

# THE LIFEWORLD OF NOMADIC AND DENOTIFIED TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN NANDED DISTRICT OF MAHARASHTRA

**Komal Dnyandev Devkate<sup>1</sup>, Pravin Panditrao Ghunnar<sup>2</sup>, Sandhya Rani<sup>3</sup>**

PhD Scholar, Tata Institute of Social Sciences  
devkatekomal@gmail.com

Assistant Professor, University of Mumbai

Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences  
pmsrani@tiss.edu

## Abstract

*This paper highlights the manifold life vulnerabilities experienced by the Nomadic and Denotified Tribal Communities from the Nanded district of Maharashtra. The qualitative approach was instrumental in gathering and analyzing the data of this study. The paper argues that exclusion, vulnerability, and the criminal stigma deteriorate people's Lifeworld from these tribal communities. People from these communities live with no means of security, struggling to avail basic needs like food, shelter, and clothes. Further, In this article, cultural practices, health issues of women are also highlighted, which is again amongst the major concerns for these communities. What is required is a pressing need for a policy framework that focuses on the socio-economic and political inclusion of people by supporting them through educational, occupational, and other developmental programs.*

**Keywords:** NT-DNTs, Lifeworld, Exclusion, Vulnerability, Women status

## INTRODUCTION

Even after 74 years of independence, the nomadic and de-notified tribal communities are still far from meeting their fundamental human rights. They are staying without permanent shelter, food, water, electricity, education, health, etc. Their social position has always been challenging as society has always labeled them as 'criminals.' Due to British colonial policies, they have lost traditional occupation. As a result, they have to move from one place to another place for their survival. Their children are deprived of education, and they cannot take education through regular school systems due to an unstable lifestyle. The NT-DNTs communities' main concerns are poverty, superstition, and ignorance, and they have remained the most neglected, marginalized, economically, and socially deprived communities in India (Idate commission, 2017). The people from the NT-DNT are continuously exploited by the rest of society and the police authority. Surprisingly, even today, we do not see any policy preventing injustice and exploitation.

India consists of 10 percent population of the nomadic and de-notified tribe, which is estimated 7% percent of India's population and consists of a number of de-notified communities (Renake Commission, 2008). Further, he has stated that in 1931 the last caste-wise census was conducted that also failed to include all the categories of DNTs. According to the census, the tentative population of DNTs was around 10 to 15 crores (Renake, 2008). The nomadic and de-notified tribes constitute about five million of the population in Maharashtra. There are 313 Nomadic tribes and 198 De-notified tribes (Rathod, 2014). Population data of the entire NT-DNT Community across India is unavailable. Post-1931, no caste-based census has been undertaken. The diversity among the DNT and NT communities makes it difficult to design one standard policy for their inclusion within the mainstream society of India. (Sanap, M. 2012).

The quality of life of the nomadic tribes is inferior because of their extreme poverty. This has resulted in the prevalence of high rates of undernutrition, high morbidity, and high infant and maternal mortality among these tribes (Jopphet, Diwakar, & Sabharwal, 2015).

A study by (Bokil 2002) reveals that denotified tribal women are more vulnerable as the above statement indicates the reason is rooted in the precarious conditions of their communities. Denotified Tribal women are

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Research Scholar, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Master of Social Work Department, University of Mumbai.

<sup>3</sup> Professor & Chairperson, Centre for Population, Health and Development, School of Development Studies

not confined to the house's four walls as the house does not exist. They are involved in processing and manufacturing as well as in selling and marketing. Due to the interaction of the other world in day-to-day life, they are pretty bold, fearless, and articulate. But despite this, they are repressed by the traditional patriarchal structures and institutions.

The serious crimes considered for women are exogamous marriage, adultery, and premarital pregnancy. Most tribes have their traditional caste councils that resolve disputes among individuals, families, and others. Women do not have any role in these councils and face discrimination. The elderly male has supreme authority. The status of women is extremely low, and often brutal sanctions are imposed on them (Bokil, 2002). As NT-DNT communities are not connected with the mainstream of social life, they are unaware of health awareness and medical facilities. They are so poor that they cannot afford and go to qualified doctors or Specialists. Their women and children are most vulnerable to the contamination of various diseases due to Malnutrition. So special requirements and budgetary allocation be made in the Sub Plan for NT-DNTs for Health Awareness and other Medical Facilities (NIRMAN, 2011). Increasing Malnutrition is another scenario in NT/DNT communities. Many children are malnourished in Maharashtra, and the government will soon declare there is no malnutrition in Maharashtra (Sanap, M 2012). A survey in some of the villages, Marathwada and Vidarbha, has shown a number of malnourished children whose State was in the mode of denial earlier.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method was used to conduct the study in the Nanded district of Maharashtra. The geographical location of these communities was scattered in the selected blocks of the study area. Participants from Nomadic and Denotified communities such as Hatkar, Dhargar, Banjara, Pardhi, Vadar, Bhoi, Gosavi, Jogi Ghisadi, and Beldar participated in this study. The data was collected using various methods such as case studies, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Some participants were settled in some of the study villages, and some were still wandering in search of livelihoods.

The data was collected in 2019 for a different reason in the study area; since the situation of the NT-DNT Community is similar in almost all places, selecting any district to understand the problem of this Community was the primary reason for the researcher. However, the habitat of the study population was available in the district, and it was inquired from the local sources before the selection of the study location. Further, the studies on this topic are minimal across Maharashtra. Nanded comes under the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, which consists of none of the studies focusing on the study population. Nanded is located in the southern part of Maharashtra, near its boundary with Andhra Pradesh. It is one of the largest districts of the Marathwada region of Maharashtra and has a population of 33 61,292 (Directorate of Census Operations, Maharashtra 2011). More than 50% of the people of this district are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture, and soybean and cotton are the main crops (Ghunnar, P & Hakhu, A, 2018).

## KEY FINDINGS:

### **Religion & Culture**

'The nomads are known for their cultural richness, special cultural identity and diversity but globalization and modernization have greatly influenced them socially, culturally as well as economically. Nomadic communities' social uniqueness characteristics are closely related to their economic activities' (Idate Commission, 2017). Hindu is the major and which these communities believe; they obtain the services of Brahmin priests for their significant events like births, festivals, weddings, funerals, etc. They practice the Hindu religion and worship the gods such as *Khandoba, Krishna, Ganpati, Mahadev, Tuljabhavani*, etc. Their patron god is *Khandoba, Sevalal Maharaj, Mari Aai, Darepa, and Maloba*. They celebrate all the festivals *Diwali, Holi, Ganpati, Navratri*, etc. However, the affordability and acceptability of the priests are impossible for some of the communities, especially *Vadar, Gosavi, and Ghisadi*. Also, the celebration of festivals depends on collecting money and grains by roaming in the villages for begging and offering some services.

The Nomadic and Denotified tribes have a rich cultural legacy and can be easily identified by their dress, dialect, folklore, customs, and traditional practices. These tribes had wandering traditions from their history. However, the culture of these communities has very poor recognition. They have always been dominated by the majority population cultures and indirectly made them inferior to their culture.

As some of the community key persons of these localities and noticed while interviewing them, most people from NT-DNT communities speak the Marathi language. Still, the tone was different from those from non-NT-DNT communities as they speak their language in their Community. Also, it is revealed that the language also makes them inferior as a result, they get afraid of expressing their feelings in front of any of the mainstream agencies. This also affects if some of them send their children to the school where the child gets inferior.

### **Housing and Settlement**

According to a study by Nirman in 2011, 'Most of these communities have no permanent residence, and they generally live on the outskirts of the villages, the place where they stay are *Pal or Tanda's* or any non-permanent

settlement, some of which do not even fall under Gram Panchayat areas' similarly, the housing patterns of the people from these areas are almost in poor condition. As said by one of the participants that *'We do not have a house or a door, We have to move around for our empty stomach and children. We don't have any government facilities or as there is no government or Leader for us. They only come at the time of voting. Once the voting is over, no one comes.'* Also, it is revealed that people from these communities are living in very poorly constructed houses. They do not have a permanent settlement since they are on the move frequently, especially the DNTs. Some of them have their own house, but they do not have any basic facilities available at their house. Also, many of these communities live in temporary huts without basic facilities such as drinking water, sanitation, electricity, etc.

### **Livelihood**

The NT-DNT communities do not have land except a few communities such as Hatkar, Dhangar, and Banjara as they have their small pieces of agricultural land. They are growing various crops such as *Jawar, Wheat, Soybean, Cotton, Pulses, Green gram, red gram*, etc. The majority of people's livelihood is dependent on livestock like cows, buffalo, hens, goats, etc. Also, the majority of NT-DNT communities are working as labor in the other agricultural land. The traditional occupation of these communities differs from each other. Traditionally they worked differently to sustain their lives, such as breaking stones, goat rearing, making and repairing agricultural tools, begging, entertaining, hunting, etc. 'In the rural areas, a majority of them are migrant laborers while in the urban areas hawking flowers, cheap toys and trinkets and begging on the streets are their common forms of livelihood' (EPW Editorial, 2010). Further, Sanap, M. (2012), mentions 'Livelihood issues are more painful, and their traditional occupations are not viable in the present context. Due to the advent of modern media and the technological and cultural advent, their traditional occupations are no more relevant. They are finding themselves helpless to cast their position in contemporary society' One of the villagers said that *In the days of our parents, we used to live in the forest and go hunting, but now there is no forest and no animals for hunting.* It is revealed that their traditional occupation is changing, and they are facing difficulties in their new occupation due to lack of skills, social stigma as a criminal, language issues, etc. As the participants said, very few of them are continuing their traditional occupation.

### **Education**

As per the National Commission for De-notified, Nomadic, and Semi Nomadic tribes Report, 2008, these communities are mainly illiterate. Those who are educated are educated primarily up to the 10th class. On the other hand, these communities do not give importance to girls' education; the reason behind it is due to the moving nature of the Community, it is challenging to take care of girls. Another reason is early marriages are a prevalent practice in the communities. One of the participants said that *there is no such thing as education in our destiny, and we do not know what is in the destiny of our children.*

According to the report of the Council for Social Development (CSD), 2017, Hyderabad highlights poor socio-economic conditions and low levels of education. It reports that the existing government programmes and policies are not enough to improve access to education for these most vulnerable sections. Despite various schemes and programmes for the education of tribes in India, the enrollment of children from NT-DNT communities, even at the preprograms primary educational level, is very minimal. It is challenging for them to enroll their kids in educational institutions due programs, nomadism, poverty, lack of awareness about education. Renke Commission (2008) critiques that the flagship programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has not made much headway in providing education to NTs and DNTs because of a lack of awareness about education among them, steady migration and Nomadic children have responsible for earning for their family, etc. Further, the commissions a program to the wandering tradition, De-notified, Nomadic, and Semi Nomadic Tribes cannot take education from the regular school systems in a settled society. Education is a mirage to the Denotified, Nomadic and Semi Nomadic communities. Therefore it is revealed that the educational status and attainment of these communities are very poor.

### **Health**

As reported by (Nirman 2011), these communities are unaware of health awareness and medical facilities. They are so poor that they cannot afford/go to qualified doctors or Specialists. Their women and children are most vulnerable to contamination of various diseases due to Malnutrition. A lot of superstitions prevail in Denotified & Nomadic Communities, which are attached to multiple health disorders. Due to poverty and ignorance, many people still prefer treatment through black magic and tona totka. Therefore there is a need to create health awareness among denotified and nomadic communities to begin taking access to government health facilities (Sarthak, 2017). Nutrition is dependent on food intake, and it is a must for any life to survive.

On the other hand nutrition and food is a significant factor for good reproductive health. The results about food habits, taboo foods, consumption of food, perception about food, how many times they eat a day, the respondents' height and weight, etc., were very shocking. Many of them eat once a day that includes only *Dal* and rice or sometimes *Roti Subji*. The intake of nutritional values in these food items seems very poor. Therefore, Increasing Malnutrition is another scenario in NT/DNT communities. Primary children are

malnourished in Maharashtra, and the government will soon declare no malnutrition in Maharashtra. Our survey in some villages, Marathwada and Vidarbha, has shown the number of undernourished children that State was in the mode of denial earlier (Sanap, 2012). These communities are very far away from modern health facilities. They do not visit the doctor even though they have a severe illness. This is primarily because of the hospitalization expenses. Some of the community people also reported that these people never practice the behavior of visiting doctors. The majority of women deliver at home through the help of old village women who are experienced or older women from the Community.

### **Water and Sanitation**

"Safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (collectively known as WASH) are crucial for human health and well-being. Yet, millions of people globally lack adequate WASH services and consequently suffer from or are exposed to many preventable illnesses. Lack of safe WASH negatively impacts the quality of life and undermines fundamental human rights" (WHO, 2019). Most of the participants from different places of the study location said that they have to fetch water from other wells, leaking water supply pipes, hand pumps, bore wells, etc. The water use in their houses is anyway very low; however, to meet even that is very difficult for many of the times. Further, the sanitation practices in these communities are very poor in their localities. Hence they do not meet the basic standards of WASH, which are essential human needs.

### **Women Status**

The Renke Commission Report, 2008 suggests that 'women are also victims of the customs and institutions of their communities (Agrawal, 2018).

The Sarthak organization, in its report, 2016 submitted to National Commission for Women, mentions that 'the life of a nomad is difficult, surrounded by circumstances full of trauma, agony, and turbulence, from which their women suffer the most. The level of education among women of denotified communities is very low. Bokil, 2002 writes, 'patriarchy among nomads is more stringent than sedentary, agricultural communities. Though outward expressions differ in different communities, the underlying feature is that women are considered a piece of property. Further, he adds, 'the status of women is extremely low and often brutal sanctions Agrawal 157 are imposed on them.' He notes that while the DNT women are: 'Quite bold, fearless and articulate, they are severely repressed by the patriarchal structures' as cited in (Agrawal 2018). In most of these communities, male family members such as husbands, sons, etc., are dominant, and women cannot make any decision without asking men's permission in their family.

There are various places where women cannot go alone, such as Banks, Post offices, Cinema halls. However, in some DNT communities, the patriarchal rigidity is less, i.e., Banjara, Pardhi, Vadar. Due to the Nomadic way of life, women are not getting opportunities to participate in any SHG or dairy cooperative, etc. A study also showed that most women do not belong to any groups or clubs such as Self-help groups, dairy cooperatives, and social clubs. Also, if any women who do not have children are labeled very severely in society, they live with very poor status in society. Suppose women who are unable to conceive are considered as a *Banj*. Such women face various issues from their husbands and in-laws. The majority of men go for another marriage if their wife is not able to conceive. Society does not treat them like other women; they do not invite such women for any functions, especially the *Haldi kumkum* program. Also, many people do not have food prepared by these women, and many other women do not allow their children to talk with childless women as they believe that it is not good for their children. Due to this kind of fear, most girls prefer to get pregnant as soon as possible after their marriage. On the other hand, if a woman gives birth to a boy for the first time, her status will be a little high in the family and society. Such rigidity and practices make women very deprived and vulnerable in society.

### **Dowry**

Most of the tribes from the NT/DNT community practice the dowry system. Girls' families have to give dowry to boys' families at the time of marriage or before marriage. There are various things which need to be given to the boys' family as dowry such as cash which is a very high amount like minimum one lakh to thirty lakh. They also have to provide all utensils which are needed for the house, including some wooden furniture. Expensive clothes for boy and his family, gold for boy and girl, and all the marriage expenses including food. Most people said that if we do not give dowry, our girls will not be happy in their house. It means dowry is to make sure that girls will be happy in their marital house. One of the participants said, that *we are teaching our daughter with the hope that it will reduce the amount of dowry as boys want educated girls. If a girl is not good-looking, then we have to give more dowry; otherwise, no one will marry her, and in the end, we have to face so many problems.* This evil practice is more prevalent in these communities and makes many parents overburdened/stressed to having daughters at home. Dowry is also one of the reasons responsible for less preference for girl children in the families. Therefore it can be said that these communities make women manifold deprived and vulnerable.

### **Child Marriage**

As reflected in the (UNICEF, 2011) report, 'Child marriage is not only a human rights violation, but it also hinders the achievement of millennium development goals and compromises the future of our children and our



country. Further, they add, 'In India, almost half of all girls marry before 18 years, which is the legal age of marriage. Also the implications of child marriage for girls are an increased risk of maternal and infant mortality, HIV infection due to early sexual debut and early childbearing. Girls married at early ages are also at a higher risk of domestic violence. Moreover, it restricts girls' opportunities to go to school and realize their potential beyond their roles as wives and mothers, however, for generations (UNICEF, 2011).

As reported in many kinds of literature and by the community leader and people, for generations, the practice of early marriage has been most prevalent in these communities. Now at least, after puberty, marriage is considered earlier; it was even younger ages they used to get married. Hence, child marriage is a prevalent practice in these communities. These communities prefer to marry in their close-knit relationships. As like marrying with father's sister's daughters and mother brother's daughters is very common. Nowadays, the expenses on marriages are heavily increased even though they cannot afford it. Most of them are highly indebted due to marriage expenses and distress in their families. After marriage also the girl's parents have to fulfill the expectations of the boy's family. As reflected in (Mane 2001:54), Child marriages are common. In some nomadic communities like the Pardhis or Vaidus, women are sold, exchanged, mortgaged, and even leased out, as cited in Bokil, M. (2002). It is also reflected in the Renke Commission, 2008 that 'About 8 percent women in Denotified communities and 7 percent in Nomadic communities have had their first child at the age of 14 years.

One more reality came out while discussing marriage practice in these communities that the boy's family visits the girl's family through a person (who is a relative or neighbor or who gives the address of the girl's family and initiates the process of marriage. They ask a few basic questions to the girl, which the girl has to answer, and she does not get a chance to ask any counter questions to the boy or any other relative. Also, she cannot even decide whether she has to marry with the proposed proposal. The same happens with many boys too in these communities. This may lead to many problems in their future coordination and family relationships. Further, in the marriage process, many other small events lead to many expenses to both families, which are mostly unnecessary.

### **Public Distribution System**

The Public Distribution System is available in all the villages, but many people from NT-DNT communities do not have Ration cards to avail grains from PDS shops. Especially the DNTs. Also, many people observed and shared that they do not have supporting documents to avail the other governmental facilities. However, some of them said *we have ration cards, but who knows when the ration comes and when it ends? We even do not know how much ration one should get at times. If we are in the village, sometimes we get it, sometimes not.* Further, the experiences at the different governmental offices are also worse as they do not have exposure to approaching people in a standard setup. Due to the migration of many of these communities, people could not access the service.

### **Exclusion**

Due to the Nomadic way of life, NT-DNT communities face exclusion from fundamental rights such as Food, Shelter, Health, Education, etc. The primary reason behind their exclusion is British colonial policies such as the Land reform of 1950, Criminal tribe act 1971 forest act, etc. These tribes stayed in forests and grazing lands for their livelihood and residential use as they never had access to private land or home ownership (Idate Commission, 2017). The NT-DNT communities are also excluded from the livelihood resources. These communities depended on their traditional occupation such as Hunting, Good and services such as handmade wool cloths, wood baskets, wool blankets, Ayurveda medicine, etc. The land reform of 1950 focused on growing more food and generating revenue, so public lands were used to cultivate crops. As a result of these policies, it has neglected pastoralism. The land which was used by these communities developed as agricultural fields. Another reason behind the exclusion of NT-DNT communities is social stigma due to the criminal tribe act 1971. Due to social stigma, they are not mixing up with mainstream society.

The exclusion of NT-DNTs was also seen at the local self-governance institutions. Most of the participants said that they never attended the Gram Sabha. Most of them live outside the villages, and those who live in the villages are always sidelined or made unaware of the Gram panchayat happenings. One of the participants from Dongargaon village said, *'we never visited the Gram Panchayat as if we go there the people from the office make fun of us or sometimes indirectly even threaten us.'* Many people in different villages said that they have the least awareness about the government schemes/initiatives, and therefore, they are always away from the benefits of the government initiatives. There is also apathy from the government officials regarding making these people aware of being inclusive for them. This leads them to unprecedented vulnerability and further marginalities.

### **Discussion:**

The historical deprivation of NT-DNT communities continues in similar ways even today. This led them to live in manifold vulnerability in contemporary times. As reflected in many studies and empirical evidence, these communities are excluded from the developmental process. They are still far away from meeting their basic fundamental rights. The extreme poverty and their position in society lead them to many issues such as

illiteracy, Malnutrition, exclusion from socio-political and cultural aspects, child marriages, further exploitation, and many more. Despite being culturally rich, their culture has always been suffocated. It has never been glorified; in fact, it has been stigmatized. The livelihood of these communities is also very much part of their cultural practices. However, historically and even in contemporary times, there are many restrictions in practicing their traditional livelihood. They have a lack of skills, knowledge in adopting current livelihood sources. Therefore they are manifold insecure in earning bread and butter to their families. The housing conditions and the settlements are also in deplorable conditions. Especially the DNT communities. The study also finds that education awareness is very poor in these communities. It is primarily because of their nomadic way of life, lack of understanding, and exclusion from most mainstream institutions/domains. These communities are also experiencing a very poor state of their health. Most of them do not seek modern medical treatment even after serious ailments. This is primarily because of lack of money even to avail food. Further, the water and sanitation facilities at their localities are also much concerning; this even adds to their health status.

Child marriage, dowry is amongst the most concerning problems of these communities. This is leading to many issues in the lives of adolescent married children, especially girls. This further leads to the exploitation of women in these communities; thereby, the status of women in society is very poor. Government schemes such as ICDS, PDS, MGNREGA, and so on are made to uplift poor and marginalized people, but the accessibility and availability of these and many other programs are highly concerning in these communities. Overall the study finds that these communities are excluded socially, economically, politically, culturally, and many more mainstream aspects.

### **Social Work Intervention**

- To contribute in providing sustainable Livelihood activities as the study showed that livelihood is a primary concern of these communities as they have to move from one place to another for livelihood, which affects their entire life such as education, health, etc.
- Policy intervention and advocacy for providing free and residential schools for these communities, as the study found that respondents' education is very poor.
- Work for the programs targeting on basic needs of these communities such as a house, water, electricity, and toilet. The study found that due to their way of life, these communities are not getting this kind of facilities.
- Emphasize feminist social work practice to treat women as equal and help their activities by shading perception of *Mardangi*. Childless women should be treated respectfully; childless can be either a husband or wife problem. Therefore proper awareness is required of these communities.
- Contributing in the vocational training programs, it should be introduced for the girls as traditionally they engage in handicraft work. This will be a better opportunity for the livelihood of these communities.
- Lack of awareness about many health concerns of these communities emerged as an essential factor from this study. Therefore provide knowledge and understanding on different health practices through community health workers. Also, Community based counseling services on family planning and contraception use are essential for adolescent married girls. Awareness program for girls and women on breastfeeding and use of the sanitary pads.
- Motivate women to participate in self-help groups for their overall development of the women in these communities.
- Addressing the concepts, issues and concerns of the identity and discrimination of nomadic communities in the social work curriculum
- Historical exclusion and marginalization and issues needs to be raised in the context of social work curriculum

### **CONCLUSION**

The governmental and non-governmental organizations' genuine efforts in providing at least basic living standard for these communities is much needed. Also, the societal approach towards these communities needs to be changed to achieve a dignified life for the NT-DNT communities. The exclusion, vulnerability, and criminal stigma need to be addressed to give them an equal Lifeworld in society. There is a pressing need for a policy framework that focuses on the socio-economic and political inclusion of people by supporting them through educational, occupational, and other developmental programs.

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