Educational Challenges Faced by De-notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) children in Government-Aided Ashram Schools: A Case Study of Satara District, Maharashtra

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Abstract:

De-notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) in India, despite their cultural diversity and historical resilience, remain one of the most educationally deprived groups. The Ashram school model introduced by the Maharashtra Government was intended to mainstream children from such marginalized communities. This paper investigates the educational barriers faced by DNT students in government-aided Ashram schools of Satara district during 2013. It uses qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze infrastructural gaps, policy implementation issues, and socio-cultural hurdles. Drawing upon a case study of selected schools and supplemented with state-level statistics, the paper offers critical insights and policy recommendations to address the systemic inequalities in tribal education.

Keywords:

De-notified Tribes, Nomadic Tribes, Ashram Schools, Educational Challenges, Social Exclusion.

1. Introduction:

The educational development of marginalized communities remains a critical concern in India, especially among De-notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs). These groups, historically excluded from mainstream welfare frameworks, continue to face layered barriers in accessing quality education. Maharashtra is home to a significant population of DNTs, many of whom depend on Ashram schools and government-aided hostels for their children's education. Satara district, with its mix of rural and semi-urban populations, serves as a vital case study to understand the structural and contextual challenges that shape the educational journey of marginalized tribal students.

Ashram schools were introduced as a transformative model to bridge the educational divide for Scheduled Tribes (STs) and later extended to De-notified Tribes and other backward communities. These fully residential institutions aim to provide basic amenities such as shelter, nutrition, and learning under a single administrative framework. The logic behind residential schooling was to remove students from unstable, migratory, or disadvantaged home environments and immerse them in structured, supportive learning spaces. However, despite the good intentions and considerable budgetary allocations, several systemic inefficiencies have stunted the potential of this model.

The Constitution of India under Article 46 directs the State to promote the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other weaker sections. Yet, more than seventy years after independence, tribal literacy remains significantly lower than the national average. De-notified and Nomadic Tribes are among the least studied and least benefitted groups in this context. They often fall outside the radar of effective educational delivery due to their mobile lifestyles, social stigma, administrative apathy, and gaps in policy implementation. Ashram schools, therefore, represent both an opportunity and a challenge: an opportunity to offer inclusive education and a challenge due to their resource constraints and operational inefficiencies.

Satara, although considered more developed compared to tribal-dominated districts like Gadchiroli or Nandurbar, still exhibits pronounced gaps when it comes to the education of DNT children. Many students in this region come from families who have never had access to formal education. First-generation learners face issues ranging from linguistic and cultural alienation to emotional neglect. Moreover, residential schools often struggle to meet basic health, nutrition, and recreational needs of the students, which further hamper their holistic development.

This study, therefore, seeks to analyze the educational experiences of students enrolled in government-aided Ashram schools in Satara district through the lens of access, equity, infrastructure, and scheme implementation. The research employs qualitative methods including structured interviews with students and teachers, analysis of official records, and case studies of selected schools. It attempts to explore the ground realities behind low attendance, high dropout rates, emotional challenges, and ineffective fund usage.

In conclusion, this case study is more than a localized documentation of deficiencies. It is a call to action for systemic transformation. It advocates for sensitive, decentralized, and accountable educational models tailored to the unique needs of DNT communities in districts like Satara. By bridging the gap between entitlement and access, and by amplifying the voices of the children themselves, we can move closer to the constitutional promise of equal education for all.

Review of Literature:

Studies by Meena Radhakrishna (2001), Badaik (2010), and the TISS (2011) report highlight the deep-rooted marginalization of DNT communities. The National Commission for DNTs (2008) identified education as a critical tool for mainstreaming but lamented poor policy execution.

The 2012 Maharashtra Tribal Development Report indicated serious lapses in infrastructure, teacher vacancies, and delayed scholarships. A UNICEF report (2010) emphasized the need for culturally contextual pedagogy, especially for tribal and nomadic communities. Reports from the CAG (2013) and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2013) also criticized the underutilization of funds allocated for Ashram school infrastructure.

The educational marginalization of De-notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) has been a persistent issue in India, rooted in historical exclusion and policy neglect. Various studies have attempted to understand the systemic barriers faced by these communities, particularly in relation to state-run institutions such as Ashram schools.

Desai (2011) emphasized that while India has made progress in educational access, regional and social disparities continue to persist, especially among tribal and nomadic populations. Her research outlines how human development indicators are intrinsically linked to educational attainment and identifies education as a primary vehicle for mobility among deprived groups.

Singh and Patil (2013) provided a detailed review of the Indian government's policy frameworks for DNT education. Their study concluded that although several schemes exist, implementation failures and lack of sensitized governance prevent the intended outcomes. They argued for community-based approaches and greater accountability mechanisms to reach marginalized groups effectively.

Kumar and Tiwari (2014) examined access to education among Scheduled Tribes and DNTs, analyzing both infrastructural deficiencies and socio-cultural roadblocks. They found that while schemes such as hostel grants and post-matric scholarships do exist on paper, actual ground-level utilization remains weak due to red tape and poor targeting.

Zende (2012) offered insights from a qualitative study conducted in Ashram schools across Maharashtra, where he highlighted the emotional, psychological, and developmental challenges faced by first-generation learners. His findings underscore the role of trained teachers and inclusive pedagogies in retaining DNT students.

Government of Maharashtra (2012), through its official audits and program evaluations, acknowledged lapses in fund utilization, lack of infrastructure, and delays in scholarship distribution. These official reports serve as primary evidence for understanding the scale of administrative inefficiencies and the need for system-level reforms.

Objectives

1. To analyze the socio-economic background of DNT students in selected Ashram schools.
2. To identify major educational barriers (infrastructure, pedagogy, stigma, absenteeism).
3. To assess the effectiveness of government schemes implemented in 2013.
4. To recommend actionable interventions for infrastructure improvement and educational inclusivity.

Methodology

- **Design**: Mixed methods approach (qualitative + quantitative)
- **Sampling**: 3 government-aided Ashram schools (Tathwade, Shere, Umbraj)
- **Respondents**: 45 students (15 from each), 9 teachers, 3 wardens, 3 local education officers
- **Tools**: Structured questionnaires, FGD, interview schedules, government report analysis

- **Data Analysis**: Thematic coding and basic statistical tabulation

Socio-Economic Profile

Table 1: Monthly family income and parent occupation of DNT students (n=45)

Income Range	% of Students	Primary Parental Occupation
< ₹5,000	62%	Agricultural labor/migration
₹5,001–₹10,000	30%	Sugarcane cutting, hawking
> ₹10,000	8%	Small business

Infrastructure Gaps

- 2 of 3 schools lacked functional libraries
- 1 school had no separate toilets for girls
- Hostels overcrowded with poor sanitation
- No science lab or digital classroom facilities
- Poor access to safe drinking water
- Teacher-student ratio: 1:52 (ideal: 1:30)

Availability of Basic Infrastructure in Sample Schools (2013)

Facilities	**Shere Ashram School**	**Umbraj Ashram School**	**Tathwade Ashram School**
Separate girls' toilet	No	Yes	No
Library	No	Yes	No
Science Lab	No	No	No
Hostel condition	Poor	Average	Poor
Drinking Water	Unsafe	Safe	Unsafe

Case Study

Shere Ashram School - Status of Girls

Many students from this Ashram School are from Matang family .They faces significant academic disruption due to seasonal parental migration for sugarcane cutting. Irregular attendance of these students has resulted in below-average performance in math and science, though there is noticeable aptitude in language subjects. The absence of female mentorship, inadequate hostel monitoring, and poor menstrual hygiene facilities further hinder regular attendance and well-being.

Umbraj Ashram School & Tathwade Ashram School - Status of Boys

Students from the Kaikadi community and Banjara community faces educational challenges rooted in financial hardship and a speech impairment, which isolates them socially despite regular attendance and evident talent in visual art. Teachers lack the training to support the communication needs, and the school environment offers no inclusive aids or psychological support, putting them at risk of disengagement. Though the students from Banjara community are gifted in folk dance and active in cultural events,

The absence of personalized support, emotional guidance, and migration-sensitive strategies led to the eventual dropout. These cases highlight systemic neglect in addressing the diverse learning and emotional needs of children from marginalized and migrating communities, particularly those belonging to De-notified Tribes.

Data Collected from the teachers and Local Education Officer:

- **Irregular Attendance** :

Frequent seasonal migration with families disrupts schooling for many DNT children, leading to prolonged absenteeism, learning gaps, and dropouts. Teachers struggle to maintain contact due to the community's mobility and lack of communication infrastructure.

- **Language Barriers**

DNT children often speak tribal dialects like Kaikadi or Ghisadi and face difficulty understanding and using Marathi—the language of instruction. This hampers both academic progress and social integration in the classroom.

- **Lack of Parental Support**

  Most parents are illiterate and show limited involvement in their children's education. Education is not seen as a priority, and children are often expected to contribute to the household or accompany parents during migration.

- **Poor Learning Outcomes**

  Despite being in higher grades, many DNT students lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers attribute this to irregular attendance, inadequate home support, malnutrition, and emotional distress.

- **Identity-Based Stigma:**

  DNT children face subtle but persistent discrimination from peers and sometimes staff, based on their social identity, language, and appearance. This affects their confidence and sense of belonging, making classroom participation more difficult.

- **High Dropout Incidence**

  Teachers interviewed during the study reported that dropout rates among DNT children are significantly higher than the general student population. There was total 23% of drop out from std 5^{th} to 8^{th} . These dropouts are often undocumented or misreported due to poor tracking systems.

  Local Education Officers recognize the severity of dropout issues among DNT children but are constrained by systemic limitations such as poor tracking, fund delays, lack of cross-district coordination, and the invisibility of nomadic identities in educational planning. They recommend flexible schooling models**,** mobile education units**,** and community-based outreach workers to reduce dropout rates and improve retention.

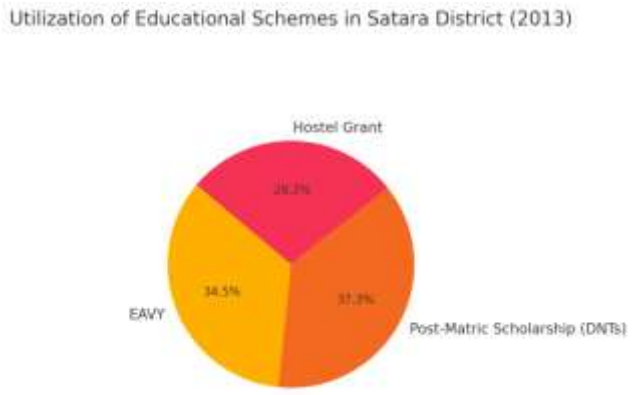
Government Schemes and Implementation Gaps (2013)

- **Ekatmik Adivasi Vikas Yojana:** Targeted infrastructure funding but execution delayed. Satara district utilized only 61% of allocated funds.
- **Post-Matric Scholarship for DNTs:** Disbursement lags of 6–9 months affected student retention.
- **Hostel Grant Scheme:** Only 50% of funds utilized in Satara district (source: District Planning Office report, 2013)
- **Ashram School Modernization Programme:** No action taken due to tendering delays and administrative red tape.

Scheme Utilization in Satara (2013)

Scheme	Allocation (₹ lakhs)	Utilized (₹ lakhs)	% Utilized
EAVY	120	73.2	61%
Post-Matric Scholarship (DNTs)	85	56.1	66%
Hostel Grant	100	50.2	50%

This table compares three government schemes — EAVY, Post-Matric Scholarship (DNTs), and Hostel Grant — focusing on fund allocation versus actual utilization. The percentage utilization reveals inefficiencies in how funds are absorbed at the institutional level.



Discussion The educational experience of DNT students' remains hindered by systemic failures: lack of contextual pedagogy, infrastructure issues, absence of psychosocial support, and delayed policy implementation. Cultural dissonance between school curriculum and DNT students' realities, coupled with infrastructural neglect, continues to alienate them from the schooling process. Government schemes are underutilized due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of accountability.

Recommendations

1. Integrate cultural education and tribal languages into early-grade curriculum
2. Hire counselors and tribal community liaisons
3. Monitor government scheme delivery using MIS dashboards
4. Introduce flexible academic calendars for migrating students
5. Upgrade infrastructure using participatory planning
6. Establish a Tribal Education Monitoring Committee in each block
7. Provide digital learning access and solar-powered classrooms

Conclusion The study concludes that while Ashram schools have the potential to transform the lives of DNT children, they are currently failing to do so due to systemic neglect. Infrastructure and pedagogical gaps, coupled with weak scheme implementation, have perpetuated the marginalization of these children. A shift from symbolic inclusion to structural reform is essential, with a child-centric, culturally sensitive, and a countable educational model.

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