

1. Denotified Tribes- Governance

Denotified Tribes (DNTs), Nomadic Tribes (NTs), and Semi Nomadic Tribes (SNTs) across India are demanding a separate column in the 2027 caste census and constitutional recognition through a distinct Schedule, citing longstanding political misclassification, and exclusion from welfare benefits

Nomadic, Semi Nomadic and Denotified Tribes (NTs, SNTs and DNTs) in India

Conceptual Clarification and Definitions

Nomadic Tribes (NTs)- Communities that constantly move from place to place for livelihood and do not have a fixed habitation. Mobility is often linked to traditional occupations such as pastoralism, trading, performing arts, animal rearing, and craft-based livelihoods.

Semi Nomadic Tribes (SNTs)- Communities that move seasonally or periodically, but may have temporary or partial settlements. Their movement is often dictated by climatic conditions, agricultural cycles, or market demand.

Denotified Tribes (DNTs)- Communities that were notified as “criminal tribes” under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 during British rule. The Act presumed criminality by birth and subjected these communities to surveillance, forced settlements, and restrictions on movement. After Independence, the Act was repealed in 1952 and these communities were “denotified”, hence called Denotified Tribes.

Historical Background- Colonial Legacy of Criminalisation

Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 Enacted to control mobile populations that were seen as a threat to colonial administration. Marked entire communities as hereditarily criminal, violating basic principles of justice.

Post Independence Continuity of Stigma- Though repealed, many states enacted the Habitual Offenders Act, 1952, which continued police surveillance and profiling of DNTs. This resulted in institutionalised discrimination even after constitutional guarantees of equality.

Long Term Impact- Loss of traditional livelihoods. Social exclusion and intergenerational poverty. Deep mistrust between these communities and state institutions.

Demographic and Social Status in India- South Asia hosts the largest nomadic population in the world, with India being a major contributor.

In India- Around 10% of the population is estimated to belong to NTs, SNTs and DNTs. Approximately 150 Denotified Tribes exist across states. Around 500 Nomadic and Semi Nomadic communities are identified.

Settlement Pattern- Most DNTs have now become partially or fully settled. Nomadic communities continue to remain mobile due to lack of land, housing, and livelihood security.

Legal and Administrative Classification Issues

DNTs are not a homogeneous category- Some are included under Scheduled Castes (SC). Some under Scheduled Tribes (ST). Others under Other Backward Classes (OBC). A significant number are excluded from all constitutional categories.

Implications of Fragmented Classification- Uneven access to reservations and welfare schemes. Absence of uniform policy framework. Difficulty in targeted data collection and budgeting.

Major Challenges Faced by NTs, SNTs and DNTs

Lack of Recognition and Documentation

Absence of permanent residence leads to- Nonavailability of Aadhaar, ration cards, voter IDs. Exclusion from welfare schemes, PDS, healthcare, and education.

Statelessness like conditions despite being Indian citizens.

Political Marginalisation- Minimal representation in local bodies, state legislatures, and Parliament. Lack of political voice weakens advocacy for community specific policies.

Social Stigma and Discrimination- Continued perception as “criminal” or “antisocial”. Harassment by police and local administration. Social exclusion from villages, markets, and housing.

Economic Marginalisation

Decline of traditional occupations due to- Urbanisation and mechanisation. Wildlife and forest laws affecting pastoralists.

Limited access to credit, skill training, and markets.

Educational Deprivation

High illiteracy rates due to- Mobile lifestyle incompatible with formal schooling. Lack of residential schools and hostels.

Intergenerational cycle of low human capital.

Poor Health and Living Conditions- Inadequate access to public health facilities. Malnutrition, occupational health hazards, and lack of insurance.

Government Initiatives and Institutional Measures

Idate Commission- Constituted in 2014 under the chairmanship of Bhiku Ramji Idate.

Mandate- To study socioeconomic conditions of NTs, SNTs and DNTs. To recommend institutional and policy reforms.

Key Recommendations

Address stigma arising from Criminal Tribes Act and Habitual Offenders Act. Amend or repeal discriminatory provisions in state laws. Create separate policy identity for NTs/SNTs/DNTs instead of subsuming them under SC/ST/OBC. Establish a permanent statutory commission. Ensure access to education, health, housing, and identity documents.

Development and Welfare Board for DNTs- Constituted in 2019 based on Idate Commission recommendations. Acts as a coordinating and advisory body for welfare schemes. Focus on convergence of central and state initiatives.

Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs- Launched in 2022 to provide holistic socioeconomic support.

Key Components

Coaching and mentoring for competitive examinations. Health insurance coverage for vulnerable families. Livelihood support through skill development and community enterprises. Financial assistance for housing construction.

Way Forward- Policy and Governance Imperatives

Creation of a constitutional or statutory identity for NTs, SNTs and DNTs. Comprehensive nationwide enumeration and data collection. Repeal or reform of all residual discriminatory laws. Expansion of residential schools, hostels, and mobile education units. Strengthening community

participation in policy design. Sensitisation of police and local administration. Inclusion of these communities within the broader framework of social justice and inclusive development.

Source- [https-](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/denotifiednomadicandseminomadictribesdemandseparatecolumnncensus2027/article70591623.ece#~~text=Denotifi)

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