

ANNEX-B/2

(P. 57)

APPENDIX-I

The BhantusA criminal tribe of India

The Bhantus are one of the many wandering gipsy tribes of India who subsist by organized robbery and dacoity and who for this reason proscribed by the Indian Government as criminal tribes. They are found in North and Central India, branches of the tribe also existing in Eastern India where they are known as Arwal Wats. Their area of operations even extends as far as Burma, but they are not distinguishable there from the other Indian criminal tribes because they do not wander about in gangs. Being a proscribed criminal tribe, and probably the most dangerous of all such tribes, even in India the Bhanu invariably covers his identity by assuming an alias such as Kanjar, Sansia, Habura, Beria, Chhapar-Kuchband, etc., with which he has no connection whatsoever.

For years the Government of the United Provinces has tried to bring them to settlements under the care of the Salvation Army where they have been taught industries, but it is with great difficulty that they have been secured and confined within the limits of the settlement. A large gang of Bhantus in 1926 voluntarily came to the Andamans from Indian jails and from free settlements. These were settled on the land under the care of Captain Sheard of the Salvation Army, and their wives and children were allowed to accompany them. In the Andamans their life has been good and the colony comprises 235 individuals. They cultivate the land, the younger men and boys also being employed in the saw-mills and on coolie labour in various other trades.

Owing to their antecedents as a criminal tribe, there is little information available about these people, except that in Police records. Hollins in his "Criminal Tribes of the United Provinces" gives an account of their activities, but it is very difficult to obtain correct information, because they have a past of hitherto undetected history, or being good citizens, and there are few such, they do not wish to have their names known, owing to the stigma attached to the name. In the United Provinces no such concealment is necessary because their previous life is known, and they themselves are intimately known to the Police Officer in charge, who has been connected with them for many years. It is due to the latter's co-operation that I have been able to place on record some data on their tribal organization, habits and customs.

Adjutant Sheard supplied most of the information in reply to the questionnaire, which I set, and spent several months verifying it, his experience obtained by daily contact with them for many years being unique. The writer is extremely grateful to him for his care and willingness and for the thoroughness of his reply to the questionnaire.

Origin.--The Bhantus claim descent from the Chauhan or clan of Chitorgarh, which they regard as their mother