

Research Article

From Census to Commission to Life Narratives: Tracing the Nat Community's Socio-Economic Status

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Abstract

This paper delves into a comprehensive exploration of the macro-level socio-economic landscape characterizing the Nat community, a de-notified tribe categorized as a scheduled caste in the state of Rajasthan, India. The primary aim is to furnish a nuanced understanding of the life and livelihood dynamics and the contemporary circumstances of the Nat community both at a national level and, more specifically, within the confines of Rajasthan. Historically, the Nat community is a nomadic group of entertainers who performed for Rajput kings and their subjects through dance and acrobatic skills. Drawing upon an amalgamation of existing scholarly works, the most recent datasets, and pertinent information from sources such as the 2011 census and reports issued by the National Commission on Nomadic, Semi-nomadic, and De-Notified Tribes, the paper unfolds across various thematic sections. These segments include an examination of the historical trajectory of the Nat community, an assessment of their social standing across different states, an exploration of the diversities, divisions, and deprivations experienced by the Nat community in Rajasthan, and a macro-level reflection on their demographic, educational, and economic profiles. Through this multi-faceted approach, the paper aspires to contribute valuable insights into the intricate socio-economic fabric that encapsulates the Nat community in the Indian context.

Keywords

Nat Community, De-notified Tribe, Social Position, and Diversities and Divisions

1. Introduction

The Nat community, as elucidated by various scholars and historical accounts [10, 19], constitutes a nomadic tribe dispersed throughout the country, with a predominant presence in the northern regions. The term "Nat" appears to encompass diverse clans united by shared occupations, such as dancing, sex work, and various acrobatic pursuits. Rose [18] posits that Nat and Bazigar of Punjab are interchangeable caste groups, notwithstanding certain distinctive characteristics. Risley, as cited in Singh [19], characterizes Nat as the "Nar, Nat, Nartak, Natak," a musician caste group in Bengal, identifying them

with the Brahmanical Kathak of Hinduism. Alternatively, some theories assert that the Nat community's origin aligns with the 'Nuri,' engaged in the production of lac bracelets.

Historically, the Nat community thrived as entertainers, traversing the state to showcase their dancing and artistic prowess. Azeez, Toolsiram, and Mishra [9] contend that the Nat community members were invited by Rajput and other influential families for performances on special occasions. The favor of kingdoms in Rajasthan towards the Nat community was evident, with their proximity to kings as enter-

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tainers and patronage by Zamindars. Neuman [16] emphasizes the crucial role of dance, music, and artistic performances in Nat culture, contributing to their enhanced social standing.

However, with the decline of kingdoms, the Nat community faced challenges in the changing socio-political landscape [9, 21]. The loss of patronage and livelihood forced them into commercial sex work. Traditionally nomadic, the Nats sustained themselves by selling salt and entertaining kingdoms through their artistry. Their mobility and accessibility made them favorites of the nobility, even rumoured to serve as spies for kings. As kingdoms disintegrated, the community found itself marginalized, acquiring a reputation as a criminal tribe through the criminal tribes Act 1871 [8]. Female artists, once favored by kings, gradually transitioned into conventional sex work [12]. Acharya [1] contends that the Nat community has historically practiced sex work, passing down the profession from generation to generation. Despite their challenges, the Nat community has preserved traditional art forms, such as Godna work (tattooing), thanks to their artistic skills [17].

Social Position of Nat Community in Different States

The Nat community, as delineated in diverse geographical contexts, exhibits a nuanced interplay of socio-cultural attributes and economic activities, reflecting both continuity and adaptation. Rawat [17] underscores the religious diversity within the Nat community, encompassing both Hindu and Muslim affiliations. Notably, in Uttar Pradesh, the Nats confront marginalization, particularly classified as a scheduled caste, yet facing rejection from local village communities, including Dalits. This exclusion manifests in limited access to civic, public, and natural resources, further exacerbated by biases in benefit allocation under schemes such as MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee). Despite engaging in various occupations, the prevalent misconception of them solely as beggars persists [17].

In Uttar Pradesh, Nat men are reported to work in brick kilns, snake-catching, and selling dry wood, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their economic pursuits [17]. The scenario differs in Madhya Pradesh, where the Nat community, having migrated from Uttar Pradesh, has shifted from traditional occupations like dance and prostitution to roles in agriculture, petty jobs, and metalwork. The community's socio-economic conditions in Madhya Pradesh have reportedly improved due to government policies and programs [17].

Moving to Bihar, the Nat community is identified by various names such as Bazigar, Sapera, and Gulguliya, concentrated in specific regions. The Nat community in Bihar exhibits linguistic diversity, speaking both Magahi and Hindi. While they have transitioned from traditional occupations to alternative livelihoods such as selling herbal medicine, agriculture, and petty businesses, Alam and Singh [4] emphasize that Muslim Nats in Bihar maintain their identity as acrobats, with some engaging in begging. The community in Bihar is further classified into distinct categories, reflecting a complex

social structure.

In West Bengal, the Nat community, referred to as Natta, is subdivided into categories such as Bratya Kshatriya, Karwal Nat, Manch Rang Nat, and Gawar Nat. The community is engaged in traditional occupations like acrobats, rickshaw pulling, wage labor, and metalwork. The linguistic shift from Natta to adopting surnames like Nandy and Sarkar is indicative of evolving identity dynamics [19].

Haryana presents an interesting case, with some Nats claiming Ahi Ravan as their ancestor, while others assert Brahmanical origins from Marwar. Child marriage persists in the state, and occupational diversity is evident among the Nats, ranging from traditional occupations like acrobats and prostitution to newer engagements such as agriculture and casual labor [19].

In Punjab, the Nat community, having migrated from Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, speaks Gujarati within the community and Hindi with others. Modern sources of entertainment are leading to a decline in traditional occupations, rendering the community economically vulnerable. Despite an absence of major social divisions, three sub-groups – Mahakarhia, Gaurhna, and Mota – are perceived as having a higher social standing, refraining from inter-group marriages [14].

In the national capital, Delhi, a subset of the Nat community, represented by the Kabutari or Kabutari Nat, has migrated from Rajasthan. The Kabutari Nat, known for their rope-dancing skills, exhibit social distinctions within the larger Nat community, with certain sub-groups considered to have lower social positions [19].

In summation, the Nat community across different states demonstrates a complex interplay of socio-cultural identities, economic adaptations, and varying degrees of social inclusion or exclusion. The diverse trajectories of the Nat community underscore the importance of nuanced, context-specific analyses to comprehend the multifaceted nature of their experiences and challenges.

2. Nat Community in Rajasthan: Diversities, Divisions and Deprivations

In the context of Rajasthan, the Nat community, identified as an entertainer nomadic tribe, historically enjoyed patronage from Rajput rulers, often referred to as RajNat [11]. Singh [19] characterizes them as traditional professionals engaged in singing, dancing, and acrobatics, occasionally recognized as 'Bahnmati,' signifying something extraordinary. The Nat community's oral tradition traces its lineage to Rajputs, asserting descent from a Natni (Nat woman) and Raja Bhoj, the king of the Malwa region in central India.

Geographically, the Nat community is distributed across all districts of Rajasthan, speaking their own language, Bagri, which exhibits linkages with the Indo-Aryan language family. However, for external communication, they employ Hindi and are conversant with Marwari dialects. Notably, the commu-

nity predominantly adheres to a non-vegetarian diet, and the consumption of alcohol is socially accepted within their cultural practices [19].

As Swarankar [20] observes, with the decline of the feudal system in the state, the Nat community experienced a diminution in royal patronage. The traditional system of entertainment gradually gave way to modern media, gaining popularity in rural areas. The nomadic nature of the Nat community left them unprepared for the transition, rendering them seemingly unskilled in the evolving socio-economic landscape. Consequently, confronted with changing circumstances, the community underwent a shift from a nomadic lifestyle to a more settled existence, establishing temporary hamlets in unused lands either near or at a distance from villages [6]. Singh [19] further notes that local landlords and Rajputs, acknowledging the Nat women dancers, incentivized them with land and extended invitations to settle in nearby villages. The transformation from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle marked a significant adaptation within the Nat community, highlighting their resilience in response to socio-economic changes. The intersection of historical patronage, cultural practices, and adaptive strategies underscores the dynamic nature of the Nat community's experiences in Rajasthan.

2.1. Social Divisions Amongst Nat

The senior informant from Nandalalpura village in the Jaipur district, possessing extensive knowledge of the Nat community, shared insights during preliminary visits, offering a nuanced understanding of the community's internal dynamics. According to this source, the Nat community can be broadly categorized into three groups: Mala, Bidu, and Chaddi, a classification consistent with Singh's observations [19]. Each of these major categories further encompasses several sub-castes or clans, such as Karmavat, Topavat, Madhani, and others. A notable feature of the social hierarchy within the Nat community is the perceived higher status of the Chaddi group, while Mala and Bidu groups are considered to have equal standing. Despite this hierarchy, the informant emphasizes that intermarriage is permissible among the groups, challenging the notion of a rigid social structure. The informant posits that the sense of superiority is a mental construct, noting that if they can eat, live, and marry together, the hierarchy is merely a perception. The Chaddi group, it is highlighted, attributes its elevated position to a historical role of serving kings [19].

Singh [19] further notes that Mala and Bidu groups comprise numerous gotras or clans, whereas Chaddi is identified as a single clan. The gotras of Mala and Bidu allegedly bear names associated with the Rajput patrons for whom they served as entertainers, exemplified by designations like Nagria, Ragha, Abhua, Halem, Bhamria, Madhani, etc.

The senior informant's perspective sheds light on the intricacies of the Nat community's social organization, illus-

trating the interplay of historical roles, perceived hierarchies, and the pragmatic reality of social interactions. The notion of gotras linked to Rajput patrons emphasizes the historical roots of their relationship with the ruling elite.

Furthermore, the Nat community, in accordance with regional, socio-cultural customs, and religious influences, manifests multiple identities [7, 22]. This multiplicity of identities is recognized as potentially contributing to an identity crisis within the Nat community. The adoption of Hinduism and Islam introduces variations in socio-cultural aspects, adding complexity to the community's self-perception and external perceptions [17]. This identity crisis becomes particularly apparent as the community navigates the intersection of various cultural, religious, and regional influences.

2.2. Socio-Cultural Features

The Nat community faces significant challenges in terms of social stigma and marginalization, primarily due to the occupation of commercial sex work, which carries multiple layers of stigma within the broader societal context. The community's low social position is exacerbated by negative perceptions associated with sex work, which is deemed as a "low-standard" occupation [13]. Nat women engaged in sex work are often viewed as transgressing social norms prevalent in traditional Indian society, where sex is perceived as permissible only within the bounds of the marital system [9]. Consequently, Nat women involved in sex work experience degradation, humiliation, and are labeled as shameless, leading to isolation and a lack of association with other caste communities [7].

The economic status of Nat men is notably low, primarily due to their status as daily wage earners and a lack of land ownership. The financial well-being of many Nat families, particularly in Jaipur and Ajmer districts, relies on the earnings of women engaged in sex work. Despite the societal disdain attached to this profession, families with women in sex work often fare better economically than others in the community [9].

Marriage practices within the Nat community involve considerations of family consent, with a prevalence of monogamous marriages, but instances of polygyny are not uncommon. Nat women follow traditional marriage symbols such as Mangalsutra, Mehendi, and Bangles, and adhere to practices like Ghoonghat after marriage. The practice of bride price payment is also prevalent. Nat girls who engage in sex work may return to the village after a certain age, seeking marriage opportunities within or outside the community. The decision to marry outside the community is viewed as a fresh start, allowing women to move away from their past lives [9].

The Nat community exhibits a patriarchal structure where male family members make key decisions. Women in the community are broadly categorized into those involved in sex work and those who are not, with the former facing social exclusion and lack of respect. Married women are expected to adhere to norms of chastity, maintaining a certain distance

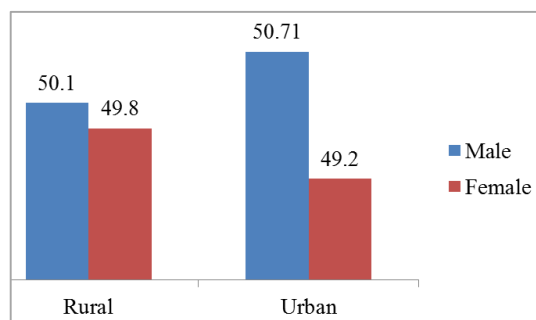
from elders, and participating in religious rituals. Pre and extra-marital affairs, especially for married women, are strictly prohibited by the caste council. Nat males are prohibited from being clients of sex workers, emphasizing the community's attempts to maintain distinct professional and personal spheres within the realm of sex work [3, 2].

The livelihood and socio-cultural features of the Nat community highlight a complex interplay of luxury, socio-political changes, occupational transformations, poverty, deprivation, and marginality. Despite changes in society, the social status of the Nat community has shifted gradually, underscoring the challenges faced by marginalized groups like the Nat community. Stigma and discrimination persist as integral components of their social identities.

In the subsequent section, authors discuss various data sources, including the census of India and reports from national commissions, providing a broader contextual understanding of the Nat community's socio-economic and cultural landscape.

3. Demographic, Education & Economic Profiles: Macro Level Reflections

The demographic and socio-economic profile of the Nat community in Rajasthan is challenging to precisely ascertain due to a lack of clarity in estimating households and populations. However, insights can be gleaned from available data, particularly the 2011 Census and reports from the National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NT/DNT commission).



Source: Census of India, 2011

Figure 1. Percentage Distribution of Nat Children (0-6 years) in Rajasthan by Gender and Location.

The 2011 Census data provides valuable insights into the demographic distribution of the Nat community in Rajasthan. According to the census, the total population of the Nat community in the state is reported to be 65,904. This population is distributed between rural and urban areas, with approximately 80% of Nat households residing in rural settings and the remaining 20% in urban areas. The trend of settling down in cities for livelihood is indicative of a transition in the community's traditional lifestyle, possibly influenced by

economic opportunities and changing occupational dynamics. The average household size among the Nat community is noted to be around five members. This figure underscores the composition of families within the community, potentially encompassing extended family structures or multi-generational households.

One positive aspect highlighted in the census data is the nearly equal gender ratio within both urban and rural areas of the Nat community. This parity in gender distribution is a noteworthy demographic characteristic, indicating a relatively balanced representation of males and females within the community across different settlement patterns.

Table 1. Percentage Share of Nat Children (0-6 years) in Rajasthan by Gender and Location.

Area	Male	Female	Total number
Rural	51.3	48.7	11,034
Urban	51.7	48.3	3,013
Total	51.4	48.6	14,047

Source: Census of India, 2011

The majority of the Nat population, specifically children aged 0-6 years, resides in rural areas. The total number of Nat children in rural areas is 11,034. The gender distribution among Nat children is almost equal in both rural and urban areas. The percentage share of male and female children is approximately balanced, indicating no significant gender disparity. The total number of Nat children in the age group of 0-6 years, combining both rural and urban areas, is reported to be 14,047. This information is crucial for understanding the socio-economic dynamics and developmental needs of the Nat community, particularly in the context of early childhood.

Table 2. Literacy Status of Nat Community Across Gender and Area.

Area	Male	Female	Total number
Rural	65.7	34.3	18,452
Urban	67.5	32.5	2,931
Total	65.9	34.1	21,383

Source- Census of India, 2011

Table 2 outlines the literacy status of the Nat community, revealing a total of 21,383 literate members, with 18,452 residing in rural areas and 2,931 in urban areas. However, a stark gender disparity is evident, particularly in female liter-

acy rates, which stand at only 34%, while the male literacy rate is 66%. This concerning gap underscores challenges in ensuring equitable access to education, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address barriers faced by females in both rural and urban settings. The data highlights a critical aspect of the Nat community's socio-economic landscape, signaling the urgency of initiatives to promote education and bridge gender-based disparities within the community for holistic development [5].

The operationalization and definition of the term 'worker' in the Indian census have evolved over time, with the process beginning as early as 1872. The dynamic nature of work led to multiple amendments, adapting the terms "work" and "worker" to reflect changing dimensions. In the census context, work is now defined as participation in any economically productive activity, regardless of compensation, wage, or profit, encompassing both physical and mental endeavors. The definition extends to activities involving effective supervision, part-time and unpaid work within family occupations, on farms, or in any economic pursuit such as cultivation or domestic milk production. Individuals engaged in these diverse categories, whether for profit or not, fall under the classification of workers according to the census of India. The reference period for determining an individual's worker status is the one year preceding the enumeration date, providing a comprehensive and standardized framework for assessing workforce participation [15].

The Census of India distinguishes between main workers, those engaged in work for the majority of their reference period (6 months or more), and marginal workers, those with less consistent work participation. Main workers are further categorized based on industrial classifications into four distinct groups: cultivators involved in agricultural cultivation, agricultural laborers engaged in labor-intensive agricultural activities, household industry workers contributing to economic activities within households, and other workers involved in diverse economic endeavors beyond the aforementioned categories. This categorization framework allows for a detailed examination of the workforce, enabling a nuanced analysis of their distribution across various sectors and activities. Such classifications contribute significantly to understanding the intricate dynamics of the labor force and its engagement in diverse economic pursuits.

The data in Table 3 highlights the working population of the Nat community in Rajasthan based on gender and area. The total number of workers in the community is 26,347, with 22,115 in rural areas and 4,232 in urban areas. In rural settings, the participation of women in the workforce is comparable to that of men. However, in urban areas, a notable gender gap is evident, with only 25% of women participating in the workforce compared to 75% of men. This discrepancy suggests that the shift to urban areas corresponds with a gradual increase in male economic involvement within the Nat community. Understanding these gender-specific patterns is crucial for devising targeted interventions that promote equitable

economic opportunities for both men and women within the community, particularly in urban settings.

Table 3. Working Population of Nat Community in Rajasthan by Gender and Area.

Area	Male	Female	Total number
Rural	57.2	42.8	22,115
Urban	74.4	25.6	4,232
Total	60.0	40.0	26,347

Source- Census of India, 2011

Table 4. Distribution of Main Workers in the Nat Community in Rajasthan by Gender and Area.

Area	Male	Female	Total number
Rural	67.5	32.5	13,932
Urban	78.9	21.1	3,156
Total	69.6	30.4	17,088

Source- Census of India, 2011

The data presented in Table 4 illustrates the distribution of main workers within the Nat community in Rajasthan across gender and area. Out of the total 17,088 main workers, 13,932 are based in rural areas, while 3,156 are in urban areas. The census categorizes cultivators, agricultural laborers, household industry workers, and other workers engaging in similar labor forms as main workers. However, a discernible gender gap is evident among main workers, with approximately three-fourths of this category comprising male members. This gender disparity highlights the need for targeted efforts to address barriers to female participation as main workers within the Nat community, particularly in rural and urban contexts, fostering gender-inclusive economic opportunities.

Table 5. Percentage Share of Nat Marginal Workers in Rajasthan by Gender and Locality.

Area	Male	Female	Total number
Rural	39.7	60.3	8,183
Urban	61.2	38.8	1,076
Total	42.2	57.8	9,259

Source- Census of India, 2011

The data in Table 5 delineates the percentage share of Nat marginal workers in Rajasthan based on gender and locality. The total number of marginal workers is 9,259, with the majority, 8,183, residing in rural areas. Notably, in rural settings, the majority of marginal workers are women, constituting 60.3 percent. In contrast, in urban areas, males comprise a higher percentage of marginal workers, accounting for 61.2 percent,

while females constitute 38.8 percent of the 1,076 individuals in this category. This distinction between rural and urban areas underscores gender-specific patterns in marginal work within the Nat community, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address disparities and promote equitable economic opportunities for both genders in different contexts.

Table 6. *Percentage Share of Nat Non-Workers in Rajasthan by Gender and Locality.*

Area	Male	Female	Total number
Rural	45.1	54.9	30,304
Urban	39.9	60.1	9,253
Total	43.9	56.1	39,557

Source- Census of India, 2011

Table 6 presents the percentage share of Nat non-workers in Rajasthan categorized by gender and locality. According to the 2011 census, the total number of non-working individuals in the Nat community is 39,557, with 30,304 residing in rural areas and 9,253 in urban areas. In rural settings, the gender ratio shows a relatively balanced distribution, with females representing 54.9 percent and males 45.1 percent of

non-workers. However, in urban areas, a notable gender gap emerges, with non-working females comprising 60.1 percent, while males constitute 39.9 percent. This discrepancy emphasizes the distinct patterns of non-worker distribution across genders in urban contexts, warranting focused attention on factors influencing non-working status among females in the Nat community in urban areas.

Table 7. *Social Categories of De-notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Communities in Rajasthan.*

Community	SC	ST	OBC	Others	Not included in any list	Total
De-notified Communities	5	3	5	0	1	14
Nomadic Communities	12	1	5	11	13	42
Semi-Nomadic Communities	0	0	13	0	0	13
Total	17	4	23	11	14	69

Source- National Commission for De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes, 2017 (p. 102-104)

Table 7 presents the distribution of de-notified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic communities in Rajasthan across different social categories, based on the Idate Report, 2017, of the National Commission for De-notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes. Among the total of 14 de-notified communities in the state, five are listed under Scheduled Caste (SC), three under Scheduled Tribe (ST), and five under Other Backward Class (OBC). For the 42 nomadic commu-

nities, 12 are categorized as SC, one as ST, five as OBC, and 11 are not listed under any category. All 13 semi-nomadic communities in the state are listed under the Other Backward Class (OBC) category. This categorization provides insights into the social classification of these communities, influencing their access to various welfare and development programs.

Table 8. Role of Caste Councils in Addressing Issues of De-notified and Nomadic Tribes in Rajasthan.

Issues addressed by Jaat Panchayats	Estimated by the community	
	De-notified Tribe	Nomadic Tribe
Resolving family disputes	98	93.5
Resolving disputes between lineages	71	82.6
Resolving disputes over grazing and other economic rights	61	58.7
Hearing cases related to theft, assaults, etc	16	19.6
Issues arising of interaction with other communities	18	13

Source- National Commission for De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes, 2008 (p. 76)

Table 8 outlines the significant role of caste councils in addressing the issues of de-notified and nomadic tribes in Rajasthan. The key problems addressed by these councils include family disputes, disputes between lineages or clans, overgrazing and economic rights, theft cases, and assault cases. The table provides a percentage breakdown of cases handled by caste councils for each respective issue. It is noteworthy that these councils play a crucial role in the day-to-day affairs of de-notified and nomadic tribes, acting as arbitrators in various disputes. However, it is essential to acknowledge that these councils are predominantly male-dominated, lacking representation from women and highlighting the patriarchal nature of the community.

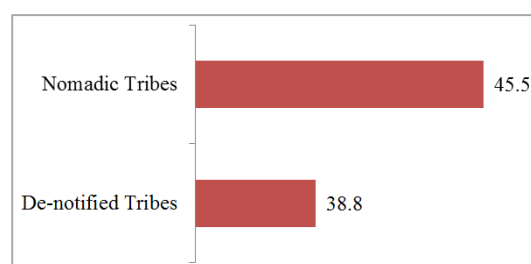
Table 9. Percentage Share of Households of De-notified Communities in India by Type of Dwelling.

Type of Dwellings	Percentage of Households
Permanent Structure	28.33
Semi-permanent and kuttcha structure	51.66
Mobile/Caravan	1.66
Tent	8.33
Others	10.1

Source- National Commission for De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes, 2017 (p. 75)

Table 9 presents the percentage share of households of de-notified communities in India based on the type of dwelling. Approximately 52% of these households reside in semi-permanent and kuttcha shelters. In contrast, 28% have permanent shelters, 8% live in tents, and the remaining 12% use other means of settlement. This data provides insights into the diverse housing conditions within de-notified communi-

ties, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to improve living conditions, particularly for those residing in semi-permanent and kuttcha shelters.

**Figure 2.** Percentage of DNT/NT households having access to health care services.

Source- National Commission for De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes, 2008 (p. 50)

The available data on access to health care services, albeit dated, suggests a notable proportion of de-notified and nomadic households facing challenges in obtaining easy access. Interestingly, a higher percentage of de-notified tribes, in comparison to nomadic tribes, report difficulties in accessing such services. The commission report highlights various contributing factors to this disparity, including economic challenges, lack of awareness, geographical distance to health care facilities, instances of discrimination and stigma, among others. Additionally, the attitudes and perceptions held by health care providers toward these communities are identified as influential factors hindering their access to essential health care services. This underscores the complex interplay of socio-economic, geographical, and attitudinal factors that collectively impact the healthcare accessibility for de-notified and nomadic tribes.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study sheds light on the multifaceted

aspects of the Nat community, a de-notified and nomadic tribe, across various regions in India. The historical roots of the Nat community trace back to their role as entertainers for royal patrons, and the decline of feudalism marked a significant turning point in their socio-economic status. The transition from nomadic lifestyles to settled communities brought about challenges, especially in the face of changing socio-political landscapes. While some members of the Nat community retained traditional occupations like acrobatics and music, others were forced into commercial sex work due to diminishing opportunities. The complex interplay of identities, including the syncretic blend of Hindu and Muslim practices, adds layers to the socio-cultural fabric of the Nat community. The socio-economic conditions of the Nat community vary across different states, reflecting the impact of regional dynamics on their occupations and lifestyles. The community's engagement in agriculture, metalwork, and other wage labor in some regions contrasts with their traditional roles as entertainers in others. The adoption of different surnames and the emergence of distinct sub-groups underscore the adaptive strategies employed by the Nat community in response to changing circumstances.

The demographic and socio-economic profile derived from the 2011 Census data highlights gender disparities in literacy rates and workforce participation, especially in urban areas. The prevalence of sex work among Nat women, while providing economic stability for some families, subjects them to societal stigmatization and exclusion. The patriarchal nature of the community is evident in decision-making structures, where women are often marginalized. The analysis of caste councils reveals their pivotal role in dispute resolution, primarily focusing on family issues, lineage disputes, and economic rights. However, the predominantly male composition of these councils underscores gender imbalances within the community. The examination of housing conditions indicates that a substantial portion of de-notified communities resides in semi-permanent and kutcha shelters, emphasizing the need for improved living conditions. While the provided data on health care access is dated, it signals ongoing challenges for de-notified and nomadic households, with economic constraints, lack of awareness, and discriminatory attitudes from healthcare providers contributing to limited accessibility.

In summary, the Nat community's narrative reflects a dynamic interplay between tradition and adaptation, resilience and vulnerability, as they navigate the evolving socio-economic landscape across diverse regions in India. Efforts to address the challenges faced by this community necessitate nuanced strategies that consider the intersections of caste, gender, and economic disparities, along with promoting inclusive healthcare and educational initiatives.

Abbreviations

MGNREGA Mahatma Gandhi National Rural
Employment Guarantee Act

SC Scheduled Castes
ST Scheduled Tribes
OBC Other Backward Classes

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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