

# The Libidinal Empire: Prison Transportation and Kālā Pāni

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# Genesis of Present Work

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- How many of us have introduced an 'Andaman Text' in Indian / Postcolonial / Commonwealth Literature courses?

# Introduction

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- The 'Mutiny' (1857) or the Cellular Jail (1906) is just a very minor subject of the big story of Transportation.
- 'Andaman Texts' indicate that it is ocean politics that is central to British formation of the Andamans as a regular penal settlement.
- (Auto)biographical narratives and legal / historical texts of the period show that the Empire took to its practice a libidinal logic in taming the Kālā Pāni.

# Central Argument

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- While I argue that the Indian nation highly romanticizes the sacrifice of freedom fighters in the Cellular Jail, I suggest that the contribution of 'hereditary' criminals (Thugs, for instance), murderers and petty offenders—convicted chiefly for the purpose of controlling the ocean and the geographical spaces of the Andamans—remains significant yet less explored.

# Text 1

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➤ Captain W.B. Birch proposed requirement of prostitutes for Port Blair Free Police (1873).

➤ Conclusion Thereupon:

“The young convicts, and those of mature years who have the reputation of being addicted to unnatural crime, are segregated from the rest of the convicts, and kept under the surveillance of married petty officers on certain fixed stations where special accommodation is provided for them, but it cannot be supposed that the crime is thus wholly suppressed.”

Captain Stewart to Govt.

## Text 2

# Barindra Ghose on Settlement

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“...there was no such thing as gentleman, not even perhaps such a thing as man...” (*The Tale of My Exile*)

“When it becomes physically impossible to grind out 30 lbs of oil, one is forced to seek the aid of the more robust ruffians in order to avoid punishment and that means to sell, in return, one’s body for the most abject ends” (108).

# Text 3

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“Many hundred Mutineers and Rebels will before long be established at Port Blair. The congregation of so large a body of male convicts, not held under the strict discipline which can be enforced only within the prison walls, is a gigantic evil.”

C. Beadon to Captain H. Man.

# Text 4

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“At all events, the standing reproach of so great a scandal to humanity in the track of the commerce of one of the greatest and most frequented highways of the world has been permanently removed, and the reclaiming of its wretched population from their present misery and degradation is brought within the reach of the Christian and the philanthropist.”

F.J. Mouat.



# Text 5

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“...the number of convicts in the female jail at Port Blair is rapidly decreasing, and that, if a larger number of females are not transported than has been done during the past three years, it will be impossible to carry out the system of permitting female convicts to marry, after five years’ imprisonment, convicts who have obtained tickets as self-supporters, and to carry on the weaving manufactory which is productive of larger savings to Government.”

Colonel T. Cadell to Govt.

# Text 6

## Savarkar on Settlement

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“Speaking of evolution, there are two basic facts of life which it enunciates. One is known as the struggle for existence and the other as the preservation of the race. Hunger and sex are its elements” (*My Transportation for Life*. 1949, 231).

# Conclusion

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- Many a valuable document of the colonial period was destroyed during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945).
- Colonial historiography needs to be further explored in the field of prison transportation, and re-reading of prison narratives will strengthen the discipline of Postcolonial Studies.

# Thank You

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