

Count the Uncounted: Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Communities in India

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Abstract

Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) are among the most marginalized social groups in India, yet they remain statistically invisible within the country's data architecture. Despite the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act in 1952, the absence of a distinct category for DNTs in the Census of India 2011 has reinforced their exclusion from welfare planning, monitoring, and evaluation. The lack of reliable, disaggregated demographic data produces persistent misrecognition, resulting in inconsistent classification under Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, or Other Backward Classes, or omission from records altogether. Successive commissions, including the Renke Commission (2008) and the Idate Commission (2018), have emphasized the need for an enumeration framework that captures the unique socio-economic and cultural realities of these communities. Evidence from state initiatives such as mobile ration systems in Karnataka tandas and Ashramshalas for Pardhis in Maharashtra illustrates how responsive interventions become effective when informed by data. This paper argues for the integration of DNTs into future census exercises and proposes the creation of a dedicated Ministry for Denotified and Nomadic Tribes to enable identification, data-driven policymaking, and the protection of cultural identities, thereby advancing inclusive development and social justice for DNT communities.

Keywords: Census of India, Data Invisibility, Policy Frameworks, Renke Commission, Idate Commission, Cultural Preservation.

Introduction

The Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) of India constitute one of the most historically marginalized and socially stigmatized population groups within the country. Their exclusion is rooted in a colonial legacy that transformed mobility, cultural occupations, and non-sedentary livelihoods into markers of deviance. The Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871 classified several itinerant and pastoral communities as "hereditary criminals," thereby institutionalizing surveillance and embedding stigma into their collective identity (Radhakrishna, 2001). Although the Act was repealed in 1952, the introduction of the Habitual Offenders Act reproduced earlier mechanisms of suspicion and control in a different legal form (Rao, 2017; Sharma, 2015). The shift in terminology did not dismantle the epistemic

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Published: 27 February 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/SPIJSH.2026.v3.i2.45561>

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assumptions underpinning colonial criminalization; rather, it sustained a social imaginary in which DNT communities continued to be perceived as populations situated at the margins of normative citizenship.

Over the decades that followed, welfare expansion and constitutional reform did not significantly transform these structural hierarchies of recognition. DNTs remain positioned at the periphery of institutional engagement, experiencing limited access to public services, social protection, and livelihood security. Their marginalization, however, is not solely a consequence of economic deprivation or social stigma; it is also the outcome of a deeper problem of administrative and statistical invisibility. Unlike Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), whose demographic representation is systematically enumerated and regularly updated through the Census of India, DNTs do not exist as a distinct statistical category. Instead, they are dispersed across SC, ST, and Other Backward Classes (OBC) classifications, or omitted entirely from formal records (Renke Commission, 2008; Idate Commission, 2018). The absence of separate enumeration prevents accurate estimation of their population size, social conditions, or developmental needs, and significantly weakens their claims to targeted policy support.

This structural invisibility has tangible consequences for everyday life. Evidence from diverse regional contexts demonstrates how the intersection of stigma, administrative exclusion, and documentary inaccessibility reproduces cycles of marginalization. In Madhya Pradesh, members of the Pardhi community continue to face discrimination in schooling and neighbourhood access due to enduring criminal stereotypes (Meena, 2020). In Rajasthan, groups such as the Nat and Kanjar, historically associated with performance and itinerant cultural labour, have been displaced from their traditional occupations and compelled into precarious forms of work (Sharma, 2015). In Punjab, the Sansis continue to be perceived through the lens of criminalized identity, reinforcing surveillance and socio-economic vulnerability (Rao, 2017). Similarly, Kaikadi households in Maharashtra often reside in temporary or informal settlements and remain excluded from housing entitlements and ration systems due to lack of permanent residence documentation (Idate Commission, 2018). These examples illustrate that exclusion among DNT communities is layered, intersecting spatial precarity, labour insecurity, institutional bias, and restricted access to welfare.

The marginalization of DNTs is therefore not reducible to poverty or mobility alone; it is historically produced, institutionally sustained, and socially reproduced across generations. The disjunction between community realities and policy frameworks has also contributed to the erosion of cultural legitimacy. Many DNT communities historically sustained livelihoods through pastoral, artisanal, performance-based, or itinerant occupations that once formed integral components of regional socio-economic systems. With the consolidation of sedentary development models and regulatory governance, these cultural economies were delegitimized rather than adapted or supported. The Budhan Theatre movement in Gujarat, led by Chhara youth, represents a critical instance of resistance in which cultural expression becomes a means of reclaiming dignity and countering stigma (Budhan Theatre, 2005). However, such initiatives remain localized and fragile in the absence of institutional recognition.

Central to these conditions is the lack of reliable, disaggregated, and community-specific data

on DNTs. The absence of separate enumeration constrains policy design, implementation, and evaluation, while simultaneously limiting opportunities for institutional accountability. Without demographic visibility, deprivation among DNTs remains analytically obscured and administratively unacknowledged. In practical terms, what is not counted cannot be monitored, and what remains unrecognized cannot be meaningfully addressed within formal development planning.

Against this background, the present study argues that the creation of a separate and systematically maintained data category for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes particularly through their integration into forthcoming national Census exercises is both an empirical necessity and a normative imperative. Separate enumeration is essential not only for measuring socio-economic exclusion but also for enabling targeted welfare planning, budgetary prioritization, and institutional responsibility. In the absence of such recognition, policy interventions risk remaining symbolic, while structural inequities persist beneath aggregated national indicators.

Accordingly, this paper examines the historical trajectory of criminalization and its contemporary implications for DNT citizenship, evaluates the limitations of existing administrative and welfare frameworks, and highlights the urgent need for establishing dedicated, disaggregated data systems. Through this analysis, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing scholarly and policy debates on recognition, citizenship, and the politics of enumeration. In doing so, it advances the argument that the inclusion of DNTs within national census and data architectures is not merely a technical reform, but a foundational step toward institutional visibility, social justice, and substantive inclusion.

In doing so, the paper makes three key contributions. First, it brings together dispersed historical, policy and sociological scholarship to demonstrate how colonial criminalization has translated into contemporary forms of administrative and statistical erasure. Second, it foregrounds the central role of enumeration and data architecture in shaping access to welfare, recognition and citizenship for DNT communities. Third, it argues that the integration of DNTs as a distinct category in the forthcoming Census is not only a technical reform, but a structural precondition for targeted policy design, budgetary prioritisation and programme accountability.

Review of Literature

Scholarship on Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) has expanded in recent decades, although it remains fragmented and comparatively limited when viewed against the extensive research on Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). The literature cuts across anthropology, sociology, governance, and development studies, and reveals several interrelated thematic strands: (i) historical criminalization and colonial governance; (ii) continuity of stigma and marginalization; (iii) state policy frameworks and commission reports; (iv) exclusion from welfare and development systems; and (v) identity, citizenship, and belonging. Collectively, these studies underscore that the absence of reliable, disaggregated data on DNTs reinforces administrative invisibility and structural exclusion (Rao, 2017; Renke Commission, 2008; Idate Commission, 2018).

1. Historical Criminalization and Colonial Legacy

A vast body of scholarship traces the marginalization of DNTs to colonial governance structures. Radhakrishna (2001), in her seminal work *Dishonoured by History*, demonstrates how the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 branded entire communities as hereditary criminals, institutionalizing surveillance and embedding suspicion into their social identity. Rather than criminalizing individual acts, the Act criminalized communities, thereby transforming identity itself into an object of policing. Anthropological analyses further argue that colonial rule produced enduring categories of “dangerous classes.” Das (1995) explains how colonial administration constructed DNTs as socially deviant because their mobile livelihoods challenged settled agrarian and census-based systems. The census and policing apparatus thus operated as technologies of classification and control.

Post-independence governance did not fully dismantle these structures. Rao (2017) shows that although the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed in 1952, its replacement by the Habitual Offenders Act reproduced colonial logic in a new legal form, extending surveillance over communities historically stigmatized under colonial law. This legacy forms a critical backdrop for understanding the persistence of stigma and structural discrimination faced by DNTs today.

2. Continuing Stigma, Policing, and Social Marginalization

Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that stigma associated with DNT identity continues across generations. Devy (2011), in the *People’s Linguistic Survey of India*, highlights that DNTs experience both social exclusion and linguistic marginalization, as their oral traditions and languages occupy a peripheral position in mainstream discourse. Cultural invisibility and policy neglect reinforce each other. Empirical field studies provide grounded insights into everyday marginalization. Sharma (2015) documents systemic harassment, economic precarity, and limited educational access among the Nat and Kanjar communities in Rajasthan. Meena (2020) shows that the stereotype of criminality continues to shape school experiences of Pardhi children in Madhya Pradesh, contributing to alienation and dropout. Mukherjee (2019) further finds that inconsistent classification across SC, ST, and OBC categories leads to frequent exclusion of DNT households from welfare entitlements.

In parallel, scholars also document emerging forms of cultural assertion. The Budhan Theatre movement, initiated by Chhara youth in Gujarat, uses performance and street theatre to challenge narratives of criminality and reclaim dignity and citizenship (Budhan Theatre, 2005). These initiatives demonstrate that culture operates simultaneously as a site of oppression and resistance.

3. Policy Frameworks, Commissions, and Administrative Recognition

A distinct strand of literature comprises policy documents and commission reports that repeatedly emphasize structural exclusion of DNTs. The Renke Commission Report (2008) provided the first comprehensive national-level mapping of socio-economic deprivation among DNTs and attributed major gaps in welfare access to the absence of reliable demographic data. The Idate Commission Report (2018) reiterated that DNTs remain “the most marginalized among the marginalized” because they are scattered across caste categories without formal

recognition of their distinct historical experiences.

Earlier reports, including the Ayyangar Committee Report (1949) and the Antrolkar Committee Report (1961), also acknowledged deep structural barriers but did not generate sustained policy transformation (Rao, 2017). More recent policy analyses note that although some states have introduced community-specific schemes, these initiatives remain fragmented due to the lack of enumeration frameworks and beneficiary identification systems.

The literature thus identifies a persistent paradox: DNTs are recognized rhetorically as a vulnerable group, yet remain administratively invisible because there is no unified data architecture through which they may be systematically identified and monitored (Idate Commission, 2018; Renke Commission, 2008).

4. Welfare Exclusion, Data Invisibility, and Development Governance

An emerging body of work links welfare exclusion directly to data absence. Scholars argue that the lack of a distinct category for DNTs in national census and administrative databases leads to three forms of misrecognition: (i) subsumption under SC or ST lists without acknowledgement of distinct identity; (ii) placement under OBC categories with limited targeted support; and (iii) omission from records due to mobile or semi-nomadic settlement patterns (Mukherjee, 2019; Rao, 2017).

Documentation requirements for welfare access such as domicile certificates, ration cards, and proof of residence often assume fixed settlement, creating barriers for communities with histories of mobility. As a result, exclusion becomes embedded in the very design of welfare delivery systems.

State-level initiatives illustrate the value of contextualized policy responses. Examples include mobile ration distribution in tanda settlements in Karnataka and Ashramshala-based schooling initiatives for Pardhis in Maharashtra, which demonstrate improved outreach when interventions recognize community-specific contexts (Renke Commission, 2008). However, these programs remain localized rather than systemic because they are not anchored to a national database or enumeration framework.

Development studies scholarship therefore argues that DNTs are excluded not only at the implementation stage, but within the planning process itself, because they are absent from national data systems used to identify beneficiaries and allocate resources (Idate Commission, 2018).

5. Identity, Citizenship, and Belonging

Recent interdisciplinary research situates the DNT experience within broader debates on citizenship, belonging, and state society relations. The historical construction of DNTs as deviant or criminal has shaped their contemporary interface with governance institutions, which is often mediated through policing rather than welfare administration (Radhakrishna, 2001; Rao, 2017).

Scholars highlight that the lack of secure identity documents produces a paradoxical condition wherein DNTs are visible to surveillance systems yet invisible within welfare frameworks.

Mobility, itinerant livelihoods, and cultural diversity complicate bureaucratic expectations of residency and settlement, thereby shaping forms of precarious citizenship.

Cultural studies perspectives emphasize that identity among DNT communities is dynamic and negotiated. Activism, artistic practices, and community organizations represent efforts to reclaim dignity, assert history, and re-articulate belonging in the public sphere (Budhan Theatre, 2005; Devy, 2011).

From this perspective, enumeration and documentary recognition are not simply administrative processes but key instruments through which citizenship is negotiated, contested and materially experienced by DNT communities.

6. Gaps in the Literature

Despite a growing body of scholarship on Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs), significant research gaps persist. Much of the existing literature remains historically oriented, with a strong emphasis on colonial criminalization and its socio-legal afterlives, while relatively fewer studies generate contemporary empirical evidence on present-day socio-economic conditions of DNT communities across regions. The absence of large-scale quantitative or mixed-method studies limits the ability to assess variations in welfare access, livelihood outcomes, or educational mobility at the national level. Further, although commission reports and policy documents provide important descriptive insights, they are not consistently integrated into analytical frameworks on governance, citizenship, and development, resulting in a weak translation of policy recommendations into evaluative academic discourse. Another critical gap lies in the limited representation of community voices; most narratives are produced through external institutional or academic perspectives, with fewer studies foregrounding lived experiences, agency, and intra-community diversity. Additionally, cross-state comparative research remains underdeveloped, despite the fact that DNTs encounter differentiated administrative classifications and welfare outcomes across regional contexts. Collectively, these gaps highlight the pressing need for systematic enumeration, longitudinal and comparative research designs, and community-engaged approaches that can more accurately capture the heterogeneity and contemporary realities of DNT communities.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory research design grounded in secondary data analysis. Given the absence of comprehensive, disaggregated primary datasets on Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) in India, this approach enables the systematic synthesis of dispersed evidence to address the research objective. The study is situated within a constructivist paradigm, which holds that social realities are constituted through historical, cultural, and institutional processes (Creswell, 2014). This paradigm is particularly appropriate for examining how colonial legal frameworks and post-independence state policies have shaped both the marginalization and statistical invisibility of DNTs. The methodological approach is also relevant to development policy analysis, as it allows examination of how

administrative classification and data regimes influence welfare entitlement, citizenship recognition, and access to state resources.

Data Sources and Inclusion Criteria

The analysis draws on three broad categories of secondary sources. Sources were included based on their relevance to four domains central to the research question: (i) historical criminalization and legal regulation, (ii) contemporary stigma and exclusion, (iii) policy recognition and welfare access, and (iv) statistical and administrative data architecture. Preference was given to national-level reports, peer-reviewed scholarship, and empirically grounded documentation. Where necessary, selective use of civil society materials was incorporated to capture community perspectives absent in formal datasets.

Government and Policy Documents

Primary institutional sources include committee and commission reports that provide official perspectives on DNT recognition and policy response, namely the Ayyangar Committee Report (1949), Antrolikar Committee Report (1961), Renke Commission Report (2008), and Idate Commission Report (2018). These documents offer key insights into administrative categorisation, state welfare frameworks, and structural constraints in implementation.

Scholarly Literature:

Core academic texts and peer-reviewed studies form the theoretical and contextual foundation of the analysis. These include Radhakrishna's *Dishonoured by History* (2001), Devy's *People's Linguistic Survey of India* (2011), and empirical or conceptual analyses by Sharma (2015), Meena (2020), and Rao (2017), which collectively deepen understanding of historical criminalization, contemporary exclusion, and the persistence of stigma.

Civil Society and Cultural Resources:

NGO reports, activist archives, and cultural interventions supplement institutional and academic sources by foregrounding lived experience and community assertion. Budhan Theatre (2005), for instance, documents cultural resistance and identity reclaiming efforts among Chhara youth providing narrative and experiential dimensions often absent from formal policy records.

Where possible, triangulation across these categories was pursued to enhance interpretive validity and to capture multiple perspectives on the same phenomena.

Analytical Strategy

The study employs a thematic synthesis approach (Thomas & Harden, 2008) to interpret heterogeneous secondary materials. The process involved iterative coding of texts across three broad analytical domains: (i) historical criminalization, (ii) persistent stigma and social exclusion, and (iii) policy and data gaps. Subsequent analysis examined convergence and divergence among sources. For example, parallels between Radhakrishna's (2001) discussion of colonial criminality and the Renke Commission's (2008) acknowledgment of its institutional afterlives were analysed jointly to illustrate both continuity and formal recognition of legacy

effects.

Within this study, thematic synthesis serves three analytical functions:

- (i) It structures fragmented evidence into meaningful conceptual categories;
- (ii) It enables interpretive comparison across academic, policy, and civil society sources; and
- (iii) It facilitates identification of systemic gaps in both knowledge production and institutional data infrastructures.

Justification of Methodological Choice

The qualitative, secondary-data design is justified on practical and scholarly grounds. Practically, the absence of a dedicated national dataset for DNTs renders large-scale quantitative analysis unfeasible. Secondary synthesis therefore represents a necessary pathway to evaluate existing knowledge and expose structural omissions in official statistical systems. From a scholarly standpoint, integrating dispersed reports, studies, and community-based documentation into a consolidated analytical narrative advances conceptual clarity and lays the foundation for future empirical, field-based research. The value of such synthesis in data-scarce contexts is well established within development studies and social policy research (Rao, 2017; Thomas & Harden, 2008).

Reflexivity and Positionality

The analysis remains attentive to the positionality of the researcher and the risk of over-representation of institutional narratives in the absence of primary field data. Civil society and community-based sources are therefore used not as substitutes for ethnographic research but as complementary perspectives that foreground experiential dimensions of marginalization.

Ethics and Transparency

As this study relies exclusively on publicly available secondary materials including published reports, academic texts, and documented cultural resources formal ethics approval was not required. No human participants were directly involved, and no identifiable personal data were used.

Limitations

This methodological approach carries certain limitations. Existing research is unevenly distributed across communities, with relatively greater documentation of groups such as Pardhis, Chharas, and Nats compared to Kanjar, Sapera, and Bedia communities, which may influence emphasis across themes. Additionally, although NGO and activist reports contribute valuable lived-experience narratives, they are not always peer-reviewed and are therefore interpreted cautiously. Finally, the absence of comprehensive national or state-level datasets limits the scope for systematic cross-regional or longitudinal comparison.

Despite these constraints, the study offers a critical and structured synthesis that illuminates gaps in both scholarship and policy architecture. It clarifies how historical criminalization, administrative misrecognition, and statistical invisibility intersect to shape the lived realities of

DNT communities, while underscoring the need for future primary data collection and evidence-based policy design.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of secondary literature indicates that the persistent marginalization of Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) is rooted in their statistical invisibility within national data systems. Unlike Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), DNTs are not recognised as a distinct social category in the Census or in administrative databases. This absence of formal enumeration prevents their systematic identification in welfare planning, targeting, and monitoring (Renke Commission, 2008; Idate Commission, 2018). As a result, the State is unable to assess the extent of deprivation within these communities or to evaluate programme outcomes in relation to them.

A recurring theme across the reviewed sources is that policy exclusion frequently follows from data exclusion. Several studies demonstrate that the absence of a distinct data category for DNTs leads to their misclassification under SC, ST, or OBC lists, or to their omission from records altogether (Mukherjee, 2016; Sharma, 2015). This not only obscures the scale of their vulnerability but also restricts their eligibility for schemes designed around fixed settlement, residency proof, and documentary identity. For historically mobile and semi-nomadic groups, such bureaucratic prerequisites remain structurally exclusionary.

It is important to clarify that the purpose of this paper is not to evaluate PMJDY as a financial inclusion programme in itself. Rather, the scheme is examined as an illustrative policy case that demonstrates how the absence of a distinct enumerated category for DNTs restricts beneficiary identification, programme monitoring and assessment of outreach. PMJDY therefore serves as an empirical lens through which the structural consequences of non-enumeration become visible.

The experience of national financial inclusion initiatives provides an illustrative case of this challenge rather than the substantive focus of the study. For example, while the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) has achieved large-scale account expansion at the national level, the absence of disaggregated data means that it is not possible to determine how many DNT households have been reached or whether they meaningfully benefit from the scheme (Government of India, 2023). Evidence from studies in Maharashtra and Rajasthan shows that members of nomadic communities were frequently unable to open or operate bank accounts due to lack of permanent addresses, documentary proof, or institutional trust (Mukherjee, 2016; Meena, 2019). These implementation barriers are symptoms of a broader structural problem namely, that DNTs are not identifiable within the policy database architecture through which inclusion is measured.

The literature further indicates that the historical legacy of criminalization continues to shape interactions between DNTs and state institutions, including administrative and financial systems (Radhakrishna, 2001; Rao, 2017). Where communities remain uncounted, their exclusion cannot be empirically recorded, monitored, or addressed. Thus, invisibility within the Census translates into invisibility within programme evaluation frameworks, reinforcing a cycle in which deprivation persists without institutional acknowledgment.

At the same time, evidence from state-specific and civil society initiatives demonstrates that outcomes improve when interventions are context-sensitive and community-identified. Localised programmes that recognise mobility patterns, cultural contexts, and settlement dynamics have shown greater success in reaching DNT households (Kale, 2018). These positive instances further highlight the importance of accurate enumeration as a prerequisite for targeted outreach and responsive policy design.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the challenges faced by DNTs across welfare and financial inclusion initiatives are not isolated administrative lapses but manifestations of a deeper structural absence from national data architecture. Without their formal inclusion as a distinct category in the national Census, the State lacks a reliable demographic basis for welfare targeting, budget allocation, monitoring, and policy accountability. The discussion therefore reinforces the central argument of this study: the integration of DNTs into the forthcoming Census is essential for enabling systematic recognition, evidence-based policymaking, and substantive inclusion.

Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate that the exclusion of DNTs is produced not only at the level of implementation, but within the very design of the data systems that organise welfare delivery in India. When a population is not counted, it cannot be located within programme registers, monitored through scheme databases or included in evaluation frameworks. In this sense, the absence of DNTs from the Census does not merely reflect their marginality it actively reproduces it. Integrating DNTs as a distinct enumerated category is therefore a necessary precondition for meaningful inclusion in policy, welfare and development governance.

Conclusion

The exploration of Jan Dhan Yojana in the context of Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) demonstrates that the barriers they face in accessing banking services are not merely financial or administrative challenges, but manifestations of a deeper structural condition their continued statistical and legal invisibility within national data systems. While the Yojana has expanded the institutional architecture of financial inclusion, the experiences of DNT communities reveal that this expansion remains limited in the absence of reliable mechanisms to identify, enumerate, and monitor them as a distinct social group.

The findings underscore that financial inclusion must be understood not only in terms of account coverage, but in relation to trust, usability, accessibility, and recognition. For DNTs, historical stigma, documentary exclusion, and administrative apathy intersect with the absence of a dedicated data category, resulting in their systematic under-representation across welfare, credit, and social security programmes. Unlike Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, DNTs lack constitutional and statistical visibility, which weakens both their institutional recognition and their policy claims. In this context, the gaps observed in Jan Dhan Yojana outcomes are symptomatic of a broader problem of non-enumeration rather than isolated programme-level shortcomings.

The study therefore argues that meaningful inclusion for DNTs requires a shift from symbolic participation in national schemes toward structural recognition through enumeration.

Integrating DNTs as a distinct category in the forthcoming national Census would provide the demographic foundation necessary for targeted welfare planning, monitoring, budget allocation, and accountability. Only when DNTs are counted can their exclusion be measured, addressed, and transformed into substantive citizenship.

Ultimately, the path from exclusion to inclusion for DNT communities lies in acknowledging their histories, mobility patterns, and cultural identities within national policy frameworks. Census recognition, combined with community-responsive programme design, is essential for ensuring that initiatives such as Jan Dhan Yojana move beyond numerical outreach and contribute to empowerment, dignity, and social justice for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes.

Recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrate that financial inclusion and welfare outcomes for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) are inseparable from their historical stigmatization, administrative invisibility, and lack of statistical recognition within national data systems. Accordingly, policy interventions must move beyond uniform welfare design and prioritise structural reforms that centre enumeration, cultural sensitivity, and institutional accountability.

1. Recognise DNTs as a distinct category in the forthcoming Census

The foremost policy priority is the integration of DNTs as an independently enumerated category within the national Census and allied administrative databases. The absence of such recognition results in misclassification under SC, ST, or OBC categories and prevents programme-level targeting and monitoring (Renke Commission, 2008; Idate Commission, 2018). A nationwide socio-economic enumeration should be undertaken with survey mechanisms capable of capturing nomadic and semi-nomadic populations who are routinely excluded from settlement-based surveys. Census recognition is essential for evidence-based welfare planning, budget allocation, and institutional accountability.

2. Establish Census-linked monitoring for financial inclusion and welfare schemes

Schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) demonstrate national outreach, yet the absence of disaggregated beneficiary data obscures the extent of DNT participation. A Census-linked monitoring framework should identify DNT households as a recognised beneficiary group and track access, usage, and gender-specific barriers. Financial inclusion indicators must move beyond numerical account coverage toward metrics grounded in usability, trust, and sustained engagement.

3. Develop culturally responsive and region-specific policy frameworks

Policy design must align with community livelihoods, mobility patterns, and cultural practices rather than imposing uniform development templates. Mobility-integrated welfare for pastoralist groups, conservation-linked livelihood alternatives for forest-dependent communities, and cultural fellowships for performance-based occupations illustrate how identity-affirming interventions can strengthen social and economic security.

4. Scale up state-level best practices through national coordination

State initiatives such as Ashramshalas, mobile ration delivery systems, and cooperative livelihood models have demonstrated positive outcomes when tailored to local contexts. These approaches should be consolidated, evaluated, and institutionalised through a coordinated national framework instead of remaining fragmented state-specific measures.

5. Establish a dedicated Ministry for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes

Finally, the study recommends the creation of a dedicated Ministry with statutory authority, budgetary autonomy, and monitoring capacity. Unlike time-bound commissions, such an institution would ensure sustained policy attention, integrate welfare and cultural protection, coordinate cross-state initiatives, and anchor long-term research and enumeration processes.

Synthesis

Across all recommendations, a central principle emerges: data recognition, cultural respect, and policy accountability must operate together. The integration of DNTs into the forthcoming Census is not merely a statistical reform, but a foundational step toward equitable welfare delivery, institutional visibility, and substantive citizenship for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes.

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