



Colonial Settlement in Andamans (1789-1890)

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ABSTRACT

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are located in the Bay of Bengal. The total number of these islands is 319, out of which only 38 islands are inhabited by people. Many travellers talked about these islands such as I'Tsing, Marco Polo, etc. Mostly travellers talked about these islands People, here, practised pagan worship and they are most cruel generation and eat everybody that they can catch, if not of their own race. Andaman is usually called '*Kala Pani*' for many reasons. Britishers also called it '*Kala Pani*. British Government work for the policy of imperialism, so first they have colonise the whole India directly or indirectly. After this they wanted to colonise the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for many reasons such as policy of imperialism, for trade purpose and also who was threat for British Government in India, could be imprisoned in these islands. They were first time in 1789 send Archibald Blair to Colonise the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. But after seven years in 1796 Britishers ended the settlement in these islands for many reasons. After this again in 1857 they try to establish a penal settlement in Andaman Islands. This research paper explores the colonial settlement in Andaman Islands by the Britishers, also why they wanted to colonise these islands.

Introduction

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are located in the Bay of Bengal in Indian Ocean. The total number of these islands is 319, out of which only 38 islands are inhabited by people. Moreover, out of



these 38 islands, 26 are in Andaman while 12 in Nicobar. Apart from them, there are other small islands which are 572 in total. The Andaman Islands have three parts including the Northern Andaman, the Central Andaman and the Southern Andaman.ⁱ As per the census of India 2011, the total population of Andaman and Nicobar Islands is 3, 80,581. A large number of aboriginals still living on these islands. Port Blair (now called Sri Vijaya Puram) is the capital of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It is located 1255 km far from Calcutta, 1200 km far from Vishakhapatnam and 1190 km far from Chennai. The history of Andaman and Nicobar Islands is very old.

According to M. V. Portman, when he visited Penang with 13 aboriginals of Andaman, Penang people call them '*Handumans*'. So it was possible that the word Andaman divert from the Handuman, because Malaya people called them Handumans. The Japanese and Chinese sources refers these islands as '*Audaban*' and '*Yeng-to-Meng*'.ⁱⁱ

All travellers, who wrote about the Andaman Islands, describe the inhabitants of these islands as cannibals, Thereafter, a Chinese traveller, I'Tsing also talked about these islands in seventh century, mentioning them as Islands of cannibals. In 1290 A.D, Marco Polo wrote about them that "Angamanian is a very long Island. People, here, practised pagan worship and they are most cruel generation and eat everybody that they can catch, if not of their own race".ⁱⁱⁱ Likewise, several other travellers also visited these islands and spread information about them.

Andaman is usually called '*kala pani*'. One of its possible reasons can be the black clouds which usually roam over these Islands, bringing ceaseless rainfall and making sea water appear black.^{iv} Hence it is called Kala Pani. But it was believed that the meaning of Kala Pani is the place of death, the place from where only a fortunate person could return. During the Penal Settlement in 1858, the British Government also called it Kala Pani.^v Indian prisoners also named it '*Kala Pani*' so due to the tortures practised there by the British Government, and did also consider the imprisonment at this place a death sentence.

First Settlement in Andamans (1789-1796)

People had scarcely acknowledged these Islands before the Britishers arrived there. The British East India Company decided to put up settlement on the Andaman Islands in 1789. The Andaman Islands had such a location that it was very necessary for the British Government to rule it. The British East India Company also wanted to control and utilize the natural resources available there. In 1788, Britishers sent Archibald Blair to the Andaman Islands in order to collect information regarding these islands. During his survey Blair was Visited Rutland Island, Baren Island, Port Campbell, Port Andaman, Baratang and



Port Blair^{vi}. Blair recommended the establishment of the Penal Settlement on the Port Cornwallis in South Andaman, Later it was renamed as Port Blair. Thereafter some prisoners were shifted there, and were set to clear the forest. Archibald Blair made the Chatham Island the centre for his activities.^{vii} Archibald started his survey on 29 December, 1788 and submitted his report to Lord Cornwallis on 9 June 1789. In his report Archibald Blair talked about the geography of Andaman and also he was talked about the land, climate, monsoon, food and availability of water in these Islands.^{viii} After his report, Blair attends a meeting with Governor General in council on 12 June, 1789 and in this meeting East India Company decided to colonize the islands. Blair again sailed to Andaman in September, 1789 and work here up to 1792.^{ix} Thereafter, on the recommendation of the Governor General of India, Captain Alexander Kyd replaced Lt. Blair on 5 November, 1792. In November, 1792, a new site was decided to establish a colony in Andaman. This new site was situated in the North Andaman on the suggestion of William Cornwallis. Then the new site was named as Port Cornwallis and the old site which was situated in South Andaman and selected by Archibald Blair known as Port Blair (Sri Vijaya Puram). Captain Alexander Kyd took charge of the Andaman on 5 March, 1793. Afterwards, as per the suggestion of General Kyd, 200 prisoners, 113 constables and 72 labourers were sent there. But the new site, which was situated in North Andaman, was unhealthy for the settlers. Twenty one out of them died within the time period of two months. Most of the prisoners were unfit for any work.^x However, few more prisoners were sent there again in 1794, but they could not bear up the harsh weather condition of the Islands. In 1795, the great spell of rain affected the health of the settlers. Fifty deaths occurred in the colony and everyone depressed by climate and sickness, and wanted to leave the settlement. In January, 1796, the new surgeon expired due to illness. Kyd reported to the secretary of Governor General in council about the sickness. Ultimately a decision was taken to end the settlement in Andamans.

As mentioned above, in 1796, everyone in this site was depressed and wanted to leave the Andaman Islands. Hence, British Government decided to end the settlement in Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 1796 because of high death rate and unhealthy surroundings. At the time of closing the settlement there were 270 convicts and 500 other persons residing in the colony. Some of these prisoners were moved to Penang and the rest to Calcutta.^{xi} From 1796 to 1856 there was no settlement in these islands. But many times East India Company ships passed by these islands and their ships were attacked by aboriginals of these islands.



In 1825 Lieutenant Edward Alexander described in his book that he was passed the Little Andaman Island and his crew members were attacked by the aboriginals, three of his men injured and one was killed in this incident.^{xii}

In November 1844, two British ships named the '*Runnymede*' and '*Briton*' got clashed with the rocks of the Andaman Islands and got destroyed there. So, the sailors had to take shelter on these islands, thereafter some of the crews died there while the rest were brought back.^{xiii} In 1849, a ship named *Emily*, under the command of captain Anderson reached Andaman, also got destroyed there. He described that how he was attacked by the native people of these islands.^{xiv} Likewise, another attack is said to be made on January 13, 1855, when three sailors from a ship, called '*Fyze Baksh*', were also killed and four others were deadly injured by the natives of these islands. These incidents convinced British Government to colonise these islands again.

Penal Colony (1857-1896)

Considering all such incidents mentioned above, the British government decided to colonize these islands.^{xv} The Government of Bengal appointed Mr. Henry Hopkinson, who was the Commissioner of Arakan, to prepare a report regarding the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. He presented his report on February 08, 1856. He stated that the Penal Settlement should be established again on these islands.^{xvi} The British Government was still in the process of considering the report and the Revolt of 1857 had started. A large number of people took part in the revolt against the British Government and they arrested many Indians. This particular act also intended to shift these prisoners outside the country, so a committee was formed to establish a settlement on the Andaman Islands. It was formed on November 20, 1857 aiming particularly at finding out such locations on these islands where settlement could be established.

The chairperson of the committee was Dr. Fredrick J. Mouat. The other members of the committee were Dr. G.K. Playfair and Lieutenant J.A. Heathcote.^{xvii} This committee reached the Port Blair on December 11, 1857, and inspected different localities there. The most adequate place the committee selected was the Old Harbour. Thereafter, the committee suggested the British Government to rename the Old Harbour as Port Blair, after Archibald Blair's name to honour him. This suggestion was accepted by the British Government. Moreover, the committee also tried to negotiate with the aboriginals of the islands in order to make a balance between the natives and the foreigners. But the aboriginals attacked them who, in turn, confronted and took one of them to Calcutta. The recommendations of this



committee were approved by the British Government. Thereafter, on 15 January, 1858, the Governor General approved the establishment of settlement on the Andaman Islands, and also said that the life-term prisoners would be moved there. He further said that prisoners of the Revolt of 1857 should also be sent there.^{xviii}

Captain Henry Mann, an executive engineer and superintendent of the convicts at Moulmein, was appointed as the superintendent of the Penal Settlement, and Port Blair was selected for the Settlement. Captain Henry Mann reached at Port Blair on January 22, 1858, making these islands as a part the British Empire. But the actual work of the settlement was done under the commands of Dr. J.P. Walker. On March 04, 1858, Walker left Calcutta along with 200 prisoners, one native overseer, two native doctors and 50 soldiers.^{xix} Having reached there, he initially made efforts to cleanse the Chatham Island, but the place had shortage of water so they established their Head Office on the Ross Island. Walker faced many difficulties there. The major problem he faced was of fleeing prisoners and, secondly, the unpleasant and harsh weather conditions of that place, that is why the death rate was very high there. A number of 64 out of 773 prisoners died even in the first three months, and, meanwhile, 140 prisoners fled the imprisonment who, could not be recaptured. Besides it, 88 prisoners tried to escape but were caught, later, one of them committed suicide and the rest were hanged to death.^{xx}

Dr. Walker had a very strict attitude towards prisoners. That's why many of them frequently tried to flee the imprisonment. However, it was very difficult for them to escape. The escaped-prisoners were usually killed by the natives of the islands, and sometimes they themselves died of hunger, or in case recaptured, they were given death sentence.^{xxi}

On May 17, 1859, the natives of these islands attacked the settlement. It is called the 'Battle of Aberdeen'. But a prisoner named Dudhnath Tiwari, who had fled the prison, had already informed Dr. Walker regarding this attack, so this is how he could save himself from it. Later on, the British Government kept tolerance towards the natives of these islands.^{xxii} At that time, another plan was made to call upon the families of prisoners to populate the towns there. Dr. J. P. Walker appointed two prisoners families as agents of government in Calcutta and North-West province. They had to convince the prisoners' families to settle in the Andamans. They would get 50 rupees per month as a salary and 2 rupees bonus for each woman and child. This is how 25 prisoners were inspired to call upon their families there.^{xxiii}



At the time of Walker, 62 people were run the entire administration of Andamans. The supervisor of the Andaman Henry Man; The superintendent of the settlement, Dr J. P. Walker; Health Officer and Assistant Surgeon, Alexander Roman; Assistant compounder J. Rigro; Two doctors Nawab Khan and Karim Baksh; Richardson and Lala matan Das was Overseer; one jamadar, two collies and fifty security personnel under Lieutenant Topper.^{xxiv}

After Dr. Walker, Captain Houghton took over the in-charge-ship of the Andaman Islands on October 03, 1859. He treated prisoners more liberally as compared to Dr Walker. So, the number of cases of prisoners escaping prison got decreased.^{xxv} During 1861, the office of the Vice-Superintendent was also created there, it was to work in the absence of the Superintendent.

Robert Napier Report

In May 1862, in-charge-ship was handed over to Lieutenant Colonel, R. C. Tytler, who, as Captain Houghton had done, adopted the same policy of tolerance towards prisoners. At this time almost 149 acres of land cleared for the cultivation in these islands. At that time, Sir Robert Napier visited Andaman in 1863. He was in fact sent there by the British Government to inspect and witness the condition of prisoners, and to make necessary recommendations. Sir Robert Napier found prisoners living in miserable conditions there. He presented his report in 1864.^{xxvi} According to his report, 8035 prisoners were sent there between 1858 to 1863. While, 2098 prisoners out of them had died and 612 had fled the imprisonment. However, the escaped-prisoners were also considered dead.^{xxvii} The number of death cases indicates that death rate was very high there. The Robert Committee considered that forced-labour and lack of medical facilities primarily responsible for much high death rate. It was, then, decided that any prisoner must not be set to hard labour without the permission of the health officer. Every prisoner is assigned work as per his health conditions.^{xxviii} Some prisoners also got married and settled there. The Hindu prisoners were excluded from society, once they crossed the sea. It happened so because it was a custom in Hindu religion that once a Hindu goes across the sea, his religion gets demoralized. So, the Hindu prisoners, who were sent to that place, got distinguished from society after they got married and settled there.^{xxix}

Administration under British Burma

On April 01, 1864, the in-charge-ship of the Andaman was handed over to the Chief Commissioner of British Burma.^{xxx} After Tytler, the in-charge-ship of Andaman was taken over by Lieutenant Colonel, Ford in May 1864. Ford also made many recommendations regarding Andaman.



Ford presented his first annual administrative report, regarding Andaman during 1864-65. During his period, the Chief Commissioner of Burma sent Major Nelson Davies there for inspection, who also made some recommendations regarding administration in Andaman. He also expressed his concern regarding high death rate of prisoners. Davies was observed that there were many reasons for the high death rate in the Andamans. Firstly, the unhealthy prisoners were sent to the Andamans; Secondly, The weather of the Islands; thirdly, no proper diet given to prisoners; lastly convicts worked in a unhealthy sites in the Andamans.^{xxxii}

Davies rejected the Self-Supporting system. Some of Davies recommendations were approved by the Government of India. On the basis of his recommendations, the initiatives to clear forest and to dry wetlands were taken to save prisoners from Malaria. Likewise, the prisoners, who were about 45 years old and were physically weak, were no more to be sent to Andaman. The quality of the meals given to prisoners was also improved.^{xxxiii} But according to M. V. Portman, Davies report was not true about the Andaman penal settlement. Because, Davies relations were not good with the Colonel Ford, who was superintendent of the settlement at that time.^{xxxiii} At the time of Colonel Ford the area under cultivation increased from 149 to 353 acres and another 724 acres of land cleared for the cultivation in these islands.

In March 1868, Colonel Henry Man was again appointed as the Superintendent. He had already worked for the settlement ten years ago. During his tenure, the administration of Andaman was again handed over to the Government of India, which was previously under the command of Chief Commissioner of British Burma. Colonel Henry Mann set up several rules and regulations for prisoners. He made such rules in every field, which along with few modifications, lasted till 1945. At this time 876 acres of land used for cultivation and another 3000 acres land cleared for the cultivation.^{xxxiv} Colonel Mann remained on this designation till March 16, 1871. However, F.L. Playfair was appointed as the executive superintendent of Andaman after some time.

Lord Mayo Death

D.M. Stewart was appointed as the Superintendent of Andaman on July 15, 1872. During this time, the office of the Superintendent was replaced with the office of the Chief Commissioner. D.M. Stewart became the first Chief Commissioner of Andaman. During this time, the Viceroy of India was Lord Mayo who showed his personal interest in the Andaman Settlement. He visited Andaman in 1872, and directed D. M. Stewart to paid special attention to cultivation, self-supporting system, animal husbandry and relation with the aboriginals. Lord Mayo was wished to see a sunset at Mount Harriet and



while he was on his way back from Mount Harriet, he was murdered at Hope Town Jeffy on February 08, 1872. He was murdered by a prisoner named Sher Ali.^{xxxv} After Lord Meyo's death, the British Government thought to make some improvement in Andaman.

Scot Campbell and Stewart Report

As per this new strategy, the secretary of Home Department, Scott Campbell inspected the Penal Settlement in Andaman, and gave some suggestions. Campbell also made some recommendations regarding management of prisoners. Aiming at collecting more information, Major General Sir Henry Norman was sent to Andaman after Campbell had completed his report. Sir Henry and Stewart prepared a joint report on June 01, 1874. According to this report, there were 7820 male and 895 female life-term prisoners on these islands at the time. Moreover, a number of 888 prisoners were also there for a short term prisoners. The facility of ticket of leave was given to 1167 prisoners, which included 476 women. Stewart in his report also made a suggestion that the number of the prisoners for fixed time should be increased.^{xxxvi}

So, the Andaman Penal Settlement continued and the Government of India kept on sending prisoners there. By the end of the 19th Century, the Andaman penal settlement had got divided into three divisions namely Northern, Southern and Western. All of them were under control of the Chief Commissioner of Andaman. In Andaman, some of the overseers were Europeans whereas some of them were Indian warders. The Civil Officer of Andaman had got some special provisions over the prisoners held there.^{xxxvii} During 1875 to 1878, both Major General Barwell and Captain Prothero were the commissioners of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. I

In 1879, Colonel T. Cadell was appointed as the Chief Commissioner who held this office for next fourteen years.^{xxxviii} At the time of Colonel Cadell a forest department was established in the Andamans. Colonel Cadell was paid his special interest to the development of agriculture and forest in the Andamans. Colonel Cadell had good relations with the natives of the Andamans. Some natives of the Andaman were help Britishers in these islands to recapture the prisoners, who were fled from the settlement.^{xxxix}

In 1885, the Secretary of the Home Department, Alexander Mackenzie made investigations in Andaman, and on his recommendations; 500 prisoners were shifted from Burma to Andaman. Mackenzie was of the view that the high death rate of prisoners was due to strict punishment which was one of the major reason.^{xl}



In the Andamans, The prisoners do all the work in the settlement. The prisoners were work here in many departments, they were clear the land for cultivation, construction of buildings, construction of roads, etc. Following table show that prisoners in the Andamans were doing all type of work.

| Sr. no. | Works | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 |
|---------|----------------------|------|------|---------------------|
| 1 | Supervising | 701 | 688 | 1118 |
| 2 | Commissariat | 207 | 186 | 162 |
| 3 | Medical | 124 | 203 | 125 |
| 4 | Marine | 562 | 744 | 290 |
| 5 | Forest | 56 | 438 | 706 |
| 6 | Cultivation | 144 | 562 | 616 |
| 7 | Manufacturing | 797 | 941 | 1098 |
| 8 | Cloth | 631 | 242 | 252 |
| 9 | Collies and Servants | 3954 | 4083 | 3642 ^{xli} |

Lyall and Lethbridge Committee

Sir Alexander Mackenzie in his report gave many suggestions regarding Andamans to the Government of India. In response to such suggestions, the British Government sent C.J. Lyall (Home Secretary) and A.S. Lethbridge, the Inspector General of Jails, Bengal, to Port Blair. C.J. Lyall and A.S. Lethbridge went to Port Blair in 1890 and submitted their report on April 26, 1890,^{xlii} and also, they made many recommendations in their report. They were assured that the existing penal system in the Andamans had no deterrent effect on the criminals. The prisoners in India preferred to be sent to Andaman than their imprisonment in Indian Jail. They suggested that the initial period of prisoners should be full of fear. To increase the severity of confinement in the Andamans a separate confinement in cells during preliminary stages and confinement in a limited area during the second stage, was recommended by Lyall and Lethbridge committee. They were in favour of encouraging released prisoners to settle in Andamans and also they recommended that in future, the term convicts should not be sent to Andamans. They also suggested that a classification of habitual and non-habitual criminals.^{xliii} On the recommendation of the Lyall and Lethbridge committee, Cellular Jail construction was started at Atlanta point, on the eastern side of the Port Blair (Sri Vijaya Puram). The construction of Cellular jail was started in 1896 and got finished in 1906.^{xliv}



Conclusion

Thus, we observe that the British Government made the first attempt to come to Andaman in 1789 and by 1890 AD, a large number of prisoners were sent there. The British Government intended to establish a colony in Andaman owing to several reasons. Firstly the British Government wanted to take over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands from the point of view of security and at the same time they could control the trade in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. Secondly, the people, who were a threat to the British Government in India, could be imprisoned and kept there. This would either keep them away from Indian land or they would involve in the construction work of buildings and roads. Thirdly, many people working under the British Government were curious to know about the native people of Andaman. In this settlement the prisoners do all the work. Self-supporter system also work in the Andamans, in this system the prisoner, who were spent ten years or more time in the settlement and he spent his time peacefully in the settlement, were eligible to be a self-suuporter. Self-supporter prisoners were almost free in the settlement, they were doing cultivation, cattle rearing and many more works, but they were not leave the settlement. So at the end the British Government wanted to establish the colony in the Andamans, which was run by the prisoners, and not depend on India's mainland. But this settlement always depends on India because everything in the Andamans imported from Indian mainland at that time.

Endnotes

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