

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF NOMADIC AND DE-NOTIFIED TRIBES OF MAHARASHTRA**

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### **Abstract:**

*Nomadic and De-notified Tribes (NT-DNT) are one of the most marginalized communities in India. Lack of constitutional safeguards, social stigmatization and criminalization attached to their identities make them prone to violence and vulnerable in every walk of life. Nomadic and De-Notified tribes are wandering communities who move from one place to another in search of fulfillment of their basic needs. Because of their wandering tradition, the Nomadic and De-notified tribes have no permanent residence. As result, they do not get decent housing and have to live their life on vacant spaces and move on to next nomadic cycle. Despite being “De-Notified,” these nomadic groups continue to face severe discrimination and ostracism. They are still perceived as social outcasts by upper-caste villagers, unduly harassed by the police and enforcement officials and are effectively ignored by the Indian State. Due to this constant wandering, they do not get respect from the rest of the society which results in undignified life. Literature review shows that, very limited researchers and organizations have focused on studying socio-economic condition of nomadic and de-notified tribes. There is lack of comprehensive study carried out on Socio-economic condition of nomadic and de-notified tribes of Maharashtra. Though there are fewer efforts to analyze socio-economic condition of DNT, there is not enough and comprehensive data on the same. Therefore this study attempts to fill this gap. In absence of livelihood opportunities in the face of globalisation, the DNTs are not in position to develop their socio-economic condition and at the same time the response of their socio-economic condition is very poor. Therefore it is important to study the socio-economic condition of DNTs.*

**Key Words:** *Pastoral Nomads, Dhargar, Natural Resource Management, Drought Vulnerability, Sustainable Livelihood*

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### **Introduction:**

The word nomad is derived from the 'Greek' word for pasture nomos (Goyal, O. 2005). Nomadic tribe is the primitive tribe in India which has been positioned in the lower stratum of social system and their status is lower than other communities. It is one of the vulnerable groups in the state of Maharashtra, which moves from one place to another in search of livelihood. 'Since generations, due to nomadic lifestyle NTs do not own resources to survive, it includes, land and other productive resources. It has left the community with various vulnerabilities. As far as general situation of nomads is concerned, the review shows that their situation is so pathetic in various developmental indicators includes health and education.

There is no uniform definition of the NT/DNTs of Maharashtra. In many states, they have been classified as OBCs, in some as Dalits and Tribes and in other states, they are not in any category. In Maharashtra, they are known as NT/DNTs. Their problems lie in the state's definition in defining them as a nomadic tribe's i.e.

unconstitutional category. The Constitution has categories like SC, ST and OBCs. They are the tribes but nomadic tribes therefore they can't enjoy the privileges of Scheduled Tribes (ST). Due to the nomadic lifestyle, this group is invisible in society; therefore, the group is still remained away from the fruits of the development, at the same time the government is also failed to reach this category and especially to the women and children from this group.

Under the nomadic tribes' category, there are various subgroups that are into providing various services to the village communities. They have been classified into four categories like 1) Pastoralists and hunter-gatherers 2) Goods and services providers 3) Entertainers 4) Religious performers (Bokil, M. 2002) and most of the communities are dependent on these occupational categories. Under the process of globalization, their traditional livelihood sources have undergone tremendous changes and rarely has it been brought into academic, policy and research discourse. In this context it is important to understand the socio-economic condition of Nomadic and De-notified Groups of Maharashtra.

**Review Literature:** The nomadic and denotified tribes are an integral part of Indian society. Encyclopedia of Social Sciences Vol. 11-12, (1933) defines Nomadic Tribe (NT) as a group of people who move from place to place and have a specific traditional means of livelihood. De-notified Tribes (DNT) are known as criminal tribes, they are labelled as criminal tribes under the criminal tribe Act enacted in 1871. They are now recognized as *VimuktJati* after the repealing of the Criminal Tribes Act. Though the exact population figure of the NT/DNT is not available, reports show that there are about 250 nomadic tribes in India (Lokdhara National Network's Report on MDGs and Nomadic Tribes, 2006-07). 'The social category generally known as the Denotified and Nomadic tribes of India covers a population approximately of 60 million (Resist Initiative International, 2007). In Maharashtra, there are about five million nomadic people. The population figures are mentioned on the basis of figures of the 1931 census.

**Objectives:** The paper attempts to study the following objectives:

1. To study the socio-economic and livelihood issues of NT-DNT communities.
2. To explore factors affecting on socio-economic condition of NT-DNT
3. To understand initiatives taken by government to address socio-economic issue of NT-DNTs.

**Methodology:** The research employs a qualitative approach to investigate the natural resource management among nomadic tribes in Maharashtra. Qualitative methods are chosen to enable a comprehensive exploration of the intricate factors influencing migration patterns, historical contexts, and cultural significance, as well as to understand the natural resources management practices among the Dhangar communities.

The research adopts a descriptive and analytical research design. The paper uses secondary data sources including scholarly articles, books, reports, and archival documents.

**Analysis Plan:** The analysis plan involves following key steps:

**Literature Review:** A comprehensive review of existing literature is conducted to identify relevant studies, theories, and frameworks pertaining to migration dynamics, natural resources management of the Dhangar community in Maharashtra.

**Data Collection:** Secondary data is collected from diverse sources, including academic databases, libraries, government publications, and research reports.

**Data Analysis:** The collected data is systematically analysed using thematic analysis and content analysis. Thematic analysis involves identifying recurring themes, patterns, and categories within the data, while content analysis focuses on extracting and interpreting specific information relevant to the research objectives.

**Discussion:**

Drought has a significant impact on pastoral nomads in India, who rely heavily on grazing lands and access to water for their livelihoods. Drought conditions can lead to a reduction in the availability of grazing lands and water sources (Bogale & Erena, 2022), resulting in loss of income from the sale of animals and reduced access to milk and other animal products for household consumption. This can cause food insecurity and poverty for the pastoral nomads (Stavi et al., 2022), who often lack the resources and alternative livelihood options to cope with the impacts of drought.

Drought can have a significant impact on natural resources in India, including water, land, and vegetation. In addition, pastoralists may be forced to move their herds to new areas in search of water and grazing lands, which can lead to conflicts with other communities over resources, as well as increased pressure on already fragile ecosystems. This can result in the degradation of grazing lands, reduced vegetation cover, and increased risk of wildfires (Boyd, 2023).

The pasture land and water availability determine the movements of pastoral communities in their own areas. In Maharashtra the herding pattern, migratory pattern, and herd composition is being developed based on the availability of grazing and water resources. The study area is semi-arid, and drought is a yearly and continuous phenomenon. It results in the shrunken pasture land. The Dhangars follow sheep-goat pastoralism. The community in this area constantly moves with their flock in search of quality pastures and water. Sheep depend on pastures; therefore, the sheep of the arid region remain more or less under migration. It is followed according to the availability of the grazing resources. The seasonal migration is observed from their native place to places with sufficient water and pasture. It is also followed according to the availability and holding of the pasture land. The halts of Dhangars depend on the host communities' willingness and availability of the water and pasture resources.

The grazing restrictions are increasing because land under cultivation is increasing. So, it is affecting both sides; on one hand, the percentage of grazing land has gone down, and on the other hand, it is also restricting the movement of Dhangars. Next to this, due to a lot of competition over natural resources and forest restrictions on grazing, the traditional and customary rights of the shepherd-Dhangars have been ignored. So, here we see that the Dhangars practice traditional livelihood because of limited access to pasture and water resources, which can be attributed to the drought.

**Patterns of herding within the Dhangar community:**

Herding pattern is evolving based on water and grazing resource availability. For generations, pastoralism has been followed as a primary economic activity for sustenance in the study area. Pastoralism is mainly followed

by continuously migrating or semi-nomadic communities. It is because of seasonal and climatic variability. 'Herd mobility is the main strategy pastoralists use to manage risk and use the range of resources communally and efficiently' (Ghotge, 2004, p.24). Continuous or periodic migration is an important characteristic of pastoral life. The pasture land and water availability determine the movements of pastoral communities in their own areas.

#### **Grazing management:**

The nomadic tribes, are those traditional communities, migrate to different locations, searching for fodder and water for their livestock. The migratory route is defined based on the availability of fodder and water. It also indicates that migration is seasonal. The migration pattern is determined by the availability of pasture within the area. Therefore, the community has to follow either seasonal or circular movements. In her writing, Ghotge (2004) stated that, in semi-arid regions even today, migratory and semi-migratory systems of livestock rearing continue to be practiced. As a part of this, community people follow different pre-decided routes. The routes have been set since their ancestor's period. The migratory routes are determined according to traditional relationships with the migratory or halt villages.

Based on Prasad (1994) framework on grazing management, one can analyse the grazing management followed by shepherd-Dhangars. The grazing management of sheep in the areas taken under the study depends upon factors such as intensity of cultivation, landholding of the farmers and herders, availability of fallow and range land for grazing, rainfall during the season, and availability and accessibility of common land for grazing. Therefore, sheep grazing management ultimately influences the pattern of pastoral nomadism. In the study area, the grazing management of the sheep can be classified based on grazing followed in the season; it is categorized into three seasons: i. Rainy season grazing management ii. Winter season grazing management iii. Summer season grazing management.

#### **Opinion about the sustainability of occupation:**

Many factors are pushing Dhangars out of their traditional livelihood. Like the increase in land under cultivation, environmental law and ecological situation restrict Dhangars from grazing. Some land is acquired for government projects; therefore, grazing land is decreased. Traditionally, there was a mutual understanding and symbiotic relationship between the farmer and Dhangars, but the total understanding is changing due to changes in the cropping system.

Second, development makes many job opportunities available in urban and semi-urban areas. As a result, some have migrated to Mumbai; some have migrated to Pune. Some of the modern cities attracted Dhangars young generation. Therefore, people from this community are leaving their traditional livelihood pattern.

#### **Findings:**

The paper summarizes the following findings:

- Drought-induced resource scarcity is the critical factor behind migration among the Dhangars.
- Due to a lack of adequate grazing and water resources, the community must follow migration during the winter and summer seasons.

- Migratory routes of the community are affected due to the agriculture expansion and other economic activities.
- Drought significantly impacts the sustenance of pastoralism as a livelihood activity.
- Drought is a crucial livelihood shock faced by the community.
- Grazing issues are affecting the sustenance of the traditional occupation of the community.

**Recommendations:**

- The rights over the Common Property Resources should be ensured. Customary rights of the community, for example, access to grazing should be considered duly in new policies reforms related to grazing and forestry.
- The community should be involved in preparation of grazing-related policies by considering grazing-related experiences in their own villages and villages on the migratory routes.
- Institutionalization of the commons should be done for the equitable distribution of grazing resources (both in the village and migratory routes).
- Indigenous knowledge systems should be considered when planning for drought mitigation and managing common related issues.
- While migrating over long distances, the government should make available the Public Distribution System (PDS) in a cluster of the villages along the migratory route, by which shepherds can get access to the grains and maintain their food security.

**Conclusion:**

The study discourse moves around the risk factors to the lifestyle of the Dhangars' access to grazing and water resources. However, the above-discussed risk factors attached to the shepherds' life, negligence of shepherd-pastoralists in the policy domain, structural problems and disparities, and environmental and other physical factors are giving rise to challenges and hardships to the pastoral lifestyle of shepherds. The livelihood of the Dhangars is dependent on the semi-arid land ecosystems, but the drought has created various socio-economic vulnerabilities among them. The groundwater level has gone down. The agriculture and livestock-based occupations have been affected tremendously. The community is becoming vulnerable to several risks in livelihood, sustenance, food security, living conditions and many others. The push factors like proportion of land under cultivation are increasing; therefore, the grazing/pasture land area is decreasing rapidly; a lot of ecological factors and new environmental laws are restricting Dhangars from grazing, so grazing is in flux. The common lands used earlier by the shepherds is now acquired by the industrialists and encroached upon by the private bodies for commercial purposes. So, the grazing land is decreasing. Community people are finding nomadic life quite difficult. Traditionally there was mutual support, mutual understanding, and a symbiotic relationship between the farmer and pastoralists, but the whole dynamics of the symbiotic relationship is changing due to changes in the cropping system, cropping pattern and land use mechanisms. The pull factors like the attraction of education, job, modern life, settled lifestyle, and sedentary agriculture is affecting this community.

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