

Language, Ethnicity, and Disparities in Contemporary India

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“Official” Languages of India

Table of Schedule Eight Languages in Descending Order of Number of Persons Who Returned the Language as their Mother Tongue (Census of India, 2001)

Rank	Language	Number	Percentage of Population
1	Hindi	422,048,642	41.03
2	Bengali	83,369,769	8.11
3	Telugu	74,002,856	7.19
4	Marathi	71,936,894	6.99
5	Tamil	60,793,814	5.91
6	Urdu	51,536,111	5.01
7	Gujarati	46,091,617	4.48
8	Kannada	37,924,011	3.69
9	Malayalam	33,066,392	3.21
10	Oriya	33,017,446	3.21
11	Punjabi	29,102,477	2.83
12	Assamese	13,168,484	1.28
13	Maithili	12,179,122	1.18
14	Santali	6,469,600	0.63
15	Kashmiri	5,527,698	0.54
16	Nepali	2,871,749	0.28
17	Sindhi	2,535,485	0.25
18	Konkani	2,489,015	0.24
19	Dogri	2,282,589	0.22
20	Manipuri*	1,466,705	0.14
21	Bodo	1,350,478	0.13
22	Sanskrit	14,135	Negligible

*Excludes figures of Paomata, Mao-Maram and Purul subdivisions of Senapati district of Manipur for 2001.



MAP 3. Map of India, 2008

Potti Sriramulu (1890-1952)



Nations with the largest population of Muslims (2010 estimates)

Nation	Total # of Muslims	Percentage of National Population that is Muslim
Indonesia	204,847,000	88.1
Pakistan	178,097,000	96.4
India	177,286,000	14.6
Bangladesh	148,607,000	90.4
Egypt	80,024,000	94.7
Nigeria	75,728,000	47.9

Source: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “The Future of the Global Muslim Population” (January 2011)

Religious Composition of India's Population (2001 Census Data)

Religious Composition (%)	Population	
Hindus	827,578,868	80.5
Muslims	138,188,240	13.4
Christians	24,080,016	2.3
Sikhs	19,215,730	1.9
Buddhists	7,955,207	0.8
Jains	4,225,053	0.4
Other Religions & Persuasions	6,639,626	0.6
Religion not stated	727,588	0.1
Total	1,028,610,328	100.0

Three Meanings of “Caste”

1. Indian government categories:

– SC/ST – Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes

- Indian Constitution reserved 22.5% of government jobs and university seats for these “Depressed Classes” (former “untouchables” and tribal groups)

– OBC – Other Backward Classes

- Reservations were expanded recently to include an addition 27% of the population, for a total of 49.5% reserved seats in government institutions (now includes other economically disadvantaged lower caste groups)

Three Meanings of “Caste”

2. jati

- Derived from the Sanskrit verb for “born,” “brought into existence
- Often refers to kinship group or lineage
- May also be linked to occupation or pre-modern administrative titles (e.g., revenue collector, village office holder)
- Jatis defy being placed into a single all-India hierarchical system
- Evidence of social mobility linked to jatis in pre-modern eras
- Jatis often (though not always) appear today as surnames or family names

Three Meanings of “Caste”

3. varna (literally “color”)

- Based on textual tradition (more abstract system)
- British assumed that it could map directly onto all groups in India and be used to classify them all within a single overarching system (in practice it didn’t)
- Four categories + outcaste group:
 - Brahmins (priests & secular advisors to kings)
 - Ksatriyas (warriors, kings, rulers)
 - Vaisyas (merchants, traders)
 - Sudras (producers, agriculturalists, artisans, laborers)
 - Panchamas (outcastes, those outside system, “untouchables”)

Three Puzzles

1. Why would someone be willing to die, not for a nation, but for the recognition of a regional linguistic or cultural identity?
2. When groups do demand recognition, why don't they demand separation from the Indian nation, as we have seen happening elsewhere in the world, and even elsewhere in South Asia?
3. Why the recent return of caste into the Indian census in 2011?