राष्ट्रीय महिला आयोग

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

Research Report On

Overlooked and Overburdened

Socio-Economic Conditions and Livelihood Transitions of Women from De-Notified Tribes, Nomadic Tribes and Semi-Nomadic Tribes

2026

Submitted by

actionaid

ActionAid Association (India)

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FOREWORD

The De-Notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs, NTs, and SNTs) of India represent a vibrant yet historically marginalised segment of our society. Their unique ways of life, intertwined with nomadism and traditional occupations, have contributed significantly to India's cultural and social fabric. However, centuries of systemic exclusion, colonial stigmatisation, and subsequent socio-economic marginalisation have left these communities struggling for recognition, rights, and resources.

This report aims to shed light on the contemporary challenges faced by women from these communities across five Indian states. It captures their voices through a mixed-method approach, integrating robust quantitative data and qualitative insights gathered from focus group discussions, interviews, and case studies. This endeavour seeks not only to highlight their struggles but also to celebrate their resilience and aspirations for a dignified future.

The findings reflect deep-rooted disparities in access to essential services such as education, healthcare, housing, and livelihoods. They also reveal the compounding effects of gender, caste, and socio-economic vulnerabilities on the lives of women. While some states have made notable strides in recognising and supporting DNTs, NTs, and SNTs through specialised classifications and schemes, much remains to be done to address their unique needs.

This study serves as a call to action for policymakers, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders to recognise and rectify the systemic inequities faced by these communities. It advocates for inclusive and transformative policy interventions that respect their rights, sustain their cultural identities, and ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities.

We hope this report contributes meaningfully to the growing discourse on social justice for De-Notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes, particularly women. Their journey toward dignity and equity is a shared responsibility, and it is imperative that we act collectively to realise their aspirations.

I am grateful to the National Commission for Women for supporting this research. My special thanks to its Chairperson, Sushree Vijaya Kishore Rahatkar, whose encouragement and guidance helped shape the study and strengthen its focus on the rights, dignity, and empowerment of women from De-Notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the community members who shared their stories, as well as the researchers, field staff, and partners whose efforts made this study possible. Together, let us strive for a future where no community is left behind.

Sandeep Chachra
Executive Director
ActionAid Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women from Nomadic, De-Notified and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NT-DNT-SNT) constitute one of the most historically marginalised populations in India. Although the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed more than seven decades ago, the legacies of colonial criminalisation continue to shape their everyday lives through persistent stigma, insecure livelihoods, fragmented administrative recognition, and unequal access to rights and public services. While several national commissions have highlighted the socio-economic deprivation experienced by these communities, there has been remarkably little empirical research focusing specifically on the experiences of women across different regions of India.

Recognising this critical knowledge gap, the National Commission for Women commissioned the present study to examine the socio-economic status and lived experiences of women belonging to NT-DNT-SNT Communities across multiple states. Building on earlier research undertaken in Delhi and drawing upon ActionAid Association's nearly two decades of engagement with De-Notified and Nomadic communities, this study provides one of the most comprehensive contemporary assessments of the conditions of NT-DNT-SNT women in India.

The study argues that the exclusion experienced by these women cannot be understood simply as poverty or lack of welfare. Instead, it reflects a deeper condition of incomplete citizenship in which women are visible to the state through documentation, surveillance and regulation, yet remain inadequately recognised as rights-bearing citizens entitled to secure housing, productive assets, quality education, healthcare, dignified livelihoods, effective social protection and meaningful political participation.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-method research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. A household survey was conducted among 3,000 women across five states - Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh - covering communities classified as De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes under diverse state administrative frameworks. The survey generated detailed evidence on housing, land ownership, livelihoods, migration, education, health, food security, documentation, access to welfare schemes, political participation and experiences of violence and discrimination.

The quantitative findings were complemented through Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews, institutional consultations and detailed community case studies. A review of historical literature, constitutional provisions, legislation, public policy and the recommendations of successive national commissions was undertaken to situate the empirical findings within their broader historical and policy context.

To understand variations within the NT-DNT-SNT population, the study presents detailed community profiles of six major communities - Nat, Musahar, Bawariya, Pardhi, Banjara and Narikuravar - together representing over one-third of the survey respondents. The combined methodology enables the report to move beyond aggregate statistics and capture the diversity of women's experiences across regions, occupations and administrative categories.

Key Findings

The findings demonstrate that the disadvantages experienced by NT-DNT-SNT women are not isolated sectoral problems but mutually reinforcing forms of structural exclusion rooted in historical criminalisation and reproduced through contemporary institutions.

The study reveals that historical injustice continues to shape present-day realities. Colonial policies transformed mobility into a marker of criminality and subjected entire communities to surveillance and control. Although these laws were repealed after Independence, their legacy persists through police profiling, social prejudice and institutional discrimination. Women frequently reported that they continue to experience suspicion while travelling, discrimination in public institutions and unequal treatment in accessing government services.

The research also demonstrates that administrative recognition remains fragmented and inconsistent across states. Communities are variously classified under Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, Vimukta Jatis, De-Notified Communities and Most Backward Classes. While these classifications determine eligibility for reservations and welfare schemes, they often obscure shared histories of De-notification and create considerable confusion regarding rights and entitlements. As a result, formal recognition has not translated into equitable access to affirmative action.

One of the clearest findings concerns the persistence of landlessness and insecure settlements. Nearly 95% of respondents reported owning no agricultural land, making landlessness one of the defining characteristics of NT-DNT-SNT women's lives. Although almost 90% had lived in the same location for more than five years, indicating that most communities are now settled rather than nomadic, settlement has rarely been accompanied by secure tenure or legal recognition. Many households continue to reside on panchayat land, government land, roadside settlements or other insecure locations, leaving them vulnerable to eviction and exclusion from housing programmes.

Housing conditions remain inadequate despite evidence of increasing sedentarisation. While over half the respondents reported living in permanent structures, a substantial proportion continued to reside in kuccha houses, tents and temporary shelters. More than 57% still relied on open defecation, and among households possessing personal toilets, nearly three-quarters lacked a functional water connection, severely limiting their usability. Women repeatedly described the indignity, health risks and safety concerns associated with inadequate sanitation.

Food insecurity emerged as another significant concern. Nearly one in twelve women reported surviving on only one meal a day, while the overwhelming majority depended on only two meals daily. Although the Public Distribution System remains an important source of food security for many households, numerous respondents described interruptions in access due to documentation problems, migration and administrative exclusions.

Educational exclusion remains severe and deeply gendered. Across the sample, approximately 62% of women had never attended school, while only around 12% were currently enrolled in educational institutions. Even among those who had entered school, educational attainment remained extremely low, with most leaving before completing primary or upper primary education. Qualitative evidence demonstrated that poverty, insecure settlements, lack of nearby schools, documentation barriers, migration and gendered care responsibilities combine to interrupt educational trajectories from an early age. For many girls, the transition from childhood to labour occurs before education has the opportunity to transform future life chances.

The study also documents profound changes in livelihoods. Many traditional occupations - including performance arts, pastoralism, itinerant trade, forest-based work and artisanal production - have steadily declined under changing economic conditions and restrictive legal frameworks. Women have consequently been pushed into insecure and poorly remunerated forms of informal labour including agricultural work, construction, sanitation, domestic work, public works programmes and casual wage employment. Livelihood diversification has become a survival strategy rather than an indicator of economic opportunity.

Migration remains an important livelihood strategy for several communities, although the study challenges the assumption that NT-DNT-SNT Communities are universally mobile. Instead, mobility is highly differentiated across communities and often seasonal or circular in nature. Families increasingly maintain permanent residential bases while migrating temporarily for work, enabling children to remain in school and households to retain access to welfare schemes. Nevertheless, women migrants continue to experience exploitation, unsafe working conditions, wage insecurity and inadequate access to health and childcare services.

The findings reveal a striking contrast between documentary inclusion and substantive citizenship. Aadhaar enrolment, voter identity cards and other forms of official documentation are now widespread across most communities. Yet this administrative visibility has not translated into effective access to welfare. Housing schemes, health insurance, livelihood programmes, sanitation initiatives and targeted NT-DNT welfare interventions reach only a small proportion of eligible households. Women repeatedly described themselves as "visible to the state but invisible to its services."

Political participation remains particularly weak. Access to reservation benefits was negligible across several communities despite formal eligibility under different constitutional categories. Participation in Gram Sabha meetings was low, representation in local government institutions was extremely limited, and very few women reported involvement in collective organisations or producer groups. Grievance redress mechanisms were widely perceived as ineffective, with repeated accounts of unresolved complaints, bureaucratic delays and institutional indifference.

The community profiles further demonstrate that there is no single NT-DNT experience. Nat women continue to negotiate the decline of traditional performance livelihoods while confronting police suspicion and insecure housing. Musahar women experience among the highest levels of educational exclusion, landlessness and dependence on casual wage labour. Pardhi communities continue to struggle against the enduring legacy of criminalisation despite formal recognition under Maharashtra's VJNT framework. Bawariya women experience highly precarious housing and livelihood conditions, while Banjara women demonstrate relatively greater settlement stability but continue to face insecure livelihoods and uneven access to welfare. Narikuravar women illustrate how even comparatively stronger welfare systems can coexist with persistent social exclusion and livelihood vulnerability. Together, these diverse experiences reinforce the conclusion that historical stigma interacts with local policy regimes to produce different but equally persistent forms of exclusion.

Across all communities, however, one common pattern emerges. Women shoulder the cumulative burden of insecure housing, food insecurity, unpaid care work, livelihood precarity, inadequate sanitation, weak healthcare, administrative exclusion and limited political voice. These disadvantages do not operate independently but reinforce one another across generations, producing a cycle of structural inequality that cannot be addressed through isolated welfare interventions alone.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this study demonstrates that NT-DNT-SNT women remain among the most excluded groups in contemporary India despite decades of constitutional guarantees, welfare expansion and policy reform. Their exclusion is neither accidental nor temporary. It is the product of a long historical process through which colonial criminalisation, fragmented administrative recognition, insecure livelihoods, landlessness, gender inequality and institutional neglect have combined to deny women full and equal citizenship.

The study argues that policy must move beyond viewing NT-DNT-SNT women primarily as beneficiaries of welfare programmes. They must instead be recognised as rights-bearing citizens entitled to secure housing, productive assets, quality public services, dignified livelihoods, political representation and equal protection under the law. Addressing one dimension of exclusion in isolation will not be sufficient. Lasting change requires integrated interventions that simultaneously address historical injustice, gender inequality and structural poverty.

Recommendations

The study recommends a comprehensive national strategy for the inclusion of NT-DNT-SNT Communities centred on recognition, restitution and rights. At the national level, this should include a dedicated institutional framework for NT-DNT-SNT Communities, improved enumeration, rationalisation of administrative classifications, expansion of the SEED Scheme, reforms to policing and legal frameworks, and strengthened mechanisms for monitoring reservation and welfare access.

State Governments should prepare dedicated NT-DNT-SNT action plans focused on settlement regularisation, housing security, documentation, education, healthcare, livelihoods and women's leadership. Long-settled communities require secure tenure, basic infrastructure and effective access to public services rather than policies based on outdated assumptions of mobility.

Education must prioritise residential facilities, bridge courses, scholarships and flexible learning models for girls affected by migration and insecure settlements. Livelihood interventions should support both traditional occupations and new economic opportunities through producer collectives, market access, skill development and financial inclusion. Greater attention is also required to women's occupational safety, workplace rights and social security.

Finally, the study calls for stronger collaboration between governments, statutory commissions, civil society organisations, research institutions and NT-DNT-SNT Communities themselves. The experiences documented throughout this report demonstrate not only persistent exclusion but also remarkable resilience, cultural richness and community leadership. Ensuring that NT-DNT-SNT women enjoy full citizenship, dignity and equal opportunity is therefore not simply a matter of social welfare. It is a constitutional imperative and an essential step towards building a more just, inclusive and democratic India.

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This report would not have been possible without the courageous participation of the women from the De-Notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic tribes. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the community members who generously shared their time, efforts, and deeply personal stories for the purpose of this study.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

For some time now, growing attention has been drawn to the historical injustices and contemporary exclusions faced by India's De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs, NTs and SNTs). Despite their constitutional recognition and the efforts of successive commissions, these communities continue to experience disproportionate levels of poverty, social stigma, landlessness, educational exclusion, livelihood insecurity, and limited access to welfare and political representation. Within these communities, women face particularly severe forms of marginalisation arising from the intersection of gender, caste, tribe, mobility, and economic deprivation.

The National Commission for Women (NCW) has consistently recognised that women belonging to De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNT-NT-SNT) constitute one of the most marginalised and least understood groups in India. In its 2023 Call for Proposals, the Commission noted that these communities continue to experience the enduring consequences of their historical criminalisation under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, compounded by landlessness, loss of traditional livelihoods, lack of identity documentation, and exclusion from development processes. It further observes that women within these communities are the "vulnerable within the vulnerable", facing intersecting deprivations in education, health, shelter, sanitation, livelihood security, workplace safety, access to welfare, and sexual and reproductive rights.

The Commission also identified a significant gap in existing knowledge. While previous studies have documented the broader socio-economic exclusion of DNT Communities, they have rarely examined the specific experiences of women or generated evidence on their health, education, autonomy, decision-making, livelihood transitions, occupational challenges, and encounters with legal and social barriers across different regions of the country. Recognising this gap, the NCW called for an empirical, field-based study that would document these realities through systematic research and generate evidence capable of informing policy and institutional responses.

The present study was commissioned in response to this call. Building on the Commission's earlier engagement with the issue (Sarthak, 2017) it extended the enquiry across multiple states and communities to provide robust empirical evidence on the lived experiences of women from De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes and to support more responsive policies and programmes for their inclusion and empowerment.

For more than two decades, ActionAid Association has worked alongside DNT, NT and SNT Communities across multiple states, supporting efforts related to identity documentation, access to social protection, education, housing rights, women's leadership, livelihood security, protection from violence, and community mobilisation. Through this engagement, it became increasingly clear that the challenges confronting these communities are not isolated issues but manifestations of deeper structural exclusions rooted in histories of criminalisation, displacement, caste discrimination, and policy neglect.

ActionAid Association's work has also contributed to a growing body of documentation and advocacy on the rights of De-Notified and Nomadic communities. Drawing upon field-based research, community engagement, and policy analysis, the organisation has produced a range of publications, reports, policy briefs, and advocacy documents that have highlighted issues such as the continuing impact of colonial-era criminalisation, barriers to accessing welfare schemes, challenges faced by mobile populations in securing citizenship documents, educational exclusion, livelihood transitions, and the particular vulnerabilities faced by women and girls. These

efforts have sought not only to document exclusion but also to amplify community voices and contribute to policy dialogue at state and national levels.

The present study represents an important contribution to this continuing body of work. Conducted across five states - Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh - it combines quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the lived realities of women from De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities. The study seeks to move beyond generalisations and provide a grounded understanding of how different histories, classifications, policy frameworks, and socio-economic contexts shape women's experiences across regions.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 situates the study within the broader historical and policy context of De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes in India. It traces the colonial origins of criminalisation, the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act, the emergence of post-independence policy frameworks, and the continuing challenges arising from fragmented classifications, incomplete recognition, and inadequate institutional support.

Chapter 3 presents a review of relevant literature and existing scholarship relating to DNT, NT and SNT Communities, with particular attention to gender, livelihoods, education, mobility, welfare access, and political participation. The chapter identifies key knowledge gaps and establishes the conceptual foundations that inform the study.

Chapter 4 outlines the research design and methodology adopted for the study. It explains the mixed-methods approach used to collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data, describes the sampling framework, fieldwork processes, ethical considerations, and limitations of the research, and provides an overview of the communities and locations covered.

Chapter 5 presents a state-wise analysis of the findings. Drawing upon both survey data and qualitative narratives, it examines a range of thematic issues including food security, housing and sanitation, asset ownership, land access, livelihoods, migration, education, health, documentation, welfare access, political participation, and grievance redressal. The chapter highlights both common patterns and important regional variations across the five states.

Chapter 6 moves from state-level analysis to community-level profiles. It provides detailed examinations of six communities - the Nat, Musahar, Bawariya, Pardhi, Banjara, and Narikuravar communities - combining historical context, quantitative findings, and qualitative narratives to understand how exclusion and resilience are experienced in distinct social and cultural settings.

Chapter 7 brings together the major findings emerging from the study and analyses the broader structural patterns shaping the lives of DNT, NT and SNT women. It reflects on the intersections of gender, caste, tribe, mobility, poverty, and state policy, and identifies key challenges that continue to impede substantive inclusion and equality.

Finally, Chapter 8 presents a set of recommendations directed towards the Union Government, State Governments, statutory bodies, civil society organisations, academic institutions, and community-based organisations. Drawing directly from the evidence generated by the study, the chapter proposes measures aimed at strengthening rights, recognition, representation, social protection, education, livelihoods, and gender justice for women from De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities.

At its core, this publication seeks to contribute to a larger project of recognition and justice. It is not only a study of deprivation but also a documentation of resilience, agency, and aspiration. By centring the voices and experiences of women from De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities, it seeks to support more informed public policy, stronger institutional accountability, and a future in which these communities are recognised not through the lens of stigma and exclusion, but as equal citizens entitled to dignity, rights, and opportunities.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review

Historical and Contemporary Dimensions of Stigma and Exclusion

This chapter reviews the existing literature on Nomadic, De-Notified and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NT–DNT–SNT) in India, tracing the historical origins of stigma and exclusion while examining their contemporary manifestations. It brings together insights from historical, sociological, and policy-oriented scholarship to show how colonial transformations, administrative classifications, and ongoing structural inequalities have shaped the marginalisation of these communities. The review also foregrounds the growing recognition of gender as a critical lens, highlighting both the gaps in existing research and the need to centre the lived experiences of NT-DNT women within broader debates on justice, rights, and social transformation.

Colonial Transformation, Stigma, and the Making of "Criminality"

The marginalisation of Nomadic, De-Notified and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NT–DNT–SNT) in India has been the subject of a growing body of historical, sociological, and policy-oriented scholarship. This literature consistently locates the roots of stigma and exclusion in the structural transformations introduced under colonial rule. As Sumit Sarkar argues in *Modern Times: India 1880s–1950s*, British governance fundamentally reconfigured relationships to land, livelihood, and mobility by privileging settled agriculture and private property over mobile ways of life such as pastoralism, hunting, gathering, and itinerant trade (Sarkar, 2014).

A central theme in this scholarship is the colonial push toward sedentarisation, whereby mobile populations were coerced or induced into settled agrarian systems. This shift was closely tied to the fiscal logic of colonial rule, where land revenue from stable agricultural production and the expansion of commercial crops became central to imperial economic interests. Communities that did not conform to this model were increasingly perceived as economically unproductive and administratively problematic (Sarkar, 2014).

The consolidation of private property regimes further entrenched this transformation. Colonial land settlements sought to define land as a fixed, marketable commodity, reflecting what Ranajit Guha described as the "rule of property" (Guha, 1983). Within this framework, mobility itself became suspect. Nomadic and pastoral communities — whose livelihoods depended on seasonal movement and shared access to forests, grazing routes, and commons — were progressively excluded through forest laws, enclosure, and legal restrictions on customary practices. Environmental historians such as Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil have documented how these processes disrupted longstanding ecological inter-dependencies between pastoralists and settled cultivators (Gadgil & Guha, 1992).

This material displacement was accompanied by an ideological reordering of social value. Settled agricultural life came to be seen as orderly and "civilised," while mobility was associated with disorder and deviance. Over time, these perceptions were codified into law. As Sanjay Nigam (1990) argues, colonial knowledge systems played a central role in constructing certain communities as inherently criminal. This culminated in the enactment of the Criminal Tribes Act 1871, which institutionalised the doctrine of hereditary criminality and enabled the surveillance, control, and forced settlement of entire communities (Sarkar, 2014; Radhakrishna, 2001).

Importantly, subsequent legislative developments deepened and expanded this regime of control. While the initial application of the Criminal Tribes Act was largely confined to regions such as Punjab and the North-Western Provinces, it was significantly broadened under the revised Criminal Tribes Act of 1911 (Narayan, 2022). The 1911 Act

extended its jurisdiction across British India and vested enhanced powers in provincial authorities. These authorities could unilaterally notify entire communities as "criminal," mandate compulsory registration, collect biometric identifiers such as fingerprints, and require periodic reporting to police officials or village authorities. The law also enabled strict regulation of movement, often confining individuals to designated areas (The Criminal Tribes Act, 1911, Act III of 1911). This expansion marks a critical intensification of surveillance, embedding everyday monitoring and restriction into the lives of notified communities and further normalising the association between mobility and criminality.

Subsequent scholarship has emphasised that the category of the "criminal tribe" was not a neutral administrative classification but a product of colonial epistemologies. Nicholas Dirks (2001) and Anupama Rao (2003) demonstrate how colonial ethnography and census practices transformed fluid and occupationally diverse communities into fixed and stigmatised identities. This marked a shift from penalising individual acts to criminalising entire communities, embedding stigma within legal and administrative systems. As Meena Radhakrishna (2001) shows, these developments must be situated within broader colonial anxieties about mobility, labour control, and governance, particularly in the aftermath of 1857.

Alongside these historical processes, the literature also provides important insights into the diversity and internal composition of NT-DNT Communities. As noted by Bhukya and Surepally (2021), Nomadic Communities in India can be broadly grouped into three categories: (i) hunting and foraging groups such as Konda Reddis, Chenchus, Kadars, and Cholanayakas; (ii) pastoral communities including Pardis, Gujjars, Banjaras, Bhils, Minas, Kurabas, and Kurumas; and (iii) peripatetic groups engaged in itinerant occupations such as peddling, storytelling, performance, and craft production, including Lohars, Kaikaris, Kewats, Yerakalas, and Jogis. These categories are neither rigid nor mutually exclusive, reflecting the fluidity of livelihoods and identities historically associated with mobility. Collectively, NT-DNT Communities are estimated to constitute nearly 10% of India's population, although precise figures remain contested (Renke Commission, 2008). Many of these communities also embody syncretic cultural and religious practices, complicating attempts to classify them within rigid religious or caste-based frameworks (Bhukya & Surepally, 2021).

The relationship between Nomadic Tribes (NTs) and De-Notified Tribes (DNTs) is similarly complex and historically embedded. As noted by the Lokur Committee (Government of India,1965), these categories are not discrete but overlap in significant ways, shaped by colonial administrative classifications, shared histories of marginalisation, and enduring social stigma. Many communities that were once notified under colonial law were later "De-Notified," while others continue to exhibit nomadic or Semi-Nomadic characteristics. Their shared experiences of exclusion - from education, healthcare, and political representation - underscore the need to analyse them collectively while recognising internal diversity.

Efforts to enumerate these communities have also been limited and uneven. The Renke Commission (2008), drawing on the 1931 caste census, estimated their population to be between 10 and 12 crore. However, the absence of updated and disaggregated data continues to pose a major challenge for both research and policy. This lack of reliable enumeration is further compounded by their fragmented classification across Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and unclassified categories, making it difficult to assess their socio-economic and educational status comprehensively (Idate Commission, 2018).

The consequences of this regime were far-reaching. Communities notified under the Criminal Tribes Act were subjected to intense surveillance, restrictions on movement, and punitive disciplinary measures. At the same time, these processes also produced pools of controlled labour that could be deployed in plantations, infrastructure projects, and emerging industries (Sarkar, 2014). Although the Act was repealed in 1952, its underlying logics persisted in postcolonial governance

through mechanisms such as Habitual Offenders legislation, which continued to normalise suspicion toward De-Notified communities (Simhadri, 1979; Radhakrishna, 2001).

The literature also underscores how colonial inter-ventions disrupted older systems of interdependence and intensified existing inequalities. While pre-colonial societies were not free of hierarchy, colonial rule systematised and deepened exclusion through law and administration. Access to forests, grazing lands, and commons became increasingly tied to formal property rights, excluding nomadic and landless populations from both livelihood systems and emerging welfare frameworks.

Contemporary analyses, including those of the Renke Commission (2008) and the Idate Commission (2018), demonstrate the enduring nature of this historical marginalisation. These reports document widespread landlessness, lack of access to education and healthcare, absence of identity documentation, and fragmented administrative classification across Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and unclassified categories. This fragmentation obscures the shared historical trajectory of NT-DNT Communities and limits the effectiveness of policy responses.

A consistent insight across the literature is that mobility continues to produce structural exclusion. Since welfare entitlements are largely tied to fixed residence and documentation, NT-DNT Communities face systemic barriers in accessing basic rights, including food security, citizenship documents, and social protection schemes. Thus, the stigma historically attached to these communities is not merely a residue of the past, but an actively reproduced condition embedded in contemporary institutions and practices.

The Need for a Gendered Lens

Within this broader framework, a growing but still limited body of scholarship draws attention to the gendered dimensions of stigma and exclusion. While foundational studies have illuminated the historical processes of criminalisation, there remains insufficient systematic engagement with how these legacies shape the lives, labour, and identities of women within NT-DNT Communities (Radhakrishna, 2001; Rao, 2003). Feminist scholars have emphasised the need to foreground gender as a central analytical category in understanding these communities.

One important strand of this work highlights the continuities between colonial stigma and present-day gendered exclusion. The repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act did not dismantle the social and institutional logics it produced. Instead, stigma continues to be reproduced through everyday policing practices, administrative categorisation, and societal prejudice (Nigam, 1990; Radhakrishna, 2001). For women, this often translates into a form of social erasure, where their identities are shaped by inherited stereotypes of deviance and immorality, limiting their access to education, healthcare, housing, and justice.

Scholars increasingly argue that stigma within NT-DNT Communities operates in profoundly gendered ways, with women's bodies becoming key sites through which notions of purity, pollution, and deviance are enacted and regulated (Agarwal, 1994; Anupama Rao, 2003). This is not merely symbolic but is reflected in material conditions, where women are pushed into highly surveilled, stigmatised, and precarious forms of labour. At the same time, there remains a significant gap in empirical research examining how stigma shapes women's livelihood trajectories, inter-generational roles, and psychosocial experiences.

The literature situates NT-DNT women at the intersection of economic precarity and social exclusion. High levels of landlessness, lack of identity documentation, and exclusion from formal labour markets mean that survival is often dependent on informal and insecure work (Renke Commission, 2008; Idate Commission, 2018). Scholars caution against moralistic interpretations of such livelihoods, emphasising instead that they must be understood as outcomes of structural constraints, including caste-based discrimination, restricted access to markets, and state neglect (Radhakrishna, 2001; Rao, 2003). Yet, despite these

realities, women's experiences are frequently subsumed within broader community - level analyses. The absence of gender-disaggregated data and nuanced qualitative research renders invisible their specific encounters with violence, policing, and barriers to welfare access - producing significant policy blind spots.

Emerging scholarship, however, challenges reductive portrayals of NT-DNT women as passive victims. Across regions, women are organising into collectives, participating in self-help groups, and engaging with state institutions to claim recognition, rights, and entitlements. Documenting these forms of agency is critical to understanding how resistance and transformation are negotiated within conditions of constraint.

At the same time, available evidence - though still limited - points to the intensification of marginalisation at the intersection of gender and tribal identity. Women from NT-DNT Communities experience what can be described as "double marginalisation," shaped both by external discrimination and internal patriarchal norms. As Milind Bokil observes, "the DNTs are mainly patriarchal communities. The authority of the elderly males is considered supreme. The status of women is extremely low and very often, brutal sanctions are imposed on them" (Bokil, 2002). In certain contexts, historically marginalised and stigmatised occupations have included coerced or socially compelled forms of labour, including sex work, sustained by both structural exclusion and community-level pressures (Negi, Azeez, & Kaini, 2021).

Recent policy reports and field studies have begun to shed light on the everyday realities of NT-DNT women. The Idate Commission (2018) documents severe deficits in access to basic amenities, including sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities, exposing women to heightened risks of harassment and violence. The report also highlights deep educational deprivation, with a majority of women lacking access to formal schooling. Studies such as those conducted by Sarthak in collaboration with the National Commission for Women (2017) further reveal the exclusion of women from decision-making processes within households and communities, alongside their concentration in precarious forms of labour such as rag picking, begging, and other informal occupations, while simultaneously bearing the full burden of unpaid domestic work.

The vulnerabilities of NT-DNT women became even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fieldwork by Deepa Pawar (2021), covering thousands of NT-DNT households, indicates that women bore primary responsibility for ensuring household survival amidst collapsing livelihoods. This often came at the cost of their own nutritional and physical well-being. The period also witnessed a rise in gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and early or forced marriages, driven by economic distress, institutional neglect, and disruptions in education systems.

In the contemporary urban informal economy, NT-DNT women continue to occupy some of the most precarious and least protected forms of work. They are engaged in street vending, construction labour, sanitation work, domestic services, and waste picking, alongside itinerant occupations such as performance, small-scale trade, and animal-based livelihoods (Pawar, 2021). However, the invisibility of these communities, combined with the informal nature of their work, results in limited access to public infrastructure and social protection, particularly in health and sanitation. Their exclusion from formal labour protections further exposes them to exploitative wages, unsafe working conditions, and chronicinsecurity.

From an intersectional perspective, Patricia Hill Collins (2022) conceptualises such experiences as being "interlocked in systems of oppression." This framework is particularly useful in understanding how caste, tribe, class, gender, and occupational stigma intersect to shape the lived realities of NT-DNT women. Their multiple and overlapping identities produce forms of marginalisation that are distinct in both intensity and character.

While direct research on NT-DNT women remains limited, parallels can be drawn from studies of other historically oppressed communities. For instance, a

study by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (Irudayam, 2012) documented high levels of physical, sexual, and domestic violence among Dalit women, offering a lens through which to understand the likely, though under-documented, vulnerabilities faced by NT-DNT women.

Taken together, the literature demonstrates that the stigma and exclusion faced by NT-DNT Communities are historically produced, structurally embedded, and continuously reproduced in contemporary contexts. Within this, women experience layered and intensified forms of marginalisation shaped by gender, caste, mobility, and economic precarity. At the same time, their lives also reflect forms of resilience, negotiation, and collective action that challenge dominant narratives. This underscores the urgent need for more grounded, gender-sensitive, and inter-sectional research and policy approaches - ones that not only address material deprivation but also restore dignity, autonomy, and belonging.

Bridging Policy Gaps

Towards a Gendered, Multi-State Inquiry into NT-DNT Communities

In light of the persistent disjuncture between policy intent and lived realities, there is a clear need for a more empirically grounded and analytically rigorous understanding of NT-DNT Communities, particularly through a gendered lens. As this chapter has demonstrated, the intersecting dynamics of livelihood precarity, adverse legal regimes, fragmented classification, and constrained access to welfare collectively shape the conditions of marginalisation experienced by these communities, with disproportionately adverse consequences for women. Despite the proliferation of commissions, schemes, and policy interventions, existing frameworks continue to rely on aggregated and insufficiently disaggregated data, thereby obscuring intra-community differences and regional variations in socio-economic conditions.

A systematic, comparative study of women from NT-DNT Communities across multiple states - specifically Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh - offers a critical methodological pathway to address these gaps. These states present diverse configurations of classification regimes, policy approaches, and historical trajectories, making them analytically significant sites for examining how structural exclusion is produced, reproduced, and negotiated across contexts. Such an inquiry would enable a nuanced understanding of women's socio-economic positioning in relation to livelihoods, access to state entitlements, documentation, mobility, and exposure to stigma and institutional bias.

Importantly, a multi-state, gender-focused analysis would move beyond descriptive accounts of deprivation to generate evidence capable of informing context-sensitive and structurally responsive policy design. By foregrounding the lived experiences of NT-DNT women, such research can contribute to reorienting policy frameworks away from narrowly conceived welfare approaches toward more substantive forms of recognition, inclusion, and justice. In doing so, it holds the potential to bridge the gap between formal policy commitments and the complex realities that continue to define the everyday lives of NT-DNT communities.

Chapter 3:

Legal and Policy Context

The legal and policy landscape governing Nomadic, De-Notified and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NT-DNT-SNT) in India must be understood against the backdrop of their historically produced marginalisation and the continued reproduction of exclusion in contemporary governance systems. As the preceding chapter demonstrated, stigma, surveillance, and dispossession were not merely remnants of colonial rule but often remain embedded within ongoing legal, administrative, and policy frameworks that shape the everyday lives of these communities. This chapter examines how independent India's legal and policy regimes - while formally committed to equality and welfare - have often failed to adequately recognise or address the distinct realities of NT-DNT Communities.

A central feature of this context is the precarity of livelihoods among NT-DNT Communities. Historically dependent on mobile, seasonal, and community-based occupations, these groups have been systematically displaced from their traditional economic systems due to restrictive land, forest, and urban regulatory regimes. Contemporary livelihoods are largely informal, insecure, and poorly remunerated, with limited access to labour protections or social security. The transition from mobile to sedentary economies has not been accompanied by meaningful inclusion, leaving many NT-DNT households in conditions of chronic vulnerability.

At the same time, legal frameworks have often reinforced rather than alleviated this marginalisation. Post-independence laws - ranging from policing and habitual offender legislation to land, forest, and urban governance regimes - have continued to operate through assumptions that privilege settled populations while rendering mobile communities suspect, invisible, or non-compliant. Documentation-based welfare systems, in particular, have excluded large sections of NT-DNT populations who lack fixed residence or formal identity papers, thereby limiting their access to basic entitlements such as food security, healthcare, education, and housing.

Closely linked to these challenges is the issue of classification. Unlike other historically marginalised groups, NT-DNT Communities remain fragmented across administrative categories such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and unclassified groups. This fragmentation obscures their shared history of exclusion and undermines the design and delivery of targeted policy interventions. The absence of a coherent classification framework also contributes to data gaps, weak institutional accountability, and uneven access to affirmative action measures.

Together, these dynamics reveal that the marginalisation of NT-DNT Communities is not simply a matter of socio-economic deprivation, but is deeply structured by the ways in which law and policy define, recognise, and govern them. This chapter therefore situates NT-DNT Communities within the broader legal and policy framework of independent India, examining how issues of livelihood precarity, adverse legal regimes, and fragmented classification intersect to shape their access to rights, welfare, and citizenship.

Disrupted Economies, Precarious Lives

The Changing Livelihood Landscape of Nomadic Tribes and De-Notified Tribal Communities

According to Bokil (2002), British colonial rule fundamentally reconfigured the ecological, social, political, and economic foundations of rural life in India. These transformations disrupted long-standing systems of subsistence and livelihood, particularly for communities whose economies were based on mobility, customary access to

commons, and specialised occupational roles. As traditional economic arrangements were dismantled, many communities were dispossessed of their established means of survival. In the absence of viable alternatives, some were pushed into activities that were subsequently criminalised, reinforcing cycles of stigma and exclusion. Although the post-independence policy of de-notification sought to formally dismantle this legacy of legalised stigma, its structural consequences have persisted. De-Notified Tribes (DNTs) continue to face entrenched socio-economic marginalisation, limited access to public goods and services, and systemic barriers to mobility and recognition, underscoring the need for more targeted and restorative policy interventions.

Historically, DNT Communities were engaged in a wide range of occupations that reflected both ecological adaptation and economic diversity. These included pastoralism, itinerant trade, artisan production, hawking and vending, as well as performance-based livelihoods such as animal shows, storytelling, acrobatics, and religious entertainment. Some communities also practised herbal healing and fortune-telling, while others were engaged in semi-skilled and skilled labour (Renke Commission, 2008). These occupational systems were not marginal in themselves; rather, they were integral to local economies and social exchange networks.

However, processes of rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, and regulatory transformation have rendered many of these traditional livelihoods increasingly unviable. As Singh (2021) notes, the occupational base of De-Notified communities has been steadily eroded within the modern economic framework. Contemporary research, including the work of Deepa Pawar, highlights how NT-DNT Communities have been absorbed into the urban informal economy, where they play a critical yet undervalued role. Today, they are concentrated in precarious sectors such as construction labour, domestic work, sanitation services, factory work, waste picking, and informal entertainment - occupations that are essential to urban functioning but characterised by insecurity and lack of protection.

Within these broader patterns, distinct occupational specialisations continue to persist among subgroups, reflecting historical continuity alongside changing economic conditions. For instance, the Gadiya Lohars remain associated with ironsmithing, the Vadars with stone and earth work, the Makadwale with animal-based performances, and the Potraj with roadside religious performance. Similarly, communities such as the Vaghya Murali and Jogti continue to perform ritual and cultural roles, while Banjaras engage in folk performance traditions. Pastoral occupations also endure among groups like the Dhangars and Mendhpals. However, even where these practices continue, they are increasingly marked by seasonality, declining demand, and economic precarity.

In addition to these structural economic shifts, DNT Communities have been adversely affected by a range of post-independence legislative and regulatory frameworks. Laws governing forests, wildlife protection, urban space, and public order have often curtailed traditional occupations - such as animal-based performances, access to natural resources, and itinerant trade — without providing viable alternatives. As a result, legal regimes have not only failed to facilitate transition but have, in many cases, deepened livelihood insecurity and reinforced marginalisation. Together, these processes illustrate how the erosion of traditional economies, combined with restrictive legal frameworks, continues to shape the precarious and uncertain livelihoods of NT-DNT Communities in contemporary India.

Continuities of Criminalisation

The Habitual Offenders Framework and Persistent Stigma

The formal repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act 1871 in 1952 is often presented as a decisive break from colonial regimes of collective criminalisation. However, a substantial body of scholarship demonstrates that this transition was more nominal than transformative, with many of the underlying logics of surveillance and suspicion continuing under new legal and administrative frameworks. Central to this continuity has been the enactment of various Habitual Offenders Acts

(HOAs) by state governments, which replaced the explicit category of "criminal tribes" with the ostensibly individualised notion of the "habitual offender."

In principle, the Habitual Offenders framework marked a shift from collective to individual culpability. In practice, however, scholars argue that it reproduced earlier patterns of targeting De-Notified and Nomadic Communities. Sanjay Nigam (1990) shows that colonial policing had already institutionalised the idea of "criminality by birth," embedding it within administrative routines and knowledge systems. This epistemic framework did not disappear with independence; rather, it informed postcolonial policing practices. Similarly, Meena Radhakrishna (2001) demonstrates that many individuals and communities previously notified under colonial law continued to be treated as "suspect populations," with Habitual Offenders legislation functioning as a legal bridge that carried forward colonial suspicion into the postcolonial state.

Empirical studies further reveal that the implementation of Habitual Offenders laws has relied heavily on pre-existing police records and inherited community profiling. Y. C. Simhadri (1979), in his sociological study of De-Notified Tribes, notes that police surveillance systems continued to track these communities through registers, routine reporting requirements, and informal watch lists. Rather than dismantling the infrastructure of surveillance created under colonial rule, post-independence legal regimes effectively repackaged it in bureaucratic and ostensibly neutral terms.

Beyond formal legislation, scholars emphasise the persistence of stigma within institutional practices, training manuals, and administrative rule books. The repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act did not automatically translate into a transformation of policing culture. As Nigam (1990) argues, colonial categories of knowledge - produced through ethnographic classification, census operations, and policing manuals - became deeply embedded within the everyday functioning of the state. These categories continued to inform how certain communities were perceived and treated by law enforcement agencies. Radhakrishna (2001) similarly notes that the stigma of "criminality" persisted in police training materials, intelligence records, and administrative discourse, reinforcing the association between specific communities and deviance even in the absence of explicit legal sanction.

This continuity is evident in the routine practices of policing, where De-Notified and Nomadic Tribes are disproportionately subject to preventive detention, arbitrary questioning, and false implication in criminal cases. Studies and human rights reports have documented how these communities are often the first to be suspected in cases of theft or petty crime, reflecting an enduring institutional bias (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Such practices illustrate how legal repeal does not necessarily dismantle entrenched epistemologies of suspicion, particularly when they are embedded within bureaucratic systems and professional training.

Importantly, the persistence of these frameworks has had profound implications for the everyday lives of NT–DNT Communities. The continued association with criminality affects access to employment, housing, education, and social acceptance, reinforcing cycles of marginalisation. It also shapes community–state relations, producing distrust and limiting engagement with formal institutions. For women, these dynamics are further compounded by gendered forms of surveillance and vulnerability, as stigma intersects with patriarchal norms and economic precarity.

In this sense, the transition from the Criminal Tribes Act to Habitual Offenders legislation represents not a rupture but a reconfiguration of control. The language of law shifted from hereditary criminality to habitual offending, but the underlying structures of surveillance, classification, and suspicion remained largely intact. As a result, the de-notification of communities did not lead to their full social or institutional rehabilitation. Instead, stigma has persisted as a durable feature of governance, reproduced through both legal frameworks and everyday administrative practice.

Criminalising Livelihoods

Legal Regimes and the Marginalisation of Nomadic Tribes and De-Notified Tribal Communities

De-Notified Tribes (DNTs), Nomadic Tribes (NTs), and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (SNTs) in India have experienced profound disruptions to their traditional ways of life as a result of successive legislative interventions. Rather than enabling transition or inclusion, many of these laws have undermined customary livelihoods, restricted access to resources, and deepened socio-economic vulnerability. Legal frameworks such as the Criminal Tribes Act, the Wildlife Protection Act (1972), the Prevention of Beggary Acts, and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1960) have, in different ways, criminalised or delegitimised occupations historically practised by these communities - often without providing viable alternatives or rehabilitation measures (Renke Commission, 2008). As a result, dispossession has been accompanied by a persistent absence of pathways for economic recovery.

The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, while framed around conservation goals, has had particularly adverse consequences for communities whose livelihoods were embedded in forest-based economies and animal-related practices. Hunting, gathering, and animal performance - once integral to both subsistence and cultural identity - have been rendered illegal, leading to the erosion of occupational systems (Kumar, 2021). Communities such as snake charmers and bear handlers have been forced to abandon their traditional practices, losing primary sources of income. For groups like the Makadwale, whose livelihoods and cultural practices are closely tied to monkeys, such prohibitions have resulted in both eonomic displacement and cultural dislocation (Pawar, 2021).

Similarly, anti-begging legislation has disproportionately impacted NT-DNT Communities engaged in itinerant and performance-based livelihoods. Laws such as the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 criminalise visible forms of poverty and traditional modes of subsistence, including street performance and alms-seeking, without offering alternative employment pathways. In parallel, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 has severely affected communities such as the Qalandars and Salwars, who historically depended on animal-based performances. The forced surrender of animals under these laws has led to acute economic displacement, further compounded by the absence of compensation or rehabilitation.

In forested regions, the interaction between conservation laws and administrative practices has produced additional layers of exclusion. Despite the enactment of the Forest Rights Act (2006), which aims to recognise historical claims of forest-dwelling communities, De-Notified and Nomadic groups have often been denied access to its provisions. Entrenched stereotypes and institutional biases continue to shape the actions of forest and wildlife authorities, resulting in harassment, denial of claims, and forced evictions. The 2019 Supreme Court order directing the eviction of nearly one million forest-dwelling families illustrates the precarious nature of tenure and the vulnerability of communities whose rights remain unrecognised.

Concerns have been further intensified by proposed legal reforms such as the draft Indian Forest Act (2019), which sought to expand the discretionary powers of forest officials. Provisions allowing for unilateral adjudication of land claims, confiscation of property, arrest, and even the use of force raise serious risks of institutional abuse. In practice, such dynamics are already visible in areas like Uttarakhand's Jim Corbett National Park, where relocated tribal families continue to be treated as encroachers, denied access to basic services such as healthcare and education, and prevented from securing stable housing or compensation for livelihood losses (Engage, EPW).

Taken together, these legal and administrative frameworks reveal a pattern in which legislation -rather than facilitating inclusion - has often reinforced structural marginalisation. By criminalising traditional livelihoods, restricting access to natural resources, and failing to

provide meaningful alternatives, these laws have contributed to cycles of dispossession and vulnerability. Consequently, NT-DNT Communities remain exposed to ongoing discrimination, coercive state action, and institutional neglect, underscoring the urgent need for rights-based and context-sensitive policy reform (Council for Social Development, 2010).

Disrupted Traditions, Precarious Futures

Community Experiences

The impact of legal and regulatory frameworks on De-Notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Communities is starkly illustrated through specific community experiences. The Qalandars, historically reliant on animal-based performances involving bears and monkeys, have been among the most severely affected. Following the prohibition of bear dancing under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, members of the community were compelled to abandon their traditional occupation. In the absence of adequate rehabilitation or alternative livelihood support, many have transitioned into low-paid and insecure wage labour, resulting in heightened socio-economic vulnerability (Sarthak, 2017).

A similar pattern is evident among the Nat community of Haryana, known for their long-standing traditions of acrobatics and performance. With the rapid expansion of urbanisation and the rise of modern entertainment forms, the demand for such traditional skills has sharply declined. As a consequence, many Nat families have been pushed into conditions of extreme precarity, often relying on street-based livelihoods such as begging or small-scale vending. Disturbingly, even young children are drawn into income-generating activities, performing on streets or engaging in informal trade to support household survival (Sarthak, 2017).

The decline of the traditional circus industry further reflects this broader erosion of performance-based livelihoods. Institutions such as the Great Bombay Circus, once central to India's entertainment landscape, have struggled to survive amid shifting public preferences, increasing regulatory restrictions on the use of animals, and competition from digital and multiplex entertainment. These changes, combined with financial and technological constraints, have significantly undermined the viability of circus arts, placing entire communities dependent on this ecosystem at risk (The Hindu).

The experience of the Bhats of Rajasthan underscores the cultural dimension of this transformation. Traditionally engaged in puppet theatre, folk music, and dance, the Bhats have witnessed a sharp decline in demand for their art forms. While some have adapted by performing at weddings or diversifying into crafts such as wood carving, many continue to face economic hardship, and their traditional knowledge systems are increasingly threatened with disappearance.

Taken together, these examples highlight a broader structural pattern. Legal and policy frameworks in India have not only restricted or criminalised traditional livelihoods but have also failed to provide viable pathways for transition. This has resulted in the loss of economic security, erosion of cultural heritage, and deepening social marginalisation for NT-DNT Communities. Addressing these challenges requires a critical rethinking of existing policies to ensure that they move beyond regulation and control toward enabling dignified livelihoods, cultural continuity, and inclusive development.

Gendered Impact of Livelihood Precarity in Nomadic Tribes and De-Notified Tribal Communities

The precarious livelihood conditions of Nomadic and De-Notified Tribes (NT-DNT Communities) have profoundly gendered consequences, particularly for women whose labour and bodies become central to household survival under conditions of structural exclusion. As Anuja Agrawal demonstrates in *Chaste Wives and Prostitute Sisters,* the organisation of sexuality within communities such as the Bedias is not simply a cultural artifact but is deeply embedded in material conditions of poverty, caste stigma, and restricted economic opportunities.

Agrawal argues that systems of caste-based sexual labour emerge and persist where "women's sexuality becomes a crucial economic resource for the household", particularly in contexts where men's access to stable livelihoods is limited and communities are systematically excluded from land, education, and formal employment (Agrawal, 2008). This results in a gendered division of labour where women disproportionately bear the burden of sustaining families through stigmatised and exploitative work.

Across NT-DNT Communities such as the Nat, Bedia, and Bachra tribes of North India, this dynamic is further intensified by histories of legislative displacement and criminalisation. The disruption of traditional occupations - combined with continued policing under postcolonial legal frameworks - has narrowed livelihood options, making entry into informal and often exploitative economies more likely. In many cases, what is externally framed as "tradition" is in fact a structurally produced compulsion, shaped by the absence of viable alternatives.

As highlighted by Jha and Sharma (2016), women from the Nat community, in particular, have often been compelled to engage in sex work due to the erosion of traditional livelihoods and the lack of access to dignified employment. The criminalisation of their customary occupations has not only deepened economic precarity but also constrained pathways for exit, effectively trapping women within cycles of exploitation and stigma.

Importantly, Agrawal's work cautions against viewing these practices through a purely moral or cultural lens. Instead, it situates them within a broader political economy where gender, caste, and state power intersect to produce specific forms of vulnerability. The visibility and institutionalisation of sex work in these communities must therefore be understood not as an inherent social trait, but as an outcome of historical marginalisation, policy neglect, and exclusionary development trajectories.

The experiences of women in NT-DNT Communities underscore a critical insight: livelihood precarity is not gender-neutral. It is mediated through deeply unequal social relations that position women as both economic actors and sites of control and stigma. Any meaningful intervention must therefore address not only income poverty but also the structural conditions that feminise survival and normalise exploitation.

Fragmented Recognition

Commissions, Classification, and the Exclusion of NT-DNT Communities

Despite the constitutionally embedded commitment to welfare and affirmative action, the trajectory of state engagement with Nomadic, De-Notified, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NT-DNT Communities) in India reveals a long history of partial recognition, misclassification, and persistent exclusion. From the early years of the republic, various commissions and committees have attempted to identify and address the marginalisation of these communities, yet their efforts have largely failed to produce a coherent or transformative framework.

The Kalelkar Commission (1955), the first Backward Classes Commission, marked an initial attempt to recognise socially and educationally backward groups, including many nomadic and De-Notified Communities (Government of India, 1955). However, this recognition remained broad and indistinct. NT-DNT groups were subsumed within the larger category of "backward classes," without any specific attention to their unique histories of criminalisation, mobility, and exclusion. This lack of distinct identification would become a recurring structural issue.

A critical moment in shaping this trajectory came with the Lokur Committee (1965), which laid down criteria for the identification of Scheduled Tribes (Government of India, 1965). By privileging characteristics such as geographical isolation, "primitive traits," and limited interaction with mainstream society, the Committee effectively excluded many NT-DNT Communities whose mobility and forced interaction with state and market structures did not fit this sedentary and static model. In doing so, it institutionalised a form of misrecognition - where deeply marginalised

communities were rendered ineligible for protective frameworks because they did not conform to narrow definitional criteria.

The Mandal Commission (1979–80) further incorporated several NT-DNT Communities into the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category, acknowledging their socio-economic deprivation (Government of India, 1980). Yet, this move reinforced fragmentation rather than resolving it. NT-DNT Communities came to be distributed across SC, ST, OBC categories — or left out entirely — resulting in uneven access to reservations and welfare schemes, and the absence of a unified policy approach.

By the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the limitations of this fragmented framework had become increasingly evident. The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2000–2002) explicitly noted the continued marginalisation of De-Notified and Nomadic tribes, calling for more focused attention (NCRWC, 2002). However, its recommendations remained largely advisory and did not lead to substantive structural reform.

The Government of India initiated its formal engagement with De-Notified Tribes (DNTs), Nomadic Tribes (NTs), and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (SNTs) through the establishment of the first dedicated commission in October 2003. Despite the significance of this step, the initial commission encountered several limitations that hindered the effective execution of its mandate. Consequently, the Renke Commission was constituted in March 2005 to carry forward and complete the unfinished work of its predecessor. In July 2008, the Renke Commission submitted a comprehensive report outlining a series of policy recommendations intended to address the historical marginalisation of these communities. Notably, the Commission's findings revealed that approximately 50% of DNT households lacked any form of official documentation, and 98% of the population remained landless. (Renke Commission, 2008)

Building upon the Renke Commission's recommendations, a working group under the aegis of the National Advisory Council (NAC) formulated an expanded set of policy proposals in 2011. These proposals reflected a deeper understanding of the systemic barriers facing DNT, NT, and SNT Communities and aimed to institutionalise long-term mechanisms for their inclusion within the framework of Indian welfare governance.

In 2017, the Idate Commission released an additional report that explored more intensively the multifaceted challenges experienced by these communities. A primary source of information for the Commission's analysis consisted of grievances submitted through petitions and memorandums from individuals, community representatives, and organisations across various states and union territories. The Commission systematically categorised the issues raised in these communications and responded accordingly. In total, over 3,200 petitions and memorandums were submitted, encompassing demands for constitutional recognition, the creation of a separate schedule for DNT-NT-SNT groups, inclusion within the SC/ST lists, and enhanced access to education, housing, and other essential public services.

Out of a total of more than 3,700 petitions and memorandums received, the highest number - 618 - related to infrastructure and sanitation. These petitions identified critical deficiencies in the availability of basic civic amenities such as roads, drainage systems, toilets, community centres, and cremation grounds. The second most prominent concern, with approximately 568 petitions, pertained to housing needs and land allotments for residential and agricultural purposes.

Another 551 petitions called for the creation of a distinct reservation category for DNT and NT Communities, paralleling the existing provisions for SC and ST groups. Several other grievances focused on the absence of essential identity documents, such as Aadhaar cards, ration cards, and caste certificates, all of which are prerequisites for accessing government schemes. Many submissions also requested formal inclusion in SC, ST, OBC, or a distinct NT-DNT category. Additional concerns

highlighted the lack of nearby schools, the need for targeted scholarship programmes and hostel facilities, and the challenges associated with securing loans due to insufficient documentation. Artisan and acrobatic communities also sought tailored government assistance to sustain their traditional livelihood practices in the face of rapid socio-economic changes.

In response to these sustained demands and findings, the Government of India established the Development and Welfare Board for De-Notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DWBDNC) in 2019. This institutional body was designed to act upon the recommendations made by the Idate Commission and to provide a focused platform for policy implementation and monitoring. For the fiscal year 2024–25, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment allocated ₹32.43 crore to the DWBDNC under the Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED).

The challenges faced by DNT and NT Communities are compounded by multiple structural barriers, including the lack of disaggregated data, anomalies in classification, patriarchal social norms, low educational and economic indicators, erosion of traditional livelihoods, and social discrimination. These intersecting factors contribute significantly to the double marginalisation of women from DNT and NT Communities.

Challenges Related to Classification

A critical impediment to the effective delivery of welfare entitlements to these communities lies in the issue of classification. The existing framework often conflates DNTs, NTs, and SNTs under broader categories such as SC, ST, or OBC. This undifferentiated classification obscures the specific vulnerabilities and distinct cultural identities of these communities. As a result, they are frequently subsumed within larger, more politically organised groups that are better positioned to access the benefits of affirmative action. The absence of a separate, nuanced category prevents focused policy attention and undermines the ability of state mechanisms to respond to the unique socio-economic challenges faced by these groups.

According to the findings of the Idate Commission, detailed in its 2017 report *Denotified for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes,* there exists considerable variation in how different communities aspire to be officially classified. Preferences regarding categorisation are neither uniform nor homogenous across groups. As indicated by the report's data visualisations, the most commonly expressed preference was for inclusion under the Scheduled Tribes category. The second most preferred option was the establishment of a separate category for NT/DNT Communities. Notably, the least preferred classification was inclusion under the Other Backward Classes category. (See Figure 1) (Idate Commission, 2017).

Central Government Schemes for DNT, NT and SNT Communities

Recent central government initiatives have sought to address the layered deprivations faced by De-Notified Tribes (DNTs), Nomadic Tribes (NTs) and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (SNTs) through a convergence based approach that spans education, health, livelihoods and housing. While these schemes signal increased policy attention, most do not exclusively target DNT-NT-SNT groups; instead, they include them within broader categories such as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Economically Backward Classes (EBCs), with important implications for access and effectiveness.

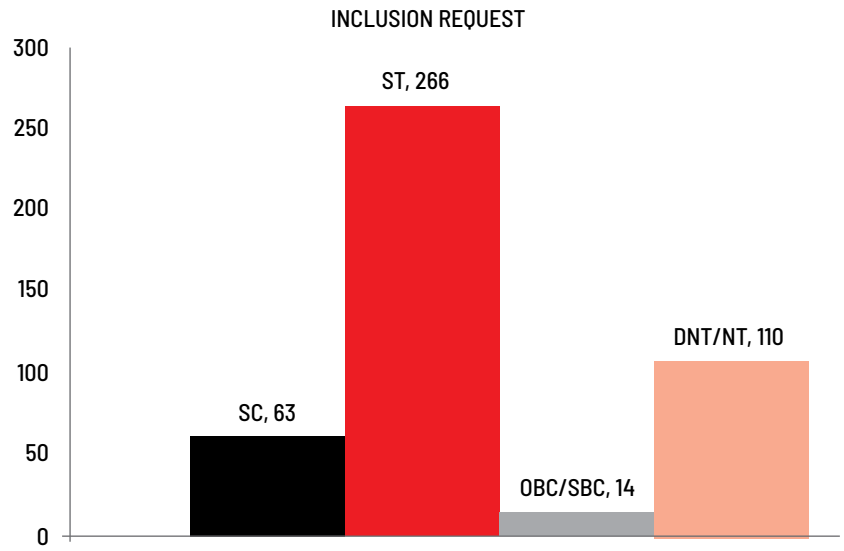
Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED)

In 2022, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched the Scheme for Economic Empowerment of De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi- Nomadic Tribes (SEED) as a central pillar of the Union government's current approach. SEED is designed as an integrated framework with four principal components:

›› Educational empowerment

Free coaching support for competitive examinations (e.g. UPSC, SSC, banking) is extended to students from DNT-NT-SNT Communities. Coaching is delivered through accredited centres, with financial stipends and academic resources

Figure 1: Graph on inclusion request taken from De-Notified for De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities Report, 2017[1]



intended to improve representation of DNT-NT youth in formal employment and higher education.

›› Health security

SEED links eligible families to health insurance coverage under Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), which provides up to ₹5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care in empanelled public and private hospitals. This is particularly significant given low health seeking behaviour and limited infrastructure in many DNT-NT settlements.

›› Livelihood promotion

Livelihood support is envisaged primarily through convergence with the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and, in urban areas, the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM). These programmes aim to facilitate self employment, skill development, micro enterprise formation and financial inclusion via self-help groups, credit linkages and market access. However, the extent to which DNT-NT women can access these opportunities depends on their ability to navigate documentation requirements and entrenched stigma.

›› Housing and settlement support

Housing assistance is provided through integration with Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY–Gramin and Urban), with the objective of supporting the transition from kutcha or temporary dwellings to pucca housing for DNT-NT-SNT households. In principle, landless families are prioritised for housing and, where feasible, land allocation, though implementation remains uneven.

Centrally Sponsored Scholarship and Education Schemes

In addition to SEED, several centrally sponsored and central sector schemes explicitly list DNT-NT-SNT Communities alongside OBC/EBC groups:

›› Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship Schemes

Centrally sponsored scholarships at the pre-matric and post-matric levels aim to reduce dropout rates and support school and college education through tuition support, maintenance allowances and examination fee waivers.

1. https://socialjustice.gov.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/Idate%20Commission.pdf

›› Top Class School and College Education Schemes

Central sector schemes for "Top Class" school and college education seek to enable meritorious OBC/EBC and DNT-NT-SNT students to access high quality institutions by covering tuition, boarding and related academic costs.

›› Free coaching schemes for competitive examinations

Parallel central schemes provide financial and institutional support for coaching for professional courses and public service examinations, recognising educational mobility as crucial to breaking cycles of inter-generational exclusion.

Institutional Architecture

At the institutional level, the Development and Welfare Board for De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities (DWBDNC) was established in 2019 to coordinate these interventions. The Board is mandated to:

- Identify beneficiaries and facilitate convergence across ministries
- Monitor implementation of SEED and related schemes
- Advise on policy gaps and barriers specific to DNT-NT-SNT Communities

However, as a non-statutory body with limited authority, DWBDNC's capacity to address deeper structural issues such as fragmented classification, documentation barriers and persistent stigma remains constrained.

Taken together, recent central schemes mark an important shift toward recognising DNT-NT-SNT Communities within national development policy. Yet, their reliance on convergence with pre-existing programmes rather than tailored, rights based interventions means that many of the structural and gendered dimensions of exclusion documented in this study continue to be insufficiently addressed.

State Level Schemes: Overview and Classification

The states of Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh provide analytically important contexts for examining state level schemes due to their large and diverse DNT-NT-SNT populations, histories of criminalisation under the Criminal Tribes Act (1871), and varied caste/community classification regimes (SC, ST, OBC, VJNT, DNC, MBC). While Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu accord distinct administrative status to De-Notified and Nomadic Communities (e.g. Vimukta Jatis and Nomadic Tribes – VJNT in Maharashtra, and De-Notified Communities – DNC, Most Backward Classes – MBC in Tamil Nadu), most DNT-NT-SNT groups in Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh are classified under broader SC/ST/OBC categories.

This variation in classification shapes access to welfare schemes and affirmative action, with important consequences for women's educational, livelihood and housing outcomes. Below, state specific schemes are outlined, distinguishing clearly between state designed interventions and centrally sponsored schemes that operate through state implementation mechanisms.

Haryana: Schemes Applicable to DNT Communities

In Haryana, DNT and NT communities such as Sansi, Banjara and Bazigar are primarily classified under Scheduled Castes (SC), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Backward Classes (BC), with no separate administrative category for DNTs. As a result, they access a combination of state and central schemes via these broader classifications, rather than DNT specific programmes.

Key Schemes Relevant to DNT-NT Communities in Haryana

The following schemes are available to DNT-NT communities in Haryana, though they are not exclusively designed for them:

- **Dr. Ambedkar Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship for DNTs** (state implemented; centrally sponsored)

- **Dr. Ambedkar Medhavi Chhatra Sanshodhit Yojana** (state scheme for meritorious students)
- **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Awas Navinikaran Yojana** (housing repair/upgradation scheme)
- **Provision of Legal Aid** (state legal services, with relevance for communities facing criminalisation and rights violations)
- **Monetary Relief to Victims of Atrocities** (linked to the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) framework)
- **Mukhya Mantri Samajik Samarasata Antarjatiya Vivah Shagun Yojana** (inter-caste marriage assistance)
- **Mukhya Mantri Vivah Shagun Yojana** (marriage support for women from disadvantaged communities)
- **Post-Matric Scholarship for OBC Students** (centrally sponsored, state implemented)
- **Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme for SC Students** (centrally sponsored, state implemented)
- **Pre-Matric Scholarship for Children Engaged in Cleaning Activities and Exposed to Health Hazards**
- **Pre-Matric Scholarship for OBC Students**
- **Pre-Matric Scholarship for SC Students** (Classes IX and X)
- **Nanaji Deshmukh Scheme for Construction of Hostels for DNT Boys and Girls** (centrally sponsored hostels for DNT students)

While these schemes create formal entitlements, DNT-NT women in Haryana continue to face significant barriers to actual access due to persistent stigma, administrative hurdles, limited awareness and documentation gaps.

Maharashtra: Schemes for Vimukta Jatis and Nomadic Tribes (VJNT)

Maharashtra has instituted a distinct administrative category for Vimukta Jatis and Nomadic Tribes (VJNT), acknowledging their unique socio-historical trajectory and seeking to facilitate targeted interventions. Nonetheless, VJNT Communities remain outside many constitutional safeguards available to SC/ST groups, limiting their access to reservation benefits even where state level schemes exist.

Selected State Level Schemes for VJNT Communities

Among the welfare schemes initiated by the Maharashtra government, the following directly target VJNT and Special Backward Class (SBC) communities:

25% Margin Money Loan Scheme

A state funded concessional loan facility providing up to 25% margin money to economically disadvantaged individuals from VJNT and SBC communities. The scheme aims to promote financial and social advancement by improving access to capital at nominal interest rates.

Motor Driving Training Scheme for VJNT, SBC and OBC Candidates

This scheme offers training in light and heavy motor vehicle driving and conductor certification, delivered through accredited private motor driving schools. It includes free lodging, boarding and coverage of licence fees, with the explicit objective of creating sustainable livelihood options for youth from marginalised communities.

Savitribai Phule Scholarship for VJNT and SBC Girl Students (Standards V–VII)

A gender focused scholarship that provides ₹60 per month for ten months per academic year to eligible girl students, designed to incentivise enrolment and retention in upper primary grades.

Meritorious Scholarships for VJNT and SBC Students in Secondary Schools (Standards V–X)

Annual scholarships of ₹200 (Classes V–VII) and ₹400 (Classes VIII–X) to promote educational continuity and performance among students from backward communities.

These schemes, while important, remain constrained by limited coverage, social prejudice and weak institutional delivery. For VJNT women, the intersection of caste based stigma, gender

and precarious livelihoods often blunts the transformative potential of such initiatives.

Tamil Nadu: Schemes for DNC, MBC and Related Communities

Tamil Nadu employs a structured classification that formally recognises DNT-NT-SNT Communities under Backward Classes (BCs), Most Backward Classes (MBCs) and De-Notified Communities (DNCs). This framework underpins a relatively extensive portfolio of state sponsored welfare schemes.

Educational Schemes

Administered largely through District Backward Classes and Minorities Welfare Offices, Tamil Nadu's educational schemes for DNC/MBC/BC communities include:

›› Pre-Matric and Post-Matric scholarships

Fee exemptions for students studying in Tamil medium government and government aided schools; tuition waivers for English medium students in Classes VI–X; and post-matric scholarships covering tuition, special and examination fees for Classes XI–XII and higher/technical/professional education.

›› Free Education Scheme

Complete tuition and mandatory fee waivers for students from DNT-NT-SNT Communities enrolled in three year degree courses, diplomas and professional programmes in government and government aided institutions, with hostel support to enable continuity.

›› Web enabled scholarship disbursement

Direct benefit transfer into student bank accounts, introduced to improve transparency and timeliness of scholarship payments.

›› Rural Girls' Incentive Scheme

Financial incentives for rural girl students from MBC and DNC communities in Classes III–XII, aimed at reducing gendered dropout patterns.

›› Distribution of free bicycles (Class XI)

Universal provision of bicycles to all Class XI students in government and government aided schools, enhancing physical access to secondary education.

›› Free hostels and boarding grants

A network of hostels providing lodging, boarding and supplementary academic support for students from marginalised communities.

›› Kallar Reclamation Schools

Specialised institutions for the Piramalai Kallar community, listed under DNC, reflecting targeted efforts to address educational exclusion.

Employment, Livelihood and Housing Schemes

In addition to education, Tamil Nadu implements:

- Skill development programmes tailored to emerging market demands to enhance employability among youth and women from DNT-NT-SNT Communities.
- Support for self employment, including financial assistance and capacity building for micro enterprise and small business formation.
- Housing and infrastructure development schemes directed at improving insecure and inadequate housing conditions, including individual house construction, provision of basic amenities and community infrastructure.

Despite this relatively comprehensive architecture, DNT-NT-SNT women in Tamil Nadu still confront entrenched social exclusion, livelihood vulnerability and gendered barriers that limit the full realisation of these policy commitments.

Rajasthan: Targeted Schemes for DNT and NT Communities

Rajasthan hosts multiple DNT-NT Communities -such as Gadia Lohar, Kanjar, Nat, Banjara and Sansi - who are variably classified under SC, ST and OBC categories. The absence of a unified DNT category has contributed to uneven access to welfare. In response, the state has introduced certain targeted schemes.

Key State Level Schemes

›› Gadia Lohar Housing Scheme

A housing programme specifically for the Gadia Lohar community that provides ₹35,000 for house construction, disbursed in two instalments. The scheme is complemented by subsidised land allocation in rural and urban areas to support settlement and secure housing rights for itinerant households.

›› Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship Schemes

Scholarships for students from DNT backgrounds: pre-matric assistance for Classes I–X, and post-matric support for higher secondary, college and technical/vocational courses, covering tuition, maintenance and related academic expenses.

›› Hostel facilities for NT-DNT students

Hostel provision in selected districts for students lacking fixed residence or adequate schooling infrastructure, aimed at enabling continuity of education.

›› Skill development and livelihood programmes through Rajasthan Skill and Livelihoods Development Corporation (RSLDC)

Vocational training, entrepreneurship support and self employment promotion, including special initiatives for women from DNT-NT communities to engage in micro enterprise and cooperative development.

Despite these measures, civil society assessments underline persistent gaps in enumeration, representation, access to credit, land titles and welfare schemes. The Idate Commission (2018) has recommended a distinct legal and administrative framework, including separate budgetary provisions and improved data systems for DNT-NT communities in Rajasthan.

Uttar Pradesh: Central Scheme Implementation and State Context

Uttar Pradesh: State Government Schemes for De-Notified and Nomadic Tribes

In Uttar Pradesh, De-Notified and Nomadic Tribes are dispersed across multiple districts and are largely classified under broader constitutional categories such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Communities including the Nat, Kanjar, Bedia, Habura, Sansi, Musahar and others therefore access welfare schemes primarily through these classifications rather than through a distinct DNT administrative category. This fragmented recognition shapes the nature of state level interventions, which tend to extend generic welfare schemes to DNT-NT populations rather than design tailored programmes exclusively for them.

In recent years, however, the Government of Uttar Pradesh has initiated a more focused institutional approach to the welfare of De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities. The State Cabinet has approved the constitution of a dedicated Uttar Pradesh Nomadic Development Board (Ghumantu Vikas Board) tasked with identifying DNT-NT-SNT Communities, undertaking enumeration, and ensuring effective implementation of both central schemes - such as the Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED) - and relevant state welfare programmes. The Chief Minister has explicitly linked this initiative to extending housing, land leases, voting rights and access to basic services to historically excluded De-Notified and Nomadic groups, signalling an emerging state level framework for targeted action even in the absence of a standalone DNT category.

Key State Level Schemes and Interventions

The following interventions and centrally sponsored schemes operate through state implementation mechanisms and are particularly relevant to DNT-

NT Communities in Uttar Pradesh, though they are not exclusively designed for them:

- **Ashram style residential schools and hostels**

  Free education, lodging, food, clothing and educational materials are provided to children from marginalised communities up to the senior secondary level. Children from De-Notified and Nomadic Communities are given special facilities in hundreds of government hostels originally created for SC students, including accommodation and academic support.

- **Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarships for SC/ST/OBC Students**

  State implemented scholarship schemes cover tuition fees, maintenance allowances and examination costs for students from SC, ST and OBC communities. DNT-NT students classified within these categories access educational assistance through these generic schemes rather than DNT specific scholarships.

- **Implementation of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin and Urban (PMAY)**

  Through state level targeting, pucca houses and, in some cases, land leases are extended to households from De-notified and Nomadic Communities residing in kutcha or temporary structures, roadside settlements or forest fringes. Certain long settled communities have been prioritised for regularisation of settlements and conferral of revenue village status.

- **Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED) – Livelihood Component via NRLM**

  Uttar Pradesh implements the livelihood component of SEED through convergence with the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and the state rural livelihoods machinery. Resources are channelled to create and strengthen self-help groups (SHGs) and livelihood clusters among DNT/NT/SNT households, with a specific focus on women's collectives.

- **Social protection schemes administered by the Social Welfare Department**

  The Social Welfare Department implements a range of social protection schemes — pensions, ration cards, Ayushman Bharat health insurance, electricity connections, and LPG schemes — for marginalised households. Recent saturation drives have explicitly sought to include De-Notified and Nomadic Tribes within these programmes.

These schemes and interventions together create formal entitlements and potential pathways for improvement in education, housing, livelihoods and social protection.

Bridging Policy Gaps

Towards a Gendered, Multi-State Inquiry into NT-DNT Communities

In light of the persistent disjuncture between policy intent and lived realities, there is a clear need for a more empirically grounded and analytically rigorous understanding of NT-DNT communities, particularly through a gendered lens. As this chapter has demonstrated, the intersecting dynamics of livelihood precarity, adverse legal regimes, fragmented classification, and constrained access to welfare collectively shape the conditions of marginalisation experienced by these communities, with disproportionately adverse consequences for women. Despite the proliferation of commissions, schemes, and policy interventions, existing frameworks continue to rely on aggregated and insufficiently disaggregated data, thereby obscuring intra-community differences and regional variations in socioeconomic conditions.

A systematic, comparative study of women from NT-DNT Communities across multiple states - specifically Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh - offers a critical methodological pathway to address these gaps.

These states present diverse configurations of classification regimes, policy approaches, and historical trajectories, making them analytically significant sites for examining how structural exclusion is produced, reproduced, and negotiated across contexts. Such an inquiry would enable a nuanced understanding of women's socioeconomic positioning in relation to livelihoods, access to state entitlements, documentation, mobility, and exposure to stigma and institutional bias.

Importantly, a multi-state, gender-focused analysis would move beyond descriptive accounts of deprivation to generate evidence capable of informing context-sensitive and structurally responsive policy design. By foregrounding the lived experiences of NT-DNT women, such research can contribute to reorienting policy frameworks away from narrowly conceived welfare approaches toward more substantive forms of recognition, inclusion, and justice. In doing so, it holds the potential to bridge the gap between formal policy commitments and the complex realities that continue to define the everyday lives of NT-DNT Communities.

Chapter 4:

Research Methodology

Given the complex and layered nature of exclusion experienced by women from De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNT-NT-SNT), this study adopted a mixed-methods design to capture both the structural patterns of deprivation and the lived realities underlying them. The research problem itself - marked by the absence of reliable disaggregated data, historical stigma, and deeply gendered vulnerabilities - necessitated the simultaneous use of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The mixed-methods research design has been defined as "[a]n approach to research in the social, behavioural and health sciences in which the investigator gathers both quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) data, integrates the two, and then draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data to understand research problems." (Creswell, 2015)

Accordingly, quantitative data were collected through structured surveys to assess key indicators such as socio-economic status, access to entitlements, education levels, livelihood patterns, and health conditions among women across selected communities. At the same time, qualitative methods - including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and narrative accounts - were employed to document women's everyday experiences of marginalisation, violence, occupational precarity, and their negotiations with state institutions and social norms.

Both strands of data were analysed independently and later brought together at the stage of interpretation. This convergence enabled the study to not only validate patterns of exclusion (such as lack of identity documents or limited access to welfare), but also to contextualise these findings within histories of criminalisation, displacement from traditional livelihoods, and persistent social stigma. Importantly, the design also allowed for the identification of gaps and contradictions between reported access and actual lived experiences.

Area of the Study

The research was carried out in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu. The selection of these five states was guided by multiple considerations. First, these states have a significant presence of NT-DNT Communities, together accounting for nearly one-third of De-Notified Tribes and one-quarter of Nomadic Tribes in India (Idate Commission, 2017). Second, they reflect regional diversity in development indicators and welfare provisioning. Third, the choice was informed by ActionAid Association's existing field presence and longstanding community relationships, which enabled deeper engagement and access.

A key consideration in the selection was the variation in how NT-DNT Communities are classified across states. Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu were included for their distinct policy frameworks that recognise these groups under separate categories - such as Vimukta Jati and Nomadic Tribes (VJNT) and De-Notified Communities/Most Backward Classes. In contrast, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh were selected to represent contexts where NT-DNT Communities are largely subsumed within broader Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), or Other Backward Class (OBC) categories.

This comparative framework enables the study to examine whether distinct classification systems translate into improved access to rights, entitlements, and welfare measures. By analysing these differences, the research seeks to generate evidence on the implications of policy recognition for socio-economic outcomes and contribute to more informed advocacy on classification and resource allocation.

In the absence of comprehensive social mapping of NT-DNT populations, districts within these states were purposively selected based on the known concentration of these communities, ensuring that the study captures diverse regional and socio-political contexts.

Sampling Design and Methodology

The study employed a non-probability purposive sampling method to identify respondents. Sampling considerations included age, marital status, education, occupation, and regional distribution across rural and urban locations within each selected state. ActionAid Association's pre-existing engagement with NT-DNT Communities, particularly with women, enabled effective rapport-building, thereby facilitating data collection on sensitive gender-related issues.

A sample of 3,000 women - 600 from each of the five states - was surveyed through a structured questionnaire. Proportional representation was ensured based on local community populations. Complementing the survey data, the qualitative component comprised six focus group discussions (FGDs) per state, 20 case studies capturing in-depth life histories, and 10 key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders including government officials, community leaders, and representatives from civil society organisations.

Respondent Categories

Thus the respondents were divided into three primary categories:

1. **Community respondents** – including NT-DNT women and girls across diverse demographic profiles, who participated in the quantitative survey and some in the focus group discussions and in sharing case studies.
2. **Government officials** – such as district administrators and welfare officers engaged in policy implementation who participated in the key informant interviews.
3. **Institutional respondents** – who also participated in the key informant interviews, included leaders of community-based organisations (CBOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) involved in the development and rights-based support for NT-DNT Communities.

Data Collection Tools

The study employed a variety of tools for data collection, consistent with its mixed-methods approach:

- **Structured questionnaire surveys** administered through the Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) method using the Kobo Toolbox, a digital platform developed by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. This approach minimised logistical challenges and improved data accuracy.
- **In-depth interviews, FGDs, case studies, and participant observations** formed the core of the qualitative data collection, capturing narratives around access to healthcare, education, employment, and exposure to violence or state interventions.
- **Key informant interviews** were conducted with local leaders, administrators, and CSO representatives to contextualise the lived realities of NT-DNT women within broader policy and administrative frameworks.

Sources of Data

The research relied on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data included the structured survey responses, interviews, FGDs, and case studies collected during fieldwork. Secondary data was drawn from government reports, academic literature, legal frameworks, news articles, and publications by ActionAid Association, national commissions (e.g., Renke and Idate Commissions), and research institutions.

Literature Review and Desk Study

A comprehensive literature survey was conducted as part of the preparatory phase of the research. This included analysis of published research articles, books, government legislation, official policy documents, media reports, and findings from CSOs and international organisations. The desk study helped identify gaps in current knowledge,

contextualise the field data, and validate existing classifications and policy responses towards DNT, NT, and SNT Communities.

Field Survey Scope and Justification

The survey focused on 3,000 women respondents across five states, using a questionnaire that collected detailed information on individual and household characteristics, educational attainment, access to healthcare, livelihood patterns, land ownership, documentation, and social security entitlements, as well as incidences of gender-based violence. The inclusion of Kalbeliyas and similar groups who face discrimination comparable to DNTs was justified through both existing literature and ActionAid Association's programmatic experience.

Given the inconsistencies in classification across states and the absence of a dedicated national census for DNT-NT groups, their inclusion was necessary to build a nuanced and comparative understanding of how identity, state recognition, and access to welfare intersect for women from these historically excluded communities.

Chapter 5:

State-Wise Data Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the study which used the mixed-methods approach, where in quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently. This chapter thus analyses both types of data in an integrated manner to develop a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic realities of women from NT-DNT Communities across five states.

The chapter is organised around a set of key thematic areas that reflect the multiple dimensions of deprivation and exclusion faced by NT-DNT Communities, and especially the women from these communities. These include food security; housing and sanitation; asset ownership; agricultural land ownership and possession; livelihoods and work; migration patterns; education; health status and access to healthcare; access to identity documents and welfare schemes; access to reservation; political participation; and access to grievance redressal mechanisms. Together, these themes provide a holistic framework to examine not only material conditions but also questions of rights, recognition, and agency.

Under each theme the analysis begins with a comparative overview of quantitative findings across Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu, identifying broad patterns and disparities across regions. This is followed by a state-wise analysis, which situates these patterns within specific policy, institutional, and socio-cultural contexts. The quantitative findings are further enriched by qualitative insights drawn from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, which illuminate the lived experiences behind the data and help explain observed trends and contradictions.

By weaving together statistical patterns with experiential narratives across these themes, the chapter offers a layered and grounded analysis of how structural inequalities, policy frameworks, and everyday practices intersect to shape the lives of NT-DNT women in diverse regional contexts.

Profile of Community Respondents

Any meaningful interpretation of quantitative data must begin with a clear understanding of who the community respondents are. The socio-economic realities captured in this study are not abstract figures; they are shaped by the social location, identity, and lived contexts of the women who participated in the quantitative survey, in the focus group discussions and in sharing case studies. In the case of NT-DNT Communities - marked by histories of criminalisation, fragmented classification, mobility, and deep gendered marginalisation - the profile of respondents becomes especially critical. It is through this lens that the data acquires meaning.

This section, therefore, presents the demographic and social profile of the respondents as a foundational step in the analysis. By examining their distribution across tribal categories (De-Notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic), social classifications (SC, ST, OBC, and state-specific categories such as VJNT, DNC, and MBC), age groups, marital status, and household composition, the study situates the quantitative findings within the broader structures of tribe, caste, gender, and regional policy frameworks.

Understanding these characteristics is essential for two reasons. First, it helps identify the structural conditions that shape access to resources, entitlements, and opportunities, including how state-specific classification systems may enable or constrain recognition. Second, it allows for a more nuanced reading of the data by highlighting patterns of vulnerability and agency — such as the predominance of working-age women, the high proportion of married respondents, and the diversity of household structures, including fluid and mobile family arrangements.

In this sense, the respondent profile serves as more than descriptive background; it provides the analytical grounding necessary to interpret subsequent findings on livelihoods, access to welfare, and social inclusion. It also underscores the importance of viewing the dataset as a "situated snapshot" - a grounded, field-based representation that reflects both the diversity and the structural marginalisation of NT-DNT women across states.

The sample had 66.87% respondents from De-Notified Tribes, 28.50% from nomadic tribes and 4.63% from Semi-Nomadic tribes. (See Table 5.1) In terms of social category, the largest section of the sample reported that they fell within the Scheduled Caste (SC) category at 52.40%, followed by 16.00% reporting themselves as Other Backward Classes (OBC). 12.57% reported being classified under Scheduled Tribes (ST), 11.47% under Vimukta Jati and Nomadic Tribes (VJNT), which, as explained earlier is a classification available in Maharashtra, a state where 57.33% of respondents identify as VJNT. 4.97% as De-Notified Communities and 2.07% as Most Backward Communities, which are classifications available in Tamil Nadu. (See Table 5.2).

Haryana's social classification is largely dominated by the SC category, with 96.70% of respondents identifying as Scheduled Castes, and negligible representation of OBCs (2.81%) and STs (0.50%). In Uttar Pradesh, the majority of the population is classified under Scheduled Castes (62.18%), followed by OBCs (30.59%), with a small proportion under Scheduled Tribes (7.23%). In Rajasthan, 58.43% are categorised as Scheduled Castes, 39.23% as OBCs, and 2.17% as Scheduled Tribes.

The case of Tamil Nadu is distinct, as it has carved out specific categories for De-Notified Communities

Table 5.1: Social Group of Respondents – De-Notified Tribe (DNT)/Nomadic Tribe (NT)/Semi-Nomadic Tribe (SNT)

Social Group	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
DNT	2006	66.87	606	100	218	36.33	371	61.94	346	57.67	465	78.15
NT	855	28.50	-	-	248	41.33	228	38.06	254	42.33	125	21.01
SNT	139	4.63	-	-	134	22.33	-	-	-	-	5	0.84
Total	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**599**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**595**	**100**

Table 5.2: Social Category of Respondents – Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Vimukta Jati and Nomadic Tribe (VJNT), De-Notified Community (DNC), Most Backward Caste (MBC)

Social Category	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
SC	1572	52.40%	586	96.70%	104	17.33%	350	58.43%	162	27.00%	370	62.18%
OBC	480	16.00%	17	2.81%	45	7.50%	235	39.23%	1	0.17%	182	30.59%
ST	377	12.57%	3	0.50%	90	15.00%	13	2.17%	228	38.00%	43	7.23%
VJN (Maharash-tra)	344	11.47%		0.00%	344	57.33%	-	0.00%		0.00%	-	0.00%
DNC (Tamil Nadu)	149	4.97%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	149	24.83%	-	0.00%
MBC (Tamil Nadu)	62	2.07%	-	0.00%	2	0.33%	1	0.17%	59	9.83%	-	0.00%
No Status	16	0.53%		0.00%	15	2.50%		0.00%	1	0.17%		0.00%
Total	**3000**	**100%**	**606**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**599**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**595**	**100%**

(DNC) and Most Backward Communities (MBC). However, the largest number of respondents fall under Scheduled Tribes (38.00%), followed by Scheduled Castes (27.00%). Under the distinct categories, 24.83% fall under DNC and 9.83% under MBC.

As mentioned earlier, Maharashtra presents a different scenario, where the state has created a special category, the VJNT. The VJNT category constitutes 57.33% of respondents in Maharashtra. Additionally, Scheduled Castes account for 17.33% and Scheduled Tribes 15.00% of respondents.

The age distribution of the sample was divided into eight groups. The largest segments are the 25–34 years group (29.00%) and the 35–44 years group (26.96%), together comprising 55.96% of the population. Those under 45 years make up 71.01%, indicating a predominantly young population. Middle-aged groups, 45–54 and 55–64 years, represent 15.89% and 9.67% respectively. The population above 65 years declines sharply, with 65–74 years at 2.74%, 75–84 years at 0.67%, and 85+ years at 0.03%. (See Table 5.3)

Table 5.4 presents the distribution of marital status across the sample of 3,000 individuals. The majority (85.93%) reported being married, followed by 8.33% widowed and 5.07% single or unmarried. Separated and divorced respondents each account for 0.33%.

Table 5.5 shows that the most common household size is between four and six members (44.33%). Households with three or fewer members account for 15.70%, while those with six to ten members make up 13.83%. Households with ten to fifteen members account for 1.90%, and those with more than fifteen members represent 0.63%. A notable portion of the data (23.60%) is marked as not available. Uttar Pradesh (12.65% + 5.22%

Table 5.3: Age Group of Respondents

Age Group	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Five State Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
14-24	450	15.05	137	22.61	90	15.13	53	8.88	81	13.52	89	15.01
25-34	867	29.00	186	30.69	146	24.54	211	35.34	144	24.04	180	30.35
35-44	806	26.96	154	25.41	162	27.23	169	28.31	162	27.05	159	26.81
45-54	475	15.89	64	10.56	111	18.66	93	15.58	122	20.37	85	14.33
55-64	289	9.67	41	6.77	72	12.10	61	10.22	66	11.02	49	8.26
65-74	82	2.74	18	2.97	12	2.02	7	1.17	22	3.67	23	3.88
75-84	20	0.67	6	0.99	2	0.34	2	0.34	2	0.33	8	1.35
More than 85	1	0.03	-	-	-	-	1	0.17	-	-	-	-
Total	2990	100	606	100	595	100	597	100	599	100.0	593	100

Table 5.4: Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Married	2578	85.93%	506	83.50%	427	71.17%	572	95.49%	513	85.50%	560	94.12%
Widowed	250	8.33%	54	8.91%	84	14.00%	15	2.50%	73	12.17%	24	4.03%
Single/Unmarried	152	5.07%	39	6.44%	87	14.50%	11	1.84%	5	0.83%	10	1.68%
Separated	10	0.33%	2	0.33%	1	0.17%	1	0.17%	6	1.00%		0.00%
Divorced	10	0.33%	5	0.83%	1	0.17%		0.00%	3	0.50%	1	0.17%
Total	3000	100%	606	100%	600	100%	599	100%	600	100%	595	100%

Table 5.5: Number of Members of the Respondent's Household

Household Size	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
3 and less	471	15.70	113	18.65	75	12.56	65	10.90	136	22.67	82	13.83
04-06	1330	44.33	312	51.49	276	46.23	234	39.26	288	48.00	220	37.10
06-10	415	13.83	130	21.45	56	9.38	122	20.47	32	5.33	75	12.65
10-15	57	1.90	12	1.98	3	0.50	10	1.68	1	0.17	31	5.22
More than 15	19	0.63	3	0.50	1	0.17	2	0.34	-	-	13	2.19
NA	708	23.60	36	5.93	186	31.16	163	27.35	143	23.83	172	29.01
Total	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**597**	**100**	**596**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**593**	**100**

+ 2.19% ≈ 20.06%) and Rajasthan (20.47% + 1.68% + 0.34% ≈ 22.49%) have the highest proportion of larger households (6+ members). In contrast, Haryana (51.49% in 4–6 category) and Tamil Nadu (48.00%) show a higher prevalence of medium-sized households. Maharashtra (12.56%) and Uttar Pradesh (13.83%) have notable proportions of small households (3 or fewer members).

A review of the respondents reveals the complex interplay of caste, class, tribe, and gender among women from DNT-NT-SNT Communities. The predominance of DNT respondents (66.87%) and the high proportion classified under SC (52.40%) point to historically layered vulnerabilities.

The respondent profiles represent policy variation, fragmented identities, and working-age realities, offering insights into livelihoods, social protection, and marginalisation, while highlighting mobility, precarity, and changing settlement patterns across communities. Taken together, while not statistically representative of all NT-DNT women in India, the sample provides a robust indicative snapshot that surfaces key structural trends, lived realities, and policy gaps. It is therefore particularly useful for grounding gender-sensitive, context-specific policy design and further in-depth research.

Food Security

The data on food and resource procurement among De-Notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Communities across the surveyed states reveals that, 52.37% of respondents rely on "self-procurement" as their primary means of securing food. (See Table 5.6) While the term suggests independence, it is more linked to high vulnerability and irregular food access. For many NT-DNT women, "self-procured" includes purchase from the open market, foraging, barter and receiving wages and payments in kind. In the focus group discussion (FGD) with the Bawariya community in Haryana, women shared how, in the absence of stable food sources, they often gather grains scattered on temple floors as offerings by devotees. This is one of the food security practices covered under "self-procurement".

While 6.80% survive on begging and charity and 8.10% depend on other means such as religious offerings, employer-provided food, or community support, the Public Distribution System (PDS) is reportedly accessed by 32.73% of households. This is not anomalous in view of the broader literature on food security access among the most marginalised populations. PDS, Government of India's primary food security intervention is widely regarded for its scale and institutional reach, with notable improvements in coverage and reduced leakages in recent years (Drèze & Khera, 2013; Himanshu & Sen, 2013). Yet, access for NT-DNT women remains deeply uneven. The literature shows that exclusion is structurally embedded in documentation requirements, with mobility and lack of fixed residence limiting inclusion (Khera, 2011), while geographic isolation further constrains access in remote areas (Planning Commission, 2005). Social stigma and discrimination shape

everyday delivery (Thorat & Lee, 2005), and intra-household inequalities mean women may remain food insecure despite nominal access (Himanshu & Sen, 2013). State-level variations further reinforce these disparities (Drèze & Khera, 2013). Taken together, the literature and the five-state dataset suggest that exclusion is not merely a delivery failure but a structural outcome of how eligibility, residence, and identity are defined. A system premised on sedentary, documented households systematically marginalises mobile populations, producing layered exclusion shaped by stigma, invisibility, spatial marginality, and gender inequality.

Food consumption patterns reflect the question of access. Across the sample 76.80% of respondents report having two meals a day, while 8.27% survive on just one meal. Only 14.93% report having three or more meals daily. (See Table 5.7) These averages mask gender disparities. Women in Haryana report significantly lower food access, with 21.80% having only one meal a day compared to 4.80% of men. In Maharashtra, 15.80% of women and 16.00% of men report having one meal a day, but a slightly smaller proportion of women report having three or more meals compared to men (10.30% vs 12.00%). (See Table 5.8)

Examining Table 5.6 across states, in Haryana, 45.71% of households say they rely on self-procurement, while 36.63% say they access food through the PDS, and 16.01% depend on begging and charity - the highest among the surveyed states. The FGD with the Bawariya community in the state spoke about how they have to resort to begging. In Singhikat Deha Basti, in Hissar district, women spoke about systemic barriers to PDS access that have left families scrambling. Many residents in this area struggle with errors in biometric registrations and incorrect family income records on government databases, which deny them their ration entitlements. Some say they have had to approach authorities just to correct these records This was stated by multiple women who were interviewed in Haryana and was raised with the District Welfare Officer in Panipat as well. There is a process to correct it on the online portal, however, families face difficulties in getting this correction made. Women spoke about how the burden of

Table 5.6: Food Security

Primary Source of Food	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Begging/Charity	204	6.80%	97	16.01%	75	12.50%	10	1.67%	-	-	22	3.70%
Public Distribution System	982	32.73%	222	36.63%	172	28.67%	48	8.01%	433	72.17%	107	17.98%
Self-Procured*	1571	52.37%	277	45.71%	283	47.17%	529	88.31%	30	5.00%	452	75.97%
Others	243	8.10%	10	1.65%	70	11.67%	12	2.00%	137	22.83%	14	2.35%
Total	**3000**	**100%**	**606**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**599**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**595**	**100%**

* This category includes purchase from the open market, foraging, barter and receiving wages and payments in kind.

Table 5.7: Reported Number of Meals a Day

How many meals do you take in a day in general	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
One meal a day	248	8.27	127	21	95	15.8	7	1.2	14	2.3	5	0.8
Two meals a day	2304	76.8	460	75.9	435	72.5	567	94.7	260	43.3	582	97.8
3 or more meals a day	448	14.93	19	3.1	70	11.7	25	4.2	326	54.3	8	1.3
Total	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**599**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**595**	**100**

Table 5.8: Reported Number of Meals a Day by Men and Women

Number of meals taken in a day?	Five State Total				Haryana				Maharashtra			
	Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
One	251	8.37	148	18.80	132	21.80	29	4.80	95	15.80	96	16.00
Two	2205	73.50	2288	4.93	462	76.20	550	90.80	443	73.80	432	72.00
Three or 3+	544	18.13	564	76.27	12	2.00	27	4.50	62	10.30	72	12.00
Total	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**600**	**100**

acquiring food falls disproportionately on them as they navigate both hunger and humiliation. During Focussed Group Discussions women shared that they are the ones who have the responsibility of procuring and preparing food for the family. Even those who can access PDS shops report routine caste-based discrimination, bribe demands, and exclusion by ration dealers favouring dominant caste groups. An instance from Hissar was shared wherein the son of a woman who was interviewed faced verbal and physical abuse at the PDS shop. Many families resort to borrowing food or money at high interest from local moneylenders, locking them into cycles of debt.

Maharashtra exhibits a similarly precarious scenario, with 47.17% of households relying on self-procurement, 28.67% on the PDS, and 12.50% on begging and charity. The proportion of respondents reporting one meal a day is 15.80%, while 11.70% report having three or more meals daily. The gender divide is also evident here, with women slightly more likely to eat less frequently than men. While community organisations have intervened in crises like COVID-19 to distribute ration kits, gaps in consistent government support have left many families vulnerable to food shortages.

Rajasthan stands out with 88.31% of households dependent on self-procurement, the highest across all states, while PDS coverage is only 8.01%. This unusually low PDS access likely reflects either sample-specific location effects or exclusion from formal entitlements, and requires further investigation rather than being treated as a generalisable state-level pattern. A correlation with existing literature shows that food security cannot be equated with the existence of the PDS. Instead, access is mediated by recognition, location, and social position. The low level of reported access underscores the need to rethink food security systems for populations that are mobile rather than settled, informal rather than documented and marginalised rather than institutionally visible. Although only 1.67% report begging and charity as a food source, the Gadia Lohar community described severe ration procurement struggles, with residents receiving insufficient quantities and having to pay bribes for receiving due quota of grain. During the COVID-19 lockdown, civil society groups stepped in to fill the void with complete ration kits - an intervention that starkly exposed the absence of reliable state support during emergencies. The Bhoriya/Bauria community reported even graver malpractices. Ration dealers would extract money for online applications or falsely claim kinship with politicians to intimidate and exploit residents. Women narrated stories of being cheated out of their entitlements, often paying for rations that never arrived.

In Tamil Nadu, 72.17% of households rely on the PDS, while self-procurement accounts for only 5.00%. No respondents reported begging or charity as a primary source of food. However, access issues remain. The Narikuravar community in Madurai faces challenges of poor quality and inconsistent supplies at Anganwadi centres and ration shops. Water scarcity compounds their struggle, forcing households to purchase drinking water and leaving little for food expenses. Similarly, the Valaiyar community in Thoothukudi, despite having ration cards, is systematically excluded from other social security schemes. When denied rations, families

Table 5.8: Reported Number of Meals a Day by Men and Women (Contd. ...)

Number of meals taken in a day?	Rajasthan				Tamil Nadu				Uttar Pradesh			
	Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
One	8	1.30	11	1.80	12	2.00	11	1.80	4	0.70	1	0.20
Two	459	76.60	461	77.00	258	43.00	259	43.20	583	98.00	586	98.50
Three or 3+	132	22.00	127	21.20	330	55.00	330	55.00	8	1.30	8	1.30
Total	**599**	**100**	**599**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**595**	**100**	**595**	**100**

often buy food on credit at inflated prices, plunging into high-interest debt.

In Uttar Pradesh, 75.97% of households have to rely on self-procurement, with 17.98% accessing the PDS, and 3.70% depending on begging and charity. Food insecurity is acute, the FGD with the Musahar community, reveals that ration provisions are often insufficient for large families of eight to ten members. Many families survive by installing private taps at a personal cost of ₹3,000, pooling money from extended families or borrowing at high interest. Even then, limited access to water for cooking, drinking, and hygiene worsens the daily struggle for food security. Meal patterns reflect this as 97.80% report having two meals a day, while only 1.30% report three or more meals. Among women, fewer report adequate meal frequency compared to men.

These patterns collectively reveal a layered and intersectional food security crisis among DNT, NT, and SNT Communities. This includes uneven access to state welfare (e.g., PDS coverage varying from 8% to 72%), reliance on informal and insecure food sources, intra-household gender disparities in food consumption, and regional variations shaped by administrative classification and entitlement systems. Women appear to experience slightly lower meal frequency in some states (e.g., Haryana), though this varies across regions and is not uniformly consistent across all states.

The lived realities captured in qualitative accounts - such as reliance on informal food sources or exclusion from ration systems - underscore the need for more accessible and accountable food security mechanisms.

Housing and Access to Basic Services

Contrary to common assumptions of nomadism, a large segment appears settled. The overwhelming majority (89.73%) of respondents have lived in their current location for more than 5 years, suggesting a degree of settlement, despite historical mobility. A small portion (under 5%) have moved within the last 5 years (See Table 5.9). However, "settlement" may still mean informal tenure or encroachments on public lands, often without legal protection. The tables that follow provide further insight.

The high incidence of residency on public land or roadside spaces reflects continued precarity and vulnerability due to insecurity. Table 5.10 indicates that government land (29.27%) and own land (28.87%) are nearly equal, in response to the query of type of current place of stay. Nearly 19% live on panchayat land and 7.97% reside on vulnerable terrains like road and railway edges. Only a small portion reside on private land (6.3%) or employer's land (0.3%), indicating limited access to secure tenure.

While the surface data suggests a majority live in permanent structures, the material-wise breakdown indicates that many "permanent" homes may still be structurally vulnerable. Thus, while Table 5.11 shows that permanent housing structures are reported by 54.8%, followed by semi-permanent (15.8%) and tent-based (20.5%) shelters. Table 5.11a shows that most respondents (66.07%) lived in self-financed owned houses, while 22.73% fell under "Others," indicating insecure or informal housing arrangements. Government-provided housing remained limited nationally (8.5%), as did rented housing (2.7%). Uttar Pradesh recorded the

Table 5.9: Length of Stay in Current Location

Duration	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Less than 1 year	75	2.50	6	0.99	32	5.33	12	2.00	25	4.17	0	0.00
1 to 2 years	52	1.73	9	1.49	1	0.17	19	3.17	22	3.67	1	0.17
2 to 3 years	53	1.77	13	2.15	1	0.17	8	1.34	28	4.67	3	0.50
3 to 5 years	128	4.27	22	3.63	1	0.17	22	3.67	72	12.00	11	1.85
More than 5 years	2692	89.73	556	91.75	565	94.17	538	89.82	453	75.50	580	97.48
Total	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**599**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**595**	**100**

Table 5.10: Land Type for Current Place of Stay

Land Type	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Along the high-way	20	0.67%		0.00%	0	0%	7	1.17%	11	1.83%	2	0.34%
Along the railway	35	1.17%		0.00%	0	0%	2	0.33%	33	5.50%		0.00%
Along the road	204	6.80%	89	14.69%	6	1%	70	11.69%	19	3.17%		0.00%
Employer's Land	9	0.30%	1	0.17%		0%	6	1.00%		0.00%	2	0.34%
Government Land	878	29.27%	73	12.05%	358	60%	185	30.88%	178	29.67%	84	14.12%
Others	94	3.13%	7	1.16%	53	9%	2	0.33%	27	4.50%	5	0.84%
Own Land	866	28.87%	148	24.42%	115	19%	216	36.06%	269	44.83%	118	19.83%
Panchayat Land	569	18.97%	103	17.00%	9	2%	66	11.02%	19	3.17%	372	62.52%
Private Land	189	6.30%	95	15.68%	10	2%	42	7.01%	39	6.50%	3	0.50%
Village Common Land	156	5.20%	90	14.85%	49	8%	3	0.50%	5	0.83%	9	1.51%
Total	**3000**	**100%**	**606**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**599**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**595**	**100%**

Table 5.11: Housing Type for Current Pace of Stay I

Housing Type	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Government Shelter	34	1.13%	1	0.17%	24	4.00%		0.00%	8	1.33%	1	0.17%
Mobile Caravan/ Mobile Van	8	0.27%	-	0.00%	1	0.17%	7	1.17%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%
Others	110	3.67%	3	0.50%	83	13.83%	6	1.00%	17	2.83%	1	0.17%
Permanent Structure	1644	54.80%	195	32.18%	276	46.00%	346	57.76%	309	51.50%	518	87.06%
Semi-per-manent	474	15.80%	61	10.07%	86	14.33%	74	12.35%	230	38.33%	23	3.87%
Temporary/ Makeshift Structure	730	24.33%	7	1.16%	49	8.17%	43	7.18%	11	1.83%	5	0.84%
Tent	615	20.50%	339	55.94%	81	13.50%	123	20.53%	25	4.17%	47	7.90%
Total	**3000**	**100%**	**606**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**599**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**595**	**100%**

Table 5.12: Ownership Status of Current Place of Residence

	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Owned - Self Financed	1982	66.07	306	50.5	333	55.5	395	65.94	369	61.5	579	97.31
Owned - Government Provided	255	8.5	11	1.82	98	16.33	12	2	120	20	14	2.35
Rented	81	2.7	7	1.16	10	1.33	8	0.33	55	9.17	1	0.17
Others	682	22.73	282	46.53	159	26.5	184	30.72	56	9.33	1	0.17
Total	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**599**	**100**	**600**	**100.00**	**595**	**100**

highest level of self-financed ownership (97.31%), while Tamil Nadu (20%) and Maharashtra (16.33%) showed relatively higher access to government-provided housing. Haryana had the highest proportion under "Others" (46.53%), reflecting greater housing insecurity. When classified by material 44.4% live in kuccha houses, and only 22.57% in pucca homes, with the rest in semi-pucca structures. (See Table 5.12)

The data complicates the widely held assumption that Nomadic and De-Notified Communities are primarily mobile. Instead, it reveals a pattern of "sedentarised precarity" — where physical settlement does not translate into social or economic security. While nearly 90% of respondents have resided in the same location for over five years, this stability is largely de facto rather than de jure, with a significant proportion living on government or panchayat land, roadside spaces, or other vulnerable terrains. Such locations are typically marked by the absence of formal tenure, exposing households to constant risks of eviction, displacement, and exclusion from state services.

A growing body of scholarship demonstrates that such conditions of insecure housing produce distinctly gendered vulnerabilities, intensifying existing inequalities in access to safety, resources, and autonomy. Studies on urban poverty and informal settlements show that inadequate and insecure housing conditions - characterised by overcrowding, lack of tenure security, and poor access to basic services - heighten women's exposure to everyday violence and harassment within domestic and public spaces (Phadke, Ranade, & Khan, 2011). Empirical work further links housing insecurity to adverse health and well-being outcomes, particularly for women who bear disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work under conditions of spatial and material deprivation (Bhan, 2016). In addition, the precarious nature of informal housing - often subject to eviction, displacement, and exclusion from state services - places a disproportionate burden on women in low-income and marginalised communities, including migrants and De-Notified and Nomadic groups, by increasing livelihood insecurity and limiting access to welfare entitlements (Baviskar, 2003; Datta, 2012).

This condition of insecure settlement is thus deeply gendered. For women, the lack of secure housing intensifies multiple, overlapping vulnerabilities. First, tenure insecurity undermines access to welfare entitlements - such as PDS, healthcare, and identity documentation - which are often tied to proof of residence. Women, who are typically responsible for managing household food security and caregiving, bear the immediate burden of such exclusions. Second, living in informal or roadside settlements increases exposure to violence and harassment, particularly in spaces lacking basic infrastructure such as sanitation, lighting, and secure shelter (Phadke et al., 2011). Third, the apparent contradiction between "permanent" structures and the predominance of kuccha or semi-pucca materials indicates structural fragility, which disproportionately affects women during climate shocks, extreme weather events, or seasonal disruptions (Bhan, 2016).

Importantly, the data also highlights that even where households report "own land," this ownership

may be informal, undocumented, or socially contested - limiting women's claims to property and weakening their bargaining power within both the household and the community. Research in the Indian context has consistently shown that women's limited ownership and control over land and housing assets significantly constrains their autonomy and ability to exit abusive relationships, thereby reinforcing dependence and vulnerability (Agarwal, 1994; Panda & Agarwal, 2005). In contexts where women's asset ownership is already low, insecure housing further entrenches economic dependence and reduced autonomy.

Taken together, the findings and the literature converge on a critical insight: settlement without security reproduces rather than resolves marginalisation. For women from NT-DNT Communities, housing precarity is not merely a question of shelter deficit but a central axis through which gendered forms of social, economic, and spatial marginalisation are produced and sustained, shaping access to livelihoods, bodily safety, state entitlements, and dignity.

Looking at data across the states indicates that in some states, such as Uttar Pradesh where 87.06% of women reported to be living in permanent structures, DNTs, NTs and SNTs are living in permanent structures. This is perhaps linked to the efficiency of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, as corroborated during focus group discussions in Jaunpur district with Nat and Musahar communities. Conversely, Maharashtra (21.67%) has reported higher proportions of temporary or makeshift structures or tents, which needs further investigation. A significant portion of households in Haryana (55.94%) live in tents, reflecting extremely vulnerable living conditions. This was also confirmed during the focus group discussion with the Bhoriya/Bauria community in Manana, Panipat. The living conditions were absolutely deplorable with communities living in flooded spaces in makeshift structures. The houses did not have toilets, nor did they have stable water connections.

With regard to housing structures, Haryana (67.70%) and Maharashtra (58.30%) have a majority of kuccha houses which leaves the families susceptible to extreme climatic conditions or hazards. Haryana has the highest proportion of kuccha housing at 67.70%, indicating that the majority of the population lives in temporary structures. The percentage of pucca houses is extremely low at 3.60%, suggesting limited access to durable housing. A significant portion of the population (28.70%) resides in semi-pucca structures, reflecting a transitional state between kuccha and pucca housing. In Rajasthan, kuccha housing accounts for 48.60%, lower than in Haryana and Maharashtra. The proportion of pucca housing is relatively high at 25.40%, indicating better access to permanent structures. Semi-pucca housing stands at 26.0%, showing a balanced distribution between different types of housing. On the other hand, Tamil Nadu (44%) and Uttar Pradesh (46.60%) have a more balanced distribution between kuccha, semi-pucca, and pucca houses. Tamil Nadu has the lowest proportion of kuccha housing at 20.80%, indicating better housing conditions compared to the other states. The percentage of pucca housing is the second highest at 35.20%, and semi-pucca housing is the most common at 44%. This distribution suggests a strong presence of semi-permanent and permanent housing structures in the state. Uttar Pradesh has the highest proportion of pucca housing at 46.60%, indicating the best housing conditions among the five states. Kuccha housing is relatively low at 27.20%, and semi-pucca housing accounts for 27.2%. This distribution reflects a significant shift towards permanent housing structures in the state.

With lack of pucca structures, communities in Haryana, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan rely on the use of diverse materials, including bamboo, tarpaulin, and metal sheets which is linked to economic constraints. Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh have a higher concentration of kuccha houses using primarily mud and cloth tents, highlighting limited access to better and more durable construction materials. (Table 5.13) High percentages of kuccha houses, temporary structures, and reliance on government land or housing signal greater vulnerability, particularly in Haryana and Maharashtra.

When women living in kuccha housing were asked what kind of materials were used for their dwelling place, bamboo and cloth-based materials dominated the answers, with over 60% using bamboo (pure or mixed) and cloth-based tents. Use of metal sheets, tarpaulin, dried leaves, and mud further suggests poor insulation, low durability, and exposure to weather. (See Table 5.14) (See Photographic Documentation for visual details.)

Inter-state housing variations reveal structural inequality in secure shelter for NT-DNT Communities. While Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu show improvement, Haryana and Maharashtra reflect persistent exclusion. Fragile housing and insecure tenure heighten vulnerability - especially for women. Housing is central to dignity, safety, entitlements, and access to basic services, particularly sanitation.

Sanitation

A significant proportion of respondents - 57.67% - reported practicing open defecation, underscoring persistent gaps in access to adequate sanitation facilities (See Table 5.15). The data reveals an alarming trend, particularly for women, many of whom reported having no access to toilets and being compelled to defecate in open fields. This lack of sanitation infrastructure is not merely a question of service delivery but is closely tied to conditions of insecure housing and settlement. For women, the absence of safe and private sanitation facilities intensifies everyday vulnerabilities - exposing them to risks of harassment, violence, and health complications, while also imposing constraints on mobility, dignity, and bodily autonomy. This also renders them open to harassment from men and violence or abuses from members of the dominant community who are usually the owners of the fields.

In Rajasthan and Maharashtra, there is a very high prevalence of open defecation, at 63% and 64.67% respectively. The case in Tamil Nadu (52.67%) and Uttar Pradesh (47.90%) and Haryana (57.67%) is only marginally lesser. It is encouraging to note that nearly 50% women in Uttar Pradesh reported access to toilets. During the focus group discussion with the Musahar community in Jaunpur, it was also revealed that there is a community toilet in the village which is run and managed by women from the same community under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission. Tamil Nadu (44%) and Haryana (37%) show better access to personal toilets compared to other states according to the data, however, the focus group discussions in Haryana particularly with the Bhoriya/Bauria community and Deha community in Hissar, revealed a very distressing situation. The women face constant harassment by field owners and sexual harassment from men who regularly come there to watch them using the toilet.

A growing body of literature shows that inadequate access to safe, private sanitation heightens women's vulnerability to gender-based violence and harassment. In the absence of secure toilets, women often practice open defecation or use distant, poorly lit facilities, increasing exposure to assault and surveillance (Phadke, Ranade, & Khan, 2011). Sanitation insecurity also creates conditions of fear and self-regulation, with women restricting food and water intake or altering routines to reduce risk (Sahoo et al., 2015). These strategies harm physical and mental health. Further, inadequate sanitation reflects broader

Table 5.13: Housing Type for Current Pace of Stay II

Housing Type	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Kuccha	1332	44.40	410	67.70	350	58.30	291	48.60	125	20.80	156	26.20
Pucca	677	22.57	22	3.60	15	2.50	152	25.40	211	35.20	277	46.60
Semi-Pucca	991	33.03	174	28.70	235	39.20	156	26.00	264	44.00	162	27.20
Total	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**599**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**595**	**100**

Table 5.14: Type of Material Used for Kuccha Housing Type

Type of kuccha material	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Bamboo	133	9.98	112	27.32%	4	1.14%	6	2.06%	3	2.40%	8	5.13%
Bamboo with other materials	419	31.46	129	31.46%	4	1.14%	163	56.01%		0.00%	123	78.85%
Cloth tent	259	19.44	2	0.49%	115	32.86%	84	28.87%	58	46.40%		0.00%
Cloth tent with other materials	84	6.31	0	0.00%	84	24.00%		0.00%		0.00%		0.00%
Dried Leaves	15	1.13	0	0.00%	3	0.86%	2	0.69%	1	0.80%	9	5.77%
Dried Leaves with other materials	1	0.08	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	0.34%		0.00%		0.00%
Mud	68	5.11	11	2.68%	51	14.57%	1	0.34%	4	3.20%	1	0.64%
Mud with other materials	10	0.75	7	1.71%	2	0.57%	1	0.34%		0.00%		0.00%
Metal Sheets	55	4.13	1	0.24%	13	3.71%	3	1.03%	37	29.60%	1	0.64%
Metal sheets with other materials	2	0.15	0	0.00%	2	0.57%		0.00%		0.00%		0.00%
Tarpaulin	163	12.24	133	32.44%	5	1.43%	13	4.47%	8	6.40%	4	2.56%
Tarpaulin with other material	34	2.55	9	2.20%	3	0.86%	14	4.81%	6	4.80%	2	1.28%
Others	89	6.68	6	1.46%	64	18.29%	3	1.03%	8	6.40%	8	5.13%
Total	**1332**	**100**	**410**	**100%**	**350**	**100%**	**291**	**100%**	**125**	**100%**	**156**	**100%**

spatial inequalities, compounding risks for women in informal settlements (Bapat & Agarwal, 2003).

In an FGD in Jaipur, women from the Banjara, Nat and Kalbeliya communities shared their plight of having to use open spaces for defecation due to lack of access to toilets. Similar concerns emerged among the Gadia Lohar community in Alwar and Bharatpur, where women described harassment, including being watched, filmed, or subjected to lewd remarks while bathing in makeshift spaces. Across Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, many women reported facing sexual harassment and verbal abuse from higher-caste landowners when defecating in the open, leaving them feeling threatened and unsafe.

None of the De-notified or Nomadic Communities in the FGDs reported receiving support under the Swachh Bharat Mission. While community toilet usage was relatively higher in Maharashtra (16.83%), access remained limited and conditions poor. In Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh, although community toilets existed for Nat and Musahar communities, women reported that they were often unusable. An officer in Jaunpur district noted that management of such toilets is typically assigned to women from lower-caste Self-Help Groups, reflecting the persistence of caste-based labour roles even within welfare schemes.

Water access further complicates sanitation use. Rajasthan (48.17%) and Maharashtra (40.54%) reported relatively higher proportions of toilets with water connections, whereas Uttar Pradesh recorded an extremely low 0.34%. Although 36.43% of women reported using personal toilets, only 25.71% of these had water connections, forcing 74.29% to arrange water separately and increasing women's daily burden (See Table 5.16).

Personal Kitchens

A majority of respondents across the surveyed states reported using personal kitchens for cooking

Table 5.15: Type of Toilet Used

Kind of Toilet	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Community Toilet (CT)	177	5.90%	19	3.14%	101	16.83%	30	5%	15	2.50%	12	2.02%
Open Defecation (OD)	1730	57.67%	363	59.90%	388	64.67%	378	63%	316	52.67%	285	47.90%
Personal Toilet (PT)	1093	36.43%	224	36.96%	111	18.50%	191.00	32%	269	44.83%	298	50.08%
Total	**3000**	**100%**	**606**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**599**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**595**	**100%**

Table 5.16: Does the personal toilet have a water connection

Water Connection	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	812	25.71	154	68.75	66	59.46	99	51.83	196	72.86	297	72.86
Yes	281	74.29	70	31.25	45	40.54	92	48.17	73	27.14	1	27.14
Total	**1093**	**100**	**224**	**100**	**111**	**100**	**191**	**100**	**269**	**100**	**298**	**100**

Note: The total count relates to respondents who said they have personal toilets in Table 5.14

Table 5.17: Personal Kitchen or Community Kitchen

	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Community Kitchen	183	6.10	10	1.70	33	5.50	5	0.80	134	22.30	1	0.20
Personal Kitchen	2817	93.90	596	98.30	567	94.50	594	99.20	466	77.70	594	99.80
Total	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**599**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**595**	**100**

and related activities, with significant variations visible in state-level patterns. (See Table 5.17) In Haryana, almost the entire population – 98.30% – uses personal kitchens, reflecting a preference for household-based food preparation and minimal reliance on communal cooking spaces. Similarly, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh reported extremely high rates of personal kitchen usage at 99.20% and 99.80%, respectively. Maharashtra, while still overwhelmingly dependent on personal kitchens, had a slightly higher proportion of respondents (5.50%) using community kitchens compared to these northern states Tamil Nadu stands out as a clear outlier: while 77.70% of respondents have personal kitchens, a notable 22.30% of households rely on community kitchens – by far the highest proportion among the surveyed states. This suggests either a stronger presence of communal cooking infrastructure or differing cultural patterns of shared meal preparation, especially among De-Notified and Nomadic groups in the region. At five-state data set, 93.90% of respondents reported using personal kitchens, with 6.10% relying on community kitchens - most of them concentrated in Tamil Nadu.

Table 5.18 presents the distribution of cooking fuel types used across the five states. Wood remains the most common cooking fuel, used exclusively by 39.57% of households and in combination with

other fuels by an additional 11.30%, making it the predominant source for over half the sample. This indicates a continued reliance on traditional biomass, which has implications for health and environmental sustainability. Haryana shows the highest dependence on wood (66.01%), with only 6.27% relying solely on gas and 18.32% combining gas with other fuels. The use of gas remains limited here. In Maharashtra, while 55% of households primarily use wood, a substantial share (25.83%) use gas in combination with other fuels, indicating a transitional pattern in fuel use. Coal use (including with other fuels) is highest here at 11.33%. Locations studied in Rajasthan follow a similar pattern, with 44.57% using only wood and 25.54% using gas plus other fuels. This mix may reflect both access constraints and cultural preferences. Tamil Nadu presents a contrasting picture, with the highest exclusive gas usage (51.83%) among all states and only 21% relying solely on wood. This suggests better penetration of LPG and possibly more robust public provisioning or affordability. Uttar Pradesh exhibits a dual trend: while 41.18% of households combine wood with other fuels, and only 10.76% use wood exclusively, gas-only use remains low (3.70%). This points to a significant transitional reliance on mixed fuel use, possibly due to intermittent access or cost concerns.

Access to Water

Patterns of water access display sharp state-wise disparities (See Table 5.19). At the level of the five-state data set, 36.43% of respondents say they rely on tap water as their primary source for general use, followed by 25.13% using hand pumps, 16.40% depending on tube wells or bore wells, 9.47% on wells, and 9.33% on private tankers.

In Haryana, access to tap water is relatively high at 48.68%, while 21.29% use hand pumps and 22.28% depend on tube wells or bore wells. Private tankers account for 4.79%. During discussions in Panipat district, women from the Bawariya community shared that although a few households have private taps, many rely on borrowing water from neighbours.

Maharashtra shows a more diversified pattern, with 40.50% accessing tap water, 28.17% depending on wells, and 18.00% on tube wells or bore wells. Hand pump usage is relatively low at 5.50%, and private tankers account for 4.67%. Despite this spread of sources, communities raised concerns about seasonal scarcity and irregular access.

Rajasthan reflects high dependence on non-piped sources, with both private tankers (29.72%) and tube wells or bore wells (29.72%) being equally dominant, followed by hand pumps at 23.87%. Only 12.35% report access to tap water, while dependence on wells is minimal (0.67%). The Bhopa Naik community in Tonk, Rajasthan noted a strong culture of mutual aid, where households with water connections share it with others in the locality. In Alwar district, women noted that during summer months, conflicts over tanker water are common, and only those able to hire private tankers can secure adequate supply.

Tamil Nadu emerges as the state with the highest access to tap water, with 61.50% of respondents relying on it. Wells (15.00%) and tube wells or bore wells (10.00%) are also significant sources, while private tankers serve 7.33% of households. However, communities such as the Narikuravar in Madurai reported that despite the presence of taps, supply remains irregular, forcing households to purchase drinking water.

In sharp contrast, Uttar Pradesh remains heavily reliant on hand pumps, with 75.46% of respondents identifying them as their primary water source, while only 18.82% have access to tap water. Tube wells or bore wells (1.85%), wells (3.53%), and private tankers (0.17%) play a marginal role. Focus group discussions in Varanasi highlighted that ageing hand pumps often provide poor-quality or insufficient water, exacerbating everyday hardships. The Dafali community in Jaunpur spoke about households with access to water sharing it with those that did not have access.

Across states, these patterns underline stark inequalities in water access among De-Notified and Nomadic Communities. While states like Tamil Nadu demonstrate relatively better tap water coverage, others such as Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan depend heavily on traditional or

Photographic Documentation

The photographs presented in this section offer a visual glimpse into the everyday realities of De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribe (DNT-NT-SNT) Communities across Rajasthan and Haryana. They complement the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study by documenting the physical environments in which many families live, including housing conditions, access to basic amenities, sanitation facilities, and settlement patterns. The photographs should be viewed not as isolated instances of poverty but as visual evidence of the structural inequalities documented throughout this report. Together with the empirical findings, they underscore the urgent need for secure housing, basic services, dignity, and the full realisation of citizenship rights for De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities.

Photograph 5.1: Living conditions of De-Notified Tribes in Tonk, Rajasthan



Photograph 5.2: Living conditions of De-Notified Tribes in Tonk, Rajasthan



Photograph 5.3: Living conditions of De-Notified Tribes in Tonk, Rajasthan



Photograph 5.4: Living conditions in Bawariya Settlement in Panipat, Haryana



Photograph 5.5: Living conditions in Bawariya Settlement in Panipat, Haryana



Photograph 5.6: Living conditions in Bawariya Settlement in Panipat, Haryana



Photograph 5.7: Bathing space in Gadia Lohar Basti, Alwar, Rajasthan



Photograph 5.8: : Bathing space in Gadia Lohar Basti, Alwar, Rajasthan



Photograph 5.9



Photographs 5.9 and 5.10: The starkest illustration of these living conditions emerged during a focus group discussion in Haryana. The two photographs document the circumstances of a young woman experiencing severe trauma following a sexual assault by unknown men. Lacking access to appropriate care, a safe living environment or adequate institutional support, her family resorted to securing her feet with metal wire to prevent her from wandering away. The incident starkly demonstrates how poverty, inadequate housing and the absence of psychosocial support can turn trauma into further deprivation of dignity and autonomy.

Women experiencing trauma arising from sexual and other forms of violence, trafficking, homelessness or abandonment have a right to psychosocial and mental-health support. The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 provides for accessible, affordable and non-discriminatory mental healthcare, with an emphasis

Contd ...

Photograph 5.10



... Contd.

on community-based care and protection of dignity, privacy and safety. Mission Shakti, through One Stop Centres and Shakti Sadans, further provides for counselling, shelter, healthcare, legal assistance and rehabilitation for women in distress.

For NT-DNT women, however, these rights must be understood in the context of discrimination and stigma that blocks access to institutional services, and how insecure tenure, homelessness, overcrowding and inadequate housing can intensify trauma and make sustained counselling, treatment and recovery extremely difficult. Secure and dignified housing, privacy, psychosocial care and protection from violence and stigma must therefore be treated as inter-connected requirements for recovery. The goal of institutional and public support should be to enable dignity, autonomy and safe community living - not abandonment or custodial confinement.

Table 5.18: Type of Fuel Used for Cooking

Type of Fuel	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Coal	23	0.77%	2	0.33%	2	0.33%	7	1.17%	11	1.83%	1	0.17%
Coal + Other Fuels	175	5.83%	6	0.99%	66	11.00%	76	12.69%	2	0.33%	15	2.52%
Gas	462	15.40%	38	6.27%	35	5.83%	56	9.35%	311	51.83%	22	3.70%
Gas + Other Fuels	808	26.93%	111	18.32%	155	25.83%	153	25.54%	148	24.67%	241	40.50%
Wood	1187	39.57%	400	66.01%	330	55.00%	267	44.57%	126	21.00%	64	10.76%
Wood + Other Fuels	339	11.30%	49	8.09%	4	0.67%	39	6.51%	2	0.33%	245	41.18%
Other	6	0.20%	0	0.00%	8	1.33%	1	0.17%		0.00%	7	1.18%
Total	**3000**	**100%**	**606**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**599**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**595**	**100%**

Table 5.19: Sources for General Use of Water

Water Source	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Bottled Water	3	0.10%			1	0.17%			1	0.17%	1	0.17%
Hand pump	754	25.13%	129	21.29%	33	5.50%	143	23.87%			449	75.46%
Others	75	2.50%	9	1.49%	9	1.50%	22	3.67%	35	5.83%		0.00%
Pond/River/ Lake	19	0.63%	9	1.49%	9	1.50%		0.00%	1	0.17%		0.00%
Private Tanker	280	9.33%	29	4.79%	28	4.67%	178	29.72%	44	7.33%	1	0.17%
Tap	1093	36.43%	295	48.68%	243	40.50%	74	12.35%	369	61.50%	112	18.82%
Tube Well/ Bore Well	492	16.40%	135	22.28%	108	18.00%	178	29.72%	60	10.00%	11	1.85%
Well	284	9.47%		0.00%	169	28.17%	4	0.67%	90	15.00%	21	3.53%
Total	**3000**	**100%**	**606**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**599**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**595**	**100%**

private sources. This uneven distribution reflects broader infrastructural gaps, socio-economic marginalisation, and the continued exclusion of these communities from reliable and equitable basic services.

Electricity Connections

A little over half of the respondents (56.40%) reported having an electric connection, while a substantial 43.60% remain without access, indicating significant gaps in electrification among NT-DNT Communities (See Table 5.20). Lack of electricity affects women's ability to engage in education, income-generation (e.g., sewing), and even safely navigate their homes after dark. It also limits access to digital services, which are increasingly vital for welfare entitlements.

Across states, access varies considerably. Rajasthan reports the highest proportion of households with electricity (57.76%), followed closely by Haryana (52.97%) and Maharashtra (50.50%), indicating that about half the households in these states have connections. In contrast, Uttar Pradesh shows lower access, with only 43.36% of households connected, while a majority (56.64%) remain without electricity.

Tamil Nadu emerges as a clear outlier, with only 13.33% of households reporting access to electricity and an overwhelming 86.67% lacking connections

- the lowest access among all surveyed states. This sharply contrasts with the state's otherwise relatively better performance in housing and water access, indicating uneven infrastructural reach for NT-DNT Communities.

The data suggests that even in states with moderate connection rates, a significant proportion of households remain excluded. Qualitative insights further indicate that access does not necessarily imply reliable or formal connections, with some households relying on informal arrangements or shared electricity, often involving irregular payments or dependence on neighbours (Zhang, 2018).

Among those who do have access, anecdotal accounts from focus group discussions indicate that expenditure on electricity remains a notable burden, though precise expenditure breakdowns were not captured in this dataset. Nonetheless, the combination of limited access and high costs reported by respondents underscores persistent infrastructural and affordability challenges.

Overall, the findings highlight persistent and uneven electrification gaps, with no state achieving universal access. These disparities reflect broader structural inequalities and suggest the need for targeted interventions that address both connectivity and affordability, particularly for historically marginalised communities.

Asset Ownership

The data on asset and livestock ownership (Tables 5.21 and 5.22) points to a clear pattern of low asset accumulation and limited livelihood diversification as reported by women from DNT-NT-SNT Communities. Assets considered range from basic household goods such as mobile phones to higher-value items like refrigerators, while livestock ownership was assessed separately.

Across all states, asset ownership is largely concentrated at the lower end of the spectrum, with over half of the respondents (51.13%) reported owning only one asset, indicating a narrow and fragile economic base. This pattern is particularly pronounced in Maharashtra (86%) and Haryana (54.79%), where single-asset ownership dominates, reflecting significant economic vulnerability. Rajasthan shows a similar trend, with 52.25% of respondents owning only one asset and 32.55% owning 2–3 assets. Uttar Pradesh presents a relatively more balanced distribution, with 44.03%

Table 5.20: Electric Connection in House

Electric Connection	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	1692	56.40%	321	52.97%	303	50.50%	346	57.76%	80	13.33%	258	43.36%
No	1308	43.60%	285	47.03%	297	49.50%	253	42.24%	520	86.67%	337	56.64%
Total	**3000**	**100%**	**606**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**599**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**595**	**100%**

Table 5.21: Asset Ownership

Asset category	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Only 1 asset	1534	51.13	332	54.79	516	86	313	52.25	111	18.5	262	44.03
02-03 assets	927	30.90	225	37.13	74	12.33	195	32.55	183	30.5	250	42.02
04-05 assets	379	12.63	44	7.26	10	1.67	55	9.18	223	37.17	47	7.9
06-07 assets	117	3.90	4	0.66	-	-	15	2.5	72	12	26	4.37
08-09 assets	35	1.17	1	0.17	-	-	14	2.34	11	1.83	9	1.51
More than 10 assets	8	0.27	-		-	-	7	1.17	-	-	1	0.17
Total	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**599**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**595**	**100**

owning one asset and 42.02% owning 2–3 assets, suggesting modest diversification but still limited accumulation.

Tamil Nadu stands out with a comparatively stronger asset profile. Only 18.5% of respondents reported owning a single asset, while a notable 37.17% owned 4–5 assets, indicating relatively better asset acquisition, possibly linked to improved access to welfare schemes or livelihood opportunities. However, ownership of 6 or more assets remains rare across all states, not exceeding 12% even in Tamil Nadu, underscoring the overall low levels of capital formation.

Livestock ownership, an important indicator of rural economic resilience, is both low and uneven across states. Overall, only 13.13% of women reported owning livestock. Rajasthan (18.5%) and Haryana (17.2%) record relatively higher ownership, consistent with local livelihood patterns involving pastoralism and animal husbandry. In contrast, Tamil Nadu (5.2%) and Uttar Pradesh (10.1%) show limited livestock ownership, indicating weaker integration of livestock into livelihood systems.

Taken together, the data highlights a context of constrained asset ownership and weak livelihood diversification, which limits economic resilience and reinforces vulnerability among women in these communities.

Agricultural Land Ownership and Possession

The data on agricultural land possession and ownership (Tables 5.23) reveals a near-total exclusion of DNT–NT–SNT Communities from agrarian assets, with significant gender disparities within the limited ownership that exists (Table 5.24).

Across the five-state data set, an overwhelming 94.90% of respondents reported having neither owned nor leased agricultural land. Only 4.27% owned land, and a mere 0.83% had access through leasing, indicating that less than 6% of the women reported to have any form of land access. This pattern reflects deeply entrenched structural barriers to land ownership.

State-wise trends mirror this overall exclusion, with minor variations. Haryana presents an extreme case, where 100% of respondents reported no ownership or leasehold access to land. Maharashtra (95.67%), Uttar Pradesh (95.63%), and Rajasthan (94.49%) also show very high levels of landlessness, with only small proportions reporting ownership or leasehold access. Tamil Nadu stands out with relatively higher ownership at 11.33%, suggesting a somewhat better - though still limited - access to land among respondents in the state.

Among the small subset of respondents who reported land ownership, gender disparities are pronounced. Across the five states, 47.47% of land is solely owned by men, 28.28% is owned by women, and 24.24% is jointly held. Rajasthan reflects a particularly skewed pattern, with 63.33% of land owned by men and only 23.33% by women. Uttar Pradesh shows a higher proportion of joint ownership (50.00%), but women's independent ownership remains low at 12.50%. Tamil Nadu presents a relatively more balanced pattern, with nearly equal shares of land held by men and women (41.86% each), while Maharashtra shows a mixed pattern, though the small sample limits strong conclusions.

These findings underscore the historical and structural landlessness of DNT-NT-SNT Communities, who have remained outside settled agrarian systems and largely excluded from land redistribution processes. For women, this exclusion is further intensified by gendered barriers to ownership, reinforcing economic dependency and limiting access to schemes such as PM-KISAN, agricultural credit, and land-linked employment under programmes like MGNREGA. Overall, the data highlights the urgent need for targeted, gender-sensitive land rights and asset redistribution policies to address this entrenched marginalisation.

Livelihood and Work

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) (2022-23) records 45.6% as rural workers and 54.4% as employed in the non-farm sector. This conforms with other government data and

studies, that shows that India's rural workforce is gradually shifting from farm-based to non-farm employment, though agriculture remains the dominant employer. However, Table 5.25 shows that only farm-based livelihood activity is 24.90% (29.40% if you add figures of additional livelihoods reported). This correlates to lack of access to agricultural land reported in Table 5.23. Non-farm other activities are reported by 27.6% and traditional non-farm livelihoods by 24.73%. The reliance on non-farm and non-farm traditional sectors points to displacement from land-based livelihoods and structural barriers in entering formal or stable labour markets. The "no work" figure reflects high levels of unemployment or invisibilised care work, particularly among mobile or `stigmatised communities.

The disaggregated livelihood practices data shown in Table 5.26 indicates that the largest segment of women reported involvement in traditional livelihoods (742), agriculture (312), animal husbandry (349), public works (333), and construction (230). Practices such as forest produce collection, services, mining, and manufacturing see smaller participation. Traditional occupations - such as drum beating, puppetry, animal shows, etc. - remain important but often unrecognised in

Table 5.22: Asset Ownership – Livestock

Livestock Ownership	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	2606	86.87	502	82.80	512	85.30	488	81.50	569	94.80	535	89.90
Yes	394	13.13	104	17.20	88	14.70	111	18.50	31	5.20	60	10.10
Total	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**599**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**595**	**100**

Table 5.23: Asset Ownership – Livestock

Land Possession Status	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No owned land no leased land	2847	94.90%	606	100%	574	95.67%	566	94.49%	532	88.67%	569	95.63%
Owned Land	128	4.27%	-	-	3	0.50%	31	5.18%	68	11.33%	26	4.37%
Leased Land	25	0.83%	-	-	23	3.83%	2	0.33%	-	-	-	-
Total	**3000**	**100%**	**606**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**599**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**595**	**100%**

Table 5.24: Gender-based Ownership Pattern

Ownership	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Male ownership reported	47	47.47%	-	-	1	50.00%	19	63.33%	18	41.86%	9	37.50%
Female ownership reported	28	28.28%	-	-	-	0.00%	7	23.33%	18	41.86%	3	12.50%
Ownership with both male and female reported	24	24.24%	-	-	1	50.00%	4	13.33%	7	16.28%	12	50.00%
Total	**99**	**100%**	**-**	**-**	**2**	**100%**	**30**	**100%**	**43**	**100%**	**24**	**100%**

Note: Respondents reporting gender-based land ownership was less than respondents reporting land ownership.

policy. Public employment (MGNREGS) also plays a critical role, especially where private options are scarce. Tables 5.27 to 5.31, show reported livelihood activities across each of the surveyed states.

The data relating to employment type in agriculture (Table 5.32) show that among the 386 women who reported of livelihood activities in agriculture, 64.51% report regular work, and 32.12% are casual workers. Despite "regular" employment, reported incomes are extremely low. This suggests disguised unemployment or underpaid family labour. Women's roles may be significant but undervalued.

With regards animal husbandry (Table 5.33), of 459 women dairy (34.2%) and poultry (30.5%) dominate. Animal husbandry serves as a vital fallback or supplementary livelihood. Yet, poor infrastructure, limited market access, and lack of veterinary support depress earnings.

Forest produce collection data seen in Table 5.34 shows the activity remains marginal, likely due to deforestation, eviction from forest lands, and loss of customary rights. Women collectors often lack forest access passes or ownership of NTFP rights. Bamboo/leaves (84.85%) dominate this activity, with very few collecting honey or medicinal plants.

The data regarding traditional livelihoods seen in Table 5.35, reflect cultural resilience coupled with economic vulnerability. Despite being their identity and primary skill base, such practices remain informal and unsupported by livelihood schemes. Diverse occupations persist, including drum beating, blacksmithing, selling handicrafts and puppetry with a majority (53.19%) falling under the category of "Other Traditional Forms".

Table 5.36 presents data related to public works. NREGS is reported as the engagement of 78.81% of the respondents, and 18.36% in other rural public works. That MGNREGA is a key income source, and public employment is a lifeline but often seasonal and erratic. Wage delays and job card irregularities remain critical barriers for women.

Construction work data seen in Table 5.37 is dominated by unskilled labour (82.4%), with few women in skilled roles (masonry, painting). While construction absorbs many landless women, but most are stuck in casual, unsafe, and low-paid roles. Training or upskilling pathways are minimal.

Mining & Manufacturing (Tables 5.38 & 5.39) are minor avenues of livelihood with just seven women reporting involvement in mining, largely in informal settings. Manufacturing was mentioned by 43 respondents, mostly in unspecified small-scale work (86% "other"). Engagement is minimal, likely due to physical risk, exclusion from formal sector jobs, and lack of local manufacturing ecosystems. Women may also face entry barriers in male-dominated sectors.

The services sector (Table 5.40) is dominated by sanitation/waste work (50%) and "other services" (42.67%), including informal vending, domestic work, etc. This sector is both growing and precarious. Women's entry often reflects caste-based occupational segregation (e.g., sanitation) or survival-based vending.

Viewing the data from the viewpoint of responses from states, showed interesting variations. The livelihood profile in Haryana is characterised by a strong concentration in non-farm activities and relatively high levels of worklessness. According to Table 5.25, 41.42% of respondents depended exclusively on non-farm, non-traditional livelihoods, while 23.10% reported having no work, the second-highest proportion among the five states. Only 22.11% of respondents relied exclusively on farm-based livelihoods and 13.20% on traditional livelihoods.

At the level of specific occupations, the largest category was those reporting no work (23.10%), followed by services (19.60%), animal husbandry (19.30%), construction work (17.00%), and traditional livelihoods (13.20%) (Table 5.27). Agricultural activities accounted for only 2.80% of reported livelihoods, while manufacturing activities constituted 3.30% and NREGS employment only 1.30%.

Among those engaged in agriculture, nearly two-thirds (64.71%) worked as casual labourers and only 17.65% reported regular engagement, reflecting the precarious nature of agricultural employment in the state (Table 5.32). Animal husbandry was dominated by dairy activities, which accounted for 83.90% of all animal husbandry livelihoods, while mixed livestock activities represented 7.63% and other animals 8.47% (Table 5.33). Traditional occupations were largely concentrated in unspecified traditional livelihoods (92.50%), with only small numbers engaged in drum beating at marriages (5.00%) and flower selling (2.50%) (Table 5.35). Overall, Haryana exhibits a livelihood structure marked by diversification into services, construction, and animal husbandry, alongside substantial unemployment and limited dependence on agriculture. Qualitative findings suggest that much of the service-sector employment reported in Haryana is concentrated in sanitation and waste management work, reflecting the occupational patterns of several NT-DNT-SNT Communities.

Maharashtra presents the strongest farm-based livelihood profile among the surveyed states. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64.17%) relied exclusively on farm-based livelihoods, while only 2.83% depended solely on non-farm, non-traditional activities. Traditional livelihoods accounted for 17.17%, and 14.17% reported having no work (Table 5.25).

Specific livelihood activities reveal agriculture as the dominant occupation. One-third of respondents (33.50%) reported agricultural activity as their principal livelihood, while a further 6.70% combined agriculture with animal husbandry and 1.30% combined agriculture, animal husbandry, and forest produce collection (Table 5.28). Animal husbandry alone accounted for 21.20% of livelihoods, traditional occupations for 17.20%, and no work for 14.20%. Services (2.20%), mining (0.50%), and construction (0.20%) played only marginal roles.

Table 5.25: Reported Livelihood Practices as per Sector

Sector	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Farm Only	747	24.90%	134	22.11%	385	64.17%	78	13.02%	37	6.17%	113	18.99%
Non-Farm Other Only	828	27.60%	251	41.42%	17	2.83%	121	20.20%	219	36.50%	220	36.97%
Non-Farm Traditional Only	742	24.73%	80	13.20%	103	17.17%	285	47.58%	109	18.17%	165	27.73%
Both Farm and Non-Farm Other	11	0.37%	1	0.17%	4	0.67%	3	0.50%	2	0.33%	1	0.17%
Both Farm and Non-Farm Traditional	75	2.50%	-	0.00%	4	0.67%	13	2.17%	1	0.17%	58	9.75%
Both Non-Farm Other and Non-Farm Traditional	26	0.87%	-	0.00%	2	0.33%	10	1.67%	-	0.00%	13	2.18%
Farm and Non-Farm Other and Non-Farm Traditional	5	0.17%	-	0.00%		0.00%	-	0.00%		0.00%	5	0.84%
No Work	566	18.87%	140	23.10%	85	14.17%	89	14.86%	232	38.67%	20	3.36%
Total	**3000**	**100%**	**606**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**599**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**595**	**100%**

Agricultural work in Maharashtra was notably more stable than elsewhere. More than four-fifths (81.10%) of those engaged in agriculture reported regular work, while only 17.72% were casual workers (Table 5.32). Animal husbandry was led by poultry farming, which accounted for 58.82% of animal husbandry livelihoods, followed by other animals (32.09%), fishing (4.28%), and dairy (3.21%) (Table 5.33). Forest-based livelihoods were overwhelmingly centred on bamboo and leaf collection (88.24%) (Table 5.34). Traditional occupations included acrobatics, blacksmithing, snake charming, folk performances, flower selling, and liquor selling, although three-fourths (75.70%) were grouped under other traditional livelihoods (Table 5.35). Maharashtra therefore stands out for its strong agricultural base, regular farm employment, and significant integration of animal husbandry and forest-based activities.

Qualitative accounts indicate that even where agricultural work is reported as regular, much of it takes the form of family-based labour and subsistence-oriented production, limiting its income-generating potential. Also, traditional occupations such as acrobatics and blacksmithing continue to carry cultural significance and often operate through family-based enterprises.

Rajasthan displays the strongest dependence on traditional livelihoods among all surveyed states. Nearly half of respondents (47.58%) relied exclusively on traditional occupations, while only 13.02% depended solely on farm livelihoods. Non-farm, non-traditional activities accounted for 20.20%, and 14.86% reported having no work (Table 5.25).

The occupational profile reinforces this pattern. Traditional livelihood practices constituted 47.60% of all reported livelihoods, making them by far the largest source of employment (Table 5.29). Construction activities represented 18.40%, while no work accounted for 14.90%. Agricultural activities (6.00%) and animal husbandry (6.70%) played relatively limited roles. Public works employment was also low at 0.80%.

Agricultural employment was highly insecure, with 77.50% of agricultural workers engaged as casual labourers and only 10.00% reporting regular work (Table 5.32). Animal husbandry was overwhelmingly focused on dairy production (87.04%), while mixed activities and other animals represented relatively small proportions (Table 5.33). Rajasthan's traditional economy was exceptionally diverse. Blacksmithing alone accounted for 34.97% of traditional livelihoods, followed by folk dance groups (20.92%), bartering utensils for old clothes (17.32%), and drum beating at marriages (13.07%). Smaller numbers were engaged in animal shows, handicrafts, street performances, liquor selling, and other traditional occupations (Table 5.35). The data indicate that Rajasthan retains the strongest continuity of hereditary and community-based traditional occupations, supplemented by construction labour and limited agricultural engagement.

Qualitative discussions highlighted the continued importance of hereditary artisanal and performance-based occupations, which remain closely linked to community identity and inter-generational skill transmission.

Tamil Nadu exhibits the highest level of economic inactivity among the five states. More than one-third of respondents (38.67%) reported having no work, the highest proportion recorded in the survey (Table 5.25). Non-farm, non-traditional livelihoods constituted 36.50%, while traditional livelihoods accounted for 18.17%. Farm-based livelihoods were extremely limited, with only 6.17% relying exclusively on agriculture.

The detailed livelihood profile reveals a strong dependence on public employment programmes and service-sector work. No work accounted for 38.70% of respondents, while Public Works/ NREGS employment constituted 24.30%, the highest among all states (Table 5.30). Traditional livelihoods represented 18.20%, services 11.10%, and agriculture only 5.70%. Animal husbandry, construction, and manufacturing activities were marginal.

Table 5.26: Reported Livelihood Practices – Five State Total

Reported Livelihood Practice	Count	%
Agricultural Activity	312	10.40
Agricultural Activity Animal Husbandry	42	1.40
Agricultural Activity Animal Husbandry Forest Produce Collection	8	0.27
Agricultural Activity Animal Husbandry Manufacturing Activity	1	0.03
Agricultural Activity Animal Husbandry Traditional Livelihood Practices	1	0.03
Agricultural Activity Construction Activity	1	0.03
Agricultural Activity Forest Produce Collection	2	0.07
Agricultural Activity Public Works/ NREGS	1	0.03
Agricultural Activity Services	2	0.07
Agricultural Activity Traditional Livelihood Practices	16	0.53
Animal Husbandry	349	11.63
Animal Husbandry Construction Activity	2	0.07
Animal Husbandry Forest Produce Collection	11	0.37
Animal Husbandry Mining Activity	1	0.03
Animal Husbandry Public Works/ NREGS	1	0.03
Animal Husbandry Services	2	0.07
Animal Husbandry Traditional Livelihood Practices	37	1.23
Animal Husbandry Traditional Livelihood Practices Public Works/ NREGS	4	0.13
Construction Activity	230	7.66
Construction Activity Manufacturing Activity	9	0.30
Forest Produce Collection	23	0.77
Forest Produce Collection Traditional Livelihood Practices	21	0.70
Forest Produce Collection Traditional Livelihood Practices Public Works/ NREGS	1	0.03
Manufacturing Activity	25	0.83
Mining Activity	3	0.10
No Work	566	18.87
Public Works/ NREGS	333	11.10
Public Works/ NREGS Services	1	0.03
Services	227	7.56
Traditional Livelihood Practices	742	24.74
Traditional Livelihood Practices Construction Activity	3	0.10
Traditional Livelihood Practices Construction Activity Manufacturing Activity	3	0.10
Traditional Livelihood Practices Manufacturing Activity	5	0.17
Traditional Livelihood Practices Mining Activity	2	0.07
Traditional Livelihood Practices Public Works/ NREGS	11	0.37
Traditional Livelihood Practices Public Works/ NREGS Construction Activity	1	0.03
Traditional Livelihood Practices Public Works/ NREGS Construction Activity Mining Activity	1	0.03
No Work	566	18.87
Total	**3000**	**100**

Table 5.27: Reported Livelihood Practices – Haryana

Livelihood Activities	Count	%
Agricultural Activity	17	2.80
Animal Husbandry	117	19.30
Animal Husbandry Construction Activity	1	0.20
Construction Activity	103	17.00
Construction Activity Manufacturing Activity	1	0.20
Manufacturing Activity	20	3.30
No Work	140	23.10
Public Works/ NREGS	8	1.30
Services	119	19.60
Traditional Livelihood Practices	80	13.20
Total	**606**	**100**

Table 5.28: Reported Livelihood Practices – Maharashtra

Livelihood Activities	Count	%
Agricultural Activity	201	33.50
Agricultural Activity Animal Husbandry	40	6.70
Agricultural Activity Animal Husbandry Forest Produce Collection	8	1.30
Agricultural Activity Forest Produce Collection	1	0.20
Agricultural Activity Services	2	0.30
Agricultural Activity Traditional Livelihood Practices	2	0.30
Animal Husbandry	127	21.20
Animal Husbandry Forest Produce Collection	8	1.30
Animal Husbandry Services	2	0.30
Animal Husbandry Traditional Livelihood Practices	2	0.30
Construction Activity	1	0.20
Mining Activity	3	0.50
No Work	85	14.20
Services	13	2.20
Traditional Livelihood Practices	103	17.20
Traditional Livelihood Practices Public Works/ NREGS	2	0.30
Total	**600**	**100**

Among those engaged in agriculture, 57.14% reported regular work and 42.86% casual work (Table 5.32). Animal husbandry was very limited in scale, involving only four respondents, three of whom were engaged in dairy activities (Table 5.33). Traditional livelihoods were more diverse, with selling handicrafts accounting for 31.82% of traditional occupations. Other traditional livelihoods constituted 57.27%, while smaller numbers were engaged in animal shows, drum beating at marriages, street magic performances, and the selling of precious stones (Table 5.35). Tamil Nadu's livelihood structure therefore combines high unemployment with a substantial reliance on

NREGS and public employment, while traditional occupations and services continue to provide important supplementary sources of income.

Uttar Pradesh presents a distinctive livelihood profile combining traditional occupations, public employment, and animal husbandry. Only 3.36% of respondents reported having no work, the lowest level among all surveyed states (Table 5.25). Non-farm, non-traditional livelihoods accounted for 36.97%, traditional livelihoods for 27.73%, and farm-based livelihoods for 18.99%. A notable 9.75% combined farm and traditional livelihoods, the highest such proportion among the five states.

At the occupational level, Public Works/NREGS emerged as the single largest source of livelihood, engaging 29.30% of respondents (Table 5.31). Traditional livelihoods accounted for 27.70%, animal husbandry 10.50%, services 4.70%, agricultural activities 4.00%, and forest produce collection 3.70%. Only 3.40% reported having no work. Numerous respondents also combined animal husbandry, forest produce collection, traditional occupations, and public works employment, indicating a highly diversified livelihood portfolio.

Agricultural employment was mixed, with 55.00% of workers engaged as casual labourers and 40.00% reporting regular work (Table 5.32). Animal husbandry was dominated by mixed livestock activities (52.08%), followed by poultry (31.25%) and other animals (13.54%) (Table 5.33). Forest-based livelihoods were concentrated in bamboo and leaf collection, which accounted for 87.23% of such activities (Table 5.34). Traditional livelihoods were dominated by other traditional occupations (83.33%), although handicraft production (9.65%), drum beating at marriages (3.51%), puppetry, flower selling, folk performances, and street magic also remained present (Table 5.35). Uttar Pradesh therefore exhibits the most diversified livelihood economy, combining traditional occupations, public works employment, forest-based activities, animal husbandry, and agriculture while maintaining the lowest level of reported unemployment among the surveyed states.

FGDs with Musahar women in Jaunpur highlighted continued dependence on agricultural labour, with women reporting daily earnings of approximately ₹200–300. Participants also described delayed payments for the maintenance of public toilets through Self-Help Groups, reducing the attractiveness of these opportunities.

Respondents further noted the decline of traditional livelihoods such as pig rearing and leaf-plate making due to changing market conditions. In contrast, Nat women in Varanasi described efforts to diversify livelihoods through sewing centres that provide tailoring skills and limited income opportunities. These discussions underscored the demand for sustainable, home-based livelihood options capable of reducing distress migration and income insecurity.

A significant concern that emerged from the study was the prevalence of workplace abuse. Table 5.41 shows that a majority of respondents (77.72%) across all five states reported that they had not experienced any form of workplace abuse, suggesting that overt abuse was not reported by most workers. However, nearly one in five respondents reported experiencing some form of abuse, indicating that workplace vulnerabilities remain significant for a substantial minority.

Among reported forms of abuse, verbal abuse emerged as the most common, affecting 10.13% of respondents across the five-state sample. This was followed by unpaid wages (4.38%), mental abuse (3.43%), and physical abuse (3.22%). Sexual abuse, while reported by the smallest proportion of respondents (1.12%), remains a serious concern given the likelihood of under-reporting and the severe consequences associated with such violations.

State-level patterns reveal considerable variation. Haryana recorded the highest incidence of verbal abuse, with 27.35% of respondents reporting such experiences, while only 65.38% reported no abuse. Tamil Nadu stood out for reporting the highest levels of mental abuse (10.41%) and sexual abuse (5.75%),

from De-Notified Tribes, Nomadic Tribes and Semi-Nomadic Tribes

Table 5.29: Reported Livelihood Practices – Rajasthan

Livelihood Activities	Count	%
Agricultural Activity	36	6.00
Agricultural Activity Animal Husbandry Traditional Livelihood Practices	1	0.20
Agricultural Activity Construction Activity	1	0.20
Agricultural Activity Forest Produce Collection	1	0.20
Agricultural Activity Traditional Livelihood Practices	1	0.20
Animal Husbandry	40	6.70
Animal Husbandry Construction Activity	1	0.20
Animal Husbandry Mining Activity	1	0.20
Animal Husbandry Traditional Livelihood Practices	11	1.80
Construction Activity	110	18.40
Construction Activity Manufacturing Activity	6	1.00
Forest Produce Collection	1	0.20
No Work	89	14.90
Public Works/ NREGS	5	0.80
Traditional Livelihood Practices	285	47.60
Traditional Livelihood Practices Construction Activity	3	0.50
Traditional Livelihood Practices Construction Activity Manufacturing Activity	3	0.50
Traditional Livelihood Practices Manufacturing Activity	1	0.20
Traditional Livelihood Practices Public Works/ NREGS	2	0.30
Traditional Livelihood Practices Public Works/ NREGS Construction Activity Mining Activity	1	0.20
Total	**599**	**100**

Table 5.30: Reported Livelihood Practices – Tamil Nadu

Livelihood Activities	Count	%
Agricultural Activity	34	5.70
Agricultural Activity Public Works/ NREGS	1	0.20
Animal Husbandry	3	0.50
Animal Husbandry Public Works/ NREGS	1	0.20
Construction Activity	2	0.30
Manufacturing Activity	4	0.70
No Work	232	38.70
Public Works/ NREGS	146	24.30
Services	67	11.10
Traditional Livelihood Practices	109	18.20
Traditional Livelihood Practices Mining Activity	1	0.20
Total	**600**	**100**

Table 5.31: Reported Livelihood Practices – Uttar Pradesh

Livelihood Activities	Count	%
Agricultural Activity	24	4.00
Agricultural Activity Animal Husbandry	2	0.30
Agricultural Activity Animal Husbandry Manufacturing Activity	1	0.20
Agricultural Activity Traditional Livelihood Practices	13	2.20
Animal Husbandry	62	10.50
Animal Husbandry Forest Produce Collection	3	0.50
Animal Husbandry Traditional Livelihood Practices	24	4.00
Animal Husbandry Traditional Livelihood Practices Public Works/ NREGS	4	0.70
Construction Activity	14	2.40
Construction Activity Manufacturing Activity	2	0.30
Forest Produce Collection	22	3.70
Forest Produce Collection Traditional Livelihood Practices	21	3.50
Forest Produce Collection Traditional Livelihood Practices Public Works/ NREGS	1	0.20
Manufacturing Activity	1	0.20
No Work	20	3.40
Public Works/ NREGS	174	29.30
Public Works/ NREGS Services	1	0.20
Services	28	4.70
Traditional Livelihood Practices	165	27.70
Traditional Livelihood Practices Manufacturing Activity	4	0.70
Traditional Livelihood Practices Mining Activity	1	0.20
Traditional Livelihood Practices Public Works/ NREGS	7	1.20
Traditional Livelihood Practices Public Works/ NREGS Construction Activity	1	0.20
Total	**595**	**100.00**

Table 5.32: Reported Type of Engagement in Agricultural Activities

Type of Engagement	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Casual	124	32.12	11	64.71%	45	17.72%	31	77.50%	15	42.86%	22	55.00%
Employer	2	0.52	1	5.88%		0.00%	1	2.50%	-	0.00%		0.00%
Helper	10	2.59	2	11.76%	3	1.18%	3	7.50%	-	0.00%	2	5.00%
Own Account Worker	1	0.26	-	0.00%		0.00%	1	2.50%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%
Regular	249	64.51	3	17.65%	206	81.10%	4	10.00%	20	57.14%	16	40.00%
Total	**386**	**100**	**17**	**100%**	**254**	**100%**	**40**	**100%**	**35**	**100%**	**40**	**100%**

Table 5.33: Reported Type of Livelihood in Animal Husbandry Activities

Type of Livelihood	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Dairy	157	34.20	99	83.90%	6	3.21%	47	87.04%	3	75.00%	2	2.08%
Fishing	9	1.96	-	0.00%	8	4.28%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	1	1.04%
Mixed	65	14.16	9	7.63%	3	1.60%	3	5.56%	-	0.00%	50	52.08%
Poultry	140	30.50	-	0.00%	110	58.82%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	30	31.25%
Other Animals	88	19.17	10	8.47%	60	32.09%	4	7.41%	1	25.00%	13	13.54%
Total	**459**	**100**	**118**	**100%**	**187**	**100%**	**54**	**100%**	**4**	**100%**	**96**	**100%**

Table 5.34: Reported Type of Livelihood in Forest Produce Collection Activities

Type of forest produce	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Bamboo/leaves collection	56	84.85	-	-	15	88.24	-	-	-	-	41	87.23
Other minor forest products	6	9.09	-	-	2	11.76	1	50	-	-	3	6.38
Honey/Medicinal Plants	4	6.06	-	-			1	50	-	-	3	6.38
Total	**66**	**100**	**-**	**-**	**17**	**100**	**2**	**100**	**-**	**-**	**47**	**100**

Table 5.35: Reported Type of Livelihood in Traditional Livelihood Activities

Tradtional Livelihood Activity	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Other Traditional Forms of Livelihood	442	53.19	74	92.50	81	75.70	34	11.11	63	57.27	190	83.33
Blacksmith	108	13.00	-	-	1	0.93	107	34.97	-	-	-	-
Folk Dance Groups	66	7.94	-	-	1	0.93	64	20.92	-	-	1	0.44
Selling handicrafts	58	6.98	-	-	-	-	1	0.33	35	31.82	22	9.65
Drum Beating at Marriages	55	6.62	4	5.00	1	0.93	40	13.07	2	1.82	8	3.51
Bartering utensils with clothes	54	6.50	-	-	-	-	53	17.32	-		1	0.44
Acrobats	21	2.53	-	-	20	18.69	1	0.33	-		-	-
Street Magic Shows	9	1.08	-	-	-	-	1	0.33	6	5.45	2	0.88
Animal Show	5	0.60	-	-	-	-	3	0.98	2	1.82	-	-
Selling flowers	4	0.48	2	2.50	1	0.93			-		1	0.44
Selling liquor	3	0.36	-	-	1	0.93	1	0.33	-		1	0.44
Puppetry	2	0.24	-	-	-	-			-		2	0.88
Selling of Precious Stones	2	0.24	-	-	-	-			2	1.82	-	-
Snake Charmers	1	0.12	-	-	1	0.93			-		-	-
Street Singing	1	0.12	-	-	-	-	1	0.33	-	-	-	-
Total	**831**	**100.00**	**4**	**5.00**	**106**	**100.00**	**306**	**100.00**	**47**	**42.73**	**38**	**100.00**

suggesting distinct workplace vulnerabilities affecting women workers in the state. Uttar Pradesh reported the highest incidence of unpaid wages (11.27%), highlighting wage insecurity and labour rights violations as a major concern. Rajasthan recorded the highest prevalence of physical abuse (4.36%), although the overall proportion remained relatively low.

In contrast, Maharashtra and Rajasthan reported the highest proportions of respondents indicating no abuse (83.82% and 88.12% respectively). Haryana exhibited the lowest proportion reporting no abuse, reflecting a comparatively more adverse workplace environment within the surveyed sample.

The findings suggest that while most respondents did not report workplace abuse, significant numbers continue to face verbal harassment, wage-related exploitation, psychological abuse, physical violence, and, in some cases, sexual abuse. The variation across states indicates that workplace risks are shaped by local labour markets, employment conditions, and the effectiveness of labour protection and grievance redress mechanisms.

Table 5.36: Reported Types of Work in Construction Activity

Type of Livelihood	Five State Total	
	Count	%
NREGS work	279	78.81
Other Rural Public Work	65	18.36
Urban Public Work	10	2.82
Total	**354**	**100**

Table 5.37: Reported Types of Work in Construction Activity

Type of Livelihood	Five State Total	
	Count	%
Brick Kiln Labour	9	3.6
Mason	23	9.2
Painter	12	4.8
Other Construction Labour	206	82.4
Total	**250**	**100**

Migration

Migration for work was reported by 24.83% of respondents, while 75.17% indicated that they did not migrate for livelihood. (See Table 5.42) Among those who migrated, 37.75% spoke about the availability of better work opportunities at the destination, followed by the improved working conditions (21.97%) and then the promise of a better wage rate (20.18%) and additionally, 9.68% cited discrimination in their native places as a

Table 5.38: Reported Types of Work in Mining Activity

Type of Livelihood	Five State Total	
	Count	%
Coal/Lignite Mining	2	28.57
Metal Ore mining	1	14.29
Other Mining	4	57.14
Total	**7**	**100**

Table 5.39: Reported Types of Work in Manufacturing Activity

Type of Livelihood	Five State Total	
	Count	%
Carpentry and Woodwork	3	6.98
Garment and Textile	3	6.98
Other Manufacturing	37	86.05
Total	**43**	**100**

Table 5.40: Reported Types of Work in Services Activity

Type of Livelihood	Five State Total	
	Count	%
Accountant	1	0.43
Clerical Services	1	0.43
Doctor	1	0.43
Domestic Worker	5	2.16
Lawyer	1	0.43
Nurse/Paramedic	1	0.43
Sanitation/Waste Worker	116	50
Shopkeeper/Shop Worker	2	0.86
Street Vendor	5	2.16
Other Services	99	42.67
Total	**232**	**100**

Table 5.41: Abuse at Workplace

	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
None	1880	77.72	306	65.38	430	83.82	445	88.12	264	72.33	435	76.58
Verbal Abuse	245	10.13	128	27.35	13	2.53	27	5.35	33	9.04	44	7.75
Mental Abuse	83	3.43	15	3.21	20	3.90	4	0.79	38	10.41	6	1.06
Unpaid Wages	106	4.38	13	2.78	25	4.87	2	0.40	2	0.55	64	11.27
Physical Abuse	78	3.22	6	1.28	21	4.09	22	4.36	7	1.92	18	3.17
Sexual Abuse	27	1.12	0	0.00	4	0.78	5	0.99	21	5.75	1	0.18
Total	2419	100	468	100	513	100	505	100	365	100	568	100

Table 5.42: Do You Migrate for Work?

Migrate for Work	Count	%
Yes	745	24.83
No	2255	75.17

reason for migration, while 8.62% migrated due to the absence of work opportunities at the source location. A small fraction, 1.79%, mentioned other reasons such as family relocation or seasonal factors. (Table 5.43)

Nearly all work reported is in informal, unregulated sectors with negligible social protection. Across sectors, reported incomes were low, but as the figures could not be corroborated these are not being shared, but they indicate chronic poverty and economic insecurity. Traditional roles persist but lack state support. Public works schemes disproportionately support survival, not mobility. High participation in sanitation and construction reflects caste and gender roles. Many women are engaged in multiple micro-occupations across sectors but are unable to accumulate economic resilience or upward mobility.

The data reveals a livelihood landscape defined by precarity, informality, and cultural marginalisation. For women from DNT-NT-SNT Communities, work is a survival strategy, not a path to empowerment under current conditions.

Education: Access, Attainment, and Barriers

The data reveals a deeply concerning picture of educational exclusion among women from De-Notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNT-NT-SNT). Across the sample, only 11.73% of women are currently enrolled in any educational institution, while a majority (61.60%) have never been enrolled at all. A further 26.67% had attended school at some point but were no longer enrolled at the time of the survey (Table 5.44). This indicates that for most women in these communities, access to formal education remains severely limited or altogether absent.

There are notable variations across states. Haryana (74.10%), Maharashtra (68.70%), and Uttar Pradesh (63.50%) report the highest proportions of women who have never been enrolled, pointing to entrenched barriers to entry into schooling systems. Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu show relatively better outcomes, with 52.40% and 49.20% respectively reporting never having enrolled, though these figures still represent substantial educational exclusion. Rajasthan records the highest current enrolment rate (30.90%), followed by Tamil Nadu

(20.20%), while Haryana (2.00%) and Uttar Pradesh (0.70%) report extremely low levels of current participation in education. Previous enrolment is highest in Uttar Pradesh (35.80%) and Tamil Nadu (30.70%), suggesting that while access may have been achieved at some stage, completing education is a challenge (Table 5.44).

Among those who had once been enrolled, educational attainment remains limited. Nearly half (46.62%) discontinued their education at Standard 5 or below, while 22.88% progressed to Standards 6–8. Only 15.38% reached Standards 9–10 and 10.12% studied up to Standards 11–12. Progression into higher education remains extremely rare, with only 2.75% reaching graduation and 0.62% progressing to postgraduate education or beyond (Table 5.45).

Tamil Nadu performs relatively better than the overall sample on several indicators of educational attainment. While 34.78% of previously enrolled respondents exited at Standard 5 or below compared to the five-state average of 46.62%,

Table 5.43: Why Do You Migrate for Work?

Reason for Migration	Count	%
Better Wage Rate	248	20.18
Better Work Opportunity	464	37.75
Better Working Conditions	270	21.97
Discrimination	119	9.68
No Work Opportunity	106	8.62
Others	22	1.79
Total	1229	100

Table 5.44: Status of Enrolment in Education

Status	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Currently Enrolled	352	11.73	12	2.00	30	5.00	185	30.90	121	20.20	4	0.70
Never Enrolled	1848	61.60	449	74.10	412	68.70	314	52.40	295	49.20	378	63.50
Previously Enrolled	800	26.67	145	23.90	158	26.30	100	16.70	184	30.70	213	35.80
Total	3000	100	606	100	600	100	599	100	600	100	595	100

Table 5.45: If Previously Enrolled Level of Educational Attainment

Status	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Standard 5th or below	373	46.62	76	52.41	90	56.96	45	45.00	64	34.78	98	46.01
Standard 6th to 8th	183	22.88	45	31.03	18	11.39	20	20.00	47	25.54	53	24.88
Standard 9th to 10th	123	15.38	19	13.10	34	21.52	18	18.00	23	12.50	29	13.62
Standard 11th to 12th	81	10.12	4	2.76	12	7.59	13	13.00	32	17.39	20	9.39
Diploma/Vocational Degree	13	1.62	1	0.69	2	1.27	1	1.00	9	4.89	-	-
Graduate	22	2.75	-	-	1	0.63	3	3.00	7	3.80	11	5.16
Postgraduate and Above	5	0.62	-	-	1	0.63	-	-	2	1.09	2	0.94
Total	800	100	145	100	158	100	100	100	184	100	213	100

Note: Details of previously enrolled from Table 5.43

25.54% progressed to Standards 6–8 and 17.39% reached Standards 11–12, both substantially higher than the corresponding five-state figures. Tamil Nadu also reports the highest proportion of diploma or vocational qualifications (4.89%), while 3.80% attained graduation and 1.09% progressed to postgraduate education (Table 5.45). Nevertheless, progression into higher education remains limited even in the comparatively better-performing states.

The reasons for non-enrolment highlight the intersection of structural constraints and socio-cultural norms. Across the five-state sample, family restrictions emerge as the single most significant reason, cited by 24.08% of respondents. Lack of access to nearby schools is also a major barrier, accounting for 10.23% on its own and a further 20.35% when combined with other factors. Migration-related factors account for 13.80% independently and another 2.76% when combined with additional constraints. Documentation-related barriers similarly account for 2.81% independently and 12.45% when combined with other factors (Table 5.46). Together, these findings suggest that educational exclusion is shaped by a combination of household decisions, inadequate educational infrastructure, mobility, and administrative barriers.

These patterns vary significantly across states. In Maharashtra, family restrictions are particularly pronounced, with 63.83% citing them as the primary reason for non-enrolment. In Uttar Pradesh, lack of nearby schools emerges as the dominant barrier, with 31.75% reporting this reason and a further 43.39% reporting it in combination with other factors. Rajasthan reflects a dual challenge, with frequent migration accounting for 38.85% of responses and lack of nearby schools combined with other factors accounting for 20.06%. Tamil Nadu is notable for the exceptionally large proportion of respondents citing "other reasons" (46.78%), suggesting the presence of context-specific barriers not fully captured by the survey categories (Table 5.46).

Qualitative accounts from the field echo and point to a deeper crisis. In Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi district, women from the Sholaga and Thottiya Naicker communities shared how children, particularly girls, typically drop out after Class 5 because of long travel distances to secondary schools and the lack of affordable transport. Parents, both working as daily wage labourers, are unable to accompany children to far-off schools, making continued education unfeasible. In Haryana, early school leaving is driven by pervasive fears of sexual harassment, especially for adolescent girls. Parents withdraw daughters from school as soon as they reach puberty, not only due to social norms but to avoid the risk of violence and harassment on unsafe roads to distant schools. Similar fears were raised in Rajasthan, where Bawaria women explained that girls drop out around Class 6 or 7 because the school lies 5 to 7 kilometres away, and the route is considered unsafe due to harassment by local boys. In Haryana's Hissar, FGDs revealed one rare instance of a girl admitted to a BA program, highlighting the exceptionality of higher education among these communities. Most girls in the region, like elsewhere, are pulled out of school either to support family income through daily wage work or due to fears of harassment and social scrutiny.

Focus group participants in Rajasthan's Bawaria and Gadia Lohar settlements shared how seasonal migration for cotton-picking or construction labour means children frequently miss school for months and are eventually pulled out altogether. In Uttar Pradesh, Musahar and Nat community women described how entire families migrate during brick kiln and agricultural seasons, denying children the chance to attend school, and in the absence of bridge courses or mid-session admissions, re-enrolment becomes impossible.

Documentation barriers also persist, with many families lacking birth certificates, Aadhaar, and caste/community certificates necessary for admissions and scholarships. This issue was especially acute in Tamil Nadu's Valaiyar and Narikuravar communities. Women shared that ineligible documentation not only barred their children from schools but also cut them off from mid-day meal programs and state education incentives. In Haryana's Bawariya settlements,

elders expressed anger that despite repeated attempts, local officials refuse to issue certificates, forcing children out of formal schooling.

The data also points to a significant gap in access to skill development opportunities. Only 8.13% of respondents reported receiving any training in traditional arts or crafts, while an overwhelming 91.87% had no such exposure (Table 5.47). Rajasthan stands out as a partial exception, with 24.50% reporting access to such training, likely reflecting the persistence of traditional performance and artisan-based livelihoods. FGDs confirm this continuity of traditional skills, particularly among Rajasthan's Kalbeliya, Sapera, and Gadia Lohar communities, where families still teach children artisan and performance crafts. In contrast, access to training is minimal in states like Haryana, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh. In Uttar Pradesh, Nat and Musahar women pointed out that while local NGOs sporadically offer tailoring or craft classes, government-led schemes like the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) have failed to reach their communities. Also while traditional skills continue to exist, they remain largely informal, unsupported, and disconnected from formal skilling systems or market linkages.

Taken together, the data reveals a multi-layered educational crisis shaped by the interplay of poverty, gender norms, mobility, and structural exclusion. Low enrolment, high dropout rates, limited attainment, and restricted access to skills training collectively constrain the life opportunities of women from DNT-NT-SNT Communities. While

Table 5.46: If Never Enrolled, What is the Reason?

Reason	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Frequent Migration	255	13.80%	-	-	8	1.94%	122	38.85%	80	27.12%	45	11.90%
Frequent migration + other factors	51	2.76%	1	0.22%	21	5.10%	2	0.64%	25	8.47%	2	0.53%
Lack of documents	52	2.81%	-	-	4	0.97%	9	2.87%	20	6.78%	19	5.03%
Lack of documents + other factors	230	12.45%	187	41.65%	16	3.88%	17	5.41%	6	2.03%	4	1.06%
No School in Vicinity	189	10.23%	1	0.22%	13	3.16%	44	14.01%	11	3.73%	120	31.75%
No School in Vicinity + other factors	376	20.35%	120	26.73%	24	5.83%	63	20.06%	5	1.69%	164	43.39%
Restricted by Family	445	24.08%	138	30.73%	263	63.83%	27	8.60%	10	3.39%	7	1.85%
Other Reasons	250	13.53%	2	0.45%	63	15.29%	30	9.55%	138	46.78%	17	4.50%
Total	**1848**	**100%**	**449**	**100%**	**412**	**100%**	**314**	**100%**	**295**	**100%**	**378**	**100%**

Table 5.47: Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts

Status	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	2756	91.87	588	97.00	578	96.30	452	75.50	551	91.80	587	98.70
Yes	244	8.13	18	3.00	22	3.70	147	24.50	49	8.20	8	1.30
Total	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**599**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**595**	**100**

state-level variations exist, the overall pattern points to systemic barriers that prevent meaningful participation in education and limit pathways for social and economic mobility.

Health Status, Healthcare Access, and Community Experiences

A tension between access and exclusion emerges in patterns of healthcare utilisation. Table 5.48 shows that public health facilities, particularly primary health centres and community health centres, constitute the primary source of care for minor illnesses, accounting for 69.60% of responses across the five-state data set. Public hospitals account for an additional 10.17%. Yet these aggregate figures conceal significant variations across states. Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu exhibit high reliance on primary public facilities, with usage rates of 86.3%, 89.2%, and 82.8% respectively, when added with the responses that indicate public hospitals this goes up to 97%, 96% and 95%, respectively. In Rajasthan, the quantitative data is corroborated by Banwariya and Banjara community FGDs where women said they felt safe visiting nearby PHCs and were not subjected to overt discrimination. In Tamil Nadu too, FGDs corroborated the data, although Narikuravar women shared concerns about service inconsistency and the unavailability of female doctors. In Maharashtra, qualitative narratives from women in informal settlements suggest that even where PHCs existed, essential services like ante-natal care and diagnostic testing were often unavailable, forcing women to rely on pharmacies for over-the-counter medicine.

In contrast, Haryana presents a markedly different profile, where only 15% of respondents access such facilities, while 38.3% depend on home treatment and 26.6% turn to private clinics. The deep-rooted belief in local healers, "jhaada" and faith-based treatments, was voiced by women during FGDs. The healthcare official interviewed noted the deterrent effect of caste-based stigma in public health institutions, where DNT women frequently avoid government centres anticipating hostile treatment. Uttar Pradesh, with 82% reliance on public facilities, appears relatively better in aggregate terms, though qualitative accounts reveal persistent barriers including discrimination and denial of care. FGDs in Jaunpur with Musahar and Nat women revealed harrowing stories of being refused entry to hospitals, absence of basic facilities like lifts, and severe caste-based discrimination. Several women recounted instances of childbirth conducted by other women in the community due to exclusion from government hospitals. Conversely, women from the Dafali and Chamaarmangta communities reported somewhat better access, though wage loss, travel expenses, and absence of female medical staff remained deterrents.

Across all states, the use of private hospitals remains negligible at 0.37%, reflecting both financial constraints and structural exclusion. Similarly, reliance on alternative systems of medicine is limited overall, though it rises significantly in Uttar Pradesh to 15.10%, suggesting localised patterns of dependence on non-allopathic care.

These variations underscore the fact that access to healthcare is shaped not only by availability but also by social location, perceived discrimination, and cultural familiarity with different forms of treatment. Even in states where public healthcare utilisation appears high, qualitative narratives indicate that issues of quality, continuity, and respectful care continue to limit effective access.

The health profile of women from De-Notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic (DNT-NT-SNT) Communities across the five surveyed states reveals a complex interplay between low reported morbidity and deeply entrenched barriers to healthcare access. At first glance, the quantitative data suggests a relatively low prevalence of chronic illness. However, when read alongside qualitative accounts, it becomes evident that this pattern reflects not the absence of disease, but rather a combination of under-diagnosis, low health awareness, social stigma, reliance on home remedies, and barriers to accessing institutional healthcare.

As indicated in Table 5.49, a striking 92.20% of respondents in the five-state data set reported no chronic disease. This figure is even higher

Table 5.48: Where do you go for Treatment for Minor Illness not Requiring Admission to the Hospital

Treatment Facility	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Alternate Medicine Clinics (Unani, Homeopathy, Ayurveda etc.)	90	3.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	90	15.10
Home treatment	245	8.17	232	38.30	2	0.30	-	-	5	0.80	6	1.00
Local Pharmacist/ Medicine Shop	37	1.23	29	4.80	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	1.30
Others	13	0.43	-	-	10	1.70	1	0.20	1	0.20	1	0.20
Primary Public Health Centre/ Community Health Centre/Sub-Centre	2088	69.60	91	15.00	535	89.20	517	86.30	497	82.80	448	75.30
Private Clinics	211	7.03	161	26.60	9	1.50	16	2.70	21	3.50	4	0.70
Private Hospitals	11	0.37	5	0.80	1	0.20	1	0.20	4	0.70		
Public Hospital	305	10.17	88	14.50	43	7.20	64	10.70	72	12.00	38	6.40
Total	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**599**	**100**	**600**	**100**	**595**	**100**

in states such as Rajasthan (97.16%), Haryana (94.88%), and Maharashtra (94.33%, while Tamil Nadu records a comparatively lower proportion at 80.50%, suggesting relatively greater reporting or detection. Among the conditions that were reported, hypertension emerges as the most common at 1.67% with a notably higher concentration in Haryana at 3.14%. Diabetes remains low overall at 0.77%, but is significantly more prevalent in Tamil Nadu at 3.17%. The "others" category, accounting for 4.13%across the dataset and rising sharply to 13% in Tamil Nadu, points to the likelihood of unclassified or undiagnosed conditions. Minor reporting of cardiovascular disease, gastrointestinal issues, and combined morbidities were also noted.

It is important to contextualise these numbers against the widespread lack of health-seeking behaviour. In Haryana, for instance, a Senior Medical Officer interviewed as part of the study explained that women from DNT Communities typically avoid hospitals until health conditions become severe. Traditional healers or local "jhaada" practitioners are often the first point of recourse. This reluctance, the officer emphasised, is driven by both fear of medical establishments and lack of awareness about chronic illnesses, particularly those like hypertension and diabetes that remain asymptomatic for long periods. As a result, chronic conditions that are typically asymptomatic in their early stages remain undetected. In Maharashtra, where 94.33% of respondents denied any chronic ailments, focus groups revealed a cultural preference for herbal remedies and home-based treatments, especially in remote settlements lacking reliable transport to public hospitals. Women explained that health problems were rarely disclosed unless incapacitating. A small 4.50% marked "others" for unspecified health issues, hinting at unreported conditions such as chronic respiratory problems, joint pains from manual labour, and gynaecological issues often left untreated. Tamil Nadu exhibited the highest proportion of chronic disease reporting, with 19.5% of respondents acknowledging health conditions. FGDs with the Narikuravar and Valaiyar communities in Madurai and Thoothukudi districts confirmed rising cases of diabetes and hypertension among elderly women, attributed to changes in diet, stress from displacement, and sedentary lifestyle shifts due to restrictions on their traditional occupations. Several women also noted suffering from "heat body" and frequent fevers but did not identify these as chronic conditions. The data showing lower morbidity therefore reflects a

Table 5.49: Reported Incidence of Chronic Diseases

Chronic Diseases	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
None	2766	92.20%	575	94.88%	566	94.33%	582	97.16%	483	80.50%	560	94.12%
Cardiovascular	5	0.17%	1	0.17%	-	0.00%	2	0.33%	2	0.33%	-	0.00%
Cardiovascular + others	1	0.03%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	1	0.17%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%
Diabetes	23	0.77%	1	0.17%	2	0.33%	1	0.17%	19	3.17%	-	0.00%
Diabetes + others	1	0.03%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	1	0.17%	-	0.00%
Gastrointestinal	13	0.43%	-	0.00%	1	0.17%	2	0.33%	-	0.00%	10	1.68%
Gastrointestinal + others	3	0.10%	1	0.17%	-	0.00%	1	0.17%	-	0.00%	1	0.17%
Hypertension	50	1.67%	19	3.14%	4	0.67%	7	1.17%	10	1.67%	10	1.68%
Hypertension + Others	14	0.47%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	2	0.33%	7	1.17%	5	0.84%
Others	124	4.13%	9	1.49%	27	4.50%	1	0.17%	78	13.00%	9	1.51%
Total	**3000**	**100%**	**606**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**599**	**100%**	**600**	**100%**	**595**	**100%**

broader pattern where illness exists but is neither diagnosed nor formally reported.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that while public healthcare systems remain central to service delivery, they are uneven in reach and often inaccessible in practice for DNT-NT-SNT Communities. This unevenness becomes even more pronounced in the domain of sexual and reproductive health.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

The reproductive health landscape reveals persistent gaps in institutional delivery and access to essential maternal services. As shown in Table 5.50, only 45.28% of women reported delivering their last child in a government hospital, while home births remain alarmingly high at 40.17%. Tamil Nadu stands out with a relatively higher rate of institutional delivery at 64.17%, indicating stronger public health infrastructure and outreach. In contrast, Maharashtra records the highest rate of home births at 52.11%, followed by Uttar Pradesh at 48.1% and Haryana at 40.57%. Rajasthan aligns closely with the average of the full data set. Deliveries in private hospitals remain limited at 9.17% overall, although Haryana shows a relatively higher proportion at 23.4%, reflecting a partial shift towards private care where public systems are either inaccessible or mistrusted.

The persistence of home births cannot be attributed solely to cultural preference. Field accounts point to a range of structural factors, including lack of transport, financial constraints, and experiences of caste-based discrimination in institutional settings. In many cases, women report being denied services or treated with hostility, leading them to rely on home-based deliveries even in high-risk situations.

Among those who deliver at home, Table 5.51 shows that assistance is overwhelmingly provided by informal networks. Across the five-state data set, 46.62% of home births are assisted by family members and 44.17 percent by community midwives, while 8.13% involve traditional healers. These patterns vary across states, with Haryana showing a strong reliance on midwives, Tamil Nadu on family members, and Uttar Pradesh exhibiting a relatively high dependence on traditional healers.

Table 5.50: In Case of Delivery of Last Child, What Was Place of Delivery

Place of Delivery	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Government Hospital	1151	45.28	172	32.45	180	37.97	266	47.67	342	64.17	191	42.73
Home Birth	1021	40.17	215	40.57	247	52.11	224	40.14	120	22.51	215	48.1
PHC/CHC/Sub-Centre	111	4.37	19	3.58	3	0.63	32	5.73	26	4.88	31	6.94
Private Hospital	233	9.17	124	23.4	24	5.06	35	6.27	41	7.69	9	2.01
Others	26	1.02			20	4.22	1	0.18	4	0.75	1	0.22
Total	**2542**	**100**	**530**	**100**	**474**	**100**	**558**	**100**	**533**	**100**	**447**	**100**

Table 5.51: In case of Home Delivery, Who Assisted

Assistance Provided by	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Community Midwife	451	44.17	196	91.16	79	31.98	91	40.62	15	12.50	70	32.56
Family Members	476	46.62	18	8.37	144	58.30	126	56.25	102	85.00	86	40.00
Traditional Healer	83	8.13	-	-	18	7.29	7	3.12	2	1.67	56	26.05
Others	11	1.08	1	0.47	6	2.43	-	-	1	0.83	3	1.40
Total	**1021**	**100**	**215**	**100**	**247**	**100**	**224**	**100**	**120**	**100**	**215**	**100**

These findings highlight the continued centrality of informal care systems in maternal health, particularly in contexts where institutional care is inaccessible or untrusted. While such systems reflect longstanding cultural practices, their persistence also signals gaps in the reach and effectiveness of formal maternal health services.

This is further evident in the uneven uptake of essential maternal health services documented in Table 5.52. Across the five-state data set, only 48.15% of women reported receiving a birth certificate for their last child, while 51.93% received tetanus vaccination during pregnancy. Coverage of iron supplementation stands at 48.82%, and access to supplementary nutrition is even lower at 38.83 %. State-level disparities are pronounced. Uttar Pradesh performs particularly poorly across indicators, with only 36.02% reporting birth registration and 31.1% receiving tetanus vaccination. Maharashtra also records low levels of service uptake, with most indicators hovering around 25 to 27%. Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu perform relatively better, with coverage generally in the 50 to 60% range, though still far from universal. Haryana shows comparatively higher uptake for several services but continues to lag in nutritional support.

These figures suggest that even where women come into contact with healthcare systems, the continuity and comprehensiveness of care remain limited. Gaps in service delivery, combined with social and logistical barriers, prevent the full realisation of maternal health entitlements.

In conclusion, the data presents a consistent picture of structural exclusion shaping health outcomes for DNT-NT-SNT women. The low reporting of chronic diseases, reliance on home-based care in certain contexts, high prevalence of home births, and uneven access to maternal health services all point to a healthcare system that remains only partially accessible to these communities. Gendered constraints, including limited autonomy and heavy care burdens, intersect with caste-based discrimination, geographic isolation, and economic precarity to further restrict access.

Table 5.52: Services Received During Last Child Birth

		Birth Certificate Issued		Tetanus Vaccine Received		Consultation with health worker Received		Free Iron Tablets Received		Supplementary Nutrition received		Total	
State	Status	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Haryana	Yes	319	60.19	420	79.25	287	54.15	374	70.57	183	34.53	1583	34.53%
Haryana	No	211	39.81	97	18.3	190	35.85	133	25.09	288	54.34	919	54.34%
Haryana	Don't Know/Can't Remember			13	2.45	53	10	23	4.34	59	11.13	148	11.13%
Haryana	Total	530	100	530	100	530	100	530	100	530	100	2650	100%
Maha-rashtra	Yes	125	26.37	119	25.11	122	25.74	128	27	125	26.37	619	26.12%
Maha-rashtra	No	349	73.63	331	69.83	323	68.14	316	66.67	317	66.88	1636	69.03%
Maha-rashtra	Don't Know/Can't Remember			24	5.06	29	6.12	30	6.33	32	6.75	115	4.85%
Maha-rashtra	Total	474	100	474	100	474	100	474	100	474	100	2370	100%
Rajas-than	Yes	324	58.06	355	63.62	293	52.51	335	60.04	293	52.51	1600	57.35%
Rajas-than	No	234	41.94	165	29.57	234	41.94	203	36.38	242	43.37	1078	38.64%
Rajas-than	Don't Know/Can't Remember			38	6.81	31	5.56	20	3.58	23	4.12	112	4.01%
Rajas-than	Total	558	100	558	100	558	100	558	100	558	100	2790	100%
Tamil Nadu	Yes	295	55.35	287	53.85	289	54.22	295	55.35	282	52.91	1448	54.33%
Tamil Nadu	No	238	44.65	185	34.71	187	35.08	178	33.4	193	36.21	981	36.81%
Tamil Nadu	Don't Know/Can't Remember			61	11.44	57	10.69	60	11.26	58	10.88	236	8.86%
Tamil Nadu	Total	533	100	533	100	533	100	533	100	533	100	2665	100%
Uttar Pradesh	Yes	161	36.02	139	31.1	124	27.74	109	24.38	104	23.27	637	28.50%
Uttar Pradesh	No	286	63.98	210	46.98	176	39.37	165	36.91	172	38.48	1009	45.15%
Uttar Pradesh	-	-	-	98	21.92	147	32.89	173	38.7	171	38.26	589	26.35%
Uttar Pradesh	Total	447	100	447	100	447	100	447	100	447	100	2235	100%
Five State Total	**Yes**	**1224**	**48.15**	**1320**	**51.93**	**1115**	**43.86**	**1241**	**48.82**	**987**	**38.83**	**5887**	**46.32%**

Table 5.52: contd.

		Birth Certificate Issued		Tetanus Vaccine Received		Consultation with health worker Received		Free Iron Tablets Received		Supplementary Nutrition received		Total	
State	Status	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Five State Total	No	1318	51.85	988	38.87	1110	43.67	995	39.14	1212	47.68	5623	44.24%
Five State Total	Don't Know/Can't Remember			234	9.21	317	12.47	306	12.04	343	13.49	1200	9.44%
Five State Total	Total	2542	100	2542	100	2542	100	2542	100	2542	100	12710	100%

Addressing these challenges requires more than the expansion of infrastructure. It demands a reorientation of health systems towards inclusion, with targeted interventions that improve awareness, strengthen early diagnosis, and actively dismantle the social barriers that continue to exclude DNT-NT-SNT women from equitable healthcare access.

Access to Identity Documents and Welfare Schemes

The data reveals a striking contradiction between widespread possession of basic identity documents and the limited access to substantive welfare entitlements among De-Notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Communities. Across the five-State data set, Aadhaar coverage is nearly universal at 96.33%, and 83.8% possess voter ID cards, indicating that most respondents are formally identifiable within state systems. However, this inclusion does not extend to welfare access. Only 21.97% of respondents hold ration cards, pointing to a significant gap in access to the Public Distribution System and raising concerns around food security provisioning. (Table 5.53)

This pattern of exclusion continues across other key documents. Only 29.27% possess caste certificates, which are essential for accessing reservation benefits (Table 5.54), and an even smaller proportion—15.60%—have residential certificates (Table 5.55). Passport ownership is at 6.33%, underlining both economic marginalisation and barriers to mobility.

Access to livelihood and financial entitlements remains similarly constrained. While 60.13% of respondents hold BPL cards, indicating formal recognition of poverty, only 31.87% have NREGA job cards, suggesting limited access to employment guarantees. (Table 5.54) Financial inclusion is uneven: 38.3% reported having Jan Dhan accounts, and 49.57% had access to any other bank account, leaving a substantial proportion outside formal banking systems. (Table 5.60)

The reach of welfare schemes is particularly limited. Across the five-state data set, only 23.3% of respondents reported benefiting from the Ujjwala Yojana (Table 5.61), and 24.57% had access to Ayushman Bharat health insurance (Table 5.58). The flagship PM Awas Yojana reached just 7.53% (Table 5.57), highlighting the severe inadequacy of housing support. Even more concerning is the near absence of targeted schemes: only 1.27% reported access to the SEED scheme, which is specifically designed for DNT Communities. (Table 5.56)

Qualitative discussions revealed that the state's outreach in livelihood schemes was virtually absent, focus group discussions pointed to poor dissemination of information, and communities routinely unaware of even flagship schemes.

Table 5.53: Availability of Aadhaar Card, Voter ID and Ration Card

State	Status	Aadhaar Card		Voter ID		Ration Card	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Haryana	No	26	4.30	179	29.50	156	25.70
Haryana	Yes	579	95.50	427	70.50	449	74.10
Haryana	Don't Know	1	0.20	-	-	1	0.20
Haryana	Total	606	100	606	100	606	100
Maharashtra	No	15	2.50	47	7.80	194	32.30
Maharashtra	Yes	580	96.70	546	91.00	400	66.70
Maharashtra	Don't Know	-	-	3	0.50	2	0.30
Maharashtra	Not Applicable	5	0.80	4	0.70	4	0.70
Maharashtra	Total	600	100	600	100	600	100
Rajasthan	No	12	2.00	90	15.00	83	13.90
Rajasthan	Yes	586	97.80	508	84.80	516	86.10
Rajasthan	Not Applicable	1	0.20	1	0.20		
Rajasthan	Total	599	100	599	100	599	100
Tamil Nadu	No	30	5.00	45	7.50	49	8.20
Tamil Nadu	Yes	569	94.80	552	92.00	549	91.50
Tamil Nadu	Don't Know	1	0.20	2	0.30	2	0.30
Tamil Nadu	Not Applicable	-	-	1	0.20	-	-
Tamil Nadu	Total	600	100	600	100	600	100
Uttar Pradesh	No	17	2.90	96	16.10	177	29.70
Uttar Pradesh	Yes	576	96.80	481	80.80	410	68.90
Uttar Pradesh	Don't Know	2	0.30	16	2.70	2	0.30
Uttar Pradesh	Not Applicable	-	-	2	0.30	6	1.00
Uttar Pradesh	Total	595	100	595	100	595	100
Five State Total	**No**	**100**	**3.33**	**457**	**15.23**	**2324**	**77.47**
Five State Total	**Yes**	**2890**	**96.33**	**2514**	**83.80**	**659**	**21.97**
Five State Total	**Don't Know**	**4**	**0.13**	**22**	**0.73**	**7**	**0.23**
Five State Total	**Not Applicable**	**6**	**0.20**	**7**	**0.23**	**10**	**0.33**
Five State Total	**Total**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**

Table 5.54: Availability of BPL Card, NREGA Card and Caste Certificate

State	Status	BPL Card		NREGA Card		Caste Certificate	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Haryana	No	179	29.50	553	91.30	427	70.50
Haryana	Yes	425	70.10	53	8.70	178	29.40
Haryana	Don't Know	1	0.20	-	-	1	0.20
Haryana	Not Applicable	1	0.20	-	-	-	-
Haryana	Total	606	100	606	100	606	100
Maharashtra	No	408	68.00	520	86.70	421	70.20
Maharashtra	Yes	178	29.70	73	12.20	157	26.20
Maharashtra	Don't Know	11	1.80	2	1.10	17	2.80
Maharashtra	Not Applicable	3	0.50	5	0.80	5	0.80
Maharashtra	Total	600	100	600	100	600	100
Rajasthan	No	512	85.50	254	42.40	330	55.10
Rajasthan	Yes	81	13.50	343	57.30	249	41.60
Rajasthan	Don't Know	5	0.80	1	0.40	20	3.30
Rajasthan	Not Applicable	1	0.20	1	0.20	-	-
Rajasthan	Total	599	100	599	100	599	100
Tamil Nadu	No	404	67.30	423	70.50	372	62.00
Tamil Nadu	Yes	61	10.20	149	24.80	222	37.00
Tamil Nadu	Don't Know	127	21.20	18	4.70	6	1.00
Tamil Nadu	Not Applicable	8	1.30	10	1.70	-	-
Tamil Nadu	Total	600	100	600	100	600	100
Uttar Pradesh	No	301	50.60	251	42.20	449	75.50
Uttar Pradesh	Yes	257	43.20	338	56.80	72	12.10
Uttar Pradesh	Don't Know	23	3.90	4	1.00	14	2.40
Uttar Pradesh	Not Applicable	14	2.40	2	0.30	60	10.10
Uttar Pradesh	Total	595	100	595	100	595	100
Five State Total	**No**	**1002**	**33.40**	**2001**	**66.70**	**1999**	**66.63**
Five State Total	**Yes**	**1804**	**60.13**	**956**	**31.87**	**878**	**29.27**
Five State Total	**Don't Know**	**167**	**5.57**	**25**	**0.83**	**58**	**1.93**
Five State Total	**Not Applicable**	**27**	**0.90**	**18**	**0.60**	**65**	**2.17**
Five State Total	**Total**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**

Table 5.55: Availability of Residential Certificate, PAN Card and Passport

State	Status	Residential Certificate		PAN Card		Passport	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Haryana	No	590	97.40	264	43.60	598	98.70
Haryana	Yes	16	2.60	340	56.10	7	1.20
Haryana	Don't Know	-	-	1	0.20	1	0.20
Haryana	Not Applicable	-	-	1	0.20	-	-
Haryana	Total	606	100	606	100	606	100
Maharashtra	No	492	82.00	345	57.50	478	79.70
Maharashtra	Yes	88	14.70	247	41.20	116	19.30
Maharashtra	Don't Know	16	2.70	4	0.70	1	0.20
Maharashtra	Not Applicable	4	0.70	4	0.70	5	0.80
Maharashtra	Total	600	100	600	100	600	100
Rajasthan	No	454	75.80	334	55.80	552	92.20
Rajasthan	Yes	115	19.20	264	44.10	44	7.30
Rajasthan	Don't Know	-	-	-	-	1	0.20
Rajasthan	Not Applicable	30	5.00	1	0.20	2	0.30
Rajasthan	Total	599	100	599	100	599	100
Tamil Nadu	No	387	64.50	239	39.80	582	97.00
Tamil Nadu	Yes	201	33.50	354	59.00	14	2.30
Tamil Nadu	Don't Know	7	1.20	6	1.00	3	0.50
Tamil Nadu	Not Applicable	5	0.80	1	0.20	1	0.20
Tamil Nadu	Total	600	100	600	100	600	100
Uttar Pradesh	No	471	79.20	334	56.10	522	87.70
Uttar Pradesh	Yes	48	8.10	176	29.60	9	1.50
Uttar Pradesh	Don't Know	15	2.50	38	6.40	6	1.00
Uttar Pradesh	Not Applicable	61	10.30	47	7.90	58	9.70
Uttar Pradesh	Total	595	100	595	100	595	100
Five State Total	**No**	**2394**	**79.80**	**1381**	**46.03**	**2732**	**91.07**
Five State Total	**Yes**	**468**	**15.60**	**1516**	**50.53**	**190**	**6.33**
Five State Total	**Don't Know**	**68**	**2.27**	**50**	**1.67**	**11**	**0.37**
Five State Total	**Not Applicable**	**70**	**2.33**	**53**	**1.77**	**67**	**2.23**
Five State Total	**Total**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**

Table 5.56: Reported Access to support from Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED), PM Garib Kalyan Yojana or Any Other Livelihood Scheme

State	Status	SEED Scheme		PM Garib Kalyan Yojana		Any Other Livelihood Scheme	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Haryana	No	354	58.40	211	34.80	584	96.40
Haryana	Yes			391	64.50	3	0.50
Haryana	Don't Know	232	38.30	4	0.70	19	3.10
Haryana	Not Applicable	20	3.30				
Haryana	Total	606	100	606	100	606	100
Maharashtra	No	553	92.20	365	60.80	540	90.00
Maharashtra	Yes	5	0.80	229	38.20	8	1.30
Maharashtra	Don't Know	26	4.30	2	0.30	34	5.70
Maharashtra	Not Applicable	16	2.70	4	0.70	18	3.00
Maharashtra	Total	600	100	600	100	600	100
Rajasthan	No	578	96.50	365	60.90	545	91.00
Rajasthan	Yes	6	1.00	232	38.70	47	7.80
Rajasthan	Don't Know	12	2.00	1	0.20	3	0.50
Rajasthan	Not Applicable	3	0.50	1	0.20	4	0.70
Rajasthan	Total	599	100	599	100	599	100
Tamil Nadu	No	395	65.80	363	60.50	401	66.80
Tamil Nadu	Yes	4	0.70	103	17.20	29	4.80
Tamil Nadu	Don't Know	107	17.80	110	18.30	96	16.00
Tamil Nadu	Not Applicable	94	15.70	24	4.00	74	12.30
Tamil Nadu	Total	600	100	600	100	600	100
Uttar Pradesh	No	448	75.30	278	46.70	466	78.30
Uttar Pradesh	Yes	23	3.90	292	49.10	35	5.90
Uttar Pradesh	Don't Know	45	7.60	18	3.00	19	3.20
Uttar Pradesh	Not Applicable	79	13.30	7	1.20	75	12.60
Uttar Pradesh	Total	595	100	595	100	595	100
Five State Total	**No**	**2328**	**77.60**	**1582**	**52.73**	**2536**	**84.53**
Five State Total	**Yes**	**38**	**1.27**	**1247**	**41.57**	**122**	**4.07**
Five State Total	**Don't Know**	**422**	**14.07**	**135**	**4.50**	**171**	**5.70**
Five State Total	**Not Applicable**	**212**	**7.07**	**36**	**1.20**	**171**	**5.70**
Five State Total	**Total**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**

Table 5.57: Reported Access to Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Any Other Housing Scheme

State	Status	PM Awas Yojana		Any Other Housing Scheme	
		Count	%	Count	%
Haryana	No	581	95.90	571	94.20
Haryana	Yes	4	0.70	10	1.70
Haryana	Don't Know	18	3.00	22	3.60
Haryana	Not Applicable	3	0.50	3	0.50
Haryana	Total	606	100	606	100
Maharashtra	No	542	90.30	543	90.50
Maharashtra	Yes	9	1.50	10	1.70
Maharashtra	Don't Know	29	4.80	30	5.00
Maharashtra	Not Applicable	20	3.30	17	2.80
Maharashtra	Total	600	100	600	100
Rajasthan	No	552	92.20	564	94.20
Rajasthan	Yes	42	7.00	30	5.00
Rajasthan	Don't Know	4	0.70	5	0.80
Rajasthan	Not Applicable	1	0.20	-	-
Rajasthan	Total	599	100	599	100
Tamil Nadu	No	412	68.70	408	68.00
Tamil Nadu	Yes	18	3.00	19	3.20
Tamil Nadu	Don't Know	100	16.70	97	16.20
Tamil Nadu	Not Applicable	70	11.70	76	12.70
Tamil Nadu	Total	600	100	600	100
Uttar Pradesh	No	377	63.40	410	68.90
Uttar Pradesh	Yes	153	25.70	118	19.80
Uttar Pradesh	Don't Know	16	2.70	21	3.50
Uttar Pradesh	Not Applicable	49	8.20	46	7.70
Uttar Pradesh	Total	595	100	595	100
Five State Total	**No**	**2464**	**82.13**	**2496**	**83.20**
Five State Total	**Yes**	**226**	**7.53**	**187**	**6.23**
Five State Total	**Don't Know**	**167**	**5.57**	**175**	**5.83**
Five State Total	**Not Applicable**	**143**	**4.77**	**142**	**4.73**
Five State Total	**Total**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**

Table 5.58: Reported Access to Ayushman Bharat, Any Other Medical Insurance, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

State	Status	Ayushman Bharat		Other Medical Insurance		Swachh Bharat	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Haryana	No	308	50.80	518	85.50	445	73.40
Haryana	Yes	291	48.00	80	13.20	16	2.60
Haryana	Don't Know	5	0.80	7	1.20	126	20.80
Haryana	Not Applicable	2	0.30	1	0.20	19	3.10
Haryana	Total	606	100	606	100	606	100
Maharashtra	No	499	83.20	525	87.50	552	92.00
Maharashtra	Yes	47	7.80	18	3.00	5	0.80
Maharashtra	Don't Know	34	5.70	27	4.50	29	4.80
Maharashtra	Not Applicable	20	3.30	30	5.00	14	2.30
Maharashtra	Total	600	100	600	100	600	100
Rajasthan	No	389	64.90	463	77.30	529	88.30
Rajasthan	Yes	131	21.90	99	16.50	69	11.50
Rajasthan	Don't Know	55	9.20	34	5.70	-	-
Rajasthan	Not Applicable	24	4.00	3	0.50	1	0.20
Rajasthan	Total	599	100	599	100	599	100
Tamil Nadu	No	376	62.70	353	58.80	360	60.00
Tamil Nadu	Yes	72	12.00	127	21.20	51	8.50
Tamil Nadu	Don't Know	76	12.70	76	12.70	110	18.30
Tamil Nadu	Not Applicable	76	12.70	44	7.30	79	13.20
Tamil Nadu	Total	600	100	600	100	600	100
Uttar Pradesh	No	337	56.60	490	82.40	437	73.40
Uttar Pradesh	Yes	196	32.90	12	2.00	32	5.40
Uttar Pradesh	Don't Know	9	1.50	14	2.40	63	10.60
Uttar Pradesh	Not Applicable	53	8.90	79	13.30	63	10.60
Uttar Pradesh	Total	595	100	595	100	595	100
Five State Total	**No**	**1909**	**63.63**	**2349**	**78.30**	**2323**	**77.43**
Five State Total	**Yes**	**737**	**24.57**	**336**	**11.20**	**173**	**5.77**
Five State Total	**Don't Know**	**162**	**5.40**	**158**	**5.27**	**328**	**10.93**
Five State Total	**Not Applicable**	**192**	**6.40**	**157**	**5.23**	**176**	**5.87**
Five State Total	**Total**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**

Table 5.59: Reported Access to Old Age Pension, Widow Pension, NT-DNT Hostel

State	Status	Old Age Pension		Widow Pension		NT-DNT Hostel	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Haryana	No	20	45.45	5	9.26	301	49.70
Haryana	Yes	19	43.18	40	74.07	-	-
Haryana	Don't Know	-	-	-	-	284	46.90
Haryana	Not Applicable	5	11.36	9	16.67	21	3.50
Haryana	Total	44	100	45	100	606	100
Maharashtra	No	25	69.44	52	61.9	541	90.20
Maharashtra	Yes	7	19.44	29	34.52	11	1.80
Maharashtra	Don't Know	-	-	1	1.19	33	5.50
Maharashtra	Not Applicable	4	11.11	2	2.38	15	2.50
Maharashtra	Total	36	100	81	100	600	100
Rajasthan	No	4	12.50	5	33.33	576	96.20
Rajasthan	Yes	26	81.25	8	53.33	3	0.50
Rajasthan	Don't Know	-	-	1	6.67	19	3.20
Rajasthan	Not Applicable	2	6.25	1	6.67	1	0.20
Rajasthan	Total	32	100	14	100	599	100
Tamil Nadu	No	19	45.24	37	50.68	411	68.50
Tamil Nadu	Yes	11	26.19	10	13.7	14	2.30
Tamil Nadu	Don't Know	7	16.67	7	9.59	113	18.80
Tamil Nadu	Not Applicable	5	11.90	19	26.03	62	10.30
Tamil Nadu	Total	42	100	47	100	600	100
Uttar Pradesh	No	29	54.72	5	20.83	472	79.30
Uttar Pradesh	Yes	19	35.85	15	62.50	18	3.00
Uttar Pradesh	Don't Know	1	1.89	2	8.33	27	4.50
Uttar Pradesh	Not Applicable	4	7.55	2	8.33	78	13.10
Uttar Pradesh	Total	53	100	22	100	595	100
Five State Total	No	97	46.86	104	41.60	2301	76.70
Five State Total	Yes	82	39.61	102	40.80	46	1.53
Five State Total	Don't Know	8	3.86	11	4.40	476	15.87
Five State Total	Not Applicable	20	9.66	33	13.20	177	5.90
Five State Total	Total	207	100	250	100	3000	100

Table 5.60: Reported Access to Jal Jeevan Mission, Jan Dhan Yojana or Access to Any Other Bank Account

State	Status	Jal Jeevan		Jan Dhan		Any Other Bank Account	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Haryana	No	451	74.40	458	75.60	461	76.10
Haryana	Yes	35	5.80	147	24.30	145	23.90
Haryana	Don't Know	103	17.00				
Haryana	Not Applicable	17	2.80	1	0.20		
Haryana	Total	606	100	606	100	606	100
Maharashtra	No	551	91.80	373	62.20	269	44.80
Maharashtra	Yes	6	1.00	218	36.30	322	53.70
Maharashtra	Don't Know	28	4.70	4	0.70	4	0.70
Maharashtra	Not Applicable	15	2.50	5	0.80	5	0.80
Maharashtra	Total	600	100	600	100	600	100
Rajasthan	No	586	97.80	223	37.20	335	55.90
Rajasthan	Yes	9	1.50	371	61.90	263	43.90
Rajasthan	Don't Know	3	0.50	5	0.80		
Rajasthan	Not Applicable	1	0.20			1	0.20
Rajasthan	Total	599	100	599	100	599	100
Tamil Nadu	No	374	62.30	441	73.50	84	14.00
Tamil Nadu	Yes	38	6.30	35	5.80	510	85.00
Tamil Nadu	Don't Know	106	17.70	103	17.20	3	0.50
Tamil Nadu	Not Applicable	82	13.70	21	3.50	3	0.50
Tamil Nadu	Total	600	100	600	100	600	100
Uttar Pradesh	No	384	64.50	204	34.30	283	47.60
Uttar Pradesh	Yes	106	17.80	378	63.50	247	41.50
Uttar Pradesh	Don't Know	35	5.90	9	1.50	4	0.70
Uttar Pradesh	Not Applicable	70	11.80	4	0.70	61	10.30
Uttar Pradesh	Total	595	100	595	100	595	100
Five State Total	**No**	**2346**	**78.2**	**1699**	**56.63**	**1432**	**47.73**
Five State Total	**Yes**	**194**	**6.47**	**1149**	**38.30**	**1487**	**49.57**
Five State Total	**Don't Know**	**275**	**9.17**	**121**	**4.03**	**11**	**0.37**
Five State Total	**Not Applicable**	**185**	**6.17**	**31**	**1.03**	**70**	**2.33**
Five State Total	**Total**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**	**3000**	**100**

Table 5.61: Reported Access to Ujjwala Yojana

State	Ujjwala Yojana	Count	%
Haryana	No	507	83.70
Haryana	Yes	87	14.40
Haryana	Don't Know	9	1.50
Haryana	Not Applicable	3	0.50
Haryana	Total	606	100
Maharashtra	No	513	85.50
Maharashtra	Yes	43	7.20
Maharashtra	Don't Know	29	4.80
Maharashtra	Not Applicable	15	2.50
Maharashtra	Total	600	100
Rajasthan	No	238	39.70
Rajasthan	Yes	355	59.30
Rajasthan	Don't Know	4	0.70
Rajasthan	Not Applicable	2	0.30
Rajasthan	Total	599	100
Tamil Nadu	No	366	61.00
Tamil Nadu	Yes	71	11.80
Tamil Nadu	Don't Know	86	14.30
Tamil Nadu	Not Applicable	77	12.80
Tamil Nadu	Total	600	100
Uttar Pradesh	No	371	62.40
Uttar Pradesh	Yes	143	24.00
Uttar Pradesh	Don't Know	5	0.80
Uttar Pradesh	Not Applicable	76	12.80
Uttar Pradesh	Total	595	100
Five State Total	**No**	**1995**	**66.50**
Five State Total	**Yes**	**699**	**23.30**
Five State Total	**Don't Know**	**133**	**4.43**
Five State Total	**Not Applicable**	**173**	**5.77**
Five State Total	**Total**	**3000**	**100**

State-level variations reveal uneven patterns of access. In Haryana, despite high Aadhaar (95.5%) and voter ID coverage (70.5%), access to NREGA remains extremely low at 8.7%, and PMAY benefits are negligible at 0.7%, indicating significant administrative exclusion.

In Maharashtra, Aadhaar coverage is similarly high (96.7%), and 66.7% possess ration cards, suggesting relatively better access to food entitlements. However, only 12.2% hold NREGA job cards, and access to welfare schemes such as Ujjwala (7.2%) and PMAY (1.5%) remains limited.

Rajasthan presents a relatively stronger entitlements infrastructure. 86.1% of respondents possess ration cards, and 57.3% hold NREGA job cards, the highest among the surveyed states. Ujjwala Yojana coverage is also significantly higher at 59.3%, although access to housing under PMAY remains modest at 7%. Focus group discussions noted less discrimination at PHCs and better access to public services for DNT-Nomadic groups, although gaps persisted in Swachh Bharat and SEED scheme outreach.

In Tamil Nadu, document coverage is high, with 94.8% having Aadhaar and 91.5% holding ration cards, yet this does not translate into welfare access. Only 24.8% have NREGA cards, and Ujjwala coverage is low at 11.8%. However, the state shows relatively better financial inclusion, with 85% reporting access to other bank accounts, the highest among all states. Focus groups highlighted better awareness of schemes compared to other states, though actual benefits remained limited.

Uttar Pradesh shows mixed outcomes. While Aadhaar coverage is high at 96.8%, only 68.9% possess ration cards. Notably, 56.8% have NREGA job cards, second only to Rajasthan, and 25.7% have benefited from PMAY, the highest among the surveyed states. Ujjwala coverage stands at 24%, reflecting moderate scheme penetration. Despite marginally better scheme coverage in some sectors, communities like the Musahar and Nat reported extreme marginalisation, including untouchability practices in hospitals.

Overall, the data clearly indicates that possession of identity documents does not guarantee access to welfare schemes. Instead, structural barriers - such as documentation gaps, administrative inefficiencies, and social exclusion - continue to mediate access.

Access to Reservation

The data on reservation highlights one of the most significant forms of exclusion faced by DNT-NT-SNT Communities. Across the five-state data set, 96.4% of respondents reported that they had never benefited from any form of reservation, with only 3.6% having accessed such benefits. (Table 5.62) This reflects deep-rooted barriers to accessing entitlements that should be foundational for improving socio-economic mobility in these historically excluded communities.

There are significant state-level differences. Maharashtra stands out, with 14.8% of respondents reporting access to reservation, likely reflecting the presence of a distinct VJNT category. In contrast, Rajasthan (2.7%) and Tamil Nadu (0.5%) show minimal access, while Haryana and Uttar Pradesh report zero access, pointing to near-complete exclusion experienced by survey respondents in these states.

Even where reservation benefits are accessed, their scope remains limited. Across the data set, 64.81% of beneficiaries accessed reservation in school education, followed by 29.63% in Panchayat elections, while only 2.78% reported access in employment (Table 5.63), indicating that reservation has largely failed to translate into meaningful labour market inclusion.

Correlating Reservation and Social Category

The category through which reservations are accessed highlights the structural disparities embedded in current classification systems. Across the data set, nearly half of those who accessed reservations did so under the VJNT category (46.3%), followed by 35.19% under Scheduled Castes, 12.04% under OBC, and only 6.48% under Scheduled Tribes. (Table 5.64) This distribution is

Table 5.62: Have you Benefited from any Reservation?

	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	2892	96.4	606	100.00	511	85.20	583	97.30	597	99.50	595	100.00
Yes	108	3.6	-	-	89	14.80	16	2.70	3	0.50	-	-
Total	**3000**	**100**	**606**	**100.00**	**600**	**100.00**	**599**	**100.00**	**600**	**100.00**	**595**	**100.00**

Note: the total refers to respondents reporting they benefited from reservation as shown in Table 5.62

Table 5.63: If You Benefited from Reservation, In What Field Was the Benefit

	Five State Total		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Employment	3	2.78	3	3.37	-	-	-	-
Panchayat Elections	32	29.63	32	35.96	-	-	-	-
School Education	70	64.81	51	57.3	16	100.00	3	100.00
School Education Employment	3	2.78	3	3.37	-	-	-	-
Total	**108**	**100**	**89**	**100**	**16**	**100.00**	**3**	**100.00**

closely tied to state-level classification practices: Maharashtra accounts for most access under the VJNT category, while other states depend largely on broader SC, ST, or OBC classifications, which often obscure the specific vulnerabilities of DNT-NT-SNT Communities.

This pattern becomes clearer when read alongside the overall social composition of the sample. Although the respondents are predominantly from De-Notified and Nomadic Tribes (Table 5.1), their official classification is widely dispersed - 52.4% under SC, 16% under OBC, 12.57% under VJNT in Maharashtra, and smaller proportions under DNC and MBC in Tamil Nadu (Table 5.2). This disconnect between community identity and administrative categorisation plays a decisive role in shaping access to reservation benefits.

State-level variations further underline this point. Maharashtra's distinct VJNT category appears to improve visibility and access, with 14.8% of respondents reporting that they have availed reservations, many within this category. However, the existence of a separate classification does not automatically translate into better outcomes. Tamil Nadu, despite recognising De-Notified Communities (DNC) and Most Backward Communities (MBC), does not show comparable levels of access. In contrast, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh - where these communities are subsumed within broader SC and OBC categories - report almost no access to reservations, with Rajasthan showing similarly low levels.

Taken together, the data suggests that while distinct classification can be enabling, its impact depends on the extent to which it is meaningfully implemented and supported. The uneven outcomes across states point to a broader policy gap: without consistent recognition and effective integration into reservation frameworks, DNT–NT–SNT Communities continue to remain on the margins of affirmative action.

Grievance Redressal and Access to State Institutions

The experience of De-Notified Tribes (DNTs), Nomadic Tribes (NTs), and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (SNTs) with grievance redressal mechanisms and their engagement with state institutions reflects a pattern of marginalisation and administrative apathy.

Engagement with formal state systems for accessing entitlements or addressing grievances

Table 5.64: Under Which Category Did You Get Reservation

	Five State Total		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
OBC	13	12.04	5	5.62	8	50	-	-
SC	38	35.19	30	33.71	8	50	-	-
ST	7	6.48	4	4.49	-	-	3	100.00
VJNT (Maharashtra)	50	46.3	50	56.18	-	-	-	-
Total	**108**	**100**	**89**	**100**	**16**	**100**	**3**	**100**

Table 5.65: Have you approached any government official for access to benefit or to resolve a grievance?

	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	2645	88.17	519	85.60	595	99.20	551	92.00	578	96.30	402	67.60
Yes	355	11.83	87	14.40	5	0.80	48	8.00	22	3.70	193	32.40
Total	**3000**	**-**	**606**	**-**	**600**	**-**	**599**	**-**	**600**	**-**	**595**	**-**

remains extremely limited among the surveyed women. Across the five-state data set, only 11.83% reported having approached a government official (Table 5.65), indicating that nearly nine out of ten women have had no direct interaction with administrative authorities in relation to their rights or complaints. This low level of engagement suggests a combination of constrained access and institutional distrust, shaped by factors such as limited awareness, literacy barriers, procedural complexities, and experiences of exclusion within bureaucratic spaces.

State-level patterns reveal significant variation in the extent of such engagement. Uttar Pradesh stands out with the highest reported interaction, where 32.4% of women indicated having approached a government official, followed by Haryana at 14.4%. In contrast, engagement levels remain particularly low in Maharashtra (0.8%), Tamil Nadu (3.7%), and Rajasthan (8%), pointing to regional disparities in both access to and utilisation of grievance redressal mechanisms.

Even where engagement occurs, outcomes remain largely unsatisfactory. Across the dataset, only 9.58% of respondents reported that their grievances were resolved (Table 5.66). A substantial majority (72.11%) indicated that their concerns were not addressed, while 18.31% reported that their cases were still pending. Haryana presents an especially stark case, with 97.7% of those who approached officials reporting that their grievances remained unresolved. Uttar Pradesh, despite relatively higher levels of outreach, recorded a modest resolution rate of 12.44%.

A similar pattern, though more limited, emerges in interactions with elected representatives. Across the data set, only 4.37% of respondents reported having approached a political representative to seek a benefit or raise a grievance (Table 5.67). This indicates that direct political outreach remains rare among the surveyed women. While Haryana (6.4%) and Rajasthan (6.8%) show relatively higher levels of engagement, the overall rates remain low. In Maharashtra (0.7%) and Tamil Nadu (3.5%), outreach to elected representatives is negligible, pointing to a widespread gap between these communities and elected representatives.

Where such engagement does occur, the likelihood of obtaining a satisfactory response remains limited. Across the dataset, only 12.21% of those

who approached elected representatives reported that their concerns were resolved (Table 5.67). In most states, the majority of grievances remained unaddressed. Haryana (89.74%) and Rajasthan (85.37%) present particularly stark pictures, with most respondents reporting no resolution, while in Maharashtra, 75% received no redressal.

These findings point to a persistent disconnect between elected representatives and women from DNT, NT, and SNT Communities. Insights from qualitative discussions further suggest that political leadership is often dominated by socially powerful groups, with limited accountability to De-Notified and Nomadic settlements. This lack of engagement and responsiveness contributes to the continued political invisibility of these communities.

Meera Devi's attempt to secure housing in Panipat, Haryana, emblematic of the issue. Meera comes from the Bawariya community. She spoke about her application for a housing benefit under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, remaining pending for two years. Despite submitting the application three times, she has received no response. On approaching the District Welfare Officer, she was told her family's income, wrongly recorded on the Parivar Pehchan Patra, made them ineligible. Multiple appeals to rectify the error went unheard. In a moment of collective assertion, the women of her colony visited the Tehsildar's office. Though the official promised an enquiry, no action has been taken since. "Our homes are falling, our complaints gather dust," she said bitterly.

Jamuna Devi's struggle for ration in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh is another case in point. Jamuna is a 52-year-old woman from the Nat community, and in the focus group discussion she spoke about going to the ration shop regularly for six months without receiving her entitled food grains. Despite her ration card being valid, the shopkeeper would dismiss her requests, often mocking her for being a "Banjara." Frustrated, she approached the local Gram Pradhan, who promised to resolve the issue but did not act. Finally, she and four other women decided to approach the Block Development Officer. Though they submitted an application, they were asked to "wait their turn." Months later, there was still no resolution. "We don't know where else to go," she said. "Our hunger is not on anyone's priority list."

The quantitative data collected across five states reveals similar stories of neglect, administrative apathy, caste-based discrimination, and systemic disinterest in addressing the legitimate grievances

Table 5.66: Having Approached a Government Official is Your Issue Resolved

	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	256	72.11	85	97.70	3	60.00	41	85.42	1	4.55	126	65.28
Pending	65	18.31	-	-	2	40.00	2	4.17	18	81.82	43	22.28
Yes	34	9.58	2	2.30	-	-	5	10.42	3	13.64	24	12.44
Total	**355**	**100.00**	**87**	**100.00**	**5**	**100.00**	**48**	**100.00**	**22**	**100.00**	**193**	**100.00**

Table 5.67: Have You Approached Any Elected Representative for Access to Any Benefit or Grievance?

	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	2869	95.63	567	93.60	596	99.30	558	93.20	579	96.50	569	95.60
Yes	131	4.37	39	6.40	4	0.70	41	6.80	21	3.50	26	4.40
Total	**3000**	**100.00**	**606**	**100.00**	**600**	**100.00**	**599**	**100.00**	**600**	**100.00**	**595**	**100.00**

Table 5.68: Having Approached an Elected Representative, did you get a Satisfactory Response?

	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	90	68.70	35	89.74	3	75.00	35	85.37	2	9.52	15	57.69
Pending	25	19.08	1	2.56	1	25.00	1	2.44	18	85.71	4	15.38
Yes	16	12.21	3	7.69	-		5	12.20	1	4.76	7	26.92
Total	**131**	**100.00**	**39**	**100.00**	**4**	**100.00**	**41**	**100.00**	**21**	**100.00**	**26**	**100.00**

Table 5.69: Have You Voted in Elections?

	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	855	28.50	204	33.70	220	36.70	135	22.50	80	13.30	216	36.30
Yes	2145	71.50	402	66.30	380	63.30	464	77.50	520	86.70	379	63.70
Total	**3000**	**100.00**	**606**	**100.00**	**600**	**100.00**	**599**	**100.00**	**600**	**100.00**	**595**	**100.00**

of these women. The few instances of collective action - like women mobilising to visit a Tehsildar's office - are rare and met with indifference.

These findings highlight the urgent need to strengthen grievance redressal systems for DNT, NT, and SNT Communities by making them more accessible, accountable, and sensitive to the unique socio-economic vulnerabilities these groups face. Training and sensitisation of officials, setting up proactive outreach initiatives in De-Notified and Nomadic settlements, and ensuring representation of these groups in grievance forums are critical steps toward closing this gap.

Political Participation and Self-Organisation

Savithri's unsuccessful bid to contest Panchayat elections in Tamil Nadu, speaks about the importance of political participation for the community. Savithri, is a 48-year-old woman from the Boom Boom Mattukaran community in Tamil Nadu. She defied convention by contesting Panchayat elections. Though she lost narrowly, her participation encouraged younger women in her village to attend Gram Sabha meetings and voice their concerns about water, land rights, and access to health services. "We didn't know our rights until she showed us that we could stand up for ourselves," shared one community member.

Despite such inspiring stories, political participation among women from De-Notified Tribes (DNT), Nomadic Tribes (NT), and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (SNT) Communities remains highly uneven across the five-state data set, marked by significant disparities in electoral participation, local governance engagement, and collective organisation. The survey data highlights both encouraging trends in voting participation and deep structural exclusions from decision-making bodies and organised political spaces.

Across the five-state data set, 71.5% of respondents reported having voted in elections (Table 5.69), indicating fairly high electoral engagement. However, deeper political participation beyond voting remains strikingly low. Only 3.8% of women surveyed participated in Gram Sabha meetings (Table 5.70), while a mere 0.57% had ever been members of any local government institution (Table 5.71). Participation in specialised community structures such as Forest Protection Committees was also negligible at 0.37% (Table 5.72).

Membership in organised collectives was similarly limited. Only 4.9% of women were part of a women's group or Self-Help Group (SHG) (Table 5.74), while 0.43% reported being members of farmer, artisan, or other occupational organisations (Table 5.73). Participation in trade unions was also alarmingly

Table 5.70: Participation in Gram Sabhas

	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	2608	86.93	602	99.30	585	97.50	543	90.70	510	85.00	368	61.80
Yes	114	3.80	2	0.30	6	1.00	7	1.20	76	12.70	23	3.90
Not Appli-cable	278	9.27	2	0.30	9	1.50	49	8.20	14	2.30	204	34.30
Total	**3000**	**100.00**	**606**	**100.00**	**600**	**100.00**	**599**	**100.00**	**600**	**100.00**	**595**	**100.00**

Table 5.71: Participation in Local Governance Institutions

	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	2983	99.43	601	99.20	595	99.20	595	99.30	597	99.50	595	100.00
Yes	17	0.57	5	0.80	5	0.80	4	0.70	3	0.50	-	-
Total	**3000**	**100.00**	**606**	**100.00**	**600**	**100.00**	**599**	**100.00**	**600**	**100.00**	**595**	**100.00**

Table 5.72: Membership in Forest Protection Committee

	Five State Total		Haryana		Maharashtra		Rajasthan		Tamil Nadu		Uttar Pradesh	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	2989	99.63	605	99.80	597	99.50	598	99.80	596	99.30	593	99.70
Yes	11	0.37	1	0.20	3	0.50	1	0.20	4	0.70	2	0.30
Total	**3000**	**100.00**	**606**	**100.00**	**600**	**100.00**	**599**	**100.00**	**600**	**100.00**	**595**	**100.00**

low, with just 1.6% of women reporting membership in any labour collective (Table 5.75). This overall trend reflects a critical gap between nominal electoral participation and substantive political agency for these historically marginalised communities.

A state-wise reading of the data reveals a consistent pattern: while voting levels are relatively high across states, participation in local governance, institutions, and collective platforms remains extremely limited.

In Tamil Nadu, voter turnout is the highest at 86.7%, indicating strong participation in electoral processes. However, this engagement does not extend meaningfully beyond voting. Only 12.7% of women reported attending Gram Sabha meetings, and a negligible 0.5% had ever held a position in local government institutions. Participation in Forest Protection Committees was also minimal at 0.7%. What distinguishes Tamil Nadu from other states is relatively higher membership in women's collectives (11.8%) and some presence in trade unions (6.5%). Qualitative insights suggest that while women are active in economic self-help groups and informal networks, their participation in formal political or labour institutions remains constrained by entrenched caste and gender hierarchies.

In Rajasthan, voter turnout is also high at 77.5%, but, similar to Tamil Nadu, deeper political participation remains limited. Only 1.2% of women reported attending Gram Sabha meetings, and 0.7% had been part of local governance institutions. Membership in Forest Protection Committees was almost negligible at 0.2%. However, Rajasthan shows relatively better

engagement in women's collectives, with 9.7% participation, though trade union membership remains extremely low at 0.2%. Discussions with respondents indicate that while voting is accessible, Gram Sabha spaces are often male-dominated, discouraging women's active participation.

In Haryana, 66.3% of women reported voting, but participation beyond elections is almost absent. Only 0.3% attended Gram Sabha meetings, and no respondents reported holding positions in local governance bodies. Participation in Forest Protection Committees was equally low at 0.3%. There was no reported membership in women's collectives or trade unions. Qualitative findings highlight strong patriarchal controls over public spaces and the dominance of upper-caste male leadership, which together restrict women's entry into political and civic processes.

In Maharashtra, voter turnout stands at 63.3%, among the lower rates in the sample. Participation in Gram Sabhas is limited to 1%, and only 0.8% of women reported holding positions in local bodies. Membership in Forest Protection Committees is 0.5%. Organisational participation is marginally better than in some states, with 0.7% of women part of occupational collectives and women's groups, and 1.3% reporting trade union membership. Despite relatively progressive policy frameworks such as the VJNT classification, qualitative data suggests that political and organisational spaces remain dominated by more powerful social groups, with DNT, NT, and SNT women largely confined to economic self-help networks.

In Uttar Pradesh, voter turnout is the lowest at 63.7%. Only 3.9% of women reported attending Gram Sabha meetings, and none had held positions in local government institutions. Participation in Forest Protection Committees was minimal at 0.3%. Membership in women's collectives was also low at 2.4%, with no representation in trade unions. Respondents frequently pointed to caste-based discrimination, lack of awareness, and patriarchal norms as key barriers, with many women unaware of Gram Sabha processes or their eligibility to participate in local governance.

Taken together, the data highlights a clear disconnect between electoral participation and substantive political engagement. While a majority of DNT, NT, and SNT women participate in voting, their presence in Gram Sabhas, local governance institutions, and collective platforms remains extremely limited across all states. Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan show relatively stronger engagement in women's collectives, but this does not translate into participation in formal political spaces. Qualitative findings further underline how caste, gender, and nomadic identity intersect to restrict access to decision-making processes, reinforcing the political marginalisation of these communities.

Chapter 6:

Profiles of Select Communities and Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents qualitative and quantitative profiles of the five most represented communities in the sample - Nat, Musahar, Bawariya, Pardhi, and Banjara. These communities together account for a substantial proportion of the respondents and therefore provide a strong empirical basis for deeper community - level analysis. The decision to focus on the largest communities was both methodological and analytical. Concentrating on groups with larger sample sizes allows for a more granular examination of patterns related to social structure, land ownership, housing, education, livelihoods, migration, welfare access, and political participation.

At the same time, the chapter also includes the Narikuravar community as an additional case. Although not among the five largest groups numerically, the inclusion of the Narikuravars was a deliberate effort to ensure greater regional and socio-cultural representation within the analysis. Since the five largest communities are concentrated largely in North and Central India, relying exclusively on them would have left Tamil Nadu underrepresented in the community-wise discussion. Including the Narikuravar community therefore helps capture the distinct experiences of NT-DNT-SNT Communities in southern India.

The Narikuravar profile also highlights how state-specific histories, welfare regimes, and caste classifications shape community experiences differently across regions. In Tamil Nadu, communities such as the Narikuravars navigate forms of marginalisation linked to the DNC/MBC classification system, urban precarity, livelihood transitions, and enduring social stigma. Their inclusion broadens the scope of the analysis beyond numerical representation alone and enables a more regionally balanced understanding of the diversity within NT-DNT-SNT Communities.

Together, these "Five-Plus-One" communities account for more than one-third of the total respondents in the survey. The profiles presented in this section therefore serve as an important analytical bridge between the aggregate survey findings and the thematic chapters that follow. Rather than treating NT-DNT-SNT Communities as a homogeneous category, the section foregrounds community-specific histories and lived realities, making it possible to better understand how structural exclusion operates differently across varied social and regional contexts.

Nat Community

Social Profile and Historical Background

The Nat community constitutes one of the largest groups in the study sample, a pattern that reflects their wide geographic spread across northern India, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan (Anthropological Survey of India, 1998; Sharma, 2010). This demographic presence enables a closer examination of how historical marginalisation continues to shape their contemporary socio-economic conditions.

Historically, the Nats have occupied a fluid and often ambiguous position within the caste - tribe continuum - neither fully integrated into the caste hierarchy nor entirely excluded from it. Their traditional association with performance-based livelihoods - such as acrobatics, ropewalking, singing, and dancing - has long defined their social identity. The term *nāta*, from Sanskrit, meaning "actor" or "performer," reflects this occupational grounding (Monier-Williams, 1899/2005). References in early texts such as the *Arthashastra*, attributed to Kautilya, indicate that itinerant performers and entertainers were subject to a degree of state surveillance due to their mobility, though they were not socially ostracised in the rigid sense that later caste exclusions would imply (Kangle, 1965/2010).

This relatively fluid status was fundamentally transformed under British colonial rule. As the colonial state expanded its administrative and policing apparatus, mobility itself came to be viewed as suspicious. Communities like the Nats - along with other itinerant groups such as bards, storytellers, and travelling performers - were increasingly seen as difficult to regulate and thus potentially threatening. This culminated in their inclusion under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, which classified entire communities as "hereditary criminals" rather than identifying individual acts of crime (Radhakrishna, 2001; Nigam, 1990).

The Act imposed a regime of intense surveillance and control. Members of "notified" tribes were required to register with local authorities, report regularly to police stations, and seek prior permission for movement beyond designated areas. In many cases, they were confined to settlements and subjected to constant monitoring. Violations of these provisions could lead to arrest and imprisonment, effectively criminalising mobility itself (Radhakrishna, 2001). While the law did not uniformly prescribe a fixed three-year sentence, punitive incarceration was a routine feature of enforcement. These measures disrupted traditional circuits of performance and patronage, undermining the economic foundations of Nat livelihoods.

Scholarly work has consistently emphasised that Nat livelihoods historically depended on itinerant entertainment economies, with performances embedded in local fairs, festivals, and life-cycle events (Datta, 2012; Alam, 2024). Colonial interventions fractured these circuits, and the stigma of criminalisation persisted long after the formal repeal of the Act in 1952. As several scholars note, the "de-notification" of these communities did not translate into social rehabilitation; instead, many continued to be treated as "habitual offenders" under subsequent legislation and policing practices (Radhakrishna, 2001).

In the post-independence period, these historical disruptions have been compounded by broader economic transformations. The decline of traditional performance economies - driven by urbanisation, the rise of mass entertainment, and changing patterns of patronage - has further eroded livelihood options. Welfare systems have often failed to adequately reach Nat communities, many of whom remain landless, under-documented, and without secure housing.

This disjuncture between occupational identity and contemporary livelihood realities is central to understanding ongoing marginalisation. While the caste name "Nat" continues to evoke artistry and performance, present-day livelihoods are marked by precarity, including construction labour, daily wage work, petty vending, begging, and seasonal migration. Gendered shifts are particularly significant: as demand for traditional performance has declined and caste stigma has intensified, women have increasingly moved into wage labour or informal survival strategies, often under more precarious conditions (Alam, 2024).

Caste Location and Administrative Status

Within the study sample, the Nat community comprises 233 respondents, accounting for 7.77% of the total sample. This makes them one of the largest communities covered in the community-wise analysis and allows a closer examination of how historical marginalisation, occupational transition, and partial sedentarisation shape their contemporary socio-economic conditions. (Table 6.1)

The Nat respondents show a fragmented administrative profile. In the sample, 47.21% reported being classified as Scheduled Caste, while 51.93%

Table 6.1: Distribution of Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

Tribe	Count	Share in Total Sample (%)
Nat	233	7.77
Musahar	223	7.43
Bawariya	159	5.30
Pardhi	159	5.30
Banjara	152	5.07
Narikaruvar	96	3.20
Total Top 5+1 Tribes	**1022**	**34.07**

reported being classified as OBC. A very small proportion reported ST status and VJNT status, at 0.43% each. (Table 6.2) This near-even split between SC and OBC classifications reflects state-level variation and may affect access to reservations, welfare schemes, and targeted programmes.

Within the DNT-NT-SNT framework, 78.97% of Nat respondents were classified as DNT and 21.03% as NT. No Nat respondent was recorded under the SNT category. (Table 6.3) This coexistence of caste-based and DNT-NT classifications creates administrative ambiguity and can weaken entitlement claims.

Land Ownership, Housing and Living Conditions

Landlessness is widespread among Nat respondents. As per Table 6.4, 93.56% reported having no owned or leased agricultural land, while only 6.44% reported owning agricultural land. Among landowning Nat households, ownership was divided between male-only ownership at 35.71%, female-only ownership at 28.57%, and joint male-female ownership at 35.71%. (Table 6.5)

Housing data presents a more complex picture. A large majority of Nat respondents, 88.84%, reported living in permanent structures, while 8.58% lived in tents and smaller proportions lived in semi-permanent or temporary structures. (Table 6.6) Similarly, 95.71% reported living in self-financed owned houses, with only 0.86% reporting government-provided housing and 0.43% living in rented accommodation. (Table 6.7) However, this apparent stability must be read cautiously, as "ownership" may refer to possession without secure legal title.

The structural quality of housing remains uneven. Among Nat respondents, 53.65% lived in pucca houses, 27.90% in kuccha houses, and 18.45% in semi-pucca houses. (Table 6.8) This suggests that while many Nat households are settled, settlement does not always mean secure or adequate housing.

Sanitation access remains inadequate. Among Nat respondents, 52.36% reported having a personal toilet, while 46.35% still relied on open defecation. (Table 6.9) Even among those with personal toilets, 77.05% reported that the toilet had no water connection, severely limiting usability. (Table 6.10)

Table 6.2: Social Category Composition of Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

Social Category	Top 5+1 Tribes		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	(%)	Count	(%)	Count	(%)	Count	(%)	Count	(%)	Count	(%)	Count	(%)
SC	537	52.45	110	47.21	182	81.61	158	98.74	25	15.72	35	23.03	16	16.67
OBC	231	22.6	121	51.93	-	-	1	0.63	11	6.92	109	71.71	-	-
ST	195	19.08	1	0.43	41	18.39	-	-	80	50.31	-	-	73	76.04
VJNT (Maharashtra)	52	5.09	1	0.43	-	-	-	-	43	27.04	8	5.26	-	-
MBC (Tamil Nadu)	7	0.68	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	7.29
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

(Percentages have been rounded to make 100)

Table 6.3: Social Group Composition of Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

Social Group	Top 5 +1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
DNT	886	86.69	184	78.97	218	97.76	159	100	138	86.79	144	94.74	43	44.79
NT	118	11.55	49	21.03	-	-	-	-	8	5.03	8	5.26	53	55.21
SNT	18	1.76	-	-	5	2.24	-	-	13	8.18	-	-	-	-
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.4: Possession of Agricultural Land Among Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
Possession of Agricultural Land	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No owned land no leased land	951	93.05	218	93.56	221	99.1	157	98.74	140	88.05	143	94.08	72	75
Own Land	52	5.09	15	6.44	2	0.9	2	1.26	-	-	9	5.92	24	25
Leased Land	19	1.86	-	-	-	-	-	-	19	11.95	-	-	-	-
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.5: Ownership Pattern of Agricultural Land Among Landowning Households Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
Possession of Agricultural Land	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No owned land no leased land	951	93.05	218	93.56	221	99.1	157	98.74	140	88.05	143	94.08	72	75
Own Land	52	5.09	15	6.44	2	0.9	2	1.26	-	-	9	5.92	24	25
Leased Land	19	1.86	-	-	-	-	-	-	19	11.95	-	-	-	-
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.6: Housing Type at Current Place of Stay Among Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

Housing Type	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Permanent Structure	642	62.82	207	88.84	159	71.3	43	27.04	45	28.3	148	97.37	40	41.67
Tent	170	16.63	20	8.58	46	20.63	88	55.35	15	9.43	1	0.66	-	-
Govern-ment Shelter	7	0.68	-	-	1	0.45	-	-	4	2.52	-	-	2	2.08
Semi-per-manent	153	14.97	4	1.72	12	5.38	28	17.61	63	39.62	3	1.97	43	44.79
Others	36	3.52	1	0.43	1	0.45	-	-	23	14.47	-	-	11	11.46
Tem-porary/ Makeshift Structure	14	1.37	1	0.43	4	1.79	-	-	9	5.66	-	-	-	-
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.7: Ownership Status of Current Place of Residence Among Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + !		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Owned - Self Financed	754	73.78	223	95.71	212	95.07	69	43.4	64	40.25	118	77.63	68	70.83
Owned - Government Provided	71	6.95	2	0.86	10	4.48	4	2.52	40	25.16	1	0.66	14	14.58
Rented	8	0.78	1	0.43	-	-	4	2.52	1	0.63	1	0.66	1	1.04
Others	189	18.49	7	3	1	0.45	82	51.57	54	33.96	32	21.05	13	13.54
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.8: Structural Type of Housing Among Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Kuccha	400	39.14	65	27.9	87	39.01	100	62.89	98	61.64	30	19.74	20	20.83
Pucca	360	35.23	125	53.65	118	52.91	9	5.66	2	1.26	61	40.13	45	46.88
Semi-Pucca	262	25.64	43	18.45	18	8.07	50	31.45	59	37.11	61	40.13	31	32.29
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Focus group discussions (FGDs) reveal that landlessness among Nat households is closely tied to housing insecurity and precarious settlement conditions. Even where families report owning homes, respondents frequently clarified that such ownership often refers to informal and undocumented possession rather than legally recognised title. Houses are commonly located on village commons, panchayat land, or privately owned land occupied with informal permission. As several participants observed, *"ghar apna hai, par kagaz nahi hai"* ("the house is ours, but we do not have papers"), highlighting persistent fears of eviction and exclusion from housing-related welfare schemes.

FGDs further indicated that the quality of housing remains poor despite apparent settlement. Nat families living in kuccha structures described shelters constructed from tarpaulin, bamboo, cloth, mud, and dried leaves that provide limited protection from extreme weather. Women spoke of the disproportionate burden they bear in managing these conditions, particularly during the monsoon season. One respondent explained that rainwater leaks throughout the night, forcing children to remain awake and making caregiving particularly difficult. Participants also described houses as vulnerable to flooding, excessive heat, and seasonal deterioration.

Sanitation-related discussions revealed that the presence of toilets does not necessarily translate into meaningful access. Respondents repeatedly reported that toilets constructed under government schemes were often incomplete, poorly built, or unusable because of the absence of water supply, drainage, or adequate space. Women described having to organise their daily routines around open defecation, often leaving home before dawn or after dark to avoid embarrassment. These journeys were associated with fears of harassment, snake bites, and suspicion from police, particularly in settlements located near highways or agricultural fields.

Qualitative evidence also challenges simplistic assumptions about sedentarisation. Many Nat households described maintaining a permanent or semi-permanent home in the village for women,

Table 6.9: Type of Toilet Facility Used by Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Personal Toilet	363	35.52	122	52.36	34	15.25	52	32.70	7	4.40	119	78.29	29	30.21
Community/ Shared/ Others	31	3.03	3	1.29	4	1.79	3	1.89	16	10.06	1	0.66	4	4.17
Open Defecation	628	61.45	108	46.35	185	82.96	104	65.41	136	85.53	32	21.05	63	65.63
Total	**1022**	**100.00**	**233**	**100.00**	**223**	**100.00**	**159**	**100.00**	**159**	**100.00**	**152**	**100.00**	**96**	**100.00**

Table 6.10: Availability of Water Connection in Personal Toilets Amongst Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	271	74.66	94	77.05	34	100	42	80.77	7	100	65	54.62	29	100
Yes	92	25.34	28	22.95	-	-	10	19.23	-	-	54	45.38	-	-
Total	**363**	**100**	**122**	**100**	**34**	**100**	**52**	**100**	**7**	**100**	**119**	**100**	**29**	**100**

children, and elderly family members, while working-age adults continue to travel seasonally for performances, wage labour, or begging circuits. During these periods of mobility, families often stay in temporary tents or makeshift shelters despite technically owning a house elsewhere. Respondents explained that maintaining a fixed residence is necessary to retain access to ration cards, schooling, and local recognition, while mobility remains essential for livelihood survival. As a result, settlement and mobility coexist rather than represent opposing conditions.

Overall, the qualitative findings point to a pattern of precarious sedentarisation. While many Nat families have established residential bases, these homes are frequently characterised by insecure tenure, inadequate infrastructure, poor housing quality, and limited access to basic services. The transition from mobility to settlement has therefore occurred without corresponding improvements in land rights, housing security, sanitation, or state support, leaving households vulnerable to eviction, exclusion, and continuing social marginalisation.

Education

The educational profile of Nat women shows deep exclusion, though their position is somewhat better than the overall Top Five-Plus-One sample. Among Nat respondents, 46.78% had never been enrolled in school, 36.05% had been previously enrolled, and 17.17% were currently enrolled. (Table 6.11) In comparison, the overall sample recorded 60.67% never enrolled, 22.60% previously enrolled, and 16.73% currently enrolled. (Table 6.11)

Among Nat respondents who were never enrolled, the leading reason was absence of a school in the vicinity, reported by 45.88%. Frequent migration was cited by 25.69%, lack of documents by 20.18%, and family restrictions by only 0.92%. (Table 6.12) This indicates that educational exclusion among Nats is driven more by mobility, documentation barriers, and infrastructural gaps than by family restrictions.

Among those previously enrolled, most Nat respondents had low educational attainment. 42.86% had studied only up to Standard 5 or

Table 6.11: Status of Enrolment in Education Amongst Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Currently Enrolled	171	16.73	40	17.17	-	-	34	21.38	2	1.26	90	59.21	5	5.21
Never Enrolled	620	60.67	109	46.78	174	78.03	102	64.15	141	88.68	17	11.18	77	80.21
Previously Enrolled	231	22.6	84	36.05	49	21.97	23	14.47	16	10.06	45	29.61	14	14.58
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.12: Status of Enrolment in Education Amongst Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Frequent Migration	71	11.45	28	25.69	14	8.04	0	0	5	3.55	0	0	24	31.17
Lack of Documents	52	8.38	22	20.18	4	2.3	17	16.67	2	1.42	1	5.88	9	11.7
No School in Vicinity	268	43.23	50	45.88	149	85.64	57	55.88	7	4.97	2	11.76	0	0
Restricted by Family	154	24.84	1	0.92	4	2.3	25	24.51	110	78.02	12	70.59	2	2.6
Others	75	12.1	8	7.34	3	1.72	3	2.94	17	12.06	2	11.76	42	54.55
Total	**620**	**100**	**109**	**100**	**174**	**100**	**102**	**100**	**141**	**100**	**17**	**100**	**77**	**100**

below, 33.33% reached Standards 6–8, 15.48% reached Standards 9–10, and only 4.76% reached Standards 11–12. Graduate, diploma/vocational, and postgraduate levels were each reported by only 1.19%. (Table 6.14) Thus, although Nat respondents show relatively better school entry than some other communities, progression beyond middle school remains limited.

FGDs indicate that educational exclusion among Nat women is shaped less by individual choice and more by structural barriers linked to mobility, documentation gaps, and inadequate educational infrastructure. Women who had never attended school frequently cited seasonal movement, the absence of nearby schools, lack of necessary documents, and, in some cases, family restrictions as reasons for non-enrolment. The overlap of these barriers was particularly significant, with migration often intersecting with documentation problems and poor access to schooling facilities, making sustained educational participation difficult.

The findings suggest that the Nat community's long history of occupational mobility continues to influence educational outcomes. Historical patterns of movement associated with performance-based livelihoods, combined with the enduring stigma attached to De-Notified communities, appear to disrupt educational continuity and integration into formal schooling systems. Educational exclusion is therefore linked not only to present-day poverty but also to broader processes of social marginalisation and administrative exclusion.

Table 6.13: Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts Amongst Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	897	87.77	168	72.1	221	99.1	154	96.86	156	98.11	125	82.24	73	76.04
Yes	125	12.23	65	27.9	2	0.9	5	3.14	3	1.89	27	17.76	23	23.96
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.14: If Previously Enrolled, Level of Educational Attainment Amongst Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Graduate	2	0.87	1	1.19	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2.22	-	-
Diploma/ Vocational Degree	2	0.87	1	1.19	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2.22	-	-
Postgrad-uate and Above	1	0.43	1	1.19	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Standard 11th to 12th	17	7.36	4	4.76	-	-	4	17.39	-	-	7	15.56	2	14.29
Standard 9th to 10th	30	12.99	13	15.48	-	-	2	8.7	3	18.75	10	22.22	2	14.29
Standard 6th to 8th	59	25.54	28	33.33	8	16.33	7	30.43	6	37.5	9	20	1	7.14
Standard 5th or below	120	51.95	36	42.86	41	83.67	10	43.48	7	43.75	17	37.78	9	64.29
Total	**231**	**100**	**84**	**100**	**49**	**100**	**23**	**100**	**16**	**100**	**45**	**100**	**14**	**100**

FGDs highlighted the tension between immediate livelihood needs and long-term educational aspirations. Several women explained that traditional performance and entertainment work remains an important source of identity and occasional income, but the irregular nature of earnings often takes precedence over schooling. One performer observed, *"Humara kaam jab hota hai tabhi bachche ko bazaar mein le jaa ke thoda paisa milta hai; school toh tab kaam aata hai"* ("We earn a little money only when work is available and the child accompanies us to the market; school becomes less important at that time"). This reflects the difficult choices households make when immediate economic survival competes with investment in education.

Qualitative accounts further suggest that where Nat children do enter school, educational trajectories are frequently interrupted. Schooling often ends at the primary or middle level, resulting in limited educational attainment and a group of partially literate individuals who may be able to complete basic tasks such as reading simple forms but lack the qualifications required for stable formal-sector employment. Overall, the evidence points to a pattern of persistent educational marginalisation shaped by mobility, poverty, administrative barriers, and the continuing effects of historical exclusion.

Livelihoods, Working Conditions and Livelihood Transitions

Nat livelihoods show strong continuity with traditional occupations but also significant diversification. According to Table 6.15, 46.35% of Nat respondents reported non-farm traditional

work only, while 17.17% reported farm-only work, 15.45% non-farm other work only, 8.15% both farm and non-farm traditional work, and 12.02% no work.

A more detailed livelihood classification shows that 46.78% of Nat respondents were engaged in traditional livelihood practices, 21.89% in animal husbandry, 12.45% in public works, 3.43% in agricultural activity, 2.58% in construction, and 12.02% reported no work. (Table 6.16) This confirms that traditional performance remains central, but it no longer sustains households on its own.

Training in traditional arts or crafts was reported by 27.90% of Nat respondents, much higher than the overall sample average of 12.23%. (Table 6.13) This confirms the continuing importance of inherited performance skills within the community.

Workplace abuse was reported by a minority but remains significant. Among Nat respondents for whom this question applied, 81.50% reported no abuse, while 10.00% reported verbal abuse, 8.00% reported unpaid wages, and 0.50% reported sexual abuse. (Table 6.17)

FGDs reveal that traditional performance remains central to Nat identity, but it is no longer sufficient to sustain household livelihoods. Respondents repeatedly emphasised that a single occupation can no longer support a family, summarised in the common observation that "ek kaam se ghar nahi chalta" ("one form of work is not enough to run a household"). As a result, households increasingly combine performance work with agricultural labour, animal husbandry, public works, construction, and other forms of wage labour. This diversification reflects not occupational flexibility alone but a survival strategy developed in response to declining patronage and economic insecurity.

Traditional occupations such as folk dance, music, acrobatics, puppetry, and street performance continue to function as important repositories of cultural knowledge, involving inter-generational transmission of skills, collective discipline, and community identity. However, respondents described a significant shift in the organisation of this work. Performance activities that were once embedded within kinship networks and traditional patronage systems are increasingly mediated by contractors, event organisers, and intermediaries, reducing performers' control over wages and working conditions.

FGDs across Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Haryana consistently pointed to the erosion of traditional performance spaces. Participants described shrinking opportunities as village fairs have declined, household performances have become rare, and weddings increasingly rely on recorded music rather than live performers. One recurring observation was that *"ab log mele mein dancer nahi bulate"* ("people no longer call dancers to the fairs"), reflecting the decline of traditional patronage networks. Many performers linked their economic difficulties directly to these changes.

Women performers spoke extensively about the social costs of continuing in traditional occupations. They reported facing harassment, moral stigma, and scrutiny while travelling for performances, making mobility both physically risky and emotionally stressful. Several young women described growing disillusionment with performance work and a preference for agricultural labour or other wage employment because of the low and unpredictable returns from their art. Yet many also expressed a deep attachment to their cultural heritage. As one young woman explained, *"Nach-gana se pet nahi bharta. Par ye hi hamari pehchaan bhi hai"* ("Dance and singing do not fill our stomachs, but this is also our identity"). This tension between cultural pride and economic hardship emerged repeatedly in discussions.

Qualitative evidence also highlights the persistence of mixed livelihood and settlement strategies. Many Nat families maintain a stable residential base where children and elderly family members remain, while working-age adults travel seasonally for performances, agricultural labour, or other forms of work. Mobility therefore remains both culturally embedded and economically necessary. Rather than representing a failure to settle, seasonal

Table 6.15: Reported Livelihood Practices as per Sector Amongst Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Farm Only	239	23.39	40	17.17	45	20.18	22	13.84	78	49.06	42	27.63	12	12.5
Non-Farm Other Only	306	29.94	36	15.45	167	74.89	26	16.35	2	1.26	40	26.32	35	36.46
Non-Farm Tra-di-tional Only	267	26.13	108	46.35	4	1.79	27	16.98	32	20.13	54	35.53	42	43.75
Both Farm and Non-Farm Other	5	0.49	-	-	1	0.45	2	1.26	-	-	1	0.66	1	1.04
Both Farm and Non-Farm Tra-di-tional	34	3.33	19	8.15	-	-	6	3.77	2	1.26	7	4.61	1	1.04
Both Non-Farm Other and Non-Farm Tra-di-tional	3	0.29	1	0.43	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.66	-	-
Farm and Non-Farm Other and Non-Farm Tra-di-tional	1	0.1	1	0.43	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-
No Work	167	16.34	28	12.02	6	2.69	76	47.8	45	28.3	7	4.61	5	5.21
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.16: Reported Livelihood Practices Amongst Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Agri-cultural Activity	73	7.14	8	3.43	10	4.48	3	1.89	35	22.01	5	3.29	12	12.50
Animal Hus-bandry	188	18.40	51	21.89	21	9.42	25	15.72	45	28.30	45	29.61	1	1.04
Con-struction Activity	72	7.05	6	2.58	15	6.73	20	12.58	0	0.00	31	20.39	0	0.00
Forest Produce Collec-tion	18	1.76	1	0.43	15	6.73	2	1.26	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Manu-facturing Activity	5	0.49	0	0.00	1	0.45	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	1.32	2	2.08
Mining Activity	1	0.10	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.63	0	0.00	0	0.00
No Work	167	16.34	28	12.02	6	2.69	76	47.80	45	28.30	7	4.61	5	5.21
Public Works	198	19.37	29	12.45	126	56.50	6	3.77	0	0.00	6	3.95	31	32.29
Services	30	2.94	1	0.43	25	11.21	0	0.00	1	0.63	1	0.66	2	2.08
Tradi-tional Live-lihood Practic-es	270	26.42	109	46.78	4	1.79	27	16.98	32	20.13	55	36.18	43	44.79
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.17: Abuse at Workplace as Reported by Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
None	632	74.35	163	81.50	136	62.67	55	67.07	95	83.33	118	81.38	65	70.65
Mental Abuse	5	0.59	0	0.00	2	0.92	0	0.00	1	0.88	2	1.38	0	0.00
Verbal Abuse	111	13.06	20	10.00	17	7.83	25	30.49	3	2.63	23	15.86	22	23.91
Phys-ical Abuse	32	3.76	0	0.00	18	8.29	1	1.22	10	8.77	1	0.69	3	3.26
Sexual Abuse	3	0.35	1	0.50	1	0.46	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	1.09
Unpaid Wages	67	7.88	16	8.00	43	19.82	1	1.22	5	4.39	1	0.69	1	1.09
Total	**850**	**100**	**200**	**100**	**217**	**100**	**82**	**100**	**114**	**100**	**145**	**100**	**92**	**100**

movement functions as a livelihood strategy that allows households to combine access to local entitlements, schooling, and social recognition with the need to seek income elsewhere.

Across discussions, respondents portrayed traditional performance not simply as an occupation but as a source of identity, dignity, and collective memory. Even as livelihoods diversify and economic returns decline, performance continues to organise social relationships and aspirations. The findings suggest that Nat households are engaged in a continual negotiation between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to changing labour markets. Their livelihood strategies therefore reflect both vulnerability and resilience, demonstrating an effort to retain cultural identity while responding to the realities of economic decline and shrinking opportunities for traditional artistic labour.

Migration

Migration is an important livelihood strategy among Nats. While 23.87% of the overall Top Five-Plus-One sample reported migrating for work, the proportion among Nats was higher at 35.62%. (Table 6.18) This places the Nats among the more mobile communities in the sample, though not universally migratory.

Among Nat migrants, the main reason for migration was better work opportunity, reported by 61.45%. Better wage rates were cited by 21.69%, better working conditions by 12.05%, no work opportunity at source by 2.41%, and other reasons by 2.41%. (Table 6.19) This suggests that Nat migration is not only distress-driven but also linked to the search for better income, continuity of work, and occupational opportunity.

FGDs suggest that migration among the Nat community is best understood as a continuation of longstanding patterns of mobility rather than a simple response to economic distress. Focus group discussions revealed that migration is typically short-term, circular, and seasonal, with many households maintaining a permanent residential base where children attend school and older family members remain, while working-age adults travel temporarily for performances, agricultural labour, public works, or informal urban employment. As one participant explained, *"Hum gaon chhod ke nahi jaate, bas kaam ke liye thode din bahar rehte hain"* ("We do not leave the village; we simply stay outside for work for a few days").

Respondents described migration as closely linked to the transformation of traditional performance economies. Although opportunities for performances have declined, they have not disappeared entirely. Many Nat performers continue to travel between villages, towns, and districts to participate in weddings, fairs, and festivals where performances are still occasionally commissioned. As a result, migration often combines cultural work with wage labour, blurring the distinction between occupational mobility and labour migration. Homes remain important anchors of social identity and access to entitlements, while mobility continues to provide income and sustain cultural occupations.

Women's experiences of migration reflected both opportunity and vulnerability. Participants reported facing harassment during travel, moral policing of women performers, and unsafe accommodation arrangements while moving along performance circuits. These concerns have led some younger women to withdraw from performance-related

Table 6.18: Do You Migrate for Work? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	778	76.13	150	64.38	196	87.89	127	79.87	132	83.02	103	67.76	70	72.92
Yes	244	23.87	83	35.62	27	12.11	32	20.13	27	16.98	49	32.24	26	27.08
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.19: Why Do You Migrate for Work? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Better Wage Rate	53	21.72	18	21.69	8	29.63	11	34.38	2	7.41	14	28.57	0	0.00
Better Work Opportunity	125	51.23	51	61.45	6	22.22	15	46.88	0	0.00	31	63.27	22	84.62
Better Working Conditions	45	18.44	10	12.05	10	37.04	5	15.63	16	59.26	3	6.12	1	3.85
Discrimination	3	1.23	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	7.41	0	0.00	1	3.85
No Work Opportunity at Source	13	5.33	2	2.41	2	7.41	0	0.00	7	25.93	0	0.00	2	7.69
Others	5	2.05	2	2.41	1	3.70	1	3.13	0	0.00	1	2.04	0	0.00
Total	**244**	**100**	**83**	**100**	**27**	**100**	**32**	**100**	**27**	**100**	**49**	**100**	**26**	**100**

travel and instead seek local agricultural or wage labour, even when such work offers lower returns. At the same time, some women described migration as providing greater autonomy and freedom from restrictive village labour relations, particularly when travelling with trusted kinship networks or community groups.

Overall, the qualitative evidence points to a form of "embedded mobility" in which movement remains socially organised, culturally meaningful, and economically necessary. Migration among Nats is not experienced as a complete break from settled life or cultural tradition. Rather, it represents an ongoing adaptation to declining performance patronage, changing labour markets, and household survival needs. Respondents consistently portrayed mobility as a strategy through which they negotiate economic security while maintaining community identity and social belonging.

Access to Welfare

Nat respondents show high access to basic documents but weaker access to substantive welfare. Aadhaar possession was reported by 95.71%, while 87.98% had voter ID cards. (Tables 6.20 and 6.21) Ration card possession was also relatively high at 80.69%. (Table 6.22)

However, poverty recognition and welfare access remain uneven. Only 38.63% had BPL cards, while 59.23% did not. (Table 6.23) PAN card possession was reported by 54.51%, and Jan Dhan account access by 73.82%. (Tables 6.24 and 6.36) NREGA card possession was reported by 57.94%. (Table 6.25)

Access to targeted welfare was weak. Only 1.72% of Nat respondents reported support under SEED, while 85.84% reported no access and 11.16% did not know about the scheme. (Table 6.26) PM Garib Kalyan Yojana support was reported by 54.51%, while livelihood support schemes reached only 13.30%. (Tables 6.27 and 6.28)

Housing support was limited despite high housing insecurity. Only 13.73% reported support under PMAY, and 11.16% reported support from other housing schemes. (Tables 6.29 and 6.30) Health protection was also partial: 35.62% were enrolled in PMJAY, while only 9.87% had other medical insurance. (Tables 6.31 and 6.32)

Sanitation and water-related welfare access was weak. Only 12.45% reported support under Swachh Bharat Mission, and only 8.15% reported support under Jal Jeevan Mission. (Tables 6.33 and 6.35) Access to NT-DNT hostels was extremely low at 1.29%. (Table 6.34)

FGDs suggest that while Nat households possess relatively high levels of basic documentation, this rarely translates into meaningful welfare access or social protection. Respondents frequently described a disconnect between being documented by the state and actually benefiting from government schemes. Aadhaar enrolment camps were among the few government initiatives that consistently reached Nat settlements, often with support from NGOs or local intermediaries. However, many participants viewed Aadhaar primarily as an identity document rather than a pathway to entitlements, encapsulated in the observation: *"Aadhaar toh sabka hai, par yojana kisi ki nahi"* ("Everyone has Aadhaar, but schemes belong to no one").

FGDs revealed that access to electoral rights remains fragile despite relatively high voter registration. Respondents reported problems such as names being deleted from voter rolls, changes in polling locations, and disruptions caused by seasonal migration. Women in particular described how marriage-related mobility and travel for performances or wage labour often resulted in exclusion from electoral processes.

Access to food security schemes was also described as partial and unreliable. Participants reported that ration cards often failed to cover all household members or remained linked to outdated addresses. Seasonal migrants frequently experienced difficulties accessing ration entitlements outside their home locations due to biometric authentication failures and portability issues. As one respondent remarked, *"Gaon se bahar gaye toh ration bhi chhoot jaata hai"* ("When we go outside the village, ration is lost as well"), highlighting the challenges faced by mobile households.

Discussions around poverty identification revealed widespread frustration with the criteria used to determine eligibility for welfare benefits. Nat households often reported being excluded from BPL status because occasional earnings from

Table 6.20: Abuse at Workplace as Reported by Respondents Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	989	96.77	223	95.71	217	97.31	153	96.23	154	96.86	152	100	90	93.75
No	30	2.94	10	4.29	5	2.24	4	2.52	5	3.14	-	-	6	6.25
Not Applicable	1	0.1	-	-	-	-	1	0.63	-	-	-	-	-	-
Don't Know	2	0.2	-	-	1	0.45	1	0.63	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100.01**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.21: Do you have a Voter ID Card? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Don't Know	3	0.29	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1.26	-	-	1	1.04
No	137	13.41	28	12.02	20	8.97	44	27.67	24	15.09	7	4.61	14	14.58
Not Applicable	2	0.2	-	-	2	0.9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yes	880	86.11	205	87.98	201	90.13	115	72.33	133	83.65	145	95.39	81	84.38
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.22: Do you have a Ration Card? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	775	75.83	188	80.69	163	73.09	113	71.07	76	47.8	148	97.37	87	90.62
No	240	23.48	44	18.88	55	24.66	46	28.93	83	52.2	4	2.63	8	8.33
Don't Know	1	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.04
Not Applicable	6	0.59	1	0.43	5	2.24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.23: Do you have a BPL Card? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	344	33.66	90	38.63	108	48.43	71	44.65	26	16.35	46	30.26	3	3.12
No	615	60.18	138	59.23	100	44.84	87	54.72	133	83.65	105	69.08	52	54.17
Don't Know	43	4.21	5	2.15	1	0.45	-	-	-	-	-	-	37	38.54
Not Applicable	20	1.96	-	-	14	6.28	1	0.63	-	-	1	0.66	4	4.17
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.24: Do you have a PAN Card? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	413	40.41	127	54.51	19	8.52	73	45.91	32	20.13	111	73.03	51	53.12
No	547	53.52	94	40.34	158	70.85	85	53.46	126	79.25	41	26.97	43	44.79
Don't Know	16	1.57	12	5.15	-	-	1	0.63	1	0.63	-	-	2	2.08
Not Applicable	46	4.5	-	-	46	20.63	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.25: Do you have a NREGA Card? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	482	47.16	135	57.94	184	82.51	44	27.67	6	3.77	104	68.42	9	9.38
No	522	51.08	98	42.06	37	16.59	115	72.33	152	95.6	48	31.58	72	75
Don't Know	8	0.78	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	8.33
Not Applicable	10	0.98	-	-	2	0.9	-	-	1	0.63	-	-	7	7.29
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.26: Do you have Access to support from Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED)? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	12	1.17	4	1.72	4	1.79	2	1.26	-	-	1	0.66	1	1.04
No	833	81.51	200	85.84	143	64.13	132	83.02	154	96.86	151	99.34	53	55.21
Don't Know	85	8.32	26	11.16	1	0.45	23	14.47	5	3.14	-	-	30	31.25
Not Applicable	92	9	3	1.29	75	33.63	2	1.26	-	-	-	-	12	12.50
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.27: Do you have Access to support from PM Garib Kalyan Yojana? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	501	49.02	127	54.51	158	70.85	84	52.83	25	15.72	97	63.82	10	10.42
No	470	45.99	101	43.35	60	26.91	73	45.91	134	84.28	55	36.18	47	48.96
Not Applicable	15	1.47	1	0.43	5	2.24	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	9.38
Don't Know	36	3.52	4	1.72	-	-	2	1.26	-	-	-	-	30	31.25
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.28: Do you have Access to support from PM Garib Kalyan Yojana? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	59	5.77	31	13.3	8	3.59	3	1.89	-	-	13	8.55	4	4.17
No	833	81.51	197	84.55	144	64.57	152	95.6	152	95.6	138	90.79	50	52.08
Not Applicable	85	8.32	-	-	71	31.84	1	0.63	1	0.63	-	-	12	12.5
Don't Know	45	4.4	5	2.15	-	-	3	1.89	6	3.77	1	0.66	30	31.25
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.29: Do you have Access to support from Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	149	14.58	32	13.73	103	46.19	1	0.63	1	0.63	10	6.58	2	2.08
No	768	75.15	194	83.26	74	33.18	154	96.86	151	94.97	142	93.42	53	55.21
Not Applicable	61	5.97	1	0.43	46	20.63	-	-	-	0.63	-	-	13	13.54
Don't Know	44	4.31	6	2.58	-	-	-	2.52	6	3.77	-	-	28	29.17
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100.01**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.30: Do you receive support from any other Housing Support? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	131	12.82	26	11.16	93	41.7	3	1.89	1	0.63	6	3.95	2	2.08
No	782	76.52	198	84.98	85	38.12	149	93.71	152	95.6	146	96.05	52	54.17
Not Applicable	59	5.77	-	-	45	20.18	1	0.63	-	-	-	-	13	13.54
Don't Know	50	4.89	9	3.86	-	-	6	3.77	6	3.77	-	-	29	30.21
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.31: Are you enrolled in PM-JAY (Ayushman Bharat)? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	320	31.31	83	35.62	81	36.32	64	40.25	4	2.52	82	53.95	6	6.25
No	603	59	144	61.8	98	43.95	90	56.6	148	93.08	70	46.05	53	55.21
Not Applicable	66	6.46	6	2.58	44	19.73	2	1.26	2	1.26	-	-	12	12.5
Don't Know	33	3.23	-	-	-	-	3	1.89	5	3.14	-	-	25	26.04
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.32: Are You Enrolled in Other Medical Insurance Scheme? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	100	9.78	23	9.87	1	0.45	20	12.58	1	0.63	43	28.29	12	12.5
No	797	77.98	204	87.55	148	66.37	135	84.91	151	94.97	108	71.05	51	53.12
Not Applicable	92	9	3	1.29	74	33.18	-	-	1-	0.63	1	0.66	13	13.54
Don't Know	33	3.23	3	1.29	-	-	4	2.52	6	3.77	-	-	20	20.83
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.33: Did You Receive Support from Swachh Bharat Mission? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	85	8.32	29	12.45	16	7.17	4	2.52	-	-	33	21.71	3	3.12
No	773	75.64	174	74.68	145	65.02	130	81.76	153	96.23	119	78.29	52	54.17
Not Applicable	74	7.24	2	0.86	60	26.91	1	0.63	-	-	-	-	11	11.46
Don't Know	90	8.81	28	12.02	2	0.9	24	15.09	6	3.77	-	-	30	31.25
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.34: : Do You Have Access to NT/DNT Hostel? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	25	2.45	3	1.29	8	3.59			1	0.63	1	0.66	12	12.5
No	823	80.53	195	83.69	141	63.23	134	84.28	152	95.6	149	98.03	52	54.17
Not Applicable	86	8.41	2	0.86	74	33.18	1	0.63	-	-	-	-	9	9.38
Don't Know	88	8.61	33	14.16	-	-	24	15.09	6	3.77	2	1.32	23	23.96
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.35: Did You Receive Support from Jal Jeevan Mission? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	53	5.19	19	8.15	25	11.21	2	1.26	1	0.63	1	0.66	5	5.21
Not Applicable	84	8.22	2	0.86	68	30.49	1	0.63	-	-	-	-	13	13.54
No	806	78.86	186	79.83	129	57.85	139	87.42	152	95.6	151	99.34	49	51.04
Don't Know	79	7.73	26	11.16	1	0.45	17	10.69	6	3.77			29	30.21
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.36: Did You Have a Jan Dhan Bank Account? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	538	52.64	172	73.82	183	82.06	52	32.7	27	16.98	99	65.13	5	5.21
No	444	43.44	60	25.75	36	16.14	107	67.3	132	83.02	53	34.87	56	58.33
Not Applicable	7	0.68	-	-	4	1.79	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3.12
Don't Know	33	3.23	1	0.43	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	32	33.33
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**99.99**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**99.99**

Table 6.37: Did You Have Any Other Bank Account? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	360	35.23	91	39.06	27	12.11	26	16.35	49	30.82	93	61.18	74	77.08
Not Applicable	61	5.97	1	0.43	59	26.46	-	-	-	-	1	0.66	-	-
No	600	58.71	141	60.52	137	61.43	133	83.65	110	69.18	58	38.16	21	21.88
Don't Know	1	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.04
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

performances or short-term contracts created an impression of income stability. Respondents felt that welfare assessments failed to account for the seasonal and unpredictable nature of their livelihoods. As one participant observed, *"Kabhi paisa aata hai, par saal bhar ka hisaab kaun dekhta hai?"* ("Sometimes money comes, but who looks at the whole year's account?").

Financial inclusion was similarly uneven. While many respondents possessed bank accounts and financial documents, participants explained that accounts were often used only for receiving occasional transfers rather than sustained financial activity. Women frequently reported difficulties accessing banking services because of distance, documentation requirements, and discomfort when dealing with officials.

Access to employment-linked welfare was constrained by implementation challenges. Respondents described delays in MGNREGA muster rolls, discrimination by members of other communities, and preferential treatment for dominant caste households. Seasonal migration for performances and wage labour also meant that many families were unable to take advantage of available work opportunities even when they possessed job cards.

Qualitative evidence further pointed to the near absence of targeted outreach under schemes specifically intended for De-Notified and Nomadic Tribes. Most respondents were unfamiliar with the SEED scheme and often confused it with general loan programmes, suggesting weak dissemination and limited engagement by implementing agencies. This was widely perceived as evidence of institutional neglect despite the Nat community's historical identification as a De-Notified group.

Housing-related welfare was also undermined by insecure tenure. Respondents reported that the absence of formal land titles or disputes over land ownership routinely prevented them from qualifying for housing schemes. As a result,

households living in permanent structures often remained excluded from housing support because their occupation of land lacked formal recognition.

Health-related welfare access was similarly constrained. Participants described limited use of health insurance schemes due to poor awareness, concerns about hidden costs, and instances where hospitals reportedly refused services. Consequently, many households continued to depend on out-of-pocket expenditure and informal healthcare arrangements.

Finally, discussions around sanitation and water revealed a persistent gap between infrastructure creation and actual access. Respondents reported that toilets constructed under government programmes frequently lacked water connections, rendering them difficult to use. Women were particularly affected, as inadequate water supply reduced the practical benefits of sanitation interventions.

Overall, the qualitative findings portray a community that is highly visible to the state through documents and electoral registration but remains weakly protected by welfare systems. Respondents consistently described welfare access as fragmented, unreliable, and poorly adapted to the realities of mobile and precarious livelihoods. Formal inclusion through documentation has therefore not translated into substantive social protection, secure entitlements, or responsive state support.

Box 1

Grassroots Resistance, Women's Empowerment and the Nat Community's Journey to Justice

A Case Study of the Nat Samuday Sangharsh Samiti

This case study draws on an interview with activist Nat Dev Kumar, a founding member of the Nat Samuday Sangharsh Samiti (NSSS), established in 2005 in Belwa Nat Basti, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. His account offers insight into how community-based organising emerged from within the Nat community to address both everyday survival needs and systemic injustices, particularly those affecting women.

Dev Kumar describes his longstanding engagement with social issues in the community, with a strong emphasis on women's empowerment. One of the key initiatives undertaken by the NSSS was the establishment of a stitching centre in Sewapuri, Varanasi. Started through small community contributions (chanda), the centre has been running for two years and currently supports 19 girls, of whom nine have acquired skills in stitching petticoats and blouses. This initiative marked a significant shift in gender norms: at the outset, many women were reluctant to step out of their homes, as most were engaged in daily wage labour such as construction work. The centre not only provided skills and income opportunities but also created a space for women's collective participation.

The NSSS itself emerged in a context of limited external engagement and growing awareness of rights. In its early days, an NGO worked with the community around access to ration cards and supported the running of a small school in Belwa Basti. The school operated on a nominal fee of one rupee per child, and Dev Kumar himself taught there. These early experiences, including participation in surveys and campaigns such as the Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan, contributed to a growing consciousness about rights and entitlements, even as they provoked resistance from dominant caste groups.

A major turning point for the organisation came in response to incidents of police violence and harassment. Dev Kumar recounts a case from Majgawa Nat Basti, where members of the community were falsely

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Political Reservation, Representation and Civic Participation

Despite high levels of documentation, the Nat community remains largely excluded from reservation benefits and institutional representation. Only 0.86% of Nat respondents reported having benefited from reservation, while 99.14% had not. (Table 6.38) The two respondents who benefited did so only in school education, and both accessed reservation under the SC category. (Tables 6.39 and 6.40)

Civic participation was also limited. Only 3.00% of Nat respondents participated in Gram Sabha meetings, while 75.97% did not and 21.03% considered the question not applicable. (Table 6.41) None of the Nat respondents had ever been a member of any local government institution. (Table 6.42)

Collective membership was nearly absent. Only 0.43% of Nat respondents reported membership in a Forest Protection Committee, 0.43% in a farmer or artisan organisation, and 0.86% in a women's group. No Nat respondent reported membership in a trade union. (Tables 6.43 to 6.46)

Engagement with state institutions was somewhat higher but outcomes were poor. 23.61% of Nat respondents had approached a government official for a benefit or grievance. Among them, only 10.91% reported resolution, while 69.09% said the matter was not resolved and 20.00% said it was pending. (Tables 6.47 and 6.48)

Only 3.43% had approached an elected representative. Among those who did, 25.00% reported resolution, 62.50% reported no resolution, and 12.50% said the matter was pending. (Tables 6.49 and 6.50)

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accused of cow slaughter. Following the filing of cases against five to six individuals, nearly 200 families fled the area. Police actions during this period were marked by brutality and extortion. In one instance, a woman named Rannodevi was dragged by her hair and verbally abused by the police. When her husband inter-vened, both were beaten. The police also demanded bribes, with community members collectively raising ₹50,000 to pay local officials, only to face further demands from higher authorities.

Efforts to seek justice through formal channels were met with discrimination and intimidation. When Dev Kumar approached the DCP of Gomti Zone in Varanasi, he was met with caste-based prejudice and threats of imprisonment. Despite this, he pursued the matter through legal avenues, with the support of a lawyer, Mr. Prem Prakash, who helped file complaints with institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Scheduled Castes. However, the police allegedly fabricated evidence, including placing an animal carcass near the basti to strengthen their case. Several community members were arrested and charged under the Uttar Pradesh Control of Goondas Act, 1970.

It was in the aftermath of these events that the NSSS began to actively organise against police atrocities. The experience of collective injustice catalysed a more structured form of resistance, with the organisation taking up issues of legal rights, dignity, and protection from state violence.

Alongside this, the NSSS continued to focus on livelihood generation and reducing distress migration, particularly among women and children. The stitching centre became a key intervention in this regard. Supported in part by ActionAid Association, which provided a fellowship to a local teacher, the initiative helped cover basic operational costs such as electricity and water, ensuring its sustainability.

Overall, this case illustrates how grassroots organisations like the NSSS navigate a complex terrain of social exclusion, gender inequality, and state violence. It highlights the dual strategy of addressing immediate livelihood needs while also building collective resistance against structural injustices

Table 6.38: Have You Benefited from Any Reservation?
Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	991	96.97	231	99.14	222	99.55	154	96.86	145	91.19	145	95.39	94	97.92
Yes	31	3.03	2	0.86	1	0.45	5	3.14	14	8.81	7	4.61	2	2.08
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.39: If You Have Benefited From Reservation – in What Field?
Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
School Education	19	61.29	2	100	1	100	5	100	2	14.29	7	100	2	100
School Education Employment	2	6.45	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	14.29	-	-	-	-
Panchayat Elections	10	32.26	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	71.43	-	-	-	-
Total	**31**	**100**	**2**	**100**	**1**	**100**	**5**	**100**	**14**	**100**	**7**	**100**	**2**	**100**

Table 6.40: If You Have Benefited From Reservation – Under which category did you get reservation?
Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
ST	2	6.45	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	100
VJNT (Maharashtra)	13	41.94	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	92.86	-	-	-	-
OBC	8	25.81	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	7.14	7	100	-	-
SC	8	25.81	2	100	1	100	5	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**31**	**100**	**2**	**100**	**1**	**100**	**5**	**100**	**14**	**100**	**7**	**100**	**2**	**100**

Table 6.41: Do You Participate in Gram Sabha meetings?
Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	19	1.86	7	3	5	2.24	2	1.26	-	-	3	1.97	2	2.08
Not Applicable	173	16.93	49	21.03	122	54.71	-	-	-	-	2	1.32	-	-
No	830	81.21	177	75.97	96	43.05	157	98.74	159	100	147	96.71	94	97.92
Total	1022	100	233	100	223	100	159	100	159	100	152	100	96	100

Table 6.42: Have You Ever Been Member of Any Local Government Institution
Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	6	0.59	-	-	-	-	2	1.26	1	0.63	2	1.32	1	1.04
No	1016	99.41	233	100	223	100	157	98.74	158	99.37	150	98.68	95	98.96
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.43: Have You Ever Been Members of Forest Protection Committee?
Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	3	0.29	1	0.43	-	-	1	0.63	-	-	-	-	1	1.04
No	1019	99.71	232	99.57	223	100	158	99.37	159	100	152	100	95	98.96
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.44: Are You Member of Any Farmer/artisan Organisation?
Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	7	0.68	1	0.43	-	-	2	1.26	2	1.26	1	0.66	1	1.04
No	1015	99.32	232	99.57	223	100	157	98.74	157	98.74	151	99.34	95	98.96
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.45: Are you Member of Any Women's Group?
Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	6	0.59	2	0.86	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1.97	1	1.04
No	1016	99.41	231	99.14	223	100	159	100	159	100	149	98.03	95	98.96
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.46: Are You Member of Any Trade Union?
Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	1017	99.51	233	100	223	100	158	99.37	156	98.11	152	100	95	98.96
Yes	5	0.49	-	-	-	-	1	0.63	3	1.89	-	-	1	1.04
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Overall, the Nat community appears formally visible to the state through documents, voter IDs, ration cards, and bank accounts, but remains weakly protected by welfare systems and largely absent from political representation. Their condition reflects a pattern of partial administrative inclusion without substantive social, economic, or political empowerment.

FGDs revealed that many Nat households experience significant confusion regarding their eligibility for reservation benefits because of the community's fragmented administrative classification. Participants frequently reported uncertainty about whether they belonged to the SC, OBC, or DNT-NT category and which schemes applied to them. Several respondents described being informed by officials that they were ineligible under one category while simultaneously lacking the documentation required to claim benefits under another. As a result, reservation was often perceived not as a practical avenue for advancement but as a theoretical entitlement that remained inaccessible in everyday life.

Discussions also highlighted the limited relevance of formal democratic institutions to many Nat households. Participants commonly viewed Gram Sabha meetings as spaces dominated by landed and socially influential groups, where the concerns of communities such as the Nats received little attention. As one respondent remarked, *"Sab baithte hain par baat unhi ki sunni jaati hai jinke paas zameen hai"* ("Everyone sits there, but only those who have land are heard"). This perception reinforced feelings of exclusion from local decision-making processes and contributed to low levels of participation in village governance.

FGDs further suggested that the absence of land ownership, stable residential documentation, and political patronage creates structural barriers to political representation. Respondents felt that these disadvantages limited opportunities to participate in local governance institutions or access informal networks of influence that shape political outcomes.

Collective political organisation was also reported to be weak. Discussions indicated that the fragmented and informal nature of Nat livelihoods, combined with their dependence on contractors and seasonal work, has limited participation in unions, producer groups, or other collective platforms through which political demands might be articulated. As a result, respondents often described themselves as lacking organised mechanisms to negotiate with authorities or pursue community interests collectively.

Interactions with government officials were frequently characterised by frustration and disillusionment. Participants described repeated visits to government offices, extensive documentation requirements, and demands for informal payments that discouraged continued engagement. Many felt that pursuing grievances was both exhausting and ineffective. One respondent summarised this sentiment by stating, *"Lagate rehte hain sarkari daftar ke chakkar, par kaam nahi hota"* ("We keep running around government offices, but nothing gets done"). These experiences contributed to a perception that state institutions were difficult to access and rarely responsive to community concerns.

FGDs also revealed a deep scepticism towards elected representatives. Many respondents perceived politicians as inaccessible, aligned with dominant caste interests, or interested in engaging with the community only during election periods. Consequently, voting was often viewed as the primary, and sometimes the only, form of political participation available to them. Beyond casting a vote, respondents reported few opportunities to influence decision-making, secure representation, or hold public officials accountable.

Overall, the FGDs portray a community that is formally recognised through identity documents and electoral registration but remains largely excluded from meaningful political participation, reservation benefits, and institutional decision-making. Respondents consistently described a sense of being counted by the state without being adequately represented, heard, or supported.

Table 6.47: Have You Approached Any Government Official for Any Benefit or Grievance? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
No	837	81.9	178	76.39	109	48.88	148	93.08	158	99.37	150	98.68	94	97.92
Yes	185	18.1	55	23.61	114	51.12	11	6.92	1	0.63	2	1.32	2	2.08
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.48: Having Approached a Government Official for a Benefit or Grievance – was the Matter Resolved? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	13	7.03	6	10.91	4	3.51	-	-	-	-	1	50	2	100
No	137	74.05	38	69.09	86	75.44	11	100	1	100	1	50	-	-
Pending	35	18.92	11	20	24	21.05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**185**	**100**	**55**	**100**	**114**	**100**	**11**	**100**	**1**	**100**	**2**	**100**	**2**	**100**

Table 6.49: Have You Approached Any Elected Representative for Any Benefit or Grievance? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	33	3.23	8	3.43	15	6.73	6	3.77	-	-	2	1.32	2	2.08
No	989	96.77	225	96.57	208	93.27	153	96.23	159	100	150	98.68	94	97.92
Total	**1022**	**100**	**233**	**100**	**223**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**159**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**96**	**100**

Table 6.50: Having Approached an Elected Representative for a Benefit or Grievance – was the Matter Resolved? Responses Across Top Five-Plus-One Communities

	Top 5 + 1		Nat		Musahar		Bawariya		Pardhi		Banjara		Narikaruvar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	6	18.18	2	25	2	13.33	1	16.67	-	-	-	-	1	50
No	23	69.7	5	62.5	11	73.33	5	83.33	-	-	1	50	1	50
Pending	4	12.12	1	12.5	2	13.33	-	-	-	-	1	50	-	-
Total	**33**	**100**	**8**	**100**	**15**	**99.99**	**6**	**100**	**-**	**-**	**2**	**100**	**2**	**100**

While the survey and FGD findings reveal the significant barriers that Nat households face in accessing reservation benefits, political representation, and responsive public institutions, they also point to the importance of collective action in overcoming exclusion. In contexts where formal systems often remain inaccessible or unresponsive, community-based organisations can play a critical role in building awareness of rights, facilitating access to entitlements, supporting livelihoods, and creating platforms through which marginalised groups can collectively engage with the state. The experience of the Nat Samuday Sangharsh Samiti (NSSS) in Varanasi illustrates how grassroots organising can help address both immediate socio-economic vulnerabilities and longer-term struggles for dignity, justice, and representation. The text in Box 1: *Grassroots Resistance, Women's Empowerment and the Nat Community's Journey to Justice* highlights the role of community leadership, collective mobilisation, and women's

empowerment in enabling Nat families to assert their rights and claim greater visibility within public institutions.

Musahar Community

Social Profile and Historical Background

The Musahar community, concentrated in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, has long been positioned at the very bottom of rural caste hierarchies. Historically identified as "rat-catchers" and stigmatised as Musahar (translating into those who eat rats), they have been constructed as an "unclean" and "unskilled" caste whose labour is expendable and whose dignity is routinely denied. (ActionAid Association, 2013) Ethnographic work shows that Musahars have for generations been landless agricultural labourers, tied to unequal agrarian relations, brick kilns and casual wage work rather than recognised occupations with rights or security. (Hassan, 2013, pp. 222-235) Within this context of structural marginalisation, Musahar women occupy an even more precarious position. They bear the burden of wage labour, reproduction and care work, while their contributions remain systematically invisibilised within both household and community. (Chand, 2024)

The Musahar community was included in this study because they are one of the most structurally marginalised groups recognised under the De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNT-NT-SNT) framework in Uttar Pradesh. Both the Renke Commission (2008) and the Idate Commission (2018–24) identified Musahars among communities historically criminalised and subjected to extreme socio-economic exclusion, noting that they remain "the poorest of the poor and the most downtrodden" within the DNT category. Although categorised predominately as Scheduled Caste (SC), their simultaneous listing as a DNT Community in Uttar Pradesh places them in a double bind of marginalisation where they continue to face stigma rooted in caste hierarchy compounded by the legacy of colonial policing of mobile and labouring castes. Selecting Musahar households therefore served two analytic purposes, one to document the lived consequences of being placed on the DNT/De-Notified register in UP and secondly to compare how a doubly-marginalised population, through caste-based exclusion and De-Notified status, negotiates livelihoods, access to services and labour markets relative to other DNT and NT groups in our multi-state design. The choice was also pragmatic and methodological. Musahars display consistent indicators of landlessness and labour precarity, and because their DNT recognition is geographically specific (notably formalised in Uttar Pradesh) they allow the study to interrogate how state recognition (or its absence) shapes outcomes at local scales.

Caste Location and Administrative Status

In the present study, Musahar respondents constitute 223 individuals, or 7.43% of the total sample. They are overwhelmingly classified as Scheduled Caste (81.6%), with a significant Scheduled Tribe minority (18.4%), and almost all are recorded as De-Notified Tribes (DNT) in the survey (97%), with a small Semi-Nomadic Tribes (SNT) presence. This dual location - as Scheduled Caste and as DNT - places Musahars in a "double jeopardy" of caste stigma and De-Notified status, reinforcing their exclusion from land, education and formal labour markets. Tables 6.1–6.3)

Land Ownership, Housing and Living Conditions

Landlessness is a defining feature of the Musahar community and is strongly reflected in the survey. An overwhelming 99.1% of Musahar respondents report no agricultural land of their own; only one respondent each reports government-provided land and privately owned land. This aligns with previous research documenting Musahars as historically landless labourers, dependent on landlords for work, housing and access to common resources. (Tables 6.4–6.10).

At first glance, housing indicators might suggest relative stability with 71.3% reporting living in permanent structures at the current place of stay, and 52.9% live in pucca houses, with another 8.1% in semi-pucca structures. Ownership data also show a very high proportion of self-reported "owned" housing (95.1%). However, visits to the

Musahar settlements in Jaunpur and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh explain this finding. Focus group discussions reveal that these "owned" houses are often located in segregated hamlets at the edge of villages, on small and informally held land, with overcrowded dwellings and little access to basic services. Women described small houses that offer some protection from rain but no drainage, erratic electricity and no piped water. Nearly 39% of Musahar respondents still live in kuccha houses, and 20.6% report living in tents, suggesting overlapping and layered housing arrangements within settlements. This means that they do not pay rent to anyone, however, live in makeshift settlements which they have constructed. Among kuccha households, shelter materials typically comprise bamboo, tarpaulin, dried leaves and mud in various combinations, with a majority using fragile mixtures such as "bamboo–tarpaulin–cloth tent–dried leaves–mud."

Toilets are rare with 82.8% of Musahar respondents still depending on open defecation, and among the small group reporting personal toilets, none has a water connection. They often must wake up early in the morning and go to nearby fields when it is still dark, hence becoming a daily source of fear, shame and health risk for women.

Taken together, land and housing data point to a paradoxical spatial condition which indicate Musahar settlements are physically permanent yet socially and materially precarious. They are not mobile in the sense of nomadic groups, but their embeddedness in segregated, under-serviced hamlets reproduces a form of "sedentary marginality" where neither land rights nor urban amenities are meaningfully accessible and available.

Education

Educational exclusion among the Musahar community is severe, entrenched, and inter-generational, reflecting structural deprivation rather than individual choice or cultural disinterest. Survey data shows that 78.03% of Musahar respondents have never been enrolled in formal education, one of the highest proportions across all communities in the study. Only 21.97% were previously enrolled, and none were currently enrolled at the time of the survey. This places Musahars significantly below the overall sample average, where 64.27% were never enrolled and 12.36% were currently enrolled, underscoring the depth of educational marginalisation faced by this group. (Table 6.11).

Among Musahars who had ever entered school, educational attainment remains extremely low. Of the 49 respondents who were previously enrolled, 83.67% did not progress beyond Standard 5, while only 16.33% reached Standards 6–8. None advanced to secondary education, higher secondary schooling, vocational training, or higher education. This sharply truncated schooling trajectory effectively forecloses access to skilled employment, formal sector work, or state services that require basic literacy and certification. Unlike communities such as the Nats or Gadia Lohars, where limited schooling is sometimes supplemented by cultural or artisanal skills, Musahars lack alternative skill pathways that might offset educational exclusion. (Table 6.14).

The reasons for never enrolling in school reveal that Musahar educational deprivation is rooted primarily in spatial, infrastructural, and administrative exclusion rather than migration-induced disruption. Only 7.47% of Musahar respondents cited frequent migration as a sole reason for never enrolling, a relatively minor factor when compared to more mobile groups such as Kalbeliyas or Gadia Lohars. Instead, the dominant barriers are institutional and settlement-level. A large proportion of respondents reported overlapping constraints related to the absence of schools in the vicinity, lack of documentation, and family restrictions. Over 43% cited a combination of no school nearby, lack of documents, and family restrictions, while an additional 15.52% reported the absence of nearby schools combined with documentation barriers. These patterns point to Musahar settlements being physically peripheral, poorly serviced, and administratively invisible, where schooling is either geographically inaccessible or socially exclusionary. (Table 6.12).

Family restrictions, often interpreted narrowly as patriarchal control, must be read in the Musahar context as survival strategies shaped by extreme poverty. For households dependent on daily wage labour, sending children to school entails an immediate loss of care labour and income support within the household. Focus group discussions repeatedly described schooling as competing directly with survival needs, particularly for girls, who are expected to look after younger siblings while adults engage in wage labour. Education is thus not rejected in principle but rendered unattainable under conditions of chronic deprivation.

The near absence of training in traditional arts or crafts further compounds educational exclusion. An overwhelming 99.1% of Musahar respondents reported no training in traditional arts or crafts, the highest proportion among all communities studied. This reflects the historical positioning of Musahars as landless agricultural labourers and subsistence workers rather than artisans or performers. Unlike Nat households, where cultural labour can coexist with schooling and provide alternative forms of learning and recognition, Musahar livelihoods offer no parallel educational or skill-based capital. The result is a stark narrowing of future possibilities, where children transition directly from non-enrolment or early dropout into unskilled labour. (Table 6.13).

Taken together, the education profile of the Musahar community reveals a condition of structural educational exclusion rather than episodic dropout. Low enrolment, early exit, minimal attainment, weak infrastructure, lack of documentation, and the absence of compensatory skill systems collectively reproduce a cycle in which Musahar children inherit the same labour vulnerabilities as their parents. Education, instead of functioning as a ladder of mobility, remains inaccessible at the very first rung. *(*See Box 2: *Becoming Workers Before Becoming Students)*

In this context, improving Musahar educational outcomes requires more than enrolment drives or awareness campaigns. It demands interventions that address settlement-level infrastructure, ensure documentation support, reduce the opportunity costs of schooling through nutrition and childcare, and integrate education with livelihood security for households. Without such structural support, schooling will continue to be experienced by Musahar families not as a right or opportunity, but as an unaffordable risk in an already precarious life.

Livelihoods, Working Conditions and Livelihood Transitions

Among the communities surveyed, Musahars represent the most acute case of livelihood precarity, their economic participation is shaped less by choice and more by structural deprivation. Unlike Nats or other De-Notified tribes, they were also far less reliant on traditional livelihoods. Training in traditional arts or crafts is almost entirely absent, with only 0.9% reporting any such training. This finding can be attributed to the traditional livelihood of Musahar's being catching rats or hunting and gathering rather than performance or artisanal based like Nats, Gadia Lohar etc. The data reveals a livelihood landscape overwhelmingly defined by casual manual labour and state-assisted employment schemes: 55.6% of Musahars are dependent on Public Works/NREGS, the highest of any community in the study. A very large share of 74.9% engage in poorly paid non-farm informal labour (sweeping, odd jobs), 20.1% in casual farm work, and 5.8% in construction. Livestock-related work (8%) and forest-collection (6.7%) appear only as minor supplements, and traditional livelihoods are functionally extinct (1.8%). This profile indicates that Musahar labour is profoundly tied to survival, not mobility or opportunity. (Tables 6.15–6.17).

This economic marginalisation has deep historical roots. Traditionally considered landless agricultural labourers and rodent catchers, Musahars were locked into forms of stigmatised subsistence work that colonial and postcolonial markets never valued. The very name Musahar, meaning "rat-eater" is a product of casteist denigration tied to their occupational past. Today, that stigma translates directly into exclusion from skilled and formalised labour markets, leaving Musahar

workers concentrated at the absolute bottom of rural wage hierarchies. *(*See Box 3*: Welfare Without Wages)*

Musahar women's labour conditions are especially precarious. 67.9% work only 1–5 hours per day, not out of choice but because opportunities are erratic, of short-duration, and exploitative. Wage intervals are scattered with 30.8% earning daily wages, 31.7% reporting no fixed interval, and 24.9% falling under "Not Applicable", revealing dependence on verbal, unenforceable labour arrangements. Workplace facilities are almost entirely absent (86.9% report none), signalling employment in brick kilns, open fields, or hazardous micro-tasks where safety, sanitation and dignity are routinely denied. FGDs repeatedly highlighted coercive labour relations: (Table 6.17). *"Humare paas zameen nahi, kaam nahi. Jo milta hai, wahi karna padta hai."* (We have no land, no steady work. Whatever comes our way, we must do.)

Debt bondage to local landlords, delayed or partial wage payments, and child labour are reported as common coping mechanisms in the absence of secure work. Women are pulled into domestic labour or brick kilns to maintain household survival. NREGS often becomes a lifeline, yet workers describe late wage payments and irregular job allocation that deepen insecurity rather than resolve it.

Migration

Migration among Musahar households is selective rather than universal, shaped by extreme poverty, caste-based exclusion, and the limits of local labour markets. Survey data show that 12.22% of Musahar respondents (27 out of 221) reported migrating for work, while a substantial majority (87.78%) remained non-migrant. This proportion is significantly lower than among highly mobile groups such as Kalbeliya (68.38%) or Gadia Lohar (46.34%), indicating that Musahars are more spatially trapped within local agrarian economies rather than freely mobile. Their lower migration rate should not be read as stability. Instead, it reflects constrained choices arising from landlessness, weak social networks outside the village, and dependence on caste-bound local labour relations. *(*See Box 4: *Trapped Between Migration and Marginalisation)* (Table 6.18).

Among Musahars who do migrate, motivations are primarily economic rather than aspirational. The most frequently cited reasons were better work opportunities (22.22%) and better wage rates (22.22%), followed closely by better working conditions (25.93%). A further 14.82% explicitly combined lack of work at the source village with poor working conditions, indicating distress-led mobility rather than opportunity-seeking migration. Unlike some other DNT groups where discrimination figures prominently as a driver of migration, explicit reporting of discrimination as a reason among Musahars is limited (3.7%). However, qualitative data suggest that caste discrimination is often normalised and under-reported, embedded within everyday labour relations rather than articulated as a separate category. (Table 6.19).

FGDs in Jaunpur and Varanasi clarify the nature and destinations of Musahar migration, which typically involves entire families moving seasonally to brick kilns and construction sites in Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat. As a Rural Livelihoods Mission official noted, "Musahars migrate very often… they take their entire families and go. They work at brick kilns. This is not sustainable work." Migration disrupts children's schooling, weakens women's access to health and nutrition services, and increases exposure to exploitative labour arrangements mediated by contractors. Labour department interviews further confirmed that many bonded labour cases emerging from brick kilns involve Musahar workers, even when formally registered as advance-based wage labour rather than legally recognised bondage. The District Child Protection Officer even mentioned of Musahar children being rescued from bonded labour in other states and brought back to Uttar Pradesh.

For women, migration intensifies existing vulnerabilities. FGDs indicate that Musahar women migrate primarily as accompanying labour, combining agricultural or kiln work with unpaid

domestic labour under harsh conditions. While some women reported earning ₹200–300 per day for agricultural tasks such as katwai and ropai, these earnings are seasonal and contingent. At kiln sites, women's labour is often unpaid or subsumed under male contracts, reinforcing their invisibility as workers. Poor housing at migration destinations, lack of sanitation, and absence of institutional oversight further expose women to health risks and domestic violence.

At the same time, FGDs reveal incipient alternatives to migration where limited local livelihood support exists. In parts of Machhli Sheher, some Musahar households have reduced migration by engaging in weaving, bamboo work, or SHG-linked activities. However, these examples remain exceptional rather than systemic. Despite 82.35% of Musahars holding NREGA job cards, access to actual work remains inconsistent, pushing households back toward migration during lean agricultural periods. Women repeatedly noted that "we have cards, but we are sent back when we ask for work," highlighting the gap between entitlement and delivery. During an interview with a district officer for National Rural Livelihoods Mission, it was claimed that the work of cleaning and managing public toilets or community toilets is given to the Musahar community as they are "comfortable and well equipped" to manage toilets. This perpetuation of caste-based allocation of work in state schemes is another layer of systemic oppression.

Overall, Musahar migration reflects a cycle of constrained mobility which is neither fully sedentary nor freely mobile. It is driven less by opportunity than by the failure of local labour markets, weak implementation of employment guarantees, and entrenched caste hierarchies that confine Musahars to the lowest rungs of agrarian and informal economies. Any strategy to reduce distress migration must therefore combine assured local employment, effective NREGA implementation, and women-centred livelihood support, rather than treating migration as an individual choice divorced from structural exclusion. This pattern resonates with Chand and Banerjee's account of Musahar women's lifeworld in eastern Uttar Pradesh, where the intersection of caste stigma, gendered labour norms and landlessness produces a regime of compulsory, low-paid wage labour rather than voluntary mobility. (Chand & Banerjee, 2019)

Access to Welfare

Despite being among the most structurally marginalised communities in the study, Musahar households show relatively high levels of formal identification, which creates an impression of welfare inclusion that is not borne out in practice. Aadhaar coverage among Musahars is near-universal, with 97.29% (215 out of 221 households) possessing Aadhaar cards, and 90.05% holding voter identity cards. This suggests that Musahars are formally legible to the state. However, focus group discussions repeatedly underscored that identity documents alone have not translated into substantive access to entitlements. Many respondents described themselves as "registered but invisible," noting that government officials rarely visit their settlements and that welfare access remains mediated through local power holders rather than rights-based processes. (Tables 6.20–6.37).

Food security remains uneven. While 72.85% of Musahar households possess ration cards, nearly one-quarter (24.89%) remain excluded from the Public Distribution System. Even among cardholders, FGDs highlighted chronic inadequacy of rations in relation to household size. Furthermore, when talking of food security during focus group discussions, women from Jaunpur mentioned facing violent threats from upper caste landowners when they went to collect potatoes that had gone bad from an upper-caste land holding's harvest. Families with eight to ten members reported receiving allocations calculated for much smaller households, forcing women to stretch limited supplies or rely on debt and informal borrowing. Several participants noted that names were removed from ration lists during periodic revisions without explanation, reflecting the discretionary and opaque nature of welfare targeting at the village level. (Table 6.22).

Poverty targeting through Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards also reveals partial and uneven inclusion.

48.42% of Musahar households reported having BPL cards, while 44.8% explicitly reported not having one, despite widespread deprivation. Community members consistently attributed exclusion to local gatekeeping by Pradhans and ration dealers, rather than eligibility criteria. Applications were often submitted but never processed, and follow-up was described as futile due to fear of retaliation or loss of access to casual work. (Table 6.23).

Musahars stand out in one critical respect: access to the employment guarantee programme. 82.35% of Musahar households possess NREGA job cards, one of the highest proportions across all groups in the sample. This reflects both high demand for public employment and relative success in initial enrolment. However, FGDs revealed that possession of a job card does not ensure regular employment or timely wages. Women reported being denied work when they demanded it, receiving fewer days than mandated, and facing long delays in wage payments. NREGA work was described as irregular, seasonal, and heavily dependent on the discretion of local officials, undermining its role as a safety net. (Table 6.25).

Financial inclusion shows a similar pattern of partial success. 82.35% of Musahar households have Jan Dhan bank accounts, enabling direct benefit transfers under schemes such as PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, from which 70.59% reported receiving support. However, deeper financial inclusion remains limited. Only 8.6% of Musahars possess PAN cards, while 70.59% do not, restricting access to formal credit, insurance, and livelihood-related schemes. FGDs indicated that many respondents were unaware of the purpose of PAN cards or had never been assisted in applying for them, highlighting gaps in financial literacy and outreach. (Tables 6.24, 6.27, 6.36–6.37).

Housing emerges as one of the few areas where Musahars show relatively higher coverage on paper, but with deeply compromised outcomes. 46.15% reported receiving houses under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, a significantly higher proportion than several other communities. Yet qualitative accounts reveal a sharp disconnect between sanction and habitability. Many PMAY houses were reported to be located near garbage dumping sites, lacked electricity or water connections, or remained incomplete, particularly in Machhli Sheher in Jaunpur. Several families continued to live in kutcha structures despite having a sanctioned house, describing the allotted locations as unsafe, undignified, or socially segregated. Sanitation access remains limited, with only 7.24% reporting support under the Swachh Bharat Mission, and water access similarly constrained, as just 11.31% reported coverage under the Jal Jeevan Mission. A large share of Musahar households were marked as "not applicable" under these schemes, suggesting settlement-level exclusion rather than individual ineligibility. (Tables 6.29–6.30, 6.33, 6.35).

Health security coverage is partial and fragile. 36.2% of Musahars are enrolled under PM JAY (Ayushman Bharat), but access to other medical insurance schemes is negligible (0.45%). FGDs documented persistent caste-based discrimination in public health facilities, including neglect during childbirth, refusal to provide assistance, and verbal abuse. In one case, a Musahar woman recounted being forced to assist another woman's delivery herself when hospital staff refused to intervene, underscoring how formal insurance coverage does little to mitigate everyday discrimination in service delivery. (Tables 6.31–6.32).

Social security pensions remain largely inaccessible. Among elderly Musahars, only 12.5% reported receiving old-age pensions, while access to widow pensions, though relatively higher at 55.56% among eligible respondents, remains limited in absolute numbers. Women repeatedly cited lack of information, documentation hurdles, and administrative apathy as reasons for exclusion, with many elderly women dependent on family members or irregular charity for survival.

Overall, the Musahar experience of welfare is characterised by formal inclusion without substantive security. High levels of Aadhaar enrolment, bank account ownership, and scheme registration coexist with exclusion from effective benefits due to caste discrimination, settlement-level invisibility, elite capture, and weak grievance redressal. As FGDs repeatedly emphasised,

welfare for Musahars is not absent, but precarious, available in theory, mediated in practice, and frequently undermined at the point of delivery.

Political Reservation, Representation and Civic Participation

Political participation among Musahars is marked by a paradox of formal inclusion and substantive exclusion. On paper, Musahars appear integrated into the democratic framework: 90.05% of households possess voter identity cards, and participation in elections is widespread. However, beyond voting, engagement with local governance institutions remains extremely limited, revealing how political voice is constrained by caste hierarchies, settlement marginality, and fear of reprisal. (Tables 6.21, 6.41–6.50).

Direct benefits from reservation policies are almost entirely absent. 99.55% of Musahar respondents reported never benefiting from any form of reservation, with only one individual (0.45%) indicating access, limited solely to school education under the Scheduled Caste category. No Musahar respondent reported benefiting from reservation in employment or elected office. This reflects both structural exclusion from educational pipelines and the near absence of Musahars from spaces where political reservations might translate into leadership positions. (Tables 6.38–6.40).

Participation in Gram Sabha meetings is minimal. Only 2.26% of Musahar respondents reported attending Gram Sabha meetings, while 42.53% explicitly stated that they do not participate at all. A striking 55.2% were marked as "not applicable,"

Box 2

Becoming Workers Before Becoming Students

Educational Exclusion among Musahar Children

For many Musahar families in Jaunpur district, Uttar Pradesh, education is valued as a pathway to a better future, yet everyday realities make sustained schooling difficult. For a Musahar settlement located on the outskirts of the district, a government primary school stands less than two kilometres. Physical proximity, however, has not translated into meaningful educational access. Poverty, caregiving responsibilities, documentation barriers, and experiences of discrimination combine to push many children out of school long before they complete their education.

Women participating in focus group discussions described how household survival takes precedence over schooling. In families dependent on agricultural wage labour, daily routines are organised around work rather than education. Older daughters, in particular, are often expected to care for younger siblings while parents leave early in the morning in search of work, whether in agricultural fields or under public employment programmes.

As one woman explained: "Agar badi ladki school jaayegi, toh chhota bachcha kaun sambhalega?" ("If the elder girl goes to school, who will look after the younger child?")

Most families had attempted to enrol their children in school at some point. Women recalled periods when household incomes were slightly more stable or when local teachers actively encouraged enrolment. Yet these efforts were often short-lived. Irregular employment, illness, debt, and sudden economic shocks repeatedly forced children to withdraw from school and contribute to household labour or caregiving responsibilities.

A grandmother described the experience of her grandson, who stopped attending school after Class 2: "Masterji bole padhai zaroori hai, par jab khaane ko kaam ho, toh padhai ruk jaati hai." ("The teacher says education is important, but when there is not enough food, education stops.")

Contd ...

which FGDs clarified as a reflection of settlement location rather than personal choice. Many Musahar hamlets are located outside the main village boundary, often on embankments, fallow land, or near water bodies, and residents are neither informed about Gram Sabha meetings nor considered legitimate stakeholders. As one participant stated during a focus group in Uttar Pradesh, *"Gaon ki baithak hamare liye hoti hi nahi - bulaya hi nahi jaata"* (Village meetings are not meant for us, we are never invited). (Table 6.41).

Institutional political representation is virtually non-existent. None of the Musahar respondents in the sample reported ever being members of any local government institution, such as Panchayats, ward committees, or village councils. This complete absence reflects deep-seated barriers, including low literacy, lack of political networks, economic dependence on dominant castes, and fear of social retaliation. Women described political participation as risky, noting that speaking up could result in denial of work, harassment, or violence. (Table 6.42).

Engagement with governance structures beyond elected bodies also remains marginal. No Musahar respondent reported membership in Forest Protection Committees, farmer or artisan organisations, or trade unions. Women's collective participation is similarly absent with 100% of Musahar women reporting not being members of any women's group or self-help collective. FGDs suggest that the absence of collective platforms exacerbates isolation and weakens the community's ability to negotiate with the state, reinforcing a cycle of dependency and silence. (Tables 6.43–6.46).

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Administrative barriers further deepen exclusion. Many mothers spoke of being asked to provide birth certificates, caste certificates, transfer certificates, or other documents that they did not possess. Obtaining these documents often required multiple visits to government offices, travel expenses, lost wages, and interactions that families frequently experienced as dismissive or humiliating.

One woman captured this frustration succinctly: "Kagaz ke bina bachcha jaise hota hi nahi." ("Without papers, it is as if the child does not exist.")

Beyond economic and bureaucratic constraints, the social environment of schooling also emerged as a challenge. Parents and children described experiences of teasing, exclusion, and discrimination by children from dominant caste groups. Some families reported that Musahar children were treated as irregular students whose attendance mattered less than that of others. During peak agricultural seasons, parents felt that schools often made little effort to ensure that children who had dropped out temporarily returned to the classroom.

Over time, these repeated experiences of exclusion accumulate. What begins as occasional absenteeism gradually becomes permanent withdrawal. For many Musahar children, childhood is shaped more by labour responsibilities than educational opportunities.

As one elder reflected: "Humare bachche school se pehle hi kaam ke ho jaate hain." ("Our children become workers before they become students.")

This case illustrates that educational exclusion among Musahars cannot be explained simply by the absence of schools. Even where educational infrastructure exists, poverty, gendered household responsibilities, documentation barriers, caste discrimination, and livelihood insecurity combine to undermine school retention. The result is a cycle in which children leave school early, enter low-paid labour, and remain trapped within the same structures of marginalisation that constrained previous generations.

Box 3

Welfare Without Wages

Musahar Women and the Hidden Costs of Community Sanitation Work

Government programmes are often designed to promote inclusion, community participation, and local ownership. However, the experience of a group of Musahar women in Machhli Sheher, Jaunpur, demonstrates how such initiatives can, in practice, reproduce existing inequalities and create new forms of unpaid labour.

In one Musahar settlement, women organised through a Self-Help Group (SHG) were entrusted with maintaining a community toilet under a government-supported sanitation initiative. The arrangement was presented as an opportunity for local women to participate in community development while receiving compensation for their work. Yet, despite carrying out cleaning and maintenance responsibilities on a regular basis, the women reported that they had not received any payment for more than two years.

As one woman explained:"Hum toilet saaf karte hain, par do saal se paisa nahi mila." ("We clean the toilet, but we haven't been paid for two years.")

According to the women, government funds for the maintenance work had been sanctioned and released. However, the payments were routed through institutional arrangements over which the women had little control. They explained that the Panchayat Pradhan, who was a signatory to the SHG bank account, controlled access to the funds and had not released the money due to the women.

Another participant described their frustration: "Paise Pradhan ke account mein jaate hain, hum tak nahi aate." ("The money goes into the Pradhan's account; it never reaches us.")

Over time, the women attempted to seek redress through official channels. Repeated complaints were reportedly made to the Block Mission Manager and other local authorities, but no action followed. The absence of accountability left the women performing essential sanitation work without remuneration while continuing to bear the social and economic costs associated with the task.

The case highlights the unequal power relations that frequently shape the implementation of welfare programmes at the local level. Although the women were formally recognised as participants in a government-supported initiative, they remained dependent on local power holders for access to funds and information. Limited awareness of legal remedies, coupled with fears of retaliation and exclusion from future benefits, discouraged them from pursuing more confrontational forms of protest.

For Musahar women, sanitation work occupies a particularly difficult social position. It is essential for community well-being, yet often carries low social status and limited recognition. In this instance, the women performed labour that benefited the wider settlement while receiving neither wages nor institutional support. Their work remained largely invisible despite being central to the functioning of the facility.

This case demonstrates how welfare schemes can inadvertently reproduce caste- and gender-based inequalities when accountability mechanisms are weak. What was intended as a model of community participation became, for these Musahar women, another experience of unpaid and undervalued labour. Their story illustrates that inclusion in a government programme does not automatically translate into empowerment. Without transparent financial systems, effective grievance redressal, and protection from localised power structures, welfare participation can become another site where the labour of marginalised women is extracted without recognition or compensation.

Interactions with the state largely take the form of grievance-seeking rather than participatory governance. Compared to many other communities, Musahars show a relatively higher rate of approaching government officials, 51.13% reported having approached a government official for a benefit or grievance. However, outcomes are overwhelmingly negative. Of those who approached officials, 75.22% reported that their issues were not resolved, 21.24% said their grievances remained pending, and only 3.54% experienced any resolution. This high failure rate discourages sustained engagement and reinforces mistrust in public institutions. As one Musahar woman noted, *"Daftar jaane se kuch nahi hota - sirf chakkar lagte hain"* (Going to offices leads to nothing — only endless rounds). (Tables 6.47–6.48).

Approaching elected representatives is far less common. Only 6.33% of Musahars reported ever approaching an elected representative, and among these, satisfaction levels were extremely low. 78.57% reported receiving no satisfactory response, with only 7.14% indicating that their concerns were addressed. FGDs reveal that Musahars often view elected representatives as inaccessible or aligned with dominant caste interests. Political intermediaries rather than direct engagement tend to mediate most interactions, diluting accountability. (Tables 6.49–6.50).

Overall, Musahar political participation is best understood as procedural inclusion without political power. Voting rights exist, documents are held, and grievances are voiced, yet the community remains excluded from decision-making spaces, leadership roles, and institutional representation. Gender compounds these exclusions, with Musahar women experiencing intensified silencing due to caste stigma, economic dependence, and exposure to everyday violence. The data and narratives together suggest that without deliberate efforts to include Musahars in local governance forums, strengthen collective organisation, and protect political assertion from retaliation, democratic participation will continue to reproduce rather than challenge entrenched inequalities.

Bawariya Community

Social Profile and Historical Background

The Bawariya community has historically occupied a marginal and mobile position within the social order of North and Western India, particularly across Rajasthan, Haryana, and parts of Uttar Pradesh. Traditionally forest-dwelling and nomadic, the Bawariyas were known for hunting, trapping small animals, ritual drumming, itinerant entertainment, and forest-based subsistence. The term bawariya is linked to bawar (the nets used for trapping) reflecting their historical engagement with hunting and gathering economies. These livelihood practices, while locally embedded and ecologically adaptive, placed the community outside settled agrarian hierarchies and rendered them socially suspect in both pre-colonial and colonial imaginations.

Colonial governance profoundly transformed the social position of the Bawariyas. Under the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871, the Bawariyas were formally notified as a "criminal tribe," alongside other nomadic and peripatetic communities whose mobility was viewed as a threat to colonial order. The Act subjected the community to compulsory registration, movement restrictions, routine surveillance, and punitive policing. Mobility, which was central to Bawariya economic and cultural life, was reframed as deviance. Although the CTA was repealed in 1952, the stigma cast by it, endured through successor legislations such as the Habitual Offenders Act, and through everyday policing and social discrimination.

Post-Independence conservation policies further destabilised Bawariya livelihoods. With the enactment of wildlife protection laws, hunting which served as a subsistence activity became criminalised, stripping the community of its traditional economic base without offering viable alternatives. Forced sedentarisation followed, often at the margins of villages or near market and mela sites, where Bawariya families faced eviction, insecure tenure, and hostility from dominant caste groups. As a result, the Bawariya experience today reflects what may be described as "de-notification

Box 4

Trapped Between Migration and Marginalisation

Musahar Workers and the Limits of Mobility

Migration is often presented as a pathway out of poverty, but for many Musahar families in eastern Uttar Pradesh it is neither a choice nor a guarantee of a better future. Community interactions in Jaunpur and Varanasi reveal a more complex reality in which mobility and immobility are both shaped by structural disadvantage. While Musahars are frequently described by officials as a "migratory community," their experiences suggest that migration is less an opportunity than a survival strategy born of landlessness, caste-based exclusion, and the absence of secure local livelihoods.

Contrary to popular perceptions, many Musahar households do not migrate at all. Their inability to move is often linked to the lack of identity documents, travel resources, savings, or social networks that facilitate access to work outside the village. As a result, they remain dependent on poorly paid local labour markets where bargaining power is minimal and employment opportunities are highly seasonal. What appears as residential stability is, in reality, a form of structural immobility produced by poverty and exclusion.

For those who do migrate, movement is usually short-term, seasonal, and distress-driven. Families travel to brick kilns and labour-intensive worksites in states such as Punjab, Haryana, and Gujarat, often under arrangements controlled by labour contractors. These contractors typically organise recruitment, transport, accommodation, and wage payments, creating relationships of dependency that leave workers with little control over their working conditions.

Women participating in focus group discussions described migration not as a route to prosperity but as a difficult necessity. Entire families frequently move together to brick kilns, disrupting children's education and exposing households to cycles of indebtedness. Children often accompany parents to worksites, resulting in prolonged absences from school and increasing the likelihood of educational discontinuation.

Labour officials interviewed during the study acknowledged that many cases of bonded or semi-bonded labour emerging from brick kilns involve Musahar workers. However, these cases are rarely recorded or recognised as such, leaving affected families with limited avenues for redress. The combination of debt advances, wage deductions, restricted mobility, and dependence on contractors creates conditions in which exploitation can persist with little oversight.

The Musahar experience therefore reveals a striking paradox. On the one hand, the community is frequently characterised as too mobile for effective welfare delivery, with migration often cited as a reason for exclusion from schemes and services. On the other hand, many Musahar households are too poor and socially marginalised to migrate on terms that might improve their circumstances. Whether they stay or leave, they remain vulnerable to exploitation.

This case highlights how migration among Musahars cannot be understood as a simple economic choice. It is shaped by landlessness, caste stigma, illiteracy, insecure labour relations, and the dominance of labour intermediaries. In such circumstances, migration functions less as a pathway to social mobility and more as a coping mechanism in the face of persistent poverty and exclusion.

without de-stigmatisation" legal repeal without social rehabilitation.

Caste Location and Administrative Status

In the present study, the Bawariya constitute 5.3% of the total sample (n = 159) (Table 6.1). Their social positioning is among the most starkly marginalised across the surveyed communities. Nearly the entire Bawariya sample (98.74%) is classified as Scheduled Caste (Table 6.2), with all respondents identified as De-Notified Tribes (100% DNT) (Table 6.3). This dual classification situates the community at the intersection of caste-based oppression and the historical burden of criminalisation, producing layered forms of exclusion from land, education, and formal labour markets.

Land Ownership, Housing and Living Conditions

The Bawariya community emerges in the survey as almost entirely landless. An overwhelming 98.74% of Bawariya respondents report owning no agricultural land (Table 6.4), with only 1.26% reporting any form of land ownership. This level of landlessness is among the highest across all communities in the study and underscores the structural exclusion of Bawariyas from agrarian property regimes. Landlessness here is not incidental or temporary but deeply rooted in histories of colonial criminalisation, forced mobility, and post-colonial neglect in land redistribution and settlement policies. Without access to land as an economic, social, or political anchor, Bawariya households remain highly vulnerable to livelihood shocks, eviction, and long-term insecurity.

Even among the small fraction reporting ownership, landholding is minimal and fragmented. Gender-disaggregated data show that of the two Bawariya respondents who reported owning land, ownership is evenly split between only female ownership and joint male-female ownership. While this might appear progressive on paper, in practice these holdings are extremely marginal and do not translate into productive agricultural livelihoods or tenure security. Land ownership among Bawariyas therefore functions more as a nominal category rather than a meaningful resource base.

Qualitative narratives repeatedly emphasise the precarity of tenure even where families have lived on the same land for decades. In several focus group discussions, respondents described occupying village peripheries or common lands for 60 to 70 years yet continuing to face eviction threats and denial of formal recognition. In Rambasti, Manangaon, in Panipat district of Haryana respondents narrated how even after winning a legal case over land occupation nearly two decades ago, the community has received no housing entitlements under schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. This highlights a persistent gap between juridical recognition and administrative delivery, where legal victories do not translate into material security. As one woman from Rambasti stated: *"Jab bhi naya adhikari aata hai, hamein bhaag jaane ko bolta hai."* (Whenever a new officer comes, they ask us to vacate and go.)

Housing conditions among the Bawariya community starkly reveal the lived consequences of landlessness and tenure insecurity. Only 27.04% of Bawariya households report living in permanent structures, while a majority reside in highly precarious housing forms. More than half of Bawariya respondents, 55.35%, live in tents, and another 17.61% live in semi-permanent structures. (See Table 6.6) This makes the Bawariya community one of the most shelter-insecure groups in the study.

Ownership data adds another level of complexity to this issue. Table 6.7 shows that a majority of Bawariya households (51.57%) reported living in government-provided housing, which is significantly higher than most other communities in the sample. Only a very small proportion (2.52%) reported residing in self-financed owned houses, indicating limited independent asset ownership among the community. At the same time, a substantial section of Bawariya respondents (43.4%) fell under the "Others" category, suggesting the prevalence of informal, temporary, or insecure housing arrangements. Very few respondents (2.52%) reported living in rented accommodation.

Overall, the data indicate that Bawariya households remain heavily dependent on state support and continue to face considerable housing vulnerability compared to communities with higher rates of self-financed ownership. FGDs revealed the that the nature of ownership is overwhelmingly informal. It refers to self-built shelters on land without legal title rather than legally recognised property.

The material quality of housing reinforces this vulnerability. Nearly two-thirds of Bawariya households, 62.89%, live in kuccha houses, semi-pucca houses account for 31.45%, often consisting of fragile constructions that offer limited protection from heat, rain, or cold. Only 5.66% live in pucca structures. (See Table 6.8) Among kuccha dwellings, shelter materials are overwhelmingly makeshift. Most of Bawariya kuccha houses are constructed using bamboo, tarpaulin, and cloth tents, often combined with minimal reinforcement. Smaller proportions rely on bamboo and tarpaulin alone, tarpaulin sheets, or mud mixed with metal sheets. These materials deteriorate quickly and offer little privacy or safety, particularly for women.

Focus group discussions describe Bawariya settlements clustering near mela grounds, highways, markets, or village outskirts. While these locations allow proximity to livelihood opportunities such as informal vending or seasonal labour, they also expose households to eviction, police harassment, and social hostility. Women repeatedly described the anxiety of living in structures that can be dismantled overnight and the humiliation of being treated as temporary occupants despite decades of residence.

Sanitation conditions further deepen housing-related precarity. Nearly two-thirds of Bawariya respondents, 65.41%, report practising open defecation, while only 32.7% have access to personal toilets. (Table 6.9) Even where toilets exist, functionality is severely constrained. Among Bawariya households with personal toilets, 80.77% report no water connection, rendering toilets largely unusable. Sanitation deprivation therefore remains a daily reality rather than a transitional gap. (Table 6.10)

Women repeatedly linked the absence of toilets to experiences of fear, harassment, and caste-based humiliation. In Rambasti and other settlements, women described being verbally abused or threatened by upper-caste men while defecating in open fields. Several women noted that groups of men deliberately gather near these sites, making sanitation not merely a health issue but a site of gendered violence and surveillance. As one young mother in Haryana shared: *"Raat mein andhere mein jaana padta hai, darr laga rehta hai."* (At night we have to go outside, and we are always afraid.)

Water access remains unstable and contested. Long queues at shared handpumps are common, leading to frequent disputes within settlements. While women described informal practices of sharing water with neighbours who have taps, overcrowding and scarcity generate tensions and strain social relations. Irregular electricity further compounds insecurity by limiting visibility and safety at night. Housing precarity intensifies these vulnerabilities, living in tents or kutcha structures without secure sanitation or privacy exposes women to everyday indignities. In Mananagaon, Panipat district, Haryana women explicitly linked open defecation to threats from upper-caste men, framing sanitation as a site where caste and gender oppression intersect.

Health access is similarly constrained. In several settlements, households rely on *jhad-phunk* (witch doctors/faith healers) or unregistered pharmacists due to the absence of nearby clinics. Women reported low awareness of sexual and reproductive health issues, including sexually transmitted infections. In Manana village, women shared that symptoms such as itching or burning were treated through over-the-counter ointments obtained from local pharmacists rather than visits to government hospitals or primary health centres. This reflects not only infrastructural gaps but also fear of discrimination and lack of trust in public health systems.

Taken together, landlessness, informal tenure, precarious housing, and severe deficits in sanitation and water produce a condition of chronic insecurity for the Bawariya community. Housing is not merely inadequate but structurally unstable, reinforcing forced mobility, gendered vulnerability, and everyday exposure to violence. Despite decades of settlement, Bawariya households remain positioned outside formal regimes of land, housing, and basic services, rendering their lives perpetually provisional and their claims to space persistently contested.

Education

The educational profile of the Bawariya community reveals deep and persistent exclusion shaped by spatial marginality, infrastructural absence, mobility, and gendered social norms. In the study sample, 64.15% of Bawariya respondents reported never having been enrolled in school (Table 6.11), a figure that mirrors the overall pattern of educational deprivation among all the respondents across the five-state sample. Only 21.38% of Bawariyas were currently enrolled at the time of the survey, while 14.47% had been previously enrolled, indicating that schooling trajectories are fragile, discontinuous, and vulnerable to early disruption.

Reasons for non-enrolment point overwhelmingly to structural barriers rather than lack of interest in education. Among Bawariya respondents who were never enrolled, the dominant reason cited was the absence of schools within accessible distance combined with family restrictions, accounting for 55.88% of cases. (Table 6.12) An additional 16.67% reported a barrier involving lack of documents, and 24.51% spoke about family restrictions and a negligible number of three respondents spoke about other constraints. None of this sample cited frequent migration alone as the reason for non-enrolment. This indicates that educational exclusion among Bawariyas is rooted less in mobility per se and more in the spatial positioning of settlements at village margins, poor infrastructure, and administrative neglect that renders schools physically or socially inaccessible.

Gendered constraints further intensify these exclusions. Women repeatedly described fear of harassment, verbal abuse, and violence when girls travel long distances to reach schools, especially along highways or through dominant caste neighbourhoods. As a result, families often withdraw daughters early, particularly after puberty. Focus group discussions revealed that schooling is perceived as a risky and costly investment in contexts where daily survival depends on every available household member contributing to labour. Women explained that sending a child to school often means losing essential household support, particularly from elder daughters who care for younger siblings while adults engage in wage labour. As one woman noted during a discussion, *"paise kam ho jaate hain"* (our earnings go down) capturing the everyday trade-off between education and subsistence.

The lack of documentation compounds these barriers. Birth certificates, caste certificates, and Aadhaar remain unevenly available, restricting access to school enrolment drives and scholarships. Even where schools exist nominally, the absence of documents and discriminatory practices by school authorities discourage sustained attendance. These intersecting constraints create a pattern of educational exclusion that is settled rather than episodic, embedded in place-based marginality rather than temporary disruption.

While the proportion of currently enrolled Bawariya children appears higher than that of several other highly marginalised groups such as Kalbeliya or Pardhi, this figure masks severe attrition and limited educational progression. Among those who were previously enrolled, educational attainment remains sharply truncated. Over 43.48% dropped out by Standard 5 or below, and a further 30.43% exited schooling between Standards 6 and 8. Only 8.7% reached Standards 9 to 10, and just 17.39% progressed to higher secondary education. No Bawariya respondent in the sample reported completing graduation, vocational training, or higher education. (Table 6.14) This pattern reflects schooling that begins but does not consolidate, producing basic literacy at best, without translating into credentials that enable entry into skilled employment or formal labour markets.

Taken together, the educational profile of the Bawariya community reveals a cycle of partial entry, early exit, and limited attainment that reproduces dependence on low paid, informal livelihoods. Educational exclusion functions not merely as an outcome of poverty but as a mechanism through which economic vulnerability, gendered labour burdens, and social stigma are reproduced across generations. Without targeted interventions that address settlement level access to schools, safe mobility for girls, documentation support, and post primary retention, education is unlikely to serve as a meaningful pathway for social or economic mobility among Bawariyas.

Livelihoods, Working Conditions and Livelihood Transitions

Livelihood data for the Bawariya community reveals a landscape defined by chronic underemployment, seasonal mobility, and shrinking cultural economies. Nearly half of all Bawariya respondents (47.8%) reported no work in the past year, making them the tribe with one of the highest recorded levels of labour non-participation. (Table 6.15) However, this is not because employment is unavailable, but because the work that exists largely excludes them. For those who do find work, the overwhelming pattern is multiple low-return occupations pursued simultaneously in an attempt to assemble a minimum subsistence. Their livelihoods cannot be interpreted as diversification by choice but as a sign of structural economic abandonment.

Bawariyas are increasingly pulled into short-term construction labour, unskilled and often hazardous, and casual farm work, where caste hierarchies severely limit upward mobility. During focus group discussions in Mananagaon, Panipat, the entire basti was engaged in rag picking. Additionally, women frequently shoulder hidden labour burdens sweeping market spaces, sorting scrap, caring for animals, roles rarely recognised as economic participation. The data on wage intervals and work hours confirms this precarity of irregular daily earnings, inconsistent workdays, and 6–10 hour workdays for many women, often without rest or facilities.

Another critical livelihood thread is ragpicking and scrap collection, particularly in settlements like Rambasti in Mananagaon, Panipat where families have shifted from nomadic trades to urban scavenging economies. Here, women reported daily earnings of ₹200–300, but only through exposure to toxic waste, police harassment, and constant risk of eviction. Their work is indispensable to the city but remains invisible in policy.

These labour vulnerabilities are directly rooted in long-term sociopolitical disenfranchisement. Once forest-based traders and small-game hunters, Bawariyas were criminalised under colonial policing systems, a stigma that continues to translate into mistrust by employers and village authorities. FGDs repeatedly highlighted being monitored or denied local work because of suspicion: *"Gaon mein kaam nahi milta, log samajhte hain hum chor hain."* (We do not get work in the village, people assume we are thieves.)

Workplace facilities are uneven and largely employer-dependent. While some women report access to drinking water or basic amenities, these are exceptions rather than norms. The absence of regulated work environments exposes women to unsafe conditions, wage manipulation, and verbal harassment. FGDs document that women frequently accompany families during seasonal migration, performing unpaid care work alongside income-generating tasks, yet remain excluded from recognition as "workers" in official records.

Violence and discrimination emerge as recurring themes. Women spoke of harassment during travel for work, intimidation at worksites, and abuse linked to their caste and De-Notified identity.

The Bawariya community exemplifies a livelihood transition marked less by transformation than by erosion without replacement. Traditional occupations which were once central to community identity now persist only in fragmented and poorly remunerated forms. Unlike the Nat community, where performance remains a significant if declining economic base, Bawariya traditional livelihoods have largely lost both cultural

patronage and economic viability. The result is a shift toward caste-based, informal, and irregular work, accompanied by high levels of joblessness.

This transition has profound implications for women. As traditional and forest-based livelihoods disappear, women are drawn into invisible and exploitative labour arrangements that offer little protection or dignity. Education fails to provide an exit, housing insecurity compounds vulnerability, and migration offers only temporary relief.

Anthropologically, the Bawariya case reflects structural abandonment following de-notification. Criminalisation dismantled their economic base and post-colonial governance failed to rebuild it. Their present condition is not a transitional phase toward integration but a prolonged state of marginal survival. Any policy response must therefore move beyond welfare inclusion to address land security, livelihood stabilisation, cultural economy revival, and gendered protection mechanisms.

Migration

Migration is neither extensive nor empowering among Bawariyas. 20.13% said that they migrate. (Table 6.18) However FGDs reveal that they migrate seasonally, typically for construction in nearby towns. Their migration motivations are driven overwhelmingly by economic desperation. While 46.88% of the respondents said they seek better work opportunities (Table 6.19), FGDs reveal that many are also driven away due to social hostility. People reported leaving their villages not for new horizons but to temporarily escape police scrutiny and caste discrimination.

Crucially, migration does not lead to new skill acquisition or stable improvements in income. Instead, it reproduces the same vulnerabilities in unfamiliar environments: "Jahan jaate hain, wahan bhi hum neeche hi rehte hain." (Wherever we go, we remain at the bottom.)

Unlike Nats, who maintain a strong performance identity through mobile circuits, Bawariya mobility appears more defensive, shaped by eviction, surveillance, and the search for short-term safety in anonymity.

Access to Welfare Schemes

Despite multiple vulnerabilities, Bawariyas are active seekers of welfare access, however, bureaucracy fails them. Survey data indicates that Bawariyas are not entirely excluded from basic identity documentation, yet their access to welfare remains fragmented, shallow, and highly insecure. Aadhaar coverage among Bawariyas is high (96.23%), comparable to the overall sample, suggesting that basic biometric identification has largely been achieved. 72.33% of Bawariya respondents possess a voter ID card (Table 6.21), significantly lower than the overall average (85.1%) and far below communities such as Banjaras (95.4%). FGDs repeatedly emphasised that even those with voter IDs experience political invisibility: elected representatives visit during elections but rarely return thereafter, and grievances related to water, housing, and sanitation remain unresolved for years

Food security access further reflects this uneven incorporation. While 71.07% of Bawariyas reported having a ration card (Table 6.22), nearly 29% remain excluded from the Public Distribution System. This is a much higher exclusion rate than Banjaras (2.6%) and Gadia Lohars (20.3%). FGDs reveal that even among cardholders, access is unreliable. Women described ration dealers demanding bribes, manipulating online records, or arbitrarily denying grain. Moreover, food insecurity is so high, the women of Rambasti shared that at times they sweep grains off temple floors (which is usually given there as an offering) and cook them.

In Rajasthan, a ration dealer reportedly extracted ₹5,000 from a woman under the pretext of "online application," threatening the community by invoking caste power and political connections. As a result, households reported spending ₹2,000–3,000 per month on market purchases despite nominal ration entitlements.

Targeted poverty identification also shows sharp gaps. Only 44.65% of Bawariyas possess

a BPL card, meaning that more than half of the community is officially classified as "non-poor" despite widespread kutcha housing, landlessness, and irregular incomes. (Table 6.23) PAN card ownership stands at 45.9%. (Table 6.24) This is higher than some DNT groups but still insufficient to enable access to formal credit, insurance, or livelihood schemes.

Employment-linked welfare mechanisms also show systematic failure. Only 27.67% of Bawariyas possess an NREGA job card, despite widespread dependence on daily wage labour and seasonal migration. (Table 6.25) Women noted that whole families migrate to Punjab and Gujarat for three months at a time due to lack of local work, making NREGA effectively inaccessible in practice. Even when job cards exist, FGDs suggest work is rarely provided, reinforcing reliance on informal labour markets and contractors

Access to De-Notified-specific support is almost negligible. Just 1.26% of Bawariyas reported receiving benefits under the SEED (Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs), while 83% explicitly reported no access and another 14.47% had never heard of the scheme. (Table 6.26)

Data also shows restricted access to housing, pensions, and subsidised services. 96.9% of Bawariyas reported not receiving any benefit under PM Awas Yojana, and just one respondent (0.6%) reported receiving support. (Table 6.29) Other housing schemes are equally inaccessible, with over 93% reporting no support. (Table 6.30) FGDs from Haryana and Rajasthan repeatedly stressed that many Bawariya settlements have existed for 60–70 years but remain officially "temporary", leaving residents vulnerable to eviction threats from panchayats and landowners despite long-term habitation.

Health and sanitation schemes reveal some of the starkest exclusions. Only 40.25% of Bawariyas are enrolled in PM-JAY (Ayushman Bharat), while over half are entirely uncovered. (Table 6.31) Access to Swachh Bharat Mission support is exceptionally low: just 2.52% reported receiving toilet support, despite sanitation being identified as the most urgent need across FGDs. (Table 6.33) Jal Jeevan Mission access is similarly minimal, with only 1.26% reporting household water connections. (Table 6.35) Women consistently linked the absence of toilets and water to everyday harassment, physical danger, and loss of dignity, describing open defecation as a site of routine gendered violence.

Financial inclusion indicators further demonstrate constrained institutional access. While 32.7% of Bawariyas have a Jan Dhan account, nearly two-thirds remain excluded from even basic banking. (Tables 6.36 & 6.37) Women in FGDs reported continued reliance on upper-caste moneylenders, paying monthly interest rates of 10%, reinforcing cycles of debt and dependency.

Finally, social protection measures such as pensions reach only a small fraction of eligible individuals. Many elderly Bawariyas reported receiving old-age pensions, but FGDs clarified that payments are irregular and often partial. Widow pensions, though reaching some women, remain inconsistent and poorly monitored. No respondent reported access to NT/DNT hostels, limiting educational continuity for children from mobile or precarious households.

Taken together, the data reveal a pattern of partial documentation without substantive welfare inclusion. Bawariyas are visible enough to be enumerated, policed, and politically mobilised during elections, yet remain structurally excluded from housing, livelihood security, sanitation, and DNT-specific protections. FGDs underline that this exclusion is not merely bureaucratic but deeply social. Caste stigma, gendered vulnerability, and the legacy of De-Notified status shape how institutions respond to Bawariya claims. Welfare, for this community, is experienced not as an entitlement but as an uncertain favour mediated through power, patronage, and persistent struggle.

Their experiences with housing applications under PMAY illustrate systemic barriers. In Panipat, Meera Devi applied three times. Each time, errors in the income record on their Parivar Pehchan Patra (Family Identity Card) were used to deny eligibility. When Bawariya women collectively approached

the Tehsildar, they were promised an inquiry that never materialised. *"Hamare ghar gir rahe hain aur hamari arzi dhool kha rahi hai,"* (Our homes are collapsing while our applications gather dust.) she said.

While the Parivar Pehchaan Patra is a notable effort by the Haryana government, many respondents during focused group discussions in both Panipat and Hisar complained of inaccurate incomes being mentioned on the card thereby leading to inaccessibility to welfare schemes. The Bawariya social profile reveals a community that is settled without rights, visible without recognition and employed without protection. Their cultural and labour contributions sustain local economies such as weddings, markets, ritual spaces yet the State sees them primarily as encroachers or potential offenders, not as workers or citizens. Their educational deprivation, spatial containment on village edges, and reliance on informal wage networks reflect a reproduction of colonial-era exclusion into the present.

These findings became easier to contextualise following an interview with the District Welfare Officer in Panipat. The discussion suggested a limited familiarity with the specific histories, socio-economic conditions, and policy concerns relating to De-Notified Tribes. Another official present during the interaction made several observations that reflected commonly held assumptions about poverty and marginalisation. At one point, he remarked that "even ragpickers and rickshawallas have iPhones today." While perhaps intended to illustrate changing patterns of consumption, the statement revealed a tendency to assess well-being through visible consumer goods rather than through indicators such as income security, housing conditions, access to education, healthcare, social protection, or freedom from discrimination.

Such perspectives point to a broader disconnect that can exist between administrative perceptions and the lived realities of historically marginalised communities. They also highlight the continuing influence of class and caste-based assumptions in shaping how deprivation, vulnerability, and social exclusion are understood within institutional settings.

The urgent need is not only poverty alleviation, but restoration of dignity and restitution of rights such as secure housing titles, protected mobility, accessible schooling for girls, and regulated market access for cultural performers. Without this, the young Bawariya population, despite energy and willingness, will remain locked into cycles of dispossession that began long before them.

Political Reservation, Representation and Civic Participation

Despite formal constitutional provisions for political reservation and representation of marginalised groups, the Bawariya community remains almost entirely excluded from meaningful access to political reservation and decision-making spaces. Survey data shows that 96.86% of Bawariya respondents have never benefited from any form of reservation, whether in education, employment, or political institutions. (Table 6.38) Only 5 individuals (3.1%) reported any reservation benefit at all, and all of these were confined exclusively to school education under the Scheduled Caste (SC) category. (Table 6.39) There is no evidence of Bawariya respondents benefiting from reservation in employment or Panchayat elections, underscoring the narrow and limited reach of affirmative action for this community.

This pattern reflects a broader structural reality, although Bawariyas are administratively classified as Scheduled Castes in several states, this classification has not translated into political empowerment or leadership pathways. Reservation appears to function primarily as a symbolic entry point into schooling rather than as a mechanism for long-term political mobility or institutional voice. Unlike Pardhis in Maharashtra, where VJNT reservations have enabled some access to Panchayat elections, Bawariyas show no recorded presence in elected local governance through reservation mechanisms.

Participation in grassroots democratic institutions is extremely low. Only 1.26% of Bawariyas reported participating in Gram Sabha meetings, compared to an already low overall average of 1.6%. (Table 6.41) This near-absence from Gram Sabha forums reflects not apathy, but exclusion shaped by

social hierarchy, fear of humiliation, and lack of information. FGDs indicate that women perceive Gram Sabha spaces as dominated by upper castes and politically powerful groups, where speaking up can invite ridicule or retaliation rather than redress.

This exclusion extends to formal roles within local governance. Just 1.26% of Bawariyas reported ever being members of any local government institution, such as Panchayat committees (Tables 6.41 & 6.42), and only 0.6% had ever been members of a Forest Protection Committee (Table 6.43). Membership in farmer organisations, artisan associations, or trade unions is virtually absent. These figures point to the systematic absence of Bawariyas from intermediary institutions that often serve as bridges between marginalised communities and the state.

Women's collective political participation is especially constrained. Not a single Bawariya respondent reported membership in a women's group, making them one of the most excluded communities in the sample on this indicator. This contrasts sharply with groups like Kalbeliya, where over one-fifth of women reported such membership. The absence of women's collectives among Bawariyas has direct consequences. In the absence of collective platforms, women lack mechanisms to negotiate with local authorities, demand accountability, or even access information about schemes and rights.

Patterns of grievance redressal further illustrate the limits of political citizenship. Only 6.92% of Bawariyas reported ever approaching a government official for any benefit or grievance, which is far below communities such as Musahars (51.1%) or Nats (23.6%). (Table 6.47) Crucially, none of the Bawariya respondents who approached officials reported having their issue resolved. The data show a 100% failure rate in grievance resolution for Bawariyas, indicating not only bureaucratic inefficiency but a deep trust deficit between the community and state institutions.

Engagement with elected representatives is similarly limited and largely ineffective. Just 3.8% of Bawariyas reported approaching an elected representative, and among these, 83.3% reported receiving no satisfactory response. (Tables 6.49 & 6.50) This reinforces FGD narratives that politicians visit settlements during elections but disengage immediately afterward. Political contact, where it occurs, is episodic and extractive rather than responsive or accountable.

Taken together, these findings reveal that political reservation has failed to function as a transformative instrument for the Bawariya community. While a small number of children have accessed educational reservations, the absence of representation in Panchayats, Gram Sabhas, women's collectives, unions, and grievance redress mechanisms points to a condition of political marginality rather than democratic inclusion. Bawariyas are formally recognised as citizens, possessing Aadhaar cards and, in many cases, voter IDs. However, they remain structurally excluded from the institutions where decisions about land, housing, water, and welfare are made.

This political invisibility is not incidental. It is produced at the intersection of caste stigma, denotified histories, gendered vulnerability, and spatial marginality. Without sustained investment in political capacity-building, leadership development, and collective organisation, reservation policies risk remaining nominal for communities like the Bawariyas, offering symbolic inclusion without altering the underlying relations of power that govern access to resources and dignity.

Pardhi Community

Social Profile and Historical Background

The Pardhi community represents one of the most historically criminalised and socially marginalised groups within the De-Notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNT) spectrum in India. Although most scholarly literature locates Pardhis primarily in Maharashtra, where they are officially classified as Vimukta Jati and Nomadic Tribe (VJNT). The present

study documents their varying classification in Maharashtra itself, where they are administratively classified as Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes of Vimukta Jatis. This fragmented recognition reflects the broader ambiguity that characterises Pardhi identity. A community historically governed through criminal law rather than social policy, and subsequent uneven absorption done into postcolonial welfare frameworks.

Colonial ethnographies and administrative records consistently described the Pardhis as hunters, trackers, forest dwellers, and expert marksmen, whose livelihoods depended on deep ecological knowledge, mobility, and collective labour. These skills, however, became the basis for their criminalisation under the Criminal Tribes Act (1871), which categorised Pardhis as "habitual offenders" and subjected them to routine surveillance, compulsory registration, restrictions on movement, and forced settlement. Scholarly work on Pardhi communities in Maharashtra demonstrates that colonial policing targeted not specific crimes, but Pardhi mobility itself, recasting subsistence practices such as hunting and forest foraging as criminal acts. Although the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed in 1952, its social and administrative afterlives continue to shape the everyday experiences of Pardhi households.

Caste Location and Administrative Status

The Pardhi community constitutes a numerically significant group within the study sample, accounting for 159 respondents, or 5.3% of the total sample. (Table 6.1) This places Pardhis among the top five most represented tribes in the dataset, alongside Nat, Musahar, and Bawariya communities. Their substantial representation reflects both their wide geographical spread and their continued concentration within populations targeted under the De-Notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNT) framework. The demographic weight of the Pardhi community underscores the importance of understanding their social location, administrative classification, and age structure, as these factors critically shape their access to rights, services, and protections.

One of the most striking demographic features of the Pardhi community is the extreme fragmentation of their social category classification. Unlike several other tribes in the sample that are overwhelmingly categorised under a single administrative category, Pardhis are distributed across four different social categories. Within the sample, 50.31% of Pardhi respondents are classified as Scheduled Tribe (ST), 27.04% fall under VJNT (Vimukta Jati and Nomadic Tribe), 15.72% are classified as Scheduled Caste (SC), and 6.92% as OBC. (Table 6.2)

This internal heterogeneity is unique in its scale. While the five-state sample is majorly SC (52.40%) (Table 5.2), the Pardhi profile diverges sharply, with ST and VJNT together accounting for more than three-quarters of the community. This fragmented classification reflects the historically unsettled administrative status of the Pardhis. Criminalised under colonial law, De-Notified post-Independence, and subsequently absorbed unevenly into caste- and tribe-based welfare regimes across states.

Such fragmentation has direct implications for welfare access. Eligibility for reservations, housing schemes, education quotas, and social security varies substantially across SC, ST, and VJNT categories, producing uneven and often arbitrary access to entitlements within the same community. Demographically, this means that Pardhi households with similar socio-economic conditions may experience radically different outcomes depending solely on their state-specific classification.

From the perspective of the DN-NT-SNT framework, the Pardhi community is overwhelmingly De-Notified: 86.79% of Pardhi respondents identify as DNT, while 5.03% are classified as NT, and a notable 8.18% fall under SNT (Semi-Nomadic Tribe). (Table 6.3) Compared to the five-state sample wherein 66.87% are DNT, the Pardhi community shows a higher-than-average concentration within the De-Notified category.

Land Ownership, Housing and Living Conditions

The housing and land profile of the Pardhi community reveals deep structural insecurity,

marked by near-total landlessness, fragile housing arrangements, and extremely poor access to basic amenities. While some degree of settlement has occurred, this has not translated into secure tenure, durable housing, or dignified living conditions. Instead, Pardhi households remain caught between informal settlement, dependence on state shelters, and constant vulnerability to displacement.

Survey data show that 88.05% of Pardhi households do not possess or lease any agricultural land, underscoring the community's exclusion from land ownership. A further 11.95% report cultivating leased land, indicating dependence on short-term, insecure arrangements that offer little protection or long-term stability. None of the respondents say they own land, reinforcing the overall picture of structural landlessness. (Table 6.4)

Unlike some other communities where small pockets of ownership exist, the Pardhi land profile is dominated by absence rather than marginal ownership. This has significant implications for livelihood security, access to agricultural credit, and eligibility for land-linked welfare schemes. FGDs repeatedly highlighted that landlessness is not accidental but historically produced and is linked to criminalisation, displacement, and continued mistrust by local administrations. Women in Beed district described how lack of land undermines claims to permanence "आम्ही इथे वर्षानुवर्श राहतो, पण कागदावर आमचं काहीच नाही." (We have lived here for years, but on paper, nothing belongs to us.)

In terms of housing structures, Pardhi households display a pattern of partial sedentarisation without consolidation. Only 28.3% live in permanent structures, while the largest share of 39.62% reside in semi-permanent housing. A further 9.43% live in tents, and 5.66% in temporary or makeshift structures, indicating that a substantial section of the community continues to inhabit precarious dwellings. (Table 6.6) The relatively high share of semi-permanent housing suggests attempts at settling and investing in place. However, FGDs clarify that these structures are often built incrementally, without legal sanction, and remain highly vulnerable to demolition or eviction. Households described building walls or roofs slowly "as money comes," without confidence that they will be allowed to stay.

Housing ownership data reveal that 65.41% of Pardhi households report owning their current place of stay, while 33.96% fall under "others", a category that typically includes informal occupation, encroachment, or disputed tenure. Notably, 25.16% live in government-provided housing, one of the highest shares among the communities studied. (Table 6.7)

While government shelters offer a degree of physical stability, FGDs indicate that these are often located on the margins of settlements, poorly maintained, and disconnected from livelihood opportunities. Residents expressed fear that allotments could be withdrawn and frustration that housing provision is rarely accompanied by secure land titles or services.

The material quality of housing among Pardhi households is extremely poor. 61.64% live in kuccha houses, while 37.11% live in semi-pucca structures. Only 1.26% live in pucca houses, the lowest proportion across almost all communities in the sample. (Table 6.9) Among those living in kuccha housing, shelter materials reveal conditions of acute vulnerability. Most rely on cloth tents, followed by mud structures and metal sheets. A significant share falls variety of materials, reflecting improvised combinations of available materials. These dwellings offer little protection from heat, rain, or cold and are easily dismantled during evictions or forced moves. FGDs highlighted how seasonal changes exacerbate hardship: "पावसात सगळं घर आतून ओलंचिंब होतं." (During the rains, the whole house becomes wet inside.)

Access to sanitation among Pardhi households is among the worst in the study. 85.35% practice open defecation, while only 2.55% report access to a personal toilet. A small share uses community toilets (7.64%), often located far from settlements and poorly maintained. (Table 6.9) Even among the few households with personal toilets, conditions remain inadequate, none reported a water connection. (Table 6.10) This renders sanitation

facilities functionally ineffective and places a disproportionate burden on women, who must fetch water or resort to unsafe alternatives. Women in FGDs spoke of the daily indignities and safety risks associated with open defecation, particularly at night: "अंधारात बाहेर जावं लागतं, भीती वाटते." ("We have to go outside in the dark; it feels frightening.")

The housing and land data reveal a stark contradiction in the Pardhi experience indicating settlement without security. While many households have established semi-permanent residences, the absence of land rights, prevalence of kuccha housing, and lack of basic services mean that stability remains fragile and reversible. Government housing schemes, where present, offer shelter but not tenure thereby persisting landlessness.

This residential precarity intersects with livelihood insecurity, education discontinuity, and gendered vulnerability. Without secure land tenure, households remain excluded from formal services, credit, and political recognition. For women, inadequate housing and sanitation translate into heightened exposure to violence, health risks, and loss of dignity.

Improving housing outcomes for the Pardhi community therefore requires more than construction of units. It demands secure land titles, integration of housing with livelihood locations, provision of water and sanitation, and protection against eviction. Without addressing land and tenure at the core, housing interventions risk reproducing precarity under the guise of settlement.

Education

Educational deprivation among Pardhi women is among the most severe observed across all De-Notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) in the study and is clearly structural rather than incidental. Survey data show that 88.68% of Pardhi women have never been enrolled in school — one of the highest non-enrolment rates in the sample and far above the overall average of 64.27% for DNT-NT-SNT women. Only two Pardhi women were currently enrolled in education, while 10.06% reported having attended school at some point in the past. (Table 6.11) These findings indicate that exclusion is driven primarily by non-entry into schooling rather than dropout alone.

The reasons for non-enrolment reveal a distinctive pattern of exclusion. Among Pardhi women who had never attended school (n = 141), 78.02% identified family restrictions as the primary barrier to education. Other commonly cited factors among DNT Communities - such as migration, lack of documentation, or the absence of schools - accounted for only a small proportion of responses. (Table 6.12)

Among the small number of Pardhi women who had previously attended school (n = 16), educational attainment remained extremely limited. Nearly half (43.75%) left school at Standard 5 or below, while 37.5% studied only up to Standards 6–8. Just 18.75% reached Standards 9–10, and none progressed to senior secondary, vocational, or higher education. (Table 6.14) As a result, educational exposure remains shallow and discontinuous, rarely generating the literacy, qualifications, or confidence needed to expand livelihood opportunities or engage effectively with state institutions.

Focus group discussions provide important context for understanding how these patterns are experienced in everyday life. Women consistently described schools as spaces marked by caste-based discrimination and humiliation, discouraging both children and parents from sustaining enrolment. A mother from Beed explained: "पाळेत मुलांना वेगळं बसवतात. पारधी आहेत म्हणून." (In school, our children are made to sit separately because they are Pardhi.)

Such practices undermine the promise of education and reinforce feelings of exclusion from an early age. For girls, these experiences are compounded by household responsibilities. Women spoke of daughters being withdrawn from school to fetch water, care for younger siblings, cook, and contribute to household survival. In conditions of poverty, schooling often becomes secondary to immediate domestic needs.

Concerns about safety further limit girls' educational opportunities, particularly where schools are located outside the settlement. Parents expressed fears of harassment, violence, and social scrutiny when girls travel alone. As a result, restricting mobility is often justified as a form of protection, even when it comes at the cost of continued education.

Taken together, the Pardhi education profile reveals a deeply entrenched pattern of disadvantage shaped by the intersection of caste discrimination, gendered expectations, domestic labour burdens, and concerns around safety. Educational exclusion is not simply the result of inadequate infrastructure or administrative barriers, but of social conditions that constrain girls' participation in schooling at multiple levels.

The consequences extend beyond education itself. Limited schooling contributes to low literacy, economic dependence, early marriage, and reduced engagement with state institutions, reinforcing existing inequalities across generations. These findings suggest that interventions focused solely on school access or enrolment are unlikely to be sufficient. Meaningful change will require addressing discriminatory practices within schools, reducing the domestic burden placed on girls, and engaging with the social norms that continue to shape educational decisions within Pardhi households.

Livelihoods, Working Conditions and Livelihood Transitions

Traditionally, the Pardhi community has been associated with itinerant occupations rooted in mobility, forest-based economies, and performance traditions. However, Table 6.15 reveals a livelihood structure marked by economic precarity, limited diversification into modern sectors, and a high incidence of non-work.

Agriculture is the largest livelihood category among Pardhi respondents, with 49.06% engaged exclusively in farm-based activities, the highest proportion among the six communities profiled. Qualitative evidence suggests that most are agricultural labourers or marginal producers rather than landowning cultivators. Traditional occupations remain the second-largest livelihood category, engaging 20.13% of respondents, while only 1.26% rely exclusively on non-farm, non-traditional work, indicating minimal integration into service-sector, industrial, or other modern employment opportunities. More than one-quarter of respondents (28.30%) reported having no work, substantially above the overall average and exceeded only by the Bawariya community.

FGDs indicate that traditional livelihoods largely comprise hunting-related activities, trapping, gathering, petty trading, and casual forest-linked work that is now heavily restricted or no longer formally recognised. Smaller numbers reported working as acrobats, drum beaters at marriages, or sellers of liquor. These occupations reflect a historical livelihood system tied to movement and forest access, much of which has been eroded or criminalised over time. Traditional work remains overwhelmingly family-based, generates very low earnings, and functions primarily as a survival strategy rather than a viable source of income.

Women described how economic marginalisation is compounded by caste stigma. They reported being viewed with suspicion in markets and public spaces, facing harassment while selling goods or performing, and being pushed out of locations where economic activity might otherwise be possible. Traditional occupations therefore persist less because they are profitable than because alternative opportunities remain scarce and socially inaccessible.

Most Pardhi households rely on a combination of agriculture, animal husbandry, forest produce collection, wage labour, and traditional occupations across seasons. Rather than representing resilience or flexibility, this pattern reflects chronic livelihood insecurity, as most activities generate low and uncertain returns and remain vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations, local power relations, and social discrimination.

This insecurity is evident in wage arrangements. FGDs indicated that most were unpaid family labour, involved in subsistence activities, or with poorly defined employment relationships. Monthly or salaried employment was virtually absent. As one woman from Beed observed: "काम झाल्यावर पैसे देतील असं म्हणतात, पण कधी देतील सांगता येत नाही." ("They say they will pay after the work is done, but you never know when.")

Despite these precarious conditions, labour participation remains substantial. Many respondents reported working between six and ten hours per day, demonstrating that the central issue is not unwillingness to work but the poor returns and insecurity associated with available employment opportunities.

Working conditions are equally poor. Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported no access to workplace facilities. Most work is carried out in fields, forests, roadsides, or other informal settings where employers provide no sanitation, drinking water, rest areas, childcare, medical support, or washing facilities. Women described managing basic bodily needs in open spaces while working, often under unsafe and undignified conditions.

Livelihood insecurity is particularly acute for women. Their contributions through animal care, forest produce collection, domestic labour, and family-based occupations are frequently unpaid or unrecognised. Combined with low educational attainment, restrictions on mobility, caste stigma, and patriarchal norms, these conditions severely limit opportunities for independent income generation and financial autonomy.

Reported levels of workplace abuse appear relatively low, with 83.33% stating that they had experienced no abuse. (Table 6.17) However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously given the highly informal and family-centred nature of much Pardhi work. Among those who did report abuse, physical and mental abuse were the most common forms, followed by unpaid wages. No respondents reported sexual abuse, although this likely reflects under-reporting rather than an absence of risk.

Taken together, the data portray a community caught between declining traditional occupations and limited access to stable alternatives. Livelihoods are characterised by low earnings, insecure employment relations, poor working conditions, and restricted access to state-supported opportunities. These vulnerabilities are further intensified by caste stigma and gendered restrictions, leaving many Pardhi households dependent on multiple low-return activities that offer little prospect of long-term economic security.

Migration

Among the Pardhi community, only 16.98% of respondents reported migrating for work, while a substantial 83.02% reported not migrating. This migration rate is lower than that observed among communities such as the Nat (35.62%), Banjara (32.24%), and Narikuravar (27.08%), suggesting that limited migration does not necessarily reflect livelihood stability. Rather, it may indicate restricted mobility and continued dependence on local labour markets that offer few secure opportunities. (Table 6.18)

FGDs suggest that fear of harassment, surveillance, and social stigma discourages mobility. Women in particular described migration as risky because of weak support networks and the possibility of police scrutiny. As one participant explained, "बाहेर गेलं की जास्त संषय घेतात." ("If we go outside, people become more suspicious of us.")

The reasons cited by Pardhi migrants (n = 27) point largely to distress-driven mobility. The most commonly reported reason was the search for better working conditions (59.26%), followed by the absence of work opportunities at the source location (25.93%). Smaller proportions cited better wage rates (7.41%) and discrimination (7.41%). Notably, none reported migrating primarily for better work opportunities. These findings indicate that migration among Pardhis is driven more by the need to escape unfavourable local conditions than by prospects of economic advancement. (Table 6.19)

FGDs provide further insight into why migration remains relatively limited despite poor employment conditions. Participants described being stopped, questioned, or harassed while travelling, particularly when moving in groups or without identity documents. As one respondent noted, "रेल्वेत, बसमध्ये पोलीस विचारतातकृकोण आहात, कुठे चाललात." ("In trains and buses, the police ask - who are you, where are you going.") Historical experiences of criminalisation continue to shape perceptions of mobility and create reluctance to seek work outside familiar locations.

The low migration rate must also be understood through a gendered lens. Discussions revealed that women's mobility is often closely regulated within households, while concerns about safety and social reputation further restrict their movement. When migration does occur, women frequently engage in unpaid or poorly recognised work linked to family-based economic activities. These constraints intersect with low educational attainment and limited livelihood options, reducing the extent to which migration can function as a pathway to economic mobility.

Overall, the data suggest that Pardhi migration is shaped less by opportunity and more by constraint. Improving livelihood outcomes therefore requires not only expanding dignified employment opportunities at the source but also addressing the discrimination, documentation barriers, and social stigma that continue to make mobility risky for many members of the community.

Access to Welfare Schemes

Access to welfare schemes among the Pardhi community reveals a striking disconnect between documentation and entitlement. While most households possess basic identity documents, this has not translated into meaningful access to social protection or development programmes.

Documentation levels are relatively high. Nearly all respondents possess an Aadhaar card (96.86%), while 83.65% have a voter identity card, indicating formal recognition by the state. Yet access to welfare entitlements drops sharply beyond these foundational documents. Only 47.80% possess a ration card, leaving more than half of Pardhi households excluded from the Public Distribution System. Similarly, just 16.35% possess a BPL card, despite evidence elsewhere in the survey of widespread poverty, precarious livelihoods, and high levels of non-work. (Tables 6.20–6.23)

FGDs suggest that welfare exclusion is often linked to precarious residence, informal tenure arrangements, and difficulties securing recognition within local administrative systems. Participants described problems arising from frequent movement, absence from official records, and discriminatory attitudes among local officials. As a result, poverty often remains administratively invisible even when economic hardship is severe.

Financial inclusion is equally limited. Only 16.98% of respondents reported having a Jan Dhan account, while 30.82% possessed any other bank account. PAN card ownership stood at 20.13%. Limited banking access constrains the ability of households to receive direct benefit transfers, access formal credit, or participate fully in welfare programmes that increasingly depend on digital financial infrastructure. (Tables 6.24, 6.36 and 6.37)

Access to employment and livelihood support schemes is particularly weak. Only 3.77% possessed an NREGA job card, the lowest proportion among the six communities profiled, while 95.60% reported no access to any livelihood support scheme. These findings mirror the livelihood data, which show high levels of unemployment, insecure work, and dependence on low-return economic activities. (Tables 6.25 and 6.28)

Exclusion is equally evident in schemes specifically intended for De-Notified and Nomadic Tribes. None of the Pardhi respondents reported receiving support under the Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED). While 96.86% reported no access, a further 3.14% were unaware of the scheme altogether. FGDs confirmed that awareness of SEED is virtually absent within Pardhi settlements and that outreach efforts have been minimal. (Table 6.26)

The reach of crisis-relief programmes has also been limited. Only 15.72% reported receiving support under the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, while more than four-fifths (84.28%) reported no access. (Table 6.27)

Housing and basic infrastructure schemes show a similar pattern. Despite widespread housing insecurity, only 0.63% of respondents reported receiving support under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, while 95.60% reported no access to any other housing support scheme. Access to Jal Jeevan Mission was reported by only 0.63% of respondents, and support under the Swachh Bharat Mission by just 2.52%. These findings are consistent with earlier evidence of poor housing conditions, limited sanitation infrastructure, and high levels of open defecation within the community. (Tables 6.29, 6.30, 6.33 and 6.35)

Health protection coverage is also extremely low. Only 2.52% of respondents were enrolled in PM-JAY (Ayushman Bharat), while 0.63% reported access to any other medical insurance scheme. The overwhelming majority remained outside formal health protection systems. (Tables 6.31 and 6.32)

Educational support mechanisms are similarly absent. Just 0.63% of respondents reported access to NT/DNT hostels, despite the importance of such facilities for improving educational continuity among marginalised and mobile communities. (Table 6.34)

Taken together, the data point to a consistent pattern: documentation is widespread, but access to welfare remains limited. Pardhi households possess Aadhaar and voter identity cards in large numbers, yet participation in programmes related to food security, employment, housing, health, education, livelihoods, and social protection remains exceptionally low. The findings suggest that barriers lie not simply in documentation deficits but in weak outreach, limited institutional responsiveness, administrative discretion, and the continued marginalisation of De-Notified and Nomadic Communities within welfare delivery systems.

For the Pardhi community, state engagement appears concentrated at the level of identification rather than substantive inclusion. Without targeted outreach, active facilitation, and implementation mechanisms sensitive to the realities of DNT Communities, welfare programmes risk reproducing rather than reducing existing patterns of exclusion.

Political Reservation, Representation and Civic Participation

Access to reservation and participation in democratic institutions remain highly limited among the Pardhi community. While constitutional safeguards and state-specific reservation frameworks formally recognise their rights, the data suggest that these provisions have translated into only modest gains in practice.

Only 8.81% of Pardhi respondents reported having benefited from any form of reservation, while 91.19% reported no benefit at all (Table 6.38). Although this proportion is higher than that recorded among some other communities in the study, it still indicates that the overwhelming majority of Pardhis have not been able to access the opportunities intended through affirmative action measures.

Among the 14 respondents who reported benefiting from reservation, the largest share (71.43%) accessed it through reserved Panchayat positions, while 14.29% benefited through school education and another 14.29% through school employment-related reservation (Table 6.39). This pattern suggests that reservation has had its most visible impact in facilitating limited political representation rather than broad-based educational or occupational mobility.

The category through which reservation was accessed further highlights the importance of state-specific recognition frameworks. Among beneficiaries, 92.86% obtained reservation through the VJNT category in Maharashtra, while 7.14% accessed it through the OBC category (Table 6.40). The findings underline how access to

reservation remains heavily dependent on regional classification systems.

Despite these limited gains, Pardhi participation in democratic and governance institutions remains extremely low. No respondent reported participation in Gram Sabha meetings, indicating complete exclusion from one of the most important forums of local self-governance (Table 6.41). Similarly, only one respondent had ever been a member of a local government institution, while 99.37% had never held such a position (Table 6.42).

Participation in collective and representative organisations is equally weak. No respondent reported membership in a Forest Protection Committee or a women's group (Tables 6.43 and 6.45). Membership in farmer or artisan organisations was reported by only two of the respondents, while just three respondents reported belonging to a trade union (Tables 6.44 and 6.46). These figures point to a broader absence of organised platforms through which the community can collectively negotiate with state institutions or advocate for its interests.

Engagement with grievance redressal mechanisms is almost non-existent. Only one respondent reported approaching a government official for a benefit or grievance, and the matter remained unresolved (Tables 6.47 and 6.48). No respondent reported approaching an elected representative for assistance (Table 6.49). This suggests not only weak access to institutional channels but also a profound lack of confidence in their responsiveness.

Taken together, the data reveal a pattern of limited formal inclusion alongside persistent democratic marginalisation. A small number of Pardhis have been able to benefit from reservation, particularly through Panchayat-level political representation, yet these gains have not translated into broader participation in local governance, collective organisations, or grievance redressal systems. Reservation has created a narrow opening for representation, but it has not substantially altered the structural barriers that continue to limit the community's voice and participation in public institutions.

Field evidence reinforces these findings. Focus Group Discussions and key informant interviews conducted in Beed and Osmanabad districts of Maharashtra indicate that de-notification has not translated into social freedom. Participants repeatedly described continuing experiences of suspicion and surveillance by police and local authorities. Women spoke of being treated as potential offenders on the basis of community identity rather than evidence. As one woman from Osmanabad explained, *"Gaavat kahi chori zali ki sarvat aadhi police aamchyach vastit yete"* ("Whenever there is a theft in the village, the police come to our settlement first"). Another added, *"Aamhi kay kelach nahi, tari naav lihitat"* ("Even if we have done nothing, our names are written down"). These accounts suggest that the historical stigma attached to the Pardhi community continues to shape everyday interactions with state institutions, reinforcing patterns of exclusion that extend far beyond welfare access alone.

Banjara Community

Social Profile and Historical Background

The Banjara community, also known as Lambada, Lambani or Gor Banjara across different regions, represents one of India's historically mobile and economically significant nomadic communities. Traditionally associated with long-distance trade and transport, Banjaras functioned as key intermediaries in precolonial and early colonial economies, moving grain, salt, textiles and other commodities across large territories through pack animals and caravan networks. Their settlements, known as *tandas*, operated as mobile socio-economic units bound by kinship, clan affiliations and collective responsibility. Mobility was therefore not incidental but foundational to Banjara identity, labour organisation and social reproduction.

Colonial interventions disrupted this economic ecology. The expansion of railways, formalised markets and centralised state control weakened the Banjara transport economy and rendered many traditional skills economically redundant. In the post-independence period, Banjaras were unevenly absorbed into agrarian and informal labour economies, while their administrative

classification continued to vary across states. In the present sample, Banjaras are predominantly classified as OBC, with smaller proportions falling under SC and VJNT categories, reflecting this fragmented legal recognition (Table 6.2).

Caste Location and Administrative Status

The Banjara community constitutes 5.07% of the total study sample, placing it among the five largest communities surveyed (Table 6.1). In terms of formal social categorisation, 71.71% of Banjara respondents are classified as Other Backward Classes (OBC), 23.03% as Scheduled Castes (SC), and 5.26% as VJNT in Maharashtra (Table 6.2). This distribution reflects inter-state variation in legal recognition and the uneven pathways through which the community accesses entitlements.

From the perspective of De-Notified status, 94.74% of Banjara respondents are classified as De-Notified Tribes (DNTs), while 5.26% fall under the Nomadic Tribe (NT) category (Table 6.3). This places the Banjara community among the more uniformly De-Notified groups in the sample. However, as the later sections show, this formal recognition has not translated into meaningful access to reservation, welfare, or institutional inclusion.

Land Ownership, Housing and Living Conditions

Agricultural land ownership among Banjaras remains extremely limited. As many as 94.08% of respondents reported having neither owned nor leased agricultural land, while only 5.92% reported owning agricultural land (Table 6.4). This landlessness pushes many households towards wage labour, informal work, animal husbandry and traditional livelihood practices.

Housing ownership among Banjaras is relatively high, with 77.63% living in self-financed owned houses. Only one respondent reported living in government-provided housing, and another in rented housing, and 21.05% under other arrangements (Table 6.7). In terms of the type of current stay, 97.37% of Banjara respondents live in permanent structures, while 1.97% live in semi-permanent housing and 0.66% in tents (Table 6.6). On the surface, this suggests a relatively settled residential pattern.

The structural quality of housing complicates this picture. Only 40.13% of Banjara respondents live in pucca houses, while another 40.13% live in semi-pucca houses and 19.74% continue to live in kuccha houses (Table 6.8). Thus, while most Banjaras live in permanent settlements, nearly three-fifths live in structurally vulnerable housing.

FGDs clarify this contradiction. Women described houses that may technically qualify as permanent but suffer from poor materials, leakage during monsoons, overcrowding and lack of basic infrastructure. As one participant noted, "Our houses are broken and we don't have money to get them fixed." This was corroborated by research team visits in Panipat and Hisar, where several families were found living in partially broken houses with unusable or unfinished toilets. Women reported applying for support under the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Awas Navinikaran Yojana[2], but none reported receiving support.

Access to household water through public schemes is extremely limited. Under the Jal Jeevan Mission, only one respondent from the Banjara community reported receiving support, while 99.34% reported no access (Table 6.35). FGDs consistently highlighted the burden this places on women and adolescent girls, who remain responsible for collecting water from shared or distant sources. Seasonal shortages intensify this burden, especially during summer.

Sanitation outcomes among Banjaras are better than many other communities in the sample but remain incomplete. 78.29% of Banjara respondents

2. The main purpose of this scheme is to provide grant for the repair of house to all families, whose annual income is less than and equal to Rs 1.80 lakh in Parivar Pehchan Patra, whose house need repair an amount of ₹80,000 is provided for this purpose.

reported having a personal toilet, 21.05% continue to practise open defecation, and one respondent depends on community, shared or other facilities (Table 6.9). However, toilet access does not guarantee usability. Among households with personal toilets, only 45.38% reported having a water connection, while 54.62% reported no water connection (Table 6.10). This helps explain why open defecation persists even among households with toilets. Support from the Swachh Bharat Mission remains limited, with only 21.71% reporting support and 78.29% reporting no support (Table 6.33).

To better understand how settlement has shaped the lives of Banjara women - and why a permanent residence does not necessarily translate into security, dignity, or access to rights - read Box 5: *Settled Yet Insecure.*

Education

The educational profile of the Banjara community reflects a pattern of partial inclusion rather than complete exclusion. Banjaras show relatively higher engagement with schooling compared to several other DNT Communities in the sample. 59.21% of Banjara respondents reported being currently enrolled, 29.61% were previously enrolled, and 11.18% had never been enrolled (Table 6.11). This suggests that the central problem is not only non-entry into schooling, but also retention and educational progression.

Documentation coverage is strong. All Banjara respondents reported having Aadhaar cards, 95.39% had voter ID cards, and 97.37% had ration cards (Tables 6.20, 6.21 and 6.22). This indicates that lack of basic documents is not the primary barrier to schooling for most Banjara respondents. Yet education outcomes remain uneven.

Box 5

Settled Yet Insecure

The Everyday Struggles of Banjara Women

For many Banjara families, the transition from a historically nomadic existence to settled life was expected to bring stability, security, and greater access to state support. Yet, the experiences of women living in a Banjara tanda on the outskirts of a semi-urban settlement reveal a different reality. While the community has largely given up mobility and now resides in permanent houses, the benefits commonly associated with settlement - secure housing, reliable livelihoods, and meaningful access to welfare - remain elusive.

Most households in the settlement have gradually built pucca or semi-pucca homes through decades of earnings from agricultural labour, construction work, livestock rearing, and occasional cultural performances. Despite these visible signs of permanence, many families continue to lack formal land titles. Their occupancy is based on longstanding residence rather than legally recognised ownership, leaving them vulnerable to exclusion from housing schemes and perpetually uncertain about their future.

As one woman explained during a focus group discussion:"Ghar humne khud banaya hai, par kagaz kisi ke paas nahi hai. Jab survey wale aate hain, humara naam kat jaata hai." ("We built the house ourselves, but no one has papers. When survey officials come, our names are removed.")

Livelihoods remain equally precarious. Women combine multiple forms of work throughout the year, moving between agricultural labour, construction work, livestock care, and traditional cultural activities depending on seasonal demand. Employment is largely informal and mediated through contractors or intermediaries, leaving workers with little bargaining power. Delayed payments, unexplained deductions, and wage withholding are common experiences.

Contd ...

Among those who had never enrolled, the main reason was family restriction, reported by 70.59% of respondents. Another 11.76% cited lack of school in the vicinity, 5.88% cited lack of documents, and 11.76% gave other reasons (Table 6.12). This points to the continuing role of gendered norms, household labour expectations and social restrictions in shaping educational exclusion.

Among previously enrolled respondents, educational attainment remains limited. 37.78% had studied only up to Standard 5 or below, 20% up to Standards 6–8, 22.22% up to Standards 9–10, and 15.56% up to Standards 11–12. Only 2.22% had a diploma or vocational degree and 2.22% had graduated (Table 6.14). Thus, while many Banjara respondents enter school, progression into higher education remains rare.

FGDs suggest that initial enrolment has improved due to the proximity of government schools and incentives such as mid-day meal schemes. However, enrolment does not translate into retention. Women repeatedly described schooling as "useful only till small classes," after which economic pressures, gender norms, and household responsibilities begin to outweigh educational aspirations.

Educational discontinuation among Banjara girls is particularly gendered. Girls are often withdrawn from school to undertake domestic work, sibling care, water collection, and wage labour, while boys are more likely to continue their education. Distance to secondary schools and concerns about girls travelling outside the settlement were repeatedly cited as major barriers. One participant explained that parents fear reputational harm if

... Contd .

One participant described the situation bluntly:"Kaam poora karte hain, par paisa beech wala rakh leta hai. Hum puchne jaayein toh kaam milna band ho jaata hai." ("We complete the work, but the middleman keeps the money. If we question it, work stops coming.")

For women, housing insecurity is closely tied to everyday risks associated with inadequate infrastructure. Although some households have toilets, many lack functioning water connections, forcing continued reliance on open spaces for sanitation and bathing. Women spoke about harassment, verbal abuse, and the constant fear of being seen while carrying out these daily activities, particularly in the early morning and after dark. These concerns shape mobility, restrict employment opportunities, and reinforce economic dependence within the household.

Education represents both hope and frustration. Mothers consistently expressed a desire for their children, especially daughters, to remain in school. However, the realities of poverty, household labour demands, and the distance to secondary schools often interrupt these aspirations. Girls are frequently expected to contribute to domestic work, care for younger siblings, and support household livelihoods.

As one mother reflected:"Hum chahte hain beti padhe, par school door hai aur kaam ke bina ghar nahi chalta." ("We want our daughter to study, but the school is far and the household cannot run without work.")

The experiences of this settlement capture a broader reality confronting many Banjara communities today. The community has largely transitioned from mobility to settlement, yet settlement has not delivered security. Housing remains insecure, livelihoods remain informal and unstable, and access to welfare is often obstructed by documentation gaps, administrative barriers, and weak implementation. Women bear the heaviest burden of this transition, navigating the intersecting challenges of caste-based marginalisation, insecure labour, inadequate infrastructure, and gendered responsibilities.

Their story highlights a central paradox of contemporary Banjara life: settlement without tenure security, work without stability, and social recognition without meaningful inclusion.

adolescent girls travel daily beyond the settlement, especially in contexts where Banjara women already face social stigma. Marriage further reinforces educational discontinuation, with girls commonly withdrawn from school once marriage negotiations begin. Education is rarely viewed as relevant to their anticipated post-marital roles centred on domestic labour and informal work.

Although Banjaras experience less overt segregation than some other DNT groups, subtle forms of caste-based discrimination persist within schools. Women recalled teachers using derogatory language, singling out Banjara children for discipline, or expressing low expectations regarding their academic abilities. Such experiences contribute to alienation, low self-confidence, and disengagement, particularly among first-generation learners.

As a largely settled community, Banjaras face fewer educational disruptions from migration than many nomadic groups. However, bureaucratic barriers remain significant. Delays in obtaining caste, income, or transfer certificates often disrupt transitions between educational levels, and families reported difficulties meeting documentation requirements for admission and examinations. These obstacles disproportionately affect girls, whose educational participation is already fragile.

The perceived economic returns to education are also limited. Many women who had completed middle or secondary schooling reported entering the same low-paid agricultural or informal occupations as their non-literate peers. This weak linkage between education and employment reinforces early withdrawal from school. FGDs repeatedly reflected the sentiment that *"padhai se naukri nahi milti"* (education does not lead to jobs), particularly in rural and semi-rural areas where formal employment opportunities remain scarce.

Livelihoods, Working Conditions and Livelihood Transitions

The livelihood profile of the Banjara community reflects a long and uneven transition from mobile trading and transport-based livelihoods to insecure and fragmented forms of informal work. Their relative sedentarisation has not translated into stable employment, asset accumulation or livelihood security.

Survey data show that Banjara livelihoods are spread across farm, non-farm and traditional sectors. 35.53% of Banjara respondents reported non-farm traditional livelihoods only, 27.63% reported farm-only livelihoods, 26.32% reported non-farm other livelihoods only, 4.61% combined farm and non-farm traditional work, 0.66% combined farm and non-farm other work, 0.66% combined non-farm other and traditional work, and 4.61% reported no work (Table 6.15). This confirms that Banjara households rely on multiple and often unstable livelihood sources.

By specific livelihood activity, 36.18% reported traditional livelihood practices, 29.61% animal husbandry, 20.39% construction activity, 3.95% public works, 3.29% agricultural activity, 1.32% manufacturing, 0.66% services, and 4.61% no work (Table 6.16). Animal husbandry therefore emerges as an important livelihood component.

Traditional livelihood practices remain significant, with 36.18% of Banjara respondents reporting engagement in such work (Table 6.16). These practices retain cultural and economic importance but do not necessarily provide stable or adequate income. Construction work is also important, with 20.39% of Banjara respondents reporting construction activity (Table 6.16). Such work is typically casual, physically demanding and marked by limited social protection. Women participate in construction, animal husbandry, agricultural labour, domestic work and traditional activities, but their labour is often undervalued or treated as supplementary.

Workplace abuse data show that 81.38% of Banjara respondents reported no abuse. However, 15.86% reported verbal abuse, 1.38% reported mental abuse, 0.69% reported physical abuse and 0.69% reported unpaid wages (Table 6.17). While reported levels of physical and wage-related abuse are low in the survey, FGDs suggest that

verbal humiliation, caste-based remarks, threats and wage irregularities are often normalised and may not always be reported as abuse.

FGDs provide important context for these survey findings. Women repeatedly emphasised the instability of work availability, describing livelihoods as highly seasonal and unpredictable. Agricultural labour was reported to be available only during peak periods, while lean seasons often brought unemployment, debt, or distress migration. As one participant explained, "Kaam sirf do-teen mahine milta hai, baaki samay baithe rehna padta hai" (Work is available only for two to three months, and the rest of the time we remain idle).

Participants also expressed a strong sense of loss associated with the erosion of traditional occupations. Older generations recalled a time when trading and transport-based livelihoods provided greater autonomy, mobility, and collective organisation. Today, these occupations survive largely as cultural memory rather than viable economic strategies. Elders continue to narrate this past with pride, contrasting it with the insecurity of contemporary wage labour.

Women highlighted the double burden of paid and unpaid work. Wage labour is routinely combined with domestic responsibilities such as cooking, childcare, water collection, and elder care, resulting in long workdays with little rest. Many women reported having limited control over their earnings, with expenditure decisions typically made by male household members. This restricts women's economic autonomy even when they contribute substantially to household income.

FGDs also highlighted the precarious nature of labour relations. Wage delays, arbitrary deductions, and withholding of payments were described as recurring experiences, particularly in construction and agricultural work. Workers often felt unable to challenge employers for fear of losing future employment. Similarly, verbal humiliation, caste-based slurs, threats, and other forms of workplace mistreatment were commonly discussed, even when respondents did not always classify these experiences as abuse during the survey.

Women further emphasised the absence of basic workplace facilities. Many reported avoiding drinking water during work hours because toilets were unavailable, increasing health risks. Occupational safety measures such as protective equipment, regulated work hours, and rest breaks were described as virtually non-existent, particularly in construction and agricultural labour.

Overall, the livelihood conditions of the Banjara community are characterised by landlessness, fragmented income sources, insecure employment relationships, poor working conditions, and limited bargaining power. While extreme forms of violence are reported by relatively few respondents, the everyday experience of work is marked by structural vulnerability, where exploitation is normalised and sustained through economic dependence, social marginalisation, and institutional invisibility.

In sum, Banjara livelihoods are marked by landlessness, dependence on informal work, fragmented income sources and limited institutional protection. While the community is more settled than several highly mobile groups, this has not produced stable or secure livelihood pathways.

Migration

Migration plays a moderate but significant role in Banjara livelihood strategies. 32.24% of Banjara respondents reported migrating for work, while 67.76% reported that they do not migrate (Table 6.18). This rate is higher than the top Fve-Plus-One community average of 23.87% shown in the same table. The main reason for migration is the search for better work opportunities, reported by 63.27% of migrating Banjara respondents. Another 28.57% migrated for better wage rates, 6.12% for better working conditions, and 2.04% for other reasons (Table 6.19).

Migration destinations include nearby districts and states, where Banjaras work in construction, agriculture, brick kilns, and infrastructure projects.

Migration is often undertaken as a family unit, with women and children accompanying male workers, further disrupting children's education and increasing women's labour burden.

FGDs highlighted the risks associated with migration, including wage theft, unsafe living conditions, and lack of access to public services at destination sites. Women reported having little recourse when employers fail to pay promised wages.

Access to Welfare Schemes

The Banjara community presents a paradoxical welfare profile: high possession of identity documents but uneven access to substantive welfare benefits. As noted earlier, 100% of respondents have Aadhaar cards, 95.39% have voter ID cards, and 97.37% have ration cards (Tables 6.20, 6.21 and 6.22). However, this documentation coverage has not translated into consistent welfare access. FGDs confirm that Aadhaar enrolment drives which are often linked to ration distribution and banking were successful in Banjara settlements. However, participants repeatedly noted that *"card hona aur fayda milna alag baat hai"* ("Having a card and getting benefits are two different things"), underscoring the disconnect between documentation and entitlement realisation.

Only 30.26% of Banjara respondents reported having BPL cards, while 69.08% did not and 0.66% reported the category as not applicable (Table 6.23). This indicates a mismatch between visible poverty and poverty-linked classification. Similarly, 68.42% had NREGA job cards, while 31.58% did not (Table 6.25). FGDs suggest that possession of job cards does not always guarantee regular work, timely payment or accessible work sites.

Access to DNT-specific schemes is negligible. Only 0.66% of Banjara respondents reported receiving support under the Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED), while 99.34% reported no access (Table 6.26). Access to livelihood support schemes is also limited, with only 8.55% reporting support, 90.79% reporting no support, and 0.66% saying they did not know (Table 6.28).

Housing support is similarly weak. Only 6.58% of Banjara respondents reported receiving support under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, while 93.42% reported no support (Table 6.29). Access to other housing support was even lower, with only 3.95% reporting support and 96.05% reporting no support (Table 6.30). This is significant given the poor structural quality of many houses.

Health insurance coverage is mixed. 53.95% of Banjara respondents reported enrolment in PM-JAY/Ayushman Bharat, while 46.05% were not enrolled (Table 6.31). Only 28.29% reported enrolment in another medical insurance scheme, while 71.05% reported no such coverage and 0.66% said it was not applicable (Table 6.32).

Financial inclusion is stronger but still incomplete. 65.13% of Banjara respondents reported having Jan Dhan accounts, while 34.87% did not (Table 6.36). In addition, 61.18% reported having another bank account, while 38.16% did not and 0.66% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.37). FGDs suggest that account ownership does not automatically translate into control over banking, especially for women. Women, in particular, reported dependence on male family members for banking-related decisions and withdrawals.

The welfare profile of the Banjara community is characterised by high formal inclusion but low substantive protection. Identity documents are widespread, yet access to poverty alleviation, housing, health insurance, and livelihood support remains fragmented and unreliable. Welfare systems continue to operate on assumptions of stability, land ownership, and administrative legibility that do not align with the lived realities of Banjara households. For Banjaras, welfare access is less constrained by documentation and more by classification errors, weak implementation, limited awareness, and exclusionary eligibility criteria, resulting in a form of bureaucratic inclusion that fails to deliver material security.

FGDs repeatedly reflect this legal invisibility. Women consistently reported possessing caste certificates but being unable to convert these into tangible benefits, noting that no one had ever accessed reservation despite eligibility. This mismatch between classification and access sets the structural backdrop for deprivation across housing, education, and livelihoods.

Political Reservation, Representation and Civic Engagement

Access to reservation among Banjaras remains limited. Only 4.61% of Banjara respondents reported having benefited from any form of reservation, while 95.39% reported no benefit (Table 6.38). Among those who benefited, all reported access through school education, with no reported reservation benefits in employment, panchayat elections or other fields (Table 6.39). All Banjara respondents who benefited from reservation accessed it under the OBC category (Table 6.40).

Political participation indicators further underline the community's marginal position. Only 1.97% of Banjara respondents reported participating in Gram Sabha meetings, while 96.71% reported no participation and 1.32% marked the question as not applicable (Table 6.41). Membership in local government institutions is also rare, with only 1.32% reporting that they had ever been members of such institutions (Table 6.42). No Banjara respondent reported membership in a Forest Protection Committee (Table 6.43).

Collective organisation is also very limited. Only 0.66% of Banjara respondents reported membership in farmer or artisan organisations, while 99.34% reported no such membership (Table 6.44). Women's group participation was only 1.97%, while 98.03% reported no membership (Table 6.45). No Banjara respondent reported membership in a trade union (Table 6.46). This lack of organisational embedding restricts collective bargaining, political voice and the ability to claim rights.

Engagement with grievance redressal mechanisms is minimal. Only 1.32% of Banjara respondents reported approaching a government official for any benefit or grievance, while 98.68% had not done so (Table 6.47). Of the two respondents who approached officials, one reported resolution and one reported non-resolution (Table 6.48). Similarly, only 1.32% approached an elected representative, while 98.68% had not done so (Table 6.49). Among those who did, one case remained unresolved and one was pending (Table 6.50).

Taken together, the data show that Banjaras occupy a paradoxical position of formal recognition without substantive inclusion. They are legally classified within recognised social categories and overwhelmingly identified as DNTs, yet access to reservation, collective platforms, local governance and grievance redressal remains extremely limited. Their marginal political participation should therefore be understood not as apathy, but as the outcome of weak state outreach, limited institutional trust and historically uneven incorporation into democratic and welfare structures.

Without targeted efforts to strengthen political literacy, ensure that category recognition translates into tangible benefits, and build community-level organisations, reservation and decentralised governance will continue to function as nominal entitlements rather than lived rights for the Banjara community.

Narikuravar Community

Social Profile and Historical Background

The Narikuravar are a historically nomadic community concentrated in Tamil Nadu, with long associations with hunting, gathering, artisanal production, itinerant trade, bead jewellery making, small vending, bird trapping, and forest-linked livelihoods. Their occupations were historically shaped by mobility, ecological knowledge, informal exchange networks, and movement across rural and urban markets. Like many De-Notified and Nomadic Communities, however, these livelihood systems have been steadily eroded by sedentarisation, urbanisation, policing, restrictions on vending, and shrinking access to common resources.

FGDs revealed that the Narikuravar continue to experience police suspicion, restrictions on street vending, insecure housing, and difficulty accessing welfare. In Kalmedu village, Madurai district, women described how beadwork, small trade, and seasonal vending continue to sustain households, but incomes remain uncertain and are often supplemented by construction labour, public works, or other informal work. These livelihood transitions reflect not only economic change but also the devaluation of mobile knowledge systems and artisanal work that historically shaped community identity.

Qualitative discussions also suggest that Narikuravar gender relations cannot be understood only through deprivation. Participants referred to the continued practice of bride price rather than dowry, where the groom's family offers payment or gifts to the bride's family. While this should not be romanticised as inherently egalitarian, it indicates a marriage economy distinct from dominant dowry-based systems and may reflect forms of social valuation of women's labour and status. At the same time, women also described restrictions on widow remarriage, sanctions against inter-caste marriage, and menstrual taboos. These narratives reveal a complex social world in which cultural autonomy and patriarchal control coexist.

Caste Location and Administrative Status

The Narikuravar constitute 3.20% of the total study sample, with 96 respondents included in the top Five-Plus-One community analysis (Table 6.1). Their inclusion is analytically important because they offer insight into the specific experience of a Tamil Nadu-based nomadic community whose social position is shaped by overlapping classifications, partial state recognition, and continuing social stigma.

In the sample, 76.04% of Narikuravar respondents are classified as Scheduled Tribe, 16.67% as Scheduled Caste, and 7.29% as Most Backward Class (MBC) (Table 6.2). In terms of social group classification, 55.21% fall under the Nomadic Tribe category and 44.79% under the De-Notified Tribe category (Table 6.3). This layered classification reflects the complex administrative location of the community and has implications for access to welfare schemes, reservations, documentation, and political recognition.

These classifications are not merely administrative categories; they have direct implications for access to reservations, welfare entitlements, and state support. FGDs indicated that inconsistent classification often creates confusion over eligibility and contributes to exclusion from schemes intended for marginalised groups. Women in Kalmedu reported that families within the same settlement sometimes possess different caste certificates, resulting in unequal access to educational reservations, housing schemes, and other benefits.

The Narikuravar experience reflects a longer history of shifting state categorisation shaped by colonial criminalisation, post-independence scheduling processes, and subsequent administrative reorganisation. As a result, the community is distributed across ST, SC, and MBC categories, creating a fragmented recognition framework that weakens collective claims to entitlements and leaves access to rights dependent on state-specific classifications and bureaucratic procedures.

Although the extension of Scheduled Tribe status in Tamil Nadu represents an important form of recognition, its benefits remain uneven in practice. FGD participants repeatedly described a disconnect between formal classification and actual access to welfare. Many women reported possessing caste certificates but still facing bureaucratic hurdles, repeated documentation demands, and delays that prevented them from accessing schemes. As one participant explained, "We have the certificate, but when we go to the office, they ask for ten other documents. By the time we collect everything, the scheme closes."

Differences in classification also generate unequal access to opportunities within the community itself. Respondents noted that those classified as MBC

often face greater difficulty accessing reservations and protections available to ST households. Taken together, these findings suggest that Narikuravar marginalisation cannot be understood through poverty alone. Administrative status, histories of mobility, and uneven recognition continue to shape access to rights, resources, and opportunities, placing many Narikuravar women in a position of partial recognition but persistent exclusion.

Land Ownership, Housing and Living Conditions

Land ownership among Narikuravar respondents is uneven. While 75% reported having neither owned nor leased agricultural land, 25% reported owning agricultural land (Table 6.4). Among the small group of landowning households for whom ownership details were recorded, 87.5% reported land in women's names and 12.5% reported joint ownership by men and women (Table 6.5). Although the number of landowning households is small, this is noteworthy in a broader context where women's ownership of productive assets is often rare. This may possibly be linked to the Nannilam Mahalir Nila Udaimai Thittam (Nannilam Women's Land Ownership Scheme) which a state scheme in Tamil Nadu designed to enable agricultural land ownership by SC and ST women.

Housing data reveals partial sedentarisation but not necessarily secure or adequate living conditions. In terms of current place of stay, 41.67% of Narikuravar respondents reported living in permanent structures, 44.79% in semi-permanent structures, 2.08% in government shelters, and 11.46% in other forms of housing (Table 6.6). No respondent reported living in tents or temporary/makeshift structures in the survey (Table 6.6). In terms of ownership status, 70.83% reported self-financed owned housing, 14.58% reported government-provided housing, 1.04% reported rented housing, and 13.54% fell under other arrangements (Table 6.7).

Housing quality remains mixed. 46.88% of respondents reported living in pucca houses, 32.29% in semi-pucca houses, and 20.83% in kuccha houses (Table 6.8). These figures suggest that while a significant proportion of Narikuravar households are settled, a substantial minority continue to live in structurally vulnerable housing.

Sanitation is one of the most severe dimensions of deprivation among the Narikuravar community. Only 30.21% of respondents reported having access to a personal toilet, while 65.63% practised open defecation and 4.17% relied on community, shared, or other facilities (Table 6.9). Even among the 29 respondents who had personal toilets, none reported having a water connection (Table 6.10). As a result, many toilets are difficult to use regularly and often become non-functional, forcing households to continue practising open defecation or manually carry water for toilet use. This burden falls disproportionately on women and girls, who are primarily responsible for collecting water and managing household sanitation.

The consequences extend beyond inconvenience to serious public health risks. Women frequently linked poor sanitation to recurring illness among children. As one participant observed, "The children are always sick with loose motions and stomach pain. We spend so much money on medicines." The widespread practice of open defecation increases exposure to diarrhoeal diseases, intestinal parasites, typhoid, and other water-borne infections. In densely populated settlements, children often play in contaminated surroundings and are repeatedly exposed to pathogens, contributing to frequent illness and poor nutritional outcomes. Human waste accumulated in open areas, drainage channels, and settlement peripheries also attracts flies and rodents, while monsoon flooding can carry contaminants directly into homes. Poor sanitation therefore affects not only health, but also household expenditure, nutrition, dignity, and overall quality of life.

FGDs in Kalmedu described temporary huts made from tarpaulin sheets, overcrowding, improvised bathrooms made with old sarees, and the use of saline or purchased water for household needs. Women linked housing insecurity not only to shelter but also to sanitation, water, dignity, and fear of eviction. The absence of reliable water connections also affects menstrual hygiene, bathing, toilet

use, and household cleanliness. Women reported using old cloth during menstruation and facing difficulties washing and drying it privately. These conditions expose women to shame, harassment, and health risks.

Water-related deprivation also shapes household expenditure. Participants reported buying drinking water, while using saline water for washing dishes, cleaning floors, and other household tasks. These coping mechanisms underline how settlement without adequate services produces a condition of insecure citizenship.

Education

Educational deprivation among Narikuravars is severe. In the sample, 80.21% of respondents had never been enrolled in school, 14.58% were previously enrolled, and only 5.21% were currently enrolled (Table 6.11). This makes Narikuravar respondents one of the most educationally excluded groups among the top Five-Plus-One communities.

Among those who had never enrolled, the most commonly cited reason was "others" at 54.55%, followed by frequent migration at 31.17%, lack of documents at 11.70%, and family restrictions at 2.60% (Table 6.12). No Narikuravar respondent cited absence of a school in the vicinity as the reason for never enrolling (Table 6.12). This suggests that educational exclusion is shaped less by physical absence of schools and more by mobility, documentation barriers, livelihood insecurity, and social marginalisation.

Among those previously enrolled, educational attainment remained low. 64.29% had studied only up to Standard 5 or below, 7.14% up to Standards 6–8, 14.29% up to Standards 9–10, and 14.29% up to Standards 11–12 (Table 6.14). No previously enrolled Narikuravar respondent reported graduation, diploma, vocational degree, postgraduate education, or higher qualifications (Table 6.14). These figures indicate that schooling, where accessed, is usually truncated at the primary or early secondary level.

At the same time, traditional skill transmission remains significant. 23.96% of Narikuravar respondents reported training in traditional arts or crafts, while 76.04% did not (Table 6.13). This is one of the higher proportions among the communities studied and reflects the continued importance of inter-generational knowledge linked to beadwork, craft production, itinerant trade, and other community-based livelihoods.

FGD narratives suggest that educational exclusion among the Narikuravar community stems less from a lack of aspiration than from the instability of settlement and livelihood conditions. Women described how children often begin school but are unable to continue because of migration, insecure housing, displacement, and livelihood pressures. As one participant observed, children "start school in one place, but life keeps moving before studies can continue."

Participants also highlighted bureaucratic barriers, including difficulties obtaining documents and navigating admission processes. For mobile and semi-settled families, these obstacles often combine with poverty and weak institutional support to disrupt schooling. At the same time, FGDs challenge the assumption that low formal education reflects a lack of skills. Women described how children learn beadwork, itinerant trade, craft production, and other traditional skills within the family from an early age. These forms of knowledge continue to support livelihoods but receive little recognition within formal education or skilling systems.

The discussions reveal a broader contradiction. Traditional occupations are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, while access to formal education remains limited. As a result, many households face a form of double exclusion - distanced from traditional livelihood systems while also excluded from new opportunities created through education.

Despite these barriers, parents expressed strong educational aspirations for their children, frequently describing schooling as a way to ensure

that future generations "do not live this same life." However, these aspirations remain difficult to realise without greater institutional support and educational systems that respond to the realities of De-Notified and Nomadic Communities.

Livelihoods, Working Conditions and Livelihood Transitions

The livelihood profile of Narikuravars reflects both continuity of traditional occupations and adaptation to precarious contemporary labour markets. Sector-wise, 43.75% reported non-farm traditional livelihoods only, 36.46% reported non-farm other livelihoods only, 12.5% reported farm-only livelihoods, 1.04%)) combined farm and non-farm traditional work, and 5.21% reported no work (Table 6.15). This indicates that Narikuravar livelihoods are strongly non-farm and that traditional livelihood practices remain important.

By specific activity, 44.79% reported traditional livelihood practices, 32.29% public works, 12.50% agricultural activity, 5.21% no work, 2.08% manufacturing, 2.08% services, and 1.04% animal husbandry (Table 6.16). No Narikuravar respondent reported construction work, forest produce collection, or mining activity in this table (Table 6.16). Public works therefore appear as a significant supplementary livelihood source, while traditional occupations remain the largest category of reported work.

These data suggest that Narikuravar livelihoods should not be understood as a simple shift from traditional to modern occupations. Rather, households combine traditional work, public works, agriculture, small manufacturing, services, and other informal activities as part of a fragile survival portfolio. Traditional livelihoods continue to provide both economic support and cultural identity, but declining market space, policing, and restrictions on vending make them increasingly insecure.

Workplace abuse was reported by a significant minority. Among Narikuravar respondents who answered this question, 70.65% reported no abuse, while 23.91% reported verbal abuse, 3.26% physical abuse, 1.09% sexual abuse, and 1.09% unpaid wages (Table 6.17). No respondent reported mental abuse as a separate category (Table 6.17). These figures suggest that while a majority did not report abuse, harassment and mistreatment remain important features of the labour experience, especially through verbal abuse and intimidation.

FGDs provide context to these findings, conversations suggest that Narikuravar livelihoods are characterised by adaptation under pressure rather than a straightforward transition from traditional to modern occupations. Women described how long-standing livelihood practices such as bead jewellery making, trinket selling, itinerant trade, and craft production continue to form an important part of household survival, but have become increasingly difficult to sustain. Participants noted that urbanisation, shrinking access to public spaces, and increased policing have reduced opportunities for traditional trade, forcing many families to shift towards petty vending, seasonal craft work, construction labour, and other forms of insecure wage employment.

FGDs revealed that traditional occupations remain closely tied to community identity as well as income. Women spoke of beadwork and jewellery vending not merely as economic activities but as skills passed down through generations, while men continued to make slingshots and other traditional products. However, respondents repeatedly emphasised that these activities no longer provide sufficient income. Seasonal mobility for trade continues, particularly during festival periods, but construction work and other forms of casual labour increasingly function as fallback options when traditional livelihoods fail. Participants linked these occupational changes not to voluntary diversification but to shrinking livelihood opportunities and frequent police interference with street-based vending.

Women also highlighted the central role they play in family-based livelihood systems. They described being involved in production, sales, travel for trade, and the management of household enterprises, yet noted that this labour often remains unrecognised. At the same time, many

expressed concern that traditional skills are losing both economic value and social recognition. As one participant remarked, "Our skills remain, but there is no place for them now," capturing the tension between cultural continuity and livelihood insecurity.

The discussions further revealed that work is frequently undertaken under exploitative and insecure conditions. Women involved in vending and casual labour described routine experiences of harassment, including police confiscation of goods, eviction from vending spaces, extortion, verbal abuse, and discriminatory treatment linked to caste identity. Wage withholding, threats from employers, and humiliation by contractors or customers were also reported. Because most work is informal and lacks contracts or grievance mechanisms, many women felt unable to challenge such treatment. As one participant explained, "If we argue, tomorrow there will be no work." This dependence on employers and officials often forces women to endure abuse in order to protect their livelihoods.

FGDs also suggested that survey data may understate the extent of workplace vulnerability. Many women described forms of coercion, disrespect, and harassment that they did not necessarily identify as abuse but regarded as a normal part of working life. For women engaged in public-facing occupations, economic insecurity was often intertwined with exposure to harassment in streets, markets, and worksites. These experiences indicate that livelihood insecurity among the Narikuravar is not only about low or irregular incomes but also about the quality, dignity, and safety of work. Traditional skills continue to survive, yet without adequate recognition or support, while newer forms of labour are concentrated in poorly regulated sectors where exploitation remains common. As a result, labour itself becomes a site through which stigma, marginalisation, and insecurity are continually reproduced.

Migration

Migration remains an important but not dominant livelihood strategy among Narikuravars. 27.08% of respondents reported migrating for work, while 72.92% did not (Table 6.18). This indicates that while most respondents are not currently migrating for work, mobility continues to be significant for more than one-fourth of the community sample.

Among those who migrated, the dominant reason was better work opportunities, cited by 84.62% of migrant respondents. Smaller proportions cited no work opportunity at source (7.69%), better working conditions (3.85%), and discrimination (3.85%) (Table 6.19). No Narikuravar respondent cited better wage rate as the primary reason for migration (Table 6.19). The data therefore suggests that Narikuravar migration is driven primarily by the search for work rather than higher wages alone.

FGDs indicate that contemporary migration among Narikuravars is not simply a continuation of older nomadic mobility. It is often shaped by livelihood insecurity, restricted vending spaces, police harassment, and the absence of sufficient local work. Participants described migration not simply as a strategy for securing better income, but also as a response to stagnant earnings, limited local employment opportunities, caste-based discrimination, and insecure settlement conditions. For many families, seasonal migration for petty trade, informal labour, or short-term work supplements local livelihoods that are otherwise insufficient to sustain household needs.

FGDs revealed that migration is characterised by a constant tension between opportunity and vulnerability. Some women described travelling with family networks for trade or work, while others emphasised that migration often exposes them to new forms of insecurity, including police harassment, unstable housing, exploitative labour arrangements, and unfamiliar social environments. As one participant explained, "We leave because there is no work here, but outside too there is no certainty." This captures the precarious nature of migration, which often extends rather than resolves economic insecurity.

Participants also highlighted the role of discrimination in shaping mobility decisions. Migration was frequently described as a way of

escaping caste-based hostility and exclusion in local labour markets, suggesting that movement is often driven by social as well as economic pressures. In this sense, migration reflects not only the search for work but also an attempt to navigate environments where opportunities are constrained by stigma and unequal treatment.

Overall, the qualitative evidence portrays migration as a selective and often distress-driven survival strategy. Rather than signalling upward mobility or economic advancement, migration frequently reflects the limited livelihood options available to Narikuravar households and the continuing burdens of exclusion, insecurity, and marginalisation.

Access to Welfare Schemes and Entitlements

Narikuravar respondents show relatively high possession of basic documents but limited access to welfare schemes. 93.75% reported having Aadhaar cards, while 6.25% did not (Table 6.20). 84.38% had voter ID cards, 14.58% did not, and 1.04% did not know (Table 6.21). Ration card coverage was also high, with 90.62% reporting possession, 8.33% reporting no ration card, and 1.04% saying they did not know (Table 6.22).

However, poverty-linked and welfare access is much weaker. Only 3.12% reported having BPL cards, while 54.17% did not, 38.54% did not know, and 4.17% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.23). The high "don't know" response indicates significant informational uncertainty around poverty classification.

PAN card coverage was moderate: 53.12% reported having a PAN card, 44.79% did not, and 2.08% did not know (Table 6.24). Access to NREGA job cards was low, with only 9.38% reporting possession, while 75% did not have one, 8.33% did not know, and 7.29% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.25).

Access to DNT-specific and livelihood schemes was extremely limited. Only 1.04% reported support under SEED, while 55.21% reported no access, 31.25% did not know, and 12.50% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.26). Only 4.17% reported support from any livelihood support scheme, while 52.08% reported no access, 31.25% did not know, and 12.50% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.28).

Food security support also remained uneven. Only 10.42% reported receiving support under PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, while 48.96% reported no access, 31.25% did not know, and 9.38% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.27). This is striking given the high ration card coverage, suggesting a gap between documentation and benefit realisation.

Housing and sanitation schemes show similarly weak reach. Only 2.08% reported support under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, while 55.21% reported no access, 29.17% did not know, and 13.54% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.29). Only 2.08% reported support from any other housing scheme, while 54.17% reported no access, 30.21% did not know, and 13.54% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.30). Support under Swachh Bharat Mission was reported by only 3.12%, while 54.17% reported no access, 31.25% did not know, and 11.46% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.33). Support under Jal Jeevan Mission was reported by only 5.21%, while 51.04% reported no access, 30.21% did not know, and 13.54% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.35).

Health insurance coverage is also weak. Only 6.25% reported enrolment under PM-JAY/Ayushman Bharat, while 55.21% reported no enrolment, 26.04% did not know, and 12.50% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.31). Other medical insurance coverage stood at 12.50%, while 53.12% reported no coverage, 20.83% did not know, and 13.54% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.32).

Access to NT/DNT hostels was higher than many other schemes but still limited. 12.50% reported access, while 54.17% reported no access, 23.96% did not know, and 9.38% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.34). Given the high levels of educational exclusion, this limited access to hostel support is particularly significant.

Financial inclusion presents a mixed picture. Only 5.21% reported having Jan Dhan accounts, while 58.33% did not, 33.33% did not know, and 3.12% marked it as not applicable (Table 6.36). However, 77.08% reported having another bank account, while 21.88% did not and 1.04% did not know (Table 6.37). This suggests that banking access exists, but not necessarily through flagship financial inclusion schemes.

Taken together, the welfare data reveal a sharp gap between formal documentation and substantive entitlement access. Aadhaar, voter ID, and ration card coverage are relatively high, but access to BPL status, NREGA, SEED, PMAY, SBM, JJM, PM-JAY, livelihood support, and hostel facilities remains limited. The repeated presence of large "don't know" categories across schemes also suggests weak information flows, poor outreach, and limited institutional interface with the community.

FGD discussions revealed a persistent gap between formal documentation and actual access to welfare benefits. Women frequently reported possessing Aadhaar cards, voter identity cards, ration cards, and other documents, yet remaining unable to access schemes because of bureaucratic hurdles, lack of information, shifting eligibility criteria, and administrative delays. Several participants described documentation as necessary but insufficient, noting that possessing proof of identity rarely guaranteed access to entitlements.

A recurring theme was uncertainty about welfare coverage. Many women were unclear about whether they were enrolled in particular schemes or eligible to receive benefits, reflecting weak communication between state institutions and the community. Participants often described government programmes as something they had heard about but rarely accessed directly. As one woman remarked, "Cards are there, but benefits do not come," capturing the widespread perception that official recognition has not translated into meaningful support.

FGDs also highlighted the difficulties of navigating welfare systems. Women spoke of repeated visits to government offices, requests for additional documents, and confusion arising from changing classifications and eligibility requirements. These experiences created a sense of exclusion despite formal inclusion within state records. Similar concerns emerged around banking and financial services. Even where households possessed bank accounts, irregular incomes, limited savings, and unfamiliarity with banking procedures often restricted their usefulness.

Overall, the qualitative evidence suggests that Narikuravar women experience welfare systems as distant, opaque, and difficult to access. The central challenge is not the absence of documents, but the inability to convert formal identification into effective access to housing, livelihoods, social protection, healthcare, and other entitlements. As a result, many households remain only partially included within state welfare systems despite being formally recognised by them.

Reservation, Representation and Civic Engagement

Access to reservation among Narikuravars is extremely limited. Only 2.08% of respondents reported having benefited from reservation, while 97.92% reported no benefit (Table 6.38). Among the two respondents who benefited, both accessed reservation through school education (Table 6.39). Both received reservation benefits under the ST category (Table 6.40). No respondent reported reservation benefits in employment or political representation.

Political participation is similarly weak. Only 2.08% of Narikuravar respondents reported participating in Gram Sabha meetings, while 97.92% did not (Table 6.41). Only 1.04% had ever been a member of a local government institution, while 98.96% had not (Table 6.42). Membership in Forest Protection Committees was also only 1.04% (Table 6.43).

Collective organisation is nearly absent. Only 1.04% reported membership in a farmer or artisan organisation, 1.04% in a women's group, and 1.04% in a trade union (Tables 6.44, 6.45 and 6.46). These figures show that Narikuravar women remain largely outside formal and collective platforms that

could support rights claims, livelihood bargaining, or political voice.

Grievance redressal engagement is minimal. Only 2.08% reported approaching a government official for any benefit or grievance, while 97.92% had not (Table 6.47). Among the two who approached officials, both reported that the matter was resolved (Table 6.48). Similarly, only 2.08% reported approaching an elected representative, while 97.92% had not (Table 6.49). Of those who approached elected representatives, one case was resolved and one was unresolved (Table 6.50).

FGDs suggests that Narikuravar women experience a significant gap between formal recognition and meaningful inclusion within political and administrative systems. Despite possessing caste certificates and being eligible for reservation benefits under different classification categories, many women described confusion regarding eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, and bureaucratic procedures. Participants indicated that fragmented administrative classifications often make it difficult to understand which benefits they are entitled to claim, limiting their ability to access affirmative action measures in practice.

FGDs also revealed a distant and often uncertain relationship with state institutions. Women rarely described government offices, elected representatives, or local governance structures as accessible avenues for addressing grievances or securing entitlements. Instead, interactions with authorities were often characterised by uncertainty, apprehension, and low expectations of success. Participants suggested that approaching officials was frequently seen as burdensome and unlikely to produce meaningful outcomes, contributing to limited engagement with formal grievance redress mechanisms.

Several discussions indicated that state institutions are commonly perceived as opaque and difficult to navigate. In the absence of accessible institutional channels, women often rely on family members, kinship networks, or community contacts to resolve problems rather than seeking support through official mechanisms. This reliance reflects not only weak institutional outreach but also limited confidence in the responsiveness of public authorities.

The near absence of collective organisation emerged as another important theme. Women rarely reported involvement in self-help groups, trade unions, artisan associations, or other collective platforms that could strengthen their ability to negotiate with the state or advocate for community rights. The lack of such organisations contributes to political isolation and reduces opportunities for collective action, leadership development, and engagement with public decision-making processes.

Overall, the FGDs suggests that Narikuravar women remain largely excluded from the institutions through which rights are claimed, grievances are addressed, and political voice is exercised. While they participate in electoral processes and possess formal documentation, their engagement with governance structures remains limited by administrative complexity, weak institutional accessibility, low levels of collective organisation, and longstanding experiences of exclusion. Political marginalisation therefore appears not simply as a lack of participation, but as a consequence of broader structural barriers that restrict the community's ability to convert formal citizenship into substantive representation and influence.

Chapter 7

Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the socio-economic realities of women from Nomadic, De-Notified and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NT-DNT-SNT) through four interconnected lenses: the historical literature on stigma and exclusion; the legal and policy framework governing these communities in postcolonial India; the state-wise empirical analysis across five states; and detailed community-level profiles. Read together, these strands reveal that the marginalisation of NT-DNT-SNT women cannot be understood as a simple consequence of poverty or welfare exclusion. Rather, it is the outcome of a longer historical process through which colonial criminalisation, postcolonial legal continuity, fragmented administrative recognition, insecure livelihoods, gendered inequalities and institutional neglect have combined to deny women full access to citizenship.

The central finding of this study is that NT-DNT-SNT women continue to experience a condition of "incomplete citizenship". They are visible to the state through documentation, surveillance, and regulation, yet remain inadequately recognised as rights-bearing citizens entitled to secure housing, productive assets, social protection, meaningful political participation, and equal access to justice. While important policy initiatives have emerged in recent decades, the evidence presented in this study demonstrates that formal recognition has not yet translated into substantive inclusion.

The sections that follow first summarise the principal conclusions emerging from the study, then interpret these findings through the lens of interlocking oppression, before locating them within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals and outlining a set of recommendations for governments and other institutions.

Major Conclusions Emerging from the Study

Historical Exclusion and Legal Continuity

A central conclusion of this study is that the exclusion of NT-DNT-SNT Communities is historically produced but institutionally sustained in the present. Colonial governance transformed mobility into a marker of suspicion and criminality through the Criminal Tribes Act and related systems of surveillance. Although the Act was repealed after Independence, many of its underlying assumptions persisted through Habitual Offenders legislation, police practices, administrative procedures and public attitudes.

The evidence presented in this study demonstrates that this legacy continues to shape everyday life. Community narratives reveal ongoing police suspicion, arbitrary questioning, settlement-level surveillance and routine association with criminality. Women experience the consequences not only through direct encounters with law enforcement but also through discrimination in schools, welfare systems, healthcare facilities and other public institutions. De-notification therefore remains incomplete as a social and institutional process.

Law, Policy and the Production of Precarity

The study also finds that many legal and policy frameworks have contributed to the erosion of traditional livelihoods without creating adequate alternatives. Communities historically dependent on hunting, animal performance, itinerant trade, craft circulation, pastoralism and forest-based livelihoods have experienced severe economic

dislocation under postcolonial regulatory regimes.

Field evidence demonstrates that traditional occupations continue to hold cultural significance but increasingly survive in precarious forms. The resulting insecurity is not simply the product of economic change; it is often the outcome of policy choices that have transferred the costs of transition onto already marginalised communities.

Fragmented Recognition and Administrative Misclassification

The study highlights the role of fragmented classification systems in reproducing exclusion. NT-DNT-SNT Communities are dispersed across multiple administrative categories including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, VJNTs, DNCs and MBCs. While these classifications shape access to reservation and welfare, they often obscure shared histories of criminalisation, mobility and dispossession.

State-level comparisons show that access to benefits varies considerably depending on classification frameworks. However, the findings also demonstrate that recognition alone does not guarantee inclusion. Administrative categorisation often creates new forms of exclusion by generating confusion, inconsistent implementation and unequal access to entitlements.

Welfare Inclusion without Substantive Citizenship

The study reveals a striking contradiction between documentary inclusion and substantive citizenship. Across most communities, possession of Aadhaar cards, voter identity cards and other documents is relatively widespread. Yet access to housing schemes, social protection, healthcare, reservation benefits, livelihood programmes and grievance redressal remains limited.

The findings suggest that welfare systems continue to privilege stable residence, fixed identities and bureaucratic legibility. Consequently, many NT-DNT-SNT women are recognised administratively but remain excluded from the full range of rights and protections associated with citizenship.

Settlement without Rights

The evidence challenges the assumption that NT-DNT-SNT Communities remain universally mobile. Most respondents have lived in their present settlements for extended periods. However, settlement has rarely translated into secure tenure, legal recognition or reliable access to public services.

Many communities occupy panchayat land, government land, roadside settlements or other insecure spaces. As a result, sedentarisation has often occurred without restitution. Communities have become settled, but not secure.

Gendered Burdens of Exclusion

The study demonstrates that all of these processes are experienced in profoundly gendered ways. Women bear responsibility for managing food insecurity, water scarcity, unsafe sanitation, caregiving and supplementary income generation while simultaneously navigating hostile institutions and insecure livelihoods.

Open defecation, inadequate housing, poor healthcare access and weak social protection have consequences that extend beyond material deprivation to affect dignity, bodily autonomy and personal safety. Policies that treat poverty as gender-neutral fail to address these realities.

Food, Education, Health and Political Voice

The study further demonstrates that exclusion is cumulative rather than sectoral. Food insecurity, educational exclusion, health disparities and political marginalisation are deeply interconnected. Women experience these not as separate policy failures but as overlapping dimensions of a broader condition of exclusion.

Weak documentation affects access to welfare. Housing insecurity affects access to food and

schooling. Police harassment affects mobility and livelihoods. Limited political representation undermines the ability to address each of these challenges. Exclusion therefore operates as a system rather than a collection of isolated deficits.

Discussion: Interlocking Oppression and the Political Economy of Exclusion

While the preceding sections identify the principal patterns of exclusion experienced by NT-DNT-SNT women, they also raise a broader analytical question: how should these overlapping disadvantages be understood?

The findings of this study suggest that these experiences are best interpreted through the framework of interlocking oppression developed by Patricia Hill Collins and enriched by the work of Uma Chakravarti, Gail Omvedt and Dalit feminist scholars. This perspective shifts attention away from individual indicators of deprivation and towards the mutually reinforcing systems of power that structure women's lives.

The survey findings reveal widespread landlessness, insecure housing, low educational attainment, precarious livelihoods, limited access to welfare and weak political participation. Considered separately, these may appear as distinct problems. Considered together, they reveal a broader structure of exclusion operating across economic, social, political and institutional domains.

Uma Chakravarti's analysis of caste and gender is particularly useful in understanding these patterns. Her work demonstrates that caste survives not simply because of cultural belief but because it is embedded in unequal control over land, labour and institutions. The experiences documented in this study strongly support this interpretation. Landlessness, insecure housing and weak access to resources are not merely symptoms of poverty; they are manifestations of longstanding inequalities in access to productive assets and institutional power.

Gail Omvedt's understanding of caste as a material reality further sharpens this analysis. The experiences of Musahar, Bawariya, Pardhi and Nat women demonstrate how access to food, sanitation, housing and livelihoods continues to be shaped by unequal control over land and resources. Violence, intimidation and exclusion often function as mechanisms through which these inequalities are maintained.

The qualitative findings also reveal the continuing impact of historical criminalisation. Accounts from Nat settlements in Varanasi and Pardhi communities in Maharashtra show how police suspicion and institutional discrimination remain embedded in everyday life. The experiences of women such as Nisha in Hisar illustrate how gender, disability, caste stigma and institutional neglect can converge to produce extreme vulnerability.

Viewed through Collins' framework, these experiences represent the interaction of structural, disciplinary, hegemonic and interpersonal forms of power. Together they produce a cumulative form of exclusion that cannot be reduced to poverty alone. The evidence therefore suggests that NT-DNT-SNT women experience a distinct configuration of caste-based, gendered and historically rooted disadvantage that remains insufficiently recognised within mainstream policy frameworks.

Linking the Findings to the Sustainable Development Goals

The analytical framework outlined above has important implications for understanding the relationship between NT-DNT-SNT women's experiences and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The study demonstrates that progress towards poverty reduction, gender equality, decent work, reduced inequalities, sustainable settlements and access to justice cannot be achieved without addressing the intersecting forms of exclusion documented in these communities. Viewed through the lens of interlocking oppression, the

SDGs are not separate targets but interconnected commitments whose achievement depends on addressing structural inequalities.

Rather than reproducing the evidence already discussed, the SDG framework highlights how the findings map onto broader development commitments. Landlessness, insecure livelihoods and welfare exclusion directly undermine SDG 1 (No Poverty). Gendered labour burdens, violence and limited participation affect SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Informal and insecure employment constrains progress towards SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Fragmented recognition and unequal access to entitlements impede SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Settlement insecurity affects SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Police harassment, weak grievance redressal and limited representation undermine SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

Chapter 8

Recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrate that the exclusion experienced by women from Nomadic, De-Notified and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NT-DNT-SNT) cannot be addressed through isolated welfare interventions alone. The challenges documented across the study - historical criminalisation, fragmented administrative recognition, landlessness, insecure settlements, weak access to education and healthcare, erosion of traditional livelihoods, gender-based violence, police harassment, and limited political participation - are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Addressing these forms of exclusion requires action at multiple levels. The recommendations presented in this chapter therefore recognise that responsibility for change does not lie with a single institution. Meaningful inclusion requires coordinated action by the Union Government, State Governments, statutory bodies, local administrations, civil society organisations, academic institutions, private sector actors, and NT-DNT-SNT Communities themselves.

The recommendations are organised around the principle that NT-DNT-SNT women should be recognised not merely as beneficiaries of welfare programmes but as rights-bearing citizens entitled to recognition, restitution, representation, protection, and dignity. They also proceed from a central conclusion of this study: NT-DNT-SNT women experience a condition of incomplete citizenship, in which they are visible to the state through documentation, surveillance, and regulation, yet remain inadequately recognised as rights-bearing citizens entitled to secure housing, productive assets, substantive social protection, and equal access to justice

Recommendations for the Union Government

Recognition, Classification and Institutional Reform

The Union Government should establish a coherent national framework for the recognition, protection and development of NT-DNT-SNT Communities. The study demonstrates that fragmentation across SC, ST, OBC, VJNT, DNC, MBC and unclassified categories has weakened access to reservation, welfare, and political representation.

A national enumeration of NT-DNT-SNT Communities should be undertaken through future Census exercises and complementary administrative surveys. Data should be gender-disaggregated and should include information on land ownership, housing, education, livelihoods, migration, health, violence, welfare access, and political participation.

The existing institutional architecture should be strengthened through the creation of a statutory National Commission for De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities or a similarly empowered national authority with budgetary powers, monitoring functions and representation from NT-DNT-SNT women.

The Union Government should also initiate a serious examination of a dedicated reservation framework or sub-quota for NT-DNT-SNT Communities. At a minimum, reservation access should be systematically tracked across existing SC, ST and OBC categories to assess whether formal recognition is translating into actual benefits.

The Union Government, in collaboration with States and civil society, should support community based paralegal programmes anchored in NT DNT SNT women's collectives, enabling them to document rights violations, navigate police and court processes, and accompany survivors in cases of violence, eviction and criminalisation.

Legal Reform and Protection from Criminalisation

A comprehensive review of laws and administrative practices that continue to reproduce the legacy of criminalisation should be undertaken. This review should include Habitual Offenders legislation, anti-beggary laws, police manuals, prison manuals, and regulatory frameworks that disproportionately affect traditional livelihoods.

Police reform must be treated as a priority. Mandatory sensitisation programmes should address historical criminalisation, caste discrimination, gender-based violence, custodial safeguards and community engagement. Mechanisms for independent investigation of complaints involving NT-DNT-SNT Communities should be strengthened.

National and State Police Academies should integrate mandatory and accredited modules on the history of criminalisation, caste, tribe and gender into police training curricula. Similar modules should be introduced in judicial academies, administrative training institutes, and welfare departments so that institutional responses are informed by the actual historical and socio-economic conditions of NT-DNT-SNT Communities rather than by stigma and stereotype

Social Protection and Citizenship Rights

A National Documentation and Entitlement Mission should be established to ensure universal access to identity documents, caste certificates, residence certificates, ration cards, bank accounts, health insurance, pensions and MGNREGA job cards.

The SEED Scheme should be expanded and redesigned to improve accessibility. Greater emphasis should be placed on field-based outreach, women's livelihoods, girls' education, legal aid, hostels, health services and traditional skill development. Scheme implementation should be audited regularly to assess whether communities identified as eligible are actually receiving benefits in practice.

Housing policy should include a dedicated NT-DNT-SNT component within PMAY and related programmes. Long-settled communities should receive support for tenure regularisation, in-situ upgrading, basic services and women's co-ownership of housing assets. States must recognise that many NT-DNT-SNT Communities are already settled and that continued exclusion is now largely the product of administrative and legal barriers rather than mobility alone.

Education, Health and Livelihoods

The Union Government should establish dedicated residential schools, hostels, scholarships and bridge education programmes for NT-DNT-SNT children, particularly girls. These interventions should be designed to address settlement-level exclusion, seasonal migration, documentation barriers, and the high opportunity cost of schooling in poor households.

Mobile and community-based healthcare systems should be expanded to cover NT-DNT-SNT settlements, with a focus on maternal health, reproductive health, nutrition, mental health and disability support.

A women-centred livelihood strategy should be developed to support both traditional occupations and emerging livelihood opportunities. This should include cooperatives, producer groups, market access, design support, digital marketing, social security and access to credit. Particular attention should be paid to women concentrated in highly precarious occupations such as waste picking, construction labour, sanitation work, domestic work, performance-based labour, and other informal work marked by stigma, low pay, and weak institutional protection.

Recommendations for State Governments

State Action Plans

Every State Government should prepare a dedicated NT-DNT-SNT Action Plan informed by settlement mapping, community consultations and gender-sensitive indicators. These plans should include measurable targets for housing, education, health, documentation, livelihoods, sanitation, reservation access and political participation.

The Action Plans should also identify district-level priority areas, responsible departments, timelines, budget lines, and monitoring indicators so that NT-DNT-SNT concerns are not diffused across departments without accountability.

Secure Settlements and Housing Rights

Long-standing NT-DNT-SNT settlements should be identified and regularised. Regularisation must be accompanied by infrastructure investments, including housing, roads, water supply, sanitation, drainage, electricity and community facilities.

States should recognise that many NT-DNT-SNT Communities are already settled and that continued exclusion often reflects administrative barriers rather than mobility.

Welfare Access and Documentation

Special documentation drives should be conducted in NT-DNT-SNT settlements to facilitate access to identity documents, caste certificates, ration cards, pensions, health insurance and education-related documentation.

Food security systems should be made more accessible through portable entitlements, grievance mechanisms, alternative authentication systems and active inclusion of excluded households.

Education and Health

State education departments should develop flexible educational models for children affected by migration, insecure settlements and poverty. Residential schools, hostels, transport assistance, bridge courses and scholarships should be prioritised.

State health departments should institutionalise mobile health outreach and community health workers in NT-DNT-SNT settlements, with a particular focus on women and children.

State health departments should mandate that every public facility adopt and display a zero discrimination charter, record all refusals or delays in treating NT DNT SNT women, and face administrative action where audits find discriminatory practice.

Women's Leadership and Political Participation

States should actively support women's collectives, self-help groups, producer groups and leadership platforms. Dedicated efforts should be made to increase participation in Gram Sabhas, local government institutions, women's forums and grievance redressal mechanisms.

State Governments in conjuncture with civil society organsiations should invest in sustained political education programmes for NT DNT SNT women, covering Panchayati Raj institutions, urban local bodies, budgeting processes and grievance forums. These programmes should be linked to mentorship and fellowship opportunities that support women from these communities to contest local elections and assume leadership roles in statutory bodies and monitoring committees.

State-Specific Recommendations: Uttar Pradesh

The Government of Uttar Pradesh should develop a targeted strategy for communities such as Nat, Musahar, Bhatu, Dharikar and Rangdharwa. The need for such a strategy is underscored by findings from this study showing deep housing insecurity, continued police suspicion, weak welfare access, and livelihood precarity among communities such as the Nat and Musahar.

Priority areas should include:

- Settlement regularisation and housing rights.
- Protection against police harassment and fabricated criminal cases.
- Strengthening of livelihood opportunities for Nat performers and Musahar labourers.
- Expansion of women's self-help groups and producer collectives.
- Improved access to food security, healthcare, education and social protection.

State-Specific Recommendations: Maharashtra

The Government of Maharashtra should build upon its VJNT framework while addressing persistent implementation gaps. The study suggests that recognition through a separate category has not, by itself, overcome police profiling, housing insecurity, poor sanitation, or weak welfare access among communities such as the Pardhi.

Priority actions include:

- Auditing access to VJNT benefits.
- Strengthening legal protection for Pardhi communities.
- Expanding housing and settlement regularisation.
- Supporting traditional occupations through cooperatives and cultural industries.
- Expanding mobile healthcare and women's health services.

State-Specific Recommendations: Haryana

The Government of Haryana should prepare a focused strategy for Banjara, Sansi, Bazigar, Sapera, Nat, Kalandar and Deha communities. This is particularly important in view of evidence from the study indicating housing insecurity, weak administrative understanding of DNT histories, gender-based violence, and poor grievance response in settlements surveyed in the state.

Priority areas include:

- Housing security and land allocation.
- Protection against gender-based violence.
- Adult literacy and girls' education.
- Women's livelihood programmes.
- District-level grievance mechanisms for NT-DNT women.

State-Specific Recommendations: Rajasthan

The Government of Rajasthan should prioritise communities such as Bawariya, Gadia Lohar, Kalbeliya, Nat, Banjara, Sansi and Sikhligar. The findings point to a combination of insecure settlements, poor water and sanitation, erosion of cultural livelihoods, and persistent stigma affecting women's safety, dignity and access to public institutions.

Key interventions should include:

- Settlement regularisation.
- Water and sanitation infrastructure.
- Revival and support of traditional cultural livelihoods.
- Police sensitisation and legal reform.
- Educational support through hostels, scholarships and vocational centres.

State-Specific Recommendations: Tamil Nadu

The Government of Tamil Nadu should strengthen implementation of its DNC/MBC framework to ensure that recognition translates into substantive rights. While the state offers a relatively structured classification and welfare framework, the study suggests that communities such as the Narikuravar continue to experience insecure housing, livelihood transition, and exclusion from substantive inclusion.

Priority actions include:

- Housing and settlement security.

- Support for Narikuravar and Boom Boom Mattukaran livelihoods.
- Educational support for girls and young women.
- Administrative sensitisation.
- Expansion of cooperatives and market access initiatives.

Recommendations for National and State Commissions

The National Commission for Women and State Commissions for Women should establish dedicated grievance cells for NT-DNT-SNT women. These mechanisms should include simplified procedures that do not exclude complainants lacking formal documentation or fixed residence.

The National Human Rights Commission, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commissions, and State Human Rights Commissions should integrate NT-DNT-SNT concerns into their monitoring frameworks.

National and state-level audits should be undertaken on:

- Police harassment.
- Gender-based violence.
- Welfare exclusion.
- Access to justice.
- Reservation utilisation.
- Housing and settlement rights.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations and Community-Based Organisations

Civil society organisations should support community mobilisation, rights literacy, documentation assistance, welfare access and legal aid.

Community-based organisations should be strengthened as local institutions capable of supporting women facing violence, displacement, welfare exclusion or police harassment.

Universities and research institutions should expand participatory research involving NT-DNT-SNT women as co-researchers rather than subjects of study.

Civil society organisations should also support producer collectives, women's enterprises, cultural platforms and community leadership programmes.

Recommendations for the Private Sector and CSR Initiatives

Corporate Social Responsibility programmes should prioritise NT-DNT-SNT settlements in investments related to housing, healthcare, education, livelihoods and digital inclusion.

Private sector partnerships should be developed to create sustainable market opportunities for traditional crafts, cultural production, performance traditions, food products and women-led enterprises.

CSR initiatives should support scholarships, digital literacy, vocational training, entrepreneurship development and women's cooperatives. Such interventions should be designed in partnership with community organisations so that they respond to existing skills, market realities, and the dignity of cultural labour rather than reproducing paternalistic models of upliftment.

Towards Recognition, Restitution and Full Citizenship

The findings of this study demonstrate that NT-DNT-SNT women are not simply poor or underserved populations. They are citizens whose exclusion has been historically produced and institutionally reproduced through the interaction of criminalisation, caste-based discrimination, gender inequality, insecure livelihoods and fragmented policy recognition.

Addressing these injustices requires more than welfare delivery. It requires recognition of historical wrongs, restitution of rights and resources, meaningful representation in decision-making processes, and accountability from public institutions.

The ultimate objective of the recommendations presented in this chapter is therefore not merely inclusion within existing systems, but the creation of conditions in which NT-DNT-SNT women can exercise full citizenship, participate equally in public life, and live with dignity, security and justice.

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