

Right to Education of Children of Nomadic Mendicants and Entertainer Communities: An Action Research

Introduction

The population of 'De-notified and Nomadic Tribes' (DNTs) run into million, still there has been no census of them in India since 1931. Several commissions were appointed by the Central and State Governments to study and recommend policy and programmatic changes to improve the socio-economic status of these communities such as developing their ethnographic profiles. But all these efforts have hardly achieved the desired results.

Currently NT-DNT communities are found in almost all States of India, belonging mostly to the OBC category in some States and SC and ST in others. Still, a few communities are not covered by any of these three categories; even those who are covered are unable to avail benefits due to various reasons. Moreover, many States have not prepared lists of either the de-notified or nomadic communities, making their status unknown. As a result, DNTs are among the most underprivileged and destitute communities facing multiple forms of exclusion. Among the DNTs, nomadic mendicants and entertainer communities have been further neglected when they interface with the highly dynamic contemporary world.



In this context, the study attempts to understand the issues related to the educational development of the nomadic mendicants and entertainer communities in Maharashtra for their equitable and sustainable development. It also identifies their difficulties resulting from such processes, including accessing public services, changing livelihood options and multiple struggles.

Study Objectives

The study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To assess the educational status of NT-DNT communities in relation to enrolment and retention of children as per RTE Act provisions.
2. To undertake a rapid assessment of the socio-economic and livelihood issues of NT-DNT communities.
3. To suggest measures to address the factors that hinder access to education for the target groups.

Methodology

The study is exploratory in nature. To achieve the set objectives, it uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The universe was NT communities in the category of mendicants and entertainer from Solapur and Latur districts of Maharashtra. All school going

children constituted the focus of the study.

Target Group: The target group for this study is nomadic mendicants and entertainer communities. The major communities under the nomadic mendicants, include Budbudki, Fakir, Gosavi, Bairagi, Dasari, Garpagri, Jogi, Kashikapdi, Tirumali, Nandiwala, etc., whose traditional occupation was mainly preaching, teaching, singing devotional songs and seeking alms, roaming from place to place leading an ascetic life. On the other hand, the major communities under the nomadic entertainers are Mang Garudi, Madari, Nat, Bahurupi, Bal Santoshi, Bharadi, Davri Gosavi, Chitrakathi, Garudi, Ghisadi, Gondali, Kolhati, Madari, Vasudev, Bajikar, etc. They earn by entertaining the village communities through their acrobatic, jugglery or cultural performances. The demand for their traditional entertainment skills has dwindled in the present scenario and they are reduced to begging communities.

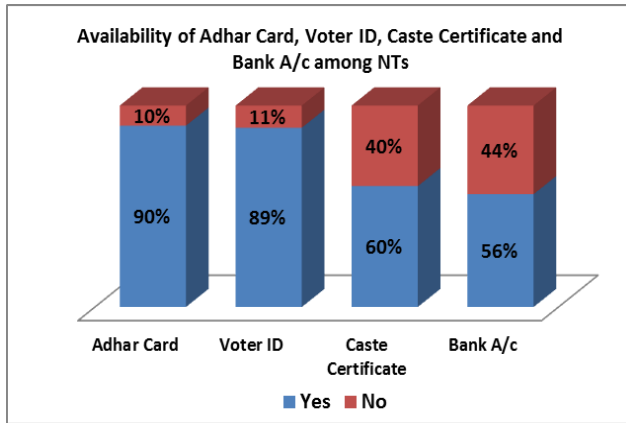
Sampling: The study is confined to two districts of Maharashtra, namely Latur and Solapur, covering 4 Blocks (Nilanga and Ahmedpur Blocks of Latur and Sangola and Akkalkot Blocks of Solapur). Cluster and multistage sampling method have been used, covering 20 clusters in 2 districts, based on the concentration of the targeted community. The sample size was 417, covering personal, family and community information; availability of citizenship documents; access to various system and scheme; assets; village life and their relationship with other communities and officials.

Study Tools: A review of secondary data and primary data collection methods like focus group discussions, interview with key informants, rapid participatory appraisals and participatory workshops have been undertaken during the study.

Study Period: The time period of the study was between April 2014 and December, 2014.

Major Findings

- Majority of the mendicant and entertainer communities belong to Hindu religion. Only two castes, namely *Faquir* and *Darweshi* belong to the Muslim religion, which are equally poor and backward. Majority of the families are nuclear (56.6%) reflecting change in the family structure among the NT communities.
- More than 68 per cent of the respondents own house, but only 20 per cent own agricultural land.
- Around 40 per cent respondents felt their community concerns did not get reflected in the Gram Sabha. Majority (42%) resolve their disputes in Jaat Panchayat, 20 per cent in Village Panchayat, while only 7.7 per cent approach Police Station.
- Nearly 76 per cent respondents do not know about the RTE Act, though all parents expressed the need for quality education for their children. Mid-day meal scheme has made a positive impact on the enrolment of children in the school.
- A sizable number of children of the DNT communities are still out of school, including 30.8 per cent children in the age group of 5 to 14 years. One third of the enrolled children drop out between class 5 and 7 and between class 8 and 10. The main reasons for drop out are poverty, lack of interest in education and children contributing to earning a livelihood.
- A significant improvement is visible for girl child education as around 63.2 per cent girls belonging to NT communities are enrolled in school.
- Contrary to popular view, 90 per cent respondents have got *Aadhar* card; 88.5 per cent have voters card; 74 per cent have domicile certificate; 78 per cent have ration cards; 60 per cent have caste certificates and 54.5 per cent have bank accounts, which means they are now in a better position to avail government benefits.



- Around 37 per cent respondents follow their traditional livelihoods. However, the majority (73.4%) informed that traditional livelihood does not generate adequate income. For 53 per cent, traditional livelihood adversely affects their socio-economic and educational development. Many reported, they face discrimination due to their

traditional livelihood and 77 per cent expressed willingness to engage in alternative livelihoods.

- In contrast to the myth that majority of the DNT communities migrate for survival, only 37 per cent migrate and they migrate with their entire family. This adversely affects the education of their children as around 28 per cent who migrate reported difficulty while enrolling children in schools.

Major Recommendations

- There is an urgent need to undertake the census of the DNT communities to systematically plan policies and programmes for them. This also includes updating the ethnographic profile of these communities.
- The majority of the nomadic mendicants and entertainer families have so far been excluded from the development process and hardly avail any benefits from these programmes. A time bound plan of action and strategies should be worked out by the Governments for their development.
- Lack of livelihood resources is one of the major problems of DNTs. So there is a need to develop livelihood regeneration programme for DNTs on priority basis.
- NGOs should consider inclusion of DNT in their work and should promote small CBOs/activists working with them to take up the cause of DNTs.
- Since a sizable number of children of the DNT communities are out of school and face exclusion at various levels, a special strategy needs to be worked out for their inclusion in the education process. The girl child education should be further encouraged by using innovative strategies.
- There is a pressing need to create awareness on the provisions of RTE Act.
- School teachers should be sensitized towards the problem of the DNTs and should be instructed to give special attention for their inclusion in the education system.