

# Colonial Construction of a 'Criminal' Tribe Yerukulas of Madras Presidency

*Nomadic communities have been a target of the fears and suspicions of sedentary communities. The Yerukulas of Madras presidency were thus 'criminalised' in the early 20th century. This gave the Salvation Army the job of 'reforming' them, and incidentally provided cheap labour to a tobacco factory. This project was so successful that today Yerukulas believe their ancestors to have been dangerous criminals.*

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In 1911, the itinerant trading community of Yerukulas in Madras presidency were declared a criminal tribe. This was under a piece of legislation called the Criminal Tribes Act, applied to the whole of British India. Under one of its provisions, special settlements could be established where the criminal tribe communities could be confined in order to watch and reform them. Missionary organisations – the Salvation Army was the main one – were put in charge of these settlements and were given more or less complete autonomy as far as administration of these settlements was concerned.

In the first part of this paper, in Sections I to III, an attempt is made to identify some of the strands which wove into the ideological perception, or construction of a criminal in the early twentieth century, as distinct from actual legislation to deal with criminality on the ground. Attitudes to itinerant communities are discussed in some detail with this aspect in mind, as also the Yerukulas' particular relationship with sedentary communities. In the middle part, in Section IV, I discuss the main features of a criminal tribe settlement called Stuartpuram where this community lived for decades, and still lives. This part discusses the processes by which the Yerukulas were first sedentarised under the Criminal Tribes Act, then made to work on land owned by the Salvation Army, and finally turned into regular wage workers in a tobacco factory. In the last part, Section V describes the way social and cultural aspects of Yerukulas' community life were transformed in the Stuartpuram settlement under the supervision of the Salvation Army. This seems to have been an inevitable result of the logic of work on land, or in a factory. Section VI discusses

'historic memory' of the Yerukulas, and their perception of their ancestors as dangerous criminals. This is done through an analysis of a poem that is a part of their oral culture even today, and which is at complete variance with the 'official' version speaking of a useful, honourable past of the earlier generations.

## I Perception of Nomads

Nomadic communities the world over have always been considered to be more criminal than not, and their 'restlessness' or constant movement is considered a troublesome feature by members of sedentary societies. The relationship between itinerant and sedentary communities has become more problematic in modern times. The more the itinerant communities get marginalised to the main sphere of society because of transformative processes, the more they become suspect from the point of view of the sedentary society they interact with. In real terms, their increasing marginality simply compounds the already existing prejudices against them. In Europe, gypsies became gradually marginalised to the established system with the processes of industrialisation.<sup>1</sup>

In India, the situation was only slightly different: here the British administration's economic policies, aimed at raising revenue, had made the itinerant communities redundant and anachronistic. The itinerant community of Yerukulas of Madras presidency is the focus of this paper, and it is important to first briefly discuss the trajectory they followed in the late 19th century, as far as their gradual marginalisation to the sedentary society is concerned.

Members of this community were chiefly traders in grain and salt, operating between the coastal areas of the presidency and the interior districts.<sup>2</sup> They were, at one time, almost the only means of distributing salt in far flung areas where wheel traffic could not reach. In the 1850s, road and railway networks were established throughout the presidency, and this community's trade – carried out largely on pack bullocks or donkeys – became largely if not wholly redundant.

Further, the famine of 1877 was devastating as far as their salt trade was concerned. Large number of their cattle died, which used to be crucial for carrying their merchandise. And as they were traders in cattle as well, they suffered huge losses during the decade of the famine. Their grain trade too suffered drastically during this period, because of the way famines were managed by the British administration, favouring the bigger grain merchants [GoM 1867; GoI 1878; Bhattacharya 1965; Ambirajan 1971]. Small traders like the Yerukulas found this item totally inaccessible at a time when their cattle, which carried it, were dying in large numbers as well.

Forest laws of the 1880s prevented them from collecting forest produce, an important item of barter in their trade, and also did not allow them now to collect bamboos and leaves, which they used for making mats, baskets and brooms, etc. Common pasture land and grazing areas were cordoned off, and not available any more to their cattle.<sup>3</sup>

They were also crucially affected by the new salt policy of the government in the 1880s, which allowed large trading companies to enter the salt trade. A large number of retail outlets were established by the government all over the presidency on

railway routes, where salt was now sold through the agents of large company traders.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of the above factors, Yerukulas suffered a massive economic setback as far as the period between the 1850s and 1860s is concerned.

As they become marginalised to the main system, prejudices and myths which already exist about nomads are renewed, or come to the surface more explicitly. David Mayall has pointed out some of these in his discussion of gypsy travellers in 19th century England. Some of these apply to itinerant communities in general, and are discussed below.

Most importantly, the nomads' lack of property, and supposed lack of due regard for others' property, is seen to be a threat to the established order.<sup>5</sup> Their independence from rigid norms and constraints of sedentary societies is found equally objectionable. In fact, itineracy is seen as a possible escape route for the so-called outcasts and refuse of sedentary societies – if one is an itinerant, it is probably because he or she was not acceptable to the sedentary society.

There have been other charges against gypsies, or migrants or nomadic people: they are escaping from the law, or simply fleeing from hard work of any kind. In agriculture-based societies, the men resent their escaping the hard work of ploughing and tilling, and the women that, or the harder labour of housekeeping and child rearing. In short, itineracy is not seen as a chosen way of life, but as an aberration of some sort. In fact, their very marginality to the established system is suspected to stem from a deliberate rejection of that system, and this offends the established members of sedentary societies. Accusations of vagrancy, lust for wandering, lack of stability and general purpose in life, restlessness and aimlessness plague all itinerant communities.

In addition, their superior knowledge of the world, acquired during extensive travels, is possibly seen to endow them with greater mental resources and a potential for greater manipulation of others. It is worth emphasising here that many of the above prejudices are not held so much by the local people, but by the local authorities.<sup>6</sup> In the Indian case, these would mean the British administration, the police establishment, the high caste sections and the village landlords.

More grievances were added to the standard list of charges against itinerants by

the Indian authorities: their lack of predictability of movements implied a potential lack of control; their shifting abodes meant shifting loyalties to different patrons, and so they were seen to be perennially disloyal; the impossibility of taxing them, or raising any kind of revenue out of them, unlike their sedentary counterparts was probably a major irritant to the administration.<sup>7</sup> In addition, for the keepers of social morality, their lack of visible social institutions implied complete disorder in their community life. Their lack of written codes of conduct, and absence of loudly articulated norms of morality implied absolute licentiousness.

At another level, there were more problems. This community had amongst its members acrobats, singers, dancers, tight rope walkers and fortune tellers. More and more, like their counterparts all over the world, street entertainment provided by them was seen to be a threat to public order. Since they always collected a large interested crowd around themselves – and were quite a large crowd by themselves – their presence made the local authorities nervous. The British administration was increasingly inclined to favour forms of recreation which could be supervised by themselves, and would not precipitate what they called 'disorderly and riotous behaviour' on part of the spectators.

It is worth mentioning here that in England, all laws relating to the gypsies were to protect the settled communities from itinerant ones and never the other way around [Mayall 1988:180]. Large-scale harassment of these communities by members of settled communities was a common feature in Europe, and there is evidence of this happening in Madras presidency as well.

It is worth pointing out at this juncture the ambivalences and contradictions in the attitude of sedentary communities to itinerant ones. These are symptomatic of the latter's simultaneous usefulness and marginality to the established systems they have to interact with.

It was, for instance, felt that these communities must be settled somewhere, but 'not near us, not here'. This is reminiscent of a similar ambivalence: 'they should visit our village, but should not stay too long'. Further, they were expected to become a part of the mainstream, but were expected also to be segregated from the main society while this was being done, so as not to corrupt it. They were, in fact, romanticised in imagination, especially in

English fiction and poetry in the case of the gypsies (ibid:87). This was for their independent spirit, their dark attractive looks (or bright clothes and jewellery as in the case of the Indian 'banjaras'), their supposed healthy outdoor life. In general, there was a lot of romance and adventure associated with their travels. However, when confronted in reality, there was fear and dread and they were shunned if not despised. In fact, a number of English ladies in their leisure time in India drew banjara men and women in a romanticised light while their law-making menfolk made them out to be ferocious criminals. (Banjaras were also declared criminal tribes by the British administration).<sup>8</sup>

So the important point is that the very nature of the relationship between these two different systems, and the gaps in knowledge of each others' real ways of living will lead to myth-making on both sides. Unfortunately, we know little about the myths that the itinerant people have about sedentary societies. At any rate, as far as sedentary societies are concerned, there is an overarching discomfort, a suspicion regarding itinerants which degenerates into seeing them as established criminals.

## II Yerukulas and the British

In the earlier section, some of the general prejudices about itinerant communities were discussed. This section looks into some specific additional charges against Yerukulas which existed in the minds of the British administrators, and which contributed substantially to their being labelled a criminal tribe. Interestingly, scattered in the official records themselves, there is information collected by the administration for other purposes, which contradicts these very charges. However, since the Yerukulas were an itinerant community, the administrators found it difficult to shake off some of the prejudices they carried with them regarding European gypsies, and seem to have simply superimposed some of these on the Indian counterparts. Moreover, the bulk of their own prejudices were shared by the high caste, landlord sections, on whom the administration relied for first hand knowledge of Indian society.

The most important of the accusations was that the Yerukulas as itinerants had an 'insatiable lust for wandering aimlessly'. It is important here to point out that their

wandering could not have been aimless – they always had fixed trade routes, depending on the demand for their wares; on the cycle of annual festivals and fairs; on the availability of raw material for making mats or baskets; and on the season in which the forest produce would be available, or stocks of grain, which they used for barter. Their movements also depended on the salt manufacturing cycle, an important item of their trade, or simply on availability of casual work which they did from time to time. Their routes and schedules of stopping and moving were fixed and cyclic.<sup>9</sup>

The second of the significant charges was that they were idle, lazy and not keen on hard work. Booth Tucker, the head of the Salvation Army in India wrote of them: “When we asked them to till the land, or work in a factory, they were shocked. Work? they said, we never work, we just sing and dance” [Tucker nd].

Now, if they did not work, neither they nor their trade, nor their crafts would have survived for so long. What was being discussed was not whether or not they worked, but the nature of their work. Their work was independent, not time bound and most important, was not *wage* work.

The third prejudice which had a long life was that of their lack of any social norms, especially regarding their women. Charges of looseness of character, and even prostitution were frequent, stemming from their polygamous practices. Buying and selling of females was another charge, with origins in brideprice which they paid at the time of marriages. The myth of their licentiousness had its roots in their unfamiliar social organisation (unfamiliar to the high caste sections) which included freedom in choosing of spouses, easy divorce, widow remarriage, and a marked absence of marriage of girls before puberty. Interestingly, however, this particular view about their immoral women prevailed with the British administrators as well, possibly because of the polygamy component. Ironically, one of the high caste commentators in 1948 held the Yerukulas up as the vision of Indian reformers. He stated that since their social norms were what the civilised Hindu society was aiming at through legislation, they should, in fact, “have been left alone” [Aiyappan 1948] (as far as attempts to civilise them were concerned).

The final and major charge that plagued the Yerukulas was that of their ostensible criminality. This had two aspects: one was

that they had always been criminals – all gypsies supposedly are – and secondly, that they had become dangerous criminals once they lost their earlier means of livelihood [Radhakrishna 1989:271-75].

As far as proof of the first aspect was concerned, their own alleged folklore was used. It was claimed that “when they asked their god Subramanya what profession they should follow, he handed them a house breaking implement!” [GoM 1926]. This was supposed to be convincing evidence of their committing thefts and robberies as a profession. In actual fact, crimes attributed to them by the police were seldom proven – this generated another minor myth of their slipperiness and nimble-fingeredness (*ibid*).

In the annual crime figures of Madras presidency, their proportion in the criminal population was always lower than their proportion in the total population. (In fact, sometimes a high caste category would account for a much higher proportion of total crime in relation to their proportion in the total population in the region) (*ibid*).

And lastly, the districts through which they regularly passed, or where they stopped for relatively longer periods, did not have a higher proportion of crime than other districts with which they had little contact.<sup>10</sup> Incidentally, when there were genuine crimes committed in areas where they stopped, it was admitted by the police themselves that it was the handiwork of local elements, who got more active whenever an itinerant community was around – these elements were merely using an existing view of itinerants to their advantage, knowing that the crime would be blamed on the itinerants.

However, the second part of this accusation – their *becoming* criminals because they lost their means of livelihood – is more important. This is because part of this assertion was true: they had lost their chief means of livelihood over a period of time. As mentioned earlier, they used to be salt and grain traders, taking salt from the coastal areas of the presidency into inland areas where wheel traffic could not reach, and bartering it for grain or forest produce. The loss of means of livelihood was correctly attributed to a network of roads and railways which had made their trading activities redundant.<sup>11</sup>

However, it is important to point out that salt was a very important source of revenue for the British administration in the 19th century, and the Yerukulas were at one time the only means of distributing

it in remote areas, where only ‘pack bullocks’ could reach [Radhakrishna 1989]. This is the reason why the British administration officially recognised this important aspect of their existence, viz, their salt trading activities. Similarly, they helped in averting famines in far flung areas, and that is why their grain trade was acknowledged.

The point, however, is that they were never only salt and grain traders. In fact, they did a number of other things apart from these two major activities. They were cattle breeders and traders; dealers in all kinds of forest and agricultural produce; were casual workers; made baskets, mats, brooms and brushes, and as mentioned earlier, were also acrobats, dancers, singers and fortune tellers. They certainly got marginalised drastically as a result of British policies, but they probably did not become criminals, certainly not as a community. They had too many other resources they could still fall back upon. In the Tamil speaking region, where they were called koravars, they continued to be called ‘inji’, ‘kal’ or ‘dabbai koravars’, depending on the work they still did.<sup>12</sup>

The point that is being made is that prejudices against itinerants formed a major strand that fed into the Criminal Tribes Act.

### III ‘Hereditary’ Criminal

The concept of crime and its causes had been changing all through the late 19th century, perhaps even earlier in Europe [Emsley 1987; Yang 1985; Jones 1982]. There was a strong school of thought, put forward by criminologists and scientists at one point, which held that crime was inherited over generations in a family through a set of genes [Stepan 1982].

In the Indian context, the concept of a ‘hereditary criminal class’ remained important and attractive for a long time. This was probably for the reason that this view allowed deflection of enquiries into the causes of crime, and allowed for stringent, arbitrary measures of control. The important point to emphasise here is that the investing of some sections with hereditary criminality was different in the case of India and England. In India it was based not on the notion of genetically transmitted crime, but on crime as a profession practised by a ‘hereditary criminal caste’. Like a carpenter would pass on his trade to the next generation, hereditary criminal caste

## IV 'Criminal' Tribes

Yerukulas were declared a criminal community under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1911. Before going into the substantive part of this section, which discusses a criminal tribe settlement called Stuartpuram, it is important to briefly point out a few salient features of the Criminal Tribes Act, and the way it operated in general.

Firstly, before a community was declared a criminal tribe, 'respectable members' of a village were consulted, who were invariably either headmen, or high caste sections, or landlords; often these categories overlapped. The notified criminal tribe members had to take the permission of the headman before they could enter or leave a village. There is evidence that these headmen-cum-landlords used the act to extract free labour from the criminal tribe members before they allowed an itinerant community to pass through the village.<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, one of the provisions required the notified criminal tribe members to report to the nearest police station to register their attendance twice a night. These powers were used by the subordinate police for extortions and harassment so widely that it caused some administrative concern [Baird nd].

Thirdly, criminal tribe members were forced to work in mills, factories, mines, quarries and plantations by the police administration as a part of relieving their own vigilance duties, and handing over to the employers extraordinary powers of control under the Criminal Tribes Act. Under this, even ordinary workers could be declared criminal tribes in case their work performance was not satisfactory, and in fact in crucial ways this act also effectively replaced the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act, especially on the plantations. As far as this particular use of the Criminal Tribes Act was concerned, any low caste, vulnerable section of the people could be declared a criminal tribe and forced to work in an enterprise; any persons including a manager of an enterprise could be made responsible for their control, and any site, including an enterprise could be declared a criminal tribe settlement [Radhakrishna 1989].

And lastly, a section of those declared criminal could be interned into special settlements set up under one of the provisions of the Criminal Tribes Act. Stuartpuram settlement in Guntur district was one such settlement, and it is here that

members would pass on this profession to their offspring [quoted in Nigam 1990]. In England, a hereditary criminal implied one who had inherited criminality through the genes of a parent or an ancestor.

In India, then, the concept of hereditary crime never really got linked to biological determinism. This happened not because of genuine advance in the field of genetics, but because the Indian caste system seemed to adequately explain to the British administrator the phenomenon of daunting criminality of at least a section of Indians.

By the end of the 19th century, however, it was not the hereditary criminal that the British Indian administrators were looking for any more. Now they were looking for a criminal with more 'scientific' reasons for being one. Clearly, there was a genuine need in these circles to find an explanation for criminality of such large numbers of people in society. By calling the trait hereditary, the problem was rendered not amenable to resolution or intervention. A genuine social cause had to be identified and dealt with efficiently.

It was in the context of this search that in the first decade of this century, policies followed by the British Indian administration 50 years ago were blamed for destroying the traditional means of livelihood of a number of communities [Radhakrishna 1989:271-75]. Commission of crime was now directly related to lack of means of livelihood, and non-availability of work. (Even in England, lack of 'ostensible means of livelihood' made a person qualify as a potential criminal by now.) This further implied that if honest (wage) work could be found for such communities, they could be weaned away from crime.<sup>13</sup>

And this is how the concept of criminality got linked to a secular cause like loss of livelihood by certain communities due to a set of colonial policies, discussed in the last section.

It is worth pointing out here that there was the additional input into notions of criminality by the then developing discipline of Indian anthropology as well. This discipline addressed itself to the study of particular sections of the Indian population, mostly indigenous 'tribal' communities and itinerant groups, and contributed in a very substantial way to the conceptual outline of a criminal in the popular mind. By focusing on bizarre or exotic ritual aspects of the social lives of such communities, and at the same time also on their differential anthropometric measurements, the discipline managed to draw the fine

line between a civilised and barbaric individual. In the popular ethnographic literature of the period, a sketch was drawn of a criminal who possessed not just bizarre social customs, but a strange body and psyche as well, 'which had criminality written all over'.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to mention that the Salvation Army also considerably helped public perception of the criminality of groups with which they worked. In fact over a period of time they were able to define with some authority, for administrations all over the world what constituted criminality, and in different social contexts, even pointed out who these criminals were – paupers in England, tribals or gypsies in India, aborigines in Australia, New Zealand or North America and so on. Salvation Army had been working with released prisoners in India a few years before the Criminal Tribes Act was instituted, and this organisation was taken very seriously by the government – its officials had evolved categories of criminals like incorrigible, habitual, hereditary, ordinary, worst character, would be good, won't be good, badmash, nekmash and so on in what they called 'crimdom', and differential treatment was suggested for varying degrees of Indian criminality in a potential 'curem'. The treatment had to be punitive, deterrent, preventative (sic) or curative [Tucker nd:4].

In any case, the general point to emphasise here is that the category of a criminal tribe was not a sudden development – different stands of social and political opinions and considerations had been shaping the general category of an Indian 'criminal' for several decades. The complexity of these converging currents has not been explored here. A criminal could, for instance, be anyone who resisted the British, or even resisted a local oppressive landlord or high caste member. In addition, the plethora of new legislations that the British introduced created new 'criminals' all the time. These were either people ignorant of the new laws, or those wilfully defiant of the ones which encroached on their traditional rights – for instance, forest laws. To give an example of the broadness and flexibility of the term 'criminal', and the open ended uses to which the Criminal Tribes Act could be put, it was suggested that the act could be used profitably "for combating secret societies, political preachers who might create unrest and so on" – in other words to combat the newly emerging nationalist movement.<sup>15</sup>

about 6,000 Yerukulas lived for several decades from 1913 onwards. The settlement was named after Harold Stuart, the moving force behind settlements in general, and a senior government official at that time, in charge of the police. The spirit behind these settlements, thus, can be imagined to be punitive, rather than reformative, contrary to the claims by the administration till much later.

In the 1910s, when the criminal tribe settlements were established in Madras presidency, itinerant communities were singled out for settling by policy. The official directive was that “worst characters, especially wandering gangs” must be settled.<sup>17</sup> The Salvation Army was entrusted with itinerant communities, and sedentary criminals were to be the responsibility of the police.<sup>18</sup> Stuartpuram settlement, then, became the literal ‘site’ where the British administration and the Salvation Army together decided to have what they called an ‘experiment in criminology’. Since the Salvation Army was responsible for a number of settlements and was, in fact, the main organisation working with the supposed criminal communities in India, it is appropriate to mention a few details about this organisation, and why it would be attractive to the British administration.

Salvation Army identified itself aggressively with the imperial aims of England of the time. Born in the 1870s, the heyday of British imperialism, it not only called itself the *Salvation Army*, it cashed on the popular image of romanticised imperialism by adopting marches, flags, brass bands and uniforms for its employees. Their head was called ‘General’ Booth, they had officers who signed ‘articles of war’, their newspaper was called *The War Cry*. They had open air ‘bombardments’, not meetings. They would not say that they were going to start work in a new region, but ‘occupy a new territory’, and ‘declare war’ (on ungodliness or whatever) [Parsons 1988]. In short, the Salvation Army was a shadow imperial body – self-consciously so – and absolutely identified itself with the aims and projects of England of the time.

General Booth had envisaged for the English poor, what he called city colonies and farm colonies.<sup>19</sup> For the Indian criminal, however, he decided on ‘settlements’. Of course, in this case, this imperial term took on a new meaning – the itinerant communities were to be settled down as opposed to being allowed to wander aimlessly.

Stuartpuram settlement was meant to be a settlement for well behaved, reformed and non-criminal members drawn from another criminal settlement, Sitanagaram, also located in Guntur.<sup>20</sup> However, when the Salvation Army was given land in Guntur to set up this settlement, there were a number of protests, posed in different ways. The landlord sections were particularly infuriated, and charged that CT members escaped at night from the settlement and committed crime. Thus, this settlement was also declared to be a criminal settlement, and a substantial increase in the police force was sanctioned in the area, to intensify patrolling.<sup>21</sup>

Stuartpuram settlement was initially planned as an agricultural settlement: 500 acres of sandy land and 1,000 acres of swamp land were handed over to the Salvation Army by the government, free of assessment. However, for a number of reasons, the plans failed. Essentially, the land was of very poor quality, and the implements of agriculture primitive. Moreover, the Yerukulas were not keen on tilling the land, and made unenthusiastic agriculturists.

Following is an excerpt from a settlement manager’s poetic account of his experiences with making unwilling settlers work on land:

The Salvation Army found it very tedious to convert them into good cultivators industrious

To work on land they were forced and could not be induced

Though driven like a flock of sheep, the first crop failed... No crowbars, no proper spade and no physical strength

So work turned out did not reach the desired length.<sup>22</sup>

Again,

In the beginning, I had recourse to a stick,

I was glad, as it brought the desired result quick [Achariar 1926].

Most important, there was fierce opposition by the landlords in the area, who objected to the very concept of low caste communities being given land, in addition to their fear that paddy land, when suitably irrigated, was very valuable.<sup>23</sup> It was revealed that “the monied folk of Bapatla [had] counted...on buying the swamp land at cheap rates and rack renting the actual cultivator whenever a crop could be raised”.<sup>24</sup> This plan was unwittingly foiled by the administration by parcelling out large tracts of land to the Salvation Army. The protest by the landlords was also in

a large measure due to their anxiety about losing the services of Yerukulas as agricultural workers on their own land.<sup>25</sup>

All this opposition took place in the era when landlords were important political allies of the British administration, and on balance, the administration decided not to alienate the landlord/headmen sections any further. Irrigation facilities – plans to make available water from the Krishna river to the settlement – were withheld, and alternative means of supporting the settlement had to be now seriously considered.

It was at this juncture, that the Indian Leaf Tobacco Company (ILTD), (a later branch of the Indian Tobacco Company (ITC)) began to be discussed within the administration and the Salvation Army circles, as possible alternative employers. The ILTD had existed in Guntur district since 1908 in order to procure local tobacco, as the leaf wing of British American Tobacco Company and Peninsular Company. By 1925, the factory was said to have employed half of the total adult population of the settlement.<sup>26</sup> Essentially, according to government policy, once infrastructure for the settlement had been provided by the government, the settlements were to be self-supporting. Once income from land was found to be not enough, gradually the settlement became dependent on the factory for the employment of the settlers.<sup>27</sup> The Salvation Army had no other means of finding employment for their charges.

The company’s initial contact with the Stuartpuram settlers seems to have been through the mats made by the Yerukula women. The mats and baskets were, in fact, an essential part of the manufacturing process at the factory, and the Salvation Army was the medium through which the sales took place to the ILTD. Slowly, women came to be employed in the factory as regular wage workers, while the men continued to work fruitlessly on land. The financial situation of the settlement was quite stable for a few years after the women settlers from Stuartpuram began work in the ILTD factory. The ILTD management, the Salvation Army and the administration seemed optimistic about the future progress of the settlement.

In the late 1920s, a process set itself in motion which changed the balance of forces further in favour of the ILTD and the Salvation Army. This was in the form of availability of more men workers from the settlement for factory work, and more powers of control for the Salvation Army on settlement land.

In 1928, 'natural flow' – fresh water – under the sandy soil was discovered and found to be effective to raise paddy. Water beneath the surface of the sandy soil of the settlement's agricultural land was not brackish as had been believed all along. This revived the interest of the settlers in cultivation.<sup>28</sup> In the same year, the settlers petitioned the government about being given permanent 'pattas' as had been promised.<sup>29</sup> Salvation Army was firmly opposed to the plan of transferring land to the settlers, and wrote to the officials to this effect.<sup>30</sup> What had happened was that the land had risen enormously in price. "The place prospered so much that it had its own railway station and villages sprang up like a wild west town after a gold strike" [Watson 1964:145].

The petition by the settlers had been pending for five years before it was turned down on a number of administrative grounds (resurvey of land will have to be done, more village officers will have to be recruited and so on). The most important official argument, however, was that the concept of permanent pattas was inconsistent with the running of the place as a reformatory settlement.<sup>31</sup> (Settlers were supposed to leave the settlement after their reformation had been achieved, to make place for new criminals.)

Essentially, there had been ominous signs shown by the settlers. There was an indication that the settlers had been found to be not totally without resistance to the policies of the Salvation Army, and had in fact organised themselves into a cooperative society.<sup>32</sup> Members of this society were now preparing to invest their own funds in digging an irrigation channel to improve the land, so that the fruit of the land would then legitimately be theirs, and not appropriated by the Salvation Army.<sup>33</sup>

The response of the Salvation Army was to discharge a large number of settlers from the provisions of the Criminal Tribes Act, and thus from the settlement itself, and transfer them to a new area called the New Colony near the ILTD factory premises. The official requirement of a means of livelihood, before a settler could be discharged from the settlement, was met by finding them employment in this factory.

This plan was fully supported and, in fact, financed by the government. Building a new colony involved digging wells, building huts, and providing other infrastructure, and this was done in great hurry just before the start of the tobacco processing season in 1935, so that the discharged

settlers could be immediately employed in the factory. Taking advantage of the situation at this juncture, the ILTD management decided to expand its operations at Chirala.

The problem of men, hitherto tenants of the Salvation Army, had to be sorted out: these men had to be found work in a factory where work processes had been designed to employ mainly women. But there had been a strike by the 3,000 seasonal workers in 1932,<sup>34</sup> and the ILTD had since then been looking out for a more pliable workforce.

In 1933, the manager of the ILTD, Chirala, wrote to the chief inspector of factories, requesting him to exempt the workers in the factory from the provisions of the Factories Act, as the factory needed to work for 12 hours a day, and 66 hours a week.<sup>35</sup> The case made out was on the basis of the nature of the processes themselves. The fact which convinced the administration, however, in favour of the exemption of ILTD from crucial sections of the Factories Act was that "machine room operatives were drawn mostly from Stuartpuram settlement,...maintained by public funds" (ibid). The manager of the settlement, a Salvation Army official, had written to the ILTD management, urging that the provisions of the Act should be relaxed to enable the men settlers to work as long hours as possible. The "concession", according to him, if granted, would benefit the administration of the settlement and indirectly make the task of control of criminal tribe settlers easier and cheaper for the government (ibid).

This plea to the ILTD company, in fact, was not inconsistent with the fact that the Salvation Army wanted to discharge as many settlers from the Stuartpuram land as possible and work had to be found for them in order to make out a case with the government for discharging them. These settlers were soon after, in 1935, discharged and transferred to the new colony near the factory on the grounds that "to walk 3½ miles in the morning for work is not conducive to efficiency".<sup>36</sup>

The exemption applied for was to section 21 (rest periods in factories), section 22 (weekly holidays), section 27 (limiting of working hours per week), and section 28 (limiting of working hours per day). The exemption which was granted was to sections 27 and 28. It applied to all machine operatives in all tobacco handling and redrying factories.<sup>37</sup> In this way, Yerukulas were used as an instrument in a major modification of the law,

which was to now cover not just machine room workers from this community in the ILTD factory, but all machine room workers in all tobacco factories in the presidency.

By the beginning of 1935, every available man and woman from Stuartpuram was in the employment of ILTD. ILTD, as a result of the new exemptions, was now working double shifts, from 5 am to 1 am the next morning, except on Sundays.<sup>38</sup> The factory manager was reported to have given the government very good accounts of the Yerukula workers. On the whole, these workers were found to be thoroughly satisfactory by the ILTD.<sup>39</sup> They found regular work in the factory for ten months in a year – a pattern which was to continue for many years.

## V Rewriting a Culture

Stuartpuram became a large settlement in terms of numbers as whole communities – not individuals – were put in at a time. After all, the Criminal Tribes Act was meant to work with the concept of whole communities. In fact, even the Salvation Army said they were embarrassed by what they called "this rain of riches". (They explained this phrase to an intrigued government official: "To others, these criminals may hardly appear in the light of riches, but to us each bears the image and supersubscription of the Divine Mint".)

This large settlement needed extensive police presence outside to prevent escapes, and inside, the Salvation Army took an attendance up to five times a day, including nights [Radhakrishna 1992]. There was strict punctuality and discipline for both children and adults and a system of fines and even corporal punishment to deter disorderly behaviour. There were, incidentally, virtually no outsiders allowed into the settlement for scrutiny, and enquiry committees could enter it only in the 1940s, when the nationalists took up this issue seriously.

Stuartpuram settlement, as described earlier, was meant to be an agricultural settlement. Though the official rationale was that it should be so because "agriculture was the natural profession of all Indians", what comes through clearly in the records is the deep anxiety the British administration had for reclamation of waste land, forest land and swamp land. In fact, land reclamation was synonymous with reclamation of criminal souls. Once cultivable, the land could start paying revenue.

A large tract of waste land was given to the Salvation Army for cultivation by the Yerukulas. This needed some reorganising of the community's social and cultural priorities.

Drastic transformation in the lives of the Yerukulas followed. Most important, of course, was the fact that the itinerant mode of existence was suddenly replaced by a forced settled life. The Salvation Army divided the community into families, which were now the new operational social and economic unit – each family was given a small piece of land, which it was responsible for cultivating, or else punishment followed.<sup>40</sup> The family was further broken up by removing the children to another part of the settlement. The Salvation Army felt that the 'rising generation' should be kept away from their wicked parents, and brought up in a more wholesome atmosphere. Separate schools and dormitories were established for these children, and they were allowed to meet their parents only on Sundays during church activities. The two components of criminals' reformation were moral education, and work. The Salvation Army concentrated on the children for moral education, and on the adult men for work.

Here it is important to emphasise that the Salvation Army did not normally prepare women for wage work in any of its settlements – ideally, they were to be trained in feminine virtues and were expected to sew, embroider and cook for their families.

Recent work on Africa shows that missions in general expected women to remain in domestic surroundings and men to earn a wage outside. In fact, in the mid-19th century, regarding women, a general mission slogan was "improve the wives of the poor and servants of the rich" [Gaitskell 1994:121]. Meaning that if at all women must work outside, they must again be domestic workers and continue to cook, sew and mind children in their employers' homes.

Coming back to the Stuartpuram settlement, a new division of labour within the family was devised and appropriate gender roles defined. In fact, mat making, which was a traditional activity of both men and women of the Yerukula community, was now handed over exclusively to women, to be combined with other indoor activities.<sup>41</sup> Men now ploughed and tilled the waste land, albeit unsuccessfully.

There were myriad ways in which true women were fashioned out of what the Salvation Army called "thievish raw

material". For instance, they were taught to pay attention to their appearances. The Salvation Army even held periodic parades of the "most neatly dressed women" (and gave the winners a prize of one rupee each).<sup>42</sup> The women would also not be allowed to go outside the settlement on a pass if they looked like "so many vagrants". The 'before' and 'after' photographs of women in the Salvation Army records show the 'after' version with a completely changed Hinduised appearance, complete with neatly tied saris, oiled hair with flowers and vermillion marks on their foreheads.

Anyway, after more than a decade of such remoulding, something happened: these newly domesticated women were required to work outside their homes for a wage as the land was found unable to support the families. As already mentioned earlier, the government expected the Salvation Army to make the settlements under their care completely self-supporting once the initial infrastructure had been paid for. Now that there was a severe financial crisis, these women were persuaded or forced in hundreds to go and work in the newly established tobacco factory several miles away.

The Salvation Army had so far been systematically inculcating in them an indoor culture of house keeping and child rearing. Now they were expected to walk a distance of seven miles every day, spend a total of 12 hours outside their homes, earning a wage. In fact, the Salvation Army even asked the government to provide creches for the infants and toddlers in the settlement, so that young mothers could go as well. For the next 10-12 years, the women alone earned as much as 80 per cent of the entire settlement income.<sup>43</sup>

Ironically, while women were the principal earners in their families, the Salvation Army consolidated the new moral code for them. Unable any more to scrutinise their activities, unable also to adhere to the notion of them as dependent wives, the Salvation Army began to take on a more active role in their personal, marital affairs. This was done in order partly to keep their own control and partly to make sure that economic independence did not confound gender identities, as it had gender roles.

Women used to have the freedom to choose their spouses – the Salvation Army now granted permissions for marrying. The Salvation Army officials had always been votaries of proper match-making in

the settlements, now they became urgently active on the issue. They wrote to the government wanting "a voice in the choice of spouses"<sup>44</sup> and got it. They were finding to their alarm that bride price, something they had been trying to suppress as it meant mere selling of females, now rose steeply (sometimes as much as Rs 500).<sup>45</sup> The Salvation Army substituted it with dowry, which they gave themselves. It always consisted of saris and vessels for the bride – true symbols of lost domesticity. (Incidentally, in other settlements in the north, the Salvation Army used to insist that the man be able to support his wife before letting them marry – they had to give up that condition here, which they did quite cheerfully.) They also forbade completely what they called "desertions" by women of their husbands. So ironically, the women lost their autonomy in marital affairs at a time when they were the principal contributors to the family income.

It is important to mention here that the ILTD Company where the women worked supported the Salvation Army on the severe discipline in the settlement, and their active role in the women's family affairs. In fact, at a later point in time, the ILTD management became quite active itself on the second issue. The discipline – strict punctuality, orderly behaviour and a system of harsh punishments – resonated well with factory life. On the whole, the ILTD management found that these workers were "less troublesome" than others, and much more pliable.<sup>46</sup> The Salvation Army's insistence on an irrevocable form of marriage worked in the company's favour as well because they could continue to pay a family wage which was much lower than the sum paid to an individual man and woman.

As a result of the special exemption from the Factories Act that the government granted to the ILTD, whole families from the settlement had come to be employed in the factory from the 1930s. The men were now working up to 20 hours a day in different shifts.

The ILTD, then, had a new interest in keeping families together at the settlement. I came across at least three petitions by Yerukula men in the company records, where the management was requested to intervene and help them in getting their wives to stay with them. The ILTD obliged in all three cases by threatening the women with loss of their jobs in case they divorced their husbands. Interestingly, I did not see any similar petitions by women.

## VI 'Historic Memory'

So far, the earlier sections have, in effect, dealt with colonial construction of the Yerukulas' criminality, and the later ones with some of the ways in which their real daily lives were lived out decades ago. It is within this dual context that I am going to try and locate this community's current perception of its own past history.

About 10 years ago, I met the descendants of the Yerukulas in question, still living in Stuartpuram settlement and working with the very same tobacco factory, the ILTD. When I met them, they were about to be retrenched in thousands, because the factory was going to have a mechanised plant to do the work that these workers had been doing manually. Stuartpuram, of course, was officially not called a criminal tribes settlement any more, and the community, Yerukulas, were not criminal tribes anymore – after independence, the Criminal Tribes Act, under which they had been notified by the colonial administration, had been repealed. Salvation Army, now a much depleted organisation both as far as its authority and number of personnel were concerned, was still operating there with a hospital, a school and other welfare activities.

I spent a long time with the community, both men and women talking about their work in the tobacco factory, the various strikes they had conducted to protest against the mechanisation and so on. The workers were articulate, and talked a great deal about their experience with ILTD and were quite emphatic about the unfavourable partisan role of the Salvation Army in their struggle with the company. They also freely expressed their views on the factory management's mechanisation plans which would now make them redundant.

During my stay at the settlement, I noticed that in their leisure time the children and the adults would sing. Sometimes after the day's work, they would gather together and tell each other long tales with much enthusiasm. Slowly I learnt that the stories they told so often were different sagas of how their forefathers were dangerous criminals; how the Salvation Army had worked tirelessly and selflessly for them for decades; how the tobacco factory had weaned their forefathers away from an earlier life of crime, by giving them employment and so on. Their songs, I found, were those taught by the Salvation Army in praise of Christ.

I wondered how this had happened. When they were so clear about their present destiny, and relationship vis-a-vis the Salvation Army and the ILTD, why were their narratives and songs in such a different tone as far as their past was concerned? I knew by then from official records that this community had been an itinerant one for generations before they were interned in this settlement – in fact, the village community around the settlement remembered their salt and grain trade, and other activities. However, there were no traces of this relatively recent past etched on their memories in any form. There were no songs or folklore, which in any way reflected links with their earlier itinerant life, or their earlier work. Their stout denial of an itinerant past intrigued me as much as their assertions of an earlier dangerous criminality – and I could not understand this phenomenon till quite recently, when I stumbled upon some official publications of the Salvation Army.

Since I am discussing a community here which was unlettered, and has not left behind any written records, its own folklore (as also folklore about it) becomes an extremely important source of data to understand a whole range of issues. It also becomes very crucial to pose some of the following questions: whether the components of this folklore originated from inside the community, by and large, or from outside; if the latter, then was it an involuntary, 'natural' or gradual transformation/assimilation of versions of their past, or were some of these consciously or 'artificially' introduced; whether the folklore of the community, in however small a way, is a positive reading of its own past, or does the new version/s undermine its confidence or resources to fight its disabilities of the *present*; have stories or tales about a community, which pass off as its history with outsiders, become a part of the community's own historic memory? And equally, whether subsequent generations of that community keep these narratives alive by making such versions a part of their own oral tradition.

Reproduced here is a poem, which appeared in the Salvation Army newspaper, *The War Cry* (February 1916). It was called – 'The Crim as we find him in the Telegu country'. It appeared in 1916, a few years after Stuartpuram settlement had been established. It stands by itself, has no explanation or prose narrative to go with it, and is written by a Major Anandham, a non-Indian Salvation Army

officer. (The Salvation Army officials always took local names, but never from the 'criminal' communities with which they worked.) Parts of this poem are reproduced here:

Come listen to me for a moment or more,  
For I am a 'crim', yes, I am a 'crim';  
There are records against me, yes, more  
than a score,  
I belong to the criminal kind.

I live most by plundering other men's  
goods,  
For I am a 'crim', yes I am a 'crim';  
My home is in the jungle way off in the  
woods,  
Oh, I am of the criminal kind.

I watch out for travellers 'long lonely  
bye roads,  
Oh, I am a 'crim', yes I am a 'crim';  
And many a 'hold up' I've done on the  
road,  
That's the life of the criminal kind...

Away to the jungle and off to the fair,  
I'm only a 'crim', I'm only a 'crim',

There is booty and plenty awaiting me  
there,

I belong to the criminal kind.

The reader would have noticed that there is first person address used here – the 'I' dominating the narrative. The Salvation Army muse here is putting forward the supposed point of view of the Yerukulas, but from the point of view of an individual.

Coming to the second edition of the poem which is written about a decade later, it is found to be much edited, changed and added to. It appears in a book of over 300 pages, written for an international audience by Booth Tucker, now the head of Salvation Army. The book in which it appears is called *Mukti Fauj or Forty Years with the Salvation Army in India*.<sup>47</sup> It is a part of a chapter called 'Criminocurology', and has a long prose narrative before and after. The content of this narrative is almost entirely the unfolding of a success story that Booth Tucker has to tell.

The interesting point about the location of this poem is that it is surrounded with prose which has important details. Here there is discussion of the tremendous resistance that the Yerukulas offered to their sedentarisation, to conversion to Christianity, or work on land or in factories. The poem, however, is quite beatific and ecstatic in tone, as if the Salvation Army just came and conquered. Perhaps the problems could now be talked about, once it is a success story, a story with a



happy ending. But still, lack of any resistances in the poem is interesting as this poem, in all essential particulars, represented the myth which the Yerukulas accepted; the resistance which actually took place on the ground was never a part of the myth.

Reproduced here are parts of the poem which are newly added to the earlier version, most likely not by the original author but some more senior bard in the Salvation Army.

I've oft been to prison and tasted their fare,

For I am a Crim, yes, I am a Crim!  
Learned more of my business profession  
while there,  
Seeing mine is a criminal mind.

And when I get out into freedom again,  
I, who am a Crim, I, who am a Crim!  
I fool the police, with their cleverest men,  
Oh, I'm of the criminal kind!

The longer I follow, the more I delight,  
In this life of a Crim, this life of a Crim!  
To rob and to plunder, by day and by night,  
This life of a criminal kind.

Here the criminal is shown to be a worse one than in the original version – he fools the police with his cleverness, he even learns new tricks of the trade in prison, and in fact is also sadistic about his pursuit of crime – “the longer I follow, the more I delight”.

This is an important development – the criminal is now shown to be much more dangerous in retrospect, though he has in fact been steadily reforming for the last decade in the settlement. At one level it is understandable – the Salvation Army has to show its international audience how unpromising the initial raw material was, to heighten the fact of their success with them. Alternatively, may be the settlers seemed more criminal as they were actively resisting the Salvation Army when this poem was being rewritten. But in real terms, the new version was an improvement on the earlier one.

In the second edition of the poem, there is an actual break in the narrative when the Salvation Army enters the picture, both symbolically and literally. This break, separating the earlier and later lives of the criminals, is achieved on paper by the device of having the old and the new sections separated by astericks and it is the newly added section which heralds the new man. It is interesting that this break, symbolic and literal, was absent in the earlier poem written a decade ago and in some ways shows that even the Salvation Army was aware of the rupture that took

place in the interim period, as far as the Yerukulas' past and present was concerned. Thus goes the new section:

The Salvation Army now comes to our aid;

With work for the Crim – yes, work for the Crim!

And for us a pathway to Heaven has made,  
For Tribes of the criminal kind...

They give us an offer of work we accept  
'Tis work for the Crim – yes, work for the Crim;

And soon at our task we become quite adept,  
We tribes of the criminal kind...

At last we wake up to the fact, and the thought,

“I'm no longer a Crim! I'm no longer a Crim!!

I'm living by industry, honestly wrought,  
And have changed from the criminal mind!”

The reader will note here that the ‘I’ of the earlier poem has changed to ‘we’: there has been great progress made in the intervening years. In fact, the ‘we’ now includes not only the whole community of say, the Telegu country, but “we, tribes of the criminal kind”. (There were at least 3-4 million criminal tribe members in India.) The poem, in fact, is no longer called The Crim as we find him in the Telegu country, but simply, The Crim.

Moreover, the ‘we’ of the poem now includes not just those who have been reformed but includes the Salvation Army as well:

So all hands to work, through the storm,  
or the calm –

We will rescue the Crim, we will rescue the Crim –

And rid this fair land from a menace and harm,

The tribes of the criminal kind.

There is not only distancing of the reformed ones from the unreformed ones, there is now total identification the reformed members feel with the projects and plans of the Salvation Army for all Indian criminal tribe members. The newly reformed man is grateful that the Salvation Army has given him an opportunity to work honestly, and give up a life of crime.

This is quite interesting, as when I had spoken to the Yerukulas in the 1980s, I found that the content of the two poems is exactly that they also believed: We were dangerous criminals, the Salvation Army came along, gave us work, and we were reformed.

One can speculate on what happened.

Did they really mean what they said? Were their own stories believed by them? Where were their earlier tales? Why is their present memory devoid of their past? There are several possibilities.

Firstly, the Yerukulas of 1980s do not have any stakes in their past, so they are not going to intervene in versions of that past; their energies are better deployed in fighting for their present, which they were doing. (As mentioned in an earlier section, they were actively engaged in fighting their retrenchment from the ILTD factory in thousands.) Perhaps their emphasis on past criminality is to bring to others' notice their present non-criminality – a sign that they are still not free of the stigma of criminality by communities around them. It is also possible that talking about their past dangerous criminality, their ability once to ‘hold up’ those in power and terrorise them, gives them a sense of power today: ‘We were also powerful once’ – a sign of their powerlessness in the present. Another possibility is that this is myth-making of their own. Belief in their earlier criminality rationalises their current situation of vulnerability and poverty: ‘Because we were criminals in the past, we deserve our present miserable fate’. There is also a touch of both defiance and relief in their loud assertions of past criminality: ‘No one can harm us at least today’. And finally, may be by resigning themselves to this version of their history they will be left in peace by the Salvation Army, or the ILTD, or whoever might challenge an alternative memory of their history.

These were some possible explanations as far as their assertions of past criminality are concerned. About their inability or refusal to remember their itinerant past, it is probably an expression of their discontent with that way of life. As discussed earlier in the paper, they were becoming increasingly marginalised, and begun to be dispensable to the local communities. Even before the Criminal Tribes Act was formally instituted, at least two or three decades before that, they had become vulnerable to police harassment and extortions. Perhaps they finally found peace once they were sedentarised, though it was not in a criminal tribe settlement they would have liked to become sedentary.

These are mere speculations. The explanation for this collective denial of a collective history, and blanking out of collective memory of their folklore reflecting an earlier life, is probably a combination of all these but around one major fact: there

was a severe rupture in the continuity of their lives once they came to the settlement. Folklore and songs and tales can only survive in a lived community life, and one with some continuity, however flimsy, with an earlier life. Under the Salvation Army, in a criminal tribe settlement, the community life was totally broken up and their forced transformation into disciplined wage workers took a toll of their cultural resources.

To repeat here some of what was discussed in an earlier section, firstly and most importantly, from being considered useful if not honourable people, they were officially declared predators on the larger society. Then, their itinerant mode of existence was replaced by settled life. The community as a unit was broken into families, which were now the operational social and economic units. The men's trading activities were replaced by forced work on land and later in the tobacco factory, and the women first forcibly confined to the home, and then forced to become factory workers. Their earlier social practises were considered barbaric and substituted with ones more acceptable to Victorian and brahminical notions of respectability; the women lost their relative egalitarian position in the community, and became increasingly subordinated to men.

Moreover, their children were taken away from them – who could they tell tales to, or sing songs to? It was a fractured community life, with broken bonds and ties. The settlement discipline allowed no meetings larger than six people at a time, except under the Salvation Army eyes. In any case, there could not be the leisure for telling of tales or singing of songs – both the men and the women worked up to 16 hours a day.

In other words, there were several convulsions of engineered and sudden change in the continuity of their lives, and breaches with the immediate past. What remained of a community was more a confederacy, created by the punitive discipline and the application of the Criminal Tribes Act. The social and cultural resources, gathered over generations were probably irreparably destroyed with the violence of change that each of the breaches implied. The system of relationships and other social balances that communities evolve to sustain themselves seem to have been wiped out in this particular case because of a lack of continuity between the present and the past. Ironically, it was not until both men and women began work in the tobacco factory that some semblance of a collective or community identity began to emerge again,

because of a shared environment, however restrictive. By then, however, it appears that their past history had already been rewritten in their memories.

There is a clue to the gradual way in which a rupture from their past took place. Their real lived experience, once they were beginning to be labelled criminals, was at complete variance with their earlier existence as legitimate traders. There was the Salvation Army inside the settlement, and if they managed to escape, the police outside. In fact, the police were a major constituent of their new psyche, as the possibility of a life outside the settlement, if they managed to escape, was clouded with their ubiquitous presence.

They hunted me, haunted me, hounded me ever,

I was a 'crim', they said I was a 'crim';  
And my honest intentions were scorned  
all the more,

I was branded the criminal kind.

So I gave up my struggle and thought  
it my lot,

For I was a 'crim', yes, I was a crim,  
With the rest of my fellows, the Sircar  
I fought,

Being marked as the criminal tribe.

The rupture is also expressed in a telling manner in the following two instances that Booth Tucker told his international audience in an amused manner, fully aware that absconding from the settlement spelt terror for the settlers: "One of our women officers was conducting a meeting amongst a number of tribesmen. She had been speaking to them...about the necessity of resisting the temptations of Satan. "Who is your greatest enemy?" she asked. "The Police". "But, I mean, your spiritual enemy, the enemy of your souls." They persisted, however, in repeating the answer. The officer was forced to change the subject and had to give them a chorus to sing instead [Tucker nd:13].

Recounting another instance, he recalled that a Salvation Army officer asked his Yerukula pupils, "I have a friend that's evernear – neverfear. What does that mean?" "Don't be afraid of the police, god will look after you", came the prompt reply (ibid).

But the most poignant is the way, before the rupture became complete, their prayers changed which used to be for the peace of their dead and the health of their children:

"Spirits of our fathers, help us. Save us from the government and shut the mouths of the police" (ibid:12).

So this was the mental soil on which so

powerful a myth, so convincing a version of another history could be sown. The important point to emphasise here is that the Salvation Army had consciously spun it, improved upon it, and intended to plant it years before it was actually made their own by members of the Yerukula community. As indicated earlier, there was resistance on the ground to the components of this version while it was being spun.<sup>48</sup> Now being passed on to new generations, this new history faces no such resistance.

Ironically, the official records of the British administration, the ILTD factory, and the Salvation Army contradict much of what the Yerukulas believe today. These sources not only grant the Yerukulas an 'honourable' past, they speak of the resistance that the community offered to forces which challenged the legitimacy of its existence at various stages. Equally ironically, it is the *official* sources which acknowledge the lack of any real basis for branding the community a criminal one. The *oral* traditions of the community, which are supposed to 'recover' an 'authentic' past, reconstruct over and over again the criminal that the larger society had once invented, by passing on a constructed version of their history to their children and grandchildren. This version, as the paper attempts to show, did not originate out of the way their actual lives were lived, but was purposefully introduced into the oral culture of the community about seven decades ago.

It will be appropriate to end with what the 'Crim' in the 1920s were meant to be thinking of themselves and their situation from the point of view of the Salvation Army:

Now (work) is our watchword, from day unto day,

There is hope for the Crim; there is hope for the Crim,

*We wipe from our minds our sad record away,*

We tribes of the criminal kind, (emphasis added). [27]

## Notes

[Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, School of Oriental and African Studies, Oxford and Cambridge. I am grateful to the participants of these seminars for very useful discussions and comments. Issues raised in this paper have been discussed with a large number of other scholars and friends, some of whom have decisively moulded the final shape. I thank all of them. All the Government Orders (GOs) were consulted at Tamil Nadu Archives and Andhra Pradesh Archives. The Salvation Army documents were consulted at the organisation's archives at the International Heritage Centre, London.]

- 1 For an excellent account of gypsies in England, see Mayall (1988).
- 2 For an account of their trading activities, see Radhakrishna (1989).
- 3 Government of Madras, *Administration Report of the Forest Department (Southern and Northern Circles)*, Madras Presidency for 1889-90, Madras, p 27. Revenue for grazing went up from Rs 40,138 in 1883-84 to Rs 1,43,845 in 1889-90, (Government of Madras, *Report of the Forest Committee*, Madras, 1912, Vol II, pp 7, 32).
- 4 A detailed analysis of the *Report of the Salt Commission*, 1876, Madras, makes this fact clear.
- 5 This and the next para which follows draw largely from Mayall (1988).
- 6 The local people must find the nomads quite useful for the unusual wares they bring periodically. Their various skills of weaving mats or making baskets or playing musical instruments, and more dramatically in the case of acrobats and dancers make them a colourful and interesting presence, in all probability providing relief and diversion from the tedium of daily routine.
- 7 I am grateful to David Washbrook for bringing to my notice the point about taxing.
- 8 Banjaras were a community much more in evidence all over India, unlike the Yerukulas who operated only in the limited Telegu regions of Madras presidency. In fact, Banjaras were called the 'exporters' of grain and salt to distant provinces and regions by the Madras administration, and Yerukulas termed 'local' traders. Essentially, Banjaras were a numerically larger community, operating on a much larger scale, traversing a much larger geographic area. For the same reason, they escaped the Criminal Tribes Act for a longer period compared to the Yerukulas, being relatively less vulnerable.
- 9 Judl 239, September 24, 1918.
- 10 Judl GO 1071, Back nos 51-53, dt August 10, 1870. IGP to chief secretary to government, Fort St George, Madras, May 19, 1870, No 3016.
- 11 For a detailed discussion of the process by which the Yerukulas lost their varied means of livelihood, because of a set of colonial economic policies, see Radhakrishna (1989).
- 12 PWL GO 225L, February 26, 1929.
- 13 This essentially meant that the CT members, as government policy, were to be parcelled out to owners of mills, factories, mines, quarries as workers, as also to plantation owners [Radhakrishna 1989].
- 14 For a detailed discussion of some of the currents which went into the making of the discipline of Anthropology, see Radhakrishna (1997).
- 15 Home (Judl) 2764, dt November 23, 1916.
- 16 For a general discussion of this issue, see Radhakrishna (1989).
- 17 For an account of the criminal tribe settlements, see Meena Radhakrishna (1992).
- 18 *The War Cry*, London, June, 1913. *The War Cry* was the official organ of the Salvation Army.
- 19 General Booth had spelt out his plans to salvage the English poor in his detailed work *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, (Salvation Army, London, 1890). The criminal settlements in India were inspired by those ideas [Radhakrishna 1989: Appendix].
- 20 Salvation Army called Sitanagaram a sieve through which the criminals had to pass and be tested, and "only those who responded to the treatment could find their Cannan in Stuartpuram" (Judl GO 3219 (Mis), December 21, 1915).
- 21 Note on Stuartpuram settlement, Note, 1925.
- 22 Though the above was said of another section of the Yerukula community in another Salvation Army managed settlement, the same could be said of Yerukulas in Stuartpuram as well.
- 23 According to the Salvation Army sources, it was Rs 1,000 per acre (F Booth Tucker, *Mukti Fauj or 40 years with the Salvation Army in India and Ceylon*, Marshall Brothers, London, nd, p 232.)
- 24 Demi official letter from Guntur collector to Stuart, Member of Council, March 20, 1915 in Judl GO 2509, October 14, 1915.
- 25 Notes to Judl GO 2509, October 14, 1915, comments by inspector general of police.
- 26 Government of Madras, *Administration Report of the Labour Department*, 1925-26, Madras.
- 27 PWL GO 2394L, August 23, 1929; PWL GO 2338L, August 19, 1930; PWL GO 1313L, June 17, 1932.
- 28 The acreage under paddy almost doubled in 1928. Government of Madras, *Administration Report of the Labour Department*, 1928-29, Madras.
- 29 PWL GO 1147L, May 26, 1933.
- 30 Salvation Army records at Stuartpuram settlement, Bapatla. Letter from manager to deputy tahsildar, Chirala dated August 26, 1930. The policy so far had been that the tenancy of the family was taken away if its members were found to be resorting to crime. This could not be done if the family owned the land.
- 31 PWL GO 1147, May 26, 1933.
- 32 This society, called the Stuartpuram Yerukula and Staff Tenants' Cooperative Society came into existence in 1926 and was free of patronage, unlike other such societies, of the labour department or christian organisations.
- 33 Government of Madras, *Administration Report of the Labour Department*, 1934-35, Madras.
- 34 Government of Madras, *Administration Report of the Labour Department*, 1932-33, Madras.
- 35 Devt GO 1315, October 27, 1933. Commissioner of labour to secretary to the government of Madras, Devt Department dt October 1, 1933, enclosing letter from the ILTD manager to chief inspector of factories dt July 22, 1933.
- 36 PWL GO 2671L, December 6, 1934.
- 37 Devt GO 1315, October 27, 1933.
- 38 PWL GO 2726L, December 17, 1935.
- 39 Government of Madras, *Administration Report of the Labour Department for 1934-35*, Madras.
- 40 Judl GO 2308, September 22, 1916; Note, 1925.
- 41 The notion that this was primarily a woman's job seems to have not been confined to the Salvation Army. It is interesting to note that Yerukulas under a Roman Catholic priest underwent a similar division of labour. Home (Judl) GO 1534, June 14, 1916.
- 42 Booth Tucker, *Mukti Fauj*, nd, op cit, p 234.
- 43 PWD GO 1313L, June 17, 1932.
- 44 Home Judl GO 1759, August 5, 1918. Booth Tucker to member of council, July 12, 1918.
- 45 Ibid. As the Salvation Army official put it, girls who had been straightened out and cured of drinking habits were sold to the highest bidder.
- 46 PWL GO 1654 L, July 6, 1928.
- 47 F Booth Tucker, *Mukti Fauj*, nd op cit, p 229.
- 48 Even according to the Salvation Army, "We encountered many difficulties. The tribe was nomadic and resented internment, nor did they like the work in the quarries...In fact, they objected to everything. Even the six hundred donkeys which they brought with them entered into the spirit of their non-cooperating masters" (*Mukti Fauj*, nd, p 228). Another account speaks of their 'resentful mood', 'arguments and scuffles', 'protestation and threats of violence' towards the Salvation Army officials [Baird nd: 131]. The records at the ILTD factory, Guntur, and the official documents record the assertion and resistance of the Yerukulas as workers in the factory, especially after they got organised as the ILTD Workers' Union [Radhakrishna 1989].

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