

Spirits, Politics, and Rituals in the History of Nicobar Islands

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KEYWORDS Nicobar Islands. Power. Spirits. Colonialism. Devil Murder. World View

ABSTRACT Using historical accounts this paper deals with distinction of politics and religion imposed and generated in the Nicobarese culture and society by colonial and missionary enterprise. In relation to the colonial encounter, the framework of understanding religion and politics was questioned and administrative efforts were made to install an order. However, the Nicobarese responded to the new meanings imposed on them by reconstituting elements from the domain of religion and politics to create rituals of politics. For tribal culture like the Nicobarese, issues of power, belief, order, morality and faith are all fused into one. This paper is the analysis of the fused meanings in case of devil murder and carved images of Hanta-Koi, pertaining to power of spirits and colonial authorities, in generation of symbolic actions and the rituals undertaken by the Nicobarese. The intent is to establish not a meaning but rather about a series of meanings that create a lack of distinction between politics and relation within Nicobarese worldview and experienced history.