

## **‘Criminal Tribes’ and their Settlement in Raj Marwar: A Historical Narrative**

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*Marwar was one of the largest princely states in British times. It was the home of tribes like Minas, Bhils, Baories, Sansis, etc. Following the policy in British India, the Government here designated some of them as ‘criminal.’ Thereafter restrictions were placed on them. They were deprived of their arms, etc. But this by itself would not have been sufficient to end the crime. The Government was conscious that they had to be led to a settled life and that this alone was the solution. The obvious choice was to settle them in agricultural pursuits. It gave them agricultural land, loans, etc. They were also employed as chowkidars. The policy was successful though it had some limitations. For instance, a large part of the state was under the jagirdars. They refused to give land to these tribals. On its own part also, what the Government annually spent on their settlement was often less than what it had provided for in the budget. When independence was round the corner, these tribals became aware of their civil rights. They asked for the removal of the restrictions put on them. In free and democratic India, these restrictions were an anachronism. Naturally then, they came to an end.*

Marwar covered an area of 35,016 sq. miles. It was the largest princely state in Rajputana and one of the largest states in India. Some Criminal Tribes lived there.<sup>1</sup> A good number of them were the Bhils and Minas. This has misled Prem Angrish who failed to take note of other Criminal Tribes, i.e. Baories, Bagries, Kolis, Thoris, Nuts and Sansis.<sup>2</sup> These tribes indulged in house-breaking, robberies, dacoities, cattle lifting, poisoning and murder. They also violated the

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<sup>1</sup> Many nomadic communities of India had long been the suspect of the mainstream population and the British colonial administration alike. Indeed the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 was enacted by the latter, and by this Act some tribal communities were declared and notified as ‘criminal tribes’. Under this law every member of such notified communities was to give attendance regularly at the local police station. It also curtailed their free movement for collection of raw materials and selling of traditional products.

The central rationale behind the Act derives from the belief that their criminality was hereditary and somewhat genetic. Some such tribes were often relocated away from their original inhabitations because of their ‘disorderly and riotous’ behaviour. But some historians and other social scientists have forcefully argued that the notion of ‘criminal tribes’ was essentially an artificial social construction induced by their special social and economic circumstances and discriminations further reinforced and cemented by the above colonial Act itself.

<sup>2</sup> Prem Angrish, *Marwar ka samajik avam arthik itihās* (Jodhpur: Usha Publishing House, 1991), chapter 3. (In Hindi).