

TOPONYMY OF ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) are a group of remote, isolated island archipelago and external territory of India at the juncture of the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea extending between 92° to 94° East and 6° to 14° North latitude. The capital city of ANI, Port Blair, is located 1,190 km from Chennai of mainland India. Since pre-historic times, these islands were the home of aboriginal tribes. The vulnerable tribal groups identified in the Andaman group of islands are the Great Andamanese, Onges, Jarawas, and Sentinalese, all of Negrito origin, while the tribes in the Nicobar group are the Nicobarese and Shompens, both of Mongloid origin. This article looks at the toponyms of various islands of ANI and shows how these names reflect the social and political attitudes and motivations of the name-givers. This article also analyses how the toponyms distinct and different on islands based on island life, e.g. biodiversity, food, customs, space, time, memory and their relationship to mainland and continental toponymies in order to draw valid conclusions about the specificity of island toponymies.

KEYWORDS: *Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India, Toponymy*

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) form an important group of oceanic islands, situated in the Bay of Bengal, extending between 92° to 94° East and 6° to 14° North latitude. The northern group of islands form the Andaman Islands, while the southern group of islands form the Nicobar Islands, which is separated by Ten Degree channel. The North Andaman, Middle Andaman and South Andaman islands occupy major land mass.

ANI comprises 572 islands, islets and rocky outcrops, covering an area of 8,249 sq km with a coastline of 1,962 km. However, only 37 islands are inhabited. Out of which, 10 islands in the South Andaman District, 14 in the North & Middle Andaman District and 13 in the Nicobar District (Census of India, 2011). There are three (03) districts, nine (09) tehsils, 69 gram panchayats, seven (07) Panchayat Samiti and two (02) Zilla-Parishads. The capital town of all the groups which form the Union Territory is Port Blair.

It is presumed that these islands had a former land connection from Cape Negris at south part of Burma to Achin Head (Cape Pedro) in Andalus (Sumatra). Since pre-historic times, these islands were the home of aboriginal tribes. The vulnerable tribal groups who have been identified in the Andaman group of islands are the Great Andamanese, Onges, Jarawas, and Sentinalese, all of Negrito origin, while the tribes in the Nicobar group are the Nicobarese and

Shompens, both of Mongloid origin. The Chinese knew of these islands over a thousand years ago and called it the 'Yeng-t-omag' in the First Millennium". These islands also find a place in the first map of the world drawn by Ptolemy, the renowned Roman geographer during the second century. The famous Forester Champion has passionately remarked, "If tropical rain forests are to be seen in their pristine glory anywhere in the world, it is in the Andamans." The forests are quite rich with tropical evergreen, semi-ever green, moist-deciduous and littoral forests, mangroves, bamboo, and cane brakes. Mr. Jacques Coustoue, the famous marine explorer, who made a film on these islands titled "The Invisible Islands," said that he had never come across such clear waters during his many voyages across the globe, as in Andaman he could see live corals even at a depth of 60–100 m off the Narcondam Islands.

The Britishers established their colony in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for the second time in 1858. During this colonization the British Officials and soldiers settled in large groups. With the Second World War, Japanese troops occupied the islands. When India achieved independence in 1947, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were incorporated into the Indian Union.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The history of these islands is well documented from most perspectives, but not from a toponymic standpoint. There are two basic ways to conduct toponymic research:- One concentrating on the etymology, meaning, and origin of toponyms, and one focusing on the toponyms of a region and examining patterns of these names (Jan Tent, 2015). "Topographers and cartographers often bear a less theoretical interest in toponymy: they simply need to know by what name(s) every object to be mapped has to be known and recorded" (Tjeerd Tichelaar, 2002). Names of places, villages, cities, countries or forests have been also based on elements of biodiversity, either plants or animals (Tripathy, 1993; Mohanty and Tripathy, 2011).

Joshua Nash (2015), working in the field of linguistics, recorded that Islands have been given little attention by toponymists and island's physical segregation, distinctness and their isolation from continental environment, would be the interesting factors for linguists and onomasticians to study about the toponymy of islands. There is hardly any study from the toponymic point of view on Indian Islands particularly the Andaman and Nicobar Islands that are the considered as the present day evidence for the origin of stone age people and tribal communities from ancient times. There has been a lack of attempt on comprehensive account of place names of these islands and the available literature does not describe in detail the reasons and explanation of place names, their meaning and their conversion over a different period of times of Rulers and Settlers.

The studies on toponymies in India are very few and that too are related to non-island places.

Interestingly, the biodiversity of localities were used to coin names in some places. Patil (2015) revealed, in his work, that the names of villages or localities of forests in Dhule and Nandurbar districts of Maharashtra State possess the relationship with the local biodiversity. The names of local plants and animals were used to coin the village or forests names (Trivedi, 1993; Mohanty and Tripathy, 2011). Tayade and Patil (2012) observed that the perceptions regarding plant-based naming generally pertained to phytogeography, agriculture, ecology, economy, horticulture and religion. In their Toponymic study carried out in Buldhana district of Maharashtra, they have found that the indigenous tree species have priority over other introduced ones and this toponymic information were found useful for afforestation programmes, besides knowing agro-climatic suitability of the region.

The studies on toponymy in other countries gave more understanding on the subject. For example, while studying the names of streets in Bucharest City of Romania, it was argued that place names had the impact from aspects of ideological change, changing constructions of national identity and political orientation (Duncan et. al., 2002). Similarly, place naming practices of the Dutch, French and English along the Australian coastline between 1606 and 1803 were investigated by Tent & Slayter (2009) and showed how names reflect the social and political attitudes. The toponymy of Herschel Island (Qikiqtaryuk), Western Arctic Coast of Canada was studied by Burn & Hattendorf (2011). It was revealed that the features of Herschel Island were named by Lt. Cdr. Charles H. Stockton of US Navy to commemorate the US ships that entered the Island in 1889 and the Surveyors of US Navy who made the survey in the Island to prepare the bathymetry map. The place names of Nepean Island, a small uninhabited island to the south of Norfolk Island (Australia) were studied by Joshua Nash (2012) from the angle of naming behaviour of the Norfolk Island. The observations of the place names were put forward to other toponymists and linguists to use in their research.

Research Question

The specific concern of the work is to understand and explore the scope for further research on toponymy of Islands of Andaman and Nicobar, India and to make an attempt, from the available literature, to analyse the names of few islands and to examine how the names were given. The concept on toponymic study for islands of India was raised from the project on development of database for coastal Islands of India, which is being carried out in the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), Chennai. The database, as it would contain social and environmental characteristics of each and every island, the information on history of islands is also available in it.

This short note helps to understand toponyms of various islands of ANI and their connection with social & political attitudes and motivations of name givers. Some of the island names and their name history (Figure 1 & 2) understood from existing literature are given below:

Table 1

Island & Place Names in ANI	Name History
Ritchie's Archipelago	Named after an 18 th Century British Marine Surveyor, John Ritchie, who was involved in documentation of Andamans.
Viper Island	Ship 'Viper' was given to Lieutenant Archibald Blair of the Indian Navy to survey the Andaman in 1789.
Sir Hugh Rose Island	Named after Hugh Rose, 1 st Baron Strathnairn.
Port Blair (Capital)	To honour Lieutenant Archibald Blair of the British East India Company.
John Lawrence Island	British Imperial Statesman John Lawrence, 1 st Baron Lawrence, Viceroy of India from 1864 to 1869.
Havelock Island	To honour a British Major General Sir Henry Havelock KCB associated with India during the Indian Mutiny of 1857.
Neil Island	James George Smith Neill, a British soldier in 1857
Nicobar Island	The earliest extant references to the name "Nicobar" is in the Sri Lankan Pali Buddhist chronicles, states that the children of the followers of the legendary founder of the Sri Lankan Kingdom, Vijaya, landed on Naggadipa (the island of the children, from the Pali nagga meaning 'naked') (Wilhelm Geiger, 1912). The modern name is likely derived from the Chola dynasty name for the islands, Nakkavaram or 'Puup Pii' (literally, "naked man" in Tamil)
Narcondum Island	One of the Pegu Group of Valcanoes. The name Narcondam could have been derived from the Tamil word naraka-kundam, meaning "a pit of Hell," Although this may be the result of confusion between it and Barren Island. (Portman, 1899)

Table 1 Contd.,	
Island & Place Names in ANI	Name History
Tillang Chong Island	Its name, as attributed by Col. Gerini in his work on Ptolemaic geography, is apparently derived from the name given by Chinese sailors of yore: tswe-lan-chan or 'island of blue waters'.
Teressa Island	When Austria (1778-1784) and Denmark (1754/56-1868) claimed Nicobar Islands as a colony, They named Teressa after the Austrian Arch-duchess Maria Theresia.
Mount Harriet National Park	Named in commemoration of Harriet Tytler, the second wife of Robert Christopher Tytler, a British army officer (1862 -1864).

Toponyms of ANI do not show much variation among them. The islands are either named after a person or character or the island is named after the geographical position or the name of the people/tribal communities inhabited (North Sentinel Island – due to inhabitant of tribal community 'Sentinalese').

Most of the islands in the ANI are largely named after British Generals and civil officials who served in India at the time of the Indian Rebellion of 1857. It was referred in several literature that the name 'Andaman' was derived from 'Hanumans' (Sanskrit epic 'Ramayana') and the Malays who used these islands for a long time as a base for their piratical activities, refer to these islands as 'Handuman'. The word 'Handuman' seems to be a corrupt form of 'Hanunam'. The Indian History Professor L. P. Mathur (1968) Mathur concluded that name Andaman is a corrupt form of the Malay name 'Handuman' after referring Mr.Portman's observation.

The size and location of several islands in ANI reflect in their toponymy. Present day District's name viz., South Andaman, Middle Andaman and North Andaman reflect in geographical positions and islands namely Great Andaman, Little Andaman and Great Nicobar reflect the size of the island comparable to the other areas.

The long histories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India provide a challenging field for more refined toponymic analysis. This effort revealed these place names of islands and their history and put forward a resource which other toponymists and linguists can use in their research. The concept of 'island toponymy' can be considered as a new area of linguistic research for Indian Islands and more island names should be studied for their toponymy.

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APPENDICES



Figure 1: Map of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands

