Chapter 3

Undefined Variables: Administering the Island Colony

Introduction

Soon after its arrival on the island, with the first batch of convicts in March 1858, the initial task ahead of the British crew was to evolve a system of administration for the colony. Most of the British officers, lacking in any executive training, had only their wits, grit, and the almighty as their coxswain. Administering a colony such as the Andamans, they would soon discover, was a Herculean task. This was because, on one hand, the Andamans was a complete terra incognita for the British, and on the other, the central government was minimalist in its instructions regarding the way the colony was to be run, leaving the local officials to their own devices.\(^1\) This chapter explores the imperatives and constraints that circumscribed the working of the colonial state in the Andamans. The foremost hurdle in administering the Island colony was the internal dialectics amongst the British officials regarding the character of the Andamans as a colony. The debate was over the question whether the Andamans was a purely penal colony or just another imperial colony being developed with the help of convict labour. The second variable in the working of the colony was its geography and the ecology. The third factor, circumscribing the working of the colony, was the resistance proffered by the convicts and native free police on the Islands. Garbed in various forms it was, at times, winked at and tolerated by the administration and, at other times, met with severe reprisals and violence.

Internal Dialectics – Debating the Character of the Colony

Conceived in a moment of historical flurry the character of the Andamans, as a colony, remained an issue of debate – whether it was, at all, a penal colony. This debate had, at its centre, two central issues: the social profile of the transported convict; and second, the nature and meaning of the punishment of transportation. British officials could never find a satisfactory solution to these questions. Thus, the internal dialectics in the Andamans

\(^1\) Home, Judicial, 16 July 1858, 6-10, NAI. The Central government, however, did retain the veto power to sanction or disallow any policy or regulation that it thought unsuitable.
became the foremost undefined variable which circumscribed the functioning of the Colonial State and resulted in considerable amount of administrative confusion in the Andamans. The examination of this issue reveals that the State in the Andamans was never top-heavy and internal fissures, dissension, discords, and disagreements were a characteristic feature of it working.

I. Whither a Penal Colony?

From its inception to its abandonment the constant wrangling amongst the top administrative brass regarding its actual character as a colony tormented the Andamans’ administration. There remained an ambiguity regarding the question whether the Andamans was to be the penal settlement. For some officials, the Andamans was a colony like any other, with the exception of being developed by convict labour, but with the ultimate aim of transforming it into a free colony. For instance, the first Superintendent of the Andamans, J. P. Walker, believed that these Islands were simply just another colony in the Bay of Bengal, which, like the Straits Settlement, had to be developed with varied forms of labour. Just a few months after his arrival, Walker made the suggestion, that:

> It is not desirable that this should be exclusively a convict settlement but that the introduction of free settlers into the colony would exercise a salutory influence... since many of newly-arrived artificers were desirous of sending for their families.\(^2\)

This reveals that J.P. Walker clearly did not consider the Settlement in the Andamans solely as a convict station. This attitude towards the Settlement was not only that of the officials working in the Settlement but was also shared by some members of the Governor General’s Council. In 1859, some members of the Council aired the view that the convicts should be made to work with free men and that separation from their villages and friends was already

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\(^2\) Home, Judicial, 2 March 1860, 13-16, A, NAI and Home, Public, 4 Aug 1865, 7-8, A, NAI.

\(^3\) The Central government, however, refused to sanction any general introduction of the free settlers on the Island but agreed to let the free people employed by the government on the Islands to import their families. Home, Judicial, 30 July 1858, 11-15, NAI.
penal enough. And, therefore, they were keen that the convicts should not be made to feel their degradation and punishment more acutely.⁴

And, yet, for others, the Andamans was a penal colony founded on an island to serve as a receptacle of criminals sentenced to deportation. Colonel Man, who alighted on the shores of the Andamans, as the Superintendent in 1869,⁵ staunchly believed that the Settlement in the Andamans was 'an important branch of the judicial establishment of India'.⁶ Man's was not a lone voice. His views had a wide constituency not only in mainland officials but also in the provincial governments. A letter from the Punjab government is an example of the extensive clientele of Man's opinion. It stated, 'in Western Australia the convict is wanted for colonization, whereas Port Blair is purely [a] penal settlement'.⁷ In similar vein was the opinion of J. S. Campbell, who visited the Islands in 1872.⁸ The Settlement, in his view, was:

Started solely with the object of providing an appropriate place of confinement for convicts sentenced to transportation beyond the seas, though there was, of course, the secondary hope that the place might in time prove a successful colony.... The object of the Settlement being the reception of life-convicts.⁹

This confusion over the character of the settlement in the Andamans was so pronounced that it was evident even to the contemporaries. Though loath to admitting it, some officials actually went on record conceding that the Settlement had not paid the expected dividends because of the existence of antagonistic views regarding the character of the colony. A. P. Howell was one such official who inspected the Settlement, in 1868, and wrote a famous

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⁴ Note by G.C. Collyer, Chief Engineer, Straits Settlement, to Capt. J.G. R Forlong, Executive Engineer on Special duty, 24 Sep 1859, in Home Judicial, 4 Oct 1865, 22-23, A, NAI.
⁵ Colonel Henry Man was the father of the famous E.H. Man. Both father and son had served as Superintendents of the Andamans. See Home, Judicial, 15 Jan 1858, 21, A, NAI and Home, Judicial, 15 Jan 1858, 23, A, NAI.
⁶ Home, Public, 27 March 1869, 167 to 169, A, NAI.
⁷ Home, Judicial, 30 Oct 1869, 57-59, A, NAI.
⁸ J. Scarlet Campbell was the Secretary to the Home Department, Government of India, at the time.
⁹ Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, NAI.
note on it, suggesting measures for improvement; but not without pointing out the dichotomy of views prevailing:

In reading over the correspondence about Port Blair, I do not find that Government has as yet expressed any decided view as to whether Port Blair is simply to be a great jail for life and long-term prisoners from India, where the journey across the sea is added to the terrors of imprisonment, or whether it is to be a colony where free men and convicts are to live together and gradually to people the Andamans.\(^\text{10}\)

This was the clearest statement of the tangle that prevailed in the Andamans. The confusion over the role that the Andamans was to play as a colony was translating into a much looser system of administration than what the government would have liked to see. J. S. Campbell, who visited the Islands in the capacity of Secretary to the Home Department of the Government of India, also quite candidly acknowledged the perplexing state of affairs in the Andamans and that ‘several systems are now working side by side’. In his view, one of the reasons for the insufficiency of the system was the, ‘non-establishment of any thoroughly approved system, each officer carrying out pretty nearly his individual views, which were liable to be superseded on the arrival of the new Superintendent’.\(^\text{11}\)

Campbell’s incriminating report had led to the codification of rules and regulations for running the Settlement. However, even that failed to resolve the contentious issues, which at times acquired farcical proportion as the executive head of the colony – was the Superintendent – a designation used for the head of jails on the Indian subcontinent, and a Chief Commissioner with powers of local government.\(^\text{12}\) A corollary of this problem was the lack of clarity regarding the kind of convict being sent to the Andamans.

\(^{10}\) A.P. Howell, *Note of Jails and Jail Discipline in India 1867-68*, Calcutta, 1868.

\(^{11}\) Home, *Port Blair, August 1874*, no. 52, NAI.

\(^{12}\) The penal settlement was, in the beginning, under the direct control of the Government of India. However, in 1864, it placed the Superintendent of the Settlement under the orders of the Chief Commissioner of the British Burmah. However, the Settlement officers were dissatisfied with this change as a lot of time was lost in correspondence with the Home Department by re-routing all correspondence through the office of British Burma. As a result, the administration was once again placed under the Government of India, in 1871. In
II. Profiling the Transported Felon

Initially, it was believed that the convicts being sent to the Andamans were mutineers and rebels, guilty of political crimes, 'whose capital punishment was avoidable, but whom it would have been madness to set free'. So, it was with 'a humane object' that the penal settlement was inaugurated, 'with a proper regard for human life, and without confounding men who may possess many fine qualities with the dregs of the criminal classes who form the ordinary mass of the transported convicts'.\(^{13}\) The Central government insisted that there be no cruelty or excesses of any kind, based on the view that the convicts were no ordinary criminals but respectable members of society who had rebelled against the State.\(^{14}\) So, while the colony was inaugurated as a place for receiving convicts, it was to be for political offenders from respected sections of the Indian society and, therefore, not to be run on harsh penal lines. Excesses of any kind were reprimanded and condemned by the Central government. Notwithstanding the Government of India's diktat the physical condition of the colony did not permit such leniency in the actions of the local officers. For instance, from the early batches of convicts in the Settlement, about 288 convicts escaped between March and April 1858. Out of the ones who were re-captured, Walker hanged eighty-one as retribution. He wished to instil terror in the hearts of those contemplating escape.\(^{15}\) This act incurred severe reprimand from the Central government, which in no uncertain terms, let its displeasure known.

Further, the Government of India held a false notion that only rebels and mutineers were being sent to the Andamans.\(^{16}\) Convicts sentenced to transportation were received from all December 1871, the Superintendent also acquired the title of Chief Commissioner, which finally made him the administrative head as well. The new title gave powers of local government to the Superintendent, which included the power to make rules, subject to the approval of the Governor General, which would have the force of law. See Home, Public, 1 April 1864, 1-12, A, NAI; Home, Public, 29 May, 1866, 61-62, A, NAI; Home, Port Blair, August 1874, 52, NAI.

\(^{13}\) Home, Judicial, 16 July 1858, 6-10, NAI.

\(^{14}\) ibid.

\(^{15}\) Home, Judicial, 16 July 1858, 6-10, NAI.

\(^{16}\) There is a document from mid-1859, in which a paragraph has been struck out because Walker did not want this to go on record with his statement – 'Nominally only mutineers and rebels have been transported to
over India and most of them had been convicted for murder or dacoity. Further, not all the convicts sent to the Andamans had been given the sentence of transportation. Under Act XXII of 1858, transportation was given to those people who were sentenced under the Penal Acts or to mutineers and rebels who had been sentenced to imprisonment for more than five years. Soon after, the Act IV of 1859 empowered the Governor General in Council to transport prisoners, who had been sentenced by regularly constituted tribunals to simple imprisonment. Moreover, since the settlement was still ill-equipped to take the burden of a huge population, a decision was taken by the government 'not to transport men who have lost a limb' or were old and sickly to the Andamans, as this brought down the efficiency of the labour force and also hiked the mortality rate. Many of the convicts sent to Andamans were also extremely young. The lowest age of transportation was ten years old. However, judging from the appearance of some, they looked much below the age of ten.

After the first two years, following the inception of the Settlement, even the higher officials in India admitted to the fact that 'the circumstances of the Settlement are now different to what they were when Port Blair was used as a place of transportation almost exclusively for persons convicted of crimes against the State'. However, there remained a lack of clarity over the issue. Many convicts who had been sentenced to transportation continued to await their turn in provincial jails for deportation either as a result of overcrowding in the Andamans or else because they did not measure up to the minimum physical standards proscribed by the State for deportation.

the Port Blair. Practically the local authorities seem to have given the widest possible interpretation to the orders and have sent to Port Blair every one of any crime during the disturbances and since. I do not think that half of the 318 whom we took down were properly speaking, either rebels or mutineers. Dacoity, rape and such crimes were the ordinary charges upon which their convictions were entered in the calendar'. See Home, Judicial, 29 July 1859, 1-20. It was urged by the Settlement officials that, 'If it is intended gradually to make Port Blair a quasi free settlement and to transport thither those only guilty of political crimes, the subject requires attention, at present a goodly portion are certainly common Budmashes.... most of them deny any complicity in the rebellion'. See Home, Judicial, 29 July 1859, 1-20, NAI.

17 Home, Judicial, 9 Dec 1859, 6-7, NAI.
18 Home, Judicial, 2 July 1858, 12-14, NAI and Home, Judicial, 3 June 1859, 7-13, NAI.
19 Home, Judicial, 6 Jan 1860, 7-23, A, NAI; Home, Judicial, 2 Dec 1862, 1-3, A, NAI.
Table I
Crimes for which people were sent to the Andamans in 1859

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mutiny and Deserters</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebellion</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dacoity &amp; Highway Robbery</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plunderers</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder &amp; Wounding</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary &amp; Theft</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jail</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riot</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisoning</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total no. of convicts</strong></td>
<td><strong>1301</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Guards</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. What was Punishment?

A divergence of opinion prevailed amongst the officials regarding the nature and meaning of punishment, throughout the history of the Settlement. This dichotomy directly impinged upon the system of convict management, enforced under the different Superintendents. The different notions of punishment cast the transported convict in a double role. He was, at one level, a criminal who had to atone for his crime through his desocialization, which began with his sentencing and the voyage to the Islands. The dropping of the convict's surname and pinning on him a number for his identification, the donning of convict clothes, branding and shearing of his head became the verbal and visual signifiers of the final severance of the natal ties and ascription of a criminalized identity. This convict, at another level, also formed the kernel, the seed of a new society. Through his exertions he was expected to reconstruct and reconstitute his identity and begin his life anew as a hardworking and honourable member of a social community. Thus, transportation subjected the convict to two opposing

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20 Home, Judicial, 29 July 1859, 1-20, NAI.
forces: his political and social marginality; and the imminence of his integration into the new socio-political world [that defined the contours of his life in exile].

a) The Settlement as a Penal Theatre

A group of officials espoused the view that it was the Settlement that provided the setting for the expiation of the convict's sins. This signified that the punishment for the transported criminals commenced after he arrived on the Islands. The Settlement was to be a theatre where the life in penance was to be scripted, rehearsed, and soliloquized. His entire existence in the Settlement was to be one of penalty, a one-act play. The idea behind this perspective was that it was not simply the character of punishment that deterred the criminals but the certitude and assurance that harsh punishment would follow. Only such a measure deterred the convict and others from any criminal activity forever. In this scheme, the convict remained a criminal whose life journey had to be devoted to serving the sentence for the crime that he had committed. Not a moment was to go by which made him forget the gravity and heinousness of his criminal act.

Colonel Man was one such exponent of this particular idea of punishment. His arguments were underpinned by a specific notion of crime and criminality. Crime in his opinion was a product of idleness, indolence and laziness, but with one vital difference: crime was not born of the personal character of the criminal but his environment. Colonel Man's perceptions prefigured the Victorian views of crime and criminality, which were to become dominant in the penal ideology after the 1880s. It saw crime not as a matter of choice but product either of hereditary or, more importantly, of the environment. This was a departure from the view prevalent in the early and mid-nineteenth century of crime and criminality, where crime was a product of a defect in character. And the law in the earlier scheme was directed to play an educative role in the society and geared to deal with the consequences of people's deviant behaviour.21 However, crime in Man's framework was not something that threatened the

21 Martin J. Weiner, Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law and Policy in England, 1830-1914, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990. Weiner maps the differing views on crime and criminality in the nineteenth century England on a linear scale of succession. However, the occurrence of these views in a chronological linearity needs to be problematized because Weiner does not take into account the possibility of co-existence of
social order but was more of an administrative problem, which could be solved by effective administration. It was not depravity of character but circumstances, such as poverty, unemployment, poor company and lack of education that contributed to an individual becoming a criminal. As Man once remarked:

Among every batch of convicts some will probably be found who had breathed an atmosphere of crime from their earliest childhood, others who have been tempted by extreme want or evil associates, and possibly one or two of higher class who, with open eyes, have induced a wide-spread ruin in the hope of suddenly acquiring riches.\(^{22}\)

Thus, removing the convict from an environment, which made a criminal out of him, and recasting him in a system with an in-built mechanism of incentives, where labouring and good behaviour was rewarded, was seen as achieving the rehabilitation of the convict.\(^{23}\) Therefore, certainty of punishment and an impartiality and objectivity in management, where only those indulgences were granted to the convict that he had earned from hard work and good behaviour, were to be the main aspects of the penal administration. As Colonel Man, on joining the services in the Andamans, opined, penalization of the convict in transportation could only be achieved, 'if the regulations of the Settlement admit of no compromise, but are conducted on principles determined calmly beforehand, and impartially administered, with no more regard to the convenience of the colony than to the previous

\(^{22}\) Home, Public, 27 March 1869, 167 to 169, A, NAI.

\(^{23}\) This was also the view taken by the Prison Discipline Committee in 1838, where crime in India was not seen as a product of 'depravity of character, such as is usually the crime of an English malefactor'. Crime was more a result of the social environment of the criminal, 'His general character differs less from that of the mass of his countrymen than would be the case in more civilized and moral countries. A large proportions of crimes in this country are committed by persons whose tribe have done the same time out of mind, and they are almost as naturally the result of birth, as another man's honest trade'. Given this character of the Indian criminal application of this punishment was quite effective because the convict, once removed from all that is familiar, finds it easy to commence an honest life unlike the English criminal who suffers from depravity of character. Report of the Prison Discipline Committee, Government of India, 1838, p. 97.
station and means of the individual'. Campbell's report was also a serious illustration of this view of punishment:

No life convict should, for the future, have any correspondence with India.... when a man is transported for life, he should become dead to his family. Communications from his family tend to render a man who has no hope of returning, sullen and unfit to make the most of the new life before him, and discipline is impeded. I would suggest an Act declaring any such convicts to be civilly dead, any property he may have left passing to the next-of-kin.

For Campbell, the transported criminal was as good as dead from the point of view of his social relations. In this scheme, the life of the convict in transportation had to be without any indulgences or comforts of any kind. He was expected to perform hard labour under strict discipline, 'with only such food as is necessary for health'. Anything over and above this was seen as 'an indulgence which may at any time be withdrawn in whole or part'. Such a view emphasized enforcement of extremely stringent surveillance and a segregation policy, with regard to the convicts, and wished to seal off the Islands from any external communication or interaction. The Settlement, therefore, was to be 'penal' in all respects and one that was run on the lines of strict discipline known to mainland jails.

b) Voyage as Penal Sacrament

In stark distinction, to the above notions of punishment and criminality, was the view that another group of officials held. For them, the penalization was embedded in the sentencing of the convict and the act of his transportation. The banishment of the convict from his familiar surroundings, severing of umbilical and social ties, and his passage to an unknown land forever was perceived as the aggregate of punishment. The voyage from the mainland to the dreaded kalapani (black waters) was the proverbial point of catharsis, the juncture where the convict was believed to have purged himself of the penalty for his crime:

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24 Home, Public, 27 March 1869, 167 to 169, A, NAI.
25 Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, NAI, emphasis my own.
26 ibid.
When on the sea on board ship they could discover no mark of a road, no trees, no land, only the sky above, and the black, green, and blue waters all round. The *sahib log* only on the steamers knew where to go, and they had to sit night and day looking through the telescopes.  

The voyage was believed to be a point of purgation because it was presumed that it lead to the dispossession of the convict's caste status. The voyage from India to the Andamans took nearly five to six days and the shackled prisoners huddled on the lower deck 'bewildered by the novelty of the situation, or affected by seasickness' knew not where the seas were taking them, drank water from the same pump and ate food sullied by white hands and the men of lower castes. Working with an essentialized view of the caste system, transportation was thus seen as the worst punishment that a convicted criminal could be subjected to within his social matrix. The clearest enunciation of this could be found in the report of The Prison Discipline Committee of 1838 which had decided to retain penal transportation in the penal statutes, based on the view, that it had the capacity to inspire fear and awe in the

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27 Home, Judicial, Proceedings Volume, July-Dec 1859, No. 57, NAI.

28 Home, Public, 25 June 1870, 68-70, A, NAI.

hearts of the natives of India. Going by this view, the voyage was a sort of rites of passage, a sacrament through which the convict when he disembarked on the unholy shores of the Andamans had already atoned himself. He anchored on the Islands not as a fallen or base human but one redeemed. From this thesis stemmed the belief that the life of the convict subsequent to his arrival, was not to be made unduly harsh or arduous. The imposition of regular jail discipline was apprehended as leading to an absolute extermination of the person of the convict. The report of General Napier's who visited the Settlement in March 1864 to review the working of the Settlement, was quite a significant expression of this view:

Transportation beyond sea is, to the Hindoos particularly, and a in a less degree to the Hindooised mahomedans, so terrible a punishment, - a separation for ever from every tie and relation, and possession which men hold to in life, - that it places them in a far different positions from the European who is transported to a Penal Settlement.

Further:

It is necessary to remove these Indians from the scene of their social and political crimes, but in the act of removal their punishment is in a great measure achieved; it is necessary that they should labour for their support and the advancement of the Settlement, but the severities of the regular Jail discipline would be annihilation to them.  

Ensconced within this paradigm was the belief, as evident from Napier's report, that an imposition of restrictions or disabilities of any kind on the convicts was disproportionate to their status as transported convicts. The transportee from this perspective was closer in his character to an indentured labourer who was at liberty to associate with all sorts of free and unfree people than his counterpart in a mainland jail. In sum, the officials subscribing to this

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30 "On the people of this country, the simple operation of removal to a distance is to increase the exemplary force of punishment to a very great degree. Generally over India a sentence of transportation beyond the black water is regarded with inexplicable horror. The effect of such a sentence on the convict is short of the effect of a sentence of death, whilst the effect of such a sentence on the bystanders is greater than the effect of the sentence of death'. Report of the Prison Discipline Committee, Government of India, Calcutta, 1838, p. 86.

31 Home, Public, 1 April 1864, 1-12, A, NAI.
view saw the Andamans as a quasi-free colony or just like any other imperial colony with the difference that it employed convict labour. This made them open-minded about the importation of other kinds of subordinate labour on the Islands along with the convicts. The fact that the Andamans was a colony that was being peopled by transported criminals, however, was never lost sight of and always duly acknowledged. The convicts, in this framework, were to merely provide an initial nucleus for the development of a Settlement, the aim of which was to eventually become a free colony. And, if the colony was to become a free community then the convicts had to be managed in a way that prepared them for the life of a free and an honourable person some time in future, not as an outlaw spending an entire life in penitence.

Dr. James Pattison Walker, the first Superintendent of the Andamans, was the prime example of an official holding this view of punishment.\(^3\) Though infamous for his cruel treatment of recaptured run-away convicts, Walker, from the very beginning, ran the Settlement on a much-diluted penal basis. Under Walker’s superintendence the convicts secured instantaneous benefits right after their arrival. Unlike the system of convict management prevalent in the Straits Settlement where the convicts lingered for nearly a decade before being eligible for any indulgences, in the Andamans the convicts could instantly begin their lives as self-supporters or rise to the rank of the petty officers. The convicts were classed and worked in gangs, according to their physical capacity and previous training, without any reference to the sentence or nature of their original offence, which had begotten them the sentence of transportation.\(^3\) He also made no endeavour to segregate or classify the convicts, and consequently, all classes of convicts freely intermingled in the settlement.\(^3\)

Walker thus administered the Settlement as he would his demesne and also shared a relationship with the convicts, which was closer to a patron-client relation of a landlord and peasants in a village, than a formal and impersonalized one between the Superintendent of a

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\(^3\) Trained to be a medical person, Walker (1823-1906) studied medicine at Aberdeen and became assistant surgeon in 1845 in the Bengal Medical Service.

\(^3\) Home, Judicial, 29 July 1859, 1-20, NAI and Home, Judicial, 29 July 1859, 1-20, NAI.

\(^3\) Home, Judicial, 6 Jan 1860, 7-23, A, NAI.
jail and its inmates. The observers who came from the outside also commented on this aspect of personalized ties of consanguinity between Walker and 'his convicts'. For instance, J. W. McPherson, who visited the Islands, in November 1858, made an observation in his *Memorandum of the Present State of the Settlement in Port Blair*, "They came freely to him with all their wants and grievances, and he certainly possesses their entire confidence. Indeed if I had not known the penal character of the Settlement I should have supposed myself going round with a zemindar among his villagers".35 Lording over the Islands as a feudal seigneur would, the sole penal aspect of Walker's stratagem was that the convicts were not permitted to leave the Islands at will and had to put in a certain hours of labour everyday towards the development of the Islands. Beyond these two conditions there was little to distinguish the Settlement from a hamlet in India.

**Nature's Intrigue**

The second unquantifiable variable that circumscribed the working of the colonial administration, was the geography of the Islands. The territorial location of the Andamans and its isolated character had been the crucial determinants in the British decision to colonize the Islands, who were hoping to use it as a vantagepoint. Since the Islands were said to be inhabited by cannibals, the British had bargained on making savings by not having to make provisions for policing the convicts. Much to their horror, once colonized, the geography of the Islands connived to unclasp the British hold over the Islands. The initial years of the Settlement were extremely difficult for the administrators. The clearing of the jungle 'which covered every foot of land down to the water's edge' was commenced soon after the arrival of the first batch of convicts. However, this was simply the beginning of their tale of woes. Within a month, the southeast monsoon set in and the entire company had to beat a hasty retreat from the Ross Islands and take shelter in Chatham Island, which was considered a much safer place of anchorage. Inspite of the healthiness of Chatham, a number of lives were lost to scurvy, malaria, malignant wounds, and sores on the feet lacerated by thorny bushes. The convicts worked barefoot in face of wind and tide, burning sun, and blustering rain. Their only protection were the blankets, sails or canvasses suspended over the trunks of the trees. They slept in wooden huts, on unboarded floors, and

35 Home, Judicial, 29 July 1859, 1-20, NAI.
ate mealy rations. Coupled with these physical hardships was the mental torture and humiliation that the convicts were subjected to. In the first year, one-fourth of the convicts died of ill-health. As one official stated:

The Amlah of a Judge or magistrate's Court, the native Commissioned Officer of a Corps of the line, a Bunneah or Zemindar forced to take a faurah and pick-axe in hand, and fell trees, dig trenches, row boats, build jetties, or saw timber in all the states of weather, was a novelty of position which could not fail to tell on the health.\(^\text{36}\)

The officials were fully cognisant of the privations that the convicts suffered much beyond what their crimes and the sentences conjoined upon them. But they were in no better position to rescue them. Death and disease knew no racial distinction and claimed its fair share of the British officials.

Nature's intrigue was primarily reflected in two ways: First, the Islands inspite of the best of British efforts to bridge the geographical distance, wallowed in administrative isolation. This was a mixed blessing for the local officials, who many a times took advantage of this separation but at other times fumed and chafed over the perpetual delay in exchange of letters and arrival of provisions. Besides imposing isolation, the geography of the islands also limited the British administrative hold over the colony as it prevented them from penetrating the interiors of the Islands. Second, it hugely exaggerated the financial cost involved in settling and developing the Islands. The maintenance and sustenance costs of the Andamans were rendered very high as a result of the inability of the soils and the environment to sustain the settlers. The Islands, teaming with malarial mosquitoes, shrouded for most part of the year with torrential rains and dependent on the compatriot peninsulas for its victualing, failed miserably in becoming self-sufficient and self-sustaining. Therefore, Calcutta and Rangoon had to continually foot the bill for the upkeep of the colony in the Andamans. Following is a review of the geographical and ecological imperatives delimiting the colonial administration.

\(^{36}\) Home, Judicial, Proceedings Volume, July-Dec 1859, No. 51, NAI.
I. Administrative Isolation

The British had unfurled the Union Jack in 1858 in the tiny corner of one of the four big islands in the Andaman group, the South Andaman. Over the next few decades, the British were able to extend their direct control over not more than ten to fifteen, out of the two hundred islands, of the Andaman group. The limited presence of the British on the Islands was reflected in the modest size of its official staff, which depended heavily on convict overseers to accomplish a day’s work. The Superintendent, who was the head of the administration in the Andamans, was assisted by a deputy superintendent and about seven assistant superintendents, one medical superintendent and sub-divisional and district officers and a few overseers and subordinate officers. All civil officers in the Andamans had special powers over the convicts while the charge and control of convicts in barracks and at labour was completely in the hands of convict petty officers. The administrative work of the Settlement was divided into a number of departments, such as police, medical, commissariat, forests, and marine. In order to secure the Islands from external threat, the presence of military and police forces and a naval brigade was also most essential. Therefore, a minimum of one detachment of British infantry, a detachment of native infantry, and a police battalion were stationed on the Islands.\(^37\) However, most of them were scattered about the Island and, in a case of emergency, were not in a position to be effective.\(^38\)

The Settlement was an open one, with no fences, boundary walls or ditches marking its limits. It was divided into three districts, Eastern, Western, and the Jail districts. After 1898, the Settlement boasted of the Cellular Jail on its outskirts, which was used as a clearinghouse for newcomers. Port Blair formed the nucleus of the Settlement with surrounding islands

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\(^{37}\) Lord Canning at the time of the colonization of the Islands had warned that enemies could use the colony as a stepping stone to India in the event of war. This happens eventually in 1942 when the Japanese take over the Andamans and use it as a naval base until their defeat in 1945. Officials had repeatedly cautioned the Government regarding the possible security threats to the Islands. As J. S. Campbell noted, ‘It may be a matter for the consideration of the government whether the entrances to the bay should not be, to some extent, fortified, so as to protect the Settlement from a foreign enemy…if it be considered desirable to mount heavy guns at each end of Ross Island, and the opposite points of main island, it might be well to substitute for the European infantry an equal number of Garrison Artillery. The latter, armed with breech-loading rifles, would afford all the internal protection called for by the Settlement’. Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, NAI.

serving the various needs of the colony. Ross Island was the headquarters of the British settlement, with residences and other civil conveniences for the British officers. Viper Island was used for keeping invalid convicts and the ones who had committed crimes within the Settlement. Chatham Island, which was later to house the sawmill and become the focus of forestry works, was where the Settlement was kept until the areas were cleared in Port Blair for habitation. Managing such a settlement where the convict stations were spread over different islands interspersed with deep sea required a well-developed system of intercommunication. However, establishing reliable lines of communication took considerable time to evolve.

For most part of the Settlement’s existence, the communication between the different stations was through rowing boats, and stores and goods were ‘conveyed in lighters towed by parties of convicts in boats’. In the absence of a village bell or a central clock tower, six whistlers were used for ordering time round the Settlement. Round the harbours, the time was fixed by nearly ten launches, which blew their whistles and sirens. The whistlers were scattered all over the Settlement to assist every convict stations to keep time with Ross, the head quarters. The audible range of the whistlers was limited and therefore they could only be heard locally. This system worked well until the weather hit a rough patch. The whistlers became inaudible not only in their own areas but also relinquished any possibility of being heard elsewhere or keeping up with Ross. The signal lines also remained extremely vulnerable to exploitation by the convicts in an event of a breakout. In order to prevent the convicts from taking advantage, after a few years, the police guards began to be employed as signallers but at the cost of reducing their numbers required for policing. The Islands also did not have a telephone service and wireless service, until 1905. Another aspect of the system, which was a constant irritant, was the absence of a direct steamship between Calcutta and Port Blair. Instead, a sailing ship weighing 787 tons and averaging measly eight trips in a year plied between Calcutta and Port Blair. However, a steamer did ply between

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39 This wide distribution of convict parties has also been examined by Clare Anderson and shown to be imposing limitations on the system of convict management in Mauritius.

40 The whistlers were substituted by firing of guns only by the year 1904.

41 Home, Port Blair, July 1904, 26, NAI.

42 Home, Port Blair, April 1905, 116 and Home, Port Blair, Dec 1905, 15 to 17, NAI.
Moulmein and Port Blair. By the turn of the century, the Settlement officials could take relief from the fact that there was at least one steamer running between the Andamans, Madras, Rangoon, and Calcutta.

The Settlement officials sorely felt the inadequacy of well-developed communication and transport networks that made the running of the administration a constant source of anxiety. And, while the Andamans was now a colony, which was supposed to be an adjunct of the Indian Empire, it remained geographically distanced from the power centre. This imposed a near complete administrative isolation on the Andamans. While such an isolation gave the Settlement officials considerable leeway in their functioning, it also forced them to build ties of political consanguinity with the convicts not only because of fear of escape but because murder and rebellion was an ever-present possibility for them. The pressure of having to build political alliances with the convicts was articulated at various times by different officials. As Superintendent D. M. Stewart stated:

On this question, we should never lose sight of the fact that the majority of the Indian convicts are not much worse in disposition that the mass of their countrymen, and that, taken as a body, they are not especially dangerous. What we have to guard against here is, not combined resistance to authority, but the designs of violent individuals against whose machinations precautions are comparatively useless.... Such a settlement can never be free from considerable risk of murders and outbreak. It is not a light matter to have a several thousand criminal Asiatics collected in an isolated place like Port Blair, with no means of shutting them up as within a jail: Great vigilance and judgement is necessary on the part of the Superintendent and his officers... At the same time I think the convicts feel that they are under one who understands native thoroughly, and who is certain to treat them with justice and without unnecessary harshness.

The geography of the islands thus forced the administration to adopt certain strategies as a measure of political and economic expediency. The convict warder system was one such

43 Home, Public, 1 April 1864, 1-12, A, NAI.
44 Home, Port Blair, June 1901, 60, NAI.
45 Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, Appendix I, NAI.
device of ensuring surveillance and preventing any large-scale convict rebellion. Much of the fear that the officials had of the Andamans came from the lack of knowledge about the character of the colony. The famous Reginald Craddock, who visited the Islands, in 1913, to look into the case of penal excess with regard to political prisoners in the Cellular Jail, quite candidly confessed his ignorance of the Islands and Settlement prior to his visit. He noted in his report:

Until I joined the Government of India, I was in complete ignorance of the size, physical character, and capabilities of the Andamans and Nicobars, their history and geography, and my general ideas of the convict Settlement were of the vaguest. Of the judges who pass sentences of transportation I do not suppose that one in fifty has any clear idea of the kind of life that is spent by the convict. It has always been assumed that the ‘kalapani’ is a terrifying place; one heard sometimes of the ‘chain gang’, and of a cellular jail, and that officers in the Andamans employed servants who were convicts of ex-convicts.46

The dearth of adequate information about the Islands, especially their geography, was not a phenomenon limited to the officialdom in Calcutta. It extended to the circles in the Andamans as well. The Settlement officers lived with a psychology of a people marooned on a dreary island, cut off from civilization, and devoid of all social pleasures. As if, it was not the Asiatic convicts but they who were serving a sentence of transportation. In the initial years the officials were compelled to live gaoled, on board a hulk-like vessel. As one official described the life on board the vessel, Sesatris:

The vessel is commodious as ships go, but it is a dreary abode for twelve months, in such a climate as India, and such a spot as the Andamans. A detachment of Naval Brigade were the inmates of the disarmed Frigate. Trying as such a mode of life must have been, when prolonged for so long a period, it was satisfactory to find the dwellers

46 Report of the Visit to the Penal Settlement at Port Blair by the Hon’ble Sir Reginald Craddock in November 1913, NAI.
within these wooden walls healthy and cheerful, and making the best of their not very enviable position.\textsuperscript{47}

Another account stated:

Ticks, giant centipedes and snakes were a nuisance. Dos were always getting eczema and pneumonia, and one of Olive's dogs died of snake-bite. In monsoon time you took out your mattresses to dry when there was sun. Theo Robertson once found a snake in her bed, brought in with the mattress. As for sharks, it was supposed to be safe to swim out as far as seven feet... On picnic parties the servants would beat the water to drive them away.\textsuperscript{48}

The Andamans, therefore, were not exactly a cushy or a popular posting that the colonial administrators hankered after. Most European officers commissioned to the Andamans desired a greater remuneration for their services as they would in a frontier outpost. They also found it, in the initial years of their residence, troublesome to adjust to the rough climate and arduous life of the colony. The junior officers in the Settlement who worked with J P Walker once declared that if it had not been for Mrs. Walker's presence, 'we must have gone mad'.\textsuperscript{49} And, as D. M. Stewart confirmed, the status of the Superintendent:

\textsuperscript{47} Home, Judicial, Proceedings Volume, July-Dec 1859, No. 51, NAI.

\textsuperscript{48} Raleigh Trevelyan, The Golden Oriole, Childhood, Family and Friends in India, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988, p. 232. Olive was Raleigh Trevelyan's mother, wife of Captain Walter Raleigh, who was the in charge of the garrison at Port Blair in 1923, and Mrs Theo Robertson was the wife of the Assistant Commissioner of Police from 1923. Raleigh Trevelyan describes the life in the Andamans as narrated to him by Mrs Theo Robertson.

\textsuperscript{49} Home, Judicial, 29 July 1859, 1- 20, NAI. With time, provisions were made for entertainment and leisure activities for the Officers both British and Indian, stationed on the Islands. Prominent amongst these were cricket and tennis grounds of both grass and concrete where a band of convicts played music several times in a week. There was a Sailing Club and a Volunteer Rifle Corps as well, and nearly every Saturday races for a challenge cup were held. Besides golf, hockey, and salt-water fishing engaged the officers in their free time. See C. Beadon Kloss, In the Andamans and Nicobars: The Narrative of a Cruise in the Schooner "Terrapin", with Notices of the Islands, their Fauna, Ethnology, London: John Murray, 1903, p. 20.
His position and that of his officers is not a very enviable one, and they deserve to meet with much encouragement at the hands of the Government, cooped up as they are at Port Blair in a climate which is relaxing and enervating, with little society; a complete convict surrounding even to servants, for it is most difficult to obtain, or to retain free servants; and no communication with any other place in the world save once a month. 50

Moreover, special qualities were required to work in such a Settlement. But it was a tendency in the government circles, as some officials sarcastically commented, to appoint men whom it was considered desirable to 'provide for'. And these officers, without sufficient pay and hope of advancement in their careers, hung around till they could 'get something more to their taste elsewhere'. 51 Thus, the politics of spatialization of the Islands actually worked against the interests of the British when it came to administering the Islands.

Administrative isolation of the Islands was further reflected in the inability of the Settlement officials to deal with the problem of piracy. Piracy, which had drawn the attention of the British to the Islands in the first place, remained only partially resolved. To it was added another hurdle, the escape of convicts on the vessels of the Chinese and Malay seamen. The officials believed that the Asiatic seamen 'approached this penal settlement with the ostensible object of fishing, but possibly with the intention of enslaving the Aborigines or effecting the escape of the convicts'. 52 The fishermen and the seafaring communities, which had traditionally visited the Islands for various purposes, continued to approach the Islands unabated. There was one much-talked about incident in 1880 when a ship, trading between India and Penang, was found to be carrying gunpowder, which was marked as 'provisions'.

On inquiry it was unearthed that there was an 'illicit' trade in gunpowder between Singapore and the French port of Karikal adjoining Negapatam. Further, it was discovered that about ten to fifteen guns and twenty dozen swords, besides gunpowder and rum were ordinarily taken on each ship from Karikal to the Nicobars. Payments for these arms and ammunition were being made in the Nicobars in coconuts, at fixed rates. The Chief Commissioner of the Andamans had also reported that the number of firearms in the possession of the

50 Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, Appendix I, NAI.
51 ibid.
52 Home Judicial, 29 July 1859, 1-20, NAI.
Nicobarese had increased in the last years of 1870s. Following the incident, it was decided by the Government of India that it would be made compulsory for vessels trading with the Nicobar Islands to call at Port Blair or Camorta and obtain a written permission to visit any of the British islands in the area.

The officials in Port Blair very quickly came to realize that they were not in a very effective position to deal with this problem. This was because it was the inhabitants of Nicobar who were deeply involved in the supposed 'illegal' trading nexus. Eventually, the British came round to the view that the idea of securing aid to shipwrecked sailors and suppressing 'piracy' could only be insufficiently realized if Nicobar was not colonized. The officials also partly wished to avoid the problem of having a foreign naval station in their backyard in the Nicobars. Finally, Nicobar was colonized in 1868 and placed under the administrative authority of the Superintendent of Port Blair. The Nicobars were never intended to be an adjunct of the Settlement in Port Blair as that would have been very expensive. Its accounts were also to be kept separate and Nancowry was to be converted into a military outpost. However, arrangements for the military guard, which were to be made in Nancowry could not be done without the convict labour. It was decided, therefore to open a convict station for the time being and to remove the convicts once the works were completed. With the colonization of the Nicobars, the instances of piracy did go down and the molestation of the shipwrecked sailors by the Nicobarese was also controlled. However, a complete solution eluded the British.

II. Financial Logistics

The climactic and physical conditions of the Islands led to unforeseen expenses. Consequently, the financial question acquired a disproportionate significance in the administration of the colony. One of the ideas that the British had in mind while colonizing the Islands was that they would be able to save on the initial cost of developing the Islands by substituting free labour by convict labour. However, given the state the Islands were in, the government did not make much headway even with convict labour. Nearly all the islands of the Andaman group were covered with tropical forests, dense undergrowth, marshes, and

53 Foreign, Political, Oct 1882, 333-341, NAI.
54 Home, Port Blair, June 1888, 79-80, NAI.
swamps.\textsuperscript{55} The presence of aboriginal inhabitants hostile to the presence of outsiders further checked the advance of the British in the interiors. Unless the British cleared the Islands of their forests and undergrowth, and undertook the draining of the swamps, no population ill-adapted to forest life could survive.

The spectre of epidemics and death that had shrouded the settlement in the late eighteenth century rose its dragonhead once again. Chronic dysentery, diarrhoea, piles, intermittent fever, rheumatism, scurvy, debility, boils, ulcers, and opthalmia resulted in an extremely high mortality rate in the Settlement. Between 1858 and 1864, nearly 8035 convicts had been received at the Settlement, of whom, 2908 had died, and 612 had escaped. The high death rate, in view the officials, was because of the depressing effect of banishment, bad weather, and malaria from the newly cleared forests, i.e., 'intensive labour, unhealthy weather and because of the task of clearing the jungles'.\textsuperscript{56} Further, the Islands experienced heavy rains for most of the year and, in want of enough clothing, proper shelter, and medical attention, claimed many lives.\textsuperscript{57} The diseases continued their death dance well into the late 1880s and into early 1900s when the change of season would induce poor health and mortality.\textsuperscript{58}

The high death rate and prevalence of diseases made the presence of a medical department as part of the administration indispensable.\textsuperscript{59} For civil officers, a sick convict meant loss of labour and for the medical men, the sick convict was not only to be assisted in healing but his body was also the object of experimentation.\textsuperscript{60} The relationship between the civil establishment and medical department was not an easy one. Disease and the death-ridden state of the settlement placed the medical officers, much to the chagrin of the civil officers,

\textsuperscript{55} P. Lal, \textit{Andaman Islands: A Regional Geography}, Calcutta, Archaeological Survey of India, 1976.
\textsuperscript{56} Home, Judicial, 30 July, 1858, 11-15, NAI and Home, Judicial, 3 August 1858, 5-7, NAI.
\textsuperscript{57} Home, Public, 1 August 1858, 1-12, A, NAI; Home, Public, Nov 1881, 16, NAI.
\textsuperscript{58} Home, Public, July 1867, 21-211, A, NAI; Home, Port Blair, March, 1880, 25-27, NAI; Report by E. E. Waters, Senior Medical Officers on 1 October 1903 in Home, Port Blair, April 1904, 42, NAI; Home, Port Blair, April 1906, 73, NAI; and Home, Port Blair, April 1906, 81, NAI; and Report of Colonel C. J. Bamber, a Sanitary Commissioner, who visited the Andamans in October 1908, in Home, Port Blair, Dec 1908, 26, NAI.
\textsuperscript{59} See Sen, \textit{Disciplining}, Chapter 4, titled 'Doctors and Discipline', for an in-depth analysis.
\textsuperscript{60} Home, Port Blair, Oct 1873, 19-22, A, NAI and Home, Port Blair, March 1880, 25-27, NAI. Experiments for treating leprosy with gurjan oil and quinine for malaria were conducted on the convicts.
in a position of considerable significance. The main contest between the two was over the body of the convict (sick and healthy). The altercation between the two departments was disguised under several heads, sometimes over convict clothing, over physical examination of female convicts suspected of carrying venereal diseases and, at other times, over the work and practice of transfer of convicts to different stations.61

Table II
Statistics for the Number of Dead in the
Period 10 March 1858 to 20 October 1859 (J.P. Walker's period)62

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total no. of Convicts received</th>
<th>3697</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escaped</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanged or Shot</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental Deaths</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killed by Aborigines</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Died of Disease</strong></td>
<td><strong>1365</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Dead</strong></td>
<td><strong>1474</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Released and returned to Indian Jails</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining on 20 Oct 1859</td>
<td>1837</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The climate of the Islands was also unsparing. The Settlement experienced rains for most part of the year and wet clothing was responsible for many diseases with which the convicts were afflicted. The inability of the Settlement officers to provide the convicts with suitable and sufficient clothing was seen by the medical officers as a lapse of duty. On their arrival, the convicts were quartered on Ross Island for a year or so until acclimatized, and were removed to out-stations only after the recommendation of the medical officer. But once removed from Ross, they were transferred from one station to another without further

61 Home, Public, 24 Sept 1870, 44-45, A, NAI, and Home, Port Blair, Proceedings Volume, August 1902, 74, A, NAI.

62 Home, Judicial, 6 Jan 1860, 7-23, A, NAI. In the later period, overcrowding in the barracks, insufficient supplies and infrastructure for the increased number of convicts along with mosquitoes breeding in swamps and rice fields, lack of proper local sewage system, and insufficient nutritious food also contributed to diseases such as phthisis, malaria, and dysentery.
reference to medical authority. And the Settlement had a number of convicts' stations where
the convicts were worked during the day and kept in barracks at night. Some of these
convict stations were more disease-prone than others because of the proximity to malarial
swamps. The medical officers felt that in order to keep down the number of sick the amount
of work given to convicts and his transfer from one station to another should also be under
the guidance of the medical department. The Settlement officers on their part felt this to be
interference in their work of managing the convicts. Even mainland official, Alexander
Mackenzie, Secretary to the Government of India, who came to inspect the Settlement in
1885 also remarked:

It was right to take steps to reduce the excessive death-rate which prevailed a few years
back in the Settlement, but I think we have carried matters rather too far, and that the
penal considerations have of late been duly sacrificed. There is no reason why we should
insist upon reducing the risks to convict life below those of the outside population, if, to
secure this, we have to wrap the prisoner as it were in cotton wool, and treat him as a
precious object whom we are bound to keep alive at all costs, and not to treat with any
harshness that might tend to affect his health. I strongly recommend that the
Government of India...should pass no censure on the management, so long as the
annual convict mortality does not rise over 50 per mille... When the mortality is less
than that we may suspect that penal discipline is being sacrificed to sentiment.

The interference of the medical department was, for obvious reasons not looked upon very
kindly by the Central government. The high death rate not only occasioned friction between
the civil and medical departments but also jeopardized the financial viability of the
Settlement.

There were also other factors contributing to the spiralling costs. An ever more number of
hands was required to clear the forests and undergrowth. And, without clearing the land,
vegetable farms could not be laid and neither could crops be grown. Feeding the convicts
from the rations bought from the mainland was an extremely expensive proposition. The

63 Home, Port Blair, May 1873, 10 to 17, A, NAI.
colony throughout its history remained dependent on the surrounding mainland countries for its basic requirements. Even hay and straw were obtained from Rangoon in the first decade.\textsuperscript{65} A delay in supply of provisions coming from Calcutta or Rangoon could have serious consequences for the Settlement. For instance, in 1862, the Superintendent of Port Blair reported:

The alarming position which the settlement was recently placed by running short of provisions and steps taken to prevent the possibility of a like crisis in future.... The lack of stores could make the convicts restive and could jeopardize the safety of the settlement, therefore, it was decided to ensure the supply of food and storage six months in advance.\textsuperscript{66}

As late as the 1890s, the Indian Jails Committee Report noted that the diet scale in Port Blair was a liberal one in terms of quantity of food being given out. However, the startling fact was that although the Settlement had been occupied for thirty years, not one grain cereal issued to the labouring convicts was grown at Port Blair. While the self-supporters ate what they grew, the other convicts and the troops had to be supplied imported grain.\textsuperscript{67} In order to promote the locally grown crops, a proposal to feed the convicts locally grown rice was sanctioned. However, in its actual working this experiment proved to be costlier than feeding the convicts imported rice and had to be abandoned. This was because the rice was sufficient to feed the convicts for only one-fifth of the year and it also necessitated the importation of paddy from Rangoon for the livestock.\textsuperscript{68} The Settlement also had to cough up enormous freight charges which, under the contract with the British Indian Steam Navigation Company, had to be paid on all importation.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{64} Home, Port Blair, July 1886, 98, NAI.
\textsuperscript{65} Home, Public, 20 Feb 1869, 62-63, A, NAI.
\textsuperscript{66} Home, Public, 9 Dec 1862, 4-10, NAI.
\textsuperscript{67} Home, Port Blair, June 1890, 74, NAI.
\textsuperscript{68} Home, Port Blair, March 1905, 43; Home, Port Blair, August 1907, 142; and Home, Port Blair, June 1911, 52, NAI.
\textsuperscript{69} Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, NAI.
One way of offsetting the initial costs was to build plantations as was done in the Mauritius and West Indian colonies or to commercially work the forests. As a result, undertaking developmental works became an essential aspect of the administration for the first few decades. It was not enough to put the convicts on labour for forest clearing. They were also engaged in exploring the area around the settlement for good harbours and finding natural resources, which could be exploited. A Chinaman was engaged for collecting edible birds' nests, monopoly over which was to be a source of revenue. The manufacture of tea and arrowroot yielded some success initially, which encouraging officials to undertake experimental cultivation of Liberian Coffee, cardamoms, tapioca, cacao, nutmegs, ceara and other rubber trees, vanilla, musa textilis, castor oil plant, moonj and aloe. However, these schemes did not bear the expected fruits. Despite being recently reclaimed from primeval forests, the soil in the Andamans tended to get exhausted very soon. This invariably contributed to the failure of the crops and further investments had to be made in manuring the land. It also took the British quite a few years to ascertain the value of the forests in the Andamans. For the first few decades, until the British awakened to the commercial potential of the Andamanese forests, only wood-oil for medicinal purposes was extracted. When finally their commercial potential became known, dense and impenetrable undergrowth made the work of exploration extremely difficult. Further, the officials were not in a very good position to export the timber because of high freight charges. In the Andamans, therefore, the poor quality of the soil and the nature of the climate thwarted any attempts to develop commercial projects.

Thus, the financial constraints produced as the result of geography of the Islands made controlling and judiciously employing the labour of the convict an important category of management. The inauguration of the self-supporter system, use of term transportation, and the organization of the artificer corps were all compelled by the need to maximize labour

70 Home, Public, 28 March 1862, 40-42, A, NAI.
71 Home, Port Blair, Aug 1882, 76-78, NAI.
72 Home, Port Blair, March 1880, 25-27, NAI.
73 Home, Judicial, 29 July 1860, 7-23, A, NAI.
74 Home, Port Blair, July 1886, 98, NAI.
75 Home, Port Blair, Nov 1881, 16, NAI.
utilization in the Settlement. This would be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. The attempt here is to highlight the significance of the geography of the islands, hitherto neglected by most studies, in providing an important backdrop to most of the convict management devices adopted in the Andamans.

**Transcribing Indigenous Resistance**

The various administrative measures faced resistance not only from the convicts who formed the majority of the population but other Asiatics (Chinese and Burmese forest workers, free traders, ex-convicts, and the indigenous police force) as well, who resided or visited the islands. This resistance took various forms, from overt rebellion and physically escaping from the Settlement to insidious subversion. Documenting the indigenous subversion of authority helps put on record the historical agency of the subaltern. It also assists in moving away from a state-centred view of history and demonstrates the way the state had to accommodate, reconcile, and conciliate the actions and views of even the marginal and the supposedly powerless in order to govern them.

I. **Runaway Convicts**

A convict escaping into the jungles and into the sea was the most common form of convict resistance. While there existed complacency over the issue of escape in the official mind before the setting up of the Settlement, the experience immediately after it substantially changed the view regarding it. From the very first batch, nearly half of the convicts escaped just after a few days of arriving in the Andamans.\(^6\) The geography of the Island that was initially seen as preventing escape, over time deviously connived in aiding convicts to abscond. The surrounding sea on all sides and the jungles within became an easy hideout and escape route for the convicts. The hapless Settlement officers were reduced to devising techniques that would prevent convicts from escaping. From this time onwards the convicts' desire for 'escape' came to be seen as an innate and the defining characteristic of a life of a convict. Such a notion, structured the life of the convict into binary opposites – one as the state of unfreedom, which consisted of a life of hard labour, repentance and misery; and the

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\(^6\) Home, Judicial, 16 July 1858, 6-10, NAI.
other as the state of freedom, indolence, and happiness. The bridge between the two was ‘escape’.

Statistics showed that it was the newly arrived convict who mostly attempted escape. Most of the convicts were firmly convinced that there was a road to Hindustan from the main island and that the fugitives who did not return had found it. There also existed a belief that there lived a Rajah who governed the island and the convicts could offer their services to him. With enough forces, the Rajah, it was believed, would wage a war with the British and free the convicts. Thus, apocryphal stories prevailed amongst the convicts who sought to free themselves from the British. The escape into the jungle was mostly attempted at the time when the convicts returned to barracks either for their meals or at the point just before the lock-up. The officials concluded that at these two points of the day the prisoners tendered to wander and then being tempted by the sight of the jungle, once conveniently out of the petty officers gaze, absconded. The officials were of the view that most escapes into the jungle, unlike the ones through the boats, were spontaneous and not pre-planned. This conclusion was arrived at after listening to reasons given by the returned convicts on their trial for having attempted escape. One of them stated that ‘he was enticed away by one of the convict gardeners, and did not know that he was doing wrong’. Another confessed that he ‘was tipsy from something the gardener had given him’ and his mate stated that ‘he

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77 Home, Judicial, 7 Jan 1859, 14, NAI.
78 Home, Judicial, 29 July 1859, 1-20, NAI.
79 Home, Judicial, 7 May 1858, 24-26, NAI.
80 However, there did exist cases of planned escapes by groups of convicts. In 1904, there were four organized attempts to escape. The most important was ‘that made by a band of eleven Punjabi convicts, six of who belonged to the notorious gang of Patiala dacoits. They escaped from three different stations on the 4 December 1904, and joining forces made their way to the dense jungle near the middle straits where they lay hid for a week. They then raided a village of self-supporters, wounding one of them severely. This disclosed their whereabouts and enabled a party of Andamanese to track and overtake them. The convicts offered resistance and one of them was killed and two wounded before they fled.’ See Home, Port Blair, 12 May 1906, 135, NAI. The convict station at Camorta in the Nicobars also afforded ample opportunities to the gangs of convicts to escape by sea. The officials felt this happened because of the ‘the pusillanimity of the Nicobar people the convicts are readily allowed to seize their large out-rigger canoes with which they can in fine weather quickly reach Sumatra’. See Home, Port Blair, August 1874, 75, NAI.
81 Home, Public, 4 Jan 1896, 21-22, NAI.
escaped because he wished to get back to his country.\textsuperscript{82} One of them declared that 'he did not like his work'\textsuperscript{83} and another professed that 'he never attempted to escape but he fell asleep'.\textsuperscript{84} And one of them claimed that 'he could not eat the hospital food he slipped away, and hid in the female hospital cook shed'.\textsuperscript{85}

The 'boat escapes' were the most frequent form of escape. The seafaring Burmese and Chinese convicts were in a position to easily find means of escape or else to facilitate the escape of others.\textsuperscript{86} The paucity of guards and police to follow up the runaways and 'of preventing their passing the entrances to the harbour during the absence of the station steamer from its usual anchorage off Ross Island', facilitated boat escapes. This steamer was unavailable when it was cruising about the islands on duty and when it was anchored in the harbour during the 'cyclone season' of May to June and October to December. The station steamer was meant to serve as armed guard-ships. However, the boats serving, as steamers could not be used as armed vessels and were basically despatch boats. As a measure to overcome the problem, Colonel Temple suggested in 1895, that a steam launch with a police guard on board be kept in place of the steamer. This suggestion was disapproved by the Government of India as it was felt that fewer escapes would be made in bad weather and in case of absence of the steam steamer then steam launches used daily for towing lighters and others be used.\textsuperscript{87}

The problem of escapes was also exaggerated because of lack of proper communication system.\textsuperscript{88} The Chief Commissioner lost a lot of time in getting about the harbour. For long excursions up to the harbour, he was dependent upon the steam barge, which did all the toeing work of the harbour, and could only be made available either when it was proceeding

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{82} ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Home, Public, 8 Feb 1868, 52-53, NAI.
\textsuperscript{84} ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Home, Judicial, 6 Jan 1860, 7-23, A, NAI.
\textsuperscript{87} Home, Port Blair, Jan 1896, 87-92, NAI.
\textsuperscript{88} Home, Public, 1 April 1864, 1-12, A, NAI.
\end{flushleft}
up in ordinary course or by taking it away from the ordinary work.\textsuperscript{89} In a letter of July 1880, Colonel Cadell, described a boat escape by a set of convicts. There was a delay in sending out the search party because of the want of proper communication between the several stations and the head quarters of the Settlement. Mr. Portman in whose boat the convicts had made their escape, before starting in pursuit, had pencilled a message to be signalled to the Chief Commissioner by the Native Infantry. It was dispatched a few minutes after 6 o'clock but did not reach the Chief Commissioner before 8:55 p.m. This made the Chief Commissioner urge the Government of India to reconsider the scheme for the introduction of the telegraph in the Andamans, which was being considered a while ago but had been abandoned on account of expenses. At the time regimental signallers were being used to transmit messages between different stations. The work of guarding the Settlement was being done by a schooner and steamer which were both felt to be useless and requested to be replaced 'a smart little steamer'.\textsuperscript{90}

It was believed that most convicts who ran away perished on the sea or were killed by the aborigines in the jungle. In order to meet this problem, it was urged that each gang under its own orderly and each sub-division of a gang under an umedwar should be kept together at all times. The convicts, it was suggested, be taken in a body to the bathing, feeding, and latrine parades, and no prisoner should wander out of the sight of his petty officer.\textsuperscript{91} Precautions were also taken against convicts escaping by the sea. The boats were only allowed at jetties where there were free police guards, and even then at night all oars and rudders were lodged with the guard. Sails were not permitted in the boats even of the fishermen, as they afforded too much facility for the convicts to put to sea. All hatchets and other tools were also taken away at night, and no convict was allowed to possess a knife for any purpose except one of an authorized pattern, made something like a razor with one side thick and with broad blunt end.\textsuperscript{92} In the early 1860s, the officials also began befriending the aborigine Andamanese. Many of the runaway convicts who returned to the Settlement were the one who were wounded by the Andamanese, who in every case also took away their brass pots and iron

\textsuperscript{89} Home, Port Blair, July 1886, 98, NAI.
\textsuperscript{90} Home, Port Blair, Oct 1880, 14 to 18, NAI.
\textsuperscript{91} Home, Port Blair, June 1890, 74, NAI.
\textsuperscript{92} Home, Port Blair, August 1874, 75, NAI.
rings. The officials enlisted the support of the Andamanese in capturing the runaway convicts and also induced the latter to barter jungle materials and produce with the Settlement. In 1895, a Bush Police 'armed and well victualled parties of police and convicts, pioneered by the Andamanese, who would wear the savages out by continual pursuit and thus eventually catch them', was formed. Wire-fencing round the barracks and use of leg-rings on recaptured runaway convicts was experimented for a while but given up. Photographing of the convicts was also experimented with in the late 1870s. Finally, in 1894, the recaptured runaway convicts were made to wear blue check clothing during the time they remained in the third class. The number of the petty officers was also increased which made possible vigilance over convict at meal hours, the usual time for escapes. However, a large number of escapes continued through the 1890s and even into the later period.

II. Corruption and Smuggling

Corruption, 'smuggling', and 'illegal' trading were rife amongst the convicts. Most of the munshis, or account keepers in the Settlement were convicts and the vernacular used was Urdu in Persian character. Besides the vernacular accounts, the accounts in English were kept in the District offices and then sent to the Superintendent's office, where they were again checked. The shortage of literate assistants to keep these accounts was much complained of, and a convict, whether for life or for a term of years, who knew English or Urdu, at once found his way into an office and was employed in labour which could hardly be called penal. This gave the convict munshis many opportunities for malpractice for obtaining unauthorized indulgences, committing fraud, and forgery. One such case of embezzlement of a princely sum of thirty thousand rupees at the Port Blair treasury came up, in 1910. E.J. Vint, the European Treasury Officer committed suicide to escape infamy.

93 Home, Judicial, 6 Jan 1860, 7-23, A, NAI and Home, Public, 6 Jan 1865, 6, A, NAI.
94 Home, Port Blair, March 1896, 55-56, NAI and Home, Port Blair, 20 Feb 1907, 37, NAI.
95 Home, Port Blair, March 1896, 55-56, NAI.
96 ibid.
97 Home, Port Blair, Feb 1899, 51-52, NAI.
98 Home, Port Blair, June, 1890, 74, NAI.
and the convict Babu K. C. Bose was arrested for serving as an accomplice in the wrong doing.99

The convicts in the employ of the government as clerks or junior officials were not supposed to do business. However, illicit business transactions prevailed, much to the chagrin of the officials, on a regular basis in the Settlement. Thanesari's book recounts the way he himself indulged in a bit of 'tijarat', trading, on the side. On the death of his locally obtained wife he sold all her jewellery and got three hundred rupees. He then sent this money to his wife back home in India requesting her to send him footwear. He was hoping to purchase the shoes at a low price from India and sell them dear in Port Blair, as most of the Indian goods commanded nearly twice to thrice their actual price in the Andamans. However, most of his consignment had rotted by the time it arrived. He, nevertheless, sold it but got only one hundred and fifty rupees for it. With this money, he again decided to do trading and tried to obtain stuff from India through a Bengali trader under a false name. Unfortunately, the merchant under whose name he had bought the stuff was caught in front of the Superintendent. The bundi, or Bill of Exchange, which was caught on the person of the nabbed merchant, was written in Thanesari's handwriting. This did him in and thus ended Thanesari's star-crossed attempts at doing business.100

Commerce in opium and ganja was also common in the Settlement. In order to control opium 'smuggling', its sale was licensed. Stringent rules were laid down to prevent the sale of opium to convicts and the retail prices of opium were kept as high as silver. The Government of India felt that having two licensed shops of opium in a convict settlement was sufficient and the Superintendent was empowered to rescind the license of the shops.101 However, the temptation to smuggle opium and ganja in Port Blair was very great because these drugs commanded exceptionally high prices on the black market. As a result, smuggling went on to quite an extent despite the very stringent measures enforced

99 Home, Port Blair, July 1910, 13-20, NAI.
100 Mohammad Jafar Thanesari, Kalapani Ya Tanikh-i-Ajneh, pp. 72-73.
101 Home, Port Blair, June 1893, 8-9, NAI.
continuously to prevent it. In this matter the bulk of the resident native population of the Settlement, free and convict, was against the authorities. 102

The situation was vitiated by the presence of free population, which encouraged smuggling of alcohol and opium, and gambling in the Settlement. These activities were mostly undertaken by the free Chinese labourers mostly undertook these activities. Further, till the time the convicts were permitted to trade with India it was almost impossible for the officials to suppress unwanted communication and exchange. Superintendent D. M. Stewart, in his official correspondence admitted to the existence of such an exchange:

I have reason to know that communications are now regularly sent to India which do not pass through the Post Office, and I am aware that the Post Office is not infrequently used as a vehicle for such communications owing to the untrustworthiness of the officials employed in it. The total suppression of trade and correspondence with Indian would in many respects be very desirable, but it would cramp the energies of local dealers, place a considerable monopoly in the hands of a few free men, check much honest enterprise, and inflict a great deal of suffering and misery on many thousands of persons whose correspondence is of a very harmless character. 103

Much as Stewart would have liked to see all correspondence between the convicts and their friends suppressed on the grounds of executive convenience, it seemed easier and much more productive to remove the defects of the system than to totally abrogate it. He tried, thereafter, to place the convicts' correspondence under the strictest supervision, and made the dispatch and receipts of letter entirely a matter of indulgence to be secured by good conduct alone, and at fixed intervals only. 104 However, the state was not in a position to totally do away with the lacunae and the loopholes in the system, which the indigenous population found some way or the other of circumventing. And the last resort was to allow certain excesses, which the administration was not in a position of preventing or checking. For instance, the administration took a similar approach with regard to tobacco. Following

102 Home, Port Blair, Aug 1896, 39-45, NAI.
103 Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, Appendix I, NAI.
104 ibid.
the persistent use of tobacco by the convicts, the management, after some time decided to remove prohibition against the use of tobacco by the convicts.105

III. Murder of Officials

The first plot to end British rule on the Islands and do away with the Superintendent and his establishment was hatched by the convicts sent to the Andamans in April 1859. A group of 200 Punjabi convicts conspired to kill Superintendent Walker. One of the convicts gave Walker prior information of the plot and saved his life along with that of his Indian overseer Muttra Das and the naval guards.106 It was believed by the British that convicts who were transported only for criminal offences, and not the ones who had actually participated in the Rebellion of 1857, were the ones who were involved in the conspiracy. As a result, Walker, who had inaugurated the system of running the Settlement on a non-penal basis, had to resort to sterner methods to keep a check on the convicts.107 This was first instance of convict resistance that had a direct impact of the way the colony was administered. Walker, following the large-scale of convicts, and especially after the murder conspiracy, was quite keen on keeping the convicts in fetters.108

Thus, the fear of conspiracies to murder officials was not a figment of British imagination but an ever-present possibility. Murdering the officials was the gravest form in which the convicts showed their resentment or opposition to policies and personal behaviour. The first one to fall to the convict’s dagger was Chief Justice Norman who had been killed by an Afghan/Peshawari convict.109 This was followed by the murder of Lord Mayo a month later by Sher Ali, the Pathan convict, in February 1872. Thanesari saw the killing of Lord Mayo as ‘providential’ because all the security and arrangements had failed in front of such a ‘small’

105 Home, Judicial, 13 August 1858, 11-15, NAI.
106 Home, Judicial, 32, 29 July, 1859, NAI.
107 ibid.
108 The government shot down the proposal because the greater use of fetters could lead to rise in sickness because of sores and ulcers created by fetters on the legs’ of the convicts. However, flogging was something that Walker used in an unrestrained manner and had no qualms whatsoever in admitting that it served his purpose well. Home, Judicial, 22 Oct 1858, 13-18, NAI.
109 Thanesari, Kalapani, pp. 84-87. Thanesari mentions this but I have not found any evidence of this in government records.
Following Lord Mayo's murder, it was, believed by the officials, that the life prisoners 'without any hope of release, had one great bond of sympathy between them with might overcome all difference of nationality and creed and induce them to combine against the authorities'. As a result, the rule allowing the commutation of life sentences after twenty or twenty-five years' residence in the Settlement was introduced.\(^\text{111}\)

Attempts to murder by the life-convicts did not abate and in fact increased over a period of time.\(^\text{112}\) An attack was made upon the Superintendent Colonel Horsford, by life-convict Hari Ram on 20 January 1894. The convict was tried by the sessions court and hanged on 14 March 1894.\(^\text{113}\) Soon after, in 1896, a plot to kill Colonel Temple was unearthed.\(^\text{114}\) In 1906, a Muslim convict employed as a bheesti or water-carrier murdered Mrs D'Oyly, wife of the First Assistant Superintendent.\(^\text{115}\) The lady had insulted the convict by calling him 'son of a pig'. The man greatly provoked rushed out and seized the axe for chopping wood, flung aside Mrs D'Oyly's baby and slashed her face.\(^\text{116}\) This Muslim convict had been originally convicted of murdering a foreman under whom he was working, the motive being revenge. The Settlement officers were not aware that the victim of the earlier crime had also been a European, as the copy of the appellate judgement forwarded to the Andamans did not have sufficient information. Ignorant of this fact, the convict was employed as domestic servant to one of the European officers on the Settlement.\(^\text{117}\)

The lack of information of the convict's social profile and absence of complete documentation on the nature of his crime, and the sentence, prevented the officials from checking such acts. Moreover, in most cases the reason given by the 'convict for committing the offence was his desire to be hanged and so terminate his long period of confinement'.

\(^{110}\) ibid.

\(^{111}\) Home, Port Blair, June 1890, 74, NAI.

\(^{112}\) Home, Port Blair, Feb 1881, 36-38, NAI.

\(^{113}\) Home, Port Blair, April 1895, 14, NAI.

\(^{114}\) Home, Port Blair, Oct 1896, 1-5, NAI.

\(^{115}\) Home, Port Blair, 20 Feb 1907, 37, NAI.

\(^{116}\) The murder of Mrs D'Oyly became a gory legend which was repeated and recalled by all future visitors to the Islands. See Trevelyan, The Golden, p. 246.

\(^{117}\) Home, Port Blair, 20 Feb 1907, 37, NAI.
Colonel Cadell who was the Superintendent, in early the 1880s, and the Governor-General’s Council, both felt that the death sentence was not deterrent enough, and instead, the remedy could be that ‘many men who are anxious to end their term of imprisonment by immediate death would dread the disgrace of a public flogging, administered as it is in this Settlement, on the buttocks’. Besides this suggestion, Colonel Cadell put forward another proposal. In his view the convict if subjected to flogging or reduced diet was still in a position to repeat the crime. What the convict sought was immediate death on committing the crime, but if the full course of law was allowed to take its course he was bound to wait for a few months. And in this interval, ‘the convict’s desire to die frequently evaporates, and when the time comes he is not a willing victim in the hangman’s hands - a fact which of course becomes known to the other convicts’. This Cadell felt was the best punishment. However, the Government of India was not satisfied by Cadell’s proposal because it felt that to punish the convict extra-judicially before bringing him to trial would be unfair. Instead, efforts were to be made to lessen the tendency amongst life convicts to commit murderous assaults.\footnote{Home, Port Blair, Dec 1880, 59 to 61, NAI.} How this was to be achieved was never clarified by the central authority and violence by convicts remained an ever-present fear with the officials.

\textit{IV. Insubordination by Native Police Force}

The subversion of authority was common not only amongst the convicts and the free persons but also amongst the native officers and police force stationed on the Islands. The free police furnished personal orderlies to accompany the officers, and provided guards at jetties and to the officers. Besides, they performed all other semi-military duties and were not suppose to have any communication with the convicts. The troops were segregated from the convicts and were, in fact, kept as a reserve force to be called out in case of an outbreak. In comparison, the free police were in a much more important position and a ‘great deal of the welfare of the Settlement depended on their efficiency and trustworthiness’.\footnote{Home, Port Blair, August 1874, 75, A, NAI.} However, the presence of military troops and police guard on the Islands led to disciplinary problems. A case came up, in 1887, when two policemen were found gambling with the convicts and dismissed from duty. As a result, it was suggested that the Port Blair Police Force be constituted into a Military Police and subjected to greater discipline. In 1888, by the
Regulation II of 1888 the Force was constituted a military police force, so as to facilitate maintenance of discipline within the force. In spite of these measures the instances of insubordination by police guards increased over the years. There existed factions among the police force capable of taking extreme measures to force their wishes on the Commandants and their opponents.\footnote{There also existed animosity between the native troops from different parts of India. The Home Secretary, Alexander Mackenzie noted in his inspection report of the Settlement in the year 1885 that the 'Sikhs and up-country men despise the Madrasis'. He recounted one incidence of an altercation between the two groups. ‘At some recent sports the madrasis were so enraged at being always overmatched that they gathered in force and a collision followed’. Home, Port Blair, July 1886, 88, NAI.}

While the strength of the police force had remained at 643 from 1888 onwards. By the turn of the century, its duties had considerably increased. And, in view of the growing commitments of the police force request was made by the Commandant and District Superintendent of Military Police, L.B. Walton to increase the strength of the force. This pressure on the police force had increased, according to R. C. Temple, the then Superintendent, mostly because of forest work that had begun to expand at the time. A number of them were required to look after the forest workers against the attacks of the Jarawas.\footnote{Home, Port Blair, 26 Feb 1903, 7-8, NAI.} The problems came to head in the year 1908 when the then Superintendent Colonel Herbert predicted that the insubordination of the native police guards had the potential for an Island-wide mutiny. He argued:

if the Military Police were dissatisfied all the convicts could at once get access to dhaos, axes, adzes, hammers, crowbars, and every sort of implement which are stored at stations under the charge of convict petty officers. In the event of the convicts encouraged by the example of the Police getting out of hand, the position of the few Europeans with their wives and children in isolated places such as Wimberleygunj and Viper would be very serious.\footnote{Home, Port Blair, 13 Feb 1908, 33, NAI.}
As a result, it was decided to dismiss the errant officers and policemen. However, this cast a question on the efficiency of a police force stationed in a place such as the Andamans, where the policemen served permanently and were never relieved. The force was officered by one English commandant and one English civil officer. It was felt that new commissions needed to be made who could be imbued with a proper spirit of discipline and relied upon.  

Besides the disciplinary problems there was also conflict of authority and protocol in-between the police and civil officers. The Superintendent of the Settlement acted as the representative of Government of India and had the authorization to issue direction to the Commander as to the extent of employment and distribution of the troops in the Settlement. Besides, he even had the authority to arrest an officer if he thought it best in the interest of the Settlement. Moreover, the Commander of troops could not leave the Settlement without the Superintendent's permission. While the Superintendent enjoyed extensive powers the Commander of troops was given complete autonomy when it came to their working and disciplining. He was not to be interfered with in matters of petty details. In the event of foreign invasion, all authority regarding the deployment of troops was to revert to the Commanding officer who was to use them in consultation with the Superintendent. Most of the Commandants who served in the Andamans found the powers of the Superintendent excessive and especially the power of arrest accorded to the Superintendent was point of rancour. In 1891, a quarrel erupted in-between Colonel Cadell the Superintendent and Major Curries the Military Commandant over some issues of behaviour and protocol. The quarrel escalated enough to draw the attention of the Central government and led to reprimanding and removal of the Military Commandant Major Currie from his command in the Andamans.  

Conclusion

The above was a survey of the assortment of problems that fettered the British functioning on the Islands. As the jungles got cleared and there was a greater knowledge of the geography of the Islands, many of the problems as a result of ignorance of the physical characteristics of the Islands were resolved to some extent. The financial problems, its

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123 Home, Port Blair, Feb 1908, 35, NAI.
isolation from the subcontinental power centre, and the internal dialectics over the character of the colony nevertheless plagued the Settlement till the very end. An attempt was made, in the 1890s, to come to terms with the conflicting views regarding the makeup of the colony and the nature of punishment to which the convicts was to be subjected. It came in the form of the building a Cellular Jail which was to confine the newly arrived convicts for the first six months of their stay on the Islands. The Jail was to be the embodiment of the view of punishment advocated by Colonel Man. The inmates were to be subjected to the rigors of jail discipline and gruelling intra-mural labour. However, even this was not enough to solve the perennial problems of the Settlement. These imperatives even had an impact on the labour regime in the Andamans, which was one of the main tasks ahead of the settlement administrators. The next chapter examines the manner in which the labour works and the life of the convict on labour became a contested domain.

124 Home, Port Blair, May 1892, 25-35, NAI.
Scenes from the British Life at Ross

Above: The Chief Commissioner’s bungalow

Below: British officers and their wives swimming in a pool specially made for them.
Above: The restored building of the Bakery of the British officers, Ross Island.
Below: The ruins of the Boilers used for heating water for the British officers, Ross Island.

A number of civic amenities were made available for the comfort of the British officers on the Andamans.
Above: Gravestone of one Lawrence, the infant child of a British officer who was born on 16 September 1865 and died that very day, Ross Island. A couplet of the stone reads: He Chanced Into Our World To See, A Sample Of Our Misery; Then Turned Away His Languid Eye, To Drop a Tear or Two — And Die.

Below: Gravestone erected by his shipmates for one Benjamin Lewarn of the Indian Naval Brigade who died on 8 January 1861, Ross Island.