

Penal Categories and Colonial Confinement: Understanding Convict Classification in Andamans (1858-1898)

Nasruddin Khan

Assistant Professor, Assam University, Silchar

Abstract

The study of colonial confinement in India reveals that the colonial authorities were changing the rules constantly. The Andaman penal settlement was a site where constant modification of regulations was practice along with introduction of a new system of convict classification. This article shows that the dominance asserted by the colonial regime was not complete rather it was challenged 'from below', by the convicts. This is reflected in the reformulation of rules and regulations of the settlement as well as changes in the convict classification system. The colonial records as well as convict narratives are valuable in delineating the maze of power relations in Andamans during the second half of nineteenth century.

Keywords: *Colonial confinement, penal settlement, dominance, convict classification, colonial regime*

The situation is so horrendous that even the waves and the sea dread it. Its breath is like poison. Even its goodness is more harmful than poison and its food is more bitter than a bitter medicine. The water is also more harmful than poison. Its skies are pouring clouds and the clouds are flooding with misery. The ground is diseased like chickenpox and the wind is the wind of catastrophes. The houses are full of hashish and fraudsters. And the roof is still soft and porous and drips the way his eyes are dripping. The air is rotting, full of disease. The medicine is scarce and diseases and misery are spreading.¹

¹ Fazl-i-Haq Khairabadi, *Baghi Hindustan*, Azamgarh, 1985. English translation cited from, Aparna Vaidik, *Imperial Andamans*, p. 134.