

Participatory Research with Communities facing Stigmatisation on Barriers to Accessing Education

Meeting Minutes

Agenda

12:00 to 12:10	Sarah , Chair	Launch of the webinar and introducing the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University
12:10 to 12:20	Pradeep	Introduction to Community-led Research and the Fellowship
12:20 to 12:30	Deepali	Narrative Inquiry of a Nomadic Tribe
12:30 to 12:40	Shakila , Community Fellow	Caste and Education
12:40 to 12:50	Roshni , Community Fellow	Child Marriage and Education
13:00 to 13:10	Alison and Gaynor	Response from UK Participatory Research and NE Sex Worker Forum
13:10 to 13:20	Mayank	Community's current engagement with the State
13:20 to 13:50	Andrew , Moderator	Questions and Answers

Pradeep: Introduction to Community-led Research and the Fellowship

I am Pradeep, working in Praxis, an organisation that specialises in participatory practices, with focus on social equity and governance. Thank you Sarah and Andrew for facilitating this interaction between community learners and University learners.

For the last four years, the National Alliance Group of Denotified, Nomadic and Semi Nomadic Communities is struggling to collectivise the community members. These communities are those who were christened as “criminal tribes” by colonial government through a British Parliament Act. Many of them were nomadic, and some are nomadic even now. They all face stigmatization and discrimination owing to their social identities of caste. Many individuals continue to be in occupations that are on the wrong side of legality or morality or, often, both. Today is the death anniversary of the first Prime Minister of India, who was dead against the Criminal Tribe Act, and abolished the same after the independence.

There is a group of communities, under DNT umbrella, in which many individuals and families engage traditionally in sex work. We have been organising participatory action research with the communities of Nat in Bihar and Bediya in Rajasthan and MP, for the last three years, with the aim of collectivizing communities for wider advocacy on the abolition of Habitual Offenders Act, decriminalisation of communities and for demanding constitutional recognition and affirmative action for the communities.

In the Nat hamlets in Araria district we noticed two kinds of NGO interventions: - (a) anti-trafficking and (b) forming sex workers groups around HIV. The anti-trafficking interventions use search-rescue-institutionalisation-reunification model. The rescue-institutional approach is generally a failure, and here it fails severely because the premise of reunification with the families does not apply here, for even the families are often in sex work. Sex workers groups work from the lens of HIV primarily promoting safe sex. The HIV-centric groups often refrain from engaging on structural issues, not considering the intersectional inequalities based on patriarchy, caste system and the stigmatization due to mainstreamed moralities.

In the above scenario, as part of community-based action-research, we identified community volunteers, who facilitated formation of collectives in the surrounding hamlets using the theme of higher education for girls and boys. Most children drop out at the age of 14 years in class VIII. The community volunteers took up the mandate to build a campaign for their continued education beyond class VIII.

The collectivization initially evoked enthusiasm and the number of members in the group went up from 3 to 6 to 8 to 12 to 26, but then again stabilized at 6. Not more than 6 members used to come on their own for any meeting of the Collective and take up any action.

There were various reasons - including that the members did not find any use from this group to that of this group being seen as a group that is anti-sex work. The group inadvertently escalated the tension in the community between those who oppose sex work and those who are not in opposition to sex work.

At some point of time, both the sections opposed the newly evolving collective of women members, although the collective had a mix of practicing sex workers and those who have quit sex work. There was a feeling that the group has an agenda to mainstream a moral fabric, that is inherently anti-sex work, but now in the name of higher education and through the community collective itself. So we felt the challenge that the theme higher education itself is not 'neutral' to the binary based on sex work. Some community members are still trying to strengthen the group, but there also began another layer of participatory research through Community Fellows.

We have been strengthening sex work groups in other regions around their rights and entitlements. Sex workers in brothel areas often come from various regions. In other red-light areas, the neighbourhood itself becomes a community, and an industry surfaces around sex work- that has own gatekeepers. Individual sex workers from diverse locations and with different social identities become part of the neighbourhood and the industry. In the case of traditional sex work community, there is also a homogeneity in terms of community identity, which itself is marginalized in the overall caste system. Ironically, Nat community in Araria, have embraced Islam, but have not escaped caste system, and in the recent times, they are also becoming victims of escalated communal tensions. Further, the patriarchy in the sex industry and that in the community in the form of bride price or dowry or early marriage and other customs of community endogamy and geographical exogamy, also overlap and creates their own tension. So, what is happening is that there are various layers of marginalization that affect these community members. And the NAGDNT is trying to find ways to seek the mobilisation of Nat community in Araria and Bediya community in MP around community identity for overall policy advocacy. Can this still happen?

With this question, we moved ahead and evolved a community fellowship programme. The objective was to help NAG understand the contemporary contextual factors in the community that would help the mobilisation process. NAG identified community members who were offered fellowships to organise studies about their communities and then disseminate directly to the wider society, including the academic communities. We started with six fellows, and now we have 15 community fellows. Over the last few months, we have organized Nomad Conference and seminars and webinars. Some community fellows study their own community in own locations. A few study their community in different locations. Then there are community researchers who study their community as part of University curriculum. And then there are non-community researchers who study community as part of their academic curriculum. We try to bring all of them together and facilitate interaction. During this process, while we gather new knowledge, there is also an attempt to create knowledge leadership of community fellows, who are confident to explore new domains and territories. The aim of NAG and Praxis is to help evolve about 50 community fellows by October 2021.

Deepali: Narrative Inquiry of a Nomadic Tribe

Deepali belongs to the Gadiya Lohar community and is based in Nagpur, Maharashtra. She has completed her Masters and MPhil from Tata Institute for Social Sciences and plans to pursue her PhD.

Nomadic Tribes in India: Narrating some life aspects of Ghisadis in Aurangabad District of Maharashtra

Abstract: India's 10 percent of the population is De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic. While the number of Denotified Tribes consisting of different communities is about 334, the population of Nomadic Tribes consists of about 809 different communities (GOI, 2016). The Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) constitute about 5 million of population in Maharashtra State (Rathod, 2000). There are 15 Denotified and 26 Nomadic Tribes in Maharashtra (GOI, 2016). But their struggle has been ignored by the historians, anthropologists, academicians, researchers, policy analysts. Each of these Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic communities have their unique identity, language, belief system and way of living. They are commonly known as wandering communities because they move from one place to another in search of livelihood. But they do not wander aimlessly; instead they are continuously on the move to fulfill their daily needs. Among all these nomadic communities Ghisadi is one of the Nomadic groups of blacksmiths, who are categorized as Goods and Service Nomads found across the country and are known by different names. Their main occupation is blacksmith work and they prepare tools and implements required for agriculture. This paper is based on the M. Phil Dissertation. The empirical data was collected in three talukas of Aurangabad district of Maharashtra namely, Paithan, Khulatabad and Gangapur. The present paper includes different narratives from the participants which have been collected through extensive fieldwork conducted from June to September in the year 2017. It argues that Ghisadi has been considered as a Nomadic community throughout history, they were never included or classified as "Criminal Tribe" during the colonial period, but the findings indicate that they are living with the stigma of criminality and social exclusion and also face harassment from the settled communities and police machinery even after the seven decades of the independence.

Sakila

Sakila, a young woman of 23 years, lives in Bihar. She belongs to the Nat community. Sakila's father is a labourer working in the agricultural sector but has constantly encouraged her to study and pursue her dreams. As a result of this support and hard work, Sakila completed her Bachelor's degree. When in her village, Sakila dedicated time teaching children in her community. She believes that only when one is educated is one capable of changing the fate of their community. She is currently in Nalanda, Bihar to prepare for entrances exams for a Masters in Social Work.

We are not Nat

Introduction

The British colonised around 53 countries in the world (Lodhi, B.K 2019), however they implemented the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) only in India. The CTA was introduced in 1871. Around 198 Nomadic communities were notified as criminals under this Act between 1871 and 1922. The British based on their understanding of caste institution formed the opinion that profession is largely caste based in Indian society. For example, a carpenter's son becomes a carpenter, a doctor's son becomes a doctor and hence, similarly, a criminal's son becomes a "criminal". One such community, listed under the CTA, was the Nat.

Who are the Nat?

In Bihar, people of the Nat caste have adopted both Hinduism and Islam in different locations. The Hindu Nats belong to the Scheduled Castes while the Muslim Nats come under the Other Backward Classes (OBC) in Bihar. My paper solely focuses on the Muslim Nat community.

Within the Nat, many of the community members are semi-nomadic while a few are still nomadic in nature. Some of them are settled in villages and engage in cultivation and those who are nomadic are primarily engaged in tattooing, begging, bird hunting, rope dancing, entertainment shows with monkeys, and the cattle business. Sex work is also one of the predominant occupations found within the Nat community. The Nat are largely concentrated in the districts of Madhubani, Darbhanga, Samastipur, and Patna. The languages spoken in the community are Maithali, Hindi and Urdu, while they use Devanagari and Arabic for scripts. Most women have tattoos on their arms and around their necks. Endogamous marriage is generally practiced in the community. The age of marriage for boys and girls are 18-20 years and 15-18 years respectively. According to the norms of patriarchy, married women shift in with their in-laws. The practice of dowry is still prevalent in the form of cash or kind and the traditional caste councils still exist and command social control along with the statutory village Panchayats.

Field Visit

I visited five villages for my fieldwork in Aararia district of Bihar. In Aararia district, there are around 20-25 Nat villages. My field work covers Narpatganj block of Aararia.

Basic Data of the five villages

Basmatiya - 150 people - Work: Daily wage, domestic work

Khaspur - 200 people - Work: Sex work, rickshaw pullers

Amona - 3000 people - Work: Teaching, farming, working in companies

Dholbajja - 700 people - Work: Daily wage, rickshaw pullers

Bhagkauliya - 1500 people - Work: Begging, entertainment, theft

I met 21 men and 41 women from the community living in these five villages- Bhagkauliya, Dholbajja, Amona, Khaspur and Basmatiya. I also met people from other communities to understand their perception of the Muslim Nat community. There are few quotes from the community which I want to mention here -

One of the respondents from Nat community said:

“ Our occupation has been addressed as illegal by the state. In villages, nobody wants to employ us. Even if they employ us, they give us less wages as compared to other laborers. The employers discriminate against us based on our caste, for instance, when employees are served food in plates, we are asked to sit separately, at a distance. We are also not allowed to have water or food in their utensils.

One respondent from Dholbajja village said:

“ The Nat hamlet (locally referred as tola) neither has an Anganwadi (government pre-school which provides nutrition), nor a primary school or middle school. When our children go to school, they face caste based discrimination. The teachers look down at our children. This is primarily the reason why most of our children leave education at an early stage”.

In the Khaspur panchayat, the community shared:

“ Education is not meant for our children. If education would have been so important for our children, the school teachers wouldn't have discriminated against our children. They should not have labeled our children as thieves. How will our children be able to study where these things happen? .”

A case of Amona Panchayat

This paper focuses on the Amona Panchayat. The people from this community clearly stated, “Don't call us Nat, we are not Nat”. There were around 3000 people from the Nat community in this village. In

Amona Panchayat, I interviewed 26 women aged between 16-25 years and among them, 18 were literate.

Profile of respondent in Amona Panchayat

Age Group: 16-25

Sample Size: 26

Literate: 18

Those who have never been to school: 8

Out of the 18 literate women, 3 were teachers and 2 were members of Self Help Groups in the village. Four of the girls were pursuing a B.A. degree, 3 girls were in Class 10 and the rest 6 were in Middle School.

Development in Amona village

During my field visit, I came to know that nearly 80% of the Nat children in Amona panchayat attend school, whereas not even 10% children from the rest of the four Nat villages attend school. It was quite difficult for me to believe this stark contrast in realities. There is a striking difference in the living standard of Muslim Nats of Amona village and Muslim Nats of the other four villages. They have a 'clean' attire, their houses look cleaner and so is their locality. They spoke to me in a humble way and everyone whom I interacted with was aware about the importance of education. Women from this community have formed Self Help Groups and it has been linked to a 'Jeevika Programme' of the Government of Bihar. They save money to engage in entrepreneurship programmes mostly related to dairy, poultry and goat farming. The women play an active role in supporting their family through their SHGs, however in other villages, I haven't observed any such initiatives by Nat women. .

Changing caste identity

I was also very surprised and taken aback to see people getting angry at me when I referred to them as Nat, I was unable to understand why they were hiding their caste identity and referring to themselves as Shaikh (the name of a higher-caste). A group of people gathered, a person named Satar came to me and said, "Please go away from here. We are not Nat. We spit on them (Nat). We hate to be called Nat. Please leave my village, we have all converted into sheikh now".

I was really disappointed upon hearing this and by their behavior. But later, I thought there must be some painful reasons why they hate their own caste. I planned to come back and find out what were their ideas of the Nat and what were the reasons behind the change in their caste identity.

The next day I went back to the village, I met the same person who asked me to leave. He said, "*You are very adamant. You have come back again despite our insults*". I told him that no matter how much you

may insults me, I will keep coming back until I find an answer to my question - What were the pressing reasons for their conversion to Shaikh? Everyone around me was silent. Soon after that I gathered a group of community members and facilitated a Focused Group Discussion and placed before them the question of why they hate the Nat identity.

Caste-based discrimination

As the discussion progressed, the FGD participants raised the following issues:

- With the Nat identity, they will never get equal status in society, while people of other caste groups will continue to hate them
- No employer wants to recruit people from the Nat community. Even if they recruit, it is always an unequal pay compared to wages of other labourers.
- Children face discrimination in school, teachers do not pay attention; rather make them sit at the back bench. If there's no seat left, Nat children are told to sit on floor. The teacher even makes these children clean the school.
- If something gets stolen in the school, children from Nat community are the first suspects and even get beaten for no reason. It doesn't matter whether the theft is done by them or not.
- Children from the Nat community are not allowed to participate in any of the school programmes. Nat community girls, in particular, face eve-teasing as many women from this community are involved in sex work. They can't even complain to teachers, and even though they file a complaint, it is not taken seriously. The teacher laughs at it.
- People from other communities make fun of the Nat community. Youth are often asked "what is the need for you to study? Why are you here? You are in any case going to grow up to become a sex worker (for girls) or a pimp (for boys)"
- Nat people do not get invited to weddings. If at all they get an invite, they are made to sit at the corner and eat after everyone finishes their meal.

The positive impacts of changing their caste identity

When I asked about the positive impacts of changing their caste, they said,

"The biggest positive change has been in receiving equal status in society. Nearly 10% of our Amona Panchayat 'Nat' households have been married to higher caste and thus we gained respect in society. Children don't face discrimination in school. When people from our community go for labor work, they get work at a fair wage rate like others. People from our village can easily find work in big industries and companies. Over all, an environment is there for our children to pursue education."

Conclusion

After talking to so many people and hearing their stories, I realised that, maybe they were better off changing their identity, as it did bring about an improvement in their standard of living. But this also made me think, why is it that someone has to change their caste identity to get equal status in society?

Do we all just change our caste and forget our rich history? Is it a crime to be born as Nat? Why is there a stigma attached to the Nat identity – that these people can only become thieves or sex workers. If we try, we can change many things while still remaining a Nat. We just need to make little effort by bringing everybody together and we can live a good life and achieve our dreams while being Nat. We should be proud of our cast identity. We can start this by not hiding caste but by openly accepting our identity.

In future, if I get a chance to do more research, I want to trace the history of this caste change. It will be interesting to explore how did all 3000 people come together to change their caste identity? If unity exists in the Nat community which can make them take collective decision to change their caste identity, then why can't they come together to uplift their community status in society without changing their caste identity? Why doesn't the Nat community as a whole work towards changing the education status in their community and improve their condition in society? Why can't they work as a collective to challenge perspectives of their caste identity? History has shown us that when people come together they can change the face of the country they why not the caste identity?

Roshni

Roshni is 22 years old and lives in Araria district, Bihar. She belongs to the Nat community and was part of the Fellowship programme initiated by Praxis. Her father is a carpenter, while her mother is a homemaker. Her parents have encouraged her to study and hope that someday she will help improve the condition in her village. Roshni is pursuing her Bachelors in Patna University, and hopes to go on to do her Masters in Sociology.

Perception on Child Marriage: By Roshni and Farida

As a young girl from the Nat community in Araria, Bihar, I have seen child marriages occur many a times, however, I had never delved deeper in trying to understand this phenomenon of child marriage. When given an opportunity to conduct our own research, Farida and I, Roshni, chose to study the prevalence and impact of child marriage on girls from the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes in five villages in Forbesganj, Bihar. Through this paper we wanted to understand the problems related to it and know what the different reasons for child marriage are. Despite the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006, why does this tradition still continue in many communities? What role does caste identity and poverty play in child marriage for these Denotified and Nomadic Tribes?

In order to find answers for our questions, we set out to conduct our research in five villages - Hadiya Baad, Bhaagmohobat, Samaul, Mirzapur, and Harwa – with community members from four communities - Krodi, Kuredi, Banjara and Nat. The Banjara community are involved in begging and they sell herbal medicines by roaming from village to village. They live in tent-like houses, made of bamboo and canvas. They do not have any land of their own and are living on land provided by the government. The Karori community also does not have any land of their own, and are involved in selling of honey and vermilion. The Kuredi community sell herbal medicines, and live in shacks. The Nat community earlier was involved in snake charming and showcasing magic tricks and gradually shifted to sex work. Now, most people in the Nat village are involved in daily wage labour.

Our research began with a community mapping and resource mapping of the villages, along with a survey which we conducted with 32 girls. Through these we identified that the problem that was evident was child marriage. We developed a list of questions and created a problem tree to better understand the potential root causes of Child marriage. We then went back to the communities and conducted interviews and group discussions with young married girls and their parents.

In five villages, we spoke to 32 girls between the ages of 16 to 25. 22 of them were married, of which 11 were married when they were younger than 17 years of age. Only one out of the 32 girls was still studying. 24 of them (75%) had dropped out of school. We asked the girls their reasons for dropping out and found out that 58% of them had dropped out because of marriage, 13% had dropped out because they faced caste discrimination, 13% dropped out to the financial condition at home and 17% did not feel safe going to school.

In our research we found out that the rate of child marriage is very high in the Karori community of Araria district. For their livelihood, the Karori community sells honey and *sindoor* (vermillion) and many of the children in this community are also involved in this work. Our paper focuses on this community.

When we spoke to parents they told us that when a girl or boy is born their marriages are fixed, without any consultation with the children. One girl remarked that when she was getting married, she did not even know what marriage was and thought of it as a game that she used to play with her dolls. Many of the girls highlighted that they did not know what the impact of child marriage would be on their lives. We wonder whether the reasons for child marriage is the lack of education or the conservative thinking of parents, because of which young girls are tied into a marriage about which they have no information or understanding.

Parents told us that it is 'correct' to marry children when they are young. In this community most girls are not allowed to pursue education as the family believes that if a girl studies 'too much' she will become 'bad' or 'too assertive'. As there is not much scope for her after her education, parents think it better to get their daughter married at a young age.

In one of the villages we conducted a group discussion with 10 girls from the village, all of whom had been married at a young age. One of the girls told us that her marriage was arranged when she was just five years old. "I was very interested in studying when I grew up, but my family did not pay heed to my requests and forced me to get married." She added that since she has not had a child yet, she has faced abuse in her in-laws house. "My husband often beats me because I have not been able to have a child yet". Another girl pointed out that since some cases of girls running away for 'love marriages' have occurred, parents get their girls married off at an early age to prevent this. They fear that their daughters might also fall in love and get married to some unknown man, thereby causing shame to the family honour. When we asked the girls why they think child marriage occurs in their community, they shrugged and answered that this is a tradition in their community and has been happening for years. Some of them highlighted that they face caste-discrimination very often in their lives. "If children from our caste play with children from a higher caste, the parents of those from the higher caste are quick to shoo us away. Parents from higher castes have often remarked that children from our caste are only suited to clean the shoes of those that are from the higher caste" added one of the girls.

"Children from our caste are often asked to sit on the floor in the schools and are made to do the cleaning in the school" added another girl. "The men from our community that are involved as construction labourers are also often not paid, all stemming from the caste discrimination". Caste discrimination, along with the low levels of education leads to these communities having very high levels of poverty. Most families have now been engulfed in a vicious cycle of poverty, forcing many of them to get their children married at a young age.

According to us, there are three main reasons that there is a high prevalence of child marriage in these communities:

1. Poverty – the lack of money and means forces parents to marry their girls at a young age

2. Tradition – In many cases, families are only following what has been happening in their community for generations

3. '*Izzat*' (Dignity/Honour) – In order to prevent/save a young unmarried girl from a 'wrong' man, the family prefers getting the girl's marriage arranged when she is still very young.

From our research we found that in these communities, and especially in the Karori community, women rarely have any agency. Most of them were married off at the age of 6-7 and had no idea what was happening to them, for many it is 'tradition' so they do not question it. Many of our respondents did not want to speak in-depth about child marriage since they were worried that their husbands or in-laws would listen to them and then abuse/beat them. Very few girls are encouraged to pursue education. Overall, this paints a bleak picture of the situation of women in these communities who are forced to face these challenges. While many of the respondents we spoke to, expressed their wishes of not letting the same thing happen to their daughters, this is something we will have to wait and watch... the 'tradition' and 'custom' may well force many of these girls to repeat history.

If we get any opportunity to conduct further research in the future, we would like to delve deeper into the issue of education. We would like to understand why is it that girls are not able to join even lower level of education? We found this particularly in the Karori community, despite living next to schools, many girls are not sent to school. We would like to explore more on these aspects of girls' education.

Alison and Gaynor

Alison – The UK Situation

- Struck by the similarities between the stigma of sex work in the Indian context and the UK context

Few themes that apply to the broader UK context:

- The criminalisation and stigmatisation and consequences of 'labelling' in relation to the selling of sex
- The collateral damage which historically have embodied moral judgement instead of moral engagement – that is where the issues with anti-trafficking initiatives often come from and that is what Participatory practices may be able to help overcome
- Impact of these stigmatisation processes on children – the stigma that is passed from generation to generation. In the UK context, sex workers have been worried about children being taken away into local authority care – which leads to the hiding of sex work practices and keeping those identities secret as they fear their children being taken away. This is rarely addressed in the broader approach
- One of the differences – in terms of class and caste – and how fixed those identities are and how they pass from generation to generation

Gaynor – NorthEast Sex Work Forum

- The comparisons with street sex workers in the UK. Street sex workers are known as the 'lower of the low'.
- A lot of the women we work with on the streets face stigma because of the criminalisation – many of them are still cautioned by the police – then that goes on their record which is barrier to any other kind of employment or further education that they may want to do.
- Fear of their children being taken away is massive – which often is also a turning point for women to want to go into some other kind of employment
- Similar to the Indian communities, children are labelled from early on and often they have rejection of their criminality as they grow up, because their mothers were involved in jobs of criminality
- A lot of the street sex workers don't identify within their community where they live – they have their own mini-community within that – those who use drugs or addicted to substances and are involved in sex work. There is a hierarchy of respectability within the community.
- They are also quite nomadic sometimes, they will move location to avoid criminality and to get away from people who recognise who they are.
- As people online have a higher 'respectability' they also face stigma
- All sex workers aim to hide their identities
- We are looking into student sex-work and how that creates barriers in educational institutions. We are in the process of getting a policy to address the stigma against student sex workers

Mayank, National Alliance Group for Denotified and Nomadic Tribes

Community's current engagement with the State

Close to 200 communities, mostly nomadic, were notified by the British government as “Born criminal tribes” through this notorious piece of legislation called the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA), which was introduced in 1871. Later in 1952 after 5 years of India independence, the CTA was repealed. However its benefits was short lived, when the Habitual Offenders’ Act was passed by various states, thus opening up precisely the same avenues for mal-identification and persecution as the CTA had. Similarly even

The Criminal Justice Institutions still follow the old school of lombroso criminology.

The Government of India never address the issue of NT-DNT, till a National commission in 2005 was set up to looked into the matter. The commission submitted its report in 2012. The following are some of the key highlights from their report:

1. Third schedule – The commission identifies that these communities don’t easily fall into caste or tribe categories and recognises unique characteristics of being Nomadic. It points out that though most of the communities are included in the Scheduled Castes, Schedule Tribes and Others Backwards Classes, the DNT-NT communities are still marginalised within these groups. They are unable to avail of any of the benefits that SC/ST/OBC groups get in the form of reservations (affirmative action). Therefore, the Commission highlights that it is important to create a third schedule within which all DNT-NT communities should be included. This will allow them to have separate political reservation and separate schemes that are more suited to their way of life.
2. Stigma and criminalisation –The commission very clearly observed that these communities are still victims of stigma and criminalisation.
3. Conflict with law – The commission observed that the communities in conflict with laws such as the Habitual Offenders Act, Beggary Act, Forest Act, The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, etc..
4. Population – The commission provided the figure for DNT-NT communities – as being 10% of the Indian population. This number is important to show us the scale of the issue. However, as the communities are not enumerated separately under the census, actual figures are still not available – making it difficult to have better planning.

In 2015 a subsequent commission was set-up by the new Central Government which submitted its report in 2019. The commission mentioned the need to list out the NT-DNT communities.

Currently, there is a National welfare board for Nomadic and Denotified communities, but the budgetary allocation for this board is extremely low. In a few states like Maharashtra, Gujarat and Haryana there is a state NT-DNT welfare board. Unfortunately, even today these communities are not recognised as official categories within states. There are a few schemes, set up for those DNT-NTs that do not fall under SC/ST/OBC, however the implementation of these schemes is very poor. For those that are under

SC/ST/OBC categories, accessing schemes becomes very difficult as in most cases they have difficulty in getting caste certificates and because most DNT-NT communities are pushed to the periphery of the villages – they are at the margins physically as well as socially.

To conclude, the State is not serious about the NT-DNT population in India. Though the NT-DNT represent a big chunk of the Indian population, they are divided into small communities, are culturally diverse and have no representation in central government.

Questions and Answers

Alison: As a Criminologist fascinated by point that Lombroso still influential in Indian context. Interested in the way that biological positivism interacts with caste identities. Also the colonial/ imperialist implications of modern day Anti-Trafficking interventions.

Sarah Banks: I wonder about the experience of being community researchers, and whether there was any suspicion amongst villagers, any challenges about confidentiality?

Tarini (translating for Sakila): The community chooses to hide their identity. One of my respondents, who was from an extremely poor family, was studying in college and had scored very good grades. However, when he applied for a reservation (for members from the lower castes) this made the others realise that he is from a lower caste (the Nat community). Since then he was treated differently, even by his Professors. Since then he has been adamant to not speak about his caste, because he started facing discrimination once they found out about his caste.

Sarah Banks: I am also interested in the process that you went through as community researchers with Praxis? What did you get out of that process, what that did for you and how has that helped develop your expertise?

Tarini (translating for Sakila): Earlier, whenever I thought about doing research, I didn't know how I should approach people in the village or how to start. During my fellowship, I learnt about various techniques like mapping and problem trees and how to engage with the community. It helped me understand more about the community, even when I go there multiple times, I can use the same map to gather more details. There were many instances, when I, despite being from the community, found out about things I didn't know. For instance, there were people who were engaged in sex work but I had no idea.

Even regarding education, I didn't know that so many children were left out of the education system, I was aware of the issues but not of the scale of the problem. This research opportunity really helped me understand things about my own community

Ayurshi Dutt: This is from the child marriage section covered eloquently by Roshni - you mentioned that girls were hesitant to talk to you about whether or not they had a 'happy' marriage per se or even a sense of the nature of their marriage. Can you say something about their help-seeking behaviour?

Tarini (translating for Sakila): In my area, there is an NGO where many girls went to study but after Class 8 or Class 9, they often dropout. The girls are identified as being from a certain caste (the Nat caste) which means that they have to face a lot of stigmatisation. People often ask what the need is for us to study, since they do not expect us to achieve anything. All this makes young girls uncomfortable. Even those girls that want to study find it difficult, because the stigma follows her. If I have to be insulted despite trying to study, what is the point of studying. Only those families that are financially well-off are

able to send their girls for higher studies, those that don't have the money are forced to get the girls married. Overall, the girls face very challenging times, and are never able to speak their minds.