The Labour Regime – Contestation and Differentiation

Transportation may prove a salutary punishment in many cases, and may turn the labour of those who have violated the laws of the country to a great public good... Labour is the grand desideratum in the infancy of every colony; and it is especially so in the present state of Andamans Islands. Dense jungles are to be cleared, in order to render these Islands a fit abode for man.... It is work, hard work that is wanted.¹

Introduction

The Andamans, covered with dense tropical forests, marshes, and swamps, could not be used as a naval station, a port of call, or a convict station unless the British expended huge amount of labour on it. The organization of labour works was thus the foremost task with which the British officials were confronted. The history of British administration in the Andamans is incomprehensible without understanding the contours of the labour regime that was inaugurated on the Islands. The labour regime in the Andamans served a dual purpose for the British: it was an important administrative obligation; and it also provided a crucial integrative and controlling device. The latter function was performed by the labour regime in relation to the convict population on the Islands. The presence of the convict population presented the Colonial State with two disparate intents – to control and discipline the transported felon who was a criminal convicted by the state for sedition, murder and dacoity; and second, to integrate the desocialized convict into a new society – both were reconciled through the labour regime. Despite the significant role played by labour in mediating the relationship between the Colonial State, the Island colony, and the convicts, the general tenor of the labour regime remained extremely demanding and repressive where the convicts were subjected to a high degree of brutality and harshness. The labour regime in the Islands, thus, may be characterized as coercive in character.² However, this chapter

¹ Report by Dr. G. G. Brown, dated March 1859, in Home, Judicial, Proceedings Volume, July-Dec 1859, No. 51, NAI.
argues, that its coercive nature did not obliterate the process of negotiation, bargaining, contestation, and differentiation. The high coercion was at all times, it argues, circumscribed by both pecuniary and non-pecuniary pressures which, at one level, conditioned the working of the State and, at another, empowered the convict, giving him the power to negotiate labour relations which was otherwise denied to him by virtue of being a criminal. Moreover, there was no internal homogeneity or unilinearity in the labour regime, because contestation existed not only between the administrators and the working men but also within the administration. Further, the convict workforce was a variegated one where the main lines of differentiation were the temporality of their sentence, the place of their origin and the degree of skill possessed by them.

_Convict Labour – a Contested Domain_

When the Settlement in the Andamans opened, in 1858, the only blueprint for the management of convicts available to the officials was the Straits Settlement System. This system was seen as just and equitable by the contemporaries and believed to promote a spirit of industry and fidelity amongst the convicts. However, recent studies have shown that colonies such as Straits and Mauritius, which used convict labour, were not free from disputes over the issue of labour. It was mostly the recipient colony and the place of origin of the convicts that diverged in their views regarding the mode and aim of exploitation of convict labour. These pulls and pressures had contributed to a situation where the local administrators formulated the rules of classification but never enforced them completely in
practice. In the Andamans, too, labour was a contested domain but, unlike Straits and Mauritius, the lines of contestation rested within. Contestation in the official discourse over labour was primarily over two issues – the economizing of labour and over classifying the convict workforce.

I. Economizing Labour

Labour was the important resource on the Islands at the time of its occupation and shared an inverse relationship with the financial welfare of the colony. Over-exploitation of the convict workforce invariably resulted in a high death rate. This, in turn, necessitated transportation of a greater number of convicts to the colony to make up for the lost numbers. And an increase in the numerical strength of the convicts meant a proportionate increase in the government expense over their maintenance. Therefore, labour resource had to be conserved and exploited judiciously. Consequently, there existed ever-present alterations over the best mode that could be used for the purpose. The abolition of the control of the Public Works Department on labour was an example of an attempt to achieve economy of labour.

Until 1880, most of the labour was employed under the Executive Engineer in the Public Works Department, independent of the Superintendent of the Settlement. The Marine, Medical, Forest, and Commissariat departments employed the rest of the convicts. Each department employed the convicts of different grades as petty officers, artificers or coolies and the convicts were worked on over ten different stations in the Settlement. The convicts who were employed in manufacturing various articles of daily utility worked in workshops established at various points in Port Blair. The requisitioning of labour by the various departments through their respective officers was done without an account of value of labour supplied being kept and, since the PWD looked after the labour corps, the

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5 Home, Public, 20 Dec 1865, 37-38, NAI.
7 Home, Public, 15 Sep 1862, 40-42, A, NAI.
8 Home, Judicial, April 1872, 213-15, A, NAI.
Superintendent had no control over it. This proved very expensive to the Settlement because for any work that the Superintendent wished to get done, he had to pay the PWD.

Table III

Distribution of Labour to the Departments in December 1874

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Number of Convicts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissariat</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Works</td>
<td>881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Settlement Works</td>
<td>3914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5638</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result, the working of the PWD came under considerable criticism because the need for economizing labour by putting it to a judicious use began to be felt in the Settlement. The various Settlement officers felt that the reason for lack of the economy, in the use of labour, was because the status and power of control of the Superintendent were too limited, and that, "much of the available labour has been frittered away, especially by the Department of Public Works, which, working under its own officers independently of the Superintendent, has been a very great source of expense both in money and convict-labour".

D. M. Stewart, the Superintendent in early 1870s, came up with a plan to economize on the expenses of labour. Under his plan, a system of inter-departmental payments in which convict labourers and workmen were to be supplied to various departments in return for cash payments was to be introduced. He felt that the labour that was made use of without any payment was 'not economized and employed in the most economical way'. He grumbled:

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9 J.S. Campbell's Report, written in April 1872, reference in Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, NAI.
10 Home, Port Blair, Feb 1875, 12, A, NAI.
11 Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, NAI.
All experience in this settlement shows that labour which is had for the asking, is not economized and employed in the most profitable way moreover, the tendency is to lighten labour, and the pressure put upon departmental officers to increase the number of hands with the view of lessening the task of those employed on it becomes irresistible, when all concerned are more or less interested in the result and it is mainly to check and control this lavish expenditure of labour-power that I wish to see the present system altered.12

Stewart felt that the motive of the various departments, at this time, was only to display as much progress as possible irrespective of the cost. However, with the system of inter-departmental payments, the supervising officers would develop a direct interest in seeing that they all got their money's worth for the cash they expended. The PWD attempted to thwart the move on the principle that Port Blair was not 'conducted on commercial and self-supporting principles like the Postal and Telegraph Department'.13 The Governor-General's Council was also not immediately open to the idea of introducing a system of inter-departmental cash payments, which it described as 'cumbersome'. A. P. Howell, the under-secretary to the Government of India, suggested that the method used for regulating the charge of convict labour in India be extended to Port Blair, where the convict department stood in relation to the other departments in the position of a contractor. The value of the convict labour desired by other departments was ascertained, as if, it had been performed by contractors of hired labour and was accordingly, charged for by book debit.14 The Military Department was also not in favor of introducing inter-departmental cash payments. It preferred that, 'a system of book credit and debit should be instituted, the Superintendent checking the indents for labour in communication with the heads of the various departments, and the value of convict labour being fixed at 4 annas per diem'.15

The Settlement officers, on their part, were eager to gain control over the labour works and also economize the running of the Settlement. Their main object was to curtail the hold of

12 Home, Judicial, 30 Dec 1871, 21, A, NAI.
13 Home, Judicial, April 1872, 213-15, A, NAI.
14 Home, Judicial, 30 Dec 1871, 21, A, NAI.
15 Home, Judicial, April 1872, 213-15, A, NAI.
the PWD over the labour of the convicts and the system of payments was a secondary issue. They stuck to their guns and the control of PWD over labour was finally abolished in 1880.\textsuperscript{16} Thereafter, the convict labour employed by the several departments was charged to those departments by an invoice. The Departmental officers were expected to apply to the Settlement officers for the services of the convicts, stating the number required and the purpose of their requirement.\textsuperscript{17} This change was upheld as an 'unqualified success and the Superintendent assured that 'the works have been carried on with as much vigour as heretofore'.\textsuperscript{18}

\section*{II. Locking Horns over Classification}

In the Andamans, the debates and discussions surrounding the issue of classification of the convicts provided another entry point into the contestation amongst the Settlement officials over labour. Two sets of criteria of classification came up in a chronological progression. One was based on the varying degrees of skills possessed by the transported convict, which they had acquired before being deported and that which could be harnessed in the service of the state. The other was based on the number of years spent by the convict in exile along with his personal conduct. Both the criteria unfolded sequentially against the backdrop of increasing technical, infrastructural, and institutional capacity of the colonial state.

Till the time there existed a status quo in the technical and infrastructural capacity of the colony and the number of convicts remained limited, the system continued on the lines put into place by J. P. Walker. Consequently, most of the convicts did the work of forest clearing and lived together in makeshift dwelling places. Walker would issue ticket-of-leave almost on arrival to those convicts who brought money with them or grant them after short probation.\textsuperscript{19} The self-supporter system helped the state meet the economic exigencies of the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{16} Annual Report for the year 1880-81, Home, Port Blair, No. 1881, 16, NAI.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Andaman and Nicobar Manual}, pp. 65-66.
\textsuperscript{18} Home, Port Blair, Nov 1881, 16, NAI.
\textsuperscript{19} All the ordinary convicts received an allowance of one anna and nine pie per day, out of which they provided for their own clothes and food. Orderlies, petty officers, mechanics, and boatmen received four to five rupees a month, the Commissariat coolies received four to six rupees. Home, Public, April 1864, 1-12, A, NAI.
\end{flushleft}
Settlement. The purpose obviously was to encourage the cultivation of land and to make the convict population self-sustaining.\textsuperscript{20}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total number of convicts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Sep 1862</td>
<td>2173\textsuperscript{21} [Labouring 1608, Self-supporting 242]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the end of 1865</td>
<td>3854\textsuperscript{22}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Oct 1866</td>
<td>6469\textsuperscript{23}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On March 1867</td>
<td>6982\textsuperscript{24} [Labouring 6483, Self-supporting 459]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Jan 1870</td>
<td>7498\textsuperscript{25}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Jan 1871</td>
<td>7546\textsuperscript{26}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On June 1874</td>
<td>7820\textsuperscript{27}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the end of 1877-78</td>
<td>9579\textsuperscript{28}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The change in the material circumstances of the Settlement and the subsequent numerical increase in convict numbers made imminent the classification of the convicts into different classes. There was a nearly three-fold increase in the convict population between the years 1862 and 1866 and the number of labouring convicts increased nearly six times. The classification of convicts was required, according to the Settlement officers, primarily to achieve economy of labour. It was attempted for the first time in the year 1864. The criterion for classification, however, amplified into a point of debate. Some officials, such as the then Superintendent of the Andamans Lt. Colonel Ford, driven by the need to efficiently utilize


\textsuperscript{21} Home, Public, 28 Nov 1862, 71, A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{22} Home, Public, 20 Dec 1865, 37-38, A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{23} Home, Public, Feb 1867, Proceedings Volume, A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{24} Home, Public, July 1867, 21-22, A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{25} Home, Public, 19 March, 1870, 141-143, A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{26} Home, Public, 8 April 1871, 67-68, A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{27} Home, Port Blair, August 1874, 75, A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{28} Annual Report for the year 1878-79, Home, Port Blair, March 1880, 25-27, NAI.
labour focussed solely on the economic aspect of exploitation of the convict labour. He wanted the classification to be based on the proficiency of the convicts as artisans, workmen, smiths, mason and brick, lime, salt and basket-makers and thatchers. The skilled labourers (artisans and mechanics) were to be put in the first class, followed by semi-skilled labourers (who were diligent and useful artisans) in the second and the ordinary unskilled labourers in the third class.29 The Superintendent and the Executive Engineer were only given the power of promotion or reduction from one class to another.

This classification was also based on the view that Ford took of crime and criminality. In Ford’s perception crime was ‘generally the result of idleness or evil habits’ and only ‘severe and compulsory labour’ was its proper penalty and cure. Thus, making the convict perform hard labour and provide for his subsistence was self-reformatory. And, only when the convicts began to enjoy the fruits of their industry by ‘acquiring the means of future maintenance and improvement of their condition’ they began to get reformed.30 Thus, his classification had an in-built assumption that the unskilled labourers by virtue of lacking any skill would be relegated to ‘third class’ and to perform hard labour. Ford felt that such a classification of convicts would become a means of ‘very greatly accelerating the progress of works here generally but of stimulating the convicts to excel in their different trades or occupation’.31 The object of transportation was achieved when the convict acquired a new status and was able to establish himself in a community. Therefore, in Ford’s view, ‘the only legitimate freedom’ that a convict could hope for was a ticket-of-leave.32 Tied in with this view of crime and reformation was the need to develop the Islands, an unprofessed aim of the Settlement officials.

For the time, the Governor General extended his approval to Ford’s scheme and even praised it as ‘very good’ and ‘an indication of the energy and the method which the Superintendent is bringing to bear in the discharge of his onerous duties’. However, the

29 Home, Judicial, 1 July 1864, 10-11, NAI.
31 Home, Judicial, 1 July 1864, 10-11, NAI.
32 ibid.

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premise for assortment suggested by Colonel Ford did not remain uncontested. It was severely criticized and censured by certain members of the Governor-General's Council when his recommendations came up for discussion. The Council polemicized, 'Such a classification according to proficiency in certain trades a clever scoundrel may get off with very little penal servitude, in its proper sense, at all. He will at once be in a far better position than the ignorant convict, who can easily give unskilled labour in a gang'.

The fact that the Andamans had been colonized as a penal settlement could not be lost sight of and, therefore, Ford was urged to borrow from the Straits' rules of convict management. The rules of Straits, however, remained an ideal that continued to elude the administrators in Port Blair.

The issue of classification remained in abeyance for a few years until Colonel Man once again took it up as the Superintendent in March 1868. Besides being critical of the system of classification prevalent in the Andamans, Colonel Man also objected to the fact that the convict was eligible for any employment on his arrival in the Andamans without being required to pass through a fixed probationary period 'to prove his title to reward'. Colonel Man, on taking over as the Superintendent, got a list drawn up of self-supporters, of their date of arrival, and after what length of service he was permitted to become a self-supporter. He found that the probationary course extended from one day upwards. He was rather surprised at the 'lack of rigor' in the management of convicts and confessed:

> The system is, I believe, peculiar to this Settlement, and has, according to my notions, few, if any, redeeming features; it is attended by two evils, which should for ever disqualify it for a place in any penal code, to wit, uncertainty in the punishment, and for favouritism in the administration, - the latter the fruitful parent of every description of bribery and corruption. 34

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33 cited in A.P. Howell, *Note of Jails and Jail Discipline in India, 1867-68*, Calcutta, 1868. To meet this problem, an increase in the number of staff of the Superintendent and appointment of officers with botanical and geological knowledge was also suggested, in Home, Public, 29 May 1866, 61-62, A, NAI.

34 Home, Public, 27 March 1869, 167 to 169, A, NAI.
The classification of the convicts that Colonel Man proposed was based on the number of years that a convict had spent on the Islands. And, more importantly, the promotion to first class was to come as a reward for good personal conduct, that is disciplined behaviour and hard work, and not as a matter of course.\textsuperscript{35} Based on his experience in the Straits, Man believed that, unless the convict had spent nearly eleven years in the lower grades, he should not be promoted to the self-supporter grade (first class, where the convict got a ticket-of-leave). The idea was to condense the harshest punishment in the early years of convict's life in transportation when the memory of his native life and criminal act was most vivid in his mind. After some years, a relaxation and grant of indulgences was proposed, however, only as a result of his good conduct. This, it was felt, would offer an opportunity to the convict to reform as he could hope for less misery and retrieve some measure of the social life that he left behind. Further, reformation was possible only through enforcing a regulated scale of rewards for good behaviour and punishments for misconduct and misdemeanour. This classification also stemmed from a particular view that Man, and the others in the Governor-General's council, took of crime, where the social environment led to criminalization.\textsuperscript{36} Through creating an atmosphere where the convict realised the need to work hard, and partake of rewards only thus earned, was the main aim behind Man's exertions.

Finally, Colonel Man's scheme of a six-fold classification along the lines of the Strait Settlement Rules with some modification was accepted by the Government of India and incorporated under the Act V of 1871.\textsuperscript{37} The rules for classification were further modified and improved following the report of J.S. Campbell in 1874, which was also based on the number of years that a convict spent in the Settlement and his personal conduct, and no ticket-of-leave was given until the convict had been a resident for twelve years, a period which was subsequently reduced to ten years.\textsuperscript{38} The grades or classes in which the convicts were placed were also differentiated by addition or withholding of some circumstances which aggravated or alleviated the pain of the convicts. Cooked food or dry rations, clothing, association with others and the light work that the convict was put to were the various

\textsuperscript{35} Home, Public, 27 March 1869, 167 to 169, A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{36} See the Chapter Three for Man's views on crime and criminality.

\textsuperscript{37} Home, Port Blair, August 1874, 51-84, A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{38} Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, NAI.
indices of indulgences granted in an increasing measure as the convicts rose from the lower grades into the higher ones.

III. Introducing Intra-Mural Labour

Even when the system of convict classification, according to the number of years they had spent of the Settlement, did begin, the problem of equitable distribution of labour and its judicious use both remained a grey area of the administration. While there was a periodical promotion of the convicts from class to class, of which a record was duly kept, there was little information on the kind of labour on which the convict was employed, while he was, in a particular class. Some convicts, by currying favor with the petty officers, escaped being employed on heavy labour irrespective of the class they belonged to. The uneasiness regarding the character of labour extraction led to the opening of the issue once again in 1890 with the visit of the Lyall and Lethbridge Committee. Amongst other suggestions, it recommended the building of a cellular jail containing at least 600 cells.

The Jail was to serve a variety of purpose – be an effective deterrent, help study the character of the prisoners, improve discipline amongst the convicts, a goods means of acclimatizing prisoners, provide an opportunity to make the convicts literate and was to enable authorities to dispense with fetters which was the main cause for wounds and ulceration in the Settlement.39 Over and above these aims the most important issue at hand was to render the early stages of convict's life extremely harsh by the introduction of a stage of intra-mural labour for a period of eighteen months. This suggestion for the introduction of intra-mural labour was by no means novel and had been made earlier by J. S. Campbell. In his view, on his arrival the convict was to be subjected to 'the most severe form of punishment with hard labour... being confined to a walled gaol in separate wards, and receiving sufficient cooked food for health, but nothing else'.40

The labour regime, the daily rhythm of the convict's life and the kinds of work that he was assigned inside the jail were to be completely different from what was there in the

39 Home, Port Blair, June 1890, 74, A, NAI.
40 Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, NAI.
Settlement. The prisoners were 'fed in their cells, the food being passed in through trap-doors provided for the purpose'. Only latrine and bathing parades were conducted in association. The convicts were engaged in cleaning wheat, grinding wheat, dal and kopra, pounding coir and in net making. The grinding of kopra was done with the help of Donaldson's patent mill, a small iron machine that worked on the principle of the common sugar mill. The machine was fixed outside the cell and was operated by a crank turned by the prisoner inside. The grinding work was extremely severe and disliked immensely by the convicts. Only a few prisoners were employed in coir-pounding as the particles of husk rendered the cell quite stuffy.

Extra-mural labour, which had been sceptically viewed since the 1830s, was continued to be used because of the financial and developmental needs of the Colonial State. By the 1880s, extra-mural was finally being perceived as an indulgence. Intra-mural was accepted as more productive and punitive as it enabled a greater regulation of the labour time and proffered the possibility of developing a more discriminatory scale of punishment. This made the introduction of intra-mural labour much easier on the Andamans. Even the physical conditions of the Islands had, by this time, undergone a significant change lessening the need for extra-mural labour. The Andamans now boasted of a quite, well-developed infrastructural capacity, with official residences, convict barracks, waterworks, draining, signalling system, and telegraph. Further, the commercial potential of its forests was also

41 Such a jail begins to be built in the year 1892-93. The Cellular Jail was to be the Benthamite Panoptican, with central watchtower and double-storey wings with individual cells constructed as seven radiating arms. Annual Report for the year 1892-93, in Home, Port Blair, March 1894, 5, NAI; Annual report for the year 1883-84, Home, Port Blair, April 1895, 14, NAI; Home, Port Blair, July 1893, 78-81, NAI.

42 ibid.

43 ibid.

beginning to be realized. These developments opened up the Andamans as a place, which was attractive to various kinds of contract wage labour, which in time would prove an effective alternative to convict labour.

However, even the Cellular Jail that attempted to strike a balance between the diverging opinions regarding the exploitation of convict labour did not completely alleviate the problem of the inequitable distribution of labour. This problem lasted well into the twentieth century. In the 1910s in order to remedy the situation a suggestion was made for the introduction of history tickets of the convicts. The proposal was struck down in view of the clerical expense that it involved. Instead, the then Superintendent argued for greater vigilance by the European staff but they also had their limitation in not being able to constantly watch each and every convict's labour employment. The Government of India, at this juncture, opined that, 'unless definite principles of this kind are observed, it seems humanely impossible to avoid injustice through an inequitable distribution of labour'. Finally these debates and controversy over the efficiency of convict labour, led to talks over the abolition of the penal settlement, which was attempted quite un成功fully in the early 1920s.

The Variegated Workforce

Besides mutineers, rebels, dacoits, murderers, and simple peasants and artisans from the countryside, the Settlement in the Andamans received convicts from a wide cross-section of Indian society. They ranged from Nawabs, Zamindars, Muftis, Qazi, Deputy Collectors, Munsif, and Sadr, to all the categories of people 'who had once been attended by several servants, who now had to work alongside chude-chamar', or lowest castes and eat 'soiled' food. There was no caste specialization of labour work as such but for cooking and cleaning works some concessions were made. The Brahmins were employed as cooks and the ones from the scavenging castes as cleaners. The literate convicts were valued as clerks and munshis. Along with the Indians, Burmese, and European convicts were also received in


45 Home, Port Blair, Jan 1915, 37-38, NAI.

46 Thanesari, Kalapani, p. 67.
the Settlement. This latter class of convicts fulfilled the specialized needs of the Settlement. Burmese convicts mostly provided the skilled labour in the Settlement and were used for forest work and as boatmen. The European convicts were appointed as warders and given privileges and permitted indulgences not available even to the Asiatic free population in Port Blair.

The convicts who were literate and were from a clerical or educational background were much in demand in the Settlement. Even the convicts debarred from transportation owing to the restrictions regarding age and health were, if literate, were sent to the Andamans to do duty as clerks and munshis. The social profile of such convicts begot them a totally different treatment in the colony. Mohammad Zafar Thanesari in his memoir anecdotally recounts the fate of two convicts, one a local Indian Raja and the other an English educated Indian, who were brought to Islands at the same time but received completely different treatment. The Raja, in question, was the ruler of Jaganath Puri. He was famous for the tradition in Orissa of sweeping the chariot of Lord Jaganath with a gold broom during the annual rath yatra. According to Thanesari, because of his dark skin, the Raja had to eat with 'chude chamar', the lowliest of castes, and had to perform hard labour. Later, because of his weak constitution, the Raja was made to grind wheat and soon met a tragic end. At the time Raja of Puri arrived in the Settlement, another Indian, 'who had a European name and wore coat and trousers came to the Andamans from Awadh. He was given food like the Europeans, good house, a bed and all other comforts. He did not have to perform any hard labour and instead became a clerk'. Thanesari was brought to tears at the sight of this discrimination. A bit hypocritical in his recounting, Thanesari's own position was similar to the man from Awadh, as he had been appointed the Chief Munshi in the office of the Superintendent, given a house and a servant for free, within a few days of his arrival in the Settlement. The account

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47 The Settlement sometimes was willing to take any prisoner to fulfil labor requirements. Once the Superintendent was even willing to take on Nubian and African long-term prisoners from the East African Protectorate in order to 'meet the labour difficulty'. in Home, Port Blair, Feb 1900, 5, A, NAI.

48 Home, Port Blair, Proceedings Volume, Oct 1907, 65, NAI.

49 Apparently the Raja of Puri lost his mind or probably contracted leprosy. The Inspection Report of Alexander Mackenzie mentions him, 'The lepers are kept apart, and so also the lunatics, among whom is now the Raja of Pooree', in Home, Port Blair, July 1886, 98.
nevertheless is important in understanding the importance of the social profile of the convict in the working of the administration and the labour work that the convict was assigned.

The transportation of Burmese from Rangoon and Moulmein was sanctioned in response to the demands for a larger labour force in the Andamans by the government in November 1859. They were engaged in the work of felling, dragging, hoisting and cutting the timber. The numbers coming from Rangoon were not sufficient to make up the demand, and as a result, Captain J. C. Haughton sought some from Moulmein. They were important for the Settlement as they, 'thoroughly understood timber business' and were 'capable of teaching the arts of felling, dragging, hoisting and cutting out timber – matters which to uninitiated are of great difficulty though apparently easy'. This experiment proved to be good as the Burmese formed an efficient labour force. As their term for stay in the Andamans drew towards expiry the Superintendent wrote to the Government of India to send more convicts from Tennaserim and Martaban provinces to the Andamans.

The local governments of India to where the Burmese convicts were transported, until the coming up of the Settlement in the Andamans, were also eager to be relieved of maintaining them. For instance, in 1875, the Government of Madras wrote to the Central government beseeching to be allowed to send its Burmese convicts, who were 'most troublesome' to the Andamans. The then Superintendent D. M. Stewart quite keenly lapped up the opportunity to have some more Burmese. The Burmans were seen as 'capital workmen' and, hence, much in demand notwithstanding their distinctive reputation of being given to drinking and being exceptionally unruly. Even visitors to the Andamans went on record, noting the riotous character of the Burmese convicts. Many amongst them were also excellent

50 Home, Judicial, 9 March 1860, 18-20, A, NAI.
51 Home, Judicial, 16 Nov 1860, 7-9, A, NAI.
52 Home, Judicial, Sep 1875, 237-239, A, NAI.
53 C. Boden Kloss, In the Andamans and Nicobars: The Narrative of a Cruise in the Schooner "Terrapin", with Notices of the Islands, their Fauna, Ethnology, John Murray, London, 1903. He noted, 'Of the Burmese, however, the greater part are serving sentences of the ten years, for engaging too recklessly in the national pastime of dacoitry, and many of them are employed in the jungle and as boatmen', p. 27 (emphasis my own).
seafarers and, therefore, responsible for many a case of escape.\textsuperscript{54} The Burmese convicts, invariably constituted one-third or half of the convicts who escaped from the Settlement every year. Notwithstanding the reputation of the Burmese convicts, they constituted a significant skilled labour pool. And, their transportation was stepped up whenever the need for skilled labour for undertaking the developmental works around the Settlement came up. For instance, the 1890 Lyall and Lethbridge Report forbade the continuation of transportation of term prisoners but made a concession with regard to the Burmese term convicts. Their transportation to the Islands was to be continued.\textsuperscript{55} Soon after, when the need for labour for building of Cellular Jail began to press on the Settlement officials, transportation of Burmese life-convicts to the Andamans was also started.\textsuperscript{56}

For some years, the Settlement officials debated starting the transportation of the Chinese convicts. The Chinese convicts were useful from the point of view of skilled labour as they made valuable artificers. The Settlement officers were not much interested in having Chinese convicts because there was a general stereotype about them being 'of desperate character convicted of piracy and burglary'. The Chinese also had a good knowledge of the sea, which made their escape easy. And, it was feared that they would abet and help the Indian convicts in escaping by building rafts and sailing to the subcontinent. So the only way the Chinese convicts could be effectively detained at Port Blair was by forming a separate penal settlement subsidiary to Port Blair. However, this was an expense which the government was unwilling to undertake. The government of Hong Kong made an offer to send some Chinese convicts, whom it was quite keen to lay off. The government of India was open to receiving the Chinese convicts provided the government of Hong Kong was willing to subsidize a separate settlement for them. Since the Hong Kong government was not in a

\textsuperscript{54} Home, Judicial, 6 Jan 1860, 7-23, A, NAI; Home, Judicial, 9 March 1860, 18-20, A, NAI; Home, Port Blair, 18 May 1898, 29-30, A, NAI; Home, Port Blair, 16 Dec 1901, 18, A, NAI; Home, Port Blair, 12 May 1906, 135, A, NAI; Home, Port Blair, 20 Feb 1907, 37, A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{55} Home, Port Blair, June 1890, 74, NAI.

\textsuperscript{56} Home, Port Blair, Proceedings Volume, May 1907, 19, A, NAI. Burmese female term-convicts also began to be transported to Andamans with time, 'in view of the desirability of encouraging convict marriages'. See Home, Port Blair, Proceedings Volume, Jan 1918, 80-83, NAI.
position to spare such funds, the idea of receiving the Chinese convicts was shelved entirely. 57

The transportation of the European convicts was undertaken even during the time of the first settlement of the Andamans in the late eighteenth century. At the time, there was considerable resistance to receiving European convicts in the Settlement as the presence of the European convicts was seen as a liability. There were no avenues for them to earn a livelihood and they had to be maintained by the administration at considerable expense. Moreover, the Settlement officials felt that the real purpose of the sentence of transportation was not being answered in sending the European convicts to the Andamans because putting the European convict to hard labour in the tropical climate would have meant a speedy and certain death. Therefore, the only way the European convicts could be retained profitably was by using them as warders. But this implied privileging the European convict by placing him in a situation far superior to what he may have left behind in India. 58 There was a change in policy with regard to the European convicts when the second settlement was inaugurated.

As early as September 1858, eight European convicts were granted leave from the Alipore Jail for the remainder of their term, on the condition that 'they proceed to the Andamans to perform any duty that the Superintendent of Port Blair may require of them'. 59 The Settlement was also keen on receiving the European convicts because there was a requirement of petty officers and other clerical staff on the Islands. 60 They were granted a ticket-of-leave on their arrival in the Andamans. 61 This measure bore satisfactory results and subsequently several convicts were sent to the Andamans from Bengal. 62 Permission was also granted to the families of the European convicts or Eurasian convicts to join them at the

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57 Home, Public, 15 Oct 1862, 8-9, A, NAI.
59 Home, Judicial, 10 Sep 1858, 20-21, NAI.
60 Home, Judicial, 10 Sep 1858, 20-21, NAI; Home Judicial, 7 Jan 1859, 6-8, NAI; and Home, Judicial, 1 June 1860, 1-6, NAI.
61 Home, Judicial, 7 Jan 1859, 6-6, NAI.
62 Home, Judicial, 28 Jan 1863, 49-51, A, NAI.
Settlement. The case of a Christian convict, Michael Crawford was always cited to demonstrate the success of the measure. Crawford was known for having set an example as an overseer of a division of convicts, and as the in-charge of the plantations and of the experimental farm by discharging his duties in a satisfactory manner. This had led to grant of permission to his wife and eight children to join him in the Settlement. The permission was subsequently extended to all European convicts.  

A library had also been established in Port Blair for the European convicts to 'assemble in the evening or during the leisure hours and employ themselves in improving their minds by having instructive books to read rather than spending their time in a questionable manner'. Books on mechanics, arts, sciences, cultivation, hand-books, narratives of travels and voyages, and the lives of eminent people were made available to them. The European convicts were to be trained to become overseers and the attempt was to instil a desire of reform in them. Therefore, it was a matter of principle that, 'no books, but of an elevating tendency' were allowed. The success of the system led to discussions between the local government in the Andamans and the Lord Bishop of Calcutta about the appointment of a clergyman with a family to the Andamans, in order to put the system on a sounder footing.

However, by late 1860s, the inexpediency of sending European convicts to the Andamans was beginning to be debated. In 1868, a European prisoner G. J. Scott was charged for embezzlement and using the misappropriated sums to buy his favourite female convicts clothing and jewellery. Colonel Henry Man, who was the officiating Superintendent at the time of Scott's conviction, took up the matter. The European convict, he felt, should not be deported straight to the Andamans immediately after his sentencing. Instead, the transportation to the Andamans should come as a reward following some years of good conduct. The European convict on his arrival to the Andamans, instead of undergoing severe penal servitude was given private quarters, a monthly salary of thirty rupees and a library to fill his leisure hours. In case, he was to violate any rules, the reduction of his pay was the only means available to punish him in the absence of a refractory ward or solitary

63 Home, Public, 20 Dec 1862, 39-40, NAI.
64 Home, Public, 14 Sep 1863, 24-27, A, NAI.
65 Home, Public, 1 Feb 1865, 1-3, A, NAI.
66 Home, Ecclesiastical, 6 Oct 1862, 4-5, NAI.
cells. The Government of India did not immediately reciprocate the move made by Colonel Man because it held the position that the European convicts were sent to the Andamans only when they obtained the 'license to be at large when his character has been such as to merit the indulgence'. And that the 'licenses are not granted before a prisoner has served out at least half the term of his sentence'. With time, efforts were made to put the European convicts on the same foothold as the native convicts. The J.S. Campbell Report suggested that the European convicts in the Settlement be subject to mutatis mutandis, that is, to all the rules applicable to native convicts of their class. In case, they had been noted for their good behaviour in goal previous to their arrival on the Andamans, it was to be counted towards eligibility for indulgences.

Another crucial feature of the labour regime of the Andamans was that it also employed non-convict labour, which provided an important reservoir of skilled labour that the convicts could not provide. Immediately after the beginning of the Settlement, a need was felt for skilled labourers on the Islands to undertake the supervision and execution of forest work. When it became clear that voluntary migration of artisan convicts to the Andamans was near impossible, it was suggested to the government that it hire 'a free gang', who could go down to the Andamans for a fixed period and on lower wages. They could teach some of the convicts 'to become tolerably skilled workmen when their own services may be dispensed with'. Thereafter, a license was issued to the free persons to enable them to reside in Port Blair. The license could be bought on the payment of five rupees, and several rules and regulation for their conduct were also set down. They were not to bring in or sell liquor, arms, powder, shot, and saltpetre in the Settlement. They could be asked to leave the Islands at any time by the Superintendent. They were supposed to obtain a 'pass' for keeping individuals in employment and for bringing goods into the Settlement. A breach of law by the free settlers was not punishable under the provisions of the penal code but the offences committed within the limits of the Settlement constituted 'local offences'.

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67 Home, Judicial, Proceeding Volume, Sep-Dec 1868, 11-12, NAI.
68 Home, Port Blair, July 1886, 98, NAI.
69 Letter from F. J. Mouat, Inspector of Jail to C. J. Buckland, Junior Secretary to the Government of Bengal, written on 11 May 1858 in Home, Judicial, 25 June 1858, 21-23, A, NAI.
70 Home, Public, 4 Aug 1865, 7-8, A, NAI.
offences were—breach of conditions of license, holding unauthorized communication with
the convicts, concealing or aiding convicts in escaping, passing on to convicts articles
forbidden for their use, or encouraging convicts in any offence. The local offences were
punishable by imprisonment up to six months and fine and could also lead to confiscation of
any property that he may possess within the limits of the Settlement. 71

Most of the non-convict workers were Chinese who had been initially engaged by Captain
J.C. Haughton to collect edible birds’ nest. He wished to have a monopoly over the birds’
nest trade and hoped that the revenue from this would be an asset in the budget. 72
Thereafter, the Chinese were recruited as contractors for forest work, who in turn employed
Chinamen as carpenters and smiths. 73 Chinese labour was an important resource on the
Islands as the Artificer corps had no trained carpenters and found ‘it easier to do their work
by contracts, which are taken by Chinese, who pay their fellow countrymen from Rs. 1-12 to
Rs. 2 a day wages’. 74 However, Chinese labour did not come cheap to the Settlement. The
convict labour was valued at 4 annas a day and the free labour was much higher, with
Chinese carpenters getting as much as Rs. 2 a day. 75 The Chinamen were also involved in
various kinds of activities outlawed by the penal administration. Opium ‘smuggling’ was their
forte and the Superintendent once complained to the Chief Commissioner of British
Burmah that he had to allow private trade in opium otherwise Chinese labourers would leave
the place. He further fumed, ‘gambling too, on their part, I have had to wink at’. The reason
he had to put up with these excesses was that the labour of the Chinese workmen as smiths
and carpenters was crucial for the rapid construction of barracks. And the Central
government was very keen to see the speedy completion. So, the Superintendent was left
with the choice of either ‘letting them alone in these matter, or losing them’. 76

71 Home, Port Blair, August 1874, 52, A, NAI.
72 Home, Public, 28 March 1862, 67-68, A, NAI.
73 An attempt was made to colonize the Nicobars by means of Chinese cultivators from the Straits
    Settlements. The experiment proved to be a failure and in October 1885 the scheme was abandoned mainly
    because of sickness amongst the Chinese population. Home, Port Blair, June 1886, 2, A, NAI.
74 Home, Port Blair, August 1874, 52, A, NAI.
75 J.S. Campbell mentions these rates in his report written in April 1872, in Home, Port Blair, August 1874,
    52, A, NAI.
76 Home, Public, 24 Jan 1865, 33-35, A, NAI.
The need for skilled labour was indefatigable in the Settlement. Use of the Burmese and European convicts obviously did not suffice and the officials, therefore, had to rely on free Chinese labour. However, free labour, in comparison to convict labour had to be remunerated at very high rates. Therefore, there was always a huge concern regarding making savings on the expenditure on skilled labour. Consequently, Colonel Man, on his accession as the Superintendent, undertook the organization of a convict Artificer Corps as an alternative to the costly skilled free labour. In the early 1870s, the formation of the Artificer Corps was sanctioned ‘for the construction of Public Works and for the best utilization of skilled labour’. On Man’s arrival, the Settlement had 297 free artificers in Port Blair. Most of them were Chinese carpenters, drawing two rupees per diem. The rest were a Madras or Bengal stone mason drawing rupees 38-12 per mensem. Within a few years Colonel Man discharged nearly two-thirds of the Chinese labourers and all the stone masons.

Man found that the previous Superintendent had trained a considerable number of convicts as stone masons for employment on the European barracks and Church, and some of them had even managed to acquire considerable skill. However, in other trades there were none that could be employed with free workmen. Most of them were useful only in putting up temporary barracks or sheds which required no great workmanship but skilled artificers ‘to take the place of costly free labour there were none’ – except three or four blacksmiths who were employed under the Harbour Master. As a result, one of the first tasks undertaken by him was a census of the convict body to ascertain what each man’s previous trade had been. Many of them, in Man’s opinion, had not cared to declare themselves because of ‘want of encouragement’. He was able to get a return of nearly seven hundred craftsmen. He

77 All the convicts who formed a part of the artificer corps were subjected to the rules to the class that they otherwise belonged to. The charge of the corps rested with the Superintendent. Convict foreman, petty officers and Tindals were selected out of the artificer corps to supervise the work of gangs of the labouring convicts in the corps. The convicts and 1st and 2nd class who belonged to the corps received marks for good behaviour and industrious work. The Andaman and Nicobar Manual, 1908, pp. 69-71.

78 Home, Public, June 1870, Proceedings Volume, 61 and 62, NAI.
immediately placed them under free maistrees to improve their skills. 79 He felt that working in the Artificer Corps would help in the rehabilitation of convicts, that is, 'in the case of prisoners stimulated to industry by reward, the progress in skill is often very remarkable; and when they are under sentence for life, they soon amply repay the pains and cost of teaching them trades'. 80

**Temporality of the Labour Obligation**

In Robert Steinfeld’s account of the nineteenth century discourse on free and unfree labour, the ‘duration of the contracted-for service’ formed an index of classification between free and unfree labour. 81 The working men saw the men under long duration contract service as ‘bound as slaves’ and the ones with short-term contract, as ‘free’. Steinfeld establishes, through this examination of working men’s attitude to labour obligation, that not only were the labour practices and regimes being continuously reinterpreted from below but a crucial denominator for internal differentiation of the workforce was the ‘temporality of labour obligation’. In the labour regime of the Andamans also, one of the fundamental points of differentiation of the workforce, was the temporality of the labour obligation – for life or for a term. The temporality of the labour obligation to which the convicts were subjected impinged on their status within the labour regime. The following is an examination of the difference in the functioning and the status of a life-convict and a term-convict in the labour regime of the Andamans.

Term-convicts were being sent to the Andamans from the time of its inception. 82 In July 1858, the government had decided that ‘Mutineers and rebel convicts sentenced to imprisonment for less than ten years in the Punjab’ would not be sent to the Andamans but the ones ‘sentenced in N. W. Provinces, Oudh for more than five years and in the Lower

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79 Home, Public, 4 Feb 1871, 168-71, A, NAI.
80 Home, Public, 1 Jan 1870, 83-85, NAI.
82 A term-convict was one who did not serve a life sentence. The terms of sentence generally ranged between three to seven years. On the expiry of his sentence, the term-convict was to return to his homeland.
provinces for more than three years' were to be sent to Andamans.\textsuperscript{83} However, in theory and spirit, the sentence of transportation was supposed to be given only for life. Though initially a product of overcrowding in the Indian jails, after some years the presence of the term-convicts in the Andaman's labour regime was wholly a product of economic imperatives. In order to make term transportation more digestible to the high officials in India, its continued use was justified on penal grounds. It was contended that it contributed to the security of the regime by serving as a counterbalance to the life-convicts. The Settlement officers argued that the lifers 'could not be placed in a position of trust' and term transportation answered the 'object of supplying reliable men to act as petty officers'.\textsuperscript{84} It was ironical, though, that the term-convicts could not serve as domestic servants as their presence in the households and disposition was considered unreliable for the purpose.\textsuperscript{85} Life-convicts were preferred over the term-convicts because the former were seen as having committed a crime in a moment of passion and extreme provocation, and therefore were distinguished from others who were habitual thieves and criminals. This characterization of life-convicts, however, did not always measure up to the entire lot of them.

The fact that the term-convict could return home meant that he did not severe ties completely with his society and community. Such a convict could not be categorized as 'socially dead' in the proper sense of the term. His social and emotional ties were still alive and he was not compelled to rebuild his life in the Andamans, as was the case with convict who had to spend the rest of his life on the Islands. The compulsions, legal and economic, facing the term-convict were very different from the ones that a 'lifer' was subjected to. The issues of reform, rehabilitation and integration of the convict into the new life were not imminent for the term-convict. What he himself and the administration expected was to fulfil his sentence and return to the life back in his homeland. An efficient discharging of his duties could also earn him extra marks, which went towards the remission of his sentence, expediting his return. This made the status of the term-convict 'free' in comparison to the life-convict. Moreover, the life-convict as he had no hope of release was believed to possess a desperate character as compared to a term-convict. Whatever marks the life-convict earned

\textsuperscript{83} Home, Judicial, 30 July 1858, 18-20, NAI; Home, Public, 10 Sep 1858, 60-61, NAI.
\textsuperscript{84} Foreign, Internal, Sep 1891, 35-36, B, NAI.
\textsuperscript{85} See Andaman and Nicobar Manual, 1908.
for his good behaviour facilitated the speedy acquisition of the self-supporter status but did not go towards the remission of his sentence.

Most of the term-convicts served as petty officers. Many were employed in labour works around the Settlement, much like the lifers, but there did exist a stark difference in their status within the labour regime. The development of the colony, with time, had necessitated greater labour inputs and also employment of labour in varied capacities. Superintendent R.C. Tytler who joined the services in May 1862 pushed ahead a scheme of increasing the number of convicts in the Andamans to about twenty five thousand to enable the rapid clearance of the jungles.\textsuperscript{86} The labour requirement could either be met with the greater exploitation of the existent labour force or else by augmenting their numbers or by opening the Settlement to non-convict labour. The increase in the number of the convicts was seen as the safest and the most cost-effective option. At the centre of the debate regarding the enlarging of the labour force was the opening up of the Islands to term-convicts, along with other categories of convicts such as females, juveniles, and ordinary criminals. The economic imperative exerted by the Island colony on the Indian penal administration, in the form of a greater need for convict labour, however militated against the presumed deterrent value of transportation, which supposedly could be maintained only if transportation was limited to convicts who were sentenced to transportation for life.

The officials in India saw the presence of the term-convicts as severely undermining the penal discipline in the Andamans as the returnee convicts gave glowing accounts of their life in the Andamans. This diminished the deterrent value of the sentence of transportation as a punishment. Consequently, term transportation was continuously subjected to criticism and exertions were made for its abolition. Notwithstanding the repeated censure, term transportation was resorted to for most part of the Andaman’s penal history. Term transportation after having become operational for a few years was temporarily halted in

\textsuperscript{86} And he felt that ‘if somewhat heavier expense was incurred, and the extension of the plan pushed on energetically in a short time there would undoubtedly be a flourishing agricultural settlement and a Province worthy of the British nation. It is also probable that considerable revenue would be obtainable from other sources viz. Coffee, iron, coal, wood’ in Home, Public, 27 Jan 1863, 60-62, A, NAI.
1868 as a result of A. P. Howell's note on jail discipline.\textsuperscript{87} The stoppage of term transportation lasted till 1874, when it was once again revived. The process, which went into the re-opening of term transportation, began with the murder of Lord Mayo in February 1872 in Port Blair. It led to the reconsideration of many of the earlier principles on which the Settlement was being run. For the purpose, the Secretary to the Home Department J.S. Campbell visited the Settlement in April 1872. Campbell was firmly against the idea of opening the Settlement to term-convicts. He was of the view that the Settlement in the Andamans was started as a purely penal Settlement with the view to receiving convicts sentenced for life. The reception of term-convicts, he felt, would create problems in the management of convicts. This was because, in his view:

It is almost impossible to devise a system which would be equally applicable to such [life-convicts], and to term-convicts. In case of men who are virtually dead to their own country, certain relaxations must be allowed in transportation; it would be difficult to work a stricter system for term-convicts, and it is most undesirable that the terrors of transportation should be diminished by the constant return of men who would spread a knowledge throughout the country that the life after all is not nearly so hard as that in our regular gaols.\textsuperscript{88}

For the time, it seemed that the matter was settled, however, soon the pressure of developing the colony began to mount. The Home Department had directed the Settlement officers to undertake certain development works, which required a larger amount of skilled labour than was available in the Settlement. There was a need for convicts who specialized as carpenters, bricklayers, stone masons, sawyers, stone-cutters, brass-workers, iron-moulders, casters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, moulders, surveyors, draftsmen, rattan-workers, engine-

\textsuperscript{87} Howell, \textit{Note}. He was of the view, 'the action of the Government of India on the subject of transportation has depended rather upon the capabilities and requirements of Port Blair than on a consideration of the effect of transportation upon the penal administration of India.... the system of return of convicts to the mainland after the completion of the sentence, defeated the deterrent purpose of punishment .... the net average annual cost of a prisoner in India varies from Ruppees 34-5 in Oudh to Ruppees 89 in Madras.... the cost of ordinary convict at Port Blair is calculated to be not far under Ruppees 30 a month'.

\textsuperscript{88} J. S. Campbell's Report, written in April 1872, reference in Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, NAI.
drivers, English and vernacular writers, tile-makers, and potters. The then Superintendent, D. M. Stewart, who had also opposed term transportation, by this time, recognized the mounting need for extra hands in the Settlement. Consequently, he threw in his weight with the re-opening of term transportation. In his view, there were two primary objects of penal transportation, 'the fulfilment of sentences attached to the commission of certain crimes by the law' and secondly, 'the profitable employment of the convict in Transportation'. He was of the opinion that one of these objects must and ought to subserve the other. Therefore:

In my judgement the management of convicts ought to be the first consideration, and to this object the development of the resources of the Settlements should give way....the old struggle between the requirements of discipline and the demand for labour must continue, until it has been definitively solved and set to rest....Presumably the end of transportation means above all things, punishment; but, if I understand the question rightly, it also aims at profitable employment and reformation, leading upto a state of comparative freedom within the limits of the Settlements. This object will be utterly unattainable if every spark of the convict's spirit is extinguished, and he is deprived of all hope of regaining by his conduct and industry something of a position he has lost by his crimes.

In arguing a case for a 'free' labour regime, D. M. Stewart proposed a plan to receive the term-convicts. In Stewart's opinion the term-convicts could provide the reliable men to fill the large and important body of petty officers. He did not think that a life-convict could be relied on as a check on his fellow-convicts. In Stewart's observation all the convicts who took an interest in and were efficient in this work, whether as petty officers, artificers, fishermen, boatmen and servants, were term-convicts. Thus, he concluded, no discipline, training or treatment could produce their equivalent from a class composed of life prisoners. Stewart also believed that the mixture of the class, who knew that if they behaved well would return, was an important element of safety. In order to make this system workable, Stewart proposed to place the term-convicts on arrival, and for the specified terms, in the lowest classes and give them no indulgence whatsoever, but in one respect he would place them at a

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89 Home, Port Blair, Sep 1874, 1-5, A, NAI.
disadvantage. He would keep them always as labour unless they become petty officers, and never give them any ticket of leave. D. M. Stewart's plan was an attempt to reconcile the conflicting pressures exerted on the Settlement and a concession to the physical and economic requirements of the colony over the penal principle.

Term transportation, thus, in the garb of 'necessary for the safety of the Settlement' was opened following D. M. Stewart's report and Henry Norman's visit to the Settlement in May 1872. He built a very cogent case in favor of term transportation based on the suggestions made by D. M. Stewart. In the Settlement, the proportion between the term-convicts and lifers was one is to three, respectively. However, the proportion between the two in 1875 was one is to 10. The numbers of term-convicts was far below the required proportion. As a result, the government decided that for the next few seasons and until the desired proportion of term to life-convicts had been attained, the transportation of term-convicts who had to serve not less than seven years would be undertaken.

For the next fifteen years, term transportation continued unabated in the Andamans. Nearly after fifteen years there was a revision of rules and regulations in the Andamans and following the report of Colonel Lyall and Surgeon Major Lethbridge. In June 1891, term transportation, except for Burmese term-convicts, was suspended. Lyall and Lethbridge Committee felt that the conditions, which had given rise to the opening of term transportation, following Lord Mayo's murder had been overcome and, therefore, the practice was discontinued. The real issue being that at the time the labour demand was not pressing and the Settlement had developed a sufficient degree of infrastructural abilities. However, the increased labour requirements towards the end of 1890s for the building of

90 Home, Port Blair, August 1874, No. 52, Appendix I, NAI.
91 Norman's Report, Home, Port Blair, August 1874, 75, NAI.
92 Henry Norman, at the time was the military member of the Supreme Council of India. See William Warner-Lee, Memoirs of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wylie Norman, London, 1908, pp. 246-247.
93 Home, Port Blair, July 1875, 20, NAI.
94 C. J. Lyall was the Secretary to the Government of India in the Home Department and A. S. Lethbridge was the Inspector General of Jails, Bengal, at this time.
the Cellular Jail led to a revival of the issue transportation of term-convicts.\textsuperscript{95} It was continued until March 1906 when it was discontinued as the number of term-convicts in the Settlement had become more than the stipulated 33 per cent.\textsuperscript{96}

Table V
Statistical Comparison of the Number of Term-Convicts In the Early Twentieth Century\textsuperscript{97}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total No. of Convicts Transported</th>
<th>No. of Term-Convicts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1147</td>
<td>437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>1483</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>1687</td>
<td>806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>1724</td>
<td>864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>1197</td>
<td>690</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Life-Convicts</th>
<th>No. of Term-Convicts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>9513</td>
<td>1609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>10321</td>
<td>4282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The issue of temporality of the sentence served by the convicts being transported to the Andamans brings out the lines of division in the labour regime in the Andamans. The Settlement officials saw the term-convicts as more 'efficient' labour force. They were believed to be driven by the incentive of a brighter future – when they could return to their homeland and roam as free persons. The view of the officials regarding the term-convicts was different from the one they took of the life-convicts who were seen as an 'inefficient' work force. This was a common characterization of the convict labour in the nineteenth century, where the convicts were seen as inefficient in comparison to indenture or wage

\textsuperscript{95} Home, Port Blair, Proceedings Volume, May 1901, 83, A, NAI. See Table VII.
\textsuperscript{96} In 1911, a proposal was once again put forward for the resumption of the deportation of convicts sentenced to terms of transportation to meet the demand for increased labour for the forest and other departments in the Settlement. The possibilities of commercial development of the forestry in the Andamans were finally presenting themselves and an increased labour supply could considerably increase the revenue yield. Home, Port Blair, May 1911, 42-45, A, NAI.
\textsuperscript{97} Home, Port Blair, Proceedings Volume, March 1906, 50-56, NAI.
labourers. This view was later taken over and reinforced in historical works as well. The main reason for characterizing convict labour as such was that the adherents of this view did not see the convict as having any interest or incentive in labouring. This was, however, not true for the convict in the Andamans. No doubt, the life-convict was subjected to much harshness and brutality but that did not mean that he played no role whatsoever in the negotiation of the labour relations. Not only did he stand to gain by being co-opted in the state-sponsored political hierarchy,\(^9\) he could also become a self-supporter after some years of stay in the Settlement. He could marry, have children, and also acquire some property, thereby retrieving in great measure the life that he had been severed from. The convicts in the Andamans, therefore, were not totally devoid of the supposed interest and incentives in labouring. Therefore, they can not be characterized as 'inefficient' simply on the basis of 'lack of incentives'. Beyond the issue of incentives, the characterization of a particular labour force as 'efficient' or 'inefficient' also stems from the view taken of free wage labour, which is epitomized as a system, based thoroughly on incentives or rewards for performance of labour. Any system, which does not proffer such space to the labourer, was deemed 'inefficient'. This was the view taken of slavery and its abolition, as a result of rise of capitalism. There was nothing in convict labour in the Andamans that made it intrinsically inefficient. The pecuniary and non-pecuniary pressures exerted on the labour force were really the factors that determined the efficiency of the labour force.

*Working the Forests*

Oblivious to the commercial potential of the Andaman forests, the Forest Department was initially organized to fulfil the timber requirements of the Settlement and to undertake forest clearings.\(^9\) A sawmill, supplying the needs of the Settlement, was set up on the Chatham Island. The Forest Department was put on a firmer footing, in the 1880s, when the value of

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98 This is clearly shown in Satadru Sen's account of the labor system in the Andamans.

99 Home, Judicial, 29 July 1859, 20, NAI; Public Works Department, Forests, Jan 1868, 8-11, B, NAI; Public Works Department, Forests, Sep 1868, 16 to 18, NAI; Home, Public, 26 Nov 1870, 122-123, B, NAI; Home, Port Blair, August 1874, 52, NAI; Home, Port Blair, Nov 1874, 30-33, A, NAI; Home, Port Blair, Feb 1881, 36-38, NAI.
the Padouk timber in the international market was apprehended.\textsuperscript{100} Initially, the Andaman Division worked with a small establishment of convict jemadars and tindals who served in the place of rangers and foresters.\textsuperscript{101} The growing commercial interest, after some time, began to clash with the needs of the penal administration. By the early 1890s, the Forest Department began to face problems on account of shortage of labour. There was a lively debate as to whether the timber export should be limited by the labour available in the Settlement, or be profitably opened to private enterprise.\textsuperscript{102} The forest works were further affected by the channelization of the labour force on the construction of the Cellular Jail and the shortage began to push up the cost of extraction of timber.\textsuperscript{103} However, the local administration continually reiterated its policy as 'the forest administration must be strictly subordinated to the disciplinary measures required in a convict settlement.... but, subject to these considerations they desire to utilize and preserve, by the best methods possible, the valuable forests of these islands'.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{100} In the year 1881-82, the survey of the forests in the Andaman was begun. A trained officer was posted to the Andamans, who was supposed to 'systematically and in detail explore the different parts of the Settlement, and ascertain the available supplies of the more valuable species, so that, in the event of increased demand springing up, the Government may be in a position to judge how far it can be met from the Settlement'. See Home, Forests, May 1880, 9, NAI; Home, Port Blair, Dec 1880, 11-12, B, NAI; Home, Port Blair, Nov 1881, 16, NAI; Home, Port Blair, Aug 1883, 76-78, NAI; and Home, Port Blair, July 1886, 98, NAI; Revenue and Agriculture Department, Proceedings Volume, Feb 1895, 90-92, A, NAI.


\textsuperscript{103} In the year 1894-95, the Forest Department's daily labor force was 436 as compared to 532 in the previous year, which was further reduced to 316 in 1895-96. The actual need of the Forest Department was about 1200 forest workers. The cost of extraction amounted to Rs. 19 per ton in the year 1896-97 as compared to Rs. 7.8 a ton in 1890-91. See Revenue and Agriculture Department, Forest, Sep 1895, 33-35, B, NAI.

\textsuperscript{104} Home, Port Blair, Proceedings Volume, January 1919, 61, NAI.
The Forest Department, with the surveys and explorations of forests in the North and Middle Andamans,\textsuperscript{105} began to exert pressure on the Settlement for either importing larger batches of convicts or permitting the importation of ‘free’ labour. In order to balance both the imperatives, the government experimented with the use of ‘free’ Chinese contractors, who brought their own labour force, with convict labourers for the forest works. However, with time, considerable anxiety grew with regard to working the ‘free’ labour and the convicts together, as it was believed to hamper convict discipline and the latter’s migration for fear of contamination.\textsuperscript{106} The Settlement officials began to proffer a variety of reasons for the discontinuation of the use of convict labour for the forest works in the Andamans. As early as 1868, Kurz, the curator of Herbarium of the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta, who was sent to the Andamans in March 1856 to make a collection of plants, had stated, ‘The convict labour too is a very indifferent one (five convicts are said to do the same work as one free native worker) and scarce.... Their untrustworthiness, moreover, would make a story of a Conservator in jungles without good protection dangerous’.\textsuperscript{107} The convict labour was, thus, described as ‘inefficient’, ‘bad and wasteful’, ‘unprofitable’, and given to malingering and indiscipline.\textsuperscript{108} The Colonial State was working with dichotomous categories of free wage labour and convict labour, which saw the former as a superior and efficient system of exploitation of labour.

However, the case was not of free wage labour being superior to convict labour or the latter being inefficient. Free, efficient and lazy were categories that officials were using to distinguish the convict and non-convict labourers, while the distinctions between the two actually rested on their location within the labour regime. The forest works required a particular kind of skill and training, which most of the convicts did not possess. Furthermore, most of them found forest work uncongenial and too laborious. There was a


\textsuperscript{106} Home, Jails, 1922, 8, NAI.

\textsuperscript{107} Public Works Department, Forests, Jan 1868, 8-11, B, NAI.

\textsuperscript{108} As one report stated, ‘the average convict, being an unpaid labourer, would only work to the extent that will keep him out of trouble, and therefore the outturn of work by a body of convicts was, within reasonable limits,
very high sick rate amongst the convicts and frequent outbreaks of epidemics of scurvy and malaria. Moreover, while the convicts lived on the Settlement they were not kept on physically strenuous work for more than a year. However, this rule was not enforced in the forest camps. The system of transfer from camp to camp also delayed their pay. A practice of granting special gratuities to convicts employed by the Forest Department was undertaken to encourage more convicts to take to forest work. But this practice was soon discontinued as it had the potential of creating discontent because the convicts in the employ of forest department were seen as receiving preferential treatment. All these factors together made forest work unpopular amongst the convicts who resorted to either shirking work or simply escaping into the jungles.110

Making the convicts perform labour in the forests also created administrative problems for the Settlement officials. The extension of forest works obligated the forest workers to work in groups, scattered over a wide area and nearly sixty miles from the Settlement. The Departmental officer, moreover, was only an employer of labour, while the Settlement officials were in charge of the discipline. This made the surveillance and supervision of the convicts working under the forest department a daily problem for the overseers. It was difficult for one overseer to exercise control, on an everyday basis, over 600 men scattered in different stations. As one official stated:

I have no doubt that if one of the most efficient Indian Forest Officers were sent down here he would be of little use for the first two years. What is necessary is that the officer in charge of our forest should have great local experience, understand dealing with convicts, and how to get work out of them, and above all he should be a man of great endurance and physical strength for no one but a strong man could work in these almost impenetrable forests daily for six months without being completely knocked up.111

merely the result of the strictness with which they were supervised'. In R. L. Heinig, Progress Report of Forest Administration in Andamans, 1896-97, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1898.


110 Home, Port Blair, Proceedings Volume, Jan 1919, 61, NAI.

111 Revenue and Agriculture Department, Forests, May 1882, 145-146, B, NAI.
Working the forests, thus, was no easy task for the forest officials and the presence of convict workforce was seen as further compounding their problems. Most of the time there was friction between the Burmese and convict forest workers and where the former in the eyes of the officials, always got a raw deal.\(^{112}\) The inability to provide surveillance made common activities, such as, opium smoking and homosexuality, which were seen as illegal by the State. Moreover, the convict workers in the forest had to be provided with dry rations because returning to the station for a cooked lunch was a near-impossibility. Much to the chagrin of the officials, the convicts traded these dry rations with the 'free' labourers for tobacco and other things.\(^{113}\)

The labourers categorized as 'free' were seen as such in comparison to the 'indentured' labour. The British officials were opposed to extending the indenture system to the Andamans. They were of the opinion that if suitable wages were offered and proper accommodation was provided there would be 'no serious difficulty in securing an adequate supply of free labour from Madras'. The engagement of the labour, therefore, was to be a matter of civil contract, which was enforceable under section 492 of the Indian Penal Code. As one official stated:

> This section gives the magistrate, who would be the civil officer in charge of the settlement, full discretion as to what is reasonable and proper service under the contract and as to whether the labourer's refusal to perform it is reasonable. This is all that is required for the control of the labour force.... The necessary provisions for housing, supply of food, water supply, etc., should be quite simple. They should lay down that all orders of the civil officer shall be carried out, subject to appeal to the Chief Commissioner.\(^{114}\)

So what the officials understood by free labour was the labour which was engaged through a civil contract. Under the contract, the labourer was 'free not only in the sense that the

\(^{112}\) ibid.

\(^{113}\) Home, Port Blair, Proceedings Volume, Jan 1919, 61, NAI.

\(^{114}\) Revenue and Agriculture Department, Forests, Nov 1910, 6-8, A, NAI.
recruitment of the coolie and his transport should be restricted; but also in the sense that he should be placed under no penal contract, so that his freedom of movement backwards and forwards... might not be interfered with'.

With time, the government began to convert to the view that 'the commercial potentialities of the islands are by no means negligible'. It, therefore, decided to develop the forests of the North and Middle Andaman Islands with the help of 'imported labour' or with the help of private contractors to whom the forests would be leased. The latter scheme failed to take off and the Settlement officials felt that instead of leasing out the forests to firms it was better to exploit the forests on a departmental basis. The penal settlement was confined to the South Andamans and, thus, seen as not interfering with the developmental plans for the Middle and North Andaman Islands. Efforts began to be made to attract labourers on a basis of 'temporary cultivating licenses', employed by the Forest Department for two hundred days in a year. Finally, 400 coolies, mostly 'Mundas' were recruited in Ranchi on an agreement of six months, and some were also obtained from Burma. They were engaged for clearing sites, filling up swamps, constructing jetty, and building huts and embankments. At this time, around 800 convicts were employed in forest works. The demand for non-convict labour began to increase exponentially in the Forest Department. As a result, the Forest Department began to lobby for the extension of forest works with non-convict labour. Even the Jail Commission was asked to look into the question of 'the extent to which the conditions of forest employment are or can be made compatible with convict reform'. The Jail Committee was severe in its indictment of employment of convict labour on forest works and ordered the gradual abolition of their use.

However, there was one catch in the demand for non-convict labour. The importation of labourers who came to the Andamans on a voluntary basis was not an easy task. In the early

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115 Report by C. W. Gwyne, 13 August 1921, in Home, Jails, 1922, 8, NAI.
116 Revenue and Agriculture Department, Forests, Nov 1910, 6-8, A, NAI and Home, Port Blair, August 1920, 77-78, A, NAI.
117 Home, Port Blair, Proceedings Volume, July 1920, 120, NAI.
decades of the twentieth century, there was only one steamer plying to the Andamans, and additional means of transport had to be organized for the scheme. Moreover, there was no recruiting system on which the Settlement officials could rely on and there was always the fear of epidemics and other unforeseen circumstances pushing up the cost of this project. Thus, the importation of non-convict labour was an expensive proposition. On the flip side an immediate and sudden withdrawal of the convict labour could also threaten the prospects of the Andamans forests. The Forest Department, therefore, wished to form village settlements in various pockets over the North and Middle Andamans where the labourers would be stationed on a permanent basis. It had to arrive at some arrangement which, without dislocating the forest administration, or causing financial loss would enable the withdrawal of the convicts. The Forest Department, therefore, suggested:

The obvious solution is to continue to send convicts to the Andamans for forest work – offering men of the ‘Star Convict’ class (i.e., Accidental Criminals) their tickets-of-leave in the Andamans, provided that they bring families and will work for the fair wages which will be prescribed. Such a procedure will be great boon to men, who by volunteering would be saved from long terms of imprisonment, and of great advantage to the state in that congested jails will be relieved, and the transferred men would be creating wealth.

This was a neat package offered by the Forest Department, which reconciled its commercial interests with that of the penal settlement. It was a mid-way solution, which made space for the importation of free labour while letting the department take the benefit of convict labour as well. It is interesting that when the abolition finally came in 1921, the voluntary migration of convicts on the pattern suggested by the forest department was instituted. Karen, a hill tribe from Burma and labourers from Ranchi were also recruited to work in the North and Middle Andamans.

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120 Home, Port Blair, Proceedings Volume, Jan 1919, 61, NAI.
121 Home, Port Blair, August 1920, 77-78, A, NAI.
123 The exploitation of the forests in the Andamans, however, was not done extensively. The limited and centralized character of human settlements prevented large-scale exploitation. Of the total of about 1500 square miles of workable forests, twenty-five per cent was still virgin by 1958, inspite of about eighty years of
Characterizing the Labour Regime

Given the contested nature of the labour regime and the variegated character of the workforce, how does one characterize the labour regime in the Andamans? Presuming the various geographical, physical, and psychological imperatives, and the fact that the Settlement had been opened as a penal station, the human material that the administration settled to work with were the convicts, which evidently became the most dominant form of labour to be exploited in the Andamans. The convicts were employed in nearly every form of labour—forest work, coolies, boatmen, compounders, scavengers, gardeners, electricians, domestic servants, munshis, and also as warders, tindals, jemadars and umedwars. Taking on from Robert Steinfeld's analysis, if the two indices for judging the labour regime—the kind of pressures the state permitted the employers to bring on workers; and the measures that the State permitted the workers to negotiate the labour exchange—are applied to the Andamans, it would undoubtedly fall at the extreme end of the labour continuum, rendering it a coercive and an unfree labour regime. In this, it was much closer to slavery than, perhaps, indenture or contract labour. This is because in the Andamans, the State as the sole employer had summary control over the lives of the convicts, and the latter played no legal role whatsoever in the formulation of the labour exchange relation. The convict, moreover, was not given any legal right or avenues by the State to appeal against any excesses. The administrative isolation of the Andamans further rendered the situation of the convict quite precarious as he was totally at the mercy of the local Settlement officials.

While the Andamans presents a case of an uncommonly coercive labour regime, it also displays elements, which make its categorization as one quite difficult. The early revisionist labour historiography established that the negotiated temper and the existence of pecuniary pressures were the defining elements of free wage labour, which distinguished it from unfree forms of labour. It challenged this conceptualization of free labour by demonstrating that


124 Steinfeld, Coercion.

125 Though existence of convict resistance in the form of escapes did circumscribe the functioning of the State.

even a highly coercive labour regime, such as slavery, also possessed a negotiated character and was defined as much by the presence of pecuniary, as with the non-pecuniary pressures.\textsuperscript{127} This perception fits likewise the study of convict labour. The historiography on convict labour also quite firmly establishes that the process of extraction of the labour, of the convict, was also negotiated and contested from within; and where pecuniary and non-pecuniary sanctions simultaneously worked upon the convicts.\textsuperscript{128}

The case study of the Andamans also throws some up similar insights. The non-pecuniary pressures stemmed from the obvious fact that the Andamans, while a colony, was basically a penal settlement. Notwithstanding, the changing views regarding the origins of criminality and criminal behaviour, central to all conceptions was a stereotype regarding a convict's indolence, laziness, and unwillingness to work.\textsuperscript{129} Thus, making the convict perform labour was central to penal regimes in any part of the world. It became all the more crucial in the colonial context because transportation, as a penal device, had few takers in the Western hemisphere and the celebrated purpose for retaining it in the Asiatic colonies was that it served a politico-ideological, besides an economic, function for the Raj. Transportation helped the Colonial State in dealing with the problem of collective crime, aided in the colonization of the extremities of the Empire, and imparted a benign countenance to the otherwise terrifying Imperial visage. The Andamans in this respect was supposed to be the flag-bearer of the highest standards of penal discipline (to which it seldom measured up).


Therefore, its penal regime was continually tinkered and tweaked in order to meet the image that the Raj projected of itself to the world. Its labour regime, impelled by financial constraints, often lost its balance and tried to shake off its penal moorings. However, the location of the Andamans in the Imperial ideological edifice essayed enormous pressure on it to abide by its image as the Asiatic Bastille and restored the balance in favour of the penal imperatives.

The pecuniary constraints of the labour regime arose primarily from the geographical location of the island colony, which imposed administrative isolation and subjected it to financial constraints. The Andamans, unlike a plantation colony, was not a colony that was enriching the Colonial coffers. It was a frontier outpost, with high shipping costs, no involvement in the international European trade, effectively no domestic market and possessing limited technical and infrastructural capacity. Also, the Andamans, unlike the plantation colonies, had no markets and no export enclaves to which it sent its produce. Therefore, there was no external pecuniary pressure on the colony. However, there did exist an internal economic logic based on the Islands' geographical and political specificity. The political economy of the host colony at the time of the establishment of the Settlement necessitated expending huge amount of labour. 130 This made the State resort to convict-labour instead of contract wage labour as the workers had to be subjected to a high degree of coercion in order to make them labour in a place like the Andamans.

The case, in the Andamans, was not one of non-availability of wage contract labour but of non-availability of labour for the kind of work that was needed to be done.131 The working

130 Donald Denoon has examined these issues with regard to the temperate colonies where the European labour force migrated, in "The Political Economy of Labour Migration to Settler Societies: Australia, South Africa and Southern South America between 1890 and 1914", in Shula Marks and Peter Richardson, eds., International Labour Migration, Historical Perspectives, published for The Institute of Commonwealth Studies by Maurice Temple Smith, London, 1984, pp. 186-205.
131 Prabhu Mohaptara in his study of labour organization during the nineteenth century in colonial India (at a seminar at Centre for Historical Studies, JNU), has shown that non-availability of labour did not always contribute to a situation where labourers were exploited (read subjected to physically coercive forms of labour
conditions were so adverse that in spite of the presence of nearly eight thousand convicts the land cleared in the first six years was not more than hundred acres. And, for instance, soon after the Settlement was inaugurated, the Inspector-General of Jail in Lower Bengal, Frederick Mouat, was asked 'whether volunteer artisans for the Andaman penal settlement' could be obtained from among the convicts in the jails in the Lower Bengal. Mouat had replied that there very few convicts of the description required in the Andamans and the ones who were there were needed locally. Moreover, none of them would voluntarily cross the dreaded kalapani.\textsuperscript{132} All these factors together exerted immense financial considerations of the colony and the organization of the labour within it. The formation of an Artificer Corps out of the labouring convicts and the use of non-convict labour force were features of pecuniary pressures, besides the self-supporter system, operating in the labour regime in the Andamans.\textsuperscript{133}

\textit{Conclusion}

Where the present study moves away from the revisionist historians of the Australian convict history, Clare Anderson, Anand Yang and Satadru Sen's work is that it does not see the labour regime as fulfilling only one motive of either developing the colony or of making the convict into a loyal subject.\textsuperscript{134} The transported convict was not simply just another category of migrant worker helping in developing the incipient colonies in the far-flung part of the Empire, neither making him into a governable subjects and pinning a new political identity on him by co-opting him into state-sponsored hierarchy, was the sole aim of the state. This study seeks to argue that different aims and purposes tugged at the labour regime in different directions. Second, the labour of the convict, more importantly, helped the State to build ties of political co-sanguinity with the convicts, which secured its position within the

\textsuperscript{132} Home, Judicial, 25 June 1858, 21-23, NAI.

\textsuperscript{133} The self-supporter system is discussed in the following chapter.


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administratively isolated world of the Andamans Islands. Third, the labour regime provided a rite of passage to integrate the convicts into the new social world of the Island colony. Further, the labour regime mainly constituted of convict labour but also relied for skilled labour on non-convict/ free labour. A concerted focus only on convict labour has also obfuscated the study of the other kinds of non-convict labour, which were employed on the Islands in different capacities.

The distinctive feature of the labour regime in the Andamans was that it was not only straddled by the non-pecuniary pressures but pecuniary constraints as well. At another level, the presence of these very pressures created spaces for negotiation and contestation by the convicts. For instance, the demands of political economy rendered the position of the State officials quite vulnerable and gave the convicts a historical agency, that is the space to negotiate, bargain, resist, and also collaborate.135 For instance, the Settlement, at most times, suffered from want of resources and the co-operation and participation of the convicts in the labour regime at different levels was crucial to the self-sufficiency of the Settlement. Moreover, the administrative isolation of the Islands made the Settlement officials dependent on convicts for political, besides economic, sustenance. These factors empowered the convicts in relation to the administration and the administrators knew that murder and rebellion was an ever-present possibility.136

Further, the convicts as the prisoners and the subjects of the State enjoyed certain privileges and rights. The summary control that the State had over their lives rendered their position quite similar to that of slaves, and many officials also saw them as such. Nevertheless, the State was legally, and morally, bound to take care of the lives and health of the convicts. The State was also supposed to be providing a just and a reformatory administrative system in a

135 Clare Anderson also locates the convict resistance in the possibilities that opened up for the convict's empowerment as a result of tensions in-between the colonial rhetoric and colonial action.

136 See the section on 'Administrative isolation' in the previous chapter. Colonel Man once remarked, 'the Superintendent of Port Blair has not only charge of the van Diemen's Land, but of the Norfolk Island of India, which contains men to whom bloodshed is as congenial as to a tiger. Prisoners of this description hold their own lives and that of their fellows in no estimation, and would consider a respite from all labour for two or three months as cheaply earned by the slaughter of a comrade', in Home, Judicial, 24 Sep 1870, 13-14, A, NAI.
penal colony. The public and official opinion in mainland India, back home in Britannia, and in the other parts of the Empire held a hawkish interest in the workings of the administration. This limited and, in some cases, even prevented excesses that the convicts might be subjected to. The stabilization of the labour force and social deliverance of the convicts, wretched out of their social and familial surroundings, was an equally important aim of the State. Therefore, the rehabilitation of the convict within his own social world and a recreation, re-enactment, toleration and accommodation, at least in some measure, of the life that he had lost in the act of being sentenced to transportation, was also one of the ways in which the managed and stabilized the labour regime in a place like the Andamans.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{137} Clare Anderson discusses the social life of the convicts in considerable detail in her work. She demonstrates that many aspects of convicts' social and cultural life were tolerated and even encouraged by the colonial authorities as they were seen imparting social stability to the convicts. Cohabitation with Mauritian women, the maintenance of caste strictures and attempts at Sanskritization were some of the marked features of the social life of the convicts in Mauritius.
The Convict Workshops, Phoenix Bay, 1901


A view of the convict cells of the Cellular Jail. The convicts in the Jail either worked in their cells or in the worksheds erected in-between the seven wings of the Jail.
Above: Present-day photo of the front entrance of the National Memorial, Cellular Jail.

Below: A wooden model of the panoptican-like seven arms of the Cellular Jail when it was first built. Worksheds for Intra-mural labour were erected in-between these wings.