Pardhis in Mumbai still face identity crisis: Study

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People from all over the country have made Mumbai their home, but Pardhis, who migrated to the city several decades ago, are still living in a perpetual state of homelessness despite the fact that 90% of them hail from Maharashtra, reveals a recent study on the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNT).

The study was conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) on Pardhis in Mumbai. It reveals most of the Pardhis migrated to Mumbai from other parts of Maharashtra and Karnataka in the 1970s, and till now, are facing "a division identity crisis."

According Mayank Sinha of the Centre for Criminology and Justice, School of Social Work, one of the biggest hurdles this population faces is the issue of caste certificates.

"Traditionally, Pardhis are nomadic. So they do not have a culture of keeping certificates from the 1960s which the state has asked to categorise them. The government has split the sub-groups into schedule castes (SC) and other backward class (OBC) for inexplicable reasons. Plus, the DNT label is not recognised by the central government," said Sinha.

"Now, they cannot live in villages as no one wants them there because of the stigma. And in Mumbai, they cannot avail of their status as they have no paperwork," Sinha added.

Approximately 5,189 Pardhis across 1,018 households, settled in 31 enclaves, were interviewed by the researchers. They said they had migrated due to droughts, poverty, regional underdevelopment, stigma, discrimination and persecution.

According to another researcher, Paankhi Agrawal, around 70 families were given temporary residence rights in a transit camp at Patra Chawl in Mankhurd till their final rehabilitation was being readied. Over the last three years, the number of households in the camp have doubled.

The study also found little evidence to support the popular belief about organised Pardhi gangs engaging in robbery and theft in the city.
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