central government announced a plan and timeline for the SEC Census

data collection, which was to start in June and be completed by the end of the year.

Several years of preparatory work had been occurring in the Ministry for Rural

Development (MRD) and with the help of government-appointed expert commissions,

---

[256] Personal Interview. May 20, 2012.

[257] Press Information Bureau. 2011. "BPL Census to be Conducted along with Caste Census." May 19.

like the Saxena Commission, to try to improve the accuracy of identifying poor

households eligible for state welfare benefits. In 2010, a pilot BPL was conducted in

250-260 villages throughout India, which involved the complete village questionnaire

and the enumeration of all households within the village.[258] In Karnataka, this involved

the enumeration of 14 villages in 14 rural districts throughout state. The proposed plan

for the SEC Census announced by the MRD in June 2011 was to stagger data collection

beginning in late June 2011 and finishing in December 2011. Data collection would begin

in small states and union territories in July and August, move to the first major state (i.e.,

Andhra Pradesh) in September and continue to the other major states in October-

December, and consist of two phases in the four largest states (i.e. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar,

Maharastra and West Bengal) to ensure a sufficient supply of tablets.[259] Unlike the

population enumeration phase of the decennial census which occurs at the same time

throughout the country, this spread out schedule was necessary because states were not

ready to collect the data and the supply of tablets was insufficient to collect the data

simultaneously. Officials expected that once the canvasing of the survey operations

started in a region it would take about 40 days to complete.

    The process of finalizing the SEC Census questionnaires involved making

modifications to the pilot survey conducted in 2010. With regards to the caste-related

questions, previous BPL surveys had collected household level SC/ST data, as SC/ST

---

[258] The pilot intentionally targeted a village in the two richest and two poorest districts in a state and also included four villages in every agro-climatic region of the country (as is the practices with the NSSO). The sample was drawn based on the 66th round of the NSSO.

[259] Ministry of Rural Development. "Schedule for Socio-Economic Caste Census." June 13, 2011.

status was used in the identification of BPL households. Section 1 of pilot BPL questionnaire had three caste related questions (questions 2-4 below):

Household Basic Characteristics:
1. Name of Household Head: _____
2. Name of Caste/Tribe: _____
3. Caste/ Tribe Group: Central list (A):_____ State list (B):_____
4. Religion (code): _____

Codes:

Q3: Caste/tribe Group: POST-CODE (A) from Column 3; (B) from Column 4 of Block 6 in Village Survey[260]
Q4: Religion: 1=Hinduism; 2=Islam; 3=Christianity; 4=Sikhism; 5=Jainism; 6=Buddhism; 97=Other (specify)

Unlike the questions on gender, age, illness, employment and income in the pilot, the questions on caste and religion were collected at the household level. The enumerator was expected to complete questions 2 (i.e., open-ended question on caste) and 4 (i.e. categorical question on religion), while the supervisor was supposed to fill in the answers to 3A and 3B later, based on central and state government administrative categories. The pilot survey instructions for enumerators clarifies responsibilities and how to deal with multiple caste or religious identities within a household:

BPL Pilot Survey (2010) Instructions for Caste Related Questions

2. **Name of caste/tribe**: Enter the full name of the caste/tribe of the household in words. Do not write SC/ST/OBC/General, etc. If more than one way of spelling the name of a caste, use the spelling which is most widely used. If more than one caste/tribe in the same household (e.g., in case of inter caste marriages), report the

---

[260] In 3A, the supervisor chooses an option from the central list Caste/Tribe Group: 1=Scheduled tribe; 2=Scheduled caste; 3=Other Backward Caste; 4=General. In 3B, the supervisor selects and choice from the state list Caste/tribe group, such as 1=Mahadalit; 2=Most Backward Caste; 3=Backward Caste; 4=Primitive Tribal Groups; 5=Denotified Tribes; 97=Other (specify)

caste/tribe of the household that the respondent identifies the household with. In case, the household has no preferences, use the caste/tribe of household head.

3. **Caste/Tribe Group**: This question is to be left blank by the investigator and will be post-coded by the Field Supervisor after the interview with the household is completed. The Supervisor should fill up the two spaces in this question (Col. A and B) by matching the caste/tribe name against the list of all castes/tribes in the village as recorded in Block 6 of the Village questionnaire (see Part IV of the Manual).

4. **Religion:** Enter code as per list. In case of inter-religion marriages, write the code of religion as reported by the respondent. If no preferences are reported by the respondent, write the code of the religion of household head. In case of atheist or households not declaring the religion, please write 97 and specify.

When the BPL survey was modified and expanded to become the SEC Census, slightly different urban and rural questionnaires were developed. Most of the differences in the two questionnaires related to attempts to capture household assets, job, or government programs particular to either rural or urban areas. The caste and religion questions are the same on both the urban and rural questionnaires, but have a much closer resemblance to questions on the 2011 Decennial Census compared to the pilot BPL:

Table 2: SEC Census, 2011 Decennial Census, and 2010 Pilot BPL Caste Questions

CENSUS	SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ON QUESTIONNAIRE (PAPER)		
SEC Census	**Religion**	**Caste/ Tribe Status**	
	(write name of religion in full)	Give code: Scheduled Caste (SC)-1 Scheduled Tribe (ST)-2 Other-3 No Caste/Tribe-4	If code 1,2 or 3 in Column 13, write names of caste/tribe. If code 4 in column 13, put 'X'
2011 Decennial Census	**Religion** (write name of religion in full) Also give code in box if found in list below. For other religions, write name of the religion in full but do not give any code. Codes: 1…..Hindu 2…..Muslim 3…..Christian 4…..Sikh 5…..Buddhist 6…..Jain	**Scheduled Caste (SC)/ Scheduled Tribe (ST)*** **(a)** Is this person SC/ST? If 'YES' give code in box SC….1 ST…..2 If 'NO' put '3' in box **(b)** If SC or ST write name of the SC or ST from the list supplied *NOTE: SC can be only among the Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists. ST can be from any religion	

Pilot BPL	Name of Caste/Tribe (enter the full name of caste/tribe of household in words)	Caste/ Tribe Group: (a) choose from central list of categories; (b) choose state list of categories [POST-CODED]	Religion: 1=Hinduism; 2=Islam; 3=Christianity; 4=Sikhism; 5=Jainism; 6=Buddhism; 97=Other (specify)

In SEC Census questionnaire, the question on religion precedes the questions on caste as with the Decennial Census. In addition, the religion question is open-ended with no codes provided, while in the Decennial Census the religion question is open-ended but codes are provided, such that the enumerator is expected to first record and then code the answer. The caste questions in the SEC Census and Decennial Census differ in two ways. First, the Decennial Census enumerates SC/ST status and as such produces three categories for the categorical question on caste (i.e., SC, ST or other), while the SEC Census had four answer options (i.e., SC, ST, other, or no caste/tribe). In the debates surrounding the caste census, some proponents specifically pushed for the enumeration and categorization of OBCs during the census interview. The SEC Census did not involve the explicit enumeration of OBCs (i.e., it was not one of the options along with SC and ST). As such, the 'other' category includes subcastes falling within the administrative categories of OBC and forward castes.[261] Second, caste/tribe was recorded for everyone categorized as SC, ST or 'other' in the SEC Census, while subcaste data were only collected for SCs and STs in the Decennial Census. This additional subcaste data and the option of "no caste" in the SEC Census represent the new types of caste data produced in this expanded enumeration of caste.

---

[261] Forward caste (similar to SC, ST and OBC) is a broad category to denote those groups that have been historically advantaged within India's system of social stratification. These groups are excluded from India's system of affirmative action, and continue to be overrepresented in colleges and universities, government jobs and well-paying jobs in the private sector.

From the start, the planned timeline for the SEC Census was unrealistic given the size of the exercise and required deployment of data collectors and technology. While the MRD and other central offices were finalizing the questionnaires and developing systems to help coordinate nationwide rollout of census operations in June 2011, preparatory work had just begun in most states.[262] In late June, SEC data collection started in the small state of Tripura in northeast India with photographs, press releases and government announcements. Elsewhere, things were moving much slower. In Karnataka, a senior official explained the status of SEC Census operations in mid-July and details regarding the collection of caste data:

> The BPL questionnaire came in last month. The urban schedule is not yet finalized; only last week we saw the schedule. The Rural Development and Urban Department are the nodal agencies and will release the related circulars. The Census Office will be responsible for providing the frame, training and paper, and will also populate the BPL with 2011 census data. Although the Rural and Urban Departments will be the nodal agencies, the collected data on three questions (i.e. religion, SC/ST/other, and open ended caste question) will be extracted and sent to the Census Office. For the SC/ST enumeration in the main [decennial] census, the SC/ST list is provided to each enumerator and the caste mentioned by the respondent should be on the list. The same process will happen for SC/ST in the BPL, but not for OBCs because there are multiple lists (at the state and central levels) and no single list. This caste enumeration process will get caste from everyone (not just Hindus), but then they will have to determine how to tabulate. There is no experience in this area for anyone so the procedures are not set. For SC/ST there is a template, but for others there is no template…We will pass along the caste data to the center and they may chose to share it with us. They have not yet shared with us how they are going to categorize. They are still looking for ideas on how to do this. There is a committee at the center and they will likely decide. The data won't be available until January.[263]

---

[262] The preparatory work for the census is extensive. A document entitled "State Level Activities Plan for Socio Economic & Caste Census 2011" outlines 6 areas of preparatory work (i.e. finances, set up and coordination and execution team, training, setting up data center at tehsil/ district/ headquarters, preparing household directory for deployment in the field, other activities). Almost 50 tasked are outlined in this document that need to be completed prior to the start of data collection.

[263] Personal Interview, July 12, 2011

At the state-level, the Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR), which had conducted three previous BPL surveys in rural areas Karnataka, was now the state nodal agency for an exercise that would include both rural and urban areas and collect caste data. As a long-time employee at the RDPR explained, "we had previously carried out economic censuses, but this we the first time we are collecting social (i.e. caste) data." As the nodal agency, the RDPR was responsible for overall project coordination (including communication with government agencies at center, state and local levels and the private sector) and the management and release of funds. In Karnataka, the state nodal officer was the Self Employment Program (SEP) Officer, who is an IAS officer in the RDPR. She had extensive responsibilities apart from the SEC Census, including overseeing the administration of NREGA, which is the government's massive rural employment program.

While the data collection for the SEC Census was supposed to be completed throughout the country by December 2011, in Karnataka like the rest of the country, the entire process was delayed. Between July and November 2011, preliminary work began. This process involved the appointment of a state-level coordinator within the RDPR (a retired IAS officer who oversaw the day-to-day operations of the SEC Census and reported to the SEP officer), the creation of a state-level executive committee to coordinate across government agencies, and the appointment of district level officers to create the ground-level management structure throughout the state, among other tasks (see Appendix 3 for complete list). In each district, a senior government official was appointed the SEC Census Principal Officer. In Bangalore Urban District this official was the head of the municipal government, or the BBMP Commissioner. The SEC Census

Principal Officer in each district was responsible for appointing the district level staff.

The district level management structure within Bangalore Urban District involved three

Zonal-level census officials each overseeing a zone within the city and Charge Officers to

manage the Charge Centers, which were the local data processing hubs found within each

zone that generally served two urban wards.[264] In September 2011, after a Cabinet

meeting in Bangalore, Karnataka Law Minister Suresh Kumar briefed reporters that the

central government would bear the 105 crore [17-18 million USD] cost of the exercise

and that the census would be completed by the end of 2011. Principal Secretary to the

RDPR, Amita Prasad, explained that the census would be held in two phases throughout

the state and confirmed the same timeline for completion.

An important and time-consuming task at the state and local levels was the

recruitment, appointment and training of enumerators and supervisors. Unlike for

previous censuses, the SEC Census involved two parallel trainings. First, there was an

extensive mobilization of government staff for the training of enumerators. Under the

direction of the RGI, this progress began with translating the training/instruction manual

for enumerators and supervisors into local languages, as the central government created

an English and Hindi version, and the identification of a national trainer and master

trainers. The national trainer added a centralized training program in Delhi; then she

trained a cadre of master trainers in Karnataka. The master trainers were usually

university lecturers or other highly educated government employees. The master trainers

were then deployed to train enumerators and supervisors within each district. The

government could not use the same enumerators that were involved in the decennial

[264] At the time of the SEC Census Bangalore had 198 urban wards.

census, which was completed less than five months earlier. Therefore, a major staffing challenge was the identification of a new source of enumerators. In Karnataka, master trainers were appointed in September and October and completed their training by November. The appointment and training of enumerators and their supervisors began in November and December and continued into the early 2012.

Along with the staffing and training of enumerators, the introduction of 'real-time' data entry added a massive parallel private sector staffing and technology operation that needed to be coordinated with the state and local governments. While BEL was the company in charge of data entry operations for Karnataka, through a centralized process of tendering, data entry operations within each district were sub-contracted. These sub-contractors were responsible for hiring and staffing Data Base Administrators (DBA) to oversee local data entry operations and Data Entry Operators (DEOs) to accompany each government-appointed enumerator to enter data into a hand-held PC.

As already mentioned, both the start of SEC data collection was delayed in Karnataka and the time required complete data collection once it started was longer than 40 days, as was the case in almost every part of the country. In December 2011, when the SEC Census data collection was supposed to be complete in Karnataka and throughout the country, the state government was just starting data collection in the first round of districts throughout the state. Data collection was complete in most parts of Karnataka by June 2012.

3.3. Census Publicity and the Media

Contrary to practices surrounding the decennial census and other state projects of enumeration, this section illustrates the lack of publicity surrounding the SEC census in Karnataka and the implications of this relative silence.

Centralized Publicity Campaigns

For the decennial census, the central government of India mobilizes an extensive publicity apparatus to ensure that households know about data collection, prior to when an enumerator actually arrives at the door. This type of infrastructural work is crucial to bringing the census into reality and is usually a forerunner to the deployment of the ground-level census staff throughout the country and continues throughout the census exercise. Billboard advertisements, newspaper ads, TV commercials, radio announcements, ads on government websites are all part of a large, coordinated visual and audio blitz that helps ensure that Indians across the territory and from a variety of class backgrounds know that the census is underway. For Census 2011, the central government also created a mascot, which was a schoolteacher enumerator, that sought to bring a friendly face to the census in advance of the enumeration of specific households. As part of their public campaign, the government incorporates information about the decennial census into the school curriculum. By educating children about the purpose and content of the census, the government hopes to both inculcate future heads of household and have these easily accessible youth communicate the importance of the census to the adults in their families. Along with general efforts to mobilize the masses, the government also embarks on a targeted publicity campaign, which involves working with leaders throughout the country to bring the message of the census to particular communities through their political, religious, and civic leaders. For example, during the

129

2011 Decennial Census, census officials in Delhi collaborated with local mullahs to dispel myths about the census.[265] The state's efforts to reach certain 'hard to reach' populations, which usually consists of individuals or groups that have been marginalized and discriminated by the state, often involves working with trusted leaders.

Along with government initiated outreach efforts, the private media also plays an independent yet often coordinated role in publicizing the decennial census. Through publishing government press releases, having talk shows or news stories about the census on the TV and radio, and printing photos of famous leaders and celebrities being enumerated in the newspapers the media also communicates the importance of being counted through the medium of print, TV, newspapers, radio and internet.

When compared to the decennial census, which happened just before the SEC Census, or the Adhaar or biometric ID card, which was rolled out just after the SEC Census, the near absence of publicity efforts for the SEC Census is very noticeable.[266] But why did the central government, which so intentionally publicizes other data collection efforts, remain so silent around the caste census? A large part of the difference in publicity across these projects can be explained by organizational structure and culture of the nodal agency for each project. The RGI, which oversaw the Decennial Census and Adhaar card, is a central government agency with regional offices. The government staff that work in regional offices are employed by the central government and, more

---

[265] Personal Interview, August 5, 2011.

[266] The central government had no organized or centrally coordinated publicity effort for the SEC Census (such as posters, billboards, news paper ads generated in Hindi and English that could then be translated to a variety of regional languages). There was no unified message or campaign. The SEC Census lacked a mascot or numerous photos of Prime Minister Singh, President Banerjee or Congress President Sonia Gandhi being interviewed by an enumerator published national and regional newspapers. The Ministry of Rural Development did publish a SEC Census pamphlet in Hindi and English to provide basic information about the census. It was disseminated online and *The Hindu* contained an electronic link to it.

importantly, see themselves as central government employees. There is a clear organizational culture and structure that keeps the regional offices linked to the center, with all offices viewing themselves as part of the same organization. When I spoke to census employees in regional offices in Kerala and Karnataka they were quick to point out that they were central government employees and distinguished themselves from state government workers. Within this context, the Publicity Office for the RGI in Delhi generates outreach materials with simple messages for schools, media outlets, and local implementing agencies in Hindi and English. The regional offices translate these materials into local languages. The regional offices also work closely with state and local level government agencies to coordinate census operations and in doing so play a central role in the translation and communication work between the central offices in Delhi and local implementing partners.

The Ministry for Rural Development and the Ministry for Urban Development are the nodal agencies for the SEC Census. Yet, in contrast to the organizational structure for the RGI, the regional offices for these central ministries are under the jurisdiction of state government. Therefore 'centralized projects' coordinated by the Ministry of Rural Development are far more decentralized and discretion is given to the state governments, and civil servants within the state cadre, to oversee and execute these project. For the SEC Census, the central ministries did not develop a publicity campaign and instead they gave money to each state to use for SEC Census-related publicity, as it saw fit.

SEC Publicity within Karnataka

The Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR) in Karnataka continued the pattern of decentralization started by the central MRD offices and gave

131

money to each district within the state to publicize the SEC Census. In contrast to the

organization of enumerator and supervisor trainings, which involved the translation of

material from the center to the state level, each district in Karnataka was expected to

generate new publicity materials to publicize this centrally driven project. Publicity was

entrusted to the Principal Census Officers in each district; in the case of Bangalore the

Commissioner of the BBMP was in charge of "the local requirement of publicity."[267]

When the SEC enumeration began in parts of Bangalore in late November and

early December there was virtually no publicity around the event. In Bangalore Urban

District there were no public announcements or billboards and no commercials or ads on

the TV or radio. In a city where large life-size advertisements are plastered in public

locations to announce the birthday of a local MLA or state holiday, there were no

government-sponsored billboards or public information campaigns in either public spaces

or specific neighborhoods.

In December 2011, I spent time in an urban ward in the periphery of Bangalore

where the canvasing for SEC Census had started. While I was visiting the local charge

center, I had multiple conversations with data collectors who said that the households

they visited were not aware of the SEC census. During one of these conversations, a

small truck carrying a large speaker drove by an open window as in wove up and down

small lanes to advertise a health ID card. One enumerator pointed out, "This is what we

need! If they would just make similar announcement about the SEC Census then we

wouldn't have to explain to each household."[268] As this quote suggests, the lack of

---

[267] Personal Interview, August, 7, 2012.

[268] Personal Interview, December 9, 2011.

publicity surrounding the census left data collectors to be the primary and in most cases only line of communication about the purpose of the census.

Private media coverage of the SEC Census was also extremely limited. Newspaper articles, both in the high circulation Kannada and English press, were few and far between. Between September and November 2011, in the three months leading up to the start of the SEC Census there was one article that mentioned the SEC Census in the *Vijaya Karnataka*, the largest circulation Kannada newspaper. A day after the State Cabinet approved that the RDPR could conduct the Census, a short news announcement was published on page 11.[269] In a state with active coverage of caste—for examples, other caste related articles published during this same period of time discussed conferences, meetings and statements of caste associations, efforts by political parties and leaders to organize along caste lines, and public policies targeting specific groups—the leading vernacular newspaper was quiet on this particular topic.

Local versions of *the Times of India, Deccan Herald* and *the Hindu*, three leading English newspapers,[270] had sporadic coverage of the caste census in the period leading up to the canvasing of the survey in Karnataka. A handful of articles mentioning the SEC Census discussed the costs of the exercise, the agencies that were involved, the use of PC tablets, Anganwadi workers [nursery teachers] would serve as enumerators, and the SEC Census' connection to previous BPL exercises. An article published in mid September describes the SEC Census as a follow up to the 2004 BPL census, which identified 1.8

---

[269] Staff. 2011. "Urban Caste Census." *Vijaya Karnataka*. September 16.

[270] Within Bangalore and Karnataka's other major cities (Mysore, Mangalore and Hubli), there is a sizable English readership. For example, in Bangalore *the Times of India* has a circulation of 517,000; *the Deccan Herald* has a circulation of 201,000 and *the Hindu* has a circulation of 150,000. In rural Karnataka, these papers have a very small readership.

million rural households in Karnataka living below the poverty line.[271] However, the article does not clarify that the SEC Census will also take place in urban areas. In an article published two months later, a representative from the RDPR conveys that some of the pre-data collection work has started in Karnataka, including the appointment and training of enumerators, and explains that the census will occur in two phases throughout rural and urban areas of the state.[272] The article states that the purpose of the exercise is to help the State Government "compile a list of families living below the poverty line," and there is mention that information about "caste, education and income will also be collected."

While this article does provide important information about the SEC Census, it was a single news article that appeared in one English-language newspaper between two weeks and four months before a SEC Census enumerator actually came to a household's door in Bangalore.

A handful of district-specific news articles discussed the SEC Census during the period of preparatory work.[273] However, on the whole, Kannada and English newspaper

---

[271] Staff. 2011. "Census to Identify BPL Families." *The Deccan Herald*. September 15.

[272] Staff. 2011. *The Deccan Herald*. November 2011.

[273] The scope and content of the articles varied. Relatively detailed English-language articles from Bidar, Kolar, Dakshina Kannada, and Hubli-Dharward describe the upcoming SEC Census. These articles mention the timeline for data collection, the appointment and training of local enumerators, and how data entry operators will accompany enumerators to enter data into PC tablets (*The Hindu,* September 29, 2011; *Deccan Herald*, October 3, 2011; *Deccan Herald*, October 4, 2011; *The Hindu*, November 10, 2011). The article from Bidar describes the exercise as a caste census and the enumeration of families living below the poverty line, while the article from Kolar describes it as an effort to collect statistics "to study the economic and social condition in the country, so as to frame rural development projects" (Deccan Herald, October 3, 2011). Only the articles from Mangalore and Hubli-Dharward make mention of the historic nature of the caste data collection; both mention that the last caste census was last completed in 1931. Two brief articles from Chitradurga and Bangalore discuss the recruitment and preparation of SEC Census staff (*The Hindu*, October 17, 2011; *Deccan Herald* November 10, 2011).

coverage was limited with regards to communicating the purpose, scope and content of

the upcoming SEC Census to communities throughout Karnataka.

During the six months of data collection in Karnataka from December 2011-May

2012, the media coverage remained minimal. During this period, the *Vijaya Karnataka*

had two articles related to the SEC Census. Both were published in December 2011 and

discussed how state leaders reached out to members of their caste communities on how to

provide subcaste information during the census enumeration.[274] *The Hindu* had sporadic

coverage of the caste census and published about 10 articles, which touched upon some

aspect of the SEC Census operations. More than half of these articles were very brief

consisting of just a short paragraph which mentioned when the census would start in

particular locations.[275] Two other articles were similar to, and predated, the *Vijaya*

Karnataka articles on political leaders trying to mobilize communities to provide specific

subcaste information.[276] The most detailed article on census data collection within the

state was published January 2012. Across the English and Kannada newspaper coverage

it is singular in the details that it provides about the enumeration of caste and discussion

of the identification of BPL families.[277] This article touches upon several important

aspects of the census, including the broader purpose of the census:

---

[274] Staff. 2011. "Enter as the Word 'Kunchatiga' Only." *Vijaya Karnataka.* December 19. Staff. 2011. " Enter as 'Ganig' Only." *Vijaya Karnataka.* December 26

[275] Staff. 2011. "Census Process Begins Today." *The Hindu*. December 9. Staff. 2012. "SECC Gets Underway." *The Hindu.* January 13. Staff. 2012. "Caste Census 2011." *The Hindu*. January 27. Staff. 2012. " Caste census gets under way in Madikeri." *The Hindu*. January 28. Staff. 2012. "Caste Census from Friday." *The Hindu*. February 8. Staff. 2012. "Caste Census." *The Hindu*. February 11.

[276] Staff. 2011. "Weavers Want Uniform Name in Cenus." *The Hindu*. December 11. Staff. 2011. "Appeal." *The Hindu*. December 17.

[277] Kamath, Vijesh. 2012. "Census Midway, Has Many Firsts." *The Deccan Herald*. January 22.

For the first time since 1931, caste has figured in the questionnaire in a census conducted by the Central government…The nationwide exercise is being carried out with a view to ranking households based on their socio-economic status for each state, and to prepare a list of families living below the poverty line. Though caste details are collected, the focus is mainly on the socio-economic conditions of families. [278]

The article also clarifies that a socio-economic census have previously been held in rural area every five years by the Ministry of Rural Development, but that this census has been extended to include urban areas. The article also discusses the optional nature of providing caste information, although the description of the religion question is incorrect:

There are provisions to mention religion, caste and sub-caste, but it is not mandatory for a respondent to mention all, or any of these. Under the religion column, there options are given: Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and others. It is purely optional to respond to this column.[279]

The article also quotes a senior officer for the SEC Census operations in Karnataka as saying that it is not mandatory for people to give their subcastes. The article again reinforces this point when it states, "In the section on caste and tribes, the questionnaire includes a 'no caste/tribe' option for those who do not wish to indicate their caste, or belong to religions without a caste system."[280] This article is unique because it mentions details about the enumeration of caste and describes the significance of the exercise, instead of simply discussing logistical or timing aspects of the census.

Similar to the very minimal coverage of the SEC Census in local newspapers, the television coverage was also virtually non-existent. A short TV advertisement ran sporadically on a major Kannada TV station during the final four weeks of data collection

---

[278] *Ibid.*

[279] *Ibid.*

[280] *Ibid.*

(April to May 2012). This ad explained that an enumerator would visit each household and collect detail about the social and economic conditions. While this type of ad could have been a very effective way to communicate the purpose of the census and help to ensure that households participate, the timing of the ad was very late in the data collection process.

One of the key concerns with regards to enumeration of caste expressed by technocrats within the central government was that data is "too political." They might similarly have felt that widespread publicity would result in more organizations and individuals knowing about the SEC Census in advance of its rollout and increase the likelihood that caste associations and political parties would organize and make the data collection effort embroiled a range of politics. This view may have led to the logic that "less publicity is better." Perhaps partially because of the limited publicity around the SEC Census, caste associations in Karnataka remained relatively silent with regards to the census, as the previous section discussed. The next two sections look at the government and private sector's involvement in ground level census operations.

3.4. Local Government Census Infrastructures

Most of the preparatory work for the SEC Census involved mobilizing resources for the appointment and training of data collectors and the creation of neighborhood charge centers to support data entry operations. For both of these tasks, government workers formed the front lines of the census operations, along with temporary staff hired by private companies subcontracted to oversee data entry in each district in Karnataka. In Bangalore Urban District, BBMP (i.e., municipal government) and Trans vision played lead roles, while the State Ministries for Rural Development and Urban Development and

the Census Directorate Office oversaw and supported the ground-level data collection efforts.[281] Data collection began in December 2011 in Bangalore and was completed in May 2012, with the bulk of the data collection occurring between January and April 2012. The appointment and training of a sufficient number of enumerators and DEOs and the establishment of charge centers with a staffed DBA and computer designated for the SEC Census both took much longer than initially planned for by the state officials. This section focuses in on SEC preparatory work based on my observations in Bangalore Urban District.

Neighborhood Census Data Centers and SEC Data Collection

As mentioned in the previous section, charge centers formed the local hub of census operations. In Bangalore, these neighborhood census offices were often located in ward offices of the municipality, government schools or other local or state offices. Most charge centers were the local census hub for two urban wards. They usually consisted of a single room with 1or 2 computers, depending on the number of urban wards the center served, a multi-pronged outlet or electrical strip where several PC tablets and batteries could be charged simultaneously, and in many cases an internet connection. Every charge center was supposed to have an internet connection to allow for the electronic and regular transfer of collected survey data to a remote government server, but in many instances the connection was either temporarily not working or never installed. Multiple times during my visits to charge centers, I saw DBAs backing up the data from the charge center desktop to a thumb drive which the DBA later gave to a Transvision manager who

---

[281] Transvision was the company responsible for data entry operations in Bangalore Rural and Urban Districts.

stopped in regularly to collect the data and then upload it onto the government server

from Transvision's main office in Rajajinagar, a neighborhood in the west side of

Bangalore. In addition, while the initial plan was for the BBMP to provide the computers

and internet connections in each charge center, due to the slow process of acquiring

computers Transvision eventually began to supply the computers. As one Transvision

employee explained "the government needs to write a memo to move a chair from one

office to another. How long do you think it would take for them to supply each charge

center with a computer? It's much faster for us to get them ourselves." [282]

Within each charge center several activities related to data entry for the assigned

ward occurred.[283] In many cases the enumerator training was also held at the charge

center. During census operations, charge centers became the places where data collection

teams would regular encounter their peers enumerating in the region and where

individuals involved in data collection informally learned about the experiences of others

and shared their own as they waited to collect equipment, upload or download data onto

their PC tablet or fill out and submit census abstracts after completing their enumeration.

---

[282] Personal Interview, December 5, 2011.

[283] First, National Population Registrar (NPR) data was entered into the SEC data entry program. These data were collected as part of the 2011 decennial census (but not official under the Census Act). This process involved the distribution of manual records of the NPR to each charge center for all of the enumeration blocks in the assigned ward. DBAs were responsible for entering data for several fields (name, sex, birthdate) into the data entry program for the SEC Census. DBAs then populated each tablet PC with the data for the enumeration blocks to be canvased using that computer. Second, during the census interviews, data collectors routinely visit charge centers to download the data they have collected to ensure that data are not lost. DBAs also help to field technical questions during data collection exercises. Third, once the data collectors have completed their work enumerators are responsible for generating abstracts for each enumeration block. This process often involves spending time in the charge center to ensure that the electronic data and abstract based on the household-listing match up. Fourth, the final process of validating the data through spot checks is based on a random list of houses in each enumeration block that the DBA generates and gives to supervisors.

The charge officer was the person responsible for overseeing the set up of the center, while the Transvision-employed DBA oversaw the daily operations of all data entry related processes. A BBMP employee described the staffing and related duties of government employees involved in the ground-level census operations:

> The charge officers are from several departments (and in relatively high posts): revenue, engineering, education (i.e. headmasters), and health. The enumerators are mid-level staff from a variety of government offices (such as the Vidhana Soudha or Coffee Board) but they also have to do their regular work. So most of them are likely to do their regular work in the morning and then do the enumeration in the afternoon. In the morning most families are busy and/or will not be at home, so it is not a good time to enumerate in Bangalore, but by the afternoon usually someone is home. One enumerator will enumerate 4 blocks. There are about 200+ households in a block. In some blocks, like slums, there are more households per block. So on average each enumerator will enumerate 800-1000 households. There is one supervisor for 6 enumerators. For many households in Bangalore, the enumerator will have to go two times. The census work will take about 40-45 days to complete. [284]

While the management and organizational structure of the BBMP and Transvision were separate and parallel, charge centers were a space where the government and private sector divide was very blurred. The government owned the buildings and the charge officer was a government official in charge of the charge center, but DBAs oversaw the day-to-day data entry operations. Enumerators and DEOs checked in regularly with their ward's DBA regarding data entry problems, in order to transfer their collected data or to get replacement parts, and during the creation of the census abstract and finalizing their data. Enumerators also communicated with their field supervisors, who were similarly government employees, when they encountered problems in the field with regards to access or difficulty enumerating a particular household.

---

[284] Personal Interview, December 8, 2011.

The charge officers, zonal officials and supervisors have often been involved in other recent data collection efforts. As one zonal-level BBMP employee explained,

> "Earlier this year we did the decennial census, then we did a census of Scheduled Castes for Karnataka state government, and now we have to do the SEC Census. Right now many of the BBMP officers are busy updating the election rolls and doing revenue work. The election rolls have to be completed before we can do this new census work."[285]

Most of these projects involve a temporary appointment of government employees, who also continue their regular duties as much as possible. Because of the ongoing array of surveys, households are fairly accustomed to being interviewed for a variety of government projects.

Making Enumerators

The core of this infrastructure was the people involved in the door-to-door data collection, namely 600,000 enumerators and their DEO pairs. In urban Karnataka, one new cadre of enumerators was Anganwadi workers, or nursery school teachers who had not participated in the decennial census. In addition, retired government workers and other government employees who did not participate in data collection for the 2011 decennial census also helped enumeration. As individuals who work in local, state or central government offices, this short-term job is embedded in a longer-term relationship and most enumerators are familiar with the organizational practices, categories and norms of at least a particular state agency. In the training manual for enumerators, and in the three-day enumerator training that I attended in December 2011, the job of the enumerator is framed within their larger *duty* as a government employee instead of a one-off job:

---

[285] Personal Interview, December 8, 2011.

You are privileged to have been chosen as an enumerator. As an enumerator, you are performing a duty which is of great national importance. While it is a matter of pride for you, it is at the same time, a great responsibility. You have to fulfill all the tasks assigned to you with sincerity and devotion.[286]

This view put forward by the state that census is of national importance and that the work

of the enumerator is central to the census is communicated during census trainings,

notifications, and materials related to the census and corroborated through prior

experiences. As one enumerator explained when I spoke to him at a local data processing

center:

I have worked for the government [forest service] for more than twenty years. When I heard that the government needed enumerators for this census, I thought I should serve my government. My supervisor was also willing to let me leave work early for the duration of the census work. This work is important for the government and as a government worker I must help. [287]

Enumerators are well compensated for their work. Every enumerator throughout the

country receives a predetermined and fixed payment of Rs. 24,000 [~USD 500] for

attending a training session and completing data collection in four blocks. For a nursery/

daycare teacher who has a salary of Rs. 6000-8000 per month, the payment is significant.

It conveys both the importance of the work and the demanding nature of collecting data.

As envisioned by the state officials in charge of the census, the enumerator and

DEO share day-to-day data collection responsibilities, but not evenly. When I spoke to a

local government official about the SEC Census just as enumeration was beginning in

Bangalore, he explained, "The enumerators tell the DEOs what to enter."[288] Later that

same day when I spoke to a coordinator of data entry operations for Transvision he also

---

[286] Government of India, 2011. *Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011: Instruction Manual for Enumerators - Urban*. Delhi: Ministry of Urban Housing and Poverty Alleviation: 1

[287] Personal Interview, December 5, 2011.

[288] Personal Interview, December 8, 2011.

described the DEO in a subordinate position to the enumerator, when discussing how discrepancies between what respondents say and what data collectors see should be handled:

> If a house is clearly made of mud, but the respondent says stone, the enumerator will usually tell the DEO to enter stone and the DEO has to do so. While the enumerator has the authority to cross-examine, the DEO does not. But vary rarely does the enumerator cross-examines because he wants to get the work done.[289]

During an enumerator training that I observed, a the master trainer told the enumerators "You are to ask the questions and then tell the DEO what to enter based on the respondent's replies." Similarly, the official training manual for enumerators states, "You must ask the questions, and ensure that the data entry operator enters the responses into the hand-held device correctly".[290] As envisioned by everyone involved in the training of data collectors and the management of ground-level census operations, enumerators are the lead members of the two-member data collection team. Across all of the training materials, the message is clear: the enumerator conducts the interview, while the DEO plays a 'back-end' technical role. Against this backdrop it is not surprising that it is the enumerators who participate in a lengthy training to ensure they are adequately prepared to play the leading role in the household interview.

During the extensive training of enumerators and supervisors, considerable attention is taken to ensure that they are taught the purpose of the census, how to communicate and build rapport with households, the meaning, wording and sequencing of each question and related answer options, and how to use and update the household

---

[289] Personal Interview, December 8, 2011.

[290] Government of India. 2011. *Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011: Instruction Manual for Enumerators - Urban*. Delhi: Ministry of Urban Housing and Poverty Alleviation:15.

listing for each enumeration block. In Bangalore Urban District there were approximately

100 training sessions for enumerators and supervisors, one in each charge center. As part

of the training, a particular view of caste is put forth and in two areas involves an active

reorienting of commonly held views among the middle class urban workforce of

enumerators. First, trainers discuss familiar concepts such as 'religion' and 'caste' but

work to enact them in specific ways that correspond with how those who designed the

survey imagine them to be and, as a result, structured the questionnaire. For example, the

trainer and training materials work hard to emphasize that religion and caste are

individual characteristics:

> "You have to record the name of the Caste/Tribe of each member of the household as
> reported by the respondent in reply to this question. You should not enter into any
> argument with the respondent or any member of the household for recording entry
> under this question. You are bound to record faithfully whatever Caste/Tribe is
> returned by the respondent for herself/himself and for other members in the
> household…Please note that it is not necessary that all the members in the household
> are of the same Caste/Tribe. Therefore, enquiry should be made for each member of
> the household independently. We should not presume that the Caste/Tribe of the head
> of the household or the respondent is necessarily the Caste/Tribe of every member
> being enumerated in the household." [291]

For both the religion and caste question the trainer emphasizes that these questions must

be asked about every member of the household and it should not be assumed that

individuals within the same household share these identities. The trainer does not go into

detail about the types of responses that enumerators might receive for the question on

religion, but instead simply communicates that enumerators should ask, "what is your

religion" for each member of the household and then record whatever is said.

---

[291] Government of India, 2011. *Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011: Instruction Manual for Enumerators - Urban*. Delhi: Ministry of Urban Housing and Poverty Alleviation: 47.

Second, for the categorical question on caste the four answer options are thoroughly explained, with one option requiring extensive explanation.[292] The trainer begins by explaining that the answer option of "Scheduled Caste" (SC) can only be recorded for individual who have said that they are Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist in the previous question about religion. He emphasizes this point multiple times while also clarifying that the second answer option of "Scheduled Tribe" (ST) can be recorded for individuals from any religious background. For both SCs and STs, the individual will then provide a specific subcaste and the enumerator would have to ensure that this subcaste is on the state-specific SC or ST list for Karnataka. If it is, the enumerator should record the name of the SC or ST subcaste for the final caste question. If the subcaste is not on the state-specific list, the enumerator should select the third answer option of "other" and then record the stated subcaste for the final caste question. For anyone who is not SC or ST, the enumerator should similarly select the answer option of "other" for categorical question on caste and then record the stated subcaste for the final caste question. The fourth answer option of "no caste/ no tribe" required considerable explanation. During the first day of the training, the trainer explains how respondents do not have to give information about caste:

> Now, and this is important, if someone says they have no caste or tribe then select option '4: no caste/ tribe.' Do not question them or persist that they should give you an answer. Especially in urban areas like Bangalore there will be people who say "no caste" and you should record their answer without troubling them." The trainer paused for a second and looks around the room making certain that the trainees understand his point. Then he continues, "For question 17, you write down their

---

[292] In contrast to the decennial census where there are only three answer options (1: SC; 2: ST; 3: Other), the inclusion of the "no caste" option is a direct response to the active debate over whether or not to conduct a caste census, with dissenting voices most emphatically pointing to the decision to count caste as socially regressive in 21st century India.

specific caste name, if you selected 1, 2, or 3 for the prior question. Whatever caste they say you write. Remember, this is the caste/tribe census." [293]

To ensure that enumerators conceptualize "no caste" as a real option, the trainer reiterates this point during a role-play exercise on the second day of the training. This excerpt from my field notes picks up midway through the role-play, in which Srinivas (who will supervise six enumerators during the SEC Census) is acting like an enumerator and the master trainer is pretending to be a household respondent:

> Srinivas look up from his paper questionnaire and asks the trainer, "What is your religion?" The trainer replies, "I am Hindu." Srinivas nods and records the answer on his paper questionnaire. He then looks up again and asks, "What is your caste?" The trainer proudly responds, "I have no caste." Srinivas pauses and looks at the trainer, trying to determine whether he should probe further. He can't seem to decide if this is a situation that requires greater scrutiny or if he should just record the trainer's response. Around the room, the other trainees are carefully watching the interaction unfold. Srinivas then breaks out of character to ask "Sir, how should I proceed?" The trainer also breaks out his role, looking first at Srinivas and then the rest of the room. "In a metro city like Bangalore, there are going to be people who don't want to give any information about caste. You should not bother them or push them to give an answer. Simply mark "no caste" for question 16 and then record an "X" for question 17, where you are asked to enter the name of the caste."[294]

The role-play continues on and the master trainer further illustrates this point when Srinivas begins to collect information about the second member of the household:

> He asks, "And, your wife's religion, sir?" The trainer replies, "She is also Hindu." Srinivas nods and records the answer. Then he asks, "What is her caste?" There is a silence across the room and several enumerators lean forward in anticipation of the trainer's response. He states, "She does not have a caste." Srinivas nods, with a look of understanding on his face; he now knows that he should simply record the answer as "no caste" and move on. Elsewhere in the room there are a series of half-laughs, grins and head shaking from side to side. A few enumerators exchange a glance with a friend sitting nearby.[295]

---

[293] Fieldnotes, December 3, 2011.

[294] *Ibid*.

[295] *Ibid*.

The trainer's response of "no caste" runs against the prevailing sensibility about caste for these government workers—individuals who have intimate knowledge about the caste of their colleagues, neighbors and other people who they regularly encounter. The training involves an active attempt to reorient enumerators and supervisors in two ways with regards to religion and caste. Since the designers of the caste census want to collect individual level data on caste and religion, considerable 'infrastructural work' is required to ensure that enumerators bring this same 'imagining' of religion and caste to the household interview. However, the enumerators I observed and interviewed in Bangalore approached and talked about religion and caste as family—and not individual—identities. These aspects of one's family that shape daily habits—such as prayer practices, eating habits, religious rituals, and other family customs—and the choice of marriage partners. Second, the trainer worked to communicate that the option of "no caste" was an acceptable option. His portrayal envisioned that this answer would naturally emerge from the respondent, who would respond "no caste" to the question "what is your caste?" The enumerator did not need to further press the respondent, but should simply select the "no caste" option.

Two areas where the discussion was fairly limited was the relationship between caste and religion and what constitutes caste. Both the master trainer and the training manual explain that religion data is required to classify SCs, but beyond this clarification there is little discussion about caste and the enumeration of people across religious groups. Similarly there was very little discussion about what caste was for the purpose of this government survey. Enumerators and supervisors did not ask questions about this because is a term that middle class government workers commonly use and an identity

that regularly experience. From their perspective, they would not need to ask the question, "what is caste." Perhaps for the same reason that the training program did not have an extended explanation for how caste and religion interact it did not have a section explaining what caste is and is not for the purposes of this government survey. Given the complexity of the caste system and variations across regions to write about either of these topics would be very difficult and require extensive tailoring within each region. Instead the material included in the English and Hindi language enumerator training manuals produced by the central government cover topics that can be translated into local vernacular languages without changing the content.

While data entry during the household interview is supposed to occur directly into a PC tablet, an English and Kannada paper copy of the census schedule is shared with each enumerator during the enumerator training. In addition, the training manual for enumerators and supervisors is both in English and Kannada and contains the same version of the paper census schedule that is distributed during the training exercise. In the enumerator training that I attended, the master trainer spent more than a day reviewing the census schedule in detail and referred to the paper questionnaire throughout this process. The expectation is that the enumerator will read from the paper questionnaire while conducting interviews. At the same time, the DEO will be entering the respondent's responses to the tablet PC based on what the enumerator instructs her to enter. While observing the role-play exercise during the second day of the training, the enumerators practiced recording the answers enacted before them on a paper questionnaire. Yet, at the start and end of the two-day training and several times during

the training, the master trainer clearly communicated that during real census interviews DEOs would be recording responses in the tablet.

Most of the government related census activities in Bangalore—from the 2-3 day training program to conversations in the charge centers to census interviews—occur in Kannada with English words mixed in. At the same time, the SEC Census data entry program used throughout south India is in English. The interviews that I observed in Bangalore occurred in a variety of languages (i.e., I heard five languages during my observations of census interviews: Kannada, Tamil, Hindu/Urdu, English or Telegu). Most of the enumerators spoke at least two languages comfortably and often between the enumerator and DEO they could speak 3-4 languages. While Bangaloreans and government employees are used to operating in a multi-lingual environment, and the process of producing the data involves a series of ongoing multi-lingual interactions, the census data uploaded onto the government server from Karnataka (and other southern states) is all in English.

3.5. The Private Sector

Because of 'real time' data entry, the private sector is involved in the SEC Census in multiple important ways. BEL provided the hardware and software for data entry and BEL subcontractors oversaw and staffed data entry operations in districts throughout Karnataka. This section will focus on how companies got assigned particular districts, the process of hiring temporary employees, and the data entry program.

Becoming a Government Subcontractor

As mentioned earlier, while BEL was the company with overall responsibility for data entry in Karnataka, while Transvision oversaw data entry operations in Bangalore Urban

and Rural Districts. Transvision was headquartered in Delhi and had secured their

contract through a centralized tendering process. They had applied for an e-tender in June

2010 both in Kerala and Karnataka, had interviewed for jobs in both states, and were

given the option to lead data collection operations in districts in both states (i.e.

Bangalore Rural and Urban in Karnataka and Palakkad District in Kerala). Transvision

accepted the work in Bangalore Rural and Urban districts, and declined the project in

Kerala because of the unions in Palakkad. As a Transvision manager explained:

> You can't do anything there without the unions telling you what to do. If I ran this project in Kerala, I'd show up the first day, and I would be asked how many people do you need to do to carry out this project. I'd say 5,000. Then the first union would come and say I have 2,000 people for your work. I would have to hire the 2,000 workers whether or not they were qualified to do the work. Then the second union will come and say I have 2,000 people, and a third and a fourth. In the end I would have 8,000 people. I would have to hire them. If I didn't the next day there would be a banth (strike). [296]

While the company did have a small office in Karnataka, this was the first time

Transvision was taking on a project of this scale . When I asked why they decided to take

on the project in two districts in Karnataka, the Transvision manager explained, "There

are no unions in Karnataka." I asked if it was really that simple. He said, "Yes, it's that

simple. So we can hire who we want here and no one will tell us what to do." When I

pushed him and asked him why they didn't apply to do work in the North, he laughed,

"Have you been there?" I explained that I had been to Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat,

Rasjathan and Delhi. He responded,

> So you've been to the tourist spots. You have to spend time in UP [Uttar Pradesh] or MP [Madhya Pradesh]. Go there. It's similar in Haryana. You just can't do work with the government there. They are…what is the word….stubborn. You just can't get them to do anything for you. Nothing happens, it is hopeless in these areas. The

---

[296] Personal Interview, December 8, 2011.

project you can get 70% done, and that too because the central government is involved, but 30% will be difficult to finish. And that too because it is a central government project, if it was a state level project it would be hopeless.[297]

I asked him how it was in Karnataka. He said, "Here too it is very difficult to deal with the government officials. For you, they will tell you anything." I nodded in agreement given the relative ease I had in my conversations with government workers,[298] and then asked him if government officials actually told him, 'no' when he asked for things. He explained:

> No, a government officer will never say no to you. But we will have to keep asking and you still won't get it. We have to sit and sit to push things along. We have been asking for the list of charge centers for a while now and they still don't have it. Also the list of enumerators. We need this information to proceed.[299]

While during the early phases of SEC Census ground operations, I often heard Transvision staff complaining about the challenges of getting information from government officials, as they tried to set up charge centers and recruit and hire DBAs and DEOs. I similarly heard state-level government employees complaining that in several districts the private sector was having difficulty recruiting enough DBAs and DEOs.

---

[297] Personal Interview, December 8, 2011.

[298] An excerpt from my fieldnotes that same day where I write about my ability to get access: "Although I explain that I am a Ph.D. student at Brown in the US studying sociology, many local government workers keep thinking that I am a journalist. In a lot of ways this makes sense; I'm asking real-time about a major event in the history of India—more than once today someone involved in the operations of the project referenced that this was the first time in post-independence history that this type of caste information was being collected. While the people involved in the operations are deeply aware of the historicalness of this moment, it is a sharp contrast to the lack of media coverage about the event, and people who I talk to who I know in the city don't know that the census is about to occur, nor that there is a detailed caste portion. In general, people are very willing to talk to me today. My Indianess gives me initial access as I can walk into and through government buildings without anyone taking notice of me. My femaleness creates a sense of security and mix of formalness (in a highly male office setting) and respectfulness. My Americaness makes people want to tell me things and maybe also impress me with the scope of the operations; if I've come half way across the world to learn about this, they seem to feel that they should tell me about it."

[299] Personal Interview, December 8, 2011.

Transvision had to build up an extensive organizational apparatus to carry out data collection. The company had to rapidly expand its small office in Bangalore from 4-5 permanent local employees to over 10,000 temporary employees. As part of this expansion, Transvision hired 10 new office staff to recruit, train and hire DBAs, DEOs and to help with citywide coordination of data collection and processing. The process of staffing and setting up charge centers, as well as hiring 100 DBAs and several thousand DEOs, required extensive coordination with local government officials.

Transvision sought to hire recent college graduates in engineering or computer science as DBA. DBAs formed the technical backbone of Transvision's census operations throughout the two districts. In contrast, the only skill requirement for a DEO was the ability to enter data into a computer. As a local manager of Transvision explains, "the main qualification for a DEO is that they need to be able to enter data into the tablet PC. They simply need to have a basic familiarity with computers." [300] Transvision started their recruitment of DEOs from local colleges through online advertisements and in-person recruitment efforts, which resulted in a largely male college-aged workforce who participated in the data entry work for a temporary income. However, as the process of actually pairing up enumerators and DEOs unfolded, Transvision quickly realized that enumerators often preferred working with someone they already knew. A Transvision employee told me that in Yelanka, a pilot location where SEC Census operations started in Bangalore, a Transvision manager introduced a young female enumerator to her partner DEO, a young male. The enumerator explained to the manager that her husband would not be supportive of her working with an unknown man. So the manager suggested

---

[300] Personal Interivew, December 6, 2011.

that she bring someone that she knew who could do the work and that Transvision would

hire him or her. The enumerators happily agreed, but then many of the other enumerators

also wanted to work with someone who they knew as their DEO partner. Based on this

experience in Yelanka, Transvision began to modify its process of recruiting DEOs. At

the enumerator training that I attended a few days after this incident, two Transvision

employees were present. An excerpt from my fieldnotes describes their presentation at

the start of the training session:

> We are in the classroom of the government school in a predominantly Muslim
> neighborhood in the center of Bangalore. It is midday on Saturday and while formal
> class instruction is over, there are kids playing outside. A Transvision employee
> stands in front of the room full of 25-30 enumerators, many of whom are anganwadi
> workers, and explains that during the census interview data will be entered directly
> into a PC tablet by a DEO. She explains that the tablets are easy to use. She then
> holds one up and shows it around to the audience. She then explains that if the
> enumerators want to bring someone they know to serve as their partner to enter the
> data they can. A Transvision manager then walks to the front of the room and
> reiterates this point. He first apologizes for speaking in English and says, "The role of
> the DEO is very straightforward; they enter the data into a PC tablet. The tablet is
> easy to use. There is a touch screen. Anyone comfortable with computers can use it
> quite easily. If you have any reference of someone who can work alongside you, you
> can recommend them to us. Or if you want you can enter the data yourself, if you are
> comfortable using a PC tablet. If you bring the DEO then both you and he will be
> more comfortable. We will pay the DEO 3 rupees per head for the entered data. So
> that is approximately 12 rupees per household." [301]

In this charge center, several but not all enumerators found someone they knew to

accompany them for the census work. Enumerators asked their husbands, daughters,

sons, nieces, and neighbors to enter data into the tablet. In another pilot location in the

periphery of the city, where data collection had already started the week prior, most of

the enumerator and DEO pairs did not know each other prior to the SEC Census work.

---

[301] Fieldnotes, December 10, 2011.

But I did notice that in the cases that I observed, the enumerators and their DEO pair shared the same sex.

The DEO training consists of an extremely brief overview to the purpose and content of the SEC Census and then consists of an hour to hour and a half interactive session on how to use the tablet PC. In contrast to the comprehensive and detailed enumerator training, the DEO training is technical in nature. The training ensures that DEOs are able to enter, save, and download data. DEOs are not trained in the substantive content of the questionnaire; their training does not go into details about the meaning of specific questions or answer options. Because of their relatively young age, minimal prior exposure to the government, and short technical training, DEOs have a limited sense of what is at stake with regards to the SEC Census.

The DEO's role is seen as a short-term job and not embedded in a larger sense of *duty*, as it is for enumerators. Their wage reflects the nature of this relationship. DEOs in Bangalore are paid 3 rupees per individual entry. After reports of DEOs receiving less than 2 rupees per head in some rural areas, the state government sent out a memo to the companies responsible for data entry and mandated a baseline salary for the work. While the payment structure creates an incentive to enumerate every person within a household, the total payment is low. For enumerating 2,100 people in four enumeration blocks a DEO in Bangalore would receive Rs. 6,300. This is less than one third the payment that an enumerator receives for the same work. Remuneration is a key-motivating factor for both enumerators and data entry operators, but DEOs receive far less money.

Data Entry Program

The introduction of technology for 'real-time' data entry for a nationwide census brings in several additional layers to the data collection process. A private company based on inputs from senior government officials developed the data collection software. The character of the data entry program shapes the DEOs ability to enter and change data, and structures the overall interview. As Lorraine Daston argues, material objects have biographies.[302] The PC tablet embodies the perspectives and concerns of those overseeing and managing the census from the center, but who are not directly involved in the household interviews. There are logics of classification embedded within these objects that become apparent during the data collection process and these logics shape the production of data.

Three points are particularly noteworthy in this regard. To limit "tampering with the data," once a DEO completes a data entry screen s/he cannot go back and alter data on a previous screen. If a DEO wants to change data on a previous screen, s/he needs to delete the entire record, create a new record for the household and re-enter all the data. This 'safety' feature requires data entry to be 'perfect' the first time through, which poses challenges during 'real-time' data entry (unlike when entering data into a computer from a completed paper questionnaire, as in previous censuses). It leaves DEOs with the choice of leaving errors in the data or deleting the entire record and restarting from the start, which will take additional time on their end and the interviewee. Second, the DEO is forced to enter data sequentially and cannot skip questions. The program does not allow movement in between questions; information must be entered for question before continuing to the next, in the order that the computer program prompts. Because the

---

[302] Daston, Lorraine. 1999. *Biographies of Scientific Objects*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

paper questionnaire does not match up perfectly with the computer prompts at the start of each record, this creates a situation where the DEO often takes a lead role in asking questions. Third, the data entry program is slow. During household interview, it is much quicker and the overall interview is much shorter if a data collector records the respondent's answers on a paper questionnaire or in a notebook, instead of entering responses into the tablet. As a result, during the actual canvassing of the survey, I found that enumerator and data entry pairs develop a variety of techniques for speeding up data collection. In most of the solutions developed, the DEO ends up taking the lead role in the interview process. The enumerator, in these instances, completes secondary tasks involved in the interview (i.e., updating the household listing, filling out the household receipt) or separately conducts her own interviews, records the responses on paper, and asks the DEO to enter the data into the tablet at a later time. As mentioned earlier, the DEO training does not discuss the questionnaire beyond the technical aspects of how to enter the data. When the DEO takes a lead role, his or her own personal understanding of caste and religion is not mediated by formal training, as the next chapter will illustrate in greater detail.

3.6. Implications of these local trends

This chapter describes the local context in which caste data are produced in Karnataka, with a focus on Bangalore. During processes of translation, the local politics of caste and of reservations shape the production of data and mediate aspects of the centralized plans, while other plans proceed as they were intended and envisioned.

Caste politics in Karnataka is heavily shaped by the dominant Lingayat and Vokkaliga castes. The inclusion of subcastes from these two communities on Karnataka's

156

OBC list is part of an ongoing classification struggle where the Lingayats and Vokkaligas

subcastes try to remain on the list and further increase their presence, while other

subcastes on the list try to move to other categories where these dominant groups are not

present. Because the Lingayats and Vokkaligas dominate the political/electoral field and

bureaucratic field, they are able to influence the final version of the OBC list both by

influencing the work of Backward Classes Commissions and by modifying or blocking

their completed products. The caste associations for the Vokkaligas and Lingayats did

not mobilize their constituencies in advance of the SEC Census. Their silence is

consistent with the political power of the leaders of these groups, and the likelihood that

data from the caste enumeration will likely further complicate their access to

reservations. Yet, in one instance there was an example of a subcaste within the

Lingayats mobilizing to have its members specify 'Banajiga,' and not just Lingayat, in

order to define this group separately from the large category of Lingayats and maintain

their reservation benefits.

     Unlike recent decennial censuses, there was a very limited effort by the state or

the private media to raise public awareness about the SEC Census in the period leading

up to house-to-house enumeration and during the canvasing of the survey. Overall SEC

Census publicity was minimal. The negligible advertising by state was particularly

noticeable when compared to two other projects that occurred just before and after the

SEC census. The decentralization of publicity resulted in minimal publicity in this

district, which meant that caste associations and networks with limited ties to the state

would not have known about caste enumeration in advance. In contrast, caste associations

with networks to senior politicians and bureaucrats would have had a much greater

opportunity of learning about the census and mobilizing in advance, if it would benefit them.

As a result of this broader set of conditions, people in Bangalore had little sense of why the data were being collected, or the types of data that were being collected, prior to when a data collection team knocked on their door.[303] Particularly among urban households that had not previously participated in a BPL census, data collectors were left to communicate to households why they were collecting the data and what the question and answer options were.

The training of enumerators created a situation where enumerators are trained to see the caste and religion question in a particular way, in which every individual in a household should be enumerated and 'no caste/ is an acceptable answer. The limited discussion about how caste and religion interact, both in the training program and manual for enumerators, reflects a visible gap in centralized planning that was not filled in or addressed by the local state. This practice of the centralized state meant that the data were likely to be less useful in support of Dalit Muslim and Christian efforts to be recognized and given reservation benefits similar to other SCs. In addition, the use of tablets and the design of the electronic data entry program elevated the position of DEOs, who had little substantive training on the questionnaire or the broader implication of the project. The elevated position of the DEO, the training program for enumerators, and the lack of

---

[303] While rural households have previously participated in socioeconomic censuses to determine which households fall below the poverty line, this census is the first time that households in urban areas are being enumerated for this purpose. As a result, urban households consistently incorrectly think—based on enumerator or data entry operator introductions that they "are collecting census data"—that the data collection is part of the 2011 decennial census.

publicity surrounding the SEC Census shape the context in which census data are

generated during the household interview, which is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: THE CENSUS INTERVIEW

Excerpt from February 27, 2012 field notes, Bangalore, India:

The first building we enumerate today is a three-story apartment with one unit on each floor.[304] On the ground floor, a woman in her late thirties opens the front door. Sir [the data entry operator] explains that we are here "for census work." The woman invites the three of us into her drawing room and asks us to sit down. Her teenage son stands and watches.

There are four members in the household: (1) the respondent; (2) her husband; (3) her son; (4) her mother-in-law. After collecting basic demographic information about each member of the household (i.e. name, relationship to head of household, date of birth, sex), Sir asks for more detailed information about each individual. He begins with the head of household—the husband of the respondent—and inquires about his level of education and occupation. The woman responds "degree" and "works in a bank." For the question on 'highest education level completed,' Sir selects '7: graduate or higher' from the dropdown menu on the tablet. He then chooses '9: other work' for the question on 'main source of income.' He also enters data for the subsequent question on frequency of wage payments and selects 'monthly.' He makes this inference about the wages based on the husband's employment at a bank. Sir then asks the woman if there is anyone in the household who has a disability. The woman mentions someone has "sugar" and Sir qualifies "by birth." The woman shakes her head, indicating 'no.' Sir records '7: non-disabled' for the disability question and '6: no chronic illness' for the subsequent question on chronic illnesses. For the three subsequent members of the household, he later records the same responses for the two health-related questions. By now Ma'am [the enumerator] has completed filling out the census acknowledgement slip, which includes the names of the household members. She only requires the signature of the respondent and will ask for it after the interview is complete.

Sir continues with the interview and asks the respondent, "caste?" At the same time, he enters 'Hindu' for the religion of head of household, without directly asking the woman about her husband's religion. The woman responds

---

[304] Our data collection team consists of a female enumerator, male data entry operator and me. The enumerator is an anganwadi worker (i.e., daycare/nursery teacher) for the Bangalore Municipal Corporation. Like many female enumerators, she prefers to spend the long hours of census work with someone she knows; she has asked her husband to partner with her as a data entry operator. For nearly two months, they spend almost every afternoon and early evening walking the streets of central Bangalore. Together, they enumerate approximately 700 households in four enumeration blocks. Although I am similar in age to the enumerator, because I am still a student and seem younger I refer to her as 'ma'am' and call the data entry operator (who is probably a few years older than me) 'sir.'

"Shri-xxxxxx." Sir looks up briefly from his tablet computer and asks the woman to repeat herself. The woman says what sounds like "Srivaishna," though she speaks quickly so it is difficult to follow. Sir continues to look at the woman. After another moments pause, she explains "Brahmin." Sir smiles, nods and looks back down at his computer screen. He selects '3-Other' for the categorical question on caste, and then enters 'Brahmin' for the subsequent open-ended question on caste.[305]

This interview occurred on my fifth day accompanying this enumerator and data entry operator pair in a neighborhood in the center of Bangalore. For the household interviewed in the opening passage, it was probably the first time the respondent had provided detailed information about her family's caste for a central government census. As with millions of other Indian households who are not SC or ST, previous census enumerators would have simply recorded the members in this household as 'not SC or ST.' As members of a forward caste, the individuals in this household are ineligible for affirmative action benefits and, given the assets that they possess, government officials will use data from the SEC Census to identify this household as 'above the poverty line' (APL).

Several things occur during this SEC Census interview. First, the data entry operator records answers to certain questions without specifically posing the question. The DEO makes reasonable inferences based upon responses to other questions (e.g. the information provided about occupation is used to answer the wage question), objects

---

[305] As mentioned earlier, 2011 SEC Census has three inter-related questions on caste: Q1: An open-ended question on religion. Q2: A categorical question on caste with four answer options: i. Scheduled Caste (SC), ii. Scheduled Tribe (ST), iii. Other, iv. No Caste/Tribe; only individuals recorded as Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist for Q1 can be recorded as ST in Q2.

Q3: A question on sub-caste; for individuals recorded as SC or ST to Q2, this question involves selecting a subcaste from a pre-existing state-specific SC or ST list; for anyone categorized as 'other' in Q2, this question is open-ended and the data collector is expected to record the respondent's stated subcaste. For those individuals recorded as having 'no caste/tribe" in Q2, sub-caste data are not collected.

161

within or outside the home,[306] or a combination of these factors. For example, the DEO enters that each member of the household is 'Hindu' without explicitly asking about religion. Names of family members, religious icons and other items in the apartment, and caste information provide this DEO with sufficient detail to record an answer to the religion question. Second, the respondent shifts from answering with a local caste name to a category with nationwide resonance (i.e., Brahmin). In this case through his silence, the interviewer plays a role in re-categorizing the respondent's response, and changes the degree of standardization or simplification of the data. However, the recatgorization of local caste identities into 'Brahmin' by the same DEO is uneven. Earlier the same week, I observed the DEO re-categorize the subcaste Iyengar into Brahmin, but I also observed him record Iyer as 'Iyer,' which is another common Brahmin surname. While the interviewers' identities and perceptions may shape re-categorization,[307] these processes often occur unintentionally although they generally lead to increased simplification of the data. Third, the perspectives of the respondent may also evolve as a result of the interview. While the respondent will undoubtedly continue to think and experience Srivaishna as one of her family's identities, for the purpose of future government surveys and data collection, she may likely think that Brahmin is the category of interest. In addition, the respondent's young teenage son also took part in the interview as an observer and may have been influenced by the encounter. The social encounter across

---

[306] As one such example, many homes in Karnataka have a drawing on the ground in the entryway of the home; a knowledgeable person could infer about the religion and caste of the household based on this drawing. However, most data collectors that I observed asked about the religion of the head of household even if they could deduce it from the household name and other clues during the interview.

[307] Both the enumerator and DEO in the opening passage are 'Brahmins' from the State of Karnataka.

data collectors and households during the census interview helps to construct caste data and shape self-understandings.

In this chapter, I examine how micro-level social processes, such as the household interview, play a role in knowledge-making practices of the contemporary Indian state. Based upon observations of 300 household interviews of the SEC Census in Bangalore and 30 semi-structured interviews with enumerated households in Bangalore Urban and Rural Districts, I show how interactions across data collectors and respondents shape caste data. I observed the census interviews by joining several data collection teams and accompanying them daily during their census work. By spending about a week with each data collection team, they became accustomed to having me observe their work. We generally conducted census interviews for 4 to 8 hours a day, 7 days a week. We would usually meet midday, after the data collectors spent the morning at their regular jobs, and enumerate well into the evening. Along with my observations of census interviews, I participated in side conversations with data collectors and got to know many of them personally. I also take advantage of my observations of other aspects of ground level census operations in the Bangalore metro area, including trainings of enumerators and supervisors, the operations of local charge centers (where survey teams download census data from their PC tablets), and the work of a private company involved in local data entry and processing. Through this fieldwork, I observed the micro-level negotiations involved in the production of census data.

This chapter shows how proceses of quantification are politically and socially embedded and also contributes to the dissertation's broader argument by contextualizing the observed practices within a longer historical timefraom and in light of what is

occuring at other parts of the census making process. In doing so, it shows how power is operating in distinct ways. First, the emerging practices are manifestations of, and contribute to, the broader struggle over classifcation that that the previous two chapters have discussed. In particular, the construction of the 'no caste' answer and the enumeration of religious minorities directly intersects within these onoing battles. Also highly visible at the level of the household interview, but perhaps less interesting to the overall argument of the dissertation, but are two additional patterns. The particular cognitive frames and world views of data collectors shape patterns of data collection, and sometimes in idiosyncratic ways, which illustrate how the data are embedded in social processes but not always clearly connected to the operation of power. The example in the opening passage illustrates this type of process. In addition, another patterns that emerges in the social process of producing the data reflect hierarchies of power in the private sphere and within politics more broadly. In this regard, an adult male is identified as the head of household and his religious and caste identity is recorded for all members of the family, even instances where marriage relations follow less traditional arrangements.The production of caste data during the census interview involves as series of simplifications which both help to reproduce the power of social elites within society, caste endogamy, and gender hiearchies within the household. In urban areas where data collectors and household respondents are unknown to one another, the production of caste data must be understood within the norms and experiences of building trust during the face-to-face interaction of the household interview. Peoples' emerging understandings of 'what is at stake' heavily shape this interaction and the resulting data.

The core theoretical concern of this chapter is how the census interview shapes the production of caste data. In much of the social science literature, enumeration processes remain relatively taken-for-granted. In the short-term encounter between the interviewer and respondent, the interviewer records pre-existing facts about the respondent or other members of her household. The wording and sequencing of questions matter in this process and influence the data that are generated. This largely extractive view of household interviews lies at the heart of social science survey research and the production of census data. Yet, particularly for politically charged social categories (e.g. caste, race, sex/gender), I argue that an extractive view of the household interview is insufficient. Processes of enumeration and classification create 'social equivalents' across certain individuals and groups, through a series of practices that involves considerable work and a variety of simplifications.[308] These 'social equivalents' make sense within a historically specific set of understandings, experiences, and social relations; they are also shaped by, and help to maintain, a particular set of power relations. This chapter scrutinizes the social equivalents that I observed, and examines if and how they help to reproduce social hierarchies, within the context Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction. At times, misrecognition is at work, and observations of census interviews help to highlight the specific ways in which these processes unfold.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. Section one provides an overview to the local context of SEC Census data collection, with particular attention to the relationships, knowledge and objects that influence the household interview. The second section provides an overview to the household interview. Section 3 looks in detail at the

[308] Curtis 2001: 4.

production of caste data during the household interview. It examines several types of

simplifications that occur and how they shape caste data. Section four discusses the

implications of these observations for marginalized groups in India. The final section

discusses the larger implications of the chapter's findings.

4.1. Local Context of SEC Census

Household interviews take place within a broader setting. In Karnataka, several factors

play an important role in shaping the context of SEC Census household interviews.

As discussed in chapter three, in Karnataka there was limited media coverage

both in local newspapers and on television, and advertising by the state is also negligible.

This is particularly noticeable when compared to similar government projects that had

considerable state-initiated publicity. In addition, local caste-based organizations were

quiet with regards to the SEC Census. As a result of these factors, very few people in

Karnataka knew about the SEC Census prior to when a data collection team knocked on

their door or entered their lane. Urban households have not previously been enumerated

for BPL surveys. As a result, urban households consistently incorrectly think—based on

enumerator or data entry operator introductions that they "are collecting census data"—

that the SEC Census data collection is part of the 2011 decennial census, not a separate

Socio-Economic Caste Census. In contrast, rural households throughout India have

previously participated in three socioeconomic or BPL censuses that have sought to

identify the households that fall below the poverty line (and are therefore eligible for state

welfare programs). As a result, rural households have a reference point from which to

distinguish the SEC Census from the decennial census. As a result, most urban

households do not understand why SEC Census data are being collected and what is at stake during the interview.

Against this backdrop, the role of the data collectors becomes elevated, as they are left to convey the purpose and the content of specific census questions. The data collection team—consisting of the government-appointed enumerator and private sector data entry operator—provides the sole explanation for the census. In the instances when I saw an enumerator or DEO explain the purpose of the interview, they would usually vaguely describe it as 'census work,' and in many cases they did not provide any explanation. As a result, urban households consistently and incorrectly assume that the SEC Census interview is part of the decennial census. This widespread public misunderstanding is particularly ironic given that the Congress-led central government leadership backed out of its original promise to ask about caste as part of the 2011 Indian Decennial Census and redirected the collection of these caste data to the SEC Census in order to avoid 'polluting' the decennial census (see Chapter 2 for more details). Yet, on the ground, the behavior of data collectors leads people to think that the SEC Census is the decennial census, which has widespread awareness, legitimacy and participation.

Finally, contrary to the plan put forth by census administrators, most enumerators take a back seat role to DEOs during the census interview. The use of the tablet PC for data entry and the specific shortcomings of the data entry program elevate the position of the DEO. When both the DEO and enumerator participate in a household interview, as with the opening passage, I usually observed the DEO both asking questions and deciding what to enter into the PC tablet. As a result, the DEO's understanding and communication of questions and answers heavily shapes data production during the

interview. In addition, many enumerators and DEOs in Bangalore knew each other prior

to working together on a data collection team. This routinely occurs in areas where

enumerators were allowed to recommend a data entry operator to serve as their partner.

In these instances, I find that the role of the DEO expands in scope with little resistance

from the enumerator, as the DEO is a well-known person.

4.2. Overview to Census Interview

The household interviews that I observed varied in length from a few minutes to more

than a half an hour, depending on the practices of data collection teams and the

communities they were enumerating. This section describes how enumerators and DEOs

collect data and do their work and focuses on three aspects of their work: the

identification of households, the interview, and the process of acknowledging that the

household had been interviewed.

Identification of the Household

> The first building we visit today is a three-story apartment building with one unit on
> each floor. Standing outside the gate leading into the small compound with the
> building, Ma'am [the enumerator] locates the building on the hand-drawn layout map
> of the block. The building is numbered 37 on the map. She flips through the pages of
> the Abridged Household Listing provided by the RGI and eventually finds building
> number 37 for which there are three entries: 37(1), 37(2), 37(3). She finds the serial
> number associated with the ground floor unit and tells Sir [the DEO] "148." He types
> the number into his handheld tablet. "Hah-ah," says Sir as data on the household from
> the NPR appears on the screen. Sir states the name of the head of household, from the
> first row of the form. Ma'am nods --it matches the name of the head of household
> written in the house list. Sir opens the front gate and we walk through open gate into
> the compound. Using his right hand, Sir knocks on the front door, which has
> decorations outside the door signaling that it is a South Indian Hindu household. In
> his left hand he is holding the handheld device. A few seconds later, a woman in her
> late thirties opens the door at look at us. Sir tells her that we are "from the Census"
> showing her the handheld device and asks if this is "the house of Suresh R.L.? The
> woman nods and invites us into the front hall. She asks us to sit down on the chairs as
> she stands near the front door. Her son observes from another corner of the room. Sir

begins to confirm the name, gender and age of the four household members based on preloaded data. [309]

During the identification of the household and its members, the enumerator is expected to use a map of the assigned enumeration block and the Abridged Household Listing (AHL), which includes all the households in that block based on the 2011 Decennial Census, to locate a particular structure and household within that structure. The hand-drawn map of the enumeration block provides a bird-eye view of the building structures, roads, and open spaces located within the delimited region of the block. Each building on the map is numbered and the enumerator uses this number to cross-identify the building in the AHL, which was produced during the first 'household listing phase' of the 2011 Decennial Census between April and September 2010 and updated during the 'enumeration phase' of the Decennial Census in February 2011. The AHL includes a record for each unit within each building drawn on the layout map. For each household unit, the name of the head of household is included in the AHL. In addition, a series of numbers are assigned to identify the geographic location of the household and link it to various government data registers. Used together, the layout map and house list identify spaces within an enumeration block where the enumerator and data entry operator find and interview households.

In her initial introduction to a household, the enumerator is expected to verify that the household living in a space matches the government record for that space, as per the AHL. If the household being enumerated matches the government record of who lives in the space, the enumerator is expected to tell the DEO the serial number for the household,

---

[309] Fieldnotes, February 27, 2012.

which links the household to preloaded NPR data on the handheld device.[310] If the DEO

cannot find an electronic record for a particular household even though the household has

been identified in the AHL then the DEO creates a new entry. If the household differs

from that in the AHL, the DEO is also expected to create a new electronic file for the

household. If a household was not enumerated during the NPR then it will not have

preloaded data on the handheld device.

In the excerpt above, two aspects of the identification process differ from how

those who scripted the performance imagined it to be. First, DEO pulls ups the preloaded

data for the household prior to our interaction with any member in the household.

Second, the DEO begins and will later continue the interview. The DEO has easy access

to the preloaded data on the household and holds the handheld tablet. As the prompts of

the data entry program do not match the paper questionnaire, particularly during the start

of the interview, it is much easier for the DEO to be asking questions to confirm the

scanned data from the NPR and then continue collecting the data on each household

member. During the initial encounter between the data collectors and the household, the

tablet PC and preloaded data are signals to the respondent that the data collection team is

here to do official ongoing government work.

---

[310] The preloaded data on the handheld device is from the National Population Registrar (NPR) and was collected between April and September 2010 during the houselisting phase of the 2011 decennial census. NPR data does not come under the Census Act and is therefore not confidential; its purpose it to provide data for the UID Card or a biometric identification card for every person living in India. In Bangalore, Data Base Administers (DBAs) scanned the NPR forms and created an entry for each household in every enumeration block in their assigned ward. I was very surprised that DBAs had to do this work because data entry has already occurred for the decennial census. I imagine the decennial census data couldn't be merged into the SEC Census program, because it is protected under the Census Act unlike the NPR data.

Canvassing the Questionnaire

After the household and its current members have been identified, the enumerator is expected to "start asking questions regarding each member of the household in the order they have been entered."[311] A large 11x14 questionnaire given to enumerators as part of the enumerator toolkit; it is from this sheet of paper that the enumerator is expected to read out each question to the respondent.

The enumerator is expected begin the interview by collecting data on sixteen individual-level questions for each member of the household: name, age, gender, relationship to head of household, occupation, wage, disability (2 questions) religion, caste (2 questions). After collecting these 'individual-level' data for every member of the household, the enumerator asks eight remaining house-hold level questions that focus on the material and construction of the home (i.e., material of walls, roof, etc.) and goods owned by the household (i.e., phone, computer, refrigerator, vehicle). Those designing the SEC Census put forth that that two distinct types of data are being collected: individual and household. The paper census schedule is labeled as such and the training of enumerators reiterates this view. At an enumerator training that I attended, the head trainer went in detail through the questionnaire, using a paper version of the questionnaire. At this point in the training, the trainer also handed out a paper version of the questionnaire to all of the enumerators. On side A of the paper questionnaire, there are 16 questions focused on 'individual particulars' and on side B of the paper questionnaire there are 15 questions focus on 'household particulars.'

---

[311] Government of India, 2011. *Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011: Instruction Manual for Enumerators - Urban*. Delhi: Ministry of Urban Housing and Poverty Alleviation.

The opening excerpts to this chapter and this section suggest that several aspects of the performed interview differ from the script. First, the DEO most often interviews households, while the enumerator plays a back end role. The prompts of the data entry program do not match the paper questionnaire—particularly during the start of the interview. Therefore, for data entry to occur real-time at the start of the interview it is much easier for the DEO to be asking questions to confirm the scanned data from the NPR and continue collecting the data on each household member. In some instances, the enumerator did interview the households, but based on my observations and the interviews with enumerated household this usually occurred when data were not being entered real-time. Instead the enumerator was recording the answers on a sheet of paper, and the enumerator would later give the paper to the DEO to enter the data into the handheld tablet. I observed this type of mobile data entry center set up in multiple ways. In one case in an urban slum where more than one household would be enumerated from one location, the enumerator and DEO stayed together, but the enumerator wrote the answers on a sheet of paper and quickly completed interviews (it is much quicker to complete an interview if data is recorded on a paper than the data entry program). The data entry operator would record answers from the collected sheet. In a second case the enumerator went door to door in a government housing complex collecting and recording data on a sheet of paper. The DEO sat at one location in the housing complex and the enumerator would periodically visit the DEO to give him "completed interview."

Second, certain data was collected for one member of the household and applied to other members of the household. The questions about disability, health, caste and religion were often asked just once. Through my observations of door-to-door data

collection and during conversations with enumerated households, I repeatedly saw that religion and caste were family identities reinforced by the discourses and understandings of respondents ("*We* are Hindu (Christian/Muslim)" and enumerators/ data entry operators. I will discuss this in greater length in the next section. There was a different understanding that underlay not asking disability and health questions of each member of the household. These questions seemed socially uncomfortable to ask of a stranger. The data collectors felt like they were intruding or asking too personal information with regards to these two questions. As a result, they were usually asked in bundled way. "Is anyone in the house sick?" or "Does anyone in the household have an illness?" Asking each member of the household a personal question in too personal of a way was not respectful—especially given their status as a visitor/guest.

Third, during most interviews there were several questions were not asked at all. The specific questions not asked varied somewhat by household, although general patterns also persisted. One question where DEOs consistently entered an answer without asking, as in the opening excerpt, was for the question related to income. Similar to the disability and health questions, this information was considered personal, but unlike the disability question it could be reasonably inferred based on the answer to the occupation question and being in the person's home. Similarly the question on religion was often not asked, because DEO's could again infer the answer based on being in the respondent's house, along with information about the respondent's name. Large pictures of Hesu [Jesus] could be found in the front hall of Christian homes. External and internal decorations, wall hanging, and photos similarly communicated whether one worshiped to Allah or Shiva. In families with small temple or shrine, deities such as Hanuman, Vishnu

and Ganesha were visible. Sometimes the DEO would simply enter "Hindu" or "Muslim" or "Christian" without asking, while sometimes they might ask "You are Christian?" as a prompt instead of "what is your religion?" In a two-room joint family household in Bangalore with six family members, the grandmother, who was interviewed by the census enumerators told us, "No. they [the enumerator and data entry operator] did not ask about religion. They asked about the caste. I told them we are Brahmins (Madhavas)."[312] Sitting in the small hall, where both our conversation and the interview with census officials occurred, asking about religion would have seemed unnecessary. The statues of deities were clearly visible and there were enough other clues that this was a Hindu house and—to a careful observer—a Brahmin house. Questions about the structure of the house and goods that the household possessed were often not asked directly if the DEO could make an assessment based on what they could see. For example, in a poor slum household, the DEO would not ask if the household had a computer or washing machine. There was a hierarchy; for example if a household lacked electricity, the data collectors would still ask if the household had a mobile phone, but not a computer.

Verification and Acknowledgments

> After completing the entry for the final question about the household possession, Sir nods his head from side to side and says that he is finished. He then completes two remaining questions entering that the household agrees to have their data posted publicly and that the enumerator and DEO find the provided information to be truthful. At the same time, Ma'am speaks to the respondent to get her signature for the acknowledgement slip. By now Ma'am has completed filling out the acknowledgement slip that lists the names of the four members of the household; she only requires the signature of the respondent and will ask for it after the interview is

---

[312] Fieldnotes, January 15, 2012.

complete. After securing the signature she tears the slip and hands portion to the respondent. We thank her for her assistance and leave. Upon exiting the home, Ma'am places a sticker on the outside front door and we climb the stairs on the side of the building to enumerate the two apartment units above the ground floor unit. [313]

After the individual and household level data have been collected, there are several steps in securing proof that the interview has occurred. First, the enumerator is supposed to ask the respondent for permission to post the collected data publicly (except for the caste and religion data). Then, the enumerator and data entry operator are supposed to record whether they think the collected information is accurate. Then, the enumerator is expected to complete an acknowledgment slip.[314] One portion of the slip is kept by the enumerator (this is the portion of the slip that is signed by the respondent) and the other portion of the slip is given to the respondent (this portion is signed by the enumerator and data entry operator). The portion of the slip that the enumerator keeps, she returns to her superior as proof that the household has been enumerated. Enumerators are also asked to put a sticker outside the door of the enumerated household and write a number on the outside of each household entry to indicate that the house has been enumerated. The written number corresponds with the number on the map and household listing. After all the households in a block have been enumerated, the enumerator is expected to create an abstract based on the revised houselist.

I never saw the enumerator or data entry operator ask for permission to publicly post data. Instead, as in the case above, they would simply enter "yes" in the data entry

---

[313] Fieldnotes, February 27, 2012.

[314] For each enumerated household a receipt slip is completed. The enumerator fills in basic information about the household including the names and gender of each member, the total number of individuals in the household and identifying information about the enumerator and the data entry operator.

program. The religion and caste data were not publicly posted, except in the case of SCs or ST for which SC or ST status was noted in the public record.

4.3. Processes of Simplification

Census data create a representation of an individual, household or population that becomes easy to act upon. Yet, the process of collecting these data involves considerable work and a variety of simplifications. The excerpt from my field notes that opened this chapter describes a household interview in which the respondent shifts from answering with a local subcaste name (i.e., Srivaishnava) to a more general caste category (i.e., Brahmin). This example of standardization emerges from the behavior of a specific DEO.[315] Given the structure of the data program and its overall slowness, it is easier for DEOs to ask questions and record answers, which previously were the core functions of an enumerator. Yet, the simplification in this example follows the government's overall approach to the production of official caste tables; it is unlikely that final caste tables for Karnataka will list "Srivaishnava", but will likely include categories for "Brahmin" or "Forward Caste." While standardization is part of the process of producing census data, census administrators desire control over these processes. They do not want ground-level data collectors to drive these types of simplifications based on their personal social maps or idiosyncrasies.

---

[315] Like many data collection teams, this DEO generally both asked questions and recorded answers into the PC tablet during interviews, instead of having the enumerator coordinate the asking of questions while the DEO enters the data. For most interviews, the enumerator limited her duties to helping to identify a household in the household listing, placing an SEC Census sticker and writing the census number on the front door of the house, and filling out an acknowledgement slip. Given my observations of limited cases where the enumerator conducted the interview, I think she would have recorded the respondent's first answer (Srivaishnava).

In this section, I describe three types of simplifications that I observed repeatedly during the SEC Census data collection to show how micro-level interactions shape the type of caste data that are produced. I unpack how caste data emerge within the context of social norms that shape face-to-face interactions among strangers during the census interview. In the conclusion to this chapter, I will discuss how these different cases relate to the operation of social power.

The construction of the 'no caste' answer

In Bangalore, due to a lack of publicity around the census, respondents are not aware of the possible answer choices to the categorical question on caste; therefore, response of 'no caste' option was not known to be an option.[316] This option has not existed in previous decennial censuses. Whether or not to offer up this answer option depends on data collectors—and more importantly—their perceptions of the respondents. My field notes from the enumeration of a single-family house in central Bangalore provide an example of how the 'no caste' option is produced:

> Before we knock on the front door of a large single-family home in the center of Bangalore, Vijayalakshmi [the enumerator] puts a SEC Census sticker outside the door. A middle-aged man, who turns out to be the son of the head of household, arrives as we are standing there. He looks at the sticker and reads aloud "Socioeconomic and Caste census." He then says "Caste census? Why? We are all one caste—we are all Indians." Mohan [the data entry operator] quickly replies, "No problem, sir. That is also an option.'" Ten minutes later, midway through the interview, Mohan gets to the religion/caste question and offers up "I'll put 'Indian,' and then 'no caste'." Everyone gathered in the hall nods in agreement. Vijayalakshmi says to Mohan "you can also put 'Hindu' and then 'no caste'." Mohan says to her as

---

[316] In contrast, in neighboring Tamil Nadu, where greater politicization of the collection of caste data led to a situation where many more people knew that 'no caste' was an option, there was greater publicity around the SEC census and some community newspapers even printed the questionnaire in full, so that certain publics may have been aware of the question and answer options prior to the household interview. However, in urban Karnataka, the production of the 'no caste' answer was heavily dependent on the specific interactions between data collectors and households.

he continues to enter data into the PC tablet "Hindu, Muslim, Christians—all are Indian." For each member of the household, Mohan enters 'Indian' for the religion field and choses the 'no caste' option for the categorical question on caste.[317]

In this example, 'no caste' is offered up as response to the question on caste when the data collectors feel that asking about caste will offend the sensibilities of the respondent. In the case of my observations in Bangalore, this most commonly occurs among a subset of well-to-do households who identify as 'Hindu' but who do not see themselves as beholden to a caste identity. The data collectors ask the question and give the option of 'no caste' within the same statement: "Sir, your caste? If you wish you can say no caste." Once offered, the option is almost always taken and there is usually a fairly clear signal beforehand that it will be.

The designers of the SEC Census are aware that for the average Indian, such as a schoolteacher serving as an enumerator, the 'no caste' option does not make immediate sense. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, during the enumerator training, considerable work is involved to make the 'no caste' option a real choice. Through a role-play, the Master Trainer depicts that this answer will naturally emerge from the certain respondents, if they are asked, "What is your caste?" Contrary to their own sensibilities, the enumerators need to be open to the 'no caste' option as it may be relevant among a subset of educated and well-to-do urban households. Embedded in educating the enumerators about the 'no caste' answer option is the message about a particular type of respondent who might choose this response.

---

[317] Field notes, March 2, 2012.

In contrast, in my observations of census interviews in an urban slum no one hesitated to talk about caste and the 'no caste' answer was never constructed. Again, an excerpt from my fieldnotes:

> "When I arrive in the slum, Shalini [the enumerator] and Sumitra [the data entry operator] are one lane over from where we left off the previous night. They are sitting on a stone with 4 to 5 children around them. Over the course of the next hour, they complete the details for another three families by asking questions to the kids. One little boy is 5 and answers about his family—namely himself and his two grandparents who care for him. He knows their names and Shalini estimates their ages. When Shalini asks the boy the name of his parents, the other kids shout, "he doesn't have any," (because the boy doesn't live with his parents) but he proudly says, "Baiappa and Baiamma." When Shalini asks him about his caste, the boy pauses and then begins to reply, but before he can answer an older neighbor boy standing next to quickly responds, "He is SC -- Chalvadi." This is a very easy question for anyone in the slum to answer because of the clustering by caste within the slum." [318]

Unlike the first example from a wealthy neighborhood where almost all the residents belong to forward castes, among the 100 households living in this slum for construction workers more than 80 percent are Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. As I mentioned earlier, SCs and STs have been providing caste information during every post-colonial census, as part of the process of administering India's system of affirmative action. Due to a history of sharing caste information, members of this community would not conceive that 'no caste' is an option on a government survey, unless otherwise notified.

In this community, there is complete residential segregation by caste such that all of the families living in the same lane or row share a subcaste identity. Individuals also have considerable knowledge about other households living in the same lane. With regards to caste, in particular, respondents would repeatedly explain, "This whole lane is Chalvadi." The 'no-caste answer' was neither constructed in this slum, nor in a second

---

[318] Field notes, December 9, 2011.

slum-like colony in another peripheral part of the city where I observed census interviews.

While the government attempts to introduce the concept of 'no caste' to enumerators through the three day training and associated training materials, the government does not make a similar effort to ensure that household respondents know about the 'no caste' option. The lack of local publicity surrounding the introduction of the 'no caste' answer means the average person simply doesn't know that 'no caste' is a possible response.

I observed the 'no caste' answer being jointly constructed by the data collectors and respondents. Enumerators and data entry operators offer up the 'no caste' option to certain households (and not others) when they sense that to do so will ease the process of collecting data and increase the likelihood for participation. In the first example, Mohan seeks to smooth things over when he offers up the option to record 'Indian' and 'no caste' respectively for the questions on religion and caste, after the respondent explicitly signals that he does not agree with the collection of caste data. In the other instances, the respondent does not necessarily express an explicit distain towards providing caste information. Based on the high social position and wealth of the family, data collectors assume that a respondent may not want to provide their caste details and convey to the respondent that 'no caste' is an option. Given the social distance between the data collectors and respondents in these cases, data collectors are particularly sensitive to avoid offending the sensibilities of respondents.

The data collectors' contribution towards the production of 'no caste' helps to avoid or limit awkward or embarrassing moments. However, the potentially

'embarrassing' nature of caste data varies across social class and caste, as does the sources of the embarrassment. In the instances where I observed data collectors offering up the 'no caste' option, they were trying to be respectful of a certain sensibility that views caste as an irrelevant identity in the 21st century. The motivation for this position varies in important ways from social movements aiming to eradicate the caste system, which started in South India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many leaders and participants in these movements intentionally disavowed their caste identities and intermarried in their efforts to dismantle the caste system. In contrast, in the urban slum, everyone openly talks about caste and it very openly structures where people live within the slum. In the case of Bangalore, the option of 'no caste' emerges within a section of the social and economic elite who perceives that caste no longer shapes life opportunities.

Attribution of religion and caste

Almost universally in my observations, DEOs attribute the caste and religion information provided about the head of household to other individuals within the family, without additional inquiry. From 300 or so observations of census interviews, I only observed one interview where the data collectors asked about religion or caste for more than just the head of household. Why do enumerators and data entry operators—who ask about the gender, age and occupation of each member of the household—so readily attribute the caste and religion of the head of household to the remaining members of the family?

Like most Indians, those involved in the census interview conceive of religion and caste as household identities. Even in 21st century Bangalore, individuals overwhelmingly view religion and caste as family identities. For example, after discussing that a head of household is 'Hindu' or 'Muslim,' it makes sense neither to the

181

data collectors nor the respondent to ask about the religion of the other people in the household. Religion and caste are perceived of as identities one is born into and not individual choices. [319] While there are situations where individuals have changed their religion, no longer identify with their caste, or have intermarried, these acts from the perspective of prevailing social norms remain the exception and are not usually discussed with strangers. To ask about the religion of each member of the household would seem odd and break the rhythm of moving through the interview.

Yet, if any place in India has a potentially legible population of inter-caste marriages it is Bangalore. While arranged, intra-caste marriages continue to predominate throughout India, processes of attribution are potentially masking changing patterns of family formation in communities like Bangalore and other metro cities in India.

From the perspective of those participating in the household interview, this type of *attribution* avoids awkward or embarrassing moments, similar to the construction of the 'no caste' answer. To ask about the religion of each member of the household would be socially awkward and break the flow and process of building rapport with the interviewee. Data collectors do not want to unnecessarily imply that individuals living within the same household might belong to different castes.

While those who design the survey want individual-level data on caste—and thus the data collector is supposed to ask about these identities for each member of the

---

[319] In contrast, there are several questions that census officials 'imagine' as individual data that data collectors and households perceive vary by individual (e.g., relationship to head of household, sex, year of birth, marital status, name of mother, name of father, occupational activity, income, frequency of wage payment). The two questions on disability fall into a third category of question type that were conceived as individual characteristics but often (but not always) asked at the household-level (e.g., "Is everyone in the household healthy?" Or "Does anyone have a disability?"). My observations of household enumerations and interviews of enumerated households thus reveal that the questions on "individual particulars" actually fall into three different categories of questions, which reflect three different shared understandings.

family—the lived experiences of caste and religion are as shared family identities. As a result, this pattern of simplification is nearly universal in my observations. Only in one household, which appeared nontraditional in multiple regards, did I observe an enumerator asking separately about the caste of a husband and wife. The couple was young (in their early 20s) and living on their own in an illegal rooftop apartment with the husband's younger sister. The arrangement suggested that this could be a 'love marriage' and opened up the possibility that they are of different caste backgrounds. Also noteworthy is that in this data collection team, the enumerator continued to play an active role during interviews.[320] In addition, the enumerator was a schoolteacher in her forties and the respondent (the young wife) was in her early twenties; this difference in age and similarity in gender made the enumerator's inquiry about the respondent's caste, after already asking her husband's caste, seem less intrusive and disrespectful.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the designers of the census are not naïve to the discrepancy between the data they want (i.e., individual-level data) and the common perception and experience of caste and religion as family identities. Multiple efforts are taken during the enumerator training and in the training materials to convey the census administrators' perspective.[321] They emphasize that enumerators should collect data on religion and caste for each member of the household. An excerpt from my field notes

---

[320] Over time this team developed techniques to cope with the slowness of the data entry program and by using both members of the data entry team in creative ways. Although they did not know each other prior to working together on the census, in age and position the enumerator was senior to the DEO, and both were female.

[321] As mentioned in Chapter 3, during a role-play exercise during the enumerator training, the enumerator systematically asked about each question for each member of the made-up family, including the questions on religion and caste.

from the second day of an enumerator training drives home this point based on a

comment made by the master trainer:

> "When you ask them about their religion, record whatever they say. If they say
> Hindu, Christian or Muslim—whatever they say record it. If they say, "I don't have a
> religion, I am atheist"—record that. Write what they say in full. Ask this question
> about every member of the household. It is not necessary for every member to have
> the same religion, okay? Don't assume that just because the head of household is
> Hindu that the other people in the house are. You must ask, okay?" The lead trainer
> looks around the room as he is talking to make sure that everyone understands his
> point. [322]

The training program emphasizes that enumerators should ask about the caste and

religion of every member of the household, as these identities might vary across

individuals. However, I never once observed an interview unfold in this manner.

Along with driving home this point through the enumerator-training program,

census administrators developed new technologies that support the collection of

individual level data on caste and religion. For example, the data entry program requires

entering caste and religion information for each member of the household. DEOs cannot

simply record the caste information for all members of a family at one time; instead, they

must complete all of the SEC Census questions for one individual before proceeding to

the next person in the family. This requires the DEO to remember the answer and enter it

for the next individual after first completing twelve other 'individual-level' census

questions. While the training program and data entry system push for the collection of

data for each member of the household, the enumerators' and respondents' social maps as

well as the social process of collecting the data leads the data collectors to do otherwise.

This pattern of attribution emerges because social norms structure how data collectors ask

---

[322] Fieldnotes, December 11, 2011.

and answer the question, while the technology—reflecting the views and predispositions of the census administrators and other users of the data—structures how the data are recorded.

Caste and Religion Minorities

Many converts to Christianity and Islam in India left Hinduism because of the discrimination they experienced within the caste system. But as caste structures so many aspects of social life, it has not been easy to leave behind. For individuals belonging to historically outcaste groups this is particularly true. Most Dalit Muslims and Christians continue to face considerable discrimination after converting—both within their families and larger communities. They are often forced to worship in separate churches and temples. The caste system has reproduced itself in particular ways within various minority religions in different parts of South Asia.

During my observations of re-enumeration in a densely packed predominantly Muslim neighborhood in the periphery of Bangalore, I also witnessed another pattern of standardization.[323] The following excerpt from an interview describes such a case:

> A woman opens the front door of a two-room home. She nods at the three of us, as Patma [the enumerator] asks her "name?" The woman answers "Ansari. Faizal Ansari" – giving the name of her husband. Patma continues, "your name?" The woman gives her name and then slowly lists the names of her children. Shareen [the data entry operator] records the woman's responses in a school-sized notebook, using a pencil. As the respondent states each name, Patma asks about the person's birthdate. The woman doesn't know the date of birth for her husband and herself—so Patma asks their age. After recording the birthdates of the four children, Shareen asks about the names of the woman's parents and her husband's parents, how much schooling each person has completed, and the type of work they do. The woman responds and Shareen records the information next to each name in her notebook.

---

[323] In Bangalore, a small number of enumeration blocks were identified for re-enumeration. In the selected blocks, the total population for the SEC Census was noticeably smaller than the count generated during the 2011 decennial census (and there was no obvious explanation for this difference, such as the clearance of a slum).

The interview continues and Shareen asks, "religion?" The woman responds, "Muslim." Shareen follows up, "caste?" The woman responds "Ansari." Shareen shakes her head, "Sunni or Shiite?" The woman looks at her for a moment. Shareen offers up, "Sunni, no?" The woman slowly nods. Shareen records "Sunni" and continues on with the interview. Shareen asks, "Do you have mobile? A two-wheeler or a four-wheeler? Washing machine?" After the woman explains that she only has a mobile, Shareen thanks her and we begin to walk away. As we are leaving, the woman asks us about the purpose of the interview. Patma simply replies, "The census."[324]

In this example, the data collectors and their supervisor (who I spoke with several times in the weeks prior to this interview) perceive two caste divisions within Islam: Sunni and Shiite. They systematically record 'Sunni' as the caste for all the Muslim families in this neighborhood—even when the families offer up a subcaste identity. Yet, Sunni doesn't appear to be a highly relevant identity to households in this neighborhood. The social maps of the data collectors and their supervisor heavily shape processes of simplification in this example.

The families being interviewed know that the data are being collected for the government, but at the time of data collection the larger implications are not understood. Subcaste information, not sect, is necessary to identify a Muslim who might be eligible for affirmative action benefits. For example, 'Ansari' falls under the administrative category of 'OBC' in certain regions of the country. Yet, in either instance, caste information, which would be necessary to identify a Dalit or OBC Muslim, is not collected.

In other areas of the city when I observed the enumeration of Muslim families (in majority Hindu enumeration blocks and with Hindu enumerators), the data collectors record Muslim or Islam as the religious identity and entered the given subcaste identity

---

[324] Fieldnotes, January 15, 2013.

(e.g., Sherriff, Ansari, etc.). As such, individual actors and their social maps heavily shape the caste enumeration of Muslims.

I also observed the enumeration of Christian families in enumeration blocks with a predominantly Hindu population. In my observations of 20 to 25 Christian households, I saw data collectors record "Christian" for the question on religion and a specific denomination of Christianity (e.g., Methodist or R.C. for Roman Catholic) as the caste. These answers emerge during the back and forth between the data collectors and respondents. Data collectors usually simply ask "religion?" or based on visible images of Christ ask, "Are you Christian?" In the former case, the respondent usually replies "Christian" or with a specific denomination, such as "R.C." The data collector then records "Christian" or "Christianity" in the religion category and "R.C." or another Christian denomination for caste. In the latter case, where the data collector asks "Are you Christian?" and the respondent agrees, the data collector follows up with "What type?" The respondent provides information on the denomination, which the data collector then records as the caste. While data on denomination reflect important identities, they fail to capture the subcaste information necessary to identify Christians who might be eligible for affirmative actions benefits.

In contrast to the construction of the 'no caste' answer and 'the attribution of the head of household's identity', the enumerator-training program is surprisingly silent on how religion and caste intersect for different groups. Beyond the discussion of the relationship between religion and the categories of SC and ST (which is standard material from Indian decennial censuses), the training manual does not provide any information on the topic of how caste and religion relate to one another. The data collectors', and in

some cases households', perceptions of what caste means for Muslims and Christians is left to shape the production of caste data for these religious minority groups in India.

4.4. Implications of Observed Simplifications

While I observed these simplifications in the Bangalore metro area, similar patterns are likely to unfold in places with comparable norms of social interaction and history of caste politics. The types of simplifications are likely to vary where caste politics and publicity around the SEC Census have unfolded differently.[325] The encounter between data collectors and households is structured by the questionnaire, but also by the social encounter. I find that prevailing social norms and the particular 'social maps' of data collectors and households play a role in how caste data are produced. The household interview is a deeply social process —structured by local norms of social interaction and data collectors' and respondents' social maps of society. In this section, I explore the broader implications of observed simplifications.

Embedded in the production of the 'no caste' answer option is a particular view regarding the type of respondents who might provide this answer. During the SEC Census in Bangalore, only a small subset of the population became aware of this option. Unlike the attempt to introduce enumerators to the concept of 'no caste' through training materials, the government has not made a similar effort to ensure that respondents know about the 'no caste' option. Knowledge of this answer choice becomes structured against

---

[325] For example, in regions of Tamil Nadu with a long history of low caste social movements, the newspapers of local caste associations printed the full SEC Census questionnaire just prior to the start of the survey period, and there was greater newspaper coverage of the SEC Census. In these communities, data collectors would not be the sole source of information regarding the Census, as many households would already be familiar with its details. The construction of 'no caste' might also follow a different pattern during household interviews because a wider cross-section of the population would be aware of the 'no caste' option.

government and enumerators' perceptions of who might wish to answer 'no caste' and a history of extremely disadvantaged groups already providing this information to the government. Data collectors suggest this option when they sense that asking about the caste or religion of an individual might offend the respondent. At the same time, like other sections of the Indian population, these types of respondents live in neighborhoods and apartment complexes, attends schools, and works at jobs where forward castes form the overwhelming majority. While members of this group may or may not wish 'to eradicate caste,' their individual life choices silently perpetuate social exclusion and inequality.

The construction of the 'no caste' answer is a case where the social map embedded in the census instrument and written training material for enumerators is superseded by a social map that emerges during the enumerator training and has resonance during the enumeration of a subset of well-to-do urban elites who are given the option to opt-out of the caste question; this option to 'opt out' remains absent for the majority of Indians, including historically marginalized groups. As such, the 'no caste' answer is embedded within existing hierarchies of power and produced within the context of an ongoing classification struggle. This is a classic example of Bourdieu's notion of misrecognition, in which caste elites are able to pretend that they don't have a caste, which reproduces the structure but allows those who benefit from it to claim that it does not matter. A common justification given for including this answer option is to allow those individuals who do not perceive themselves as having a caste identity to provide one for a government survey. As such, the production of the 'no caste' answer option during the SEC census protects the desired invisibility and privacy of India's social elite.

It creates a protective shield fails to document social advantage and helps to reproduce the social order.

With regards to a second type of simplification, I consistently observed the attribution of the head of household's caste and religious identity to other members of the family. This pattern occurred despite the repeated messages to enumerators to the contrary and a data entry program that prevents entering caste and religion data for all the members of a family at once. While government administrators desire individual level data for these social categories (similar to data on gender, age, education, employment, income and health), Indians tend to conceptualize religion and caste as family identities. During the household interview, this shared view across data collectors and most households structures the production of data.

Data collectors and respondents overwhelmingly designate an adult male as the head of household and, in most cases, his religious and caste identity becomes the identity of all other members of the family. Given the high rates of arranged marriages, which are usually 'fixed' within the same religious and caste communities, this assumption has considerable resonance with people's lived experiences. As a result, SEC Census data on religion and caste reflect prevailing social norms, but also perpetuate them where they may no longer apply. This is particularly problematic in Bangalore, a city where 'love marriages' that cross caste lines are increasingly common. The process of attributing the religious and caste identities of the male head of household to other members of the household reinforces existing hierarchies of power within the process of producing seemingly 'apolitical' and 'neutral' data. In particular, this simplification reinforces patriarchal norms found throughout most communities in the country, by

enacting an adult male's caste and religious identity as that of every other member in the household. The attribution of the head of household's identity to other members of the household occurs because the data collectors' world view, as well as the respondent's, differ from the social maps that guided the development of the census instrument, the training program for enumerators, and the data entry program which puts forth religion and caste as individual-level identities. This simplification reinforces power structures in the private sphere and perpetuates traditional social relations (i.e., endogamous marriage practices that reproduce *jaatis*) even when they have evolved into a new form of social relation that potentially reproduce hierarchies in a new way.

A third simplification with broader implications involves the enumeration of religious minorities. The enumerator-training program provides little explanation for how religion and caste intersect except for a discussion about the categories of SC and ST. There is no attention to how Dalit or OBC Muslims or Christians are enumerated. For some Muslims and Christians, during the SEC Census interview, denomination or sect has come to equal caste. In these cases, the worldviews and practices of individual data collectors strongly shape the production of caste data for Muslims and Christians. State affirmative action benefits are allocated along subcaste lines—not by sect or denomination. It is estimated that 80 percent of Muslims fall within the category of OBC, and therefore might be eligible for affirmative action benefits.[326] By not recording the subcastes of Muslims and Christians, data collectors limit those who will be counted towards the OBC reservation. The enumeration of religious minorities is a case where the designers of the census have not put forward a clear social map on the relationship

---

[326] Khurshid 2010.

between religion and caste for Muslims and Christians. This gap must be contextualized within a longer history of Muslims and Dalit Christians struggling to gain recognition as equal citizens, even though they belong to religions that are seen as 'foreign'. Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians have been fighting without success to have access to SC reservation benefits, like Dalits of other religions. The production of caste data during SECC shows the continued struggle for classification for religious minorities, and the state's, at best, indifference, or at worst, total disregard, for structuring the data collection to help produce data useful to inform this cause.

These three simplifications illustrate how the collected data on caste and religion contain and perpetuate existing inequalities by caste, gender and religion. Attention to the social and political embeddedness of processes of quantification is essential—especially if the motivation for collecting survey data is to understand and reduce inequality and discrimination. In addition, these micro-level practices must be made sense of within the broader classificatory struggles that work to reproduce the social order.

This chapter argues that ground-level enumeration processes create a face-to-face meeting of enumerators, data entry operators and household respondents, in which the encounter of 'getting caste data from households' involves a relational process of co-producing data and reproducing the social order. Because the state and civil society have remained largely inactive with regards to publicity around the census in Karnataka, household respondents have a very limited understanding of the larger implications of the data. As a result, data collectors disproportionately shape the production of data, specifically with regards to patterns of simplification and standardization that occur during the household interview. In some instances these patterns are idiosyncratic, but

this chapter also illustrates how in other instances they are part of a broader reproduction of the social order in an ongoing struggle over classification and symbolic power.

Two other findings, which I only explore minimally in this chapter, also emerge from this research. First, self-understandings evolve through the household interview. In back and forth exchanges with data collectors, household respondents and other observers come to understand what the state category of interest is with regards to caste, and this understanding is like to heavily influence subsequent interviews for government censuses. Second, technology structures the canvassing of the SEC Census. The government's use of tablets for 'real time data entry' brings a new person to the data collection team. The DEO, who is supposed to play a small technical role, becomes the lead interviewer and data collector. In addition, the tablet helps to create an aura of legitimacy and efficiency; the use of a hand-held computer for a government project is seen as a sign of 'progress.' The use of the PC tablet helps to deflect attention away from the purpose of the census, as households are impressed by the real-time data entry and therefore limit questions about why data are being collected, especially so soon after the decennial census. At the same time, and ironically, the introduction of the tablets greatly slows down the interview process and leads to a variety of data collection strategies that are quite different from how census officials envision the process. The tablet helps to elevate the position of the DEO and create buy-in such that data collectors do not have to provide much detail regarding the purpose of the survey.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Counting Caste, Making Social Knowledge

Data collection for the Socio-Economic Caste (SEC) Census—involving the first nationwide enumeration of caste since the colonial period—was completed in Karnataka in 2013. Now the caste data sit untouched on an electronic server hosted by a government agency. Expert committees that were supposed to analyze and finalize the data from the open-ended question on caste have yet to be appointed by the leaders of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government, who are in the midst of a highly contested national election. In early 2013, I had informal conversations with several social scientists likely to serve on these committees and they foresaw that, given the political nature of the caste data, the central government would wait until after the national election cycle to form the committees. Whether an expert committee eventually analyzes the data as originally planned, or the RGI steps back in to create caste tables for data that it fought not to collect, the data will undergo an additional set of transformations before becoming public. During this final stage in census making, the data are likely to become increasingly standardized, but what that standardization will look like, as certain categories are aggregated while others remain distinct, remains unknown. While my original research design included studying these expert processes, the delay and political stalling around finalizing this contested data are indicative of the politicization surrounding caste count, particularly within the central government.

This work sets out to answer two inter-related research questions. The first question is: how are caste data produced during a contemporary census in India? By examining concrete sites of knowledge making—such as enumerator trainings and census household interviews—as well as the porous political environment in which they unfold, this dissertation explores how the actions and interactions of people involved in census work shape the production of caste data. At the same time, this research explores how individuals and organizations not officially engaged in routine census work—including the Central Cabinet, Lok Sabha, local media, and caste associations—influence the production of caste data either by actively engaging in debates and discourses around the caste enumeration or through their relative silence. I have shown how actors in usual accounts of data production structure the practices of official knowledge-makers and also shape the politics of knowledge making. In my account, knowledge making is deeply intertwined with the ongoing production of the social order. I apply Bourdieu's theoretical framework to argue that the making of caste data in contemporary India is shaped by an active classificatory struggle that reproduces the social order. Caste and redistributive politics in the post-colonial period has been centered around classificatory battles in the electoral and bureaucratic fields.

This project also speaks to an additional question: how is caste evolving as a political identity in contemporary India? An exploration of the social and political processes involved in the production of caste data provides insights into the changing nature of caste as a political identity and the dynamic relationship between caste and democratic politics.

In the next section, I briefly summarize the dissertation's main findings. In section two, I return to the theoretical framework as it pertains to the production of social knowledge. I then address how this work has contributed to the literature on caste and politics. The final section explores the broader relevance of the findings.

5.1. Synthesis of Findings

In the immediate aftermath of India's independence, the full caste count was removed from the decennial census, while at the same time the post-colonial state began to struggle with the meaning of the broader category 'backward' referenced in the 1950 constitution. In the decades that followed, "backwardness" became defined—beyond the centrally recognized categories of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)—by administrative institutions and political parties in particular regions of the country. What Jaffrelot terms "India's silent revolution," or the more recent Other Backward Classes (OBC) movement in the north and the earlier anti-Brahmin and Dalit movements in the south, has resulted in a partial change in the composition of the local bureaucracy and new access to elected and appointed positions for a broader subset of previously excluded groups. The political and administrative institutionalization of OBC at the level of state governments between the 1960s and 1980s was crucial for the subsequent extension of affirmative action quotas in central government jobs to OBCs in the 1990s, and the more recent push by OBC leaders and regional political parties to force the Congress to reverse its longstanding policy against enumerating of caste. Congress' refusal to recognize and extend reservations to OBCs, and collect census data to inform OBC reservations was both ideological and instrumental. Primarily it wanted to stay in power and appease its traditional electoral base of Brahmins, Muslims and SCs in order

to do so. Despite the stated ideologies of nationalist elites, Congress took advantage of caste networks to create vote banks and win elections.

My scrutiny of the national-level politics surrounding the caste enumeration shows how the political weight of OBC leaders—arguably India's new political elite—is effective at certain times and in particular democratized spaces, such as the Lok Sabha, but has yet to fully penetrate the highest level of central-government decision-making which has remained controlled by the Congress for most of India's post-colonial history. While the Congress eventually conceded to an enumeration of caste due to the potential power of the OBC vote bank, through a series of behind-the-scenes moves it divorced the caste count from the decennial census and relegated it to a revamped Below Poverty Line (BPL) survey. Attention to these national level politics is important for understanding why this contemporary caste count occurred, how it became separated from the 2011 decennial census and the implications of these politics on the subsequent social and political processes that surrounded the production of caste data, under the management of the much less technically experienced Ministry of Rural Development. The historical account also illustrates how the production of caste data is interlinked to a series of policy developments and political mobilizations at the local, regional and central levels of government, which span across the colonial and post-colonial periods.

Returning to Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, India's longstanding social and economic elite actively fought to main their position in the post-colonial, democratic period. In the decades following Independence, high levels of participation in the formal institutions of democracy resulted and high levels of inequality persisted. Congress maintained its dominance in the electoral field by appeasing its vote banks and 'punting'

197

the issue of 'backwardness' to state governments. Over the course of two decades, while the category of OBC became institutionalized in particular regions of the country, a second layer of classificatory struggles emerged around the politics of distribution at the state level. OBC reservations became a central site of struggle as groups fought to access resources and improve status through entry into higher education and government jobs. At this level, jockeying or losses in the electoral field were often offset by changes in the bureaucratic field. Over time these localized developments became loosely organized to help create an OBC presence at the all-India level. In 2010, the OBC leadership of an identfiable vote bank successfully mobilized against the long-standing census practices of the Congress-led central government. After more than 60 years of a limited caste count, the Central Cabinet finally agreed to a nationwide enumeration of caste. But, the Congress leadership offset this 'loss' by moving the caste count within an agency with less technical expertise and as part of a state project that is widely disputed. While caste was formally enumerated, a series of implementation decisions and bureaucratic maneuvers prior to the start of the project and during it, created a course where the respectability of the data could be challenged.

Chapter three then examines how this centralized project took place on the ground in the South Indian State of Karnataka. I explore the organizational structure of local census operations and show how the state, media, caste associations, and the private company responsible for data entry played a role in the preparation and canvassing of the survey. Focusing on the local operations of the caste census shows how the decentralized execution of the SEC Census actually manifested itself. While the vision and concerns of central administrators structure the data collection, so do the actions and inactions of a

198

range of local actors. This chapter highlights how the local politics of caste intersect with the politics and practices surrounding the enumeration of caste.

The state, media, and caste associations remained largely inactive with regards to publicity around the SEC Census in Karnataka, in contrast to the widely publicized decennial census. A major implication of this lack of publicity was that data collectors—the government enumerators and private sector Data Entry Operators (DEOs)—were left to communicate information about the census to households. While the push for the caste census came from OBC political leaders throughout the country, the leaders of the dominant OBC castes in Karnataka had little incentive to mobilize in advance of the caste census; they already controlled local politics and their power and networks allowed them to disproportionately access reservations. The largest caste associations in the state—for the Lingayat and Vokkaliga castes—did not actively mobilize in advance of the caste count. The caste associations that did mobilize were those with sufficient political connections to know in advance about the SEC Census and its importance, and who felt marginalized such that they wanted to increase their political power and ability to access reservation benefits and other resources.

This chapter also highlights how the training of enumerators shaped their own views about caste, which the dissertation subsequently shows influenced the production of caste data. During the three-day enumerator training, the instructors emphasized certain points, while other gaps remained. Surprisingly, during the training and in the training materials, there was little discussion of what caste means, the range of answers that enumerators might encounter, and how caste interacts with religion in the contemporary period. In contrast, the trainer and enumerator manual repeatedly explained

199

that caste and religion should be enumerated for each individual, as these identities are most commonly conceived of as family identities; identities that are determined by birth, not choice. The training program additionally clarified to middle-class enumerators what the answer option 'no caste' meant. The trainer did this in a way that communicated that certain well-educated urban elite may not think that caste is a relevant identity for them. At the same time, while the training program was extensive for enumerators, it was minimal for the private sector DEO, who was supposed to play a purely technical, data entry role. But because DEOs were the ones actually entering the data into hand-held devices, they played a more active role interpreting questions and answers. As such, the centrally designed enumerator-training program did not explicitly mediate the DEOs' personal views of caste.

By examing the landscape of local caste politics in Karnataka, chapter three shows the particular ways in which the classification struggle plays out at the state level. The inclusion of subcastes from the dominant Lingayat and Vokkaliga groups on Karnataka's OBC list is part of an ongoing battle where Lingayats and Vokkaligas subcastes try to remain on the list and further increase their presence and access to resources, while other subcastes on the list (including relatively disadvantaged groups within the broader Lingayat and Vokkaliga communities) try to define themselves and move to other reservation categories where these dominant groups are not present. Because the Lingayats and Vokkaligas dominate both the political/electoral field and bureaucratic field, their leaders are able to influence the final version of the OBC list both by influencing the work of Backward Classes Commissions and by modifying or blocking their completed products. In addition, due to their greater political connections

and powerful networks, subcastes from these communities have an increased likelihood of being able to access reservation benefits once they are eligible for them. The categories of Lingayat and Vokkaliga create 'social equivalence' where important differences in disadvantage persist within each community. As such, a second type of classification struggle involves internal battles within the category of Lingayat or Vokkaliga in determining where the boundaries for particular subcastes should be drawn.

Chapter four honed in on the census interview and found that in cities such as Bangalore where data collectors and household respondents are unknown to one another, the production of caste data must be understood within the norms and experiences of building trust real-time during a face-to-face encounter. In addition, the data were shaped by the negligible publicity surrounding the caste census, the perspectives and behaviors of data collectors, and of data entry operators in particular, and the respondents' perceptions and understandings of caste. For most non-elite households this systematically resulted in an enumeration of caste in one way that differed from how the census administrators envisioned: the caste and religion of the head of household was applied to, and recorded for, all members of the family, rather than being collected for each member individually. Usually an adult male was identified as the head of household and his religious and caste identities were recorded for all members of the family, even in instances where marriage relations followed less traditional arrangements. For religious minorities, given the lack of central direction, the category of caste captures different types of data depending on data collectors' understandings—from denomination for Christians to sect and subcaste for Muslims. This pattern relates to the systematic exclusions that Muslims and Dalit Christians face while struggling to gain recognition

and redistributive benefits from the state. Finally, the 'no caste' option was also presented to a particular subset of households who data collectors perceived would not want to provide information about caste. This is a classic example of Bourdieu's notion of misrecognition, in which caste elites are able to pretend that they don't have a caste, which reproduces the structure but allows them to benefit from the claim that it does not matter.

5.2. The Social Production of Caste Data

This work shows how the production of caste data—from the decision to collect the data to the eventual face-to-face encounters during the census interview—reproduces a particular form of social hierarchy. This section will return to the three theories discussed in the introduction and discuss them in light of the empirical findings.

A narrowly positivist view of knowledge making, which approaches the production of social data as collecting pre-existing facts, has limited traction in this story. Still, I regularly encountered a sociologically-informed positivism that accounts for how individual world views and cognitive frames mediate the production of survey data. For example, the practices of instructors during the enumerator training suggest that they were attuned to how the worldviews of data collectors could shape the production of answers to particular questions. They spent considerable time reiterating that caste and religion data should be collected from every member of the household, because they knew that both enumerators and households would find it unconventional to ask about the caste and religious identity of each member of the household. Yet, this view falls short of articulating a coherent theory for if and how power operates to make knowledge.

Foucault's theory of governmentality puts forward an argument for how knowledge and power are co-constituted, but I find it applies most directly to particular historical moments that largely serve as background to this case. Foucault's agentless, diffuse power, which deploys particular disciplining techniques, has greatest traction in the colonial period. During this time, the collection of caste data operated as a technique of power deployed by colonial administrators over populations. Across successive censuses, the colonial state began to develop and modify national-level caste categories to make sense of the thousands of local subcastes found across the numerous localized systems of stratification within India. As Scott argues with regards to land tenuring, "officials took exceptionally complex, illegible, and local social practices…and created a standard grid whereby it could be centrally recorded and monitored."[327] As the Indian state entered the early post-colonial period, there remained a series of disciplining practices and techniques, such as generating lists of SCs and STs, that continued from the colonial period and confronted democratic politics.

Chatterjee applies governmentality to a space he defines as *political society*, where governments aided by international and nongovernmental organizations address the security and welfare of populations. His ideas gain traction in my findings during the post-colonial period. The main ideological fault lines that surround the caste count could be recast in Chatterjee's delineation. Mehta, Dutt, and others in the Nehruvian tradition operate in the normative space of civil society. As they push the state to embody the ideals of equal political citizenship, they are operating in a circumscribed space that is available to only a few. Those in favor of a caste count and OBC reservations operate

---

[327] Scott 1999: 2.

within the reality of political society, where benefits and disadvantage often accrue along caste lines. Chatterjee argues that

> the classical idea of popular sovereignty, expressed in the legal-political facts of equal citizenship, produced the homogenous construct of nation, whereas the activities of governmentality required multiple, cross-cutting and shifting classifications of the population as the targets of multiple policies, producing a necessarily heterogeneous construct of social.[328]

His theory allows us to map the ideological differences surrounding the caste census onto the disparate experiences in political versus civil society, which co-exist in the post-colonial Indian state. While governmentality and its derivative are instructive for making sense of how and why caste data were collected in the colonial period and the ideological debates that emerged in the post-colonial period, they fail to provide a holistic account of the production of caste data and how power operates during this census.

I return to Bourdieu's theory of power and social reproduction for a more coherent theoretical lens to make sense of census making. The production of caste data is an active classification struggle across multiple social fields, which involves actors and organizations outside the official spaces for planning and carrying out census operations. What emerges as a partial victory in one field is offset by moves in other fields. For example, India's long-standing social elites were forced to concede to a caste count because of electoral calculations, as neither Congress nor BJP wanted to lose the 'OBC vote.'[329] But these same social elites offset this concession by moving the caste count into the BPL. What appears to be a political victory for OBCs is challenged in a less

---

[328] Chatterjee 2004:36.

[329] While this more instrumental view is sufficient to explain why the Congress conceded to a caste count, it does not explain why Congress decided to separate the caste count from the decennial census, or classic interest-based politics

visible field. By including the caste count in a state project that is slow, inefficient and riddled with implementation challenges, the elites can further delay or block the data from being made public. In addition, they can challenge the validity of the data in the legal field at a later stage. The "failed" attempt at producing caste data also becomes a justification against future efforts to collect caste data.

The entry of the private sector in census making also serves multiple goals. Given the extensive number of contracts involved, it helped to create buy-in from a segment of India's service sector. The novelty of the tablet was presented by the media and seen by the public as a positive sign that the government is progressing into the 21st century. It also helped to enroll individual households to participate in the census interview by creating an aura that legitimate and important work was being undertaken. It allowed for a clear and easy way to justify collecting caste data right after the just-completed decennial census, and moved the conversation away from a potential focus on why the government was undertaking two massive and expensive nationwide censuses in such a short period. Especially for those who view the government as behind the times, or prefer not to be interviewed, the simple presence of the tablet helped to garner consent. The privatization of census making and the related use of tablets facilitated participation and interest and allowed the UPA government to provide contracts to, and drum up political support for, companies within the service sector.

During enumeration, the habituses of local middle-class government workers who served as enumerators, and of younger (on average), more technologically savvy DEOs, shaped the production of caste data. Due to the lack of coordinated publicity, this two-person team became responsible for communicating both what was at stake and the

question and answer options. Contrary to the conceptions of a modern and individualized caste identity put forward by the designers of the survey, the data collectors effectively minimized this potential through the social ways in which the caste data were obtained. Within the context of the household interview, the data production reintroduced traditional conceptions of how caste operates, even in instances where they may no longer apply. The caste identity of the household head became the identity for all members of the family, despite being instructed to collect information for each household member. While the inclusion of 'no caste' was supposed to give all respondents the option of classifying themselves without a caste identity, the 'no caste' option was in practice offered to a limited subset of the elite, in a classic example of misrecognition. Also, Muslims and Christians, depending on the worldviews of data collectors, may have had their sect or denomination recorded instead of subcaste; this restricts the future likelihood of being able to use the data to fight for equal recognition and increased reservation benefits for Muslims and Dalit Christians.

The lack of publicity by the state and local media during the period of enumeration in Karnataka helped to create a homology in the electoral field across the central and local levels. The large caste associations, which represent the dominant OBC castes, did not mobilize in advance of the census. While OBC leaders in the center scrutinized the activities of the government and publicly pushed for the inclusion of the caste enumeration, the specificity of OBC politics in Karnataka made a centralized caste count less of a rallying point for local OBC leaders. Elites in Karnataka are overwhelmingly from subcastes classified as OBCs, and their subcastes have also enjoyed a disproportionate share of the reservation benefits with their category of quotas.

As such, those in power had little incentive to see the current system of reservations change. While they did not want to block the caste count, as it may help to extend reservations for OBCs, the data collected at the local level may also question their particular inclusion in the OBC category. The local politics of caste complicated the politics of reservation and the politics surrounding the caste enumeration. The silence around the caste census, though likely uncoordinated and a reflection of the status quo, benefited the local dominant castes in Karnataka, as very few caste associations representing groups who may want to either secure reservation benefits or expand their portion of the benefits mobilized in advance of the count.

One additional stage in census making that likely involves a major and explicit classificatory struggle is the work of the expert committee responsible for the compilation and aggregation of collected survey data. As the historical research on colonial caste censuses illustrates, the process of 'making sense' of the collected data and producing caste tables involves extensive and contested behind-the-scene operations. Of particular importance to this stage of census making will be how 'open' or 'closed' the process is to those outside the traditional circle of experts, who during colonial caste counts reproduced an elite view of caste and inter-caste relations.

5.3. Caste as a Political Identity

My findings also help answer the question: how is caste evolving as a political identity in contemporary India? First, the strengthening of caste as a political identity is occurring through ongoing maneuvering and jockeying both within and across the bureaucratic and electoral fields. The work of the bureaucracy is constantly mediated by the politics of caste, even thought it is supposed to operate in an organizational culture that is apolitical

207

and objective—as articulated by the Home Minister in the debates surrounding the caste census. The national political parties articulate an ideological stance against the strengthening of caste, but their daily activities in the electoral field reproduce caste networks while strengthening them along new, more electorally beneficial ways. The caste elite in India actively struggles to maintain their position across fields by continuously offsetting moves in the bureaucratic field with others in the electoral field.

This work also traces how the strengthening of caste as a political identity has taken place as part of a set of practices that have tried to help eradicate the hierarchical and discriminatory aspects of caste as a social identity, within the space of Chatterjee's political society. Against this backdrop, central administrators and those ideologically opposed to the caste count put forth the option of 'no caste' in order to keep the state from imposing an identity onto people who no longer experience or identify with the category of caste.[330] But for the majority of the Indians who now fall under the administrative categories of SC, ST or OBC 'no caste' is not a sensible category for a government survey, in which self-identifying *jaati* will potentially contribute to the size of the reservation quota. For the subset of social elites or forward castes, the benefits of citizenship have existed independent of actively fighting for them, such that the 'no caste' identity is neither instrumentally disadvantageous for them, nor does it come into conflict with the lived reality of operating in the circumscribed space of civil society. The operation of redistributive politics within political society may limit the extent to which

---

[330] In my own fieldwork, I do not find this to be true. The persistence of caste as a social institution, even as it is evolving, was apparent in the local canvassing of the survey in urban Karnataka. The widespread view of caste as a family identity, the geographic clustering of castes, and the restricted relevance and emergence of 'no caste' all speak to the degree to which the social institution of caste continues to structure who people marry, where they live and how they see themselves and others even in one of India's most global cities.

these advances can transform India into a more egalitarian society, as much of the energy in these battles reproduces the social order.

The politics surrounding the caste count also speak to disjunctures within OBC politics, and the extent to which political parties and caste associations at the regional level see themselves as benefitting from the caste count. While the center was hesitant to clearly define or institutionalize a third national-level category for caste-related marginalized groups beyond ST and SC, this took place relatively early in Karnataka. As part of this history, dominant (but not Brahmin) castes in Karnataka became OBC leaders and have disproportionately enjoyed reservation benefits. An intense set of classificatory struggles continue at the local level, where less advantaged groups within the OBC category fight for access to 'reserved' educational opportunities and jobs. The peculiarities of the OBC category in Karnataka made the actuality of a centralized count less appealing. As already mentioned, those in power have little incentive to see the current system of reservations change. While they want to secure and extend reservations for OBCs, the data collected at the local level may also question their particular inclusion in the OBC category. The politics surrounding the caste census suggest that the historical relationship of institutionalization of national-level caste categories within particular regions and set of localized social hierarchies shape the particular ways that local and national caste-based politics may reinforce or come into conflict with one another.

The strengthening of caste as a political institution is also deeply entangled with electoral politics, while fundamentally challenging classic conceptions of democracy. The production of caste data was shaped by a range of decisions and negotiations that unfolded in Delhi, but which were heavily influenced by several decades of prior work

that influenced the emergence and strengthening of the OBC identity and resulting 'vote banks,' the extension of affirmative action benefits to OBCs, and most recently, the push for updated caste data. The caste count occurred because the OBC identity had sufficient self- and external recognition that the Congress and BJP feared the electoral ramifications from an issue that had widespread support from political parties across the spectrum. The institutionalization of new caste identities, particularly pan-caste ones, may work to change the status quo through the arena of electoral politics. At the same time, it reinforces a traditional, albeit evolving, hierarchical social institution.

5.4. This Project's Relevance and Looking Ahead

While the data presented in this project are particular to the socio-political circumstances of Karnataka and the SEC Census, my findings are relevant to other social knowledge making in other places in a number of ways.

First, how are the findings from urban Karnataka useful for thinking about the production of SEC Census data in other regions of India? The political forces and power dynamics that made the caste count separate from the decennial census would affect all regions. Throughout India, this broader story is likely to diminish the respectability and usefulness of the data as a whole, and decrease the future ability of backward classes to use the data to access additional resources. The findings from Karnataka suggest that the local politics of caste matter in thinking about how census operations unfold and shape the production of caste data. The specific history of caste in Karnataka meant that publicity around the caste count was low. As such, people had less opportunity to shape the caste count with their own views. In places where publicity and local caste politics create a more informed public, this awareness could dampen the ways in which DEOs

and enumerators independently affect the caste data. Yet, the idea of "no caste," even if more people are aware of the option, remains a privileged option for individuals and households where high class and high caste coincide. For this subset of elites, there is no direct benefit for providing their caste identity, and this holds true across the country. This project's findings also suggest that local norms of how interactions across strangers unfold will shape the production of data during the household interview. For example, since data collectors throughout most of India are hesitant to imply that inter-marriage has occurred by asking about the caste or religion of each individual in a household, respondents themselves would not know that the government wants individual-level data and offer that a family member has a different caste or religious identity than the household head.

In rural areas where BPL data has previously been collected, and the politics of caste tend to be extremely visible, there is a much greater likelihood that households would have realized the purpose of the census even if they were not explicitly told at the start of the survey. At the same time, depending on the local history of caste politics, caste associations may be more easily organized in rural areas, where the mapping of caste is more visible and where the spatial concentration of caste makes a targeted organizing effort easier for mobilizing a vote bank and organizing in advance of the SEC Census. As such, the overall coverage of households in these area is likely to be much more complete. Households will want to be enumerated—particularly ST, SC, OBC and other poor households—if they are likely eligible for food distribution and other government welfare programs. With regards to the production of the caste data, given the strongly entrenched nature of caste in rural villages throughout most of India, the 'no

caste' option is unlikely to have much resonance—even among elites. At the same time, enumerators are likely to personally know households, and their religious and caste identities. They are therefore more likely to play a lead role during the interview and more directly shape the social production of data.

A second, related question is, how is this study useful for thinking about collecting census and social data more broadly? This study shows how attention to the politics surrounding why the data are being collected and who is responsible for collecting them matters for the type of knowledge that is produced. For example, if an expanded caste count had been part of the 2011 decennial census, it would have created a more centrally managed operation and a cascading set of differences in the operations and execution of the census locally.[331] Yet, while this line of reasoning is fruitful to some extent, my findings suggest that this type of comparison at the level of practice must be placed within a broader theory of how power operates in a particular context to shape the construction of social data. If India's long-standing social and political elite had included the expanded caste enumeration as part of the decennial census, then power would have operated in a different way in this alternative story and the relations within and across groups would have also been different. The enumeration of caste would have remained

---

[331] Widespread publicity surrounding the decennial census means that families would have expected to be enumerated, and therefore would have had an opportunity to think about their responses. In addition, census enumerators had sole responsibility for collecting the decennial census data, and did so only for a single enumeration block. Both because of publicity and the lead role of the enumerator (because of no DEO or tablet), the resulting data collection would have likely been more comprehensive with regards to the records generated for each particular household and for the entire enumeration block. Mistakes that occurred during data collection could have been more easily corrected in the field and the well-trained enumerator would have produced more comprehensive coverage for a single block than the two-person data collection team and the bulky data entry program for four enumeration blocks for the SEC Census.

inter-twined with the politics of caste, but the specific and evolving power relations within and across fields would be different and produce a different set of classifications.

While the data collection for the SECC is complete, the delayed timeline and election cycle have stalled the next stage of analyzing the data. This final stage, when the same experts who debated whether the data should be collected take center stage again to analyze the data and make it official, is crucial to complete any account of how the caste data are produced. The period of data analysis, after the caste data have been collected and before they are made public, has historically been a moment when social elites make an indelible mark on the data by serving as 'experts' in the process of finalizing the data.[332] While my narration of the classificatory struggle involved in the production of caste data will be further enriched by attention to the work of experts, the clearly politicized ways in which the caste census has operated up to this point are evidence to the theory of knowledge production put forth in this research. Furthermore, the ways in which the data analysis has been stalled only reinforce the ways in which the data are deeply political in the first place.

This dissertation offers insights into contemporary knowledge making processes and how they are embedded and structured to allow for the production of a particular type of data—one that reproduces social hierarchies and allows social elites to maintain power. The hope remains that the production and eventual circulation of these data will have another far more democratic and productive outcome, by giving resources and access to members of social groups that remain under-represented in state institutions and who have historically faced considerable social discrimination.

[332] Dirks 2001. Cohn 1987.

While this dissertation finds considerable support for a theory of social reproduction, this account is not the only way in which power is operating or being challenged. There are numerous cases in contemporary India where particular groups have successfully fought for civil and political rights, and in doing so transformed longstanding oppressive power structures. By organizing around and changing how social and political institutions operate, they have created a more deliberative and democratic way forward for themselves and all members of society.

CATEGORIES AND ENUMERATION OF INTERVIEWEES

		Interviews conducted (07/11-02/13)
1	**Public Sector (Current and former)**	**25**
	A. Central Government	4
	B. State Government	6
	C. Municipal Government	15
2	**Civil Society Organizations**	**25**
	A. National level or elite CSOs	1
	B. Local organizations (caste associations)	12
	C. Other members of civil society (scholars, journalists)	12
3	**Private Sector**	**11**
	A. Managers	3
	B. Workers	8
4	**Private Enumerated Households/ Individuals**	**29**
	A. Bangalore Urban District	25
	B. Bangalore Rural District	4
	TOTAL	**90**

SAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Sample Interview Instrument for Private Households:

(1) Has your household been enumerated for the 2011 Socioeconomic and Caste Census (SEC Census)? What day were you interviewed by census officials?

(2) Can you describe the process?
[Let the person speak freely, if prompts are required, questions a-k are listed below.]
   a) Who did the enumeration? Did a two member team visit your house?
   b) Did the enumerator tell you why the data is being collected? Did you ask why?
   c) Who asked you the questions? For example, if there was person entering data into a computer tablet, did she or he also ask you questions?
   d) Did they record answers by hand/ on paper? Or directly into a PC tablet?
   e) Were you asked questions about
      • Disability/illness
      • Religion
      • Caste
      • And, were these questions asked for each member of the household?
   f) Did they ask you questions about the material of the walls in your home? About where you get your drinking water? If you have a computer?
   g) Were any of the questions confusing or unclear?
   h) What language did the enumerator speak? (Was there a translator involved?)
   i) At the end of the interview, were you asked whether the collected information (minus the religion and caste information) could be posted publicly?
   j) Did you receive an acknowledgement slip? Is the information on the slip correct?
   k) About how long did the interview process take?

(3) Prior to the census, had you seen any government advertising or promotional material about the census (i.e. newspaper article, advertisement, TV coverage, radio announcement, government notification)? Were you surprised or were you expecting someone to visit your house?

(4) Did you talk with family or friend about the census prior to being enumerated?

(5) Did you know that this is first time the government is conducting a nationwide caste census?
[Let the person speak freely, if prompts are required, questions a and b are listed below.]
   a) Did the enumerator mention to you as such during the survey?
   b) Did you discuss with anyone beforehand about how to answer the caste-related questions? (i.e. family member, friend, religious leader, caste based organization, etc.)

Sample Interview Instrument for Caste Associations

(1) Background information on the organization
    a) What is the full name of the organization?
    b) How many members belong to your organization?
    c) Who is able to join your organization (i.e. do your members usually belong to a specific religious, caste or social group)?
    d) Where do your members live? [In Bangalore? Karnataka? Across India? Globally?]
    e) Do you have a main office? Are there also neighborhood/branch offices?
    f) What facilities does the organization offer to its members?
    g) What activities and programs (i.e. sports, festivals; cultural programs) does the organization offer to its members?
    h) What is the process by which someone becomes a member and is there an annual fee?
    i) What is the leadership structure of the organization?

(2) Communication in the organization
    a) How do you correspond with your members (i.e. meetings, monthly newsletters, journals, etc.)?
    b) If you have a newsletter, what type of information is included in the newsletter?
    c) Could I see a copy?
    d) Is there a way for me to access past issues of this magazine or newsletter?

(3) SEC Census
    a) Did the organization communicate with members about the SEC census?
    b) If so, what was the nature (i.e. during a regular meeting; monthly newsletters; magazine) and content of this communication?
    c) Is the SEC Census in line with your organization's mission and goals?
    d) What types of data on caste would like to use or have available?
    e) What are the sub castes in your caste organization?

(4) [For members only] Level of individual or family's participation
    a) How have you participated in the caste based organization?
    b) Do you attend regular meetings? Other programs?
    c) Have you received any benefits from the organization?
    d) Do other people who you live in your neighborhood participate in the organization?

Sample Interview Instrument for Senior Public Representatives

(1) General Involvement
  a) What is your organization's involvement in the SEC census?
  b) Who is the coordinating agency for the SEC census within Karnataka? In particular, who does your organization report to?
  c) What other organizations have you collaborated with during the SEC census?
  d) Within your organization, what is your specific role with regards to the SEC census?
  e) How long have you been working on the SEC census project?

(2) Details of Caste Census
  a) What type of preparatory work has occurred related to SEC census? (i.e. trainings, coordination meetings, etc.) What is the timeline for these activities?
  b) Do you know how the SEC census schedule created? Who was involved in this process?
  c) How has the SEC Census been advertised? TV? Newspaper? Radio?
  d) Who is being selected to serve as enumerators? How are the enumerators being trained? How much are they paid?
  e) Who is being selected to serve as date entry operators? How are the enumerators being trained? How much are they paid?
  f) How are the PC tablets working? Are there any challenges?
  g) Who will compile the collected data and what will be the process of doing so?
  h) How will the data be made available? At what level? When?
  i) What has gone smoothly? As you expected?
  j) What difficulties have you encountered?

(3) Comparison with involvement in other censuses
  a) Have you previously participated in decennial census? Or another government survey?
  b) If so, how has this experience been different? (trainings, advertising, enumerations, coordination, use of PC tablets, etc.?)

(4) Broader background questions (ask later in interview after building rapport)
  a) Why do you think the central government has decided to do a caste census? Why does the government believe that caste data is important, at this point in time?
  b) How did the decision emerge to combine the caste census with Below Poverty line (BPL) Census?
  c) What are the implications of enumerating caste as part of the BPL Census?
  d) How do you think the collected data will be used?

Sample Interview Instrument for Backward Classes Commission

(1) OBCs and data (lack of data has been cited as a common problem)
   a) What data on OBCs in Karnataka exist? Similar in other states?
   b) What types of data most commonly used by Karnataka OBC commission?
   c) What types of primary data collection has the Karnataka OBC commission been involved in?
   d) Has a caste census been completed in Karnataka?
   e) What type of data do you think is needed to know about the well being of social groups?
   f) Who are the government actors/agencies that seek caste data?
   g) Are there any other agencies within government or outside government demanding this data?

(2) *OBC as a category*
   a) How is the state-level OBC list created in Karnataka? Has this changed over time?
   b) How is the OBC list updated? What is the process of making a change to OBC list for Karnataka?
   c) In actuality, how dynamic is the list? Is it really politically possible to exclude a once included group? Can you provide an example from the last five years?
   d) How did the recommendation to include sexual minorities in the category of OBC emerge? Is Karnataka first state?
   e) How do you deal with the multiple lists (state and center)?
   f) Do you think the OBC list does a good job of capturing those who it should?

(3) Broader view of caste data
   a) What are the implications of having the caste census as national exercise versus carried out by individual states? And, as part of the BPL census?
   b) Based on your experiences to date, what are the best way to carry out aggregation and categorization of caste data?
   c) Why do you think the central government has decided to do a caste census? And not in 2001?
   d) Why does the government believe that caste data is important, at this point in time?
   e) How will the data be used by different government actors?