

Invented Pasts and Fabricated Presents: Indian Nomadic and Denotified Communities*

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Friends, I am most honoured to be here, and I must thank the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics for inviting me to give this prestigious memorial lecture. Thank you very much, indeed.

I am going to talk about a subject which has been close to my heart for 25 or more years, and the issues which I am going to present here started raising their heads when I was a doctorate student. There are reasons for revisiting that research today which I will come to shortly.

Let me begin with a few headlines which will be familiar to an average, middle class English newspaper reader. Throughout the last decade, gory tales of murder, rape and robbery with mindless violence have been doing the rounds for the avid consumption of the urban readership, and certain special kinds of communities have been claimed to be responsible for all neighbourhood crime. The following headlines have been extracted from national dailies in different cities, which appeared approximately ten years ago:

- *Haryana to flush out Criminal Tribes*¹
- *Ten members of criminal tribe held*²
- *Was the murder handiwork of criminal tribe*³
- *Criminal tribes strike in Pratapgarh, kill three*⁴

The public was thus introduced to the idea of criminal tribes about a decade ago. Here are some more news items which appeared this year, and over the last couple of years:

- *Security guard murdered; **Bawaria** gang suspected*⁵
- *Six **Bawariya** criminals held*⁶
- *Hooch tragedy: **Dadu Charra**, 3 women bootleggers held*⁷

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¹ *Indian Express*, February 27, 1999.

² *Times of India*, November 30, 2001.

³ *Tribune News Service*, June 21, 2001.

⁴ *Asia Africa Intelligence Wire*, April 01, 2003.

⁵ UNI, April 26, 2009.

⁶ *The Tribune*, August 25, 2009.

⁷ *Zee News*, July 12, 2009.