

A GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF THE FINANCIAL STATUS AND LIVELIHOOD OF SELECTED SHEPHERD FAMILIES OF THE DHANGAR COMMUNITY IN JAT TEHSIL, MAHARASHTRA

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: 15th Dec 2025 Accepted: 19th Dec 2025 Published: 20th Dec 2025 Keywords: Shepherd, Income, Expenditure Demographic profile	The current research offers a Geographical and economic assessment of the Dhangar shepherd group of Jat tehsil in Sangli district, Maharashtra an area with semi-arid climatic conditions, irregular rainfall, and poor agricultural productivity. Historically pastoral and agro-pastoral in character, the Dhangars have evolved to a life of mobility, animal rearing, and small-scale cultivation under the influence of their environment. The study, founded on descriptive and analytical techniques based on primary and secondary data, has taken 50 purposively chosen Dhangar families into account to evaluate their financial condition, educational status, family composition, and saving habits. The results show that a majority of families receive less than ₹6,000 per month and save less than ₹1,000, reflecting poor financial resilience. Geography assumes a central role in determining livelihood performance families close to water sources or market towns are better off economically and socially. Literacy levels are low because of poverty, migration, and infrastructure deficits in rural areas. The research points out that saving behavior, livelihood vulnerability, and education gaps are significantly determined by geographical components such as resource accessibility, market distances, and climate pressures. This study is important to know how spatial influences intersect with social and economic frameworks in poor rural communities. Jath tehsil is well known drought prone region in the Sangli District as well as in Maharashtra state. Dhangar community has shared maximum percentage in the community structure of the Jath tehsil. Most Dhangar families are shepherd families and they are mostly uneducated so their livelihood status is very low.
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I. INTRODUCTION

Dhangar community, hitherto based on pastoralism and agro-pastoral livelihoods, is instrumental in the rural economy of Maharashtra and central India. Their shepherding, buffalo herding, weaving, and subsistence agriculture occupations are intimately connected with the geography of semi-arid, hilly, and arid lands. They were historically semi-nomadic, and their mobility between ecological zones has conditioned their patterns of settlement and social organization. Spatially mobile but politically underrepresented, Maharashtra's Dhangars fall under the category of Nomadic Tribes, a reminder of their past spatial mobility. Their own cultural practices, particularly of worshipping local deities such as Khandoba and Biroba, are locally embedded, showing strong local environment-spirituality nexus. Socially, internally divided into occupational castes like Hatkar, Gowari, and Khutekar, which were suited to particular ecological regions. These divisions affirm a common ethnocultural identity while portraying labor specialization. Constitutional and administrative status within the community is geographically varied. For instance, as per the 2011 Census, there were 43,806 Dhangars living in Uttar Pradesh who were listed under the Scheduled Castes (SC) category. Nevertheless, the request for listing among the Scheduled Tribes (ST) category particularly in Maharashtra gained momentum after 2014, pointing towards inconsistencies in geographical classification of caste identity between states. Nonetheless, the Presidential Order of September 1950, as per Article 342 of the Indian Constitution, does not mention Dhangars in the ST category for Maharashtra. Likewise, the 1950 Constitution Order for Bombay Province is silent about the Dhangar or the Dhangad tribes. (A. B. Bhagwat (2024).

This study analyzes the economic and geographical aspects of the Dhangar community in terms of their livelihood patterns, migration behavior, cultural geography, and economic well-being in order to gain a better understanding of their challenges and opportunities in India's development context.

Objectives of the study

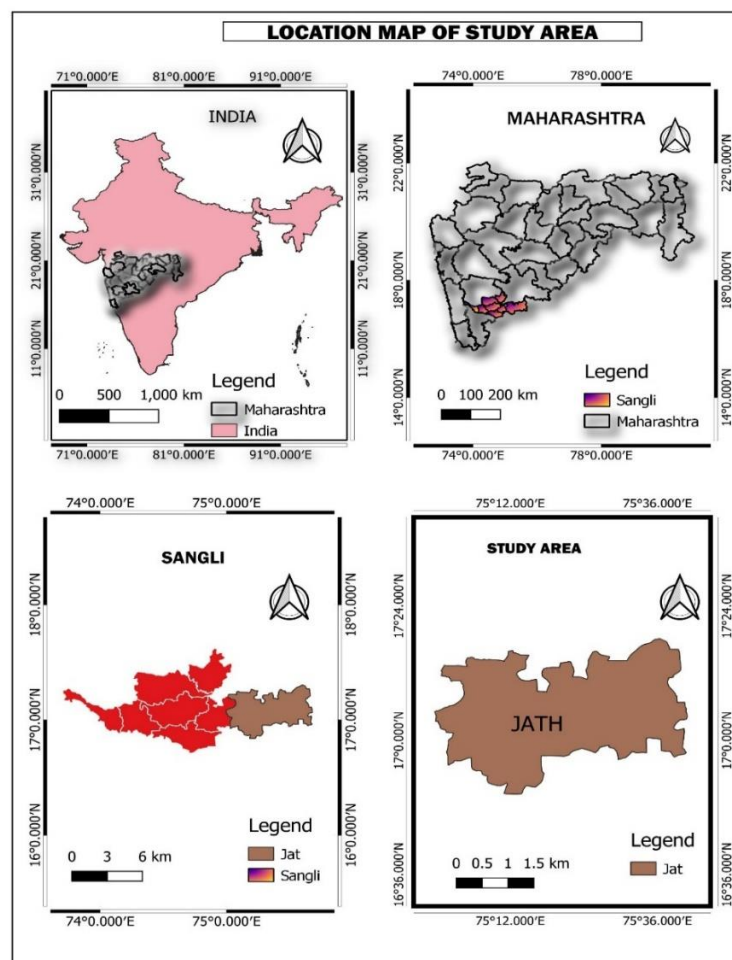
1. To study the financial status of Dhangar shepherd families in Jat tehsil.
2. To suggest measures for enhancing their financial and social well-being.

Importance of the study area

Jat tehsil of Sangli district in the semi-arid region of western Maharashtra is among the most climate-vulnerable rural sceneries, as far as livelihood resilience and economic prospects are concerned. It is characterized by limited rainfall, arid land, and poor agricultural productivity that has a direct effect on the socio-economic status of the local inhabitants in general and the Dhangar shepherd communities, who are highly reliant upon animal husbandry and seasonal movement for their livelihood. Scope of study region

The research area, Jat tehsil of Sangli district, is characterized by a semi-arid climate and frequent droughts. Its geographical constraints influence agriculture, livestock farming, and the overall rural economy. The area is densely populated with Dhangar shepherd families depending on traditional livelihoods. Scarce water, eroded soil, and seasonal migration determine their economic and social issues. Research in this

area provides insights into how environmental stress influences rural pastoral communities.



II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is founded on descriptive and analytical methods. A descriptive method was applied to give the present financial and social condition of the Dhangar shepherd families of Jat tehsil.

Sampling Method

The research used purposive sampling, where 50 Dhangar shepherd families were chosen from different villages of Jat Tehsil to provide concentrated and pertinent data.

Data Collection

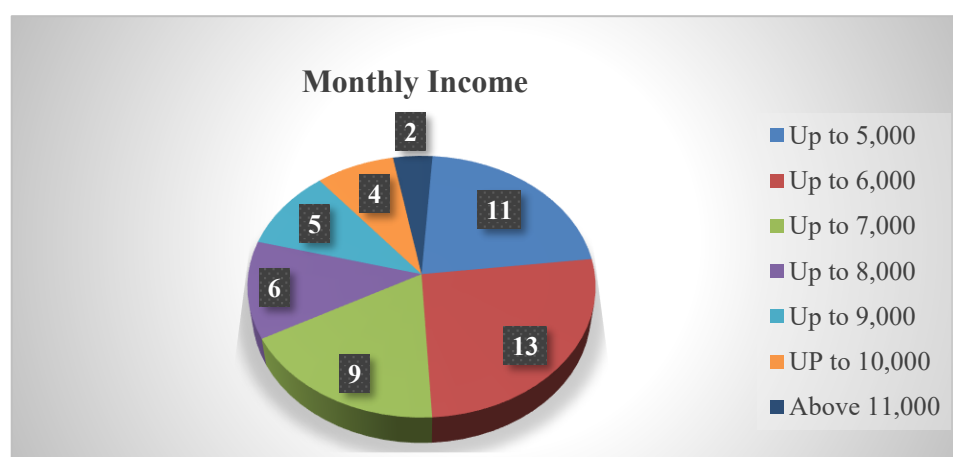
Both primary and secondary data sources were used in this investigation. Field trips, in-person interviews, and close observation of the way of life and commercial operations of shepherd families in Jat tehsil were used to gather the primary data, which gave firsthand knowledge of their financial circumstances. Numerous trustworthy sources, including government documents, reference books, research journals, magazines, newspapers, websites, and published articles, were used to gather the secondary data. These resources assisted the investigation, included useful background data, and gave a more comprehensive academic and policy framework for comprehending the chosen community's financial situation.

III. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Monthly Income

Income	Respondent	Percentage
Up to 5,000	11	22 %
Up to 6,000	13	26 %
Up to 7,000	9	18 %
Up to 8,000	6	12 %
Up to 9,000	5	10%
UP to 10,000	4	8 %
Above 11,000	2	4 %
Total	50	100

(Source: Collected form Researcher)

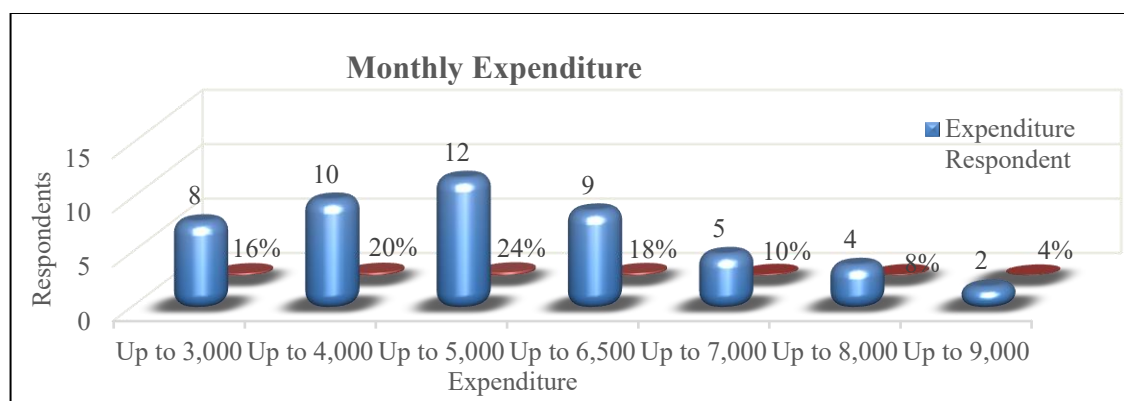


Most shepherd families in Jat Taluka earn less than ₹6,000 per month, indicating economic hardship. The highest category (26%) comes under the income level of ₹6,000 and depends upon small farming and herding. Less than 4% of households earn more than ₹11,000, indicating minimal upward mobility. Geographically, these low-income households are situated in rain-dependent, arid regions. Moderate wage earners reside close to water bodies or markets and practice diversified occupations. This is indicative of regional variations, scarce resources, and reliance on customary livelihoods.

Table 2: Monthly Expenditure

Monthly Expenditure	Expenditure Respondent	Percentage (%)
Up to 3,000	8	16 %
Up to 4,000	10	20 %
Up to 5,000	12	24 %
Up to 6,500	9	18 %
Up to 7,000	5	10 %
Up to 8,000	4	8 %
Up to 9,000	2	4 %
Total	50	100

(Source: Collected form Researcher)

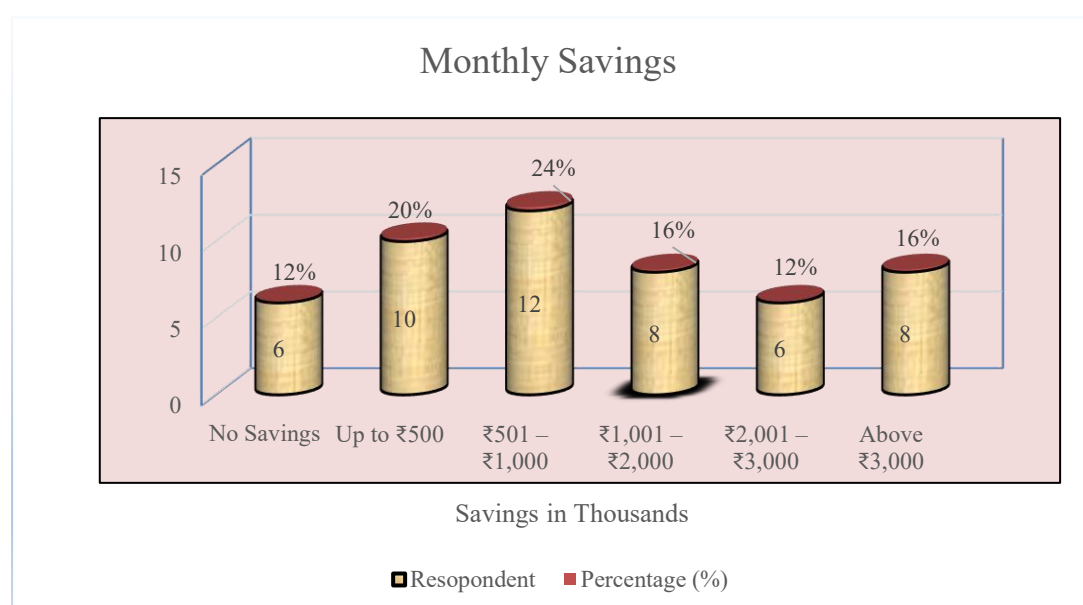


The average monthly spending of the Dhargar shepherd households in Jat Taluka is largely between ₹3,000 to ₹6,500, reflecting a small economic ability. An important 24% of the population incurred expenditures of up to ₹5,000, indicative of expenditure concentrated on necessities. Just 4% of households spend almost ₹9,000, indicating negligible economic progress. Lower spending is typical for distant or arid districts with limited access to services. Households close to markets or having more favorable irrigation spend more on transport, healthcare, and education. This pattern demonstrates how geography directly impacts rural household spending and livelihood quality.

Table 3: Monthly Savings

Savings(Rs)	Respondent	Percentage (%)
No Savings	6	12%
Up to ₹500	10	20%
₹501 – ₹1,000	12	24%
₹1,001 – ₹ 2,000	8	16%
₹2,001 – ₹3,000	6	12%
Above ₹3,000	8	16%
Total	50	100%

(Source: Collected form Researcher)



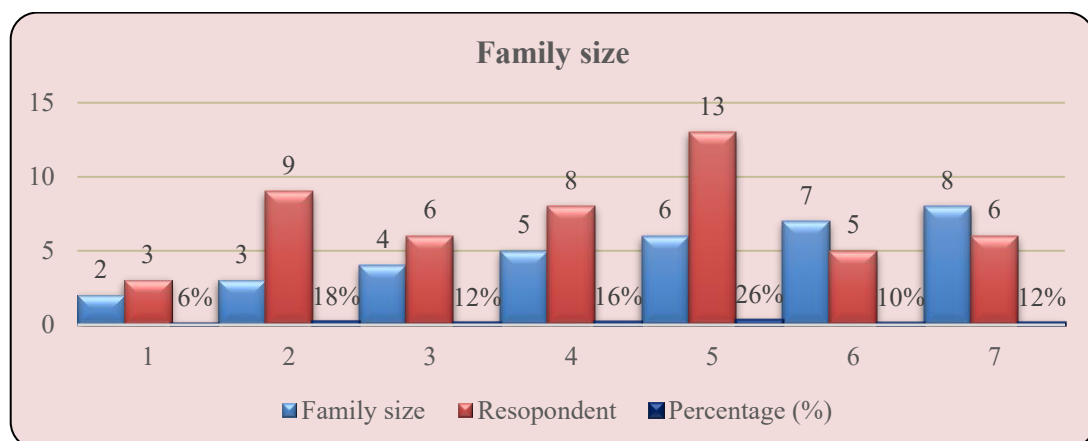
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information indicates that 56% of the Dhangar shepherd households save less than ₹1,000 a month, reflecting weak financial stability and exposure to income shocks. A significant 12% of households claim having no saving at all, mainly those who live in drought-afflicted and geographically remote areas. The largest percentage (24%) of the respondents save ₹501-₹1,000, reflecting moderate saving ability in half-access rural areas. As few as 16% of households are able to save over ₹3,000, usually in well-connected or irrigated areas with diversified livelihood sources. Geographical conditions such as irrigation access, proximity to markets, and road connectivity have a profound influence on savings behavior. This implies a direct relationship between livelihood opportunities, geography, and rural shepherd household saving behavior.

Table 4: Family size

Family size	Respondent	Percentage (%)
2	3	6 %
3	9	18 %
4	6	12 %
5	8	16 %
6	13	26 %
7	5	10 %
8	6	12 %
Total	50	100

(Source: Collected form Researcher)



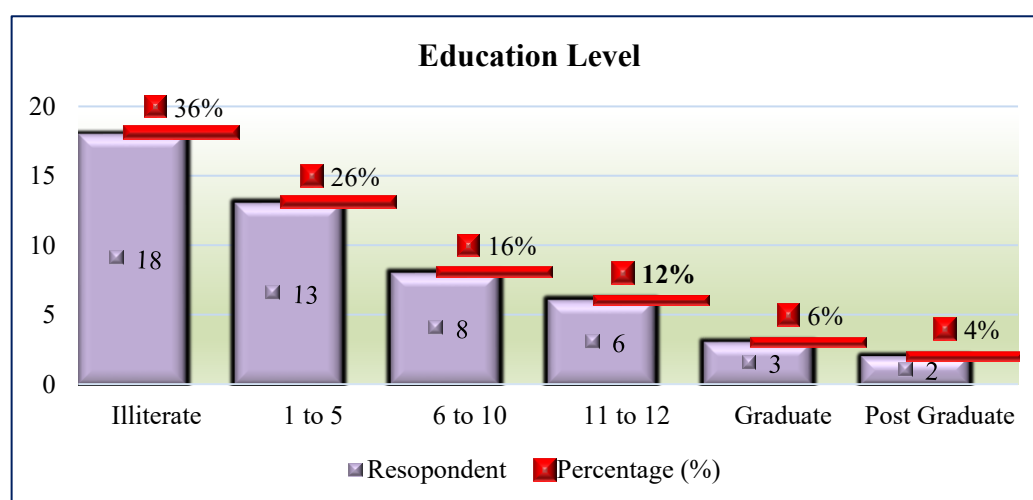
Most Dhangar shepherd households in Jat Taluka have large to medium family sizes, with 26% of them having six members and 22% with seven or more. This shows a pattern of extended or composite families, especially in more networked or old-style rural communities. Families with three or less members make up just 24% of households, mostly in rural or economically poorer areas where land fragmentation or out-migration causes these smaller families. Mid-sized families (4–5 members) are distributed across semi-accessible areas with moderate resources. Bigger families tend to mean pooled labor on herding and agriculture, but also put more pressure on scarce rural resources.

Generally, family size is also very much associated with geographical location, landholding pattern, and livelihood structure in the Dhangar society.

Table 5: Educational Level

Education	Respondent	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	18	36 %
1 to 5	13	26 %
6 to 10	8	16 %
11 to 12	6	12 %
Graduate	3	6 %
Post Graduate	2	4%
Total	50	100

(Source: Collected form Researcher)

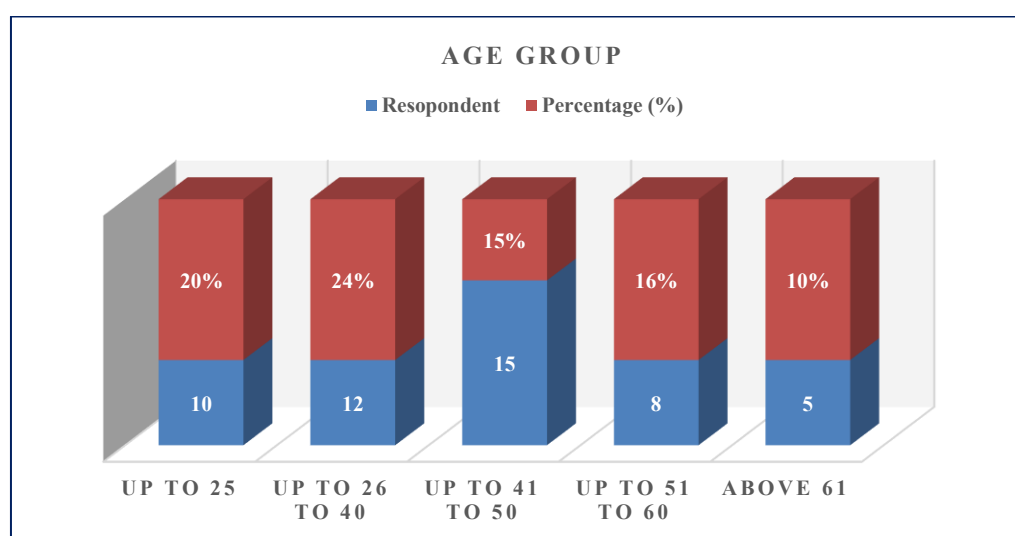


The educational background of the Dhangar shepherd community reveals that 62% of the respondents are either illiterate or have been educated only till primary level (1st to 5th standard). It has a 36% illiteracy rate, which is particularly high in geographically isolated and drought-vulnerable locations with poor access to educational facilities. Just 16% of them have attended secondary schooling (6th to 10th standard), a testament to poverty, migration, and early engagement in labor or herding. Higher secondary and post-graduate education is accessible to just 12% and 6% respectively, largely among households residing close to more connected village centers or taluka headquarters. Postgraduate training is very uncommon (4%) and limited to families with secure incomes and exposure to good schooling. Generally, the statistics show significant geographical and economic determinants of education in Jat Taluka's Dhangar community.

Table 6: Age Group

Age Group	Respondent	Percentage (%)
Up to 25	10	20 %
Up to 26 to 40	12	24 %
Up to 41 to 50	15	15 %
Up to 51 to 60	8	16 %
Above 61	5	10 %
Total	50	100

(Source: Collected form Researcher)



The age-profile of the respondents reveals that 44% of them fall in the active working age group of 26-50 years. Particularly, 24% fall in the 26-40 years category, and 20% are below the age of 25, reflecting a strong presence of younger persons in the occupation of herding. 16% of the interviewees are between 51-60 years, reflecting sustained engagement in shepherding in older age because of absence of other income opportunities. Only 10% are above 61 years, suggesting that elderly members are fewer and often less active in physical labor. This age profile indicates a demographically youthful and economically vibrant population, with the majority of family members participating in traditional livelihoods. Geographically, the youth population is more pronounced in villages near educational and employment hubs, whereas older respondents cluster in isolated herding areas.

CONCLUSION

Economic and social condition among Dhangar shepherd families residing in Jat tehsil is profoundly influenced by geographical restrictions and opportunities. The research finds that spatial inequality expressed in terms of variations in rainfall availability, access to the market, and availability of irrigation facilities plays an important part in influencing income levels, expenditure, saving ability, and education. Households in geographically privileged locations, i.e., close to water sources or road

networks, exhibit relatively improved economic stability and service access. The latter, however, in the drought-prone and backward areas, are beset by poverty, illiteracy, and limited diversification of livelihoods. Higher family sizes in those areas represent traditional joint-family systems, but they also reflect pressure on land and livelihood assets. Learner backwardness among the Dhangars is a result of both physical isolation and socio-economic marginality. The research therefore underlines the utmost significance of spatial analysis in comprehending rural livelihoods and emphasizes that the gaps in development, such as better rural infrastructure, irrigation development, mobile school units, and livestock-centered banking facilities, can be bridged among pastoral communities like the Dhangars of the semi-arid regions of Maharashtra.

SUGGESTIONS

The Dhangar shepherding families in Jat Taluka experience economic hardship because of low earnings, weak literacy, and low savings. The majority of families are extended in size and rely on traditional grazing, which is not viable under repeated droughts. There is an urgent need to facilitate livelihood diversification by way of dairy and agro-based industries. A better financial literacy and formal banking access must be provided to promote saving and investment behavior. Educational assistance, particularly for adult and women empowerment, is necessary for sustained development. Management of water resources through check dams and farm ponds can provide sustainable support for animal husbandry. Proper implementation of government schemes like Tandawasti Yojana and elimination of caste certificate hurdles should be undertaken to facilitate social inclusion.

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