

July 28.

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A POLITICAL PRISONER'S SUICIDE IN THE ANDAMANS.

The suicide of one of the political prisoners, named Indu Bhushan Roy, throws a lurid light upon the whole situation as to the treatment of political offenders in the Andamans. At 1 o'clock in the morning of the 29th April last he was found hanging in his cell by one of the warders in his round. An alarm was raised. The jailor hastened to the spot; the matter was telephoned four or five times and a police orderly was sent to the Medical Superintendent's bungalow which is situated only a few hundred yards from the jail buildings. We are informed that no response came before 8 o'clock next morning. In the meantime a Madrasi Hospital Assistant was sent for, but when he came the body was found stiff and cold. Next morning when the Superintendent, the District Magistrate and the Police came to investigate, the Jailor, Mr. Barry, gave

his own version of the affair. Now we should like to ask a question or two in this connection. Why did Indu Bhushan commit suicide? If he was tired of prison life, one would expect that he would have committed suicide long ago; for he had already been in the Andamans for over three years. Was there nothing in anything that had happened recently in connection with him to account for his taking this fatal step? Was it not rather the act of a desperate man to whom life had become insupportable in the condition in which he found himself? Is it or is it not the case, that on the afternoon of the 28th April, only a few hours preceding his suicide, Indu Bhushan desired to see the Jailor and was taken to his office, and there did he not in the most entreating terms request the Jailor to change his work, as he was engaged in making white flax out of "rambash" plant? Did he not say to the Jailor—or at any rate addressed words to that effect—"See, my hands have become so blistered by the juice of the 'rambash' that I cannot move my fingers freely and it is so painful that I cannot get a wink of sleep the whole night. I cannot take my food to my mouth. The touch of 'dal' causes me so much pain that tears come to my eyes and my food is left untouched. I will die of pain and starvation. Kindly change my work or allow me to go to hospital for a few days to get my palms healed." Saying this, he stretched his hands to the full, but met with a rebuff from the Jailor. We will not reproduce the language which the Jailor is reported to have used. Is it not the case that Indu Bhushan pleaded again, begging to be allowed to report himself personally and show his hands to the Medical Superintendent? But the Jailor shouted: "You must carry out my orders." Then after thinking for a couple of minutes, he again said, "all right, I will change your work" and ordered the warden in charge to engage Indu in "Kolu" oil mill from next morning. Indu got so frightened that he told the Jailor that he would simply die if he had to work in the "Kolu" mil with those hands of his. The Jailor was obdurate and our information is that Indu was dismissed amid a shower of abusive language. This was the last straw on the camel's back and before many hours Indu was found dead, hanging in his cell. We have another question to ask. Is it not the case that Hoti Lal made a complaint to the Medical Superintendent about Indu's death and was punished for it and was put to the oil mill at once? The political prisoners, we learn, are scattered over the entire settlement. In case they fall ill they are not taken to the nearest hospital within whose jurisdiction they live and where in the ordinary course they should be taken. They have to be taken to the Hospital of the Jail District where Captain Barkar is the Medical Superintendent and also District Officer.—Bengalee.