

4. Separate Classification for Denotified Tribes- Governance

The Union government assured leaders of Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) that they will be enumerated in the second phase of the 2027 Census, but details of the process remain unclear

I. Historical Background – Colonial Criminalization

The Criminal Tribes Act (CTA), 1871 institutionalised the colonial belief that certain castes and tribes were “hereditarily criminal.”

Communities were subjected to –

1. Mandatory registration
2. Police surveillance
3. Restrictions on movement
4. Compulsory settlement in designated areas

The Act reflected colonial administrative anxieties over mobility and resistance rather than empirical evidence of criminality. Entire communities were stigmatized through state-backed labeling, embedding social exclusion in governance structures.

Repeal and Aftermath

The CTA was repealed in 1952, and affected communities were “denotified.” However, several states enacted Habitual Offenders Acts (HOAs) in the same year.

1. These laws shifted from hereditary criminality to “habitual” criminal behavior.
2. In practice, many DNT communities remained under disproportionate police scrutiny.

Thus, formal denotification did not translate into substantive social rehabilitation.

II. Enumeration and Classification Issues

Colonial Census Enumeration

DNT communities were enumerated in the 1911, 1921 and 1931 Censuses. Post-Independence, there has been no dedicated national enumeration of DNTs as a separate category.

Post-1952 Classification

After repeal of CTA, communities were absorbed into –

1. Scheduled Castes (SC)
2. Scheduled Tribes (ST)
3. Other Backward Classes (OBC)

Many communities remain ambiguously classified or excluded due to documentation gaps.

Key Commissions

Renke Commission (2008)

1. First national effort to comprehensively list DNT communities.
2. Highlighted extreme socio-economic deprivation.

Idate Commission (2014–2017)

1. Identified approximately 1,200 communities already included under SC/ST/OBC categories.
2. Identified 268 communities that remained unclassified.

Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI)

1. Studied these 268 communities.
2. Recommended their inclusion in appropriate scheduled lists.
3. Implementation remains slow and fragmented.

Structural Problem

Absence of a dedicated Census category leads to –

1. Underestimation of population size
2. Weak policy targeting
3. Fragmented welfare delivery

III. Socio-Economic and Political Challenges

Social Stigma

1. Persistent association with “criminality” despite denotification.
2. Continued police profiling under Habitual Offenders laws.
3. Exclusion from mainstream social networks.

Lack of Documentation

Many families lack –

1. Caste certificates
2. Identity documents
3. Residential proof

Nomadic lifestyles historically prevented documentation accumulation.

Exclusion from reservation benefits due to bureaucratic hurdles.

Economic Vulnerability

Traditional occupations include –

1. Pastoralism
2. Performing arts
3. Itinerant crafts and trades
4. Animal trading

Urbanization and industrialization have eroded traditional livelihood ecosystems. Shift toward precarious informal labour markets.

Educational Backwardness

1. High dropout rates.
2. Limited access to hostels and scholarships.
3. Intergenerational poverty reinforcing educational exclusion.

Political Marginalization

1. Weak representation in local and state-level institutions.
2. Limited visibility in policymaking.
3. No consolidated electoral constituency due to dispersed population.

IV. Government Initiatives and Welfare Architecture

1. National Commission for DNTs (2014)

1. Tasked with identifying DNT communities.
2. Recommended targeted welfare measures.
3. Advocated for removal of discriminatory laws.

2. Development and Welfare Board for DNTs (2019)

1. Established under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
2. Coordinates welfare programs and monitors implementation.

3. SEED Scheme (Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs)

Key Components –

Educational Empowerment

1. Free coaching for competitive examinations.
2. Scholarships and skill development.

Health Protection– Coverage through Ayushman Bharat (Ayushman Cards).

Livelihood Support

1. Promotion of Self-Help Groups (SHGs).
2. Financial assistance for entrepreneurship.

Housing Support– Linkage with PMAY and other housing schemes.

4. Scholarship and Hostel Support

1. Dr. Ambedkar Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarships for DNTs (since 2014–15).
2. Nanaji Deshmukh Hostel Scheme for DNT students to improve residential educational access.

V. Structural Gaps in Policy

1. Fragmented classification across SC/ST/OBC lists leads to policy overlap and administrative confusion.
2. Lack of reliable population data weakens fiscal allocation.
3. Limited awareness among beneficiaries about schemes.
4. Weak inter-state coordination on migration-related welfare.

VI. Way Forward

Dedicated Enumeration

1. Conduct a separate Census or socio-economic survey for DNTs.
2. Establish accurate demographic and deprivation indices.

Legal Reform

1. Review and repeal Habitual Offenders Acts that perpetuate stigma.
2. Ensure police sensitization and accountability.

Education-Centric Strategy

1. Mobile schools and digital learning tools for nomadic populations.
2. Residential schooling expansion.

Livelihood Modernization

1. Integrate traditional skills with modern markets (e.g., digital platforms for crafts).
2. Formal credit access and entrepreneurship incubation.

Institutional Strengthening

1. Create a permanent constitutional or statutory commission.
2. Improve coordination between Centre and States.

Conclusion

Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes represent one of India's most historically marginalized communities due to colonial criminalization and post-colonial policy inertia. While legal denotification occurred in 1952, substantive socio-economic rehabilitation remains incomplete. The absence of accurate enumeration, persistent stigma, and weak institutional representation continue to constrain their inclusion.

A data-driven, rights-based, and dignity-oriented policy framework—anchored in legal reform, educational expansion, and livelihood diversification—is essential to ensure that DNT communities are fully integrated into India's developmental trajectory.

Source - <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/a-separate-classification-for-denotified-tribes-explained/article70638653.ece# ~ ~ ~ text=Since%201952%2C%20by%20which%20time,lists%20as%20%E2%80%9CVimukt%20Jatis%E2%80%9D.>