



Understanding Labour Migration and Modern Slavery in British Burma: A Reading of Early Bengali Travel Writings

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Abstract

This paper tries to examine the system of labour recruitment and migration from mainland Bengal to Burma. Besides, it seeks to understand the state of indentured labour recruited through Maistry system which may be conceptualised as a modern slavery. The bonded labour in this system was not only to explore the mining resources or not only for the developing industrial economy in colonial Burma but also to enslaving them with debt-bondage system. They were bound to work in inhuman conditions and unable to break the contract with employers because of uncertain future and due to fear of being considered untouchable in society. Hence the said system can be understood as slavery in modern British Empire in Southeast Asia. Bengali Travel writings on Burma bear multiple testimonies to labour migration from Bengal. Primarily, this article will argue that the labour recruitment process was a well-crafted mechanism to enslave poor people and it will further look into the issues of displacement and labour migration through an analysis of selected Bengali travel writings on Burma.

Keywords: Travel Writings, Migration, Displacement, Maistry System, Slavery

