NOMADIC AND DE-NOTIFIED TRIBES: THE STATUS OF EDUCATION

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The Nomadic and De-notified tribes (NT/DNT) constitute about 5 million of the population of Maharashtra and about 60 million all over India. There are 313 Nomadic tribes and 198 De-notified tribes in India.

Nomadic Tribes – If we look at the village structure, the people of the so-called ‘upper caste’ live in the middle of the village, Dalits live on the outside of the village, while Adivasis are those who live far from the village in the forest area. There are others who have no home in village, no land in field and they migrate from one place to another carrying with them their luggage on their head and these are called Nomadic tribes. Kaikadi, Dombari, Dhangar, Nandiwallas, Banjara, Vadar, Sangar, Kolati, Vaidus are some of the nomadic tribes.

De-notified tribes – The tribes that are referred to today as ‘De-notified’ tribes were communities that served as irregular army to the small princely states or kingdoms in the past. They were not paid but were set free to loot the enemy and this was the compensation. With establishment of British rule, the princely states no longer required to wage war against the neighbours. The princes got Privy Purse from Britishers which compensated their needs and of their regular army. As a result, the tribes who served as their irregular army lost their place and remained neglected. Devoid of any means of livelihood, they thus kept continuing looting the populace and decoiting.

This evoked the Britishers and the British administration to take a number of preventive steps to retain law and order. The enactment of the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 was one of them. The Act was based on a deceptive understanding of Indian society, particularly the caste system. The provisions of the Act were extremely harsh. Every member of the notified community was compelled to register himself/herself at the local police station and had to give report at a specified time of the day. The local police could easily round up any member of the community upon mere suspicion.
The Act was revoked in the year 1952 and the notified communities were ‘de-notified’. Though Criminal Tribes Act was repealed, the stigma of criminality continues.

**Educational status** – The Nomadic and De-notified Tribes have no means of livelihood, they move from village to village in search of livelihood. They are deprived from basic needs of food, clothes and shelter. Hence their priority is food for survival and not education and health. They are thus deprived of education and even access to it.

**Status of Children**: The children NT/DNTs cannot take education through regular school system due to their nomadic life style. Parents are not sensitized towards education; they force their male children into traditional occupation and the female children for domestic work so that they can contribute to their incomes.

Enrollment of children in schools among NT/DNT is very low. Although they are enrolled in nearby schools there is discontinuity due to their nomadic nature. Though some of these communities are seen to have settled at some places, yet they migrate from one settled place to another place in search of a livelihood, temporarily. They take their children along with them during this ‘temporary’ migration who join them in their labour. As a result, the children’s education gets discontinued. The children born and grown in such environment follow same life style and their way of life automatically keeps them deprived from education. Girl child is more disadvantaged because early marriage automatically leads to deprivation of girl child from education.

**VSSM Study** – A study carried out by VSSM (Vicharata Samuday Samarthan Manch- an organization that works with these communities in Gujarat) reveals that more than 25% of the children of Nomadic and De-notified tribes who are enrolled in schools were pushed out within one month due to teachers’ complaints such as:

1. Children from Dafer (a De-notified tribe of Gujarat) community are non vegetarian.
2. They stay in huts and are dirty. They do not have access to water and sanitation, so hardly take bath.
3. They don’t wear proper clothes.
4. Their settlements are always outside villages and mostly live in temporary shelters.
5. The children from Nomadic and De-notified communities eat large quantity of food and thus expenses will increase.

**Right to Education Act and NT/DNT children** – The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act came into force from Thursday, 1st April 2010. The term ‘child’ in the Act means a child in the age group of 6-14 years. (The original Article 45 and the Unnikrishnan verdict by the Supreme Court had included the age group of 0-6 years in the definition of a child.). It
means the Act takes away the constitutional right to education for the age group of 0 to 6 years.

Parents of mainstream society can give pre-primary education to their child between 0 to 6 years easily, as they have access and money for the same. But for NT/DNT families it is very difficult to give pre-primary education to their children due to lack of money, access and awareness about education. In this way children from these communities remains deprived from basic education and they can’t adjust themselves in school environment afterwards. This leads to low educational progress and they get dropped out from the school.

According to the Act private schools have to reserve up to 25 per cent of their total seats for children of weaker sections and government will reimburse the amount at a fixed rate, for one child @ Rs. 4,481 per annum at the elementary level and Rs. 10,150 at the secondary level. Most of the private schools are opposed to keeping such reservations for children of weaker sections. This leads to delays in its implementation in the state. Although the government has offered to reimburse Rs 1,000/- towards the monthly fee for every child admitted under the 25 % quota, yet schools are unhappy with this (Hindustan Times – 15/9/2011). In such situation emphasis should be given to implementation of 25% reservation for economically and socially weaker sections in private schools otherwise children of weaker sections that includes NT/DNT, Dalit, Adivasis and migrant workers will remain out of school. In such circumstances it is also necessary to motivate private schools to take responsibility to identify and bring these children into the school.

The Act has defined areas or limits of neighbourhood within which a school has to be established in respect of children in classes I – V. It states - “a school shall be established within a walking distance of one km of the neighbourhood and in respect of children in classes VI to VIII, a school shall be established within a walking distance of 3 km of the neighbourhood. Now the question is about which place the distance of 1 or 3 km is to be counted. Is it Panchayat office of village or temple or Dalit vasti? Then the question remains about Nomadic and De-notified tribe’s children who stay out of the village? Who will take responsibility to bring them to school as NT/DNTs do not have permanent settlements? In such circumstances it is very necessary that school should take responsibility of bringing child to school and that responsibility should be defined very clearly. The emphasis should be given to settle these communities with access of basic amenities and employment. Then and only then can they get education properly in regular school system.

The traditional work (occupation) which they are doing is throwing them out of the mainstream. They are always engaged in their traditional, cultural activities and stick to it, therefore they automatically remain backward and deprived from education. It is extremely necessary to integrate them into mainstream for their development and education is one of the ways to do the same. Government should take certain steps towards empowerment of these tribes.
At the same time these communities have their own wisdom, geographical understanding, knowledge of animal husbandry and of the eco system, and also have a rich tradition of folk songs, arts and literature. Let us also acknowledge their needs but also their skills and resources and see how our education system will help them.
From the letter announcing the launch of Mukt-Saad -

Sir,

With heartiest greetings I would like to make this announcement to you!

Some months back I have launched an e-journal focused on the Denotified and Nomadic Communities of India, titled 'Mukt-Saad': Call of the Unbound'. This journal is visualized as a serious, interdisciplinary scholarly journal and a non-partisan, all-voluntary scholarly activity. It is intended to be a bilingual - English and Hindi - quarterly. It is NOT a campaign periodical of any sort but strictly a research journal.