

## Chapter 8

### Discussion and Conclusion

The present study intended to understand about life of Devipujak community considering their own perceptions and experiences toward reality. It considered Subjective Constructionist Interpretivist approach that the reality is a social construction means what people believe is true about the world which is constructed by people interaction with each other. It does not emphasize on one reality and believe it is contextual. An ethnographic method was adopted to understand subjective reality of various aspects of life particularly with Devipujak community. It studied views about Devipujak community towards life, situation and their interaction both within and outside the community. An extensive field for more than a year was conducted to understand community with their own perspectives.

The NTDNTs were crucial part of social life and rendered necessary services to different sections which were later marginalized and victimized during colonial as well as post-colonial period. The Criminal Tribes Act enacted in year 1871 declared near 150 such groups as born criminals. This resulted into social exclusion and ruining of their life. Many of these communities were nomadic ones who were moving from one place to another for livelihood. There were certain provisions under the act which imposed restrictions on movement of these groups and affected their normal way of living. They were kept under various settlement camps on the name of reformation by British officials. The government authority as well as society in general have always looked them with prejudices. The British government misunderstood them in context of Indian caste-system. In the caste-system, people normally carry forwards occupations of their particular caste form one generation to another like Brahmin will take up task of priest therefore, British authority believe that these sections will also carry forwards crime from one generation to another. Among ex-criminal tribes, there were some sections who were involved into criminal acts but labelling whole community as criminals was grave injustice for them. There have not been strong relations between crime and birth of a person as there are multiple reasons driving a person to commit crime. The criminal labelling imposed on them by British government had kept them away from development and pushed these groups into marginalisation.

The Devipujak word itself indicates worshippers of goddess. They were earlier known as ‘*Vaghri*’ but the government of Gujarat passed the resolution to use word Devipujak replacing *Vaghri* in its official record in the year 2001. There are different writers who had given different understanding about the origin of the community. The Devipujak themselves carry mythological story about origin of community which is widely known among them. Many of them derived surname from the occupations they were engaged such as Chunariya (lime burners) Dantania (selling Babool stick) etc. They have profound faith in their deities. They worship Bechari Maa as their *Kuldevi* and also worship another god and goddess. *Bhuvo* and *Joshi* are highly regarded persons in Devipujak community. *Bhuvo* is the person who performs rituals of goddess and possessed by goddess in his body. A person is called *Joshi* who perform Dana ceremony among them. They confess each and every mistake committed before goddess once in a year which is known as Rajinama among them.

The development over the period of time has affected their traditional livelihood options badly. They had once played very important role to render different services in society. The pace of modernization, industrialization, urbanization as well as enactment of certain legislations pertaining to preservation of flora and fauna affected their traditional livelihood sources. The Devipujak community was providing *Dantun* to villagers in previous time. They were given rights by local rulers in some villages to provide Dantun. The villagers were giving them alms in return of their services. It was living source for some of the families in village. But people started using toothbrush and paste in last couple of years which affected their occupation of *Dantun*. It was not then enough sources of living for them so they started shifting to another income sources for living. There were not sufficient income sources available at village which can satisfy their basic needs. They get hardy employment for five to six months in a year at village. They started migrating to cities in search of livelihood and one of the prominent reasons for their migration was earning income rather than improving living standards. They started going to cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Surat, Hyderabad and so on and got engaged into various occupations there. The life in city itself was not easy and comfortable. They usually stay in slum with very minimal and unhygienic conditions. Most of them are not able to give good education facilities to their children in cities. The discrimination and hardship are not less in cities compare to village.

There was also fear of removal from the slum by municipal authority on the name of development. They are also living their life on meagre income which is not sufficient to achieve all basic needs like education, health, good housing facilities without hurdles so many of them are not able to avail these necessary services in their life. Their socio-economic condition was also poor and most of them were landless and living on daily wages in village.

The organization such as social panch plays significant role in life of Devipujak community. The issues related to family or community matters are discussed and solved in social panch. Still, majority of them prefer to discuss their issues in social panch rather than modern judiciary system. It is hard to say whether fair justice is delivered in social panch but Devipujaks usually obey the decision given by social panch. The women can participate in assembly of social panch without having active role. They sit and observe the happenings and also their views are not considered. Largely, the elders of the community are ones who make final decision which is binding to all of them. It is rare that social panch's decision are challenged in formal system like police or judiciary. There have been many incidences that nomadic and denotified groups became victim of police atrocities and societal discrimination. Although they have been decriminalized with enactment of Habitual Offender Act in year 1952, the stigma remains same towards them. They have faced caste-based discrimination at the hand of powerful communities in village. They are the first target of police department if any criminal act happens in nearby areas. They are first blamed for it though they were not involved. There were some of the individuals who have achieved well politically but majority of them are not politically empowered to represent their issues effectively at government level. They are still greatly ignored in welfare measures by government as well as society in general.

### **8.1 Suggestive Roadmap for Devipujak Community**

- The Nomadic, Denotified and Semi-nomadic communities are most neglected ones in the society in recent times. They are placed under ST, SC or OBC category in different states but they are not able to take effective benefits of reservation policies.

It is advisable to make permanent commission for Nomadic, Denotified and Semi-nomadic communities (Idate, 2017).

- In every state, separate Department or Directorate to be set up which will be responsible for the overall welfare of NTDNTs in state.
- There is no universal classification of nomadic and denotified community therefore some of them are listed under SCs/STs in one state and as OBCs in another state. Such irregularities should be removed and proper listing of these groups to be done rationally wherever possible with developing clear understanding through ethnographic studies and following due procedures. Devipujak community is classified under OBC but they are not able to take due benefits of reservation for higher education and public employment. It would be great help if sub-categorisation is created for such communities which can address issue of their less or non-representation in higher education and public employment (Idate, 2017).
- UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) observed in the year 2007 that Habitual Offender Act (1952) is used in same manner like CTA against nomadic and denotified groups so it recommended state authority to repeal it and make concrete efforts to rehabilitate nomadic and denotified groups affected by it (United Nations, 2007).
- The government officials should be sensitized towards situation of NTDNTs so they take effective benefits of important documents and welfare measures such as Aadhar card, Voter ID Card, BPL card, Old Age Pension Scheme and Widow Pension scheme.
- There were very few individuals among Devipujak community who reached to higher education and working in formal sectors. The sincere efforts to be made to improve education level among children of Devipujak community. They should have easy accessibility of educational welfare schemes like Right to Education, Pre and Post Matric Scholarship Scheme.

- There were many families who were living in *Kachha* houses in village and also living in slum at different cities. They should be given benefit of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana both for rural and urban families considering their eligibility so that they can have good housing facilities to stay.
- In village, Devipujaks were borrowing money from local money lenders for occupation, health issues of family members or social functions. Generally, local money lenders charges high interest in comparison to bank and sometimes they might have paid more interest than their principal amount but still they are not able to pay back their whole debt due to high interest charge. They should be integrated to formal scheduled banking services which can provide them loan for their occupations contributing towards economic empowerment of these groups.
- The scheme such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNAREGA) must be effectively implemented at rural level so that they can get employment at their places only. They may not need to migrate to cities for livelihood if they get employment opportunities at local level most of the times in a year.
- The political participation is very less among the NTDNTs and those who are active politically are not considered important segments in decision making. It is suggested that they get representation like STs and SCs into local governance bodies to achieve political empowerment of these groups. They can also be provided reservation benefits in state assemblies and parliamentary elections (Renke, 2008).
- The NTDNTs communities are less empowered socially, economically and politically and often become victims of atrocities. They are also not Constitutionally safeguarded like STs and SCs. They should be provided protection under Prevention of Atrocities Act which will legally protect them (Idate, 2017).
- Devipujaks community are still stigmatized and viewed as criminals and they are first target of police department in case of occurrence of crime in area. It is important that police officers should be sensitized towards nomadic and denotified communities to

prevent atrocities against them. The members of NTDNTs should be appointed in National and State Human Rights Commission which will help to prevent their harassment.

- Devipujaks migrated to different places particularly in cities for the purpose of livelihood. They also carry their small children along with them which is badly affecting their education. Their children either leave the school in middle or remain irregular. Additionally, both husband and wife go for work in village so elder daughters mostly are taken out of the school to take care of siblings. If more residential schools are established nearby population of nomadic and denotified groups, it will contribute to improve education level among children of NTDNTs. The migratory or earning parents can keep their children into residential schools and they can earn their livelihood.
- The women are helping equally to male members in Devipujak community. The government can provide them livelihood opportunities through various welfare schemes like Self Help Groups (SHGs), vocational trainings, art and craft.
- They should be availed benefits of schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), E-Shram card scheme which will ensure social security of them.
- They face social discrimination one or another way in society. It is moral responsibility of all of us that we should not keep prejudicial attitudes towards them and accept them as part of our society.
- It is crucial to develop leadership among the community members who will represent the issues of community at local, state and national level for holistic development of community.

The Devipujak community and other denotified groups have been victim of historical injustice and are still facing stigma and discrimination in society. Most of them are living marginalized and socio-economically backward life due to social exclusion. It is not only

responsibility of government but civil society, non-governmental organization and community itself should consider it their moral duty to work together for welfare of nomadic and denotified groups. The prevailing stigma and prejudicial attitudes towards them had been major hurdle in social integration for NTDNTs. It is need of an hour to build society free from violence, crime and injustice.