THE CRIMINAL TRIBES (DENOTIFIED) SETTLEMENTS IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY - A STUDY

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Abstract
Denotified Tribes or Ex-Criminal Tribes may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing common name which as a rule does not denote any specific occupation. In some parts of the country they held together rather by the obligation of kinship. The name “Criminal Tribes” is a contradiction in terms of tribe becomes caste as it takes on the features of caste within a system of castes. The criminal tribes as a legal category came to notice in 1871 after the Criminal Tribes Act was passed and they were legally dubbed as such with that name. It did not mean that they were not called criminal tribes prior to the Criminal Tribes Act.1

Keywords: Criminal Tribes Act, colonies, Aboriginals, Kallars, Valayars, kavalkarrar

The word denotified was coined in free India to identify certain communities which were declared by the British as “Criminal Tribes”. The Criminal Tribes were declared as surely by the British Government for administrative convenience. For the British policy makers, the late nineteenth century was difficult period of flux in both ideological and political terms. There were continental challengers to the Empire, there was also consolidated section of restive population within Britain when moral and ethical issues were being debated a fresh. This inequitably led to need for continued reformulation of social policy, in relation to the population both in Britain and in the colonies. During the period, there was also a revised perception of the colonies moral and material progress were taken to be at a faster pace through a set of social, political and economic policies2.

British Colonial policies and destruction of livelihood of Aboriginals
The British introduced modernization in their colonies. The introduction of modern police system, railways, salt policies and forest laws, to a larger extend destructed the traditional livelihood of the Kallars, Koravars, Yenadis, Yerukula, Yarayars, Valayars etc.

During the first half of eighteenth century the Kallars played a predominant role kavalkarrar or watchman, which has been traditional among the kallars and related castes. The police Re-organization Act 1860, set the foundation of present police system and introduced a fundamental change in village Kaval system. Later enactments in 1873, 1889 upgraded the village police and introduced low level ghat, talaiyaris but traditional calling of many Kallars and their right to collect kaval fees remained illegal. Several nineteenth
century reports connected to the outburst of kallar violence to the abolition of kallar kaval system\(^3\). This resulted in the unemployment of Kallars and created law and order problem and increasing criminality.

The Korava community had been dealing in salt trade much before East India Company assumed Government functions. Since no cart traffic was possible and those days Koravas used bullocks and donkeys kept up considerable trading intercourse between inland districts and the coasts. The introduction of railway in 1850 was responsible for the destruction of salt trade which was traditionally practiced by the Korava community. Distribution of salt on railway all over presidency was being carried on quite efficiently. More over Government policy to introduce exice on salt manufacture as per Madras salt commission in 1876 culminated trade mechanisms in which Korava community had no place. This destructed the traditional salt, trading process of Koravas, Koraches and Yerakalas, which resulted in unemployment and increasing criminality among these Tribes”\(^4\).

Apart from this the traditional grain trade of communities such as Dasaris, Rellis and Yenadis last their livelihood in nineteenth century and thus qualified as criminal tribes. The so called kal, Inji and Dapppai Koravas of Trichiropoly were notified as criminals not only for their criminality because they wander place to place and change their names. Yet another community named valayar, meaning from Tamil word valari (net) engaged in hunting and cultivation and lived by getting gains from jungles\(^5\). They belong to ancient stock of south India. The 1876 famine and new forest policy prevented them from free gazing and traditional hunting practices. This led them to a large extent towards criminal activities. In fact the number of communities lost their livelihood and beginning to be considered as criminal tribes.

The Criminal Tribes Act

In 1871 the British Government passed an act commonly known as the Criminal Tribes Act. It was first enforced in the northern part of India, and later was extended to Bengal (1876) and other area, with the Madras Presidency being the last to enact it in 1911. The Criminal Tribes Act, 1911, had its origin in the report of the Indian Police commission, 1902-1903. The commission laid down the principle that it was the aim of every police system to obtain knowledge of and to secure supervision over all persons addicted to crime starting from this principle, the commission declared that the police had more power of control over criminal tribes and with that object recommended certain amendments to the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 then in force.\(^6\) In due course this recommendation was taken up by the Government of India who found it necessary to repeal the Act and to substitute in its place the Act of 1911.
Difference between the Act of 1871 and that of 1911

The Criminal Tribes Act of 1911 was more comprehensive than the old one. In the first place the Act of 1871 only applied to certain provinces in Northern India namely Bengal, the united provinces, the North west frontier Province and the Punjab. It was not extended to Madras, whereas the Criminal Tribes Act of 1911, applies throughout British India. Moreover the application of the Act of 1871 involved certain practical difficulties which the new Act of 1911 was designed to remove. One of the objects of the Act of 1911 was to enlarge the power of control by enabling local government to proclaim criminal tribes on their own authority and provide for the registration of their members without reference to the question of settlement or the provision of the means of livelihood.7

Provisions of the Act

The Criminal Tribes Act of 1911 enables the local government to declare any tribe, gang or class to be a criminal tribe, if it is satisfied that tribe, gang or class was addicted to be systematic commission of non-bailable offences. To order the registration of the members of any criminal tribe and the taking of their finger impressions8, and to direct that every registered member should report himself at fixed intervals or notify his place of residence and charges thereof. The local Government can also declare with the sanction of the Government of India, that a criminal tribe should be restricted in its movements to any specified area or should be settled in any specified place of residence. But before such action was to be taken, the Government of India must be satisfied that it was expedient to restrict the movements of such tribe or settle it in a place of residence and that the means by which it was proposed that such tribe should earn its living are adequate.9 Another important feature of the Act was that the local Government was authorized to establish industrial, agricultural or reformatory schools, and to separate the children from their parents.10 This provision was a most useful portion of the act as it enables the local Government to secure the children, to educate them and to bring them up in a more wholesome atmosphere that in which they would have been left if the tribe had been settled. It was hoped that by these means the children would grow up as honest citizens and the criminal habits of the tribe would in the course of generation or two be entirely eradicated.11

The First Activities of the Madras Government

The question of the establishment of settlement for the reclamation of criminal had been engaging the attention of Madras Government since 1910, and the passing of the Criminal Tribes Act 1911, added an impetus to their activity12. The first thing done when the act was passed was the framing of rules for the registration and supervision of criminal tribes. These rules were finally issued in May 1913 and were followed by the notification of tribes.
The following twenty five tribes, the combined operations of which extended to no less than twenty districts of Madras presidency, were declared by the Government to be Criminal Tribes by the end of the year 1915.

2. Vayalpad or Nawabpeta Keractas of Chittoor District
3. Dong Dasar is of Nellore, Kurnol, Guntur, Krishna and Godawari districts.
4. Veppur parayas in south Arcot district.
5. Donga woddars of Kurneel Anantapur Cuddapah, Nellore and Guntur districts.
6. Togamalai Koravaras some time called kepmaris of Trichinopoly, south Arcot, Chingleput, North Arcot and Cuddapah district.
7. Rudrapad Korachas of Bellary district
8. Dommaras of Nellore District
9. Korachas, Joravas or yerakalas in Salem, Coimbatore, Trichinopoly and North Arcot District known as the Salem - Melurnad Kurava
10. Korachas, koravas or yerukalas in Salem, south Arcot and Trichinopoly district known as the Attur kiland kuravas.
11. Nakkalas of Godavari district
12. Gandarvakottai Kuravas of Tanjore district.
15. A gang of hired assassins consisting of 28 persons frequenting the district of cuddapah Kurnool and Anantapur,
16. Kilagudi kallas of Madura District
17. Kondadoras of Vizagapatnam District
18. Vellayankuppam padayachis of south Arcot district.
19. Kuttapa kallar of Tanjore and Trichinopoly district.
20. Cheettynad valayas of Ramnad District
21. Rellis of Vizagapattingnam district
22. Mela - uprappanur kallas of Madurai district
23. Sorikkampatti kallas of Madura district
24. Pusalapuram kallas of Madura district
25. Uppu kuravas of Tinnevely district

The total number of persons who were registered upto the end of 1914 was 15990 of whom placed in the settlements upto the end of 1915. A gang of koravas found in Madras and neighboring districts could not be notified and registered as there was no provisions of law authorizing the registration of criminals residing in the Madras city.
Establishment of Criminal Tribes Settlement

Another important feature of the act was that local government were authorized to establish industrial, agricultural of reformatory schools and settlements for the criminal tribe members. Under this scheme employment was to be given to the Criminal Tribe members either on government agricultural land, or in a private enterprise. The Criminal Tribes members were not allowed to go out without a pass, which was issued at the discretion of the manger of the settlement.  

The primary object of the Criminal Tribes settlement was reformatting and not merely segregation. In these settlement in older to reclaim the criminals employment opportunities were given to them both in agriculture and industries. While establishing settlements the Government preferred non-official agency, a body of self-sacrificing men who were prepared to devote their lives to the work - they considered that these would help the Government to minimize the expenditure and also could obtain skilled and devoted selfless people. Government officers are livable to be transferred and it is then often difficult to find a suitable substitute to carry the work on and for them work can only as an incident in their official career. Entrusting these settlements to private agency would also give more freedom of action by the managers than in the government. The government of Madras had therefore decided to entrust the management of the settlements as far as possible to non - official agencies, missionaries or otherwise. There were six settlements established under section 16 of the Criminal Tribes Act. They were Sitanagaram and Stuartpuram Settlement in Gundur district, Kavali settlement in Nellore district, Aziz Nagar settlement in south Arcot District Pallavaram settlement in Chengleput district and Reformatory settlementary perumbur and Kulasekarappattinam in Tinnevelly district.

Sitanagaram Settlement - Gundur district

In the year 1910 Salvation Army formulated the settlement for the reclamation of women Yerukulas, who’s male relatives were in Jail. In 1913 few men who were released from Jail before their time were sent to this settlement. In Oct 1915 this settlement was divided into Sainayapuram and Kondapet settlements each under the management of European Salvation Army Officer. Agriculture was the main source of employment other source of employment was stone quarry; silk weaving carpentry and sewing were subsidiary industries. The settlers also privately trained in mat and basket making. A school was started in 1913. Night school and dispensary were also established in this settlement. The population of the settlers at the end of 1915 was 301 males, 271 females and 333 children and total of 909 individuals. It was increased to 1110 in the year 1925. In 1946 quarry was the main occupation. The other kind of employment of settlers are goat rearing, keeping mulching sheep and Buffalos, running petty shops, poultry farming, shoe trading, sale of green grass and Cooliee work in neighbourhood. 12 settlers were engaged in sandy driving
and earned about 120 Rs. This settlement was continued up to the linguistic reorganization of Madras state in 1956. After that it came under the control of the Andhra Pradesh.

**Stuartpuram Settlement - Gundur district**

It was an essentially agricultural settlement, started in the first instance by the Salvation Army, to work as an auxiliary to and in conjunction with the Sitanagaram settlement. The settlement started with the intention of placing in it a well behaved members of the Sitanagaram settlement as a reward for their good contact. Agriculture was the chief occupation of this settlement other source of income to the settlers where sale of mats and ropes. Trading in cattle and Coolie labour. A few of well conducted in mates were appointed as watchman. The position of watchman was looked upon as a honourable one by the settlers. The strength of settlement as the end of 1915 was 302 men, 323 woman, 243 boys, 238 girls and total of 1106. In Dec 1915 the Government ordered the transfer to Stuartpuram of 200 Yerukalas from Kavali settlement in Nellore District. The settlement on its Agriculture side was flourishing. In the mean time certain inhabitants of the Bapatala and the neighboring villages setup an agitation protesting against the increase of crime in the locality. In 1916, 400 acres were brought under paddy cultivation. In that year 300 children of school going age only 95 were on the rolls of the school. This was our considered as an one of the successful criminal settlement in Madras presidency.

**Kavali Settlement - Nellore District**

This was started as a settlement for Donga Yerakalas of the Nellore in October 1912 on a purely voluntary basis by Mr. Pullard of the American Baptist Mission he was expert in scientific Agriculture. The district Magistrate granted him, 100 acres of waste land with deep well water. Through the cultivation, the Yerakalas was unable to earn even half of the usual wages of labour and to create a forms of employment weaving, fibre cleaning, bunding and market gardening for all of which Mission had made arrangement. The settlers complaint the excessive mortality in 1915 on examination, it was found only 29 per milli, the govt ordered the health officers to visit periodically.

Special attention was taken to eliminate “Black Scourage” in 1914, attendance for school was made compulsory for all children between 6 and 12 years and ordered complete separation of boys from their parents. They consisted daily morning prayer and a service on Sundays. Experiment of appointing special constables from among the settlers has successful, strength of the settlement at the end of 1915 was 257 men, 244 women and 330 children or a total of 831 persons; of whom 740 were present in the settlement. In July 1915 the Govt issued orders permitting the Labour Department of the United Planters Association of southern India to recruit for employment on the estates in the Anamalai such of the settlers as were willing to go. A proposal was made a subsidiary settlement at Allur,
in 6 Dec 1916. In the year Aug 1917, the Government accepted Mr. Bowden’s suggestion that the New settlement called Bitragunta and declared as a part of Kavali settlement.

**The Aziz Nagar Settlement - South Arcot district**

The Aziz Nagar settlement in South Arcot District was opened on 22 September 1913 to deal with criminal tribes of Madras presidency including Vempur Parayars and Piramalai Kallar, in South Arcot district. It was first placed under the Salvation Army which continued to manage till the end of 1916. The Government paid the settlers for their maintenance according to the piece work system. But the District magistrate disbursed the funds without any control on the part of the Salvation Army. This system was not acceptable to commissioner Booth Tucker who had suggested in July 1916 for grant of subsistence allowance Rs. 6 per family per mensem. Accordingly in June 1918 Booth Tucker proposed that the salvation Army should with draw from the management of the Aziz Nagar, settlement on the ground that the settlement was not making satisfactory progress. On receipt of the proposal, the Government took up the management of the settlement with effect from the 1 March 1919 and appointed in their place local Inspector of Police. The administrative control of the settlement was transferred from police department to Harijan Welfare from 15 June 1954.

**The Pallavaram Settlement - Chingleput district**

The Pallavaram settlement in Chingleput district was started in 1917 as a temporary expenditure for accommodating certain men belonging to the Kalichedu settlement. This settlement however assumed a permanent character on the abolition of Stuartpuram settlement which was practically wiped out in a cyclone in March 1917. The main occupation of people in this settlement was to work as laborers in the quarries, leather work some were employed Chrome Leather Company and paid weekly wages. A large number of workers employed in the Madras corporation in the Pallavaram quarries. The quarry work was not successful and Government therefore decided to close the settlement after 1921.

**Reformatory Settlement**

There were such other settlement in the Madras Presidency which were of a reformatory in nature. For these instead of agriculture and industry, with in the settlement, the main occupation of settlers to find work in the factories such as sugar factory. These settlements were established at Perambur and Kulasekara Pattanam.

The reformatory settlement at Perambur in Madras was instituted by the Salvation Army in 1913 as a home for the reclamation of prisoners selected from among those undergoing imprisonment in Tamil district. The object of the institution was to provide a place of probation for prisoners nearing end of their sentences. The prisoners were given
every opportunity to reform themselves and employment was found for them both within
and outside the home. The Government discharged the prisons of this settlement as they
completed their sentences. Accordingly Perambur was declared as a reformatory
settlement under the Criminal Tribes Act.

Kulasekarapatnam settlement was instituted in March 1916 as the Government of
Madras for Uppukoraras of Kovil patti to Kulasekarapatnam village. The Government
decided to provide employment in sugar factor belonging to East India Distilleries and Sugar
Factories Limited. They also provided free quarters and current wages. The strength of
the Settlement at the begging of 1917 was eighty one. The sugar factory work formed the
main occupation of the Koravars some of were taken to the locomotive and motor
departments for training. The boys who left the school were put into the workshops and
number of them were enjoyed on contract work the settlement had 176 inmates in 1918.
In 1920 31 unregistered Koravars came voluntarily to work in the factory in 1918 the Korvas
school function defectively Koravas school was entrusted to the manager 1 April 1921. The
strength of the school of March 1922 was 51. Education was made compulsory not only
among Koravas but also among the other employees living in the factory premises. In case
of Kilagudi Kallars Harvey’s cotton mills at Madura were recommended as a place where a
settlement could be formed. The agent of the company was proposed as the manager of
the settlement16.

Financial Arrangement22

The settlements in the presidency were not under the management of one single
agency and the government had not therefore found it possible to prescribe a uniform set
of rules in regard to their financial relations within settlements. The salvation Army which
was entrusted with the management of the settlements at Sitanagalam, Stuartpuram
Perambalur and Pallavaram had agreed to follow the general principles laid down by the
government. The salvation Army was accordingly got an annual fixed amount in respect of
each settlement for general supervision charges No accounts were demanded in respect of
those grants. The amount was paid in advance to the Salvation Army in four quarterly
instalments.

As all other items of expenditure on the settlement which was clarified under
Education, Medical relief, Building maintenance of incapables and grants for new settlers,
the Government covered the net cost. The Salvation Army was required to maintain
detailed amounts respect of these items which were subjected to annual audit. Managers
of the settlement had no power to sanction and establish under they head “industries” and
this power was reserved by the government. Pallavaram settlement was under Government
management and the net cost was therefore borne it. The main items of expenditure in
these settlements were maintenance of incapables and medical charges of Rs. 15 a month
at Azizanger and Rs. 8 a month at Pallavaram as fixed travelling allowances paid to the sub
- assistant surgery who visited the settlements periodically. The cost & Police staff at Pallavaram which consisted of one Inspector, two Head constables and fourteen constables and pay for inspector of Police Rs. 225 plus a special pay Rs. 45 and a conveyance allowance Rs. 25 and pay for four watches Rs. 12 each.\textsuperscript{23}

**Impact of the Settlements**

The Criminal Tribes Settlements brought out certain social changes among the Denotified Tribes. The criminal tribes did not have diary of particulars on occupation; yet they were engaged in some form of work. After the implementation of Criminal Tribes Settlement, most often the convicted criminals were brought to the settlements. They were given opportunity to do cultivation and other industrial work such as weaving, carpentry sandal making etc. They got a skill of a particular occupation. If the settlement was not provided with agriculture or industrial opportunities, they were employed in the factories such as sugar factory, mining etc. When they got the employment it changed their life style from criminality to lead a life by doing work and getting the wages. In this way the employment changed the life of the criminal tribes. In additional to this, the opening of elementary schools and Night schools too contributed to bring out social change among the criminal tribes. The land holding population of the settlement increased to eighty three percent during 1938-1939 against seventy five percent in the last decades which showed that the settlers which proper engagement were inclined to become regular agricultures abandoning their old criminal pursuits. As a crime reform measure the Government of Madras ventured on starting a schools to educate the criminal tribes in all the criminal settlement. Special emphasis was given to identify youths rather than adults to get the benefit of education. The criminal tribes population had the conviction that the act of thievin
g and highway robbery were not crime but a pride. They did not consider it as a sin. In order to make the criminal tribes understand the fact that these criminal activities were un constitutional the Government wanted to educate them first to change their attitude. Young boys and girls were attracted towards schools because education was the only panacea to reform the criminal tribes from their age old ills. In the opening years of the settlement itself, either the salvation army or the Government of Madras started primary schools from seven to four standards in all the settlements. The chief feature of the work was imparting of elementary education to the children of criminal tribes, both boys and girls. The exclusiveness was to concentrate on the young children rather than on the old one, who had been brought up in a spirit of idleness and in an atmosphere where thieving and highway robbery were looked upon as a natural avocation.\textsuperscript{24}

Traditional method of teaching were imparted in every settlement schools. Since the pupils were illiterate and found it difficult to pickup the lessons. The Government changed the old method of teaching and adopted a new individual method during the late 1930s. The reading apparatus assignment and progress chart were also given to the
schools. Special attention was paid to the weak pupils. The teachers were equipped with adequate knowledge through various programme like refresher course and other training programme. After the elementary education was over the young boys and girls were given training in cultivation carpentry, weaving and sandal making, thereby they got skilled in particular fields. The trained pupils forgot their criminal life and wanted to lead a honest life by doing work and get money. Added to this their style of life also changed cleanliness was taught in class rooms. They were made to dress in a proper way. They took bath and brushed teeth regularly and this helped for proper health care.

Education formed important to the adults and the elder members of the criminal tribes in the settlements, who had been quite illiterate since the opening of the settlement itself. Education to the adults was started during night time, since it would be the most appropriate time for the elder members, who would have leisure from their agricultural and other allied works. Moral lessons and other practical subjects were taught in these schools. Plenty of opportunities were provided to the adult settlers to read and write. As far as infrastructure was concerned the elementary school building were used also for adult education. The Government also provided necessary light, books and relevant materials. AS a result of efforts of Salvation army and government of Madras in the settlements, there was a gradual fall in the crime rate during 1939-1940. There was decline in dacoity and robbery in the Madras presidency due to these settlements. There were reduction of grave crimes too as a result of effective discipline maintained in the settlements.25

To conclude this under the Criminal Tribes Act nearly 69 communities were notified as criminals in Madras presidency. Notified castes of ‘hereditary criminals’ within the Hindu system were to be kept under police surveillance. More castes were added to the list. The branding of these communities, as ‘criminal’ was not based on the notion of heredity but rather as a community profession passed on from one generation to the next. The Act, therefore, provided for establishing reformatory schools and settlements for the reclamation of these people. Movements of members of the communities were restricted to specific areas and the act provided for their arrest without warrant if there was any violation. The crimes covered included counterfeiting of coins and currency, murder, theft, robbery, dacoity and housebreaking. Children in the age group of 6 to 18 were separated from their parents and put in reformatory schools. In due course the Indian society mutually witnessed the emergence of a new class of people who were branded as born criminals. These Criminal Tribes of yesteryears is today a new social category generally known as the Denotified and Nomadic tribes of India, covering a population approximately of 60 million. Some of them are included in the list of Schedule castes, some in Schedule Tribes, and quite a few in the different formats of Backward classes. Many of these Tribes do not find place in any of the aforesaid ones. What is common to all these Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) is the fate of being branded as ‘born’ criminals. In those times, whoever opposed the British colonial expansion was perceived as
a potential criminal. Particularly, if any attempts were made to oppose the government by the use of the arms, the charge of criminality was a certainty. Many of the wandering minstrels, fakirs, petty traders, rustic transporters and disbanded groups of soldiers were included in the list of criminal groups. It was also the context under which the Brahminical caste hegemony manipulated the British power to stamp many of the lower caste communities who opposed the caste and Brahminical suppression. Thus the British imperialism and Brahminical Casteist Fascism came together to disband the sons and daughter of the soil.

Soon after Independence, the communities notified as criminal tribes were denotified by the Government of India. This notification was followed by substitution of a series of Acts, of which the ‘Habitual Offenders Act’ was the prime one. As a matter of fact the ‘Habitual Offenders Act’ preserved most of the provisions of the former Criminal Tribes Act. Apparently, the denotification and the passing of the ‘Habitual Offenders Act’ should have ended the misery of the Criminal Tribes Act communities, but it never happened. The police, as well as the people in general, advanced with the continued attitude of look upon the ‘Criminal Tribes as born criminals.

The result is that every time there is a petty theft in a locality, the erstwhile Criminal Tribes are the first suspects. Thus they are victimized. The ratio between the arrests and the convictions of the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes needs detailed analysed and research to see the extent of physical harassment and mental torture caused by the police to these most vulnerable and the weakest sections of the society. The land possessed by these tribes was already alienated during the colonial rule through unfamiliar legal promulgations of land and forest acts. After independence, various state governments have done little to restore their land to them. Schemes for economic uplift do not seem to have benefited them. The illiteracy rate among the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes is high, malnutrition’s more frequent and provisions for education and health care is almost negligible. Above all, there is no end to the atrocities that the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes have to face. Being illiterate and ignorant of the law, the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes know very little about the police procedures, and so often get into difficult situations. The onus of proving innocence rests with them. Many of these people are scared to wear new clothes for fear of being arrested and therefore spoil them before using them. Mob-lynched, hounded from village to village, starved of all civic amenities, deprived of the means of livelihood and gripped by the fear of police persecution, the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes are on the run. Freedom has still not reach them.
End Notes

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