

# **THE STATEMENT OF MUTINY PRISONER DOODNATH TEWARRY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY**

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Submitted by

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**Rajni Sharma**

## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**The Statement of Mutiny Prisoner Doodnath Tewarry: An Ethnographic Study**” submitted by Rajni Sharma in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Development Studies submitted to the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology, Rourkela, is an authentic work carried out by her under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge, the matter embodied in the thesis has not been submitted to any other University / Institute for the award of any Degree or Diploma.

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## ABSTRACT

Tribe is a colonial construct. It is an outsider's belief on the natives of a certain geographical space. This work takes the case of Doodnath Tewarry, a mutineer of 1857, who having escaped from the Andaman open penal settlement and after spending a year with the aborigines, and marrying two of their women and deserting them while one was pregnant, surrendered at Port Blair on 17 May 1859 to report that the aborigines were plotting a war against the settlers. After the Battle of Aberdeen, Dr. J.P. Walker, Superintendent of Port Blair, recorded Tewarry's statement in great detail at Ross Island from 26 May 1859 to 4 June 1859. The primary/secondary sources of information that the court provides becomes one of the major methods by which the British could—with the statement of convicts such as Doodnath Tewarry—in detail document the customs, traditions and ways of life of the aborigines. This study analyzes and critically investigates convict Doodnath Tewarry's statement, given at Ross Island to Dr. J.P. Walker at Port Blair on the backdrop of contemporary ethnographic studies. Such court statements have made their way in documenting knowledge pertaining to aborigines in different parts of the Empire.

**Keywords:** aborigines, convicts, ethnography, mutiny, penal settlement, statement, tribe.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis deals with the tribes of the Andamans and reads the statement of Doodnath Tewarry—a Mutiny prisoner, regarding the Andamanese tribes—their customs, traditions, and ways of life—to show contemporary documentation of ethnographic studies.

Doodnath Tewarry, the son of Thakoor Tewarry, a Brahmin by caste, was a Sepoy of the 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry of Bengal Army. He was, on the wake of 1857 Mutiny, convicted of mutiny and desertion on 27 September 1857, by the Commission of Jhelum and was sentenced to transportation beyond the seas for life. He was received at the open penal settlement of Port Blair on 6 April 1858. Tewarry escaped from the settlement on 23 April 1858. He was caught by the aborigines in the jungles, but luckily was pardoned by them and hence resided with the natives for one year and twenty - four days in the Andaman jungles. He voluntarily returned to the convict station at Aberdeen, Port Blair, on 17 May 1859, to report of an attack plotted by the aborigines against the convict station, which was later named as the ‘Battle of Aberdeen’. After the battle, his statement was recorded at Ross Island in the Superintendent’s Court, by Dr. J.P. Walker from 26 May to 4 June 1859. The statement that the court records, at a later stage, becomes valuable for the British as well as ethnographers to identify the customs, habits and traditions pertaining to such tribes in the Andamans. Taking the statement into consideration, this thesis examines the contemporary documentation of ethnographic studies.

#### **1.1. The Andaman Islands**

The Andaman Islands are one among the seven union territories of India with its present capital being Port Blair. It lies in the Bay of Bengal, between 6° to 14° N latitude and 92° to 94° E longitude. The Andaman group

has 572 Islands which cover an area of 6,408 Km<sup>2</sup> while the Nicobar group covers an area of 1,841 Km<sup>2</sup>. The total area covered by these Islands is 8,249 Km<sup>2</sup>. The highest peak is Saddle Peak which accounts to be 732 meters<sup>1</sup>. The Islands located to the North of 10° belong to the Andaman groups whereas Islands from the South of 10° are included in the Nicobar group.<sup>2</sup> These groups of Islands are divided into The North Andaman, The Middle Andaman, The South Andaman, The Baratang Island and the Rutland Island in accordance with their underlying positions throughout the Bay of Bengal. In addition to all these Islands, there are some small Islands as well.

The name Andaman is said to have been taken from different sources. Rabin Roychowdhury (2004) claims that the Malayans used to call those Islands as the 'Island of Handuman' with reference to Hanuman of the Ramayana and this further transcribed itself as Andaman.<sup>3</sup> M.V. Portman (1899) opines that Andamans were perhaps named after the name of Agathodaemon, a Roman mathematician of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> F.A.M. Dass (1937) gives reference that historians such as Macro Polo in their texts have written that Andaman is a very large Island but is not administered by a king. The natives are idolaters, and a most inhumane and savage race, having heads, eyes, and teeth similar to those of canine species. Their dispositions are cruel to every person who is not of their own land, and to those on whom they can catch, they are likely to kill and eat.<sup>5</sup>

R.C. Temple (1994) mentions that the natives of the Islands were divided into 12 tribes in three groups. The Northern or Yerewa group that

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<sup>1</sup> "Andaman and Nicobar Islands," Calcutta High Court, accessed on 6 September, 2013, [http://calcuttahighcourt.nic.in/district\\_courts/andaman.html](http://calcuttahighcourt.nic.in/district_courts/andaman.html).

<sup>2</sup> "Andaman and Nicobar Islands - Home: National Portal of India," accessed on 3 February, 2014, [http://www.archive.india.gov.in/knowindia/state\\_uts.php?id=30](http://www.archive.india.gov.in/knowindia/state_uts.php?id=30).

<sup>3</sup> Rabin Roychowdhury, *Black Days in Andaman and Nicobar Islands*. (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2004), 30.

<sup>4</sup> M.V. Portman, *A History of Our Relations with the Andamanese Vol 1*. (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1899), 50.

<sup>5</sup> F.A.M. Dass, *The Andaman Islands*. (Bangalore: Good Shepherd Convent Press, 1937), 12.

consists of Chariar, Kora, Tabo, Yere and Kede tribes; and the Southern or Bojigngiji group that consists of the Juwai, Kol, Bojigyab, Bea and Balawa tribes; and Outer group that represents the Onge-Jarawa tribes.<sup>6</sup> F.A.M. Dass (1937) claims that, before the tribal warfare each tribe or sept (sic) had its own specific languages, stayed confined to their own territories and acquired special hunting grounds.<sup>7</sup> The Onge-Jarawa races are again subdivided into two types, namely, the long shore or Aryots (people who were blessed with the quality of paddling canoes with great speed) and the jungle dwellers or Eremetaga (people residing in the forest areas)<sup>8</sup>. It has been marked that the population of these tribes has been decreasing since they came in contact with the outsiders. Whitaker Romulus (1984) states that at present there are only four tribes being noticed and they are the Great Andamanese, Jarawas, Onges and the Sentinelese.<sup>9</sup>

The reports of the Census of India (1931) claim: “Of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which form the custody of a Chief Commissioner directly under the Government of India, the Islands of Great Andaman are on the way being from a penal to a free settlement, the aboriginal population being on the path of extinction. The density of the Andaman Islands is 7.66. The most striking figures for these Islands are those for the indigenous Negrito population which has shown a decrease respectively of 42,30,40 and 41% at each successive census of this century and a total decrease of over 75% since 1901.”<sup>10</sup> Census reports on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands report that the

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<sup>6</sup> R.C. Temple, *Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Imperial Gazetteer of India/ Provincial Series*. (New Delhi Asian Educational Services, 1994), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Dass, 1937, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Dass, 1937, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Romulus Whitaker “The Andaman Tribes— Victims of Development,” *Journal of Cultural Survival Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1986): 13-18.

<sup>10</sup> “Distribution and Movement of Population” Report on Census of India, 1931. Ministry of Home Affairs, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Government of India, New Delhi.

www.cen



population was estimated to be 379, 944 in 2011, which was 356,152 in 2001 and around 29,468 in 1931.<sup>11</sup>

## **1.2. The Penal Settlement**

The Government of Bengal sought to survey the Islands in 1788 to 1789 in order to establish a penal colony. The reasons behind the establishment of the penal colony was to gain control over the Islands, to utilize its resources, to open a harbor on the Islands and to curb the attacks from both the sides, i.e., natives towards the voyagers and attacks from other colonial power over India. Lt. Archibald Blair of the Indian Navy and Lt. Colebrooke of the Bengal Engineers were sent to survey the Islands in the year 1788. With the survey of both the officials, appropriate maps of these Islands were drawn initially. A settlement was established by Lt. Blair in September 1789 on Chatham Islands in the South of Andaman Islands and was named Port Cornwallis. For about three years, the settlement was prosperous. In 1790, the Commander of the East India Squadron and Admiral Lord Cornwallis' brother visited the islands and noticed that the North East Harbor was much safer than that of the South. He recommended that the settlement be shifted from South to North, and accordingly, the new settlements were shifted in 1792 to the harbor at the North side and it was named Port Cornwallis. After this, hardships of unhealthy weather caused high death rates and the settlement was subsequently abandoned in 1795. Rabin Roychowdhury (2004) claims that after the abandonment, the Islands remained deserted from 1796 to 1857 and had less contact with main land India.<sup>12</sup>

F.J. Mouat (1862) suggests that again in the year 1855, with the issues of plunders and havoc being caused to the travelers by the natives and with the murder of Dr. Helfer, who had been to survey the Islands in 1840, it became significant for the British to survey the Islands and take necessary actions on

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<sup>11</sup> Provisional Population Totals, Census of India 2011, Directorate of Census Operations Andaman and Nicobar Islands, The Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, New Delhi.

<sup>12</sup> Roychowdhury, 2004, 51.

them. On this behalf recommendations were sent to the Government of India and Court of Directors of the East India Company to suggest some measures.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the Great Indian Mutiny broke out in 1857 and the Government felt the necessity of prisons in order to detain the mutineers who were convicted during the Mutiny. Kiran Dhingra (2005) states that in November 1857 with the orders of the then Governor General of India, Lord Canning, Dr. F. J. Mouat, Surgeon of the Bengal Army and his officials were sent to survey the Islands again and to suggest the best site in order to open a new penal settlement.<sup>14</sup> With the obligations of a secure and accessible harbor, healthy living conditions, availability of wood and water and the vicinity being fit for clearance and cultivation the old harbor was selected as the best site for re-opening the Penal settlements, and this time it was renamed as Port Blair.

E.H. Man (1885) affirms that Captain H. Man, who was Superintendent at Moulmein, was ordered by the Government of India to hoist the British flag and to take the charge to open a penal settlement at the Andamans.<sup>15</sup> M.V. Portman (1899) states that “It may be assumed that the class of rebels and mutineers who are sentenced by the Civil and Military tribunals to the secondary Punishment of transportation, or to imprisonment, will not include any of the worst offenders, and therefore that the convicts with whom you will have to deal in the first instance, will, for the most part, be men who have been led to the commission of crimes against the state by the example of others, and not men of a desperate or unmanageable character.”<sup>16</sup> Kiran Dhingra (2005) has quoted the Government orders as follows:

The Governor-General-in Council is, therefore, inclined to think that the bulk of the convicts on their arrival at the settlement may at once be put in

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<sup>13</sup> F.J. Mouat, “Narrative of an Expedition to the Andaman Islands in 1857,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, no. 32, (1862), 109-126.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1798404>.

<sup>14</sup> Portman, 1899, 243.

<sup>15</sup> E.H. Man, “On the Andaman Islands, and their Inhabitants,” *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 14, (1885), 253-272.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2841983>.

<sup>16</sup> Kiran Dhingra, 2005, 37.

a position analogous to that allowed to convicts of a third class in the Straits Settlements, and that the best among them should be prompted at once to a class similar to the second class in the straits, and employed as Sirdars and Tindals over the others. Degradation to a fourth or lower class, and the imposition of irons, may probably be reserved as punishments for the refractory.<sup>17</sup>

Captain Man was also advised to make proper arrangements for the reception of convicts who were supposed to be sent to the Islands soon after his departure. The British flag was hoisted on 22 January 1858 and then he returned to Moulmein for further arrangements. Portman (1899) mentions that the first batch of convicts left Kolkata on 4 March 1858 and arrived on 10 March 1858 with 200 convicts, a native overseer, two native doctors and a guard of 50 naval brigades' men under an officer of the Indian Navy.<sup>18</sup>

Captain Man was directed that it was necessary for them to arm a limited number of guards with muskets, to keep off the savages and to protect the settlers from the Aborigines. The orders of not harming the Aborigines which might result in their extinction were also strictly advised. They were leniently considered, even during the cases of their hostile behavior. The Government also was desirous of adopting a policy with this regard. Thus, the task of the superintendent got more complicated with the orders from the Court of Directors and the Government of India that the Andamanese should not to be ill-treated, injured or troubled in any way in addition to the safety being provided to the convicts as well.

### **1.3. Prisoners and Their Relation with Tribes**

Initially, the settlements were open and a convict station at Aberdeen was established. The convicts were allowed to work in the open space. R.V.R. Murthy (2006) asserts that even during the rainy days surrounded with the

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<sup>17</sup> Dhingra, 2005, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Portman, 1899, 254.

poisonous insects like scorpion and snakes the convicts were given the tasks of clearing the forests. They were generally draped in heavy bar fetters and shackles on their feet.<sup>19</sup> Rabin Roychowdhury (2004) mentions that the Governor General in his letter dated 19 December 1788 had instructed Blair to maintain a friendly relation with the natives of the Islands by following, “conciliatory means certainly without bloodshed. It is therefore recommended to you to endeavor by persuasion, presents and other allurements but not by force or deceit”.<sup>20</sup>

The task was believed to be a challenging one for the Superintendent to control the convicts and to maintain friendly relation with the aborigines at the same time. The convicts escaped from the settlement and the time to time attack over the guards, convicts and the convict station at Aberdeen led to several problems. With such problems consequently, on 4 March 1858, Dr. Walker was given the charge as the Superintendent of the first penal settlement of Port Blair. Dr. Walker was an experienced jail superintendent and had much reputation in the management of convicts. At the Andamans, he adhered to very strict rules which were a major cause for the escape of convicts from the settlement. These escapes generally followed in gangs with the gangsmen leading the party. These escapes were frequent in nature, and were attributed to the lack of guards and the strictest penal measures adopted by Dr. Walker.

Further, the convicts were unaware of the Island and its nearby places, thus with a misconception that the landmass of Burma was nearby, convicts thought of getting employment under the Rajah of Burma and took to the path of escape. From Burma they thought of reaching the mainland India as well. In any case, most prisoners who escaped either died in jungle of snake bites or hunger or were killed by the aborigines. With a small number of guards and that too some of them supporting the convicts in escaping from the settlement

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<sup>19</sup> R.V.R. Murthy, “Cellular Jail: A Century of Sacrifices,” *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 67 (4) (OCT. - DEC., 2006), 879-888.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41856271>.

<sup>20</sup> Roychowdhury, 2004, 47.

and the settlement being open, the number of escapes went on increasing day by day. At a later date, it was concluded that such convicts either had been killed by the natives or had died during their escape due to lack of food and water were traced out.

F.J. Mouat (1861-62) claims that the convicts who had escaped from the Islands either were murdered or those who returned could hardly account of their good fortune in being permitted to do so.<sup>21</sup> Portman (1899) mentions that despite the measures to check the run-away escapes by increasing the naval guards and permitting their families to accompany them, escapes were too frequent. Dr. Walker's principles of providing capital punishment to the escaping convicts were not welcomed by the Government of India. On this context, Dr. Walker was advised to restrict the use of force in case of the aborigines unless there was some emergency like during the cases of hostility and for self-defense.<sup>22</sup> Rabin Roychowdhury (2004) mentions that on 5 August 1858 Lieutenant Templer from the Indian Navy along with eight armed guards had chased the Andamanese and in revolt had burnt their huts and killed some of them which was condemned by the Government. He further claims that the Government in its letter no. 1079, dated 12 August to Walker requested him "to adhere strictly to the conciliating line of conduct and to absolutely prohibit any aggression upon them."<sup>23</sup>

The settlement housed convicts from different backgrounds; some of them were murderers and the others were mutineers from India. Afterwards as the population of the convicts grew up, convicts taken from the other countries were also transported to the Islands. The convicts were handed over with the charge of clearing the distant land areas and forests to which the aborigines reacted in a very hostile manner. Hence, the relationship of the convicts with the tribes remained hostile in the early periods of the settlement. On a contrary,

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<sup>21</sup> F.J. Mouat, "Brief Narrative of an Expedition to the Andaman Islands in 1857," *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 6, no. 2 (1861 - 1862), 41-43, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1799665>.

<sup>22</sup> Portman, 1899, 274-275.

<sup>23</sup> Roychowdhury, 2004, 57.

the relationship of the aborigines with the British officials was of a semi-friendly nature. The British officials tried to take help of the aborigines in cases of catching the run-away convicts and placing before them, in return, tobacco and other gifts. The aborigines also helped the British officials by working in the boats, looking after the gardens, grazing the cattle, rearing pigs and bringing about the edible birds' nests, trepan and other useful forest products.

Convict No. 276 Doodnath Tewarry (1859), the protagonist of this thesis, states that there were no appropriate maps which led confusion in the mind of the convicts that they could cross the sea and reach Burma, and would serve the Rajah of Burma and could get an opportunity to get back to India.<sup>24</sup> With such thoughts in mind he escaped from Ross Island on 23 April 1858 with about ninety other convicts.<sup>25</sup> Kiran Dhingra (2005) acclaims that until the reign of Dr. Walker the relationship of the British and the aborigines was not at all good because of Dr. Walker's ambitious motives of ejecting the natives from the lands forever which had developed hatred among the minds of aborigines. This was the reason for many hostile attacks that were faced by the British during his reign.<sup>26</sup> During his reign many attacks were witnessed on the British by the aborigines and the most significant among them was the attack on 17 May 1859 which is popularly referred to as the Battle of Aberdeen. Portman (1899) states that Dr. Walker was informed by the run-away convict Dudhnath Tewari (sic) just a little before the attack took place. It was due to this early information that the attacks were successfully faced by the British officials.<sup>27</sup>

This attack in fact changed the Administration's relationship with the aborigines forever. H. Man and Richard Temple tried their best in understanding the customs of these tribes by means of the detailed study on

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<sup>24</sup> Statement recorded at Ross Island, Superintendent's court, by J.P. Walker, Superintendent of Port Blair and Commissioner in the Andamans, (1859), NAI, Port Blair.

<sup>25</sup> Statement recorded at Ross Island, Ibid., (1859).

<sup>26</sup> Kiran Dhingra, 2005, 39.

<sup>27</sup> Portman, 1899, 279.

their languages. It was, because of the statement of Doodnath Tewarry that the ethnographers were able to trace out the facts relating to their customs, habits and food taken by them.

#### **1.4. Sources and Methods**

This thesis heavily depends upon archival sources of the colonial period. Records of National Archives of India (New Delhi and Port Blair) are consulted. Various publications of the contemporary period are explored and both primary and secondary sources are consulted for the present work. The primary sources for this thesis are taken from the archival documents such as memorandums, government proceedings, letters (the demi-official, official and personal), reports of the Asiatic society and publications from various articles, proceedings and notes related to penal settlement of the Andamans. The online archives have also been consulted for the present work.

The secondary sources of information such as modern publications on the Andaman Islands, the tribes and on the penal settlements are also extensively used. The methods applied here is an interpretation of the primary sources with relative supporting argument from the secondary publications.

#### **1.5. Further Chapterization**

This thesis is based on the statement of the mutiny prisoner and convict Doodnath Tewarry. The arguments framed wholly depend on the data received through his experiences with the Aborigines of the Andaman during his stay. Although a secondary source of information now, Doodnath Tewarry's statement was found to be fruitful from both humanitarian as well as informational grounds. The statement was an answer to many interrogations and thoughts regarding the aborigines with respect to their lives, customs, behavior towards the outsiders and the misconceptions that the world had on them regarding cannibalism. Besides all these, it was a very useful source of information for the British government primarily which saved the convict

station and the convicts and at a later stage to the ethnographers to closely evaluate these tribes.

With factual reasons about which we can speak are the tribe that presently survive in those Islands but the stories of past which still remain hidden has been often termed as a mystery of these Islands. Whatever may be the case but the fact that the decline in the population of these tribes since ancient times has been only because of the contact with the outside world can never be denied. The indigenous tribe was better with its state of isolation and had not it been in contact with the outside people in the name of civilization and providing them with the better facilities the blunders in the birth rate and death rates would not have been caused to them. It was due to the self-centered needs of the civilized population that they have faced the extremes of extinction.

The proceeding parts of this thesis will showcase the statement of Doodnath Tewarry and a study on it will critically analyze the contemporary ethnographic study with a focus on the Andamanese tribes.



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## Chapter 2

### The Statement of Doodnath Tewarry

#### 2.1. Ethnographic Study and Doodnath Tewarry

*The Encyclopedia of the Early Modern World* (1450-1789) states that the term “ethnography” has been derived from the Greek word *ethnos* which means nation or people and from the word *graphia* means writing. On the whole, the term signifies writing about the people belonging to a particular region or nation. The term “ethnography” came into use in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* explains that “ethnography is the study and systematic recording of human cultures. The researchers who carry out such descriptive works are called Ethnographers.”<sup>29</sup> In this type of research, the ethnographers study about the people belonging to a particular area where they focus on the life style, food habits, language and the culture followed by the people. During their stay, they build a strong rapport with the people. With the close relationship that they develop with the informants it becomes easier for them to gain information about the usual manners and customs of the people. The researchers usually stay with the people whom they call as their “respondents” for a long period of time in which they usually learn their language, share their customs, follow their habits and simultaneously gather information about them. In between they systematically record their way of living and learn their culture. Overall, we can say that in an ethnographic study the researchers lives in a group or society where they participate in the environment, learn the language, behave in the same manner as others and follow the customs and traditions of the group with the purpose of gaining knowledge about them.

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<sup>28</sup> *Europe 1450 to 1789: Encyclopedia of the Early Modern World*, s. v. “ethnography”, Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> “Ethnography.” *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Online Dictionary*. Accessed April 7, 2014. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethnography>.

*The Britannica Concise Encyclopedia* defines ethnography as “a descriptive study of a particular human society.”<sup>30</sup> In this type of study the researchers describe the ways, habits and customs of the group based on their own perception. An ethnographic study is a two way process where the researcher as well as the respondents both participate in the environment actively and equally. In the contemporary days, ethnography is entirely grounded on fieldwork. Equipment like tape recorders, cameras and video recorders are used by some ethnographers in order to make the work easier, interesting and comprehensive.

Ethnographic research is also called participant observation because in this type of study researchers themselves become a part of the environment and observe the behaviour of the individuals in a natural setting. The purpose of an ethnographic study is to minimize the gap of understanding of the outsiders regarding the group or the people. It can be helpful for both the groups in understanding the reality of each other.

Tony L. Whitehead (2005) claims that ethnography is a process of discovery, exploration, making interpretations and continuing the inquiry with a view of achieving emic validity.<sup>31</sup> It is related to gaining knowledge through the discovery of new ideas and facts from different observations where an ethnographer keeps on exploring a world of human beings till he/she attains the best results out of it.

It can also be called as a qualitative study where answers to questions like what, where, when and how are gained and the researcher relies on the quantitative methods in order to ascertain results. Thus it can also be regarded as a process of learning. The results are gained by means of interviews, documents and participant observation.

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<sup>30</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s. v. "ethnography", accessed April 22, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/194292/ethnography>.

<sup>31</sup> Tony L. Whitehead, "Basic classical ethnographic research methods." *Ethnographically Informed community and Cultural Assessment Research Systems: Working Paper Series*. Maryland: Cultural Ecology of Health and Change (2005), 4, <http://>

Although, an ethnographer becomes familiar with the respondents by staying with them for a long period of time but the task also becomes equally difficult if the tribes are hostile to them. In case of the tribes belonging to the Andaman Islands the task of conducting such a study was difficult because of their past behaviour. Gaining information on the aborigines in that period was difficult because the natives were very hostile to the outsiders. Initially, they used to attack the ship-wrecked mariners but after the establishment of the Penal Settlement they started attacking the convicts of these settlements who were assigned to work on the land areas. The situation was always worse for the outsiders, whoever landed over the Island without any arms. Their reaction towards the convict station and its crew members was very aggressive. It has been remarked by Mouat that generally they murdered the run-away convicts who fell under their traps and probably this could be the major reason for their disappearance. With this in view, F.J. Mouat (1862) informs that in 1840 when Dr. Helfer visited the Island to carry out some scientific investigations, he was also killed. The reason behind and the circumstances of his murder was mysterious.<sup>32</sup> Many a times, they looted away the belongings of the settlement and the convicts and harassed the convicts and the other people of the settlement with such acts.

In Letter no. 88 dated on 15 January written by C. Beadon, Esq., Secretary of the Government of India to Captain H. Man, Executive Engineer and Superintendent of Convicts at Moulmein states that:

All protection measures should be taken to protect the natives from collision with the convicts which is very obvious to take place. It has also been mentioned that handling the convicts with arms with the purpose of self-defense will not be possible and ethical to do so.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> F.J. Mouat, "Narrative of an Expedition to the Andaman Islands in 1857," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, no. 32, (1862), 109-126.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1798404>.

<sup>33</sup> M.V. Portman, *A History of Our Relations with the Andamanese Vol 1*. (Calcuta: Office of the Superintendent of Government printing, India, 1899), 359.

The Government had ordered that all the fights and collisions between the convicts and the natives should be tackled with care. The convicts should not be provided with any arms for their protection because it may benefit more and more convicts in running away from the settlement. With such orders the Government of India had already notified the Superintendent and the other officers that the natives should not be harmed by any means. Since then the officers started behaving in a liberal manner with the natives.

Portman (1899) states that “during the remainder of 1862 we hear nothing of the Andamanese, and as they seem to have ceased attacking the Settlement and murdering any convicts they met with, Colonel Tytler supposed that friendly intercourse with them had been established. He used to send small parties of the Naval Brigades men to their encampments, between whom, and the Andamanese, some sort of friendly intimacy seemed to have sprung up.”<sup>34</sup> It was a period when the attacks from the aborigines was unheard for sometimes when Colonel Tytler thought that they had been successful in establishing friendly relations with them by means of sending his party of men to their camps. The actual truth was that the conciliatory measures such as providing the aborigines with plantains, liquor and gifts at regular intervals had failed and the government had to face distress most of the time.

The reason for such hostility, F.J. Mouat (1863) states, could be taken to the history of their intercourse with the Europeans, Malays, Chinese, more recently with the run-away convicts which reveals their utter disregard of human life; the extreme cunning with which they accomplish their ends; their violent rejection of all amicable intercourse with strangers, and the most unrestricted gratification of their passions in their dealings with each other.<sup>35</sup> In spite of all such precautions and orders specified by the government the aborigines attacked the convict station at Aberdeen. It was only due to the

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<sup>34</sup> Portman, 1899, 252.

<sup>35</sup> F.J. Mouat, Esq., M.D., Inspector-General of Jails, Lower Provinces to the Honorable A. Eden, Secretary to the Government of Bengal. Judicial Department. Jail. April 1863. NAI (PB) WB.

timely information of Doodnath Tewarry that the attack was tackled with a minimal damage.

Doodnath Tewarry was a run-away convict of the Penal settlement during the year 1858 and had resided in the Andaman jungles with the aborigines for more than a year. This was the period when the British were having the least knowledge of such aborigines. Portman (1899) claims that Tewarry was acquainted with the existence of the Eremtaga tribes and speaks correctly of them, though evidently having little knowledge of their ways, yet in this matter he was in advance of his time, as the existence of these tribes was not generally recognized till about 1879.<sup>36</sup>

Besides being a part of the environment, Tewarry played a crucial role in documenting knowledge regarding the aborigines. He stayed with them for a year and twenty four days which is a very long duration and is enough to produce ethnographic documents. During his stay he received a holistic understanding of the culture of the tribes. He has also given a brief description of the dialect and the language that they use for communication among themselves along with the terms to which they are associated. The statement has proved itself to be purposeful in documenting knowledge of their communities and for the ethnographers to study such particular tribes.

## **2.2. Tewarry's Intercourse with the Aborigines: An Overview**

Doodnath Tewarry was convicted for crime and desertion on 27 September 1857 and was transported for life to the Andaman Islands. He was received at Port Blair on 6 April 1858. Later he managed to escape from the settlement on 23 April 1858 with ninety other convicts led by a convict named Aga; Aga was also the gangster of the troop who claimed of knowing all the nearby areas but was proved false after some days. Tewarry in his statement states that he escaped at night from Ross Island to the main island of Andaman and entered the jungles. After two days, he and his troop were joined by

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<sup>36</sup> Portman, 1899, 285.

another troop of convicts who had escaped from another location. After the amalgamation of all the run-away troops the entire body of convicts increased to one hundred and thirty. They had travelled for thirteen days but had not come in contact with the aborigines till then. Many of them had died because of the lack of food and water. On the fourteenth day they were attacked by about hundreds of aborigines. The convicts had no arms to safeguard themselves however the aborigines had weapons such as bows and arrows with them. The convicts tried to plead and pacify the savages but most of them were put to death. Doodnath Tewarry and another convict named Shoo Dutt were injured, but anyhow they had managed to escape by entering deep into the jungles in different directions. Both of them reached the sea shore by around five in the afternoon and were joined by another convict. But they were caught by the aborigines, a party of sixty men, women and children, in the morning. All three of them fled away in the jungles. Both the companions were caught and killed by the aborigines. In the meanwhile, Doodnath Tewarry was badly injured and was pulled out of his place where he was hiding. He was pleading again and again for mercy but from a distance it was fired again and was wounded in the left wrist and on the hip. In some way, this time his pleadings were considered and luckily he was pardoned from death.

In a sympathetic way the aborigines helped out Tewarry in getting into their boat by pulling him through his arms carefully. Not only did they assist him in getting to their boats but also they applied red earth moistened with water all over his body, nostrils, neck and all over to heal his wounds. He was taken to a nearby island called Turmooglee. Since then he stayed with the aborigines following their style of living and adopting their manners, traditions and culture. It took some days in healing his wounds and afterwards he enjoyed good health throughout. Tewarry, during his stay with the aborigines shaved his head, discarded the clothes that he used to wear in his own society, followed their customs and habits and kept wandering from place to place with them. Tewarry explains that they were nomads moving in troops of thirty to



three hundred individuals belonging to the same tribe.<sup>37</sup> He claims that he saw about one quarter of land during his stay and met near about 15,000 natives in total. The people generally lived in the forests near to the sea coasts in order to get fresh water and for the convenience of fishing and obtaining the other aquatic animals like turtle, oysters. Though people go inside the jungles for hunting but they return to their encampments before sunset. With his statement, for the first time, the fact that the aborigines were not cannibals was drawn.

### **2.3. Tewarry's Statement: An Overview**

After the Battle of Aberdeen on 17 May 1859 the British could get the details of the aborigines through the statement of Doodnath Tewarry. Tewarry mentions that as he was a stranger for the natives and they did not believe him in the first instance. He was different from the natives in look, customs and behaviour. In short, he belonged entirely to a different race from them. He further states, during his stay, the aborigines never extracted any service from him.<sup>38</sup> The aborigines remained very careful with Tewarry and did not trust him with weapons. Hence, he was never allowed to handle the weapons even during the course of games and sports. One possible reason for their disbelief on him could be the fright that had developed among them with regard to the outsiders. Other possible reasons could be that he might not know the use of the weapons or because he was after all a guest for them. All this time, he was looked down upon with suspicion but their treatment to Tewarry was however not unkind.

From Tewarry's statement we could know that the aborigines felt a sense of responsibility for him. With such responsibilities they even provided him with wives. He was fed with the food whatever the natives were able to collect. His share of food was given to him without any external physical

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<sup>37</sup> Statement recorded at Ross Island, Superintendent's court, by J.P. Walker, Superintendent of Port Blair and Commissioner in the Andamans, (1859).

<sup>38</sup> Statement recorded at Ross Island, Ibid., (1859).

labour like the aborigines were going through either in catching, hunting or collecting them. Overall he was exempted from all the physical labour that a person had to go through in order to fill his empty stomach. Tewarry believed that the possible reason of this could be attributed to their kindness that they bestowed upon him.

It was assured that none of the individuals could be considered as foreigners and this means that they never migrated to distant lands. Deaths were less in number than births and were similar in proportion to that of India. Tewarry gives an account of the physical appearance of the aborigines both of the males and females where he says that he never met anyone more than or equivalent to his height. In looks both males and females are similar to each other.

#### **2.4. Marriage, Family and Society**

With the statement of Doodnath Tewarry, we get a detailed description of the society and family customs of the tribes of the Andamans. Tewarry mentions that he attended around five marriages and all of them were more or less of same kind and were simply undertaken.<sup>39</sup> No advanced arrangements were carried out for it. The bride paints her body in stripes along with her fingers that were smeared with red earth moistened with turtle oil. She was made to sit on the leaves that were spread on the ground floor. Meanwhile, the groom whose body was similarly painted was allowed to enter the room and sit down on the leaves in a kneeling posture at a distance of 10 to 12 paces away from the bride. Both of them sat silently for hours and the person who was supposed to accompany them came from his own hut and held the groom's hand in the bride's hand, presented him with bows and arrows and returned back. In Tewarry's case, he was not consulted before his marriage. Besides, he was married to two women namely, Leepa and Jigah. Although Tewarry's marriage was not much different than the general marriages of the Islands, he

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<sup>39</sup> Portman, 1899, 282

complains that he did not have any preliminary arrangements before his marriage. He was not handled with any weapon that the groom is generally presented during his marriage. Neither the brides nor the groom had painted their bodies. Since marriage he slept with them and they treated him as their husband, respected and obeyed his orders, performed all the services for him and avoided relationship with other men. But unfortunately he had to leave his family while one of his wives Leepa was in the final stages of her pregnancy.

Family relations are given higher priority. The role of each member of the family is well-described and they have strong family ties within themselves. The life style of young ladies before marriage is of a different kind. Girls attain puberty almost between the ages of twelve to fourteen years and after that they are allowed to have sexual relations with any men of their party excluding their fathers. Brothers are allowed to have sexual relations with their sisters until they are married. Before marriage they are regarded as a common property of the males of their party. They are allowed to have sexual relations with the men of their communities which are not permitted after marriage. Unmarried women never go to men rather men generally come to them for such relations. After marriage they are allowed to have sexual relations only with their husbands. Widows are not allowed to re-marry or have any connection with other men and this rule is strictly followed. After marriage the couples carry their responsibilities in their own way. Similar to other societies the society of the aborigines is a male dominated one. Females perform the tasks of cooking food, collecting berries and roots from the forests while the male members are on their expedition of hunting. They draw water from the sea shore and carry them in the bamboo hollows to their respective huts. They are entitled to handle all the household responsibilities such as making fishing nets, nourishing their children, shaving the head of their male companions and rubbing their husband's body with red earth and water in the evening in order to keep mosquito and flies away from them. However, they do not perform much service for their male companions, not even during sickness.

The aborigines are unaware of cultivation, thus fully relied on hunting-gathering activities. They do not eat any raw food rather cook it in the simplest manner at a minimal temperature before eating. They are heavy eaters. With regards to hunting they generally hunt the animals those are available to them in the Island such as pigs. Aquatic animals like turtle and fishes are also caught. Forest products like some edible roots, fibers and wild fruits form the significant part of their diet. They have no idea of any supreme being, other than their God named *Phuluga*, to which they consider very powerful.

Although the role of male children and female children differ from each other, both of them are treated with same affection. The playing habits of both the male and female children are dissimilar to each other. Boys play with little bows and arrows so that they could accompany their father in their hunting expedition when they are grown up and girls love playing with sand lying on the shore. Children imitate the manners of the grown-up people.

As a tradition followed in India old people are paid utmost respect and their decisions are taken to be the final ones. Similarly, in those societies it was found that even in the case of marriages, the old people play a significant role in deciding for the brides and grooms. Furthermore, they do not consult anyone while taking such decisions which reflect their independence in almost all the decision making processes.

Men are blessed with many special features such as good sense of hearing, strong eyesight and acute sense of smell. With their powerful vision they could see well during night time and with those qualities of good smelling power they are able to notice far off existing fruits on the trees. They are very good swimmers and have considerable skills in hunting and fishing. They are less fearful and very adventurous.

Women are hardworking, brave and strongly built. They have a good deal of work during the building of huts. Even during pregnancies they are able to travel distant places, follow their daily routine and perform their duties until

the processes of child birth starts. A group of women act as mid-wives to help the pregnant women during delivery. The women are so strong that even just after delivery they are able to join the party if it is supposed to move to some other place on the next morning. The new-born babies are fed by a woman who is suckling till the mothers do not have milk to feed them. No ceremonies are undertaken after birth of the children whether be it male or female.

They carry their young ones in a sling made up of the inner bark of a tree. As they do not use any kind of cloth to cover their bodies hence the infants remain uncovered till the rainy season. In the rainy months few leaves are sewn together with the help of a rattan and is used for covering the child.

The aborigines are binded by certain rules in carrying out the death rituals. No preliminary arrangements are done before the burial of the dead bodies. If death occurs after sunset the dead body is taken for burial on the next day. At night the wife or husband along with the children of the deceased sleep beside the dead body considering it to be alive. On the next day, the dead body is carried over the back by a single man whether it is the deceased person's son or a relative. They carry the same affection towards the deceased as do the people of India. The family members and relatives of the deceased weep during the day time before sunset and those affected heavily with the deceased person's death mourn till the body is buried. The dead bodies are dug up after two to three months of burial and the bones are used as ornaments. The skull and lower jaw is taken by the close relatives. Relatives can wear it anytime except while they go for hunting.

Their relation with the non-settlers or the foreigners was not good because they behaved in an uncivilized and barbaric way with them. Perhaps they were frightened because of the Britons who generally tried to kidnap and tame them in their own ways. Their homeland had become a scary land of uncertainties and mishaps. They were afraid of losing their land with all sorts of development that was carried on in the Islands.

## 2.5. Domesticating the Natives

With the motives of domesticating the natives British left them with a very bad fate where the natives are facing the extremes of extinction. The population of the aborigines has gone down with the passing years. People are of the view that due to their assimilation with the outsiders their health has been affected. Roychowdhury (2004) affirms that “had not the outsiders come into close contact with them they would not have to face such extinction.”<sup>40</sup> The natives are the only instance of the primitive men left behind and their extinction can be regarded as a very bad phase for humanity. They perceive life in the same way as the people from other regions and behold the same emotions like the other people. E.H. Man (1878) describes that “A husband who is childless and has been absent from his home for some time, on his return to the encampment visits first blood relation (if any), and when they have wept together he goes to his own hut, not in order to shed more tears, but to see and talk to his spouse. The same remark applies to a wife similarly circumstanced. But in the case of married couples who are parents, the meeting takes place first between them; the wife hangs round her husband's neck sobbing as if her heart would break with joy at their re-union, when she is exhausted with weeping, he leaves her and going to one of his relations, gives vent to his pent-up feelings of happiness by bursting into tears.”<sup>41</sup>

The Britishers tried to tame the aborigines by engaging them in catching the run-away convicts. They used the aborigines whenever the convicts ran away from the settlement. In return for the rewards like alcohol and tobacco they asked them to catch the convicts. They told them to catch fishes from the sea shore for them. They tried to learn the basic hunting techniques from the natives. In the name of such small rewards they made them addicted to opium, tobacco and liquor which is a reason for the

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<sup>40</sup> Rabin Roychowdhury, *Black Days in Andaman and Nicobar Islands*. (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2004), 58.

<sup>41</sup> E.H. Man, “The Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands,” *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 7, (1878) 451-469.

deterioration in the health of the natives. But after a number of attacks by the aborigines on the settlement and the people related to the settlement finally Portman (1899) directed that “further efforts, with caution should be made to tame the savages.”<sup>42</sup> In order to tame them some of the natives were taken to Kolkata so that they could come in contact with the civilized persons, educate themselves and learn their usual customs and manners. Those natives could have acted as a mode of communication between the British and the aborigines. With a view to get an absolute knowledge of their physical and mental abilities the people from the Onge and the Jarawa tribes including some of their children were taken and their blood samples were tested so that their physical abilities and weaknesses could be ascertained in a proper way. All these efforts were unsuccessful when it was found that the artificial surrounding designed for them was of no use. Their health went on deteriorating day by day and finally the government was forced to send them back to their Islands.

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<sup>42</sup> Portman, 1899, 298

## CONCLUSION

The thesis concludes with the statements given by the mutiny prisoner Doodnath Tewarry. His statements have paved way in documenting knowledge pertaining to the tribes. Doodnath Tewarry's statement is the first accurate idea through which we obtained information about the Andamanese and their customs in general. Portman states that the statement of Doodnath Tewarry and the documents framed out of it stands appropriate with all the information.

In some places Tewarry's statements were proved to be wrong. With regards to this, Portman (1899) explains that, though the reasons given by Tewarry in favour of the different actions of the Andamanese are often incorrect, his observations on their habits are equitably precise.<sup>43</sup> For Portman, Officer in charge of the Andamanese from 1879 to 1990, there is much in Tewarry's statement which is correct. For him it seems as an adventure by an ignorant man who associated appropriately whatever he remembered, overstated greatly when asked regarding matters to which he had paid no particular attention, invented his own stories whenever he felt obliged by continuous questioning in the matters unknown to him. Doodnath Tewarry acted as a source for the ethnographic study that was never possible to be carried out with such hostile tribes. Though knowing nothing about the elements of an ethnographic study he acted as a part of the environment from where it was too difficult to gain information.

Portman (1899) describes that Dudhnath (sic) had a short time before being locally pardoned for escaping and further recommended for absolute release. With his timely and true warning, he protected the Settlement from an unexpected and dangerous attack.<sup>44</sup> He claims that, if Dr. Walker would have devoted more time personally on the aborigines, he might have possibly commenced a friendly interaction with them, but since he was harassed with work and was having little assistance, this might not been expected. The

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<sup>43</sup> Portman, 1899, 285.

<sup>44</sup> Portman, 1899, 285



aggression of, and fights with the Andamanese were only what might have been anticipated, and these, at such an energetic opening of the Settlement, no one could have deterred.

It was often debated as why the native opposed the strangers entering their villages. In fact, opposition becomes an obvious reaction that can be expected from anyone if they feel any kind of risk to their life and property. Provocation of ill feelings and hostility being the outcomes. Portman informs, at a later date, it was seen that the taming of the aborigines on the Little Andaman was given up. With a kind behaviour towards them, he had also noticed a great difference in the behaviour of those savages. Afterwards he had enforced the order that, whatever encampments might be visited, none of the property of the aborigines was ever to be touched. Rewards in the form of gifts were always to be left in all the huts in which they entered. Furthermore, Portman believes that the intercourse with these people was a matter of extreme delicacy.

After considering Doodnath Tewarry's statement and the Battle of Aberdeen, Portman (1899) quotes the order of the Government of India in relation to the statement and set an order to release him for the timely information of the attack by the aborigines. The order has been quoted as follows:

In consideration of the behaviour of Life Convict Dudhnath Tewari (sic), who, after being with the aborigines of the Andaman Islands for upwards of a year, returned to give warning of an attack which they had planned to make upon the station at Aberdeen, at Atalanta Point, the Governor General in Council is pleased to comply with your recommendation in his favour, and to grant him a free pardon. He should be released and sent up to Calcutta by the first opportunity.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Portman, 1899, 298

It implies that Tewarry was released from the settlement because of his genuine assistance that had helped the Government in getting the information of the attack planned by the aborigines. In consideration of his good behaviour at the settlement he was finally pardoned. It can be concluded that with the help of Tewarry lots of information about the aborigines were received. Finally, he was released for his immense gratefulness towards the humanity in knowing such tribes.

Thus the information gained by Doodnath Tewarry in that period has become a significant source of knowledge for the ethnographers in studying them. As the inhabitants of these islands are an object of much interest in an ethnological point of view, hence it is very important and interesting as well to learn and understand about them.

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