



Hate news: Chief Justice of India's anguish is spot on

Channels communalising news must be called out — but the government is not the solution, it's the problem.

Prime Time Hate News

1. Chief Justice of India NV Ramana is right — and has done the right thing — to flag the “problem” that “everything in this country is shown with a communal angle by a section of the media.” The country is going to get a bad name, he said. But the risk is not merely reputational.
2. The CJI-led bench was hearing a batch of petitions that sought action against news channels for the ways in which their coverage of the Tablighi Jamaat meeting at the Nizamuddin Markaz last year was sensationalised.
3. Indeed, the Tablighi Jamaat was demonised, and an attempt was made to manipulate the fears already stoked by a little known virus to deepen communal polarisation.
4. In this context, however, the court's lament about “no control on web portals” and platforms without “accountability”, may, unfortunately, be an instance of not framing the problem in its full complexity.
5. In response, Solicitor General, who speaks for the Centre, referred, as a solution, to the controversial Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, that have been challenged. If the court articulated an incomplete question, the Centre has pointed to the wrong answer.

Solutions:

1. There are no easy solutions, no statist quick fixes, to the problem that has provoked the anguished reaction of the court. The communication of news is partly because of decisions taken in some newsrooms and boardrooms to do so.
2. But arguing for controls by the state is to simply ignore the larger context and political eco-system while risking the potential cramping of the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression.



The CJJ's anguish, however, could yet serve a larger purpose, by starting a wider conversation. One which acknowledges the problem in its complexities. And one which does not hesitate to call out — and forthrightly address — all the complicities.

Caste census will herald a new era of equality

The government's refusal to carry out a caste-based census in 2021 has transformed the otherwise dull exercise of conducting the decennial census into an emotive issue.

No credible opposition:

1. The opponents of caste enumeration lack any novel argument. They are replicating the same fear psychosis that it will breed casteism, divide society, and increase the existing caste-based quotas, which has been used against every other progressive measure centred around caste.
2. It is a settled debate that modern complex societies cannot function without the widespread documentation and categorisation of the population.
3. If caste breeds social unrest—as is widely argued by the opponents of caste enumeration — so does religion. But we count the latter.
4. Any observer of Indian society would suggest that caste and religion continue to be the twin central axes that structure the relations of domination and subordination.
5. It is ironic that the suffering, pain, and everyday oppression of thousands of castes are neither acknowledged nor registered. Consequently, not counting the exact socio-economic and educational conditions of castes is nothing short of a scandal.

The hostility against the caste census: Public reason in India is still caste-ridden

1. First, it is an attempt to conceal the overwhelming dominance of the upper castes in all walks of life. It implies that caste-based enumeration is opposed because it might lead to a scrutiny of the privileges of the upper castes.



2. Second, it also helps us understand that the elites do not want themselves to be an object of enquiry. This explains why the upper castes in India are understudied in comparison to the lower castes and Dalits.
3. Third, it validates the observation that the upper-caste dominated middle classes in this country, unlike the West, are socially illiberal and conservative in that they do not want lower groups to be incorporated within their fold.
4. Fourth, the opposition to enumerating castes in the census showcases that we have collectively failed to acknowledge the gravity of caste-based oppression and are indifferent towards the everyday humiliation and cruelty that the majority of this country faces. It would not be an exaggeration to say that public reason in India is still caste-ridden.
5. The classic case of this is the reception which reservations (or, for that matter, any policies directed to ensure social justice) have got in India. Instead of perceiving reservation as the marker of society's reflexivity towards its wrongdoings on its people, the constant attack on it only suggests that those seeing it as a symbol of collective remorse were historically wrong.
6. Fifth, in a society deeply divided on caste lines, most of us not only know that there are numerous castes but also practice caste specific-codes in our daily lives; be it marrying within our caste boundaries; inviting fellow cast members for funeral feasts; carrying on rituals by Brahmin priests, etc..
7. At the same time, we hardly acknowledge our privileges, question prejudices, and think intersubjectively about the plight of the oppressed communities.
8. That is why, despite credible evidence suggesting that caste is the most crucial category that shapes an individual's life prospects even in contemporary India, a caste-based census is vehemently opposed.

Thus, it is necessary to offset the mistakes which have been made by not conducting a caste census for such a long period. However, it must not be reduced to its political implications, as is generally done; rather, one must pay attention to its potential to reconstruct Indian society on egalitarian lines.



Three justifications make this exercise not only essential but desirable as well.

- 1. One, the demand for caste-based census needs to be seen as an essential step in nation-building. It offers us a historical opportunity to assess the socio-economic miseries that a large number of social groups face.*
- 2. Moreover, national cohesion and social harmony can neither be achieved by keeping the masses in the dark nor by depriving them of their legitimate share in power and resources.*
- 3. Two, caste empowerment is a stepping stone towards its eventual destruction. There is no harm in knowing the exact conditions of different castes in India.*
- 4. It is not possible to eradicate caste without attacking the structures which perpetuate it, without acknowledging its presence and impact. Privileges need to be attacked so that no social group has a stake in maintaining them.*
- 5. Caste cannot be undone by wishful thinking. A notional change in social relations is required for the eradication of caste.*
- 6. Three, there is a growing apprehension that the quest to address inter-group inequalities (through various affirmative action policies) has given rise to the intra-group domination of a few communities.*
- 7. In the absence of any scientific information on different castes' socio-economic and educational conditions, we are clueless about how to devise mechanisms to address the intra-group dominance. Therefore, caste enumeration would enable us to identify the extent to which OBCs and upper castes are undifferentiated categories.*
- 8. The lack of proper data arrests any possibility of radical socio-economic transformation of the lower castes in India.*

To conclude, caste enumeration should not merely be perceived as an instrument to facilitate robust and targeted policies and to revitalise reservations. Too much obsession with its political implications in debates has sidelined the role which it can play in ensuring social harmony, national cohesion, and intra-group equality.



Q. Account for hostility against caste census in India. Argue in favour of caste census as the most desirable thing to annihilate caste in India.

Ethics Article

Teachers should be seen as carriers of 'emancipatory education'

Role of teachers:

1. A teacher is not just a subject expert. She teaches not merely quantum physics or medieval history; she does something more. She walks with her students as a co-traveller; she touches their souls; and as a catalyst, she helps the young learner to understand his/her uniqueness and innate possibilities.
2. She is not a machine that merely repeats the dictates of the official curriculum; nor is she an agent of surveillance — disciplining, punishing, hierarchising and normalising her students through the ritualisation of examinations and grading.
3. Instead, she is creative and reflexive; and it is through the nuanced art of relatedness that she activates the learner's faith that he is unique, he need not be like someone else, he must look at the process of his inner flowering, and the artificially constructed binary of "success" and "failure" must be abandoned.

Emancipatory education: Creating a student of life that is the teacher's job

1. There is another important thing a teacher ought to take care of. She must realise that there are limits to teaching and sermonising, and she is not supposed to fill the mind of the learner with the heavy baggage of bookish knowledge.
2. Instead, her primary task is to help the learner to sharpen the power of observation, the ability to think and reflect, the aesthetic sensibility, and above all, the spiritual urge to experience the glimpses of the Infinite.

04.09.2021

Saturday



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3. In other words, once these faculties are developed, one becomes a life-long learner — beyond degrees and diplomas. In fact, teaching as an act of communion, and studentship as a project of the integral development of the physical, vital, intellectual and psychic states of being, can create the ground for emancipatory education.
4. And emancipatory education is not a mere act of “skill learning”; nor is it pure intellectualism with academic specialisation.

Conditions on the ground:

1. Yet, the irony is that we do not desire to create an environment that promotes emancipatory education, and nurtures the true spirit of the vocation of teaching.
2. Look at the state of an average school in the country. With rote learning, poor teacher-taught ratio, pathetic infrastructure, chaotic classrooms and demotivated teachers, it is not possible to expect even the slightest trace of intellectually stimulating and ethically churning education.
3. It is sad that ours is a society that refuses to acknowledge the worth of good schoolteachers.
4. Moreover, because of nepotism, corruption and trivialisation of BEd degrees, there is a massive devaluation of the vocation.
5. Likewise, while the triumphant political class has caused severe damage to some of our leading public universities, and fancy institutes of technology and management see education primarily as training for supplying the workforce for the techno-corporate empire, teachers are becoming mere “service providers” or docile conformists.
6. Here is a society hypnotised by the power of bureaucracy, the assertion of techno-managers and the glitz of celebrities. Not surprisingly then, it fails to realise that a society that has lost its teachers is dead.

However, those who love the vocation of teaching and continue to see its immense possibilities should not give up. After all, ours is also a society that saw the likes of Gijubhai Badheka, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Rabindranath Tagore and Jiddu Krishnamurti who inspired us, and made us believe that a teacher, far from being a cog in the bureaucratic machine, carries the lamp of truth, and walks with her students as wanderers and seekers to make sense of the world they live in, and free it from what belittles man. We must celebrate this pedagogy of hope.