Chronicling the Colonial Encounter

Introduction
This chapter seeks to probe, question, and problematize the marginality and inattention towards the Andamans, which has hitherto made it an area unworthy of historical inquiry. It endeavours to establish that the warp and weft of the story of the Andamans in the last three centuries was woven out of the exigencies of oceanic political currents that alternately camouflaged and spotlighted the Islands. For a detailed exposition of these themes, this chapter explores the process of colonization of the Islands, beginning with the 'first colonization', a brief interlude albeit a momentous one in the history of the Islands, followed by the mid-nineteenth century conquest of the Andamans. In both the eras the intense desire to control the maritime affairs of the Bay of Bengal and the repeated failure to stake a claim on the neighbouring Nicobar Islands were the prime motives driving the British towards the Andamans. It was the Nicobars that had historically commanded the attention of the seafarers and travellers, as they lay directly on the path of the ships criss-crossing the Bay. The Danish hegemony over the Nicobars thwarted the British claims and directed them to colonize the next best option – the Andamans. The history of the Islands, this chapter further demonstrates, was moulded by the outbreak of the revolt in the Indian subcontinent in the year 1857.

The Eighteenth Century Debacle
The colonization of the Andamans was staged in the torrential waters of the Indian Ocean politics. For the Europeans, the clinching factor in their contest over the Asiatic Empire was the hegemony over the Indian Ocean. In marked contrast, except the example of the Chola Empire, there is little evidence of Indian rulers having displayed interest in controlling the Ocean.¹ According to some historians, the Indian and Asiatic political powers looked upon the Ocean with a sense of 'awe, marvel and fear' and rarely possessed a belligerent

¹ The Cholas are also said to have conquered the Nicobars (called Manakkavaram) in the 1025. See K. A. Nilkantha Sastri, History of South India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1955/1999.
orientation to the maritime zone. The Ocean was perceived as the domain of merchants and mariners and not of the temporal authority. However, the state of the historiography on the subject, and the difference in the scale, perception and the nature of the modern state from its historical forebears, prevents positing of any binary opposition between the European and the Asiatic perceptions of the Ocean. The crucial difference in the character of navigation in-between the European and the pre-European period was that sailors while cruising across the ocean hugged the coast and, following the advent of Europeans, they started travelling across the Ocean. This was mainly because of better victualing facilities, superior seafaring technology and the changes in the character of the state.

Traversing the boundaries of various oriental empires, the European race to secure trading supremacy occasioned immense naval warfare. The geographical spaces, which got implicated in the process, and have hitherto received little attention from historians, were the islands, which peppered the Indian Ocean. The numerous islands were ripped out of their ‘oriental slumber’ and transformed into European chess pieces. Imagined by the Europeans as being seeped in the proverbial primitiveness, these islands were refashioned and refurbished to cater as fuelling and victualing depots, naval bases, arsenals, military outposts, convict stations or simply as trading centres and entrepots. The control over a maximum bunch of island spaces was thus a crucial determinant in the fortunes of the European adversaries – British, Dutch, Danes, Portuguese, and the French. The Asiatic islands in the


3 Similar to the ‘islands’, ports also played a significant role in the Colonial ocean politics. There is a growing literature on the waxing and waning of the fortunes of various port towns in the colonial period which has informed the present study on islands. Frank Broeze, ed., Gateways of Asia, Port Cities of Asia in the Thirteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Kegan Paul International, London, 1997, and Indu Banga, ed., Ports and their Hinterland in India, 1700-1930, Manohar, 1992. These volumes show that the ‘structure and function’ of most of the important port towns was governed by the ‘trading and political interests’ of the British. The various island
fray ranged from the then lesser-known ones, such as, Penang (Prince of Wales Islands), Singapore, Andamans, Siddo harbor\(^4\), Cheduba Island\(^5\), Coco Island, to ones with historical visibility such as Socorta, Sri Lanka, Nicobars, Madagascar, and Mauritius. Washed of their history, scrubbed of their oriental moorings, these island spaces dressed in the colonial attire became the Imperial sentinels guarding the extremities of the Empire.

From the British Imperial perspective, the control of island spaces became imminent in the late eighteenth century because of its growing interest in holding the reins of the affairs of the Bay of Bengal and the expansion of the China Trade. The incipient and inchoate Raj, yet to find its bearings in the subcontinent, felt under continual threat from its European rivals. While the Company had secured itself, in some measure, in northern India, its frontiers and access from the Bay was still to be padlocked. The state of affairs thus dictated that, 'guarding the Bay of Bengal... be of the utmost consequence'. The inconclusive and exhaustive Anglo-French Wars injected further gravity and volatility into the situation. As a result, the British endeavoured to keep an unflagging vigil on the non-British ships making their way into the Bay and issued standing orders to destroy any French ships intercepted there.\(^6\)

The expansion of the China Trade, since the late eighteenth century, also fuelled the British hunt for a foothold in the Bay of Bengal. While the Company had achieved a monopoly over the internal trade of opium in the Indian subcontinent, the preponderance over the seaborne trade to China, Java, and other places continued to elude it.\(^7\) Owing to the dearth of oceanic bases in the east of the Bay of Bengal, for the refuelling and re-fitting of ships, the fleets economies and societies in the Indian Ocean as they acquired shape in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century were also a product of the colonial spatial organization.

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4 Home, Public, 3 Jan 1787, OC. No. 32, pp. 91-94, NAI.
5 Home, Public, 2 July 1784, OC. No. 14, NAI. The report stated 'whichever power settled at Cheduba, or any of these islands, that from such convenient harbours near Arrakan, will have it in their power to invade Bengal'.
6 Home Public, 7 Dec 1778, OC. No. 26; Home Public, 6 July 1781, OC. No. 32; Home Public, 6 July 1781, OC. No. 31; Home Public, 19 Feb 1781, OC. No. 3, NAI.
undertook immoderately and wastefully long journey to Bombay in order to sustain naval operations. This entailed the ruination of the much valuable period of the year for navigation. This was also the time when the British were attempting to secure greater elbowroom in the Indonesian archipelago by edging out the Dutch from the opium trade. The Dutch were the principle carriers in the region and also enjoyed, besides commercial supremacy, considerable political leverage. Until the signing of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty in 1784, which had sounded the death knell to the Dutch trade in the region by establishing free trade, the Dutch East India Company had luxuriated in a virtual monopoly in the Bay of Bengal.

The central object of British desire at this time was the acquisition of a strategic harbour in the Bay, which would enable the Company to control the passage, access, and exit to the Bay. The harbour was to be such where fleets, on leaving the coast of Coromandal, could refit in time of war, where refreshments could be supplied to them and where the ships could take shelter upon the approach of a stormy monsoon. Moreover, the harbour had to be located in a strategic place where the fleet could retire in the event of a conflict. It also had to be approachable so as to allow the fleet to obtain a central position in the Bay, from where the ships could return to the scene of action, as soon as possible. It was a tall order that the British were soliciting. Nevertheless, they remained untiring and relentless in their search. The British, initially, in the early 1770s, trifled with the idea of establishing a marine port at the mouth of the Ganges in Bengal. However, the scheme was abandoned in the

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8 A. Aspinall, Cornwallis in Bengal, The Administrative and Judicial reforms of Lord Cornwallis in Bengal Together with Accounts of the Commercial Expansion of The East India Company, 1786-1793, and of the Foundation of Penang, 1786-1793, Manchester University Press, 1931, pp. 188-205.


10 Bhaswati Bhattacharya, “Dutch East India Company and the Trade of the Chulias in the Bay of Bengal in the late Eighteenth Century”, in K.S. Mathew, ed., Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History, Manohar, 1995, pp. She discusses the way the claims of Dutch monopoly were contested by the Chulia merchants of the Coromandal coast and the manner in which the Chulias adjusted to the changed situation under the British monopoly.

11 Home, Public, 23 March 1795, 1, A, Letter from Major A. Kyd to Sir John Shore written on 4 March, NAI.

12 Secret Dept., 22 Dec 1788, NAI.

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early stages itself, as weather conditions of the lower parts of Bengal were found unsuitable for the rather delicate constitution of the Company servants. The development of scientific topography, in the following decade, made feasible the collection of far more accurate information than had been hitherto possible. This encouraged the Company to venture into the open sea in search for ports and harbours.

The most probable island base answering to the need of the British at this time was the Nicobar Islands. These were a group of twelve inhabited and seven uninhabited islands in Bay of Bengal situated between Sumatra and the Andaman Islands. The strategic position of the Nicobar Islands, along the trade routes of India, Burma, and Southeast Asia, outweighed those of other islands. A base on these Islands ensured naval superiority over the surrounding littoral colonies and peninsulas, and also furnished a harbour of refuge for the China-bound fleets. The strategic value of the Nicobars was evidenced by the persistent endeavours, since the late seventeenth century, by the different European trading companies

to occupy it. The Danes were the first to commercially penetrate the Islands. The Nicobars had caught their attention in the early 1750s and, following a successful expedition, they opened and station in 1756 and re-christened them Fredrick Islands.

Unable to find a foothold in the Nicobars, the British turned their attention towards the Andaman Islands. Captain Ritchie and Thomas Forrest, who had surveyed the Andaman Islands in the early 1780s, had commented on the strategic importance of the Andamans. Ritchie had quite astutely stated that 'If ever the French take possession of the Andamans, we shall then see the value of it... and a Mauritis in the Bay of Bengal might become troublesome.' Ritchie's report occasioned the commissioning of another survey by the famous Captain J. Buchanan of the Andamans in the year 1788. Buchanan was followed by Lt. Archibald Blair of the Indian Navy and Lt. Colebrook of the Bengal Engineers, who were assigned to not only survey the Andaman Islands but also to report on the practicability of building a harbour there. The British, notwithstanding their interest in the Bay of Bengal, did not have an immediate or direct interest in the Andamans. These Islands could have followed the tandem of their own history, had it not been for the British failure to stake a claim over the neighbouring Nicobar Islands. Left with little choice and in a flutter to clinch a foothold in the Bay, the British wished to secure their claim over the Andamans at their earliest. Finally, in 1789, following Blair's recommendations, a small settlement was secured, on a harbour in the south of the Andamans, which was later christened the Chatham Island. In 1793, the Settlement was shifted to a place in the northeast of the Islands, which had been opened for the purpose of building a naval arsenal. This area, known as Port Cornwallis, though much more accessible in terms of communication from Bengal and far more spacious for a fleet than the old settlement, was ill fated. The settlement

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17 Mathur, *History*.
20 Home, Public, 10 March 1788, 30, C, NAI.
22 Home, Public, 6 August 1858, 76-78, NAI.
23 Home, Public, 13 July 1791, 4, A, NAI and Home, Public, 29 July 1791, 3, A, NAI.
lasted only for three years as the British were forced to pack their bags and leave because of high mortality and unhealthiness amongst the settlers.\textsuperscript{24}

The poor commercial performance of the Islands was also a significant reason in the abandoning of the settlement in the Andamans. The Company, during the closing years of the eighteenth century, was not in a position to hold on to a base unless it quickly paid dividends. This was because, in this period, the character of the Company was rapidly metamorphosing, from being a mere trading company, into the sovereign of a massive dominion in the Indian subcontinent, which was still to reap a rich harvest for the British. A calculated risk, at the time of its acquisition, the Empire had the potential of pulverizing the Company under its economic millstone. Moreover, the Company's finances were already burdened with the expenses of the Anglo-French wars and it foresaw development of costly disputes in future with the Dutch, the Danes, and the French over the various islands in the Indian Ocean.\textsuperscript{25}

When Captain Archibald Blair set out to survey the Islands, he was ordered to inspect the quality of the soil of the Andamans, its fertility, variations in atmosphere and heights, magnetic, and tidal observations, availability of limestone, timber, coral rock, volcanoes, minerals and sulphur.\textsuperscript{26} Amongst other considerations, Lt. Blair also hoped to find gold and tin in the Andamans along with sea-shells which could be burned for obtaining lime. Blair had been especially ordered to look for any possible deposits of sulphur, an 'indispensable ingredient' for manufacturing gunpowder.\textsuperscript{27} On the establishment of the settlement, Captain Blair made haste to send back specimens of 'poon-wood' used for making masts, to Calcutta

\textsuperscript{24} M. V. Portman, \textit{History of Our Relations with the Andamanese}, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1899, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{25} There was also a drastic reduction of expenses in all establishments and salaries. Phillimore, \textit{Historical Records}, 1945, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{26} Instructions to Lt. Blair, from E. Hay, Secretary to the Government of India, Secret Department, 22 Dec 1788, NAI.
\textsuperscript{27} Since sulphur was a volcanic production, it was surmised that it could be unearthed on one of the volcanic islands amongst the Andaman group, called the Barren Island. Seizing new sources of sulphur was a persistent worry with the British because they had experienced its shortage during the Anglo-Camatic Wars. The French had cut off their supply of sulphur by purchasing the entire stock which was to be found in Cochin and other places on the Malabar Coast. Secret Department, 22 Dec 1788, NAI.
to be compared with other timber of the same species obtainable in the other ports of India.\textsuperscript{28} Another propitious commercial project was the desire to extend the cultivation of opium and indigo, and to undertake botanical experiments.\textsuperscript{29} The Government, while undeniably keen to see the development of botanical research, was quite unwilling to incur a further expense in instituting it. The officers in-charge of obtaining the experimental collection were cautioned to accomplish their job 'without incurring any additional expense above that now entailed in forwarding the business of taking possession of that island'.\textsuperscript{30} In the Andamans, inspite of the worthy moneymaking projects, the settlement did not reap the expected dividends.

The comparative position of the Prince of Wales Island, or Penang, in relation to the Andamans, also had an impact on the dismal fate of the latter in the eighteenth century. Situated in the straits of Malacca, Penang had been colonized around the same time as the Andamans, but had outstripped the latter in terms of political and commercial success.\textsuperscript{31} The Prince of Wales Island, much like the Andamans, could not be made self-sufficient in the first three years of its take over and nor did its trade expand immediately. It continued to depend on the neighbouring Kingdom of Keda for food supplies.\textsuperscript{32} However, by 1796 when the issue of abandoning the Andamans came up, Penang had already proved its worthiness while the former had become a liability. The Dutch and the French threat in the straits of

\textsuperscript{28} Home, Public, 30 June 1790, NAI. Blair also sent the redwood found on the Island as an experiment to the China market and specimens of other kinds of wood which could be useful in building ships. Home, Public, 20 August 1790, 26, A, NAI; Home, Public, 21 Dec 1792, 40, NAI; Home, Public, 22 Sept 1790, 19, A, NAI; and Home, Public, 7 Sep 1791, 8 A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{29} The expert aid of Colonel Kyd who was the Superintendent of the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta, and who had already been conducting experiments on cultivation of opium since the 1780s, was solicited. With his help a survey of Andaman's flora and fauna was planned to assess their commercial possibilities. Home, Public, 20 Feb 1789, NAI; Home, Public, 2 May 1792, 16, NAI; Home Public, 2 May 1792, 16, NAI. Deepak Kumar has shown how the early botanical investigations were of commercial, military as well as scientific importance, in "Evolution of Colonial Science in India Natural History and the East India Company", in John M. Mackenzie, ed., \textit{Imperialism and the Natural World}, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1990, p. 51-66.

\textsuperscript{30} Home, Public, 7 Sep 1971, 8A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{31} Letter from Major A. Kyd to Sir John Shore written on 4 March 1975, in Home, Public, 23 March 1795, 1, A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{32} Aspinall, \textit{Cornwallis}, p. 204.
Malacca whittled this island into a crucial British stronghold in checking the advance of the rivals. The fleet stationed in Penang provided British naval security as this Island was sufficiently detached from the 'war-swept mainland' to pre-empt any surprise attack. In due course, the Penang fleet began to be kept on guard even when there was no immediate threat of war in Southeast Asian waters. For instance, in 1788, the fleet positioned there was summoned to remain on guard because of the 'increasing hostilities in Europe between the courts of Great Britain and France and because of the disturbed state of affairs in the United States'. Only after the conflict between France and Britain in the United States was amicably resolved were the war-like preparations in the Prince of Wale's Islands discontinued. The outbreak of the French Revolution on the continent of Europe, in 1789, also offered Penang an opportunity to display its value as a naval base.

Further, adding to the political invincibility of Penang was its noteworthy commercial success. The foundation of Penang was contemporaneous with a 'new trading era' in Southeast Asia, where the Island opened the gateways to the China trade and symbolized the shift from the traditional trading practices to 'free-wheeling enterprise'. It not only gave the British a grasp over the pepper trade in the straits of Malacca but also facilitated the China Trade by furnishing shipping intelligence. It also made a direct economic contribution, unlike the Andamans, by producing sugarcane and cotton in good measure. The British considered the cultivation of sugarcane vital because it was 'an article by which the Batavian ha(d)ve found means to drain our settlement of vast sums of resources', and cotton was 'an

34 Secret Dept, 7 April 1788, NAI.
37 Home, Public, 24 Aug 1785, OC. No. 52, NAI.
38 Home, Public, 18 June 1787, OC. No. 8, pp. 221-2213, NAI.
article always in demand in China and of course a good mode of remitting cash to our supercargoes at Canton.39 Pepper and raw silk also figured on the list of important trade items doing flourishing business in Penang. This Island was also positioned in way to help the British keep a check on the economic activities, deemed as 'piracy' in colonial parlance, by the private traders in the straits of Malacca.40 By the turn of the century, Penang had been raised to the rank of the Presidency and boasted of a naval base and a shipbuilding yard.41

The Mid-Nineteenth Century Theatre

The abandonment of the Andamans under unfortunate circumstances in 1796 did not lessen the importance of the issues and imperatives, which had played a role in their colonization. Over the next half-century, these factors acquired greater urgency than ever, forcing the British to reconsider the option of recolonizing the Andamans. Two disparate yet conjoined trends, in the early nineteenth century, occasioned this reconsideration. These were the burgeoning dominance of the British over the Indian Ocean; and the challenges that came to it as a consequence of the abolition of the Company's monopoly. The British had finally ousted the French and the Danes, along with the indigenous element in the trans-oceanic trading, and had established themselves as the masters of the Indian Ocean.42 There was a greater linkage of the local Indian Ocean networks with Europe, which reconstituted the

39 Home, Public, 9 July 1789, 19, A, NAI.

40 The British intelligence officers believed that the 'piratical' prows prevented small boats, carrying provisions of stock, from plying between different ports. As a measure to control piracy, they built galleys, which would be rowed by 'river-dacoits' of Bengal, who had been condemned to perpetual imprisonment. They hoped this would serve as a 'very exemplary and appropriate punishment' and also help curtail 'piracy'. Home, Public, 22 Jan 1796, OC. No. 15, NAI.

41 McPherson, "Penang", However, Penang was to lose its supremacy in the Southeast Asian waters with the ascendancy of Singapore and the shifts in British trading patterns following the Napoleonic Wars. By 1830, Penang was demoted to the status of a Residency and, in 1832, also shorn of its title as the Capital of the Straits.

42 Daniel R. Headrick, Tools of Empire, Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century, Oxford University Press, New York, 1981, pp. 174-175. He quite astutely notes, 'Among Empires, the most unusual kind is that of the sea. The Minoans, the Greeks, the Phoenicians, and the Vikings all dominated for the time the seas around them, but only once has there been a truly global thalassocracy a nation whose fleet and merchant marine were dominant on almost all the seas of the world. This was Great Britain in the nineteenth century'.

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hitherto equipoised relationship of the British with the local merchants, in the former's favor.\textsuperscript{43} However, the mastery over the seas camouflaged the economic transformations, stresses, and strains that the colonial economy was undergoing in the first half of the nineteenth century. After the abolition of the Company's monopoly in India, in 1813, there was intense wrangling between the Company and the private traders over the issue of remittance of profits.\textsuperscript{44} The private traders, who had grown considerable commercial muscle in the Canton trade, began to crave for greater political support from Westminster. Adding to this pressure, were the vociferous demands of Manchester textile merchants, subsequent to the expansion of machine-powered industry, for the abolishing of the import of the extremely competitive fine Indian textiles.\textsuperscript{45}

This set off the campaign against the Company's monopoly over the China trade, in which the private traders emerged victorious. The period following the abolition, of 1830 to 1850, was characterized, until a few decades ago, as an epoch of reform. However, the recent historical works have disabused the modernist pretensions of this period of colonial rule and have sought to characterize this phase as an age of 'economic hiatus', where 'none of the conditions for sustained modernization existed'.\textsuperscript{46} This was reflected, at one level, in the instituting of legal innovations couched in the language of 'reform', which were more of an assertion of British superiority over the Indian society than anything else.\textsuperscript{47} And, at another

\textsuperscript{43} McPherson, "Trade and Traders".

\textsuperscript{44} For a study of the disastrous impact of abolition on Indian cotton manufacturers and sagging value of the Indian rupee see Amales Tripathi, \textit{Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency, 1793-1833}, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1979.


\textsuperscript{47} Radhika Singha designates the various Acts passed at this time as 'crude devices for securing conviction with the semblance of "due process"', in " Providential Circumstances: The Thuggee Campaign of the 1830s and Legal Innovation", in \textit{Modern South Asia}, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1993, pp. 83-146.
level, was the transformation of India from being an exporter of manufactured goods to a supplier of primary commodities and importer of finished consumer goods.\textsuperscript{48} Another cause of economic instability, in the period, was the development of India as an important component of the British international payment system.\textsuperscript{49}

However, countervailing these negative changes was the remarkable continuity in-between the local and the international economy, which continued to nourish the Raj. C.A. Bayly confirms that the most striking feature of the contemporary economy was 'the continuation of a sophisticated but volatile long-distance economy against the background of a poor consumer economy'. A catalyst in the preservation of these international linkages was the arrival of steam ships on the historical scene. With the advent of steam ships, the maritime activity 'shifted from being fair weather to all weather'.\textsuperscript{50} Steam also imparted a new force to the western military success. The high professional standards of western arms, armies, military strategies, and the seamen were unmatched by Asian contemporaries. However,


\textsuperscript{49} K. N. Chaudhuri shows the way India, in the 1830s, was 'rapidly becoming the clearing-house for the reciprocal payments in the triangular trade between Britain, China and United States and also in-between Britain, China and India, giving rise to a complex system of multilateral financial settlements'. See his “India's Foreign Trade and Cessation of the English East India Company's Trading Activities, 1828-1840”, in A. Siddiqui, Trade and Finance in Colonial India, 1750-1860, Oxford University Press, 1995 and Amales Tripathi, “Indo-British Trade between 1833 and 1847 and the Commercial Crisis of 1847-8”, in A. Siddiqi, Trade, pp. 

these advantages until the coming of steam 'had been to a large scale nullified by
distance'. Steam abrogated these disadvantages and a clear-cut distinction between the
'European' and 'Asian' maritime ability became perceptible from the nineteenth century. It
was harnessed in the early years for 'reconnoitering the enemy positions, and in chasing and
capturing war-boats', especially in the newly conquered regions of Burma and the northeast
of India. As one contemporary writer quipped, 'the novelty, too, of this engine of war,
produced an effect analogous to that of the Spanish horses in Mexico'. Nonetheless, it was
not until the opening of the Suez that steam shipping received a huge international fillip.
Though limited, the impact of steam on the British Empire was significant.

In the mid-nineteenth century interim, besides gradually changing the geography of the sea,
the berthing of steam ships changed the maritime morphology of the Indian Ocean, for the
purpose of our discussion, in two ways: It introduced a number of private competitors, such
as Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, Jardine and Matheson and
Company, and the Apcar family, which attempted to enter specifically into the opium trade
following the advent of steam ships. Opium trading in times of the sailing ships, with all its
tribulations, meant that the 'investors in Britain could not expect a return on their capital for

52 Prinsep, An Account, p. 5.
53 Steamers were popular initially only for inland navigation. Amongst the few reasons which slowed down
the advance of steam navigation in the Indian Ocean was the prohibitive costs of freight rates and cabin
charges, and the absence of natural harbours of sufficient size which the British could exploit effectively. The
existing port towns Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta were such that they catered only to limited requirements.
Further, the civil engineering works, which had to be undertaken in order to overcome the difficulties in
building good harbours were still in their infancy in the subcontinent and the administrative and financial
backup required for the purpose was also missing. See F.J. A. Broeze, K.I. McPherson and P.D. Reeves,
"Engineering and Empire: The Making of Modern Indian Ocean Ports", in Satish Chandra, ed., Indian Ocean:
54 Even Marx saw steam as a force to reckon with. In an article titled 'The Future Results of British Rule in
India', published in the New York Herald Tribune on 8 Aug 1853, he remarked, 'Steam has brought India into
regular and rapid communication with Europe, has connected its chief ports with those of the South-Eastern
Ocean and has reinvinticated it from the isolated position which was the prime law of its stagnation'. Cited in
P.C. Joshi, Rebellion, 1857, p. 213.
at least a year'. With the arrival of steam, the public sales of opium shot up from twice a year to nine and subsequently became monthly. This happened because 'the low volume and high value of opium made it the ideal cargo for steamships'.\textsuperscript{55} It changed the character of harbours and ports. There was a greater differentiation of ports as outlets of traditional commercial commodities, as ports of call and entrepots. The fortunes of various ports and harbours ebbed and swelled with the shifts in steam technology. This was because it altered the character of sailing not only along the coast but also across the Ocean. Steam even machinated the colonization of island spaces, specking the Oceanic highways. For instance, Socorta was occupied in 1835 and Aden in 1838, to serve as coaling stations between Egypt and India and ‘harbours with little or no hinterland like Gibraltar, Papette (Tahiti), Las Palmas (Canaries), and Saint Vincent (Cape Verde Islands) became major bunkering stations for passing steamers’.\textsuperscript{56} The Ocean was, thus, transforming under the European influence. However, one must note this change was extremely gradual and not felt equally in all parts of the Ocean.

Both these changes had enormous significance for the destiny of the protagonist, the Andamans. The increased engagement of the non-Company players in the maritime affairs and the greater requirement for fuelling and naval bases impelled the British to recapitulate the fate of some of the beleaguered islands in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. And, the Andamans was one such group of islands on which the colonial gaze came to rest a second time. Once more, the Islands rose from the ashes to be anointed as an imperial outpost. In the view of the British, little had changed on the Islands. In the view of the contemporaries, the Islands still had the capacity to instil terror in the hearts of the seamen with the eerie and gloomy air that hung over the dark tropical forests liveried with vines and creepers, the impenetrable undergrowth, the swamps filled with poisonous gases, rows of mangroves hugging the coastline, and the inhospitable indigenes with their ‘poison-tipped’ arrows. Although death and disease lurked in every nook and crevice of the Islands, the British, soaked to their skins in the tempestuous rains, racked by malaria and scurvy, lonely and desolate, were still willing to make a long voyage to what was, in their imagination, a


\textsuperscript{56} Headrick, \textit{The Tentacles}, pp. 18-48.
god-forsaken country. It was not the drum rolls of the gospel and the glory of the almighty that led the British to the Andamans but the political, strategic and the commercial security of their Empire in India. The circumstances, which compelled the British to pay attention to the Andamans at the time, were same as the one in the late eighteenth century. The British officialdom was also aware of this. The Commissioner of Arracan, who was at forefront of the discussions in favor of occupation of the Andamans urged:

The reasons which towards the close of 1788, led the Board of Administration to seek a harbour sufficiently capacious to afford shelter to a fleet, have rather gained than lost force in 1856. We have much more to protect now than we had then, and without pretending to speculate on the march of events, I may imagine the case of our having deep cause to rue that we had left it to any power but our own to find a capacious harbour for a fleet at Andamans. 57

As another official candidly stated the reasons for which the British colonized the islands:

Why is it maintained? Is it for the shelter of our ships from the terrible hurricane which occasionally spread the Bay of Bengal with wrecks, or to find shelter for our disabled ships? Or is it intended that in the event of war the noble Harbours with which the islands abound shall serve as rendezvous for our naval force in the Bay of Bengal? There is not, I believe, in the whole of bay a single Port well adapted to be a rendezvous for our fleets out of the Andaman and Nicobar groups.... There is no island or groups of islands to my knowledge in the west Indies so well furnished with harbours as the Andamans Group – nor are there better harbours.... If then it is thought worthwhile to maintain settlements for our navy's sake in this quarter, I believe that the present one may be kept. 58

The ignominious Islands were all of a sudden being celebrated as a jewel in the crown. The British government had been harshly awakened to the unsurpassed utility of the Andamans

57 Home, Public, 6 Aug 1858, NAI.
as a port and a harbour. This was the perfect setting for staging the colonial conquest of the Islands. This was also the historical juncture when the Colonial State was making the final push into the frontier areas of the Empire, the distant waters of Southeast Asia, Punjab, and Afghanistan in the northwest and Burma and other territories in the northeast. The Court of Directors who had first proven to be the biggest brakes in the pace of annexation had, by the 1840s, shifted their stance and began endorsing a much more belligerent policy towards the Indian states. Amongst other factors, the economics of conquest were uppermost in official circles. Governor-General Dalhousie was careful to bring in territories that were good sources of revenue and raw material. The annexation of Nagpur was one such significant example. The Andamans, too, was poised for a similar historical inevitability, with the Ocean and its destiny conspiring in its colonization.

**Imagining Piracy**

There was another very apostolic role that the British expected the Andamans to perform – to serve as an 'imperial gendarme'. The Islands were cast as an extension of the colonial constabulary, policing the 'nefarious' activities of the European privateers, the Malays, the Chinese, and the Nicobarese. Following the abolition of the Company's monopoly, the British imagination was utterly gripped by fears of 'piracy', that is the infringement of British extra-judicial rights over the waters by the recalcitrant groups. Around 1830 onwards, greater instances of piracy by the Malays, the Chinese, and the Nicobarese began to be reported in the Indian Ocean. Numerous vessels were reported to have gone missing in the Indian Ocean.

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58 Extract from the Memorandum by Captain J. C. Haughton, in Home, Public, 15 Oct 1862, 12-13, A, NAI.


61 The references to piracy in the region abound in the Foreign Department records of the mid-nineteenth century. Foreign, Secret, 16 Sep 1831, 1-2, NAI; Foreign, Political, 5 Oct 1844, 240-245, NAI; Foreign and Political Dept., 5 Oct 1844, 980, NAI; Foreign, Political 25 April 1845, 171, NAI; Foreign, Political, 25 April 1845, 175, NAI; Foreign, Political, 25 April 1845, 176, NAI; Foreign, Secret, 27 Nov 1847, 12-13, NAI; Foreign, 9 Aug 1850, 219, NAI; Foreign, 26 Dec 1851, 194-206, F.C., NAI; Foreign, Political, 28 April 1854, 180-187, NAI; Foreign and Political, 14 Sept 1855, 86-97, NAI; Foreign and Political, 28 Feb 1856, 107-108 K.W., NAI; Foreign, Political, 8 Jan 1858, 63, NAI.
Ocean in this period. The officials in Bengal and those posted to Southeast colonies, in different capacities, were asked to look into the matter. One Mr. W. Dicey firmly concluded that:

I have no hesitation in my own mind in saying that two or more vessels have been cut off at these islands, within the last few months, making a fearful catalogues of vessels that have been destroyed and their crew murdered within the last ten or twelve years by these Pirates, who murder all belonging to the vessels taken, to prevent detection. 62

Another report insisted:

A perusal of the documents forwarded by the Commodore and the Commander of Tennaserim, leaves no doubt that at these islands, lying in the fair way between the East Coast of India and the Straits of Malacca, piracy in its worst form is systematically carried on to a frightful extent and from the method adopted of murdering the crew and passengers, whether men, women and children, their crimes are probably in many cases undiscovered and they have hitherto remained unpunished. 63

Piracy was not only disrupting the commercial interests of the British but was seen as an attack on the British sovereignty in the region. In a letter, the Commissioner of Tavoy, J.C. Haughton wrote to the Commissioner of Tennasarim and Martaban Provinces that, 'It may be said with some appearance of truth that at present the navigation of this portion of the Bay of Bengal is a disgrace to the British Government, being scarcely, if at all safer than the coast of China'. 64

This state of affairs in the Bay of Bengal, which was seen as a 'British Sea', became an issue, which the Government of India felt that it should immediately respond to. 65 As a possible solution, a suggestion was made by the Governor of Singapore to station a small, fast

62 Foreign, 15 Oct 1852, 74, NAI, Dicey, here, is referring to the Nicobar Islands.
63 Foreign, 15 Oct 1852, 71-72, NAI.
64 Foreign, 29 May 1857, 131-134, NAI.
65 Home Public, 6 Aug 1858, NAI.
moving armed steamer in the area to man the waters. This vessel was to be put under the charge of a young and active Commodore, manned by Malays and not encumbered with naval discipline and etiquette... such a vessel, if so employed must not be hampered with common law definition of Piracy, or with the instructions given by the admiralty to Her majesty's ships. Thus, the British were quite willing to overstep the boundaries set by their own law in order to deal with the piratical vessels. The motley bunch of Malays, distinguished in the colonial discourse as subversive and treacherous, was called in to serve the State. There was one case of this Datoo Juan, a Malay birds' nest breeder and an erstwhile pirate, whose services were solicited by the British. The local officers enthusiastically assented to his application for the renewal of the licence for sending in boats into the Mergui Peninsula for nest collection. It was hoped that the renewal of the license would conciliate the wily Malay and prevent him from lapsing into the 'profession of his youth and manhood - Piracy'. The British also wished to form a propitious alliance against other Malays who dared truck upon Datoo's and their own lucrative business. Besides, enlisting the services of the locals, with time British officers also began making extensive use of small steam vessels, gunboat flotillas, and shallow draft vessels to patrol the Southeast Asian waters.

Piracy had existed on the oceanic waters for centuries. A number of ancient and medieval texts ascertained its existence and noted the attempts of different States to curtail it.

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66 Foreign and Political, 28 Feb 1856, 107-08 K.W., NAI.
67 Foreign, Political, 25 April 1845, 170, NAI.
68 Foreign, Political, 25 April 1845, 173, NAI.
69 Osamu Kando, "Japan and the Indian Ocean, at the Time of the Mughal Empire, with Special Reference to Gujarat", in Satish Chandra, The Indian Ocean, pp. 174-190. Kando's article talks about the wako pirates of Japan, who along with the Chinese raided the Korean peninsula, South and East China Seas since the fourteenth century. Auguste Toussaint, in History of the Indian Ocean, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1966, also reaffirms, that 'the great plague of the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth century was piracy', which was 'a veritable hydra with hundreds of heads forever springing up anew', p. 144. Ashin Das Gupta, "Trade and Politics in Eighteenth Century India", in D. S. Richards ed., Islam and trade of Asia, Bruno Cassirer and University of Pennsylvanian Press, Oxford, 1970, pp. 181-214, talks about the Bugis and Anak Raja pirates of Malaya, whose activities in the late eighteenth century had their origins in the disruptions caused by Dutch
'Piracy', since the advent of the Europeans in the Asiatic waters, was more of a colonial taxonomical invention than an actuality. It was the term through which the British filtered the territorialization of the Indian Ocean. In the name of making the Ocean safe for travellers and sea-faring vessels, by keeping in check the 'piratical' activities, the British surreptitiously extended their control over the Islands. The phantasms surrounding 'Piracy' were continually reaffirmed, validated, and perpetuated by the British desire to eliminate all non-British trading and commercial interests in the Asiatic waterway, reflecting the maritime contestation between the Asian and European rights over the use of Indian Ocean waters. It was an illustration of the prevailing balance of power on the watercourses than a rescission of natural rights. Using law, which criminalized those seafaring commercial activities and vessels, which Southeast Asians engaged in since time immemorial, the British enforced their superior right over the sea. All commercial activities by 'unlicensed' natives were deemed 'illegal' and any abrogation of the British diktat was interpreted as 'lawlessness'. Many times, the Colonial government, as evident in the case of Datoo Juan, itself licensed the alleged piratical vessels to do commerce raiding.

The British imagination regarding piracy drew upon a discourse structured round the character of seafaring Malays and Chinese, which sought to freeze them in the mould of 'perfidious pirates':

Besides the professional pirates... all fishermen and coast-dwellers indulged in occasional piracy, and bona-fide traders were not averse to accepting the gifts of Fortune when they appeared in the shape of rich booty weakly guarded. In the Malay seas the most cruel part

70 There was once a case, in 1789, when some speculators from Madras erected, on the Coco Island, a windmill for the manufacture of coconut oil, without obviously bothering to bring it to the knowledge of the British. The Company officials, much to their chagrin, found out about it only when a ship coming towards Andamans picked up two starving natives, who had been abandoned by the mill’s proprietor, on the island, in 6 May 1793, Letter from Major Kyd to Edward Hay, Secretary to Government, Fort William, in Indian Antiquary, April 1902, pp. 209-10.

of the business lay in the seizure of prisoners to be sold as slaves, which was accompanied by a wholesale murder of the old and weak, and intolerable suffering inflicted on the weak.\textsuperscript{72}

Every Malay and Chinese seamen entering the sea or living in the coastal areas was seen as secretly coveting wealth which came from treacherous means. Its replication and reproduction, by the latter day historians, illustrates the tenacity of this discourse.\textsuperscript{73} However, the discourse was not completely detached from reality. The Chinese, Malays, and the Burmese had been sailing in these waters and visiting the islands dotting the Indian Ocean, extending up to the Bay of Bengal, for centuries.\textsuperscript{74} Its inhabitants, nicknamed ‘sea nomads’ by historians, for commercial gains exploited the Malay Peninsula’s geographical proximity to the various coastal entrepots.\textsuperscript{75} They were also at a vantagepoint from where they were said to disrupt the coastal traffic and engage in slave raiding and poaching.\textsuperscript{76} Their main interest in the Bay of Bengal region were the birds’ nest, which were a delicacy in Southeast Asia, and it was believed, that they engaged in slave raiding in the littoral colonies of the region. However, the advent of the Europeans in the Asiatic world brought with it violence, impoverishment, and loss of traditional rights on an unprecedented scale and added a new


\textsuperscript{73} Zarine Cooper, \textit{Archaeology and History, Early Settlements in the Andaman Islands}, OUP, 2002. Cooper while analyzing the piracy in the Indian Ocean does not problematize the use of the category of ‘piracy’ and reasserts the European notions of oriental pirates disrupting the flow of legitimate commerce in the Indian Ocean.

\textsuperscript{74} See Ranabir Chakravarty, “Visiting Faraway Shores: India’s Trade in the Western Indian Ocean (c. CE 800-1500)”, presented at a Conference in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, December 2004. He talks about the famous Chinese voyages under Admiral Cheng Ho (1404-33) during the Ming period. Also Ray, \textit{The Archaeology}.


brutal dimension to these seafaring activities. It changed the form of the Malay and Chinese commercial engagements which began to rely, more than ever, on what was now termed - poaching, pillaging, and buccaneering. Moreover, following the abolition of its monopoly the Company began to grudge any funds that it spent on administering the Straits Settlements. The Company’s parsimony had a double-pronged effect of bolstering dissatisfaction in the Straits over the Company’s administration and, on the other, it unwittingly encouraged free trading and led to fruition of Raffles’ dream of making Singapore a free port. The free commercial activities, from which the Company derived no profits, were obviously seen askance by the former and, many a times, deemed as ‘piracy’.

With regard to the Bay of Bengal, besides the Malays and the Chinese, it was the inhabitants of the Nicobar Islands, who became the focus of the British ire. In order to remedy the situation it was first suggested that the coconut trees of the Islands be destroyed because the ruin of their property would make the Nicobarese realize the gravity of their offences. Later, in 1844, it was suggested by one of the officials that:

It is a maxim generally admitted that punishment hardens the heart without effecting any change upon its natural propensities. I therefore do firmly believe that the only way of putting an effective stop to those daring murders is to take efficient means for civilizing the wretched natives of the Nicobar Archipelago, or in other terms teaching them Christian religion, which alone can irresistibly root up from the heart the most barbarous and perverse propensities.

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77 S. C. Hill, “Notes”, Indian Antiquary, 1923, p.27.
79 Nicholas Tarling, “Pirates and Convicts: British Interest in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the mid-Nineteenth Century”, in Nicholas Tarling, ed., Imperial Britain in Southeast Asia, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1975, Chap. 10, and also his Piracy and Politics in the Malay World: A Study of British Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century Southeast Asia, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1963. He talks in great detail about the prevalence of piracy in the Andaman seas and the involvement of Nicobarese in it. This is about the sole historical work that draws a connection between ‘piracy’ and the subsequent colonization of the Andamans.
80 Foreign and Political Dept., 5 Oct 1844, 90, NAI.
And:

That the time has come for taking these islands under the control of the British power. For the last 50 years the inhabitants have taken advantage of their isolated and independent position to plunder and murder the crews of vessels which have been wrecked on their coasts, or made their harbours in distress. Punishments for these atrocities are difficult: preventive measures are ineffectual.... The only plan, that suggests itself to us for preventing the recurrence of the outrages.... is to occupy, with a proper degree of permanency.81

In this view lay the germ of the idea of occupying one of the islands in the Bay of Bengal in order to stem the scourge of piracy. In 1848, the Court of Directors announced to the Government of India that the Danish government had determined to abandon the Nicobar Islands. And since the time the British had been interested in taking over the Nicobars because they felt, 'on diplomatic considerations some visible sign of actual dominion in that quarters would have its uses'.82 While the Nicobars continued to be crucial in the fulfilment of the British game plan in the Bay, their colonization could not be achieved until 1868. The Danes continued to treat the Nicobars as their territory and this made their occupation impracticable.83

Thus, the British began to frame plans for the occupation of the Andamans. As one official stated, 'that a harbour or harbours of refuge at a convenient part of one or more of the islands, would conduce to the security of traffic, and to the general interest of humanity'.84

As one official stated:

Looking on the map at the magnificent situation of these islands, their proximity to such seats of trade as Madras, Calcutta, Akyab, Rangoon, Moulmein, Penang, and Singapore, considering their extent, which must comprise an area of not much under two thousand

81 Home, Public, 27 March 1869, 180-194, A, NAI.
82 Home, Judicial, 4 July 1860, 3-6, A, NAI.
83 Foreign Dept, 15 Oct 1852, 75, NAI; Foreign, 1 Oct 1856, 37, NAI; Home, Port Blair, July 1875, 18, NAI
84 Home, Public, 6 Aug 1858, NAI.
square miles, their many fine harbours, and the prospect, reasoning from analogy, of the abundant fertility of the soil, it does seem astonishing that their condition on the present day should be such as to make us wish that they could be blotted from the face of the ocean or sunk a thousand fathoms deep below its surface. That instead of offering a refuge to the miserable storm-driven vessel, they should be a snare in her path leading to utter destruction.85

Taking cue, soon enough experts were summoned, correspondence with Whitehall was initiated, maps were rolled out, and the ships were readied to set sail to the Andamans. The Islands were to be, amongst other things, in charge of law enforcement, the Sheriff of the Bay of Bengal. However, destiny had willed otherwise for the Andamans. Instead of making a theatrical representation as an oceanic police officer, the Andamans was costumed as a dungeon, a receptacle for dacoits, murderers, thieves, and vagabonds. However, it was not to be any other jailhouse, but one that would rise from ignominy and obscurity to become the grand Indian Bastille. The penal settlement catapulted the Islands into a momentous historical trajectory. This is the narration of the Andamans becoming an island prison.

*Exile and Empire*

The decision to form a penal settlement on the islands was arrived at after nearly a year's deliberation. The mode of colonization of the Andamans had generated much-heated debate in the official circles. In 1856, Captain Henry Hopkinson, the Commissioner of Arracan was the first person to come up with the idea of setting up a penal colony in the Andamans for the purpose of its colonization. It was believed that a lot of good could be achieved 'by establishing of the convict settlement on the southwest part of the southern Island, which is reported to be healthy'.86 In Hopkinson's view, the setting up a convict depot was the 'cheapest plan' for occupation of the Islands. This was because labour was the chief source of expense in colonization and it could be subsidized by the use of convict labour. It was a cheap alternative because the amount that the Government was going to spend on maintaining and guarding the convicts, was the sum which they would have spent at any rate,

85 Captain Henry Hopkinson, Commissioner of Arracan to W. Grey, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, 8 Feb 1856, cited in Portman, *History*, pp. 190-191.
86 Foreign Dept, 30 Nov 1855, 20-21 & K.W., NAI.
even if the convicts were incarcerated in the subcontinental jails. He further suggested that the Burmese convicts be used to people the colony since they were familiar with the climatic and physical conditions of the Andamans. Moreover, the proximity to Rangoon and Moulmein would enable the use of a steamer and further help bring down the cost of transportation of humans and material.

The plan drawn up by Hopkinson was comprehensive and exhaustive and it won immediate converts in the government circles. However, there was ambivalence in the official circles over the issue of establishing a penal station. W. Grey, Secretary to the Government of Bengal was of the view:

The mere establishment of a penal colony at one extremity of one island would be inadequate, nor would anything short of entire domination prevent the evils which now occur from the savage and unbridled ferocity of the present inhabitants! On the other hand, there is good reason to suppose that occupation of these islands would bring many positive advantages, while their supposed unhealthiness would probably not be found more lasting than that of the coast and islands of Arracan.87

Similar was the view of J. P. Grant, Secretary to the Government of India. Although Grant was amongst the ones thoroughly taken in with the idea of convict settlement, he also admitted that such a settlement had limited uses. However, diplomatic considerations in the occupation of the Islands outweighed, in his opinion, the limitations of a convict settlement. Some visible sign of dominion in the Bay of Bengal had immense utility in warding off other foreign powers and the settlement could also be apportioned as a port of call for refreshment or coaling or merely serve as a post of observation in war time.88

Thus, while there was general agreement regarding the benefits of colonization, there exited internal differences in the official opinion regarding the mode of colonization, which was to be adopted. Lord Canning was one of the most vociferous critics of the idea of the penal station. He found Hopkinson’s argument regarding cutting the labour costs by employing

87 Home, Public, 6 Aug 1858, NAI.
convicts absolutely unconvincing. Canning had the whirling costs faced by the
Australian convict colony churning at the back of his mind. Further, he felt that Britain's
Asiatic Empire already had Arracan, Tennaserim, and Singapore as convict depots to suffice
for its needs. In Canning's view, the intention of securing a naval base on the sea was only
fractionally fulfilled if a convict depot was opened in one corner of the Islands. A naval base,
which could serve the Empire, in the time of war, had to be strengthened with a
considerable number of force and fleet. And the existence of a penal station on such a base
could only be a huge liability, unless the whole seacoast was occupied.\footnote{ibid.}

As the issue was being debated, the Raj was engulfed by the rebellion of 1857, stalling the
discussions on the occupation of the Andamans. It was generally assumed by the
uninformed contemporaries, and later by historians, that the colonization of the Andamans
was the product of this conflagration. As the discussion above indicates, the occupation of
the islands, instead of being occasioned by the revolt, was in fact delayed by its surprise
beginning. The revolt, however, was significant in deciding the British officials in favor of
opening a convict depot in the Andamans. The discussions on the Andamans' occupation
were not resumed until about September 1857 when the British found themselves on a
firmer footing following the recapture of Delhi. Two months later, in November 1857, a
committee by the name of the Andamans Committee was sent to explore the Islands and see
whether they were suitable for setting up a settlement, penal or otherwise. Dr. F.J. Mouat,
the Inspector General of Jails in Bengal, headed the committee, which returned with a
favourable report of the Islands. By January 1858, the recommendations of the Committee
were accepted and the decision was taken for the establishment of a penal settlement in Port
Blair.

Had it not been for the revolt, the British might have colonized the Islands a year before
they did. The astonishment and panic that the 1857 Revolt evoked amongst the British has
been the subject matter of many historical and literary works.\footnote{John William Kaye, The
History of the Great Revolt, 3 Volumes, Gian Publishing House, 1988, Charles Ball,
The History of Indian Mutiny, Masters Publishers, New Delhi, 1981; R.M. Coopland, A
Lady's Escape from Gwalior, ibid.} In the aftermath of the
revolt, 'the old information panics, redolent of "Thuggee and Dacoite", returned with a vengeance'. Adding to the British predicament of overflowing jails was the problem of controlling 'collective crime'. Contemporary British narratives attest to the brutality of the Indians and the British soldiers, inspite of the restraining note struck by 'Clemency' Canning. The main form of punishment given to rebels and mutineers was death – by hanging, beheading, burning or blowing up from the mouth of cannons. Yet there were others whose lives were spared but who were fettered, whipped and incarcerated in provincial goals. As a result, the jails in some of the provinces were bursting at the seams with Indians, suspected of desertion, rebellion, and mutiny. Given this situation, the sentence of transportation received a fresh lease of life and there was no disputing the decision to open a convict settlement on the Andaman.

The officials associated with prison discipline saw the revival of the sentence of transportation through the Act XXII of 1858 as 'most wise' and a 'rare necessary measure'.

Until the time the decision was taken to open a penal settlement at Port Blair, the mofussil

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92 The sentence of transportation had been revived earlier in the century in the 1820s against the backdrop of the Company's final drive to secure a stable frontier and to offset the financial costs of annexations by making the conquered territories pay for their development. A start was made with the settlement of the colony of Amboyna, where it was felt that employment of Bengal convicts would be of much help. In 1816, with the passage of the Regulation XIV, transportation to the Island of Mauritius and its immediate dependencies and the employment of convicts to work at such a place was legalized and with it transportation of convicts to Mauritius began in earnest. In 1828, Tenasserim, which had been ceded by the King of Ava in 1826, was added to the repertoire of penal settlements under the British. See T.K. Bannerjee, Background to Indian Criminal Law, Orient Longman, Calcutta, 1963, p. 91-93.
criminal courts were instructed not to specify any locality while sentencing a person to transportation 'beyond seas'.\textsuperscript{93} Different sets of rules applied to different provinces with regard to the sentence of transportation. For instance, it was decided that rebel convicts sentenced to imprisonment for less than 10 years in Punjab were not to be sent to the Andamans, unless there was a severe overcrowding in the jail. However, such convicts, sentenced in Northwest Provinces and the Awadh to imprisonment for more than five years, and in the Lower Provinces for more than three years, were sent to the Andamans.\textsuperscript{94} The condition of the jails in a particular province and the state of law and order of an area determined which rebel convicts were deported to the Andamans.\textsuperscript{95} For instance, the Inspector General of Prisons of the Northwest Province reported:

We had then very few Jails which had not been damaged to an extent which rendered them most insecure places for confinement, and the state of feeling throughout the country would have rendered the escape of a popular rebel a signal for fresh excitement and license.... Any sentence beyond five years should, I think involves transportation beyond seas – the object is most effectually obtained by sending the offender beyond the seas.\textsuperscript{96}

The Colonial State used penal transportation in order to create a moral order where the colonial law, while continuing to punish decisively, also sought to conciliate and ingratiate the colonized populace. This was because the State not only had to deal with the problem of containing the rebellion and solving the problem of overcrowded jails but also building the new basis for its authority.\textsuperscript{97} Notwithstanding the bloodshed that accompanied the

\textsuperscript{93} Home, Judicial, 26 Feb 1858, 12-13, NAI and Home, Judicial, 9 April 1858, 4, NAI.
\textsuperscript{94} Foreign, 6 Aug 1858, 554-559, NAI.
\textsuperscript{95} This was to change later, when the physical health and the age of the convict became major considerations in his eligibility for transportation to the Andamans.
\textsuperscript{96} A letter from C. B. Thornhill, Inspector General of Prisons, North-West Province to G.E.W. Couper, Secretary to the Government of North-West Province, in Home, Judicial, 20 April 1860, 3-7, A, NAI.
repression of the rebellion, a grant of amnesty and tolerance were the keynotes of the Queen's proclamation in November 1858. Transportation was a penal option with the right mix of terror and mercy, which the Colonial State wished to inspire in its subjects. This was because deportation had the potential to perpetually incapacitate the criminal from committing any crime without taking away his life or without subjecting him to confinement for life, both of which were considered to be less compassionate penal alternatives. It gave the Raj a merciful face, a legitimacy that it was seeking for its authoritarianism.

Transportation was, therefore, not merely a penal device that helped obviate the problems of overcrowded jails and nor did it represent a simplistic 'retreat of public punishment' in India. It was a means of colonizing the Islands. This strategy of using transportation or exile, as a means of empire building was a long-standing one in European history and the Andamans, in this scheme of things, were by no means unique. Be it the colonization of

Oct 2001, pp. 937-64, which looks at the way a bureaucratic penal system was evolved by the British through the court-martial system following the mutiny, which was aimed at maintaining discipline through 'moderation'.

As Beattie has also remarked that transportation 'while providing proof of the king's care for his people and frequent demonstrations of his exercising his proper role by tempering justice with mercy', Beattie, Crime, p. 473; Wiener, Reconstructing, John Styles, "Our Traitorous Money Makers: The Yorkshire Coiners and the Law, 1760-83", in John Brewer and John Styles, eds., An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century, Hutchinson University, 1980, pp. 172-249.

Sen, Disciplining. He erroneously locates transportation within the Foucauldian paradigm where it is seen as part of the general movement of 'retreat of public punishment'.

the Americas, Australia, or the island colonies in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, the transportation of convicts, felons, thieves, vagabonds, and beggars was a common method employed for settling new areas. The role played by the convicts was significant enough to be acknowledged by officials who visited the colonies in the Indian Ocean. For instance, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, Colonel Blundell once remarked:

The whole of the existing roads throughout the Island... every bridge in both town and country, all the existing canals, sea walls, jetties, piers, etc., have been constructed by convict labour. But not only is the community indebted for these essential works to the mere manual labour of convicts, but by the introduction among them of a system of skilled labour, Singapore is indebted for works which could not otherwise have been sanctioned from the State funds.

Transportation, thus, served as a mode of developing colonies, to enable them to carry Asian or European populations at a later stage.

Besides the ideological and political role played by the sentence of transportation in the politics of the Empire, there was yet another factor, which encouraged the use of the sentence of transportation. This was the shift in international labour migration and the refusal of the Strait Settlements to receive any of the mutineer convicts. As the intentions of the colonial government became known, the merchants and inhabitants of Singapore sent a

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History, Vol. IX, No. 2, Jan 1981, pp. 125-145; C.H.M. Clark, A History of Australia: From the Earliest Times to the Age of Macquarie, Vol. I; and Tim Coates, Convicts and Orphans: Forced and State-Sponsored Colonizers in the Portuguese Empire, 1550-1755, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2001. Coates has looked at the way Exile, as sentenced by the Portuguese courts (and after the 1550s the Tribunals of the Inquisition), was used as a powerful tool by the Portuguese state, which it moulded to suit its changing needs. Criminal exiles, in Coates' opinion, were the answer to various dilemma, which extended from labour shortages in the army and on the galleys to the problem of scant supply of colonizers at home or overseas. In the two hundred years (c.1550-1750) of history that Coates has examined, the judicial and inquisitorial authorities around the Portuguese world channelled nearly 50,000 exiles to new homes. This was a notable figure when contrasted to the humble population statistics of these regions. His work further charts some of the ways in which the Portuguese authorities used exiles for empire building and demonstrates how exile was a durable and yet a flexible sentence.

101 cited in Sandhu, Indians, p. 139, emphasis my own.
memorandum to the Government of India outlining the 'evils likely to arise from transporting sepoy mutineers and rebels to Straits Settlements'. The Singaporeans insisted that the convicts who had hitherto been sent there were a disparate group originating from different parts of India and, therefore, were believed to be sharing no intimate emotional or regional bond. On the other hand, the mutineers were suspected of being 'bound to each other in a sort of a tie of brotherhood, accustomed to act together, speaking the same language and naturally entertaining the most deadly sentiments of hatred and revenge'. The prospect of having such men in large numbers was a dreadful one, as it had the potential of disrupting the life of 'these purely commercial settlements, these large depots of trade, these quite peaceable agricultural stations'. The presence of rebel convicts was also perceived as further contributing to the instability of a large chunk of the lower class Chinese population, which enjoyed a rather turbulent and volatile reputation. The Singaporean opinion was, thus, unanimously against the continued use of Singapore and Penang as penal stations:

So long as these settlements were in their infancy, a body of convicts proved beneficial in the formation of roads, digging canals but now, though there is still much similar work to be performed, yet a large commercial city such as Singapore is now become, with a trade of ten millions sterling, a harbour crowded with shipping and large population earnestly engaged in mercantile and trade pursuits is no longer a proper place for the reception of the criminals of India and most specially for the late sepoys of the Bengal Army.103

The problem of overcrowded jails in India was, however, beginning to create immense strain on the government. F. J. Mouat, Inspector of Jails, confirmed that it would not be desirable to send 'such men to either Arracan or the Straits Settlements'. And if, speedy steps be not taken to form a convict settlement on the Andaman Islands, the best means of disposing of them would probably be to send them to the West Indies as compulsory labourers. In West Indies, it was hoped, they would 'be removed from all Indian association and would have no inducement in a population who have no sympathy with them to plot mischief, or commit

102 Home, Judicial, 8 Jan 1858, 7-9, NAI.
103 Home, Judicial, 8 Jan 1858, 270-274, NAI; Home, Judicial, 8 Jan 1858, 7-9, NAI.
crime'. 104 Even West Australia was contemplated as a possible destination for the mutineers, since the community there was already accustomed to the presence of the convicts and the shortness of the distance would 'facilitate conveyance'. 105

In contrast to the attitude of the Straits was that of the various British plantation colonies dotting the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. Most of these plantation colonies were facing a labour crunch at this time and began baying for the transported soldiers. In 1834, slavery, which had hitherto provided the main labour force for the colonies, was abolished. The emancipated slaves had become 'apprentices' for a period of a few years before taking to wage labour. The Apprentice System also soon came to an end, further creating shortage of labour. Consequently, the plantation colonies were frantic in their search for alternative sources of labour reserve. Indentured labour had been successfully introduced in Mauritius, and the other colonies took the cue from it. The indentured system was also introduced in West Indies but it did not alleviate the problem of labour immediately. There was also a racial dimension to the labour problem in the West Indies. There were anti-Portuguese riots in British Guiana in 1856, which made the planters believe that the presence of Indians could serve as 'buffer' between the white and black population in the colony. There was also talk of introduction of cotton plantation in Guiana, which would have required greater labour input. Thus, all these conditions together made the prospect of the colony receiving ex-Sepoy sentenced to transportation, highly attractive. 106 The local government and the European planters supported this view. The Royal Gazette, the pro-government newspaper of British Guiana, commented that, 'the most fitting punishment for those who had taken part in the rebellion, that is to say, for the great bulk of the rebels who may survive after the rebellion has been crushed, would be transportation for life... They and their wives should be transported to some distant clime and never be permitted to return'. 107

104 Home, Public, 8 Jan 1858, 270-74, NAI.
105 Home, Public, 22 Jan 1858, 63-65, NAI.
The *Colonist*, the pro-planters newspaper, in October 1857, reported that an application had been made by the Government to the East India Company Directors for twenty five thousand sepoys to be transported to the Colony. This report was based on a memorial submitted by the West Indies Committee in London to the East India Company. The West Indies Committee was a powerful lobby of the planters of the West Indies, who wished the tainted sepoys to be transported to West Indies where they could be used as labourers. A similar move had also been made by Mauritian authorities but had been turned down by the government, in Britain, because of the colony's proximity to the Indian mainland. The Governor of British Guiana made representations to the Secretary of the State for Colonies. However, the proposal did not yield immediate results. After considerable representations, dashing the West Indian hopes in July 1858, the Governor of British Guiana, Wodehouse, was informed by the Secretary of State for the colonies, Lytton that 'the Government have determined that any of the mutineers who may be transported from India are to be sent to the Andaman islands'. It was also decided that the mutineers and the rebel convicts who had already been sent to the Straits were shipped back to the Andamans once the penal station opened up there.

**Conclusion**

The first colonization had brought the Islands in the purview of colonial contest over islands and this trajectory was brought to full circle when on the morning of 22 February 1858 Colonel Man, under the reverberating sounds of a 21-guns-salute, announced the British reoccupation of the Andamans. As the British began their recovery of Lucknow and Kanpur in northern India in March 1858, on the other side of the peninsula a ship with 200 fettered convicts set sail for the Andamans. The day of the arrival of the first batch of rebel

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110 Home, Judicial, 25 June 1858, 12-19, NAI, Home, Judicial, 15 Jan 1858, 12-13, NAI, Home, Judicial, 26 Feb 1858, 1, NAI. Alapatt is of the view that the opening of the penal settlement in the Andamans made the question of sending convicts to West Indies an unsound financial proposition and that is the reason the scheme must have been abandoned. However, this is not the last word on the matter and further research may shed more light on the reasons for abandoning the scheme for transporting convicted sepoys to the West Indies.

111 Home, Public, 7 May 1858, 74, A, NAI.
mutineers to the Andamans, 16 March, has been celebrated as ‘Andaman Divas’ by their descendants as the day their forefathers touched the soil of the land which was to be their new home forever. From a historiographical point of view the retelling of the story of the colonization is important as it puts on record a story hitherto untold, settles a historical imbalance, and also sheds light on the fatal fastening of the idea of a penal settlement to the history of the Andamans. The first phase of colonization of the Andamans (1789-1796) was not distinguished by any remarkable shifts, changes or departures, given the brevity and undistinguished career of the settlement. On the other hand, this phase of colonization unlocked new possibilities for these Islands in the Imperial framework as the control of the Andamans from Fort William occasioned a significant break in the historical location of the Islands. A further significance of the story of colonization is that the history of the first phase has been relegated to a mere footnote in most government publications, records, and monographs and even in historical writings. Not only is this phase of Andamanese history considered marginal, there is also a superimposition, on this epoch, of the nineteenth century concerns of the Colonial State. This is especially evident in the projection backwards of the phenomenon of the establishment of the penal settlement. A selection from a late nineteenth century monograph is illustrative in this case. The reasons that it assigns for the colonization of the Islands in 1788 are, firstly the ‘necessity of a suitable penal settlement, to which the more heinous offenders who had been convicted by the judges, might be transported’; and, secondly, the need for a harbour of refuge. Even the official histories of the Andaman Islands, commissioned by the Government of India duplicate the above reasons for the first colonization of the Islands. The penal colony, which was inaugurated in the year 1858, has overcast other dimensions of history of the Andamans. The penal settlement, no doubt was the pontifical dimension of the Andamans’ history but it does not necessarily define the entire gamut of historical forces at work in the colonization these Islands.

In the eighteenth century, it was not the Andamans, but Penang, Arracan and Tennasserim that served as penal stations. The Andamans were never really conceptualized as a penal

114 It was decided, as early as 1787, to transport convicts to the Prince of Wales Islands and engage them in clearing and cultivating the land. It was felt that ‘it would be a greater punishment to a Bengallie to be thus
settlement. It was the Oran Laut people from the Malay coast, adept at the work of forest clearing and fishing, who were sought by Captain Blair for clearing the Andaman Islands for inhabitation.\textsuperscript{115} It was not until 1793 when the new settlement in the northeast of the Islands was coming up that the need for a huge amount of cheap and reliable labour was felt. Since the task of clearing the forest was both tedious and labourious Captain A. Kyd, the then Superintendent of the Andamans, suggested to employ male convicts for the purpose.\textsuperscript{116} Finally, it was decided to send 100 convicts under the sentence of transportation to Andamans.\textsuperscript{117} Over the years, the number of convicts on the settlement did not grow as much as they did in Penang. For instance, at the time of abandoning the settlement, there were only 270 convicts as compared to 550 free men in the Andamans. Thus, the success of the Andamans as a serviceable penal station also remained limited in comparison to other convict station. The mere use of convict labour did not make the Andamans a penal settlement in the eighteenth century. The convicts were used as a substitute for cheap free labour and, unlike the post-1858 era, worked under a civil administration. No penal edifice, regulations or mores were erected to structure the lives of convict workers. However, the second phase of the Andamans’ colonization as a penal settlement firmly attached the penal epithet to the colony, where a proper penal administration with all its trappings was inaugurated on the Settlement.

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\textsuperscript{115} Secret Dept, 15 July 1789, No. 7 & 8, NAI; 14 July 1789, Extract from the Bengal Consultations, in \textit{Indian Antiquary}, May 1900, pp.123.

\textsuperscript{116} Letter from Major. A. Kyd to Governor-General, in Home, Public, 27 March 1793, 6, A, NAI. The recommendations of Captain Kyd were readily accepted and soon several magistrates in India were summoned to draw up lists of those prisoners who were under sentence of perpetual imprisonment, possessing the most desperate and notorious characters and ones fit enough to perform physical labour, to be sent to Andamans. Letter from Mr. J. Fombelle, Registrar of the Nizamut Adalat to Mr. J.L. Chauvet, the Sub-Secretary, written on 3 April, in Home, Public, 8 April 1793, 7, C, NAI.

\textsuperscript{117} Minute of the Governor-General, in Home, Public, 19 Dec 1794, 5, A, NAI.
The following section would show the contradictions and problems, which arose, in running an island colony as a penal settlement. Often, the aims, desires, and the expectations of the officials failed to converge. The ecology of the Islands and the insubordination by the Asiatic settlers – convict and free – further circumscribed the functioning of the colony. These factors continually forced the administrators to retract, wink at, or accommodate many practices, which actually undercut the penal character of the colony. The labour regime that the administration attempted to put into place was such an example of contestations and attempts at reconciliation. The functioning of the colony demonstrates that a historian, while keeping a firm hold on the penal dimension, has to look beyond the confines of penal or convict history in order to be able to narrate a history of the Andamans.