A REPORT FROM THE VSSM, AHMEDABAD

Mittal Patel

Mittal Patel is the intiator and coordinator of ‘Vicharata Samuday Samarthan Manch’ – the DNT-NT Rights Activism wing of Janpath – the wellknown Ahmedabad bsed NGO.

Regarding the work of NT-DNT, a meeting with the Ahmedabad Congress representatives was conducted on 29/12/09. In the meeting the issues of NT-DNT communities were discussed. Community representatives from 17 different communities put their voice narrating their concerns.

The issues covered at large were as under:

- The Govt. of Gujarat has a GR to make available residential plots to the members of the Notified Tribes. Due to general non-acceptance of the villagers for the communities, the allotment could not be implemented. Also the GR is for Nomadic Tribes only and De-notified tribes are not covered under the GR. The GR needs to be implemented and both the NTs & DNTs should be covered.

- Most of the Govt. schemes for the benefit of these strata are based on the Ration card as the primary required document. Since, barring a few, none of these communities have the Ration card they cannot obtain the benefits of Govt. Schemes. Even when the ration card is given it is APL and not BPL.

- Most of the community members do not have any ration card or voter ID card. Hence they do not have any identity proving themselves as a citizen of India. It is felt by a DNT member that they would get their names on gov. record only when they commit a crime. Due to the nomadic tradition, the census does not reflect their actual population, due to the lack of which no focus is made onto them either by the Govt. or by political parties while framing policies. It is necessary to mention here that in 2001 when the earthquake hit the Kutch region, the communities for the first time came to the notice of NGOs. Following large scale help they were helped to build houses at the temporary settlements they were used to stay on. Care was not taken at the time to check the ownership of the land, and today the scenario is that the government is getting the houses built on government land vacated, once again turning them homeless.

- A special sensus of the communities needs to be carried out. Rights as an Indian citizen should be ensured to every person.
• The livelihood issues are more pathetic. Their traditional occupations are not viable in the present context. Places like Vadia forced the ladies of a community into flesh trade for survival. Alternative means for livelihood need to be found.

• In the Rapar Taluka of Kutch three communities-Koli, Pardhi and Waghri were listed as NT-DNTs in 1972 based on a survey. Later they were added to the list of Scheduled Tribes; and in 2004, without any socio-economic survey, they were discarded from the ST list. It is ironical that even when they were having reservation they couldn’t avail their rights as they were not aware about the rights.

• Education, health and livelihood issues were discussed at large.

• A National Commission for NT-DNT was set up in 2006. The Commission submitted its report in June 2008. Nothing has been done on this report till date. It is felt that the report should be made public for open discussion. Recommendations of the commission should be accepted. A separate act should be made for the upliftment of the communities.

Following the presentation the Congress dignitary agreed to request Shri Mukul Wasnik, Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment to come and to listen to the voice of the communities. The conference will be organized by the Gujarat Congress. Members of NT-DNT will make their representations to the minister. A photo exhibition of the community will be organized by the VSSM. Organizations all over India working with NT-DNTs and interested in the representations of the issues are requested to contact VSSM on the given email for further details.

Mittal Patel
VSSM,Ahmedabad
As I had intimated, the minister Shri Mukul Vasnik was to visit Gujarat and a seminar was to be organized with him and NT-DNT communities. However the minister came at a short notice, and instead of a seminar we were able to have a presentation to the minister at the Congress Bhavan in Ahmedabad on 6th Feb. 10. Representatives from all the 40 communities, at least 60 in numbers put their voice before the minister followed by a presentation.

A white paper on the condition of the NT-DNTs and their needs was submitted to the minister by VSSM.(copy enclosed)

The Minister in turn said that the issue of NT-DNT is in the mind of the ministry and they would plan to organize a meeting for open discussion on the report of NT-DNT commission.

Mittal
VICHARATA SAMUDAY SAMARTHAN MANCH
Feb 10, 2010

Friday, February 06, 2010

To,
Shri Mukul Vasnik,
Honourable Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment,
Government of India,
New Delhi

Sub: Memorandum for consideration of important issues of Nomadic and De-notified tribes.

Respected Sir,

We are thankful to you for giving us an opportunity to represent issues of nomadic and de-notified Tribes before you. It has really given us a ray of hope for these 28 nomadic and 12 de-notified Tribes in Gujarat. Livelihood, Education, Housing and basic citizen rights are the major areas where there is urgent need of attention. Your good self can influence the issues with your due intervention.

Yours sincerely,
Mittal Patel

Encl:
1. Memorandum for consideration of important issues of NT-DNTs,
2. A note regarding issues of livelihood of salt pan workers inside Little Rann of Kutch
A white paper to be submitted to
Shri Mukul Vasnik, honourable minister of social justice and empowerment, GOI,
for consideration of important issues of Nomadic and Denotified Tribes.

Nomadic and De-notified Tribes, shortly named as NT-DNT constitute approximately 8% of the total population of India. A majority amongst them are in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. In Gujarat the population of NT-DNT is around 4 million. This comprises of 40 NT-DNT communities; 28 out of these have been listed as ‘Nomadic’ while the other 12 are recognized as “De-notified”. The list of the NT-DNT communities is as per annexure-I.

Nomadic tribes were basically communities associated with traditional occupation of providing support services to the main stream society. Different communities had their different roles to play in supporting the main stream society. Some of them used to entertain the society as being Snake charmers, playing acrobats and performing folkdances etc. Some of them used to provide domestic and agricultural tools, supply bamboo articles, combs, breed bullocks to supply for agriculture etc. Many of these communities were trading in petty household requirements on small scale basis. Due to their nomadic nature they never could get settled at a particular place. Due to their nomadic nature they have their significant problems.

De-notified Tribes. The term ‘De-notified’ has historical significance. During pre-independence times, these communities were ‘Notified’ as criminal tribes and were “de-notified” only in 1952 by the Indian government. Hence they actually got independence only in 1952. Due to the stigma as criminal tribe, till date they have been looked down as criminals by the general segment of the society.

The issues of the communities: The issues covered at large are as under:

Many of the Govt. schemes for the benefit of the strata are based on the Ration Card. Since, barring a few, none of these communities have Ration card, they could not benefit from the Govt. schemes. Even if the ration card is given, it is APL and not BPL. Most of the community members do not have any ration card or voter ID card. They do not have any identity proving themselves a citizen of India. It is felt by a DNT member that they would only get their names on government record when they commit a crime.

Due to the nomadic tradition, the census is also not reflecting their actual population, lacking which no focus is being made on them either by government or by political parties while framing policies. It is worthwhile to mention here that in 2001 when the earthquake hit the Kutchh region the communities for the first time came to the notice of some of the NGOs. Following the large scale help the communities were helped to build houses at their temporary settlements they were used to stay. While building the houses care was not taken to check the ownership of the land and the pucca houses were built. Now the scene is that the government
Mittal Patel

has woken up surprised and is getting vacated the houses from the communities which have been built on government land on which they otherwise used to reside in temporary settlement.

Livelihood issues are more pathetic. Their traditional occupations are not viable in the present context. Due to the advent of modern media as well as the technological and cultural advent their traditional occupations are no more relevant. They are finding themselves helpless to cast their position in the contemporary society. In a place like Vadia in north Gujarat the circumstances have forced the ladies of Sarania community to take up flesh trade for survival. Alternative means of livelihood is a crucial issue.

Education: Deprived of any basic civic rights they are far away from basic education. It is an irony that after more than sixty years of independence the highest educated boy from the Sarania community in Gujarat is studying in 9th standard. In Dafer and snake charmer communities in Central, Northern and some other parts of Gujarat they have been introduced to primary education for the first time in their history.

Due to their nomadic lifestyle they never could get settled at one place. Now struggling with their livelihood, health, education, sanitation, social and many other issues they want to get settled down. But a social stigma associated with the communities and their criminal tags attached, nobody wants to get them settled in a village or even in its vicinity, making their lives vulnerable. Their condition is even worse then the ‘Dalits’ as, though deprived, the Dalits are at least a part of the village society. But NT-DNTs are nowhere.

Some scattered efforts were made to uplift the condition of the strata. But lacking any detailed study on these communities, hardly any of the help could reach to these communities.

Education, health and livelihood issues require to be addressed on humanitarian ground.

Vicharata Samudaay Samarthan Manch (VSSM) is actively working in more than 200 settlements of NT-DNTs in 12 districts of the Gujarat state. The main focus of VSSM is to identify major issues of NT-DNT and to co-ordinate and facilitate linkages with existing schemes of government. VSSM has also conducted baseline study and survey of 40 NT-DNT communities in Gujarat. Based on the baseline survey, studies and numerous consultations held with the communities, the following charter of demands is being put up before you for your kind consideration.

1. A National Commission for NT-DNT was set up in 2006. The Commission submitted its report in June 2008. Nothing has been done on this report till date. It is felt that the report should be made public for open discussion. Recommendations of the commission should be accepted to the extent viable. State level consultations should be held on the Report of the National Commission for De-notified, nomadic and semi-Nomadic Tribes (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, GOI), and the facts in the report should be shared.
2. No census data is available on NT-DNT population. The NT& DNTs should be enumerated in the next census to be held in 2011.

3. There is no comprehensive study or data on socio-economic conditions and livelihood status of NT-DNT as on date. National Sample Survey Authority may be pursued to undertake such comprehensive study on the socio-economic condition of the NT-DNTs, so that the exact need and fund allocation can be done from the next five year plan.

4. There may be a State Development Board looking after the overall development of the NT-DNT under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister of the state. The Board may have prominent anthropologists, sociologists along with senior officials from the various departments concerning NT-DNTs issues. There may also be a district level advisory committee headed by the district magistrate.

5. Every adult from nomadic and de-notified tribes shall be enrolled in the voters list and must be allotted Voter Identity Card. District collector being district electoral officer can be given the responsibility for the same.

6. The living conditions of the NT-DNTs are similar to those of the primitive tribes. Some of the tribes like Saraniya, Dafer, Vaadi, Madari live in miserable condition. These communities should be allotted BPL card. The poorest amongst them should be given Antyodaya Ration Card.

7. The Government undertakes BPL survey from time to time. This survey is conducted through IRD branch of the Taluka development office. However, NT-DNT settlements are not covered under such survey, as their settlements do not fall in villages. In order to cover NT-DNTs in this survey it is necessary that the Social welfare officer shall be involved in this process.

8. NT-DNT live nomadic life. They migrate along with their families. In order to ensure food security, they should be given Roaming ration cards. Similarly, migration certificates can be issued to the children so that they can access education facility at their migration destination.

9. The Government should ensure that the welfare schemes meant for Nomadic and De-notified communities actually reach them. Also NT-DNTs should be considered as a “Separate Target Group” for all poverty alleviation programmes or flagship programmes like NREGS, SGRY, NRHM, ICDS, SSA etc.

10. There is around 45 lakh hectare wasteland in Gujarat. Families of Nomadic and de-notified tribes should get at least 2-3 acres of land along with appropriate financial support for alternative livelihood options like animal husbandry, horticulture etc.

11. Youths from nomadic and de-notified communities should be given vocational training along with financial and market support for entrepreneurship. Department of Social Justice and Empowerment should involve National Small Industry Corporation for giving
training through its Technical Centers. Such association will open up large opportunities of entrepreneurship and employment for NT-DNTs. Similarly, Khadi Village Industries Commission (KVIC) also has schemes for entrepreneurship. NT-DNTs can be included in the priority list to ensure the benefits of KVIC schemes. Also, government can introduce special schemes for giving market support for the goods produced or handicraft material made by the NT-DNTs.

12. Large numbers of NT-DNTs are residing also in cities. These are actually service providers (street vendors, vegetable sellers etc) to the city population. Under JNNURM, these NT-DNTs should be given permanent housing to ensure that they are not displaced from time to time. In rural areas, NT-DNTs are settled on the common properties. These settlements should be recognized as “deemed revenue villages” and colonies should be constructed wherein all basic infrastructure and services like drinking as well as usable water, drainage, electricity, and road, Anganwadi, Schools and basic health services should be made available.

13. A large number of nomadic and de-notified tribes into their traditional occupations were either providing services to the society (Saraniya - sharpening of the knives, Oad – earthen works, Agariyas - producing salt etc) or giving entertainment (like snake charmers-Vaadi Community, Nat –rope dance, Bahurupi – taking up different roles, etc). Unfortunately almost all the traditional occupations are on the verge of extinction. There is invisible and un-recognized displacement of NT-DNTs. They are losing their livelihood due to technology advent. Certain laws like Wild Life Protection Act prevents snake charmers from their traditional occupation and they have lost their livelihood, while traditional salt producers inside the Little Rann of Kutch are being expelled from their area as the area is declared a sanctuary for wild ass. These communities are not recognised for the rehabilitation and compensation as their dependency on the common resource, land, forest land, sanctuary areas are not recognized in terms of the so called “Legal rights”. Rights of the tribes were recognized in the Forest Rights act, as they were cultivating the land. However, communities like the snake charmers who were also depending on the forest but do not have documentary evidence to claim their rights have been driven out.

14. The Nomadic communities like Snake Charmers have indigenous knowledge of behavior of snakes. They can identify poisonous and non-poisonous snakes and their behaviour. Their skill and knowledge can become a livelihood option for some of them. For example, a group of snake charmers can be given license for extracting the poison and can be linked up with Haffkins Institute- Pune as snake poison has valuable use in medicine. Secondly, some of the groups can be linked up with the government schools for conducting snake-identification and education programmes for children.

15. The Bhawaiyya from Nomadic communities have very good art of communicating to the society. Some of the groups can be engaged in Awareness Generation campaigns (Save Girl Child, Kanya Kelavani, Andhshraddha Nirmulan) for government programmes.
16. The Nomadic and De-notified communities have very less acceptance in the main-stream society. This is mainly due to the social stigma of criminality. The major problem faced by the communities is that they are being linked up in un-detected crimes. The incidences of atrocities are also very serious and affecting the community, especially women and children. There is a need of special efforts of sensitization of administration, police and to create awareness in society at large in order to develop positive attitude towards NT-DNTs.

17. Due to Sabarmati River-front Development Project, the livelihood of NT-DNTs that were depending on the river has been affected (for example, Oad and Vanzara supplying sand for construction). They have to be considered as Project Affected People and given proper rehabilitation package and support of microfinance through bank linkage.

Annexure-I

Nomadic Communities:

1. Bajaniya
2. Bhand (Bahurupi)
3. Garudi
4. Kathodi
5. Nath
6. Kotwaliya
7. Turi
8. Vintolia
9. Vadi
10. Vaansfoda
11. Bawa-Bairagi
12. Bhawaiyya
13. Garo
14. Marwada Vaghri
15. Oad
16. Paradhi
17. Ravaliya
18. Shikligar
19. Saraniya
20. Vanzara (shinangwala and Kangsiwala)
21. Jogi
22. Bhopa
23. Gadaliya
24. Kangasiya
25. Ghantiya
26. Chamtha
27. Charan Gadhvi (from Gaikwad state)

(As listed by state government)
De-notified Communities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Dafer</td>
<td>8. Theba</td>
<td>(Listed by state government)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mey</td>
<td>10. Vaghri</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>