



# Ethnicity and the Origins of ‘Local Born’ identity in Andaman Islands: An overview

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## Abstract:

The population of Andaman and Nicobar Islands possess a distinct sense of ethnic diversity, which is unique in the constitution of island's present day society. The term ‘Local Born’ however, is relatively British nomenclature and also it refers to present day unique community of Port Blair city, mostly concentrated in around South Andaman district of A & N Islands. The term ‘local born’ denotes to that of its old convict settlers from Indian sub-continent, whom we also refer sons of the soil and ‘Pre-42 category’ officially.<sup>1</sup>

This paper argues that ‘Local Born’ ethnicity and cultural identity must be understood in terms of the islands historical background with trends in development of island society. This paper is also look at how this convict community organized, influenced and promoted a distinctive local identity to remain unique and also shed empirical light on how the ‘island effects’ among ‘Local Born’. Over the decades ‘local born’ community had developed a sense of ethnic uniqueness and identification with the other communities gradually developed into larger society of A & N Islands. Despite its geographical isolation, the history of ideas within ‘local born’ is fundamentally one of interchange with the wider island society.

In this paper we will seek to address out the answer to it by following various threads of Local born cultural history. In the present article we will consider the period from British penal settlement since 1858, discussing the historical development of ideas concerning Local born ethnic identity as well as contemporary and retrospective historiographic interpretations of island society.

**Keywords:** Local Born, Penal Settlement, Islanderization, Mini India, convict society, transportation, Andaman Day, pre-42 Locals, Taqaavi, Hindustani and free settlers.

## I. Introduction:

The increasing consolidation and international recognition of the field of island studies has resulted in growing ‘Island’ territories hold special attention in academic circles due to its intrinsic complexities of society, politics and ethnic composition. An island study has traditionally focused on relatively remote and peripheral island communities. Research into such isolated islands remains key to ‘*Island Dynamics*’ work. Currently various lines of discussion takes place increasing consolidation and recognition of the field of island studies has resulted a growing theoretical sophistication and negotiation. For instance ‘Islands’ viewed academically as either singular entity or as a cultural or economic community (Stratford: 2011) has suggested an archipelagic approach to investigate Island-to-island relations. Hayward (2012) in turn has stressed the importance of the sea itself in our understanding of islandness. Fleury (2013) has grappled in his analysis of the ‘island/sea/ territory relationship. As Juni’chiro (2012) has illustrated even the concepts of ‘island’ and ‘archipelago’ are far from fixed with the conceptions of island and archipelagic status changing significantly over time in the Japanese context, where ‘the consciousness of the Japanese state as a *Shimaguni* (Islands Nation) takes on new strengths and connotations as circumstances demand.

Biagini and Hoyle (1999) and Baladacchino (2008) argued that the islands can never be regarded in isolation. Further they said that island communities are fundamentally interconnected with the world around them –the sea, other islands, large landmasses as their economies remain dependent on imported and exported goods and people and their cultures are affected by inflows of new ideas. The interconnectedness of islands has, infact become something of an island studies common place, despite there is being little evidence



of scholars within the field seeking to argue that islands are closed systems, much time and energy is spent asserting the contrary. The interconnectedness of island communities with the outside world does not preclude islands from fostering “unique cultural habits” (Jennings: 2010, p.1) precisely by nature of their relative geographical isolation. We cannot merely study islands ‘on the own terms’ for islanders themselves frequently conceive of their homes and cultures in opposition to or otherwise with reference to the outside world. To be an islander is, in some ways, to self-identify with difference and with place (Olwig: 2007). This is a study of conceptions and self-perceptions in other words, of ideas. Ideas can have real impacts: A failure of cultural imagination within an island community can contribute to political, economic and social stagnation (Grydehoj and Hayward: 2011). While the shifting cultural values of neighbouring communities can lead to an infinitely changeable island landscape of political and social power (Grydehoj: 2011).

#### **Brief history of ‘Andaman Islands’**

The Andaman Archipelago consists of a group of 325 islands and islets situated in the Bay of Bengal, near the meridian of 93 degree East and between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> parallels of North latitude. The island region is studded in many directions with numerous small islets, many of them exceedingly pretty and picturesque in appearance, rising rocky shores and richest tropical vegetation. The original inhabitants of the Andaman Islands have always been considered one of the most primitive races. (M.V. Portman: 1888) The study of the race to which they belong also involves one of those ethnological problems which yet remain to be solved (Richard C. Temple: 1908). Voyagers like Marco polo recorded the testimony of the existence of islands; Hellenic writers like Gerini and Ptolemy have recorded in their writings indicating that the islands exist in oblivion.<sup>2</sup> Formal possession of the Andaman Islands was taken by the British Government in 1788. Lt. R H Col. Brooke and Lt. Archibald Blair of Indian Navy were deputed to survey and submitted a feasibility report for the suitable place for the settlement. In the intervening time on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1788, a team headed by Lt. Archibald Blair arrived at South Andaman to search suitable place for the settlement, which now bears his name as ‘Port Blair’. On 12<sup>th</sup> June 1789 it was decided to colonize the Islands and establish a settlement at Port Cornwallis (later renamed Port Blair) by 25<sup>th</sup> October 1789. Accordingly first penal settlement was established at Port Cornwallis by

August 1790. Later on the recommendation of Commodore Cornwallis, who was in command of Bay of Bengal shifted the settlement to North east harbor of North Andaman in November 1792; a place of refuge for such mariners as had the misfortune to be shipwrecked on that dreaded coast abandoned on 8<sup>th</sup> February 1796 mainly due to extreme insalubrities.

In 1858, after Great Revolt, the British government reestablished the penal settlement in Andaman at Port Blair, for using it as a safe place for confinement of the prominent rebels, convicts and long term prisoners (R.C. Majumder: 1975). On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1857, the Andaman Committee consists of Dr. F. J Mouat, Dr. G.R. Playfare and Lt. Heathcole was appointed to select the best site for the establishment of penal settlement. Captain H Man, an experienced Superintendent of the jails at Moulmein was given charge for establishing the settlement for the second time. His successor James Paterson Walker arrived settlement on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1858 with 500 convicts and few British officials. 10<sup>th</sup> March is being observed as ‘Andaman Day’ every year to remember the arrival of first batch of convicts by their offspring.

#### **Nomenclature of ‘Local Born’ community of Andaman Islands**

The term ‘Local Born’ first used by British authorities to refer convict offspring or convict descendents (Census Report: 1901). It is also rightly defined in Census Report 1911 that ‘if the settlement to exist long enough, will possible someday develop to a more or less distinct race having a language and characteristics differing in a certain degree from anyone of the many races from which it has sprung’. Similar view also expressed in the Census Report 1921 ‘And in view of the approaching abandonment of the islands as a penal settlement it is the local indigenous population which will form the nucleus of the future settlement’. Further it is to say that one of the strong reasons for withdrawal of abandonment islands was to protect interest of existence of free population about 3,000 Local Born (the descendents of convict) who should not be repatriated to any particular province in India. The convicts brought from different parts of Indian sub-continent to Andaman Penal Settlement between 1858 to 1942 is crucial for understanding, were called ‘Locals or Pre-42 Settlers’.<sup>3</sup> In 1921 they were about 3000 such ‘free settlers’ and descendents of convicts (Census 1931). This community is an amalgamation of different castes, creed, ethnic and linguistic groups.



The term 'Pre-42 settlers' refers to larger connotation and community consists of the siblings of convicts, free settlers, Mophlas, Bhandus and Karens. Whereas Mophlas, Bhandus and Karen are homogeneous communities having their own religious customs, language and outlook remains unchanged even now, but Local Born are heterogeneous in composition and enough acculturation has occurred in terms of cultural traits and language. Now they hardly remember their origins at mainland India. Indeed this paper confines to study about 'Local Born' a specific community of Port Blair city having distinct cultural traits and unique in its composition. Let us understand the term 'self-supporters' which refers a class of convicts who 'after serving a certain length of time (eleven years) of stay in the penal settlement, well behaved convicts were allowed out on 'ticket-of-leave' and may become 'self-supporters'<sup>4</sup>. Any convict who was eligible to become a self-supporter and who wished to marry and settle down was allowed to apply for a spouse from amongst the female prisoners. The offspring's of these marriages were of course we call 'Local Born'<sup>5</sup> It is to articulate that what is known as the 'Local Born' in Andaman Islands today is a composite group that consist of those whose ancestors brought here as a convicts from Indian subcontinent during the British rule. For a long time these convict families did not have much interactions with the outside world, as they deliberately kept insulated by the penal system. Due to an absence of communication facilities in the early years and the stigma associated with the islands destiny, the convicts' families gradually lost contact with their native places, and thus became permanent residents of these islands.

Let me throw some more historical events and substance for understanding the peculiar circumstances of convict society of Andaman society. First of all it must clear to our mind that convicts and criminals are two kinds of people having different psychological instincts, characters and also different modes of modus operandi to commit crime. Let me clear the misnomer among the academic circles that most writers addressed that the Local Born siblings are mix of congregation of such larger body of convicts and criminals. In fact the convicts' character was different from the criminals. The available records on the subject establish the fact that the convicts were mostly committed minor offenses in comparison to criminals. In their report Lyall and Lethbridge strongly advocated the segregation of habitual criminals from non-habitual. In 1874 rules for the

management of transported convicts were framed under section 34 of Act V of 1871. The habitual and serious offenders were dealt with severity and others with minor offence were given slighter punishment also known as 'Penang rules'. According to this system the convicts were place into the third class. After a fixed period a good behavior in this class, he was to be promoted to second class. The convicts of this class worked as warders over the convicts of the third class. These warders were known as 'Sirdars', 'Tindals or Talabdars'. Again after a satisfactory conduct for a fixed period in the second class the convicts were promoted to first class- who is entitled to get 'ticket-to-leave' and termed 'self-supporters' (L.P.Mathur :1985,p.51). Hence Walker, the superintendent of Andaman Penal settlement proposed to hire the services of convicts for organizing a proper administrative system and also pay them in cash for 2 annas each per day or 1 rupee 8 annas on the monthly earning. They could buy provisions on fixed prices from the settlement stores managed by convicts. Keeping in view of their good character further rules were relaxed and offered them a piece of lands in 1860, in view of the urgent necessity of encouraging cultivation and professional works in the settlement. In 1862 the female convicts were also allowed to become self-supporters and they were required to sell the produce to the administration only, but the rules were relaxed and given complete freedom in this matter to achieve agricultural pursuits.<sup>6</sup>

Campbell did not favour the grant of the status of self-supporters to every convict in the first class. Only those, who could successfully support themselves, should be entitled to get a ticket-off-leave. Convicts of only first class were to be allowed to marry. This privilege was not granted to term convicts, because it was noticed that the marriage of a female life convict with a male term convict did not serve the purpose. On his release the male term convict left his wife and children in the settlement. Consequently such marriages were allowed only if the male term convict agreed to remain in the settlement ever after his release. Only life convicts allowed to call their family or to marry a female convict. In their report Lyall and Lethbridge strongly advocated that if a criminal's record for the last ten years was good he (convict) could be trusted to live with other self-supporters. During this period some convicts taught English for making them clerks in the administrative departments keeping in view of their good conduct in the settlement.



### Contract marriages

The paucity of women in the penal settlement was a major concern to British authorities since its inception. Meanwhile every effort was made to induce the families of the convicts were not fruitful because the wives of the convicts were not willing to come to islands because of its degraded status 'Kalapani'. In May 1860, thirty-five female convicts were transferred to Port Blair from Bengal presidency. If anybody married a male convict of good conduct, she was given the status of a self-supporter along with her husband. Within a short time there were several marriages. Major Davies in his report wrote that there were about four hundred female convicts in the settlement anxious to get married, but they could not marry according to the rules. The paucity of female convicts in the settlement and the restrictions on the marriage of a life term female convict with a term male convict naturally resulted in the increase of immoral practices among the convicts. Some of the term convicts married female convicts simply in order to become self-supporters. Therefore, in 1871 Government of India decided to permit only self-supporter convicts to marry. This system of marriage introduced in 1872 worked well. In spite of all possible measures to control immoral practices continued to trouble the authorities. Lyall and Lethbridge in their report observed '...provisions of more women as wives for self-supporters is one of the chief need of the settlement'.<sup>7</sup> In order to increase the number of female convicts in the Andaman penal settlement they suggested the deportation of female term convicts (Seven years and more) from India. Female convicts were transported to the Andaman penal settlement without any due consideration of their race, religion and language. A common formula applied for reformation of such a heterogeneous collection and this experiment produced a different kind of society. The settlement proved to be immensely useful as a place for academic discourse in order to identify how and why this identity arose, we will trace its development from the earliest available written sources describing local born society.

### Local Born Community –Distinctiveness

Let us consider that the 'Local Born' community represents a sub-national cultural and racial mix. In short, the 'Local Born' community loosely known as pre-42 settlers particularly the offspring's of convict population lives prior -1920s, indeed they are permanent residents and they were evolved out of the interaction of the convicts and non-convict population in the islands; cemented by a

desire to evolve a new society by a people pressed by geographical and objective environment.<sup>8</sup>

However, the local administration carefully observed that convicts intended for transportation. According to Census Report 1901, there were 45 regional and linguistic groups in the penal settlement of Andaman (R.C Temple: 1904; 64). After serving required sentence, they were freed with an offer 'Ticket of Leave' which means this would allow convicts earn their own living and live independently. 'Taqavi' also introduced to extend financial as well as material support to convict families to settle in the settlement. Under Rule 379 of the A & N Manual, no term convicts are allowed for contract marriages, but this rule was modified and female convicts were allowed contract local marriages, if they had been previously married in India.<sup>9</sup> Convicts formed the majority of Andaman penal colony population for the first few decades, who were appointed to positions of trust and responsibility as well as being granted land.

The Local Born community has all the elements which go in the making of a distinct entity. As a result of a sociological experiment, the community was evolved in isolation. They speak common language which is known as '*Hindustani*' as strange as it first appears. It primarily represents a terminological shift. The linguistic debate on the hypothesized Urdu - Hindi language family was exerting a practical influence for all purposes including observance of common rituals and practices derived from the different groups. Over the decades Local Born community developed into an organized community with common language, cultural forms and religious rites, common destiny and psychological desires. Local Born completely cut off from their moorings in the mainland and they got irretrievably mixed up amongst themselves and their descendents known as the local born never grew up with any sense of caste or community. Though casteless, together they formed one community – the community of 'Local Born'. Born here in Andaman Islands, they live and die here and have nowhere else to go except for a short visit to mainland, even during the Japanese occupation of the islands during the Second World War, they stuck to the islands and suffered very serious consequences and brutalities at the hands of occupying forces. They surely belong to the islands and may in all fairness be considered as the children of the soil.

### Islanderization

Andaman is a multicultural and ethnic island society. Owing to 100 years of colonial



domination, and subsequent migration brought people from different backgrounds to the island and most residents are multilingual. The concept 'Islanderization' means assimilation and accommodation of communities / different religious and integration of linguistic groups into islands society and seems to have occurred throughout the history of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and still continues to occur. On the other hand the social changes introduced by self or host/ alien society and which continues to occur, in some cases with added momentum in shaping the Andaman society is more complex and interesting. Islanderization, on the other hand refers to changes introduced into Andaman society during British rule and which continue even today, for example a common feature of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, casteless and classless society, living all religious people in neighborhood and co-exists amicably is significant for our substance. Indeed, Islanderization is not confined to any particular group/ section of the population and its importance, both in the number of people affected and the ways in which it affects them is steadily increasing. The complex and intricate interrelation between Islanderization and social change, on a short-term as well as long-term basis, offers a fertile field for analysis and speculation. Islanderization was found to be widespread cultural and social change among all irrespective of religious and linguistic groups of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It is also significant to report to be occurring among some tribal groups such as the Nicobarese and Andamanese. The relation of these two processes to changes in the societal level also needs to be properly understood.

The opportunity to find out for myself whether and how far Islanderization is still useful for the analysis of social changes, and whether any further clarification, refinements, elaborations and modifications were needed, was presented to me when I have embarked upon this task with some hesitation, nevertheless, as I am acutely aware of the difficulties and hazards involved in making statements claiming to hold good for discussion. I now appreciate the advantages that I enjoyed in much during field study, the topic were specific and they concerned a linguistic group of 'locals' and I had myself collected a great deal of the data. I am glad, however, that I choose the topic of Islanderization and social change among locals of A & N Islands, in as much as it forced me to undertake micro study of this nature. The limitations of micro-study of this nature are only too obvious in society like Andaman Islands, which has great regional diversity and whose people are divided into

numerous linguistic and religious groups. However, this study focuses to provide insights of the Islanderization of Telugu particularly and in general all other the communities/ linguistic groups settled in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Before discussing Islanderization, I shall examine briefly the manner in which the different linguistic groups brought to Islands have dynamically migrated into host society needs more attention which I have presented the true picture in the previous paragraphs. Let me briefly recount the main features of migration as a dynamic process of integration which is undoubtedly an all-India phenomenon, in the sense that there is everywhere movements of people in search of identity, which form heterogeneous in character and that of each group have a traditional association with one or two occupations. For instance the Local Born community heterogeneous in nature and they were worked as a semi-skilled or skilled saw mill workers during lien session and some even workers carpentry, plumber and petty shop owners.

Transportation was taken place in Andaman Islands in the form of colonization and rehabilitation by then the British government and also paved way for other communities to enter into the island region for trading and services and other are in search of potential business. Relation between 'Locals' namely pre-42 and 'migrants' namely post-48 settlers and other people crossed the seas for better future are woven into two groups for the consideration of the study. These depend upon the degree to which we consider them as a group speaking the same regional language and do not form a single endogamous group. There may be a dozen or more endogamous groups among them. Again, even within a group like Local Born there are cultural and linguistic differences between various sections and the level of interaction among them is also different initially. This usually means that the sub-groups on the basis of caste, village and region makes sense that they are independent and universal features should not lead us to ignore the significant regional differences.

Islanderization is the process by which a person or groups change or slight deviation or relaxation its customs, rituals, economic activity and way of life in the direction of a development and frequently they witness changes in their activities. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the society hierarchy that they traditionally conceded to the claimant group by the local community. The claim is usually made over a period of time, in fact a generation or two, before the 'arrival' is conceded. In fact this was happened



during the British reign of the island territory when the different groups, caste and communities were brought over here from different backgrounds, customs and rituals having traditionally sound in their economic activities. For example Mophlas, Karen and Bhandus were introduced to islands society in the year 1921 to 1926 marks significance for this study. The reference of these homogeneous communities has been done in my earlier work. Similarly 'Ranchi' and 'Telugu' labourers were also introduced to island society in the early 1947 marks significance for this study. 'Bengali, Tamil and Malayalee were rehabilitated in the post-1950s marks importance for our understanding. Occasionally a group claims a position which its neighbors are not willing to concede. This type of disagreement between claimed and conceded status may not be not only in the realm of opinion but also some important realm of institutionalized practice. For example among the pre-42 Locals the caste consciousness is high, which is not fairly visible, but they will not accept marital relationship with lower groups within the 'pre-42 locals'. However it is also true that inter-caste and inter-religious marriages are very common because of less choice and limitation and each pre-42 local family is unique in their composition since we may find amalgamation of castes, religions and linguistic groups. The above instances are common among pre-42 families especially 'local born' and the same are passing to other groups / communities existing along with them. Islanderization is generally accompanied by and often results in, upward mobility for the group in question, but mobility may also occur without Islanderization and vice versa. However the mobility associated with the Islanderization results only in positional changes in the system and not lead to any structural change. That is, a group / caste moves up above within the society, and they enjoy social status on equal terms since Andaman society is casteless and more secular in its orientation.

Let me begin with a brief consideration of the diversity of Andaman Society. In the first place, some elements of the local culture would be common to all the castes and groups living in a region from the highest to the lowest. Thus within the pre-42 Local born viz., the Bengali, North Indians, Marathi, Telugu and Tamil would speak the same language, observe some common festivals and share certain local deities and beliefs. We may call this 'vertical solidarity' and its contrasts with 'horizontal solidarity' which members of a single group or family have. (M.S.Srinivas:1966)

Among pre-42 Local born, some are upper caste such as Brahmins; some other groups are

lower caste such as cobblers and so on. There was also considerable occupational diversity between different groups of pre-42 Locals. But when they constituted part of Local society they have gradually shifted towards agriculture and steadily moved to government jobs. In fact this change in their occupation brought equality in terms of economy and social status. By and large it would be true to say those pre-42 Local born would draw more of their culture from North India and it follows from this that profound cultural differences exists between groups claiming to be pre-42 Locals. In fact while there seems to be some agreement in each area and such consensus seems to be claimed by different groups who have traditions of soldering common body of rituals. A feature of pre-42 Local born in Andaman Islands as the existence of dominant group and it may be said they enjoy vital dominance. This happened occasionally even in pre-independence India and has been an important aspect of change in the Andaman society. Different factors like co-education, jobs in administration and urban sources of income are all significant in contributing to the prestige and power of pre-42 Locals. Since independence has resulted in giving a new sense of self-respect and power to pre-42 Locals and the long-term implications of these changes are probably even more important especially in Andaman Islands to sway the local balance of power one way or the other. The vast improvement in communication during the last seven decades has contributed to the overall growth of unique kind of society and styles of living in Andaman. Over the years urban ways of living and the long term effects of this process are decreased in cultural diversity and an increase in uniformity among the groups living within the island society. The power and prestige which pre-42 Locals command affects their relations with all other groups/communities including ritually higher. But important as secular criteria are ritual superiority has an independent existence and power of local society.

Two distinct tendencies are implicit in the Islanderization process. The first feature of Islanderization is an acceptance of the existence of multiple cultures, including moral and religious norms in any local society. Such acceptance is accompanied by a feeling that some institutions, ideas, beliefs and practices are relevant to one's group while others are not. The other tendencies inherent in the Islanderization process are the imitation or follow up of the ways of other groups/communities. Not only particular group is imitated, indeed all the members of pre-42 Local born Hindu community have universally accepted the norms of



north Indian rituals during marriages and last rites ceremonies. It is necessary to mention that the local community is completely independent from the wider, all India system. Ideals of behaviors may be derived from sources of great Indian tradition, but the Islanderization of the so called 'pre-42 Local born', for instance, owes much to these sources and to the influence of isolation and distant from mainland society marks uniqueness in the existence of pluralistic culture and value system. The role of Islanderization was not, however, restricted to being the guardian of pluralistic culture; it also stimulated in other communities a desire to imitate the dominant prestigious style of life.

Before independence, in the process of Islanderization, the British introduced Urdu was markedly influenced by Islam and by certain cultural forms. Hindus were also influenced by Islam and vice versa, but gradual introduction of other complex forces brought into existence by British rule were responsible for the increased Islanderization of 'Local Born' society. The influence of 'local community' seems to extend to all areas of social life, including so fundamental a matter as the principle of descent and affiliation. Further the process of Islanderization occurred during that part to British history was that different groups of Hindus temporarily residents among the islands take over the ritual and beliefs, which are in many respect antithetical to their own. The stigma associated with 'local Born' mostly convicts, thuggish and criminals helped them to move away from their reference groups. The ease with which the low caste groups took over the new culture was perhaps to assimilate and hide their antecedents gradually. This illustrates the radical changes which may come about in the style of life and values of people when they move away from their reference groups. They may 'go native' and instead of being agents of Islanderization become themselves the imitators of local culture of Brahmins and Rajputs. It is not correct, however, to assume that the culture of the Andaman Islands is always highly best. This is especially likely to happen when communications are poor, and there is no regular contact with the towns, centers of excellence and so on. The representatives of the Islander society may in short succumb to the little traditions, and this seems to have happened occasionally. The style of life of the Island society is only to enjoy decisive role and share cultural values. The changes that have occurred in independent India have been generally such as to increase the power and prestige of 'local born' and usually at the expense of Islanderization. The Andaman society set the model for the majority

of people living in , where their way of life has undergone a degree of change as it has for instance among the 'Local Born' – the culture of the local community over their dominance extends experience a change. The Convicts, thuggish and criminals have become more islanderize in the last hundred years or so, and this had effects on the culture of all other groups in Andaman Islands. They have been able to do this because of their use of the popular language of Hindi 'Hindustani' instead of their mother tongue for the spread of their ideas and the existence of network of all local groups. 'Local Born' have exercised dominance in every sphere of activity whether social, economic, religious and administrative and they have enjoyed ritual pre-eminence and that in a society in which religious beliefs were particularly secular and strong. Today island society attracted more people from one or a few areas than uniformly from every part of India. In spite of limitations, the influence of island society on other communities or groups is immense and Islanderization spread vertically to non-dominant groups in the area and horizontally to members living elsewhere. Such spreading has been greatly facilitates in recent years by a variety of forces, technological, institutional and ideological. Islanderization has been a major process of socio-cultural changes in island history and it has occurred in every part of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, it may have been more active at some period than at others, and some part of Islands and more islanderize than others, but there is no doubt that the process has been universal.

I have commented at some length on the ways in which the Islanderization model is important for our understanding of Andaman Society. I have stressed the point that the Andaman society did permit of certain amount of mobility and I shall pursue this further in this section. There is first of all the process of Islanderization itself. One of the functions was to accommodate and assimilate all the groups/ people without discrimination of caste, colour, creed, religion and language. When a caste or group achieved social legitimacy they are allowed for free play with other neighbours in a manner of exchange of values and customs. It also meant obtaining the benefits of host society at various levels, performing or observing certain festivals, visiting to common dinning and finally to obtain a better legitimizing the role of the group. The island society itself is vital society for our substance, because it is based on the belief of social equality and mobility within the limits of its society. The most vital point is that island society is unique its composition and generally it is hypergamy.



Marriage was one such institution in which the different religious group considered to be one sided relationship with the other by which it gives its girls in marriage to the latter. The scarcity of girls in the settlement has resulted into a process of social integration and it provides evidence of the upward mobility of the groups. In some cases it also enabled the lower group to claim eventually equality with the local group. Hypergamy was significant for social mobility in yet another way. A section of groups would islanderize its way of life and then claim to be part of its structural neighbours to the parent section. In course of time they became a distinct endogamous group even though they numbered only few individuals. It may be presumed that throughout the history of Andaman Islands the Local community arose as a result of such fission from the parent body. It is necessary to stress that the mobility characteristic of Local Community resulted not only in positional changes but also for structural changes. That is, while the individuals moved up and groups are also consolidated gradually which later paved way for more stability and the idea of inequality gradually disappeared.

A potent source of social mobility in during British rule in Andaman was fluidity of social system. Such fluidity was not limited to any particular community, indeed, whoever joined to Andaman society enjoyed same amount of freedom and equality without consideration of their position in the social hierarchy. It constituted an important, though not the only avenue to social mobility. In order to capture social status and equality, however, all the groups including homogeneous communities of Andaman Islands had to have marital relationship with Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Buddhists, preferably all. This is not to deny, however, that mobility within a localized system, such as that described by Pocock, was the result of British rule.

## II. Conclusion

Generally speaking, 'Local Born' identity has been developing significantly over the past century, as a feeling of cultural distinctiveness was gradually complemented by self-identification with general population of Andaman Islands. Despite the archipelago's geographical isolation from mainland India, its identity-building process has followed wider social developments, reflecting thoughts of 'miniature India' and countless other trends on a society level. Efforts at self-identification have also contributed to these wider conceptions of local identity with the outside world. Local born community presents a case of complex island-mainland cultural interaction. One could find for

instance, trace the mutually influential intellectual exchange between local born and other neighbouring communities, which strongly influenced local concepts of ethnicity. To say that peripheral island communities possess relatively few external cultural inputs is not to say that they are therefore any less influenced by the inputs they receive. Without contradicting ourselves, we can simultaneously assert that many small islands like Andaman Islands serve remarkable well as theoretical testing grounds and that they are thoroughly integrated into the cultural flows of wider society. It is not merely that the Local Born were influenced by outside world, they served to influence the chain of ideas in the outside world as well. Furthermore, the role Local Born played in the island society must be appreciated for creation of peaceful society. Because it is an isolated archipelago, Andaman was first settled relatively late and although it has evidently maintained a cultural exchange with mainland India.

### Footnotes:

- [1]. As per the norms laid down by the GOI, Ministry of Home Affairs, vide their letter No. U-14040/0/96-ANL dated communicated vide Administration Letter No. 34-1/2004-MPH dated 31<sup>st</sup> May 2005.
- [2]. Fredric J. Mouat: 1979
- [3]. Pre-42 communities are allotted house sites and agricultural lands under the provisions of Section 5 of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Regulation 1926. The allotment of Agriculture land was made either by way of "Grant" or by issuing licenses. The Grant for the cultivation of long lived crops such as coconut, coffee and rubber for a period of thirty years and renewed for further period on the previous sanction. License for Agricultural Land as a Non-occupancy tenant was issued for paddy cultivation, horticulture and short lived crops. These Non-occupancy tenants thereafter brought under Occupancy Tenants, after cultivating five years continuously and not having violated any provisions laid down in the license while allotment was made.
- [4]. A convict was promoted to the first class after satisfactory service for a specified period when he would be granted 'Ticket-of-Leave' and termed a 'self-supporter' thereby attaining a special status, the full significance and privileges extended. Home Department, Public Branch, A proceedings, March 1864, Nos. 163-169.
- [5]. Ibid., March 1864, Nos 163-169.



- [6]. There was a sharply marked division of the settlement on what is known as the 'free' and 'convict' portions, by which the free settlers living in villages are separated from the ticket-of-leave (Self-supporters) convicts. Every effort was made to prevent unauthorized communication between these two divisions. No adult person can enter the settlement without permission. A large proportion of the free settlers are 'local born' i.e., descendents of convicts, born in the settlement and permanently resident there. Although the self-supporters convict was entitled to send for his wife from India, he very seldom did so and his wife would also not, as a general rule, choose to join her convict husband, across the sea, even apart from the fact that the Hindu wife would thereby lose her caste. So the 'Local Born' nearly all of them was the issues of 'convict marriages', the procedure of which has been described above. Such a marriages become valid only after the married couple appeared before the Superintendent and made formal declaration to the effect that they had been actually married according to their particular rite. Social rules and regulations observed in India were strictly followed. For example, a Hindu would not be allowed to marry Muslim women and un-divorced Muslim women with a Muslim husband living in India would not be allowed to marry at all. All marriages were duly registered. (For further details see Local Gazetteer 1908: Pp. 122-126).
- [7]. Home Department Judicial Branch, A proceedings, June 1890. No. 74 and September 1891, No.133.
- [8]. During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the British in order to populate the Andaman Islands took some long term or sentenced convicts to clear forest and to build roads and infrastructure. Initially British took only young convicts especially male population should be mentally sound and they would be fit for labour and as a rule less than 45 years of age. Lunatics and mentally deserted criminals are on no account to be transported to the Andaman Islands. Further the below mentioned circular also prohibits the transportation of persons until they had attained the age of 18 years, GOI (Home) Proceeding dated 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1886.
- [9]. GOI, Home Department 1874, Port Blair Branch.

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