



Indian Tribes and Dalits in Transition: Migration, Identity, and Resistance

 P. Prabakaran^{1*}  Dr. G. Paranthaman²

¹Research Scholar, Department of History, Alagappa University, Karaikudi, India.

²Assistant Professor, Department of History, Alagappa University, Karaikudi, India.

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*Corresponding Author: prabaalu2019@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper explores the dynamic transformation of India's Dalit and tribal communities through the interconnected processes of migration, identity reconstruction, and resistance. Migration has emerged as both a strategy for survival and a pathway for empowerment, enabling marginalized groups to renegotiate their social positions within changing economic and cultural landscapes. For Dalits, urban migration represents a means to transcend traditional caste hierarchies, assert dignity, and participate in new forms of political and cultural expression. In metropolitan centers, Dalit migrants have developed symbolic and collective forms of identity through festivals, community organizations, and the creation of sacred urban spaces that celebrate their heritage and leadership. Meanwhile, the rise of a new Dalit middle class reflects a growing socio-economic assertion and democratic participation. In contrast, India's tribal populations continue to experience forced displacement, economic deprivation, and cultural erosion due to industrial expansion and land alienation. Migration for many tribal families is driven by compulsion rather than opportunity, often resulting in the weakening of traditional identities and social cohesion. Despite these challenges, both Dalit and tribal groups demonstrate resilience through various modes of resistance—ranging from grassroots activism to cultural revitalization movements. The paper concludes that migration is not merely a movement of people but a complex social phenomenon that reshapes identity, belonging, and power. Inclusive policies and culturally sensitive governance are essential to ensure that these transitions lead toward equity, recognition, and sustainable development.

Keywords: *Migration, Dalit Identity, Tribal Transition, Symbolic Assertion, Urban Exclusion, Resistance, Emancipation.*



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1. Introduction: Migration as a Catalyst for Change

Migration has historically played a transformative role in reshaping the social, economic, and cultural landscapes of marginalized communities in India, particularly among Dalits and tribal populations. For centuries, caste hierarchies and entrenched social stratification have restricted the mobility, opportunity, and agency of Dalits, while tribal communities have often faced geographical isolation, economic marginalization, and cultural erosion ([Idea for India, 2023](#); [Round Table India, 2022](#)). Within this context, migration emerges as a dual-edged phenomenon: it provides avenues for empowerment and identity reconstruction, yet it also introduces new challenges and forms of exclusion.

Urban migration, especially from rural to metropolitan areas, has been a significant pathway for Dalits seeking to escape the rigidities of caste-based oppression. Influential leaders, including Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, long advocated for migration to urban spaces as a means for Dalits to access education, employment, and social mobility ([Pankaj, 2023a](#)). Cities, with their relative anonymity and economic opportunities, allow Dalits to negotiate identities beyond the constraints of their traditional social hierarchies. In these urban settings, migration is not merely a movement of labor or residence; it is a conscious act of cultural assertion, enabling Dalits to redefine their collective and individual identities through public rituals, commemoration of leaders, community organizations, and spatial reclamation within the cityscape ([Migration Affairs, 2021](#); [Pankaj, 2023b](#)).

However, the potential of urban migration for social transformation is often mitigated by structural inequalities inherent in Indian cities. Patterns of residential segregation, limited access to housing, inadequate public services, and discriminatory urban policies frequently restrict the benefits of migration ([Idea for India, 2023](#); [ORF, 2023](#)). While Dalit migrants may achieve economic progress and middle-class status, they continue to confront exclusion in neighborhoods, workplaces, and public institutions, highlighting the paradox of migration as both an emancipatory and constraining force.

For tribal populations, migration often arises from necessity rather than choice. Factors

such as land dispossession, resource extraction, industrial projects, and environmental degradation compel tribal communities to leave ancestral territories ([Times of India, 2024](#); [Reddit, 2024](#)). This displacement threatens cultural continuity, undermines traditional livelihoods, and fosters socio-economic vulnerabilities. Unlike Dalits, whose urban migration can facilitate identity reconstruction and empowerment, tribal migration is frequently associated with survival, adaptation, and cultural preservation in the face of structural adversity ([Round Table India, 2022](#)).

Understanding migration as a catalyst for change thus requires examining its dual role in both fostering empowerment and reinforcing new forms of marginalization. It is within this complex interplay of opportunity and constraint that Dalit and tribal communities navigate their evolving identities, assert cultural pride, and resist social exclusion. This study seeks to analyze these transformations, focusing on the intersections of migration, identity, and resistance, while highlighting the divergent pathways and strategies employed by Dalits and tribal populations in contemporary India.

2. Dalit Migrants: Identity, Symbolism, and Urban Expression

Dalit migration to urban areas represents a significant strategy for negotiating social identity and challenging entrenched caste hierarchies. Urban centers, with their complex socio-economic networks and relative anonymity, offer Dalits the opportunity to construct new spaces of cultural and political visibility ([Pankaj, 2023a](#)). Migration, in this sense, functions as both a survival mechanism and a transformative process, enabling Dalits to engage with modernity while asserting their historical identity.

Ethnographic studies in Mumbai indicate that Dalit migrants actively engage in symbolic acts to maintain cultural continuity and foster communal solidarity. Rituals, commemorations of influential leaders, and the establishment of community spaces such as temples, memorials, and social clubs serve as tangible markers of Dalit identity ([Migration Affairs, 2021](#)). These practices are not merely cultural but inherently political, signaling resistance to systemic exclusion and asserting the presence of marginalized groups within urban landscapes. For instance, the

celebration of community anniversaries ('jayantis') for leaders like Ambedkar not only reinforces collective memory but also becomes an assertion of dignity and rights within the city (Pankaj, 2023b).

In addition to ritualistic expression, Dalit migrants navigate urban environments by strategically accessing welfare services, educational opportunities, and employment. Their ability to leverage affirmative action policies and public programs underscores the intersection of migration with socio-political empowerment (Pankaj, 2023c). Urban mobility allows Dalits to challenge stereotypes associated with caste, reposition themselves in socio-economic hierarchies, and participate in the democratic processes of city governance. The emergence of a new Dalit middle class in metropolitan regions, such as Navi Mumbai, exemplifies the transformative potential of urban migration, as these individuals attain greater economic stability, educational advancement, and political influence (Pankaj, 2023a; ORF, 2023).

However, migration does not guarantee complete emancipation. Dalit migrants continue to face urban exclusion in the form of residential segregation, limited access to quality housing, and discrimination in employment and public spaces (Idea for India, 2023). Informal settlements and slums often become the default living spaces for Dalit migrants, where inadequate infrastructure and services perpetuate systemic inequalities. Despite these constraints, the migrants' engagement in cultural assertion and community mobilization reflects resilience and strategic adaptation to urban realities.

Another key aspect of Dalit urban expression is the negotiation of religious and ideological identities. Migration creates opportunities to reinterpret traditional beliefs and adopt new forms of spiritual and socio-political practices. Dalit communities in cities have demonstrated flexibility in religious expression, participating in both traditional rituals and contemporary forms of social activism to challenge hegemonic structures (Migration Affairs, 2021). Such practices facilitate collective identity formation, enhancing both internal cohesion and external visibility.

The combination of symbolic assertion, strategic utilization of welfare mechanisms, and active political engagement illustrates the multi-

dimensional nature of Dalit migration. It is not merely an economic or geographic phenomenon but a comprehensive social strategy encompassing culture, politics, and identity. Urban migration allows Dalits to reframe narratives of oppression, celebrate historical legacies, and negotiate new roles within the socio-economic fabric of India's cities. Through these processes, Dalits transform urban spaces into arenas for both personal empowerment and collective assertion, reflecting a nuanced interplay between mobility, identity, and resistance.

In summary, Dalit migration highlights the potential for urban environments to serve as sites of empowerment and identity reconstruction. While structural barriers persist, the migrants' ability to assert cultural pride, engage politically, and form cohesive communities underscores the transformative possibilities inherent in urban mobility. The study of Dalit migrants thus provides critical insights into how marginalized groups navigate modernity, resist exclusion, and redefine social hierarchies within the rapidly urbanizing context of contemporary India (Pankaj, 2023a; Migration Affairs, 2021; ORF, 2023).

3. The Rise of the New Dalit Middle Class

The emergence of a Dalit middle class represents one of the most significant socio-economic transformations in contemporary India. Historically marginalized by caste hierarchies, Dalits have long been subjected to systemic exclusion in education, employment, and political participation. Urban migration, coupled with affirmative action policies, has enabled a growing segment of Dalits to attain economic stability, educational attainment, and social visibility, leading to the formation of a new middle class (Pankaj, 2023a). This transformation is not merely economic; it also carries profound implications for identity, political engagement, and cultural assertion.

The Dalit middle class has emerged predominantly in urban and peri-urban regions such as Navi Mumbai, Pune, and Delhi, where opportunities for professional employment, higher education, and entrepreneurship have been more accessible. Access to government schemes, reservation policies, and social welfare programs has facilitated upward mobility, allowing Dalits to enter traditionally inaccessible domains such as civil services, corporate sectors, and technical

professions (Pankaj, 2023c). This economic advancement is accompanied by an enhanced capacity to participate in civic life, exercise political agency, and influence local governance structures, reflecting a marked shift from historical marginalization to empowered citizenship (ORF, 2023).

Cultural assertion remains a central feature of the Dalit middle class. Migrants and upwardly mobile Dalits actively engage in practices that affirm their historical identity, honor community leaders, and foster collective pride. Celebrations of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's birth anniversary, construction of community memorials, and participation in cultural festivals serve both symbolic and social functions, reinforcing group cohesion and challenging dominant narratives of caste-based hierarchy (Migration Affairs, 2021; Pankaj, 2023b). Such practices signify the negotiation of identity in urban spaces, where the assertion of Dalit heritage intersects with aspirations for social recognition and equality.

Education plays a pivotal role in the consolidation of the Dalit middle class. Higher educational attainment not only equips individuals with skills necessary for economic mobility but also enhances their awareness of rights and opportunities, enabling active participation in policy-making and civil society initiatives. Schools, colleges, and professional institutions serve as spaces where Dalits negotiate identity, form networks, and engage with broader socio-political discourses (Pankaj, 2023a). The resulting social capital strengthens community resilience and facilitates collective action against discrimination and exclusion.

Despite these advances, the Dalit middle class continues to confront structural challenges. Residential segregation, limited access to urban amenities, and persistent caste-based discrimination in workplaces and public spaces pose ongoing barriers to full social integration (Idea for India, 2023). In many cities, Dalits are confined to informal settlements or peripheral neighborhoods, reflecting the enduring spatial inequalities within urban development (ORF, 2023). Nevertheless, the community's ability to assert cultural pride, access opportunities, and mobilize collectively underscores its resilience and transformative potential.

The rise of the Dalit middle class also has broader political and social implications. As an

economically and educationally empowered group, they are increasingly influencing democratic processes, advocating for policy reforms, and challenging entrenched caste hierarchies. This political assertion manifests in participation in local governance, engagement in social movements, and the formation of networks that bridge urban and rural Dalit populations (Pankaj, 2023b; ORF, 2023). In this sense, the Dalit middle class is both a product of urban migration and a driving force for socio-cultural transformation in contemporary India.

In conclusion, the rise of the Dalit middle class represents a multidimensional process encompassing economic mobility, educational attainment, political participation, and cultural assertion. Urban migration and affirmative action policies have facilitated this transformation, enabling Dalits to transcend historical marginalization while simultaneously negotiating new forms of identity and belonging. However, persistent spatial, social, and institutional barriers highlight the continuing challenges faced by this emerging class. Understanding the rise of the Dalit middle class is crucial for comprehending the broader dynamics of social mobility, identity reconstruction, and resistance among marginalized communities in India (Pankaj, 2023a; Migration Affairs, 2021; ORF, 2023).

4. Urban Exclusion: Spatial and Policy Challenges

Despite the opportunities provided by migration and the emergence of a new Dalit middle class, urban environments in India continue to reflect persistent patterns of exclusion for marginalized communities. Dalits and tribal populations face systemic barriers in housing, infrastructure, and access to public services, which limit the potential for social mobility and reinforce socio-economic inequalities (Idea for India, 2023; ORF, 2023). Understanding urban exclusion requires a multifaceted analysis of spatial segregation, policy frameworks, and structural inequalities that shape the experiences of these communities in contemporary cities.

Residential segregation remains a significant challenge for Dalits in urban areas. Urban planning and housing markets often marginalize Dalit-Bahujan populations, confining them to informal settlements, slums, and peripheral neighborhoods with inadequate access

to basic infrastructure such as clean water, sanitation, and public transportation ([Idea for India, 2023](#); [Round Table India, 2022](#)). This spatial marginalization not only restricts mobility but also perpetuates social stigmas and reinforces caste-based hierarchies within cities. Segregated neighborhoods limit opportunities for social interaction, educational access, and economic networking, constraining upward mobility and reinforcing cycles of poverty ([ORF, 2023](#)).

Tribal populations experience similar challenges when forced to migrate to urban areas due to displacement from ancestral lands. Lacking familiarity with urban systems, language, and legal frameworks, tribal migrants are often confined to overcrowded settlements and informal labor markets. These conditions exacerbate socio-economic vulnerabilities and contribute to the erosion of cultural identity, as traditional community networks and practices are disrupted ([Reddit, 2024](#); [Times of India, 2024](#)).

While affirmative action policies have facilitated the rise of the Dalit middle class, urban policy frameworks often fail to address structural exclusion comprehensively. Urban development strategies frequently prioritize commercial growth and infrastructure expansion over inclusive planning, resulting in the displacement of marginalized communities and limited access to essential services ([Round Table India, 2022](#); [ORF, 2023](#)). Zoning laws, housing regulations, and privatization of urban amenities disproportionately affect Dalit and tribal populations, reinforcing systemic inequities.

Furthermore, welfare programs and urban services are often inaccessible due to bureaucratic barriers, lack of awareness, or discrimination. Dalit migrants may face difficulties in enrolling for housing schemes, educational benefits, or employment programs, which undermines the transformative potential of urban migration ([Pankaj, 2023c](#)). Tribal migrants, in particular, encounter legal and administrative challenges, including lack of documentation and recognition, which impede access to social welfare and exacerbate marginalization ([Times of India, 2024](#); [Reddit, 2024](#)).

The consequences of urban exclusion are multidimensional, affecting economic, social, and cultural domains. Restricted access to quality housing, education, and employment opportunities perpetuates poverty and limits

upward mobility. Social segregation reinforces caste hierarchies and stigmatization, while inadequate infrastructure negatively impacts health, sanitation, and overall well-being ([Idea for India, 2023](#); [ORF, 2023](#)). For tribal communities, displacement and marginalization in urban spaces threaten the survival of traditional knowledge, cultural practices, and linguistic heritage, leading to long-term erosion of identity ([Reddit, 2024](#)).

Urban exclusion also shapes patterns of resistance and adaptation among marginalized communities. Dalit migrants often respond through symbolic assertion, community organization, and political engagement, seeking to reclaim urban spaces and influence policy ([Migration Affairs, 2021](#); [Pankaj, 2023b](#)). Tribal communities, however, are more likely to engage in grassroots activism, legal claims for land rights, and cultural preservation efforts as strategies to counter structural exclusion ([Times of India, 2024](#); [Reddit, 2024](#)).

Addressing urban exclusion requires culturally sensitive, equitable, and participatory approaches to urban governance. Policies must focus on inclusive housing, infrastructure development, and access to education and employment for Dalit and tribal populations. Participatory planning processes, legal safeguards, and targeted welfare programs can mitigate structural barriers and promote social integration. Recognizing and preserving the cultural identities of tribal communities within urban planning frameworks is essential to ensure that migration does not result in cultural erasure or socio-economic marginalization ([Round Table India, 2022](#); [ORF, 2023](#)).

In conclusion, urban exclusion remains a persistent barrier for Dalits and tribal populations despite the opportunities offered by migration. Spatial segregation, discriminatory policies, and structural inequalities limit the transformative potential of urban migration, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic understanding of the interplay between space, policy, and social identity, as well as targeted interventions to ensure equitable access to urban resources and opportunities for marginalized communities ([Idea for India, 2023](#); [Pankaj, 2023c](#); [Reddit, 2024](#)).

5. Tribal Communities: Economic Struggles, Displacement, and Cultural Loss

Tribal populations in India represent some of the most socio-economically marginalized groups, experiencing systemic exclusion, cultural erosion, and economic vulnerability. Unlike Dalits, whose urban migration can serve as a tool for empowerment and identity assertion, tribal migration is often compelled by structural forces such as land dispossession, industrialization, and environmental degradation ([Times of India, 2024](#); [Reddit, 2024](#)). These pressures not only disrupt traditional livelihoods but also threaten the continuity of cultural practices and social cohesion within tribal communities.

Economic marginalization is a pervasive issue among tribal populations. Surveys indicate that over 46% of tribal households in certain states live below the poverty line, with limited access to stable employment, education, and healthcare ([Times of India, 2024](#)). Traditional occupations such as agriculture, forestry, and artisanal crafts have been undermined by industrial expansion, land acquisition, and environmental degradation, leaving many families dependent on low-wage, insecure labor in urban or semi-urban settings ([Reddit, 2024](#)). Seasonal and permanent migration emerges as a survival strategy, yet it often comes at the cost of social disruption, inadequate living conditions, and limited access to urban services.

Land dispossession remains a central challenge for tribal communities, directly impacting both livelihoods and cultural identity. The expansion of mining, infrastructure projects, and commercial agriculture frequently results in forced displacement from ancestral territories. Tribal households are often inadequately compensated, with insufficient legal protections or support mechanisms to secure resettlement ([Round Table India, 2022](#); [ORF, 2023](#)). Displacement not only undermines economic security but also severs the community's connection to sacred spaces, traditional knowledge systems, and natural resources essential for cultural and social life.

Migration and displacement contribute significantly to the erosion of tribal cultural practices. Language, rituals, folklore, and artisanal knowledge face disruption as communities move away from ancestral homelands or integrate into urban environments where dominant cultures

prevail ([Reddit, 2024](#)). The younger generation, in particular, may lose familiarity with traditional practices, creating intergenerational gaps in cultural transmission. Tribal identity, which is closely tied to land, community networks, and environmental stewardship, becomes increasingly precarious in the context of urban migration and industrial encroachment.

Educational access remains limited for many tribal communities, exacerbating socio-economic vulnerabilities. Rural schools often lack infrastructure, trained teachers, and culturally relevant curricula, while urban educational systems may be inaccessible due to language barriers, financial constraints, or social exclusion ([Times of India, 2024](#)). Legal marginalization further compounds these challenges, as tribal migrants frequently encounter difficulties in securing documentation, land titles, or recognition of customary rights, restricting their access to government schemes and welfare programs ([Reddit, 2024](#)). These systemic barriers limit upward mobility and reinforce cycles of poverty and dependence.

Despite these challenges, tribal communities demonstrate resilience and agency through grassroots activism, legal mobilization, and cultural preservation efforts. Movements to protect land rights, assert legal recognition, and maintain cultural heritage exemplify adaptive strategies aimed at countering structural marginalization ([Round Table India, 2022](#)). In some cases, tribal organizations engage with urban institutions to advocate for access to education, health services, and employment, creating networks that link rural and urban spheres. Cultural festivals, community gatherings, and documentation of traditional knowledge serve as mechanisms to safeguard heritage while navigating modern socio-economic realities ([Reddit, 2024](#)).

The challenges faced by tribal populations underscore the urgent need for culturally sensitive, inclusive policies. Protecting land rights, providing access to quality education, ensuring legal recognition, and promoting livelihood opportunities are essential to address both economic vulnerability and cultural erosion ([ORF, 2023](#); [Round Table India, 2022](#)). Policy interventions must consider the unique social and environmental contexts of tribal communities, balancing economic development with the

preservation of identity and heritage. Urban planning and migration policies should facilitate integration without compromising cultural continuity, enabling tribal populations to navigate transitions without experiencing marginalization or cultural loss.

In conclusion, tribal communities in India face multifaceted challenges encompassing economic hardship, displacement, and erosion of cultural identity. Migration often emerges as a coping strategy rather than an avenue for empowerment, highlighting contrasts with Dalit experiences of urban mobility. Resistance through grassroots movements, legal advocacy, and cultural preservation illustrates tribal resilience and adaptive strategies. Comprehensive and inclusive policy measures are essential to safeguard livelihoods, protect heritage, and support equitable social integration for tribal populations in contemporary India ([Times of India, 2024](#); [Reddit, 2024](#); [ORF, 2023](#); [Round Table India, 2022](#)).

6. Contrasting Experiences and Forms of Resistance

The experiences of Dalit and tribal communities in India, while both shaped by structural discrimination, diverge significantly in terms of migration patterns, identity reconstruction, and forms of resistance. Examining these contrasts provides insight into the complex ways marginalized groups navigate social exclusion, assert agency, and negotiate empowerment within contemporary socio-political contexts ([Pankaj, 2023a](#); [Reddit, 2024](#)).

Dalit resistance is often characterized by strategic engagement with urban spaces, cultural assertion, and political mobilization. Urban migration provides Dalits with relative anonymity and opportunities to construct identities outside traditional caste hierarchies. Ethnographic studies in Mumbai indicate that Dalit migrants employ symbolic practices to assert cultural pride and challenge social exclusion, such as commemorating community leaders, organizing festivals, and establishing public memorials ([Migration Affairs, 2021](#); [Pankaj, 2023b](#)).

Political participation constitutes another critical dimension of Dalit resistance. The emergence of a Dalit middle class has enabled increased engagement in democratic processes,

representation in local governance, and activism aimed at policy reforms. These activities allow Dalits to negotiate power relations within urban environments, challenging historical marginalization while cultivating new forms of collective identity ([ORF, 2023](#)). The interplay between cultural symbolism and political engagement highlights a multidimensional approach to resistance, where identity and agency are asserted simultaneously.

In contrast, tribal communities experience migration primarily as a response to displacement, economic deprivation, and environmental pressures. Their resistance strategies focus on survival, cultural preservation, and legal recognition rather than urban assertion. Forced displacement from ancestral lands, combined with marginalization in urban or semi-urban settings, compels tribal populations to mobilize around land rights, environmental protection, and the safeguarding of traditional practices ([Reddit, 2024](#); [Round Table India, 2022](#)).

Grassroots activism is a prominent mode of tribal resistance. Communities organize collectively to demand recognition of customary rights, challenge exploitative industrial projects, and secure legal redress for displacement. Cultural preservation initiatives, including festivals, oral histories, and documentation of traditional knowledge, serve as mechanisms for maintaining identity amid social disruption ([Times of India, 2024](#)). Such strategies reflect resilience in the face of structural adversity, emphasizing the centrality of cultural continuity and legal empowerment in tribal resistance.

While both Dalit and tribal communities confront systemic marginalization, their strategies reflect different socio-economic and historical contexts. Dalit resistance leverages urban anonymity, symbolic assertion, and political engagement, facilitated by migration and access to education, affirmative action, and urban economic opportunities ([Pankaj, 2023a](#); [Migration Affairs, 2021](#)). Tribal resistance, by contrast, centers on cultural preservation, legal mobilization, and grassroots activism, often responding to displacement and resource deprivation rather than seeking upward mobility in urban hierarchies ([Reddit, 2024](#); [Times of India, 2024](#)).

The divergence in resistance strategies also underscores variations in social agency. Dalits, through urban migration and middle-class

emergence, are able to negotiate identity in public and political spaces, challenging historical exclusion while constructing new social roles. Tribal communities, constrained by forced displacement and marginalization, rely on communal solidarity, legal frameworks, and cultural reinforcement to assert agency and protect their social and environmental rights. Both forms of resistance, however, share a common goal: the pursuit of dignity, recognition, and empowerment within the broader structures of Indian society.

Both groups encounter intersectional challenges shaped by caste, class, geography, and policy frameworks. Dalits in urban centers may face spatial segregation, workplace discrimination, and residual caste stigma, while tribal populations grapple with economic insecurity, legal marginalization, and erosion of cultural identity (Idea for India, 2023; ORF, 2023). Adaptive strategies, therefore, must be context-specific. Dalits capitalize on education, political participation, and urban networks, whereas tribal communities emphasize legal advocacy, community cohesion, and cultural revitalization (Pankaj, 2023c; Round Table India, 2022).

Understanding these contrasting pathways of resistance is crucial for designing inclusive policies that address the distinct needs of marginalized groups. For Dalits, interventions should focus on equitable access to urban resources, protection against spatial exclusion, and support for civic and political participation. For tribal populations, policy frameworks must prioritize land rights, cultural preservation, legal recognition, and livelihood security. Recognizing the diversity of experiences and forms of resistance is essential for creating socially inclusive development strategies that respect identity, heritage, and agency (Reddit, 2024; Times of India, 2024).

In conclusion, Dalit and tribal communities exhibit diverse yet interconnected forms of resistance shaped by migration, socio-economic conditions, and historical context. Dalits employ symbolic, cultural, and political strategies in urban spaces, while tribal populations focus on legal, cultural, and grassroots forms of advocacy. Despite differing approaches, both groups demonstrate resilience and agency, highlighting the importance of context-specific interventions to foster social inclusion, identity preservation, and equitable

development (Pankaj, 2023a; Migration Affairs, 2021; ORF, 2023; Round Table India, 2022).

7. Policy Implications and Inclusive Strategies

The experiences of Dalit and tribal communities in India, shaped by migration, marginalization, and resistance, underscore the urgent need for comprehensive and culturally sensitive policy interventions. Effective policies must address both structural barriers and socio-cultural dimensions to foster social inclusion, equitable development, and identity preservation. Understanding the distinct challenges faced by these communities is essential for creating interventions that not only mitigate exclusion but also promote empowerment and resilience (ORF, 2023; Round Table India, 2022).

For Dalit populations, urban exclusion remains a pressing concern despite opportunities for upward mobility through education, employment, and political participation. Spatial segregation, limited access to housing, and inequitable urban services constrain social integration and reinforce caste-based inequalities (Idea for India, 2023; ORF, 2023). Policies should therefore prioritize inclusive urban planning to ensure equitable access to housing, infrastructure, and public amenities, especially in informal settlements and peripheral neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by Dalits. Targeted welfare programs with simplified administrative processes and awareness campaigns can enhance access to educational, health, and employment opportunities (Pankaj, 2023c). Furthermore, supporting civic and political engagement by encouraging Dalit participation in local governance, urban planning committees, and policy-making bodies strengthens social agency and ensures that marginalized voices influence urban development (Pankaj, 2023b).

Tribal populations face unique challenges that require culturally and contextually sensitive interventions. Forced displacement, land alienation, and erosion of traditional practices threaten both livelihoods and cultural continuity (Reddit, 2024; Times of India, 2024). Policy measures should focus on ensuring recognition of customary land rights, providing adequate compensation for displacement, and facilitating secure tenure to reduce economic vulnerability and protect ancestral connections (Round Table India, 2022). Education and skill development

programs that incorporate culturally relevant curricula, language inclusion, and vocational training can enhance employability while preserving tribal knowledge and identity (Times of India, 2024). Supporting cultural preservation through festivals, community initiatives, and documentation of traditional knowledge further reinforces social cohesion and intergenerational transmission of culture (Reddit, 2024).

Policies must also account for the intersectional nature of marginalization experienced by both Dalit and tribal communities, including factors such as caste, class, gender, and geography (Idea for India, 2023; ORF, 2023). For instance, Dalit women in urban areas may face both gender- and caste-based discrimination, whereas tribal youth navigating urban labor markets confront economic, cultural, and linguistic barriers simultaneously. Intersectional policy design ensures that interventions do not inadvertently reinforce inequalities or exclude subgroups within these communities. Participatory governance and community engagement are equally important, as involving marginalized groups in policy formulation and implementation allows them to articulate needs, influence decisions, and hold authorities accountable (Pankaj, 2023a; Round Table India, 2022).

Urban migration, while offering opportunities for empowerment, also exposes Dalits and tribal migrants to exclusionary practices. Policies should aim to create inclusive urban environments that accommodate cultural diversity, protect marginalized communities, and foster equitable access to infrastructure, services, and economic opportunities (ORF, 2023). Integrating social, cultural, and economic considerations into urban planning can mitigate the adverse effects of migration and displacement while enhancing the transformative potential of urban mobility.

In conclusion, policy interventions for Dalit and tribal communities must be holistic, combining economic, social, cultural, and legal measures. Key strategies include equitable urban infrastructure, expanded access to welfare programs, protection of tribal land rights and heritage, participatory governance, intersectional frameworks addressing overlapping vulnerabilities, and inclusive urban planning that balances development with social equity.

Implementing such measures can enable marginalized communities to navigate social transitions with dignity, preserve cultural identity, and achieve socio-economic empowerment, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive Indian society (Pankaj, 2023b; Reddit, 2024; Times of India, 2024; Idea for India, 2023).

8. Conclusion

The experiences of Dalit and tribal communities in India reveal complex patterns of migration, identity transformation, and resistance in the context of socio-economic marginalization. Dalit migration to urban centers has often served as a strategy for social mobility, cultural assertion, and political engagement, allowing communities to challenge entrenched caste hierarchies while fostering a sense of collective identity. The emergence of a Dalit middle class demonstrates how affirmative action policies, educational attainment, and economic opportunities can facilitate upward mobility, enabling these communities to assert cultural pride and participate meaningfully in civic and political life. However, persistent urban exclusion, residential segregation, and caste-based discrimination highlight the structural barriers that continue to constrain full social integration.

Tribal communities, in contrast, experience migration primarily as a coping mechanism in response to land dispossession, economic hardship, and environmental pressures. Displacement and marginalization threaten traditional livelihoods, disrupt cultural practices, and undermine social cohesion, necessitating adaptive strategies centered on legal advocacy, cultural preservation, and grassroots activism. While Dalits exploit urban anonymity and political engagement to assert agency, tribal populations rely on collective solidarity and legal recognition to safeguard both economic and cultural survival. These contrasting experiences illustrate the diversity of resistance strategies among marginalized groups and highlight the importance of context-specific interventions.

Policy implications derived from these findings emphasize the need for holistic, culturally sensitive approaches that address structural inequalities while promoting empowerment. Inclusive urban planning, equitable access to services, protection of tribal land rights, participatory governance, and intersectional

policy frameworks are essential for fostering social inclusion and sustainable development. Furthermore, efforts to preserve cultural identity and support intergenerational knowledge transfer are crucial to ensuring that migration and urbanization do not result in cultural erosion or further marginalization.

In conclusion, migration, identity reconstruction, and resistance among Dalit and tribal communities reflect both the challenges and opportunities inherent in India's evolving socio-political landscape. While structural exclusion persists, the resilience, agency, and adaptive strategies of these groups provide valuable insights for inclusive policy-making, social justice initiatives, and sustainable urban and rural development. Future research should continue to explore the intersection of migration, identity, and resistance to better understand the transformative potential of social mobility and the mechanisms by which marginalized communities negotiate dignity, empowerment, and cultural continuity.

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