



COMPREHENSIVE CATEGORISATION OF DENOTIFIED, SEMI-NOMADIC, AND NOMADIC TRIBES – POLITY

NEWS: The Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) and Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) have, for the first time, undertaken a detailed classification of **denotified, semi-nomadic, and nomadic tribes** in India.

This classification effort has been crucial in identifying and categorising tribes that were historically marginalised and left out of various affirmative action benefits.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Key Findings of the Study

1. First-Time Classification of 268 Tribes

- The study has comprehensively identified and categorised **268** denotified, semi-nomadic, and nomadic tribes.
- These communities were previously overlooked or lacked formal recognition in any caste or tribe classification.
- The classification allows these groups to be considered for government welfare schemes and affirmative action policies.

2. Recommendation for Inclusion in SC, ST, and OBC Lists

- Out of the **268** identified communities, **179** have been recommended for inclusion in the **Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC)** lists.
- Inclusion in these categories would enable them to access benefits such as **reservations in education, employment, and other social welfare schemes**.
- The specific classification of each community will depend on their socio-economic and historical background.

3. First-Time Classification of 85 Communities

- The study has identified **85 communities** that had **never been classified before**.
- These communities had remained outside the purview of government benefits due to the lack of formal recognition.
- Their classification will now help them gain visibility and access to resources meant for disadvantaged communities.

4. 63 Communities Found "Not Traceable"

- The study also revealed that **63 communities** listed in previous reports were **no longer traceable**.



- The disappearance of these communities could be due to several factors:
 - **Assimilation** into larger communities.
 - **Name changes** over generations.
 - **Migration** to other states, leading to a loss of official records.
- This finding indicates the challenges in maintaining historical records and tracking smaller tribal groups.

Historical Background & Need for the Study

1. Impact of the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA), 1924

- The **Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1924** classified several communities as "criminal" by birth, leading to severe social stigma.
- The Act was **repealed in 1949**, leading to the "denotification" of these communities.
- However, despite the repeal, **successive governments struggled to reclassify these communities into appropriate social categories.**

2. Previous Attempts at Classification

- Several commissions and committees have attempted to classify these communities but fell short of comprehensive categorisation. Key efforts include:
 - **Kaka Kalelkar Commission (1955):** The first Backward Classes Commission, which acknowledged these communities but did not fully classify them.
 - **Lokur Committee (1965):** Recommended that certain communities be included in the ST list, but left many out.
 - **Mandal Commission (1980):** Identified and recommended OBC status for some of these groups, but did not cover all.
 - **Renke Commission (2008):** Found that many denotified, semi-nomadic, and nomadic tribes continued to be among the most disadvantaged groups.
 - **Idate Commission (2017):** Listed over **1,200** denotified, semi-nomadic, and nomadic tribes and highlighted **267** communities that were never classified.

3. Formation of Special Committee (2019)

- In response to the **Idate Commission's 2017 report**, the **Prime Minister's Office (PMO)** constituted a **Special Committee** in **February 2019** to complete the classification process.
- The committee was headed by the **Vice-Chairperson of NITI Aayog** and included:



- **Bhiku Ramji Idate**, chairperson of the previous commission.
- **Dr. J.K. Bajaj**, Centre for Policy Studies.
- **Director-General of the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI).**
- This committee tasked **AnSI and TRIs** with conducting an ethnographic study, which commenced in **February 2020** and was completed in **August 2023**.

What are the Essential Characteristics for a Community to be Identified as Scheduled Tribe?

- According to **Lokur Committee (1965)**, the essential characteristics are:
 - Indication of Primitive Traits
 - Distinctive Culture
 - Shyness of Contact with the Community at Large
 - Geographical Isolation
 - Backwardness

Need for Categorisation

1. Concerns Raised by the Parliamentary Standing Committee (2022)

- The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment**, in its **December 2022 report**, criticized the **government's delay** in classifying these communities.
- The committee warned that **delayed classification** would mean continued exclusion of these tribes from **government welfare benefits**.

2. Historical Misclassification of Tribes and Castes

- Experts like **S. Narayan, Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Social Sciences**, have pointed out that errors in classification date back to **colonial censuses**.
- Many communities were misclassified due to **political or administrative considerations**, leading to their exclusion from the right categories after independence.
- An **anthropological approach** to classification could provide a more **accurate and scientific** basis for determining the social status of these communities.

3. Difficulties Faced by Unclassified Communities

- Activists like **Dr. B.K. Lodhi**, who worked with the **Idate Commission**, have pointed out that:
 - Many communities are **incorrectly classified** under SC, ST, or OBC.



- **Hundreds of communities remain completely unclassified**, leaving them in a **policy vacuum** where they cannot avail themselves of any government schemes.

Potential Impact of the Study

1. Political Reactions

- The classification process has sparked debates, particularly in **Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat**, where activists are questioning the classification's **impact on reservations**.

2. Two Divergent Views on Classification

- Within the **Development and Welfare Board for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Communities**, there are two main perspectives:
 1. **Support for Classification into SC, ST, and OBC**
 - This group advocates for **completing classification quickly** to provide these communities with **reservation benefits and welfare schemes**.
 2. **Call for a Separate Constitutional Schedule**
 - This group argues for **creating an entirely new category** for denotified tribes, similar to how SC and ST groups are separately recognized in the **Constitution**.

3. State Governments' Role

- The study's findings will make it easier for **state governments** to initiate the process of including these communities in **existing reservation categories** if they choose to do so.

Next Steps

1. Review by Special Committee

- The **Special Committee under NITI Aayog** is currently **scrutinising the recommendations** of the study.

2. Preparation of Final Report

- After reviewing the study, the committee will prepare a **final report** that will be submitted to the government.

3. Government's Decision on Implementation

- The central government will **make a final decision** on whether to implement the recommendations, and how these tribes will be classified in the **SC, ST, or OBC lists, or as a separate category**.



This study marks a **historic step** in addressing the **longstanding marginalisation** of denotified, semi-nomadic, and nomadic tribes. The final government decision will determine how these communities gain access to **affirmative action policies and welfare schemes**, potentially changing their socio-economic status in India.

Basic Safeguards Provided by Indian Constitution for Scheduled Tribes

- The **Constitution of India** does not endeavor to define the term 'tribe', however, **the term Scheduled Tribe** was inserted in the Constitution through Article 342 (i).
 - It lays down that 'the **President may, by public notification, specify the tribes or tribal communities** or parts of or groups within the tribes or tribal communities or parts which shall, **for the purposes of this Constitution, be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes.**
 - The **Fifth Schedule of the Constitution** provides for the setting up a **Tribes' Advisory Council in each of the States having Scheduled Areas.**
- **Educational & Cultural Safeguards:**
 - **Article 15(4):** Special provisions for advancement of other backward classes (it includes STs)
 - **Article 29:** Protection of Interests of Minorities (it includes STs)
 - **Article 46:** The State shall promote, with special care, the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes, and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
 - **Article 350:** Right to conserve distinct **Language, Script or Culture,**
- **Political Safeguards:**
 - **Article 330:** Reservation of seats for STs in **Lok Sabha,**
 - **Article 332:** Reservation of seats for STs in **State Legislatures**
 - **Article 243:** Reservation of seats in **Panchayats.**
- **Administrative Safeguard:**
 - **Article 275:** It provides for the **grant of special funds by the Union Government to the State Government** for promoting the welfare of Scheduled Tribes and providing them with a **better administration.**

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/the-impact-of-classifying-denotified-tribes-explained/article69152097.ece>