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Colonial India and transportation: Indian convicts in south East Asia and elsewhere

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Abstract
Increased crime due to various social changes in sixteenth and seventieth centuries of Europe especially in England put a strain on the already insufficient Penal Institutions. In modern period, due to geographical explorations, emergence of colonialism and growing economic requirements of metropolis gave birth to an organized form of transportation which led to establishment of penal colonies in various parts of the world. Transportation served dual purpose of the State. On one side, the convict is no longer threat to the State as he is transported, thereby reducing the amount of expenditure that was spent on prisons in both metropolis and colonies and on the other side, the transported convicts could be used to 'develop' the new lands. In fact, transportation became a lucrative economic policy of colonial masters. In this paper, an attempt has been made to find out the reasons for the birth of convict transportation. The transportation of convicts and indentured labour from colonial India to various places in Southeast Asia, Mauritius, and Myanmar etc. has been studied. The paper concludes by describing about the abandonment of transportation of India convicts to Southeast Asia and subsequent establishment of the Penal Settlement of Andamans. To write this paper, primary sources in the inform of colonial documents available in library of Cellular Jail, Port Blair and archives, Port Blair have been taken. Apart from primary resources, secondary literature and information from various websites also helped to bring out this research paper.

Keywords: Penal colony, colonialism, Andaman, transportation, jail, settlement,

Introduction
The end of eighteenth century and the beginning of nineteenth century could be called an era of prison reforms in the West. This period redefined the meaning of incarceration. Till third quarter of eighteenth century jail was just a holding place and accused was confined before trial and subsequently, he was given punishment. Therefore, prison had hardly any role to play. With the reformers raising their voice, incarceration had been seen as a form of punishment. As prison had taken a new role of incarceration, the need to construct jails on specific lines had aroused.

The idea of transportation was born out of various compulsions. One, due to the emergence of new industrial economy and raise of industrial towns, a bigger economic gap started emerging that led to increase in the crime rate. When incarceration became a form of punishment, prisons had been over crowed with convicts that more economic burden on the part of the State. Another and important reason was, with expansion of colonies and bringing newly discovered areas under control, the imperialistic nations wanted man power to tap the resources in the new lands to serve metropolis. The last mentioned requirement of the western powers made transportation as one of the methods of punishment. Transportation served dual purpose of the State. On one side, the convict is no longer threat to the State as he is transported, thereby reducing the amount of expenditure that was spent on prisons in both metropolis and colonies and on the other side, the transported convicts could be used to 'develop' the new lands. Thus, transportation was an effective instrument in the politics of colonial economics. Though, transportation was irrelevant today, it was distinctly historical with strong colonial flavour that needs a real attention.

Transportation-Genesis
"Between 1415, when the Portuguese first used convict labour in the capture of the Moroccan city of Ceuta, and 1954, when the French penal colony in Guiana closed, the

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European powers transported hundreds of thousands of convicts, and employed them as UN free labour in overseas colonies." [1]. The modern concept of transportation of criminals to unfamiliar places had its roots in medieval Europe. Under this outlawry, criminals were banished from organized society used to take refuge in the forests of England. In sixteenth century England, religious dissenters were permitted to abjure the kingdom; the same was later extended to certain types of criminals. A penal colony is a settlement used to exile prisoners and separate them from the general populace by placing them in a remote location, often an island or distant colonial territory. Although the term can be used to refer to a correctional facility located in a remote location it is more commonly used to refer to communities of prisoners overseen by wardens or governors having absolute authority." [2]. "The English (later British) first employed transportation as a way of solving colonial labour shortages in the early 17th century. Property rights over the first batch of convicts (pardoned on condition of transportation between 1615 and 1619) were transferred to the East India Company. From hence the flow of convict labour was integrated with the privately controlled trade in indentured servants to the Caribbean and the American colonies." [3].

The American War of Independence led a crisis for the British judicial system, which had a big backlog of criminals sentenced to transportation with nowhere to send them. Briton tried to transport convicts to Africa, which proved to be unsuccessful. But ultimately, the British had a opt for Australia as penal settlement as penal transportation to Africa was not successful in terms of planning and even lack of specific destination. "Nevertheless, between 1788 and 1868, 1, 65,000 British and Irish convicts made the arduous journey to an unknown land we now call Australia." [4].

Transportation-British India

British adopted transportation as a policy mechanism in India also. Long before the transportation to Andamans started, colonial rulers transported Indian convicts to the Penal colonies in South East Asia. Though there was presence of Indians in South East Asia prior to the British rule, Indians as convicts and indentured labour were transported to these places during colonial rule. The British in India initiated a policy of transporting criminals of serious crimes to across the seas in 1787 to Bencoolen in Sumatra. These criminals were generally gang robbers who were seen as the greatest threat to colonial authority, its stability and impediment to revenue-collection in British controlled area especially country-side. Soon this new policy of transportation was seen advantageous to colonial rule and extended to other parts of Indian Ocean region. The settlements were all in recent colonial acquisitions, and thousands of Indian convicts were shipped to them, and put to work on infrastructural labour projects. They were at Bencoolen (1787-1825), Penang, otherwise known as Prince of Wales Island (1790-1860), Mauritius (1815-53), Malacca and Singapore (1825-60), and the Burmese provinces of Arakan and Tenasserim (1828-62). [5].

Indian Convicts were transported from British India to the Straits Settlements to serve out their sentences, and assist with the labour shortage and development requirements of these acquired settlements. Singapore being the fastest growing of the Settlements, immediately became a convict centre. It was not easy for Indian convicts to escape into a community life where much smaller Indian population was there. Most of these Indian convict labourers were hailed from coasts of Madras region, Northern India, Calcutta and they were from different castes brought to Bencoolen and then to Strait Settlements for labour work. Most of these convicts were thieves and murderers.

Strait Settlements

Bencoolen, Malacca, Penang and Singapore together formed as the Strait Settlements. The establishment of the Straits Settlements followed the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, by which the Malay Archipelago was divided into a British zone in the north and a Dutch zone in the south. This resulted in the exchange of the British settlement of Bencoolen (on Sumatra) for the Dutch colony of Malacca and undisputed control of Singapore. The Settlements were largely Chinese in population, with a tiny but important European minority. Their capital was moved from Penang to Singapore in 1832. Their scattered nature proved to be difficult and, after the Company lost its monopoly in the china trade in 1833, expensive to administer.

During their control by the East India Company, the Settlements were used as penal settlements for Indian civilian and military prisoners earning them the title of the 'Botany Bays of India'. The years 1852 and 1853 saw minor uprisings by convicts in Singapore and Penang. Upset with East India Company rule, in 1857 the European population of the Settlements sent a petition to the British Parliament asking for direct rule; but the idea was overtaken by events – the Indian Rebellion of 1857. On 1 April 1867 the Settlements became a British Crown colony, making the Settlements answerable directly to the Colonial Office in London instead of the government of British India based in Calcutta, British India. [6]. From 1787, the British government of India began the transportation of convicts to Bencoolen in Sumatra, A Penal Settlement and "Indian convicts who were sentenced to more than seven years' were transported there to spend time for various crimes committed. The first convicts were sent to Penang in 1790. From 1825, Malacca and Singapore also became convict stations." [7].

Bencoolen was a British Penal establishment in Sumatra in the area of what is now called Bengkulu city. It was established as a penal colony in 1685. Bencoolen was established as a Presidency with in British India in 1785 but subsequently it was degraded to Bencoolen Residency and placed under the Bengal Presidency. In 1817. Stamford Raffles was appointed as Governor General of Bencoolen and during his tenure he brought many reforms which included abolition of Slavery and establishing Singapore as a new trading port. [8]. Indian convicts were transported here for various petty crimes. It was under Anglo-Dutch treaty, the settlement was given to Netherlands in 1824.

Penang is now a state in Malaysia located in the northwest coast. Penang, part of the Strait Settlements was another Penal Settlement established by the British. It was the first Penal Settlement of the British in South East Asia. Penang, part of Strait Settlements, was originally part of Kingdom of Kedah. The island was locally known as Pulau Kesatu or Pulo Pinang. It was "Francis Light a British trade-adventurer working for Madras based firm landed at what was later called Fort Cornwallis hoisted the British Flag on the Island in 1786 and named it the Prince of Wales Island and it

became part of British India. After Raffles founded Singapore, in 1819, Penang Malacca and Singapore were incorporated to form the Straits Settlements in 1826. The importance of Penang was overtaken by Singapore and it was made the capital of Strait Settlements in 1832."[9]. "Light encouraged immigrants by promising them as much lands as they could clear and by reportedly firing silver dollars from his ship's cannons deep into the jungle. Many early settlers, including Francis Light himself in 1794, succumbed to malaria, earning early Penang the epithet 'the white man's grave'." [10]. After the abandonment of the first penal settlement of Andamans in 1796, seven hundred convicts were transferred to Penang. The settlement was made as a presidency in 1805 on par with Bombay and became part of the Straits Settlements in 1867. Indian Convict labour was key to Penang's successful colonisation. These people worked as low-cost labourers in all public works.

Malacca was another penal colony of the British in the Strait Settlements. It was first occupied by the Portuguese in early sixteenth century and taken by the Dutch in the early seventieth century. Subsequently, under Anglo-Dutch treaty in 1824, Malacca was transferred to the British in exchange of Bencoolen penal settlement. It also served as penal colony for the transport convicts from British India.

Indian Convicts were transported from British India to the Straits Settlements to serve out their sentences, and assist with the labour shortage and development requirements of these acquired settlements. Singapore being the fastest growing of the Settlements, immediately became a convict centre. It was not easy for Indian convicts to escape into a community life where much smaller Indian population was there. "The first temporary gaol was on the bank at the mouth of the Singapore, the next, between Stamford Road and Bras Basah Road, and the third was at Outram on the foot of Pearl's Hill. Laying many of Singapore's early public roads, erecting monumental buildings and bridges, these convicts literally built early Singapore. Many of their contributions are still in existence today. George D. Coleman was the first Superintendant of Public Works and Convicts." [11]. Most of these Indian convict labourers were hailed from coasts of Madras region, Northern India, Calcutta and they were from different castes brought to Bencoolen and then to Strait Settlements for labour work. Most of these convicts were thieves and murderers. Sir Stamford Raffles laid foundation for the Singapore penal system. After Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, the British vacated Bencoolen in 1825 "80 Madras and 120 Bengal convicts were the first shipment of the biggest transportation of 900 convicts to Singapore that year. Raffles's welfare system continued to be applied to them here. Between 1852 and 1854, when labour costs rose 30%, the government came to rely almost entirely on convict labour for the construction of public works. Between 1825 to 1872, Indian convicts made the bulk of the labour force for public works, in Singapore. They were nicknamed "The Road Gang." [12].

Outside South East Asia
Mauritius was a Penal Settlement of the British outside South East Asia. The island of Mauritius lies in the South West of Indian Ocean, 800 Km east of Madagascar. It remained uninhabited until the late sixteenth century when the Dutch established the first of two settlements and named it after Prince Maurice of Nassau. They were plagued with difficulties and abandoned the settlement in 1710. "Five

years later the French claimed the island, renaming it Ile de France, and the first settlers arrived in 1721. The British took the island which they called Mauritius during Napoleonic Wars." [13]. In this island, slavery was central force of labour to the expansion of plantation, but after the abolition of slavery, the plantation owners faced a big labour crisis which led the replacement of local workers with almost five lakh labourers from India under contract system changed the demography of Mauritius in due course of time.

Mauritius itself was a relatively isolated and sea bound island space that was attractive as a place of banishment, exile or transportation. "The first exile to Mauritius was a free man from Martinique who was sent to Ile de France from Paris in the 1770s." [14]. Mauritius was also a place to which Indian convicts were transported. When the first British governor of Mauritius, Robert Farquhar, arrived on the island three years after the abolitions of the slave trade, in the face of a potentially serious labour crisis, he asked the Bengal authorities to send him a supply of convicts. Subsequently the authorities transported almost fifteen hundred Indian offenders, and the Mauritian government assumed responsibility for their cost in exchange for the value of their labour. They were joined by a handful of ordinary offenders from the crown colony of Ceylon. [15].

The changing political economy and power relations between local and English governments have been linked to history of penal confinements in this island. In the words of Anderson, "Whether labour were predominantly enslaved, apprenticed or indentured, incarceration was part of a broader process through which the regulation of colonial workforce was taken from the private to the public sphere." [16]. "Mauritius jails therefore became intensely political arenas in which the changing nature of colonial relations and the regulation of labour was both expressed and contested." [17]. In fact, incarceration was central to Mauritian politics of labour and migration.

Arakan and Tenasserim in Burma (now Myanmar) were two other penal settlements of the British outside South East Asia. Apart from Strait Settlements, the Indian convicts were also sent to Arakan and Tenasserim. After the possession of these two areas, the British government started sending Indian convicts into these areas to work as convict labour. By 1830s, Burma along with Singapore became major penal destinations of the Indian convicts. By 1835, Tenasserim in Burma counted 1,172 convicts. [18]. After the establishment of Penal Settlements in Burma, British option of sending Indian convicts on transportation had been widened. "Whether convicts were sent to Burma or to the Strait Settlements depended at times on the exigencies of the day. But when the ensuing influx into Burma produced overcrowding in the jails there, traffic was redirected to the Strait Settlements." [19]. Therefore financial aspects were always taken into consideration while transporting the convicts. After the establishment of Arakan and Tenasserim settlements, the colonial expenditure on convict transportation had been reduced, due to geographical proximity of the above places to the British India.

In the period 1519-1939 an estimated 5,300,000 unfree migrants were carried on British vessels. The majority of the, approximately 58 percent were slaves, 36 percent were indentured labour mainly from Indian subcontinent and six percent were transported convicts. Convict transportation was a particularly long-lived practice followed by all colonial powers. During the regime of James I, transportation

became a state policy in England, where courts were given discretion to reprieve felons on condition of enforced removal and labour in new lands and across the seas. It was abolished during the World War II, when last Indian convicts arrived at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands in 1937. [20]. The following table explains about the convict transportation with British Empire from the beginning of seventeenth century to till the outbreak of World War II. [21].

S. No	Place of Transportation	Period	No of convicts transported
1	Caribbean (Barbados only)	1615-1699	4000
2	American colonies	1615-1718	4500
3	American colonies	1718-1775	50000
4	American colonies	1776-1800	1000
5	West Africa	17880s	1000
6	Military Transports	1790-1820	3000
7	Mauritius	1815-1817	1500
8	Bencoolen	1787-1825	4000
9	Straits Settelements	1790-1860	20000
10	Tenasserim Provinces	1849-1873	5000
11	Andamans Islands	1858-1937	40000
12	NSW	1788-1840	80000
13	VDL	1803-1853	72000
14	Vic	1846-1850	3000
15	Western Australia	1850-1868	9700
16	Bermuda	1824-1863	9000
17	Gibraltar	1842-1875	9000
18	Total No of convicts transported		316700

As observed by Anand Young that the convicts transported from South Asia to Southeast Asia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were part of a global system of forced migration. [22]. "India dispatched 4000-6000 convicts to Bencoolen between 1787 and 1825 and 15000 to the Straits Settlements between 1790 and 1860. Another 1000-1500 were transported from Ceylon to Malacca in the Straits Settlements between 1849 and 1873 and several thousand more were sent to Burma and to areas outside of South East Asia, principally Mauritius between 1815 and 1837 and the Andaman Islands after 1857." [23]. Therefore the convict transportation favoured the colonial rulers both politically and economically. The threat to their rule in colonies eliminated by transporting anti-colonial and anti-social people into far way lands and these convicts were exploited in developing and consolidating the penal settlement by the colonial administration. Over a period of time, when Strait Settlements emerged as major urban centres, the administration in these settlements were no longer interested in importing convicts as labour, keeping law and order as a major problem. Particularly, after the Revolt of 1857, when the British Government in India wanted to transport the mutineers to the Southeast Asia, there was a big hue and cry in the Settlements against the importation of mutineers. This protest from the administration of Strait Settlements probably fostered the Colonial Government in India to restart the Penal Settlement in Andamans in 1858.

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