

# Colonising the penal body: transit of the convicts from Bengal to the Malay Peninsula

Gazi Mizanur Rahman

*Department of English and Humanities, BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh*

Colonising the  
penal body

3

Received 17 February 2023  
Revised 5 May 2023  
Accepted 5 May 2023

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The British East India Company (EIC) made connections between the Malay Archipelago and Bengal and established a penal settlement at Bencoolen, followed by the Straits Settlements for the Indian convicts. The convicts from different parts of South Asia today were generally described as “Indian”, such generalisation often hides the identity of specific convicts from South Asia. Among the Indian convicts, the Bengalis were transported to Bencoolen and the Straits Settlements. However, the generic term has made it difficult to reconstruct the history of Bengali convicts’ experiences and pathos. Therefore, this paper attempts to “rediscover” the afterlife of transportation of Bengali felons in the Malay Peninsula.

**Design/methodology/approach** – By examining a range of archival records and current scholarships, this article shows the inclusivity, diversity and accessibility of convict labourers with mainstream society. This study will open up a new avenue of convict histories and subaltern studies on Asia.

**Findings** – The Bengali convicts in the Straits Settlements, one of the oldest migrant sections, have largely been ignored in historical literature. Though the Bengalis, among other South Asian convicts, constituted a significant portion, they were categorised under the generic term “Indian” (Rai, 2014). Their manual labour was invaluable for the colonial economy and the development of the Straits Settlements.

**Research limitations/implications** – Researcher faced difficulties to get the descendant of Bengali convicts.

**Originality/value** – This article is a research paper based on mostly archival records; therefore, it is an original contribution to the existing knowledge on the convict history.

**Keywords** South Asian convict, Bengali convict, Racial Capitalism, Malay Peninsula, Straits Settlements

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Transregional connectivity between Bengal and the Malay Archipelago took a new turn with British imperialism because the base of the British East India Company (EIC) of the Asia Pacific region was Calcutta. Even Sir Raffles Stamford was instructed to subjugate Singapore from Calcutta. Therefore, such transregional connectivity fostered human mobility, particularly the transportation of convicts. The EIC established the first penal settlement at Bencoolen in 1685, followed by the Straits Settlements (comprising Singapore, Malacca and Penang) for transporting South Asian felons from Bengal, Madras and Bombay. However, convicts from various parts of modern South Asia were generally described as “Indian”, a generalisation that often hides the ethnic identity of a specific convict community. This generic term has made it difficult to reconstruct the history of Bengali convicts’ pathos

© Gazi Mizanur Rahman. Published in *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this license may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

This article has been excerpted and modified for publication by the author from his paper “Colonising the Penal Capital: Locating the Bengali Convicts in Cosmopolitan British Malaya”, published as a conference proceeding in the Twelfth International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 12).



Southeast Asia: A  
Multidisciplinary Journal  
Vol. 23 No. 1, 2023  
pp. 3-18  
Emerald Publishing Limited  
e-ISSN: 2948-0426  
p-ISSN: 1819-5091  
DOI 10.1108/SEAMJ-02-2023-0017

and challenges. Therefore, this article attempts to “rediscover” the history of the Bengali felons in Malaya and Singapore. In doing so, it focuses on two interrelated issues. First, it narrates the government policies for convict labourers and deals with categorical ambiguities. The second set of issues illustrates the transportation of the convicts and their integration process with mainstream society. Thus, this study shows that many convicts belonged to the Bengali community and attempted to reconstruct their experiences, pathos and contributions. It further suggests the inclusivity, diversity and accessibility of convict labourers to mainstream society. This study will open up a new avenue of mobility and subaltern studies on Asia.

### **Theoretical frontiers**

Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924) studied historical materialism. [Engels \(1892\)](#) initially examined the capitalist expropriation and exploitation of labour, which was elaborated by [Marx \(1993\)](#) through the “material theory of history” – capitalist production and class struggle. Later on, [Lenin \(1917\)](#) expanded the notion of Marxism by conceiving the nuance of imperialism. Economic capitalism, the dictatorship of the state, the proletariat and the role of the revolutionary party have been highlighted in their works. Scholars conceptualised economic capitalism through human labour or capital. Theodore [Schultz \(1981\)](#), a Nobel laureate American Agricultural economist, introduced the notion of human capital. He prioritised the value of a labourer when the labourer acquires academic knowledge and skills that improve their usefulness in making products or services. Apart from economic and human capital, [Bourdieu \(2000\)](#) theorised several forms of capital, including social and cultural capital. Thus, scholars have conceptualised the idea of capital in different contexts. An American political theorist Cedric Robinson has developed the term “racial capitalism”. Robinson used the term to refer to the development of Black people, organisation and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions as a historical agency (2000, p. 1). Nancy [Leong \(2013\)](#) further developed the idea of racial capitalism by using the notion of “nonwhiteness”. He developed the idea of nonwhiteness as capital helps to illustrate the exploitation and profit process. He described why nonwhiteness was valuable and how the capital value was transferred.

The above discussion shows how the labour of working-class and nonwhite people has been converted into capital value that was exploited by the capitalist economy. Likewise working-class labour, the penal labour was exploited by the colonial capitalist economy. Therefore, Foucault suggested penal labour was more efficient and profitable for the colonial economy (1980, p. 38). The carceral people were victims of colonial capitalism. British colonial power brought indentured and convicts to develop infrastructures and support the colonial economy. By implementing the idea of racial capitalism, this article shows how the colonial economy and state benefited by using the labour of convicts.

### **Competing literature**

The EIC started transporting convicts from British India to the Malay Peninsula in the late 18th century ([Anderson, 2018](#), p. 212). More than 80,000 convicts were transported from British India to the Pacific region between 1787 and 1943, whereas a few Chinese, Malay and Burmese felons were exiled to Bengal, Madras and Bombay ([Amrith, 2013](#), p. 77) [1]. Anand [Yang \(2021\)](#) has examined the Indian carceral regime in Southeast Asia. He shows the importance and quotidian life of the Indian penal body in the Indian Ocean World that shaped the global system of forced migration and coerced labour. His study narrates the histories of crime and punishment, prisons, law, labour, transportation, migration and colonialism that turn fluidly between local and global contexts. Ronit [Ricci \(2016\)](#) has edited

a book titled *Exile in Colonial Asia*, a compilation of several fascinating case studies of forced migrations. He explored the history of displaced people, particularly kings, convicts and commemorations in South and Southeast Asia. His study focuses on interconnected histories of penal deportation, labour migration, political exile, colonial expansion and individual destinies. Clare Anderson (2000) has described the transportation history and discontent of Indian convicts in Mauritius. Indian convicts were significant for the Mauritian sugar industry. Anderson has shown how convicts experienced transportation and integrated into the Mauritian social and economic fabric. Without the theoretical framework, Turnbull (1970) and Sandhu (1968) discussed the Indian convicts, including the Tamils, in the Strait Settlements. Bengali convicts belonged to the Indian coerced community; however, the above scholars rarely focused on the transportation of Bengali convicts and their quotidian life in Malaya.

Drawing on hitherto unexplored archival materials and some secondary sources, taking up a predominantly qualitative approach supported by quantitative analysis and applying the racial capitalism theory, this paper examines how Bengali convicts experienced transportation, governed them and integrated into the Malay social and economic fabric.

### South Asian convicts at the Ocean's margins

As mentioned earlier that British Indian convicts came from present-day South Asia, which covers Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and around the rim of the Bay of Bengal to Myanmar (De Vito, Clare, & Ulbe, 2018, p. 11; Pieris, 2009, p. 66; Tan, 2015, p. 39). As British India was the home of diverse ethnicities and cultures, I have chosen to use "South Asian" instead of "Indian" convicts in this article.

South Asian convicts were from all walks of life, from Brahmans down to "untouchables", of which the most considerable portion was the Bengali (Turnbull, 1970, p. 87; Sandhu, 1968, p. 200). Scholars reported that convicts were awarded transportation because of committing burglary, dacoity, housebreaking, murder, *thuggee*, frauds, forgeries and revolutionary activities (McNair & Bayliss, 1899, p. 11; Yang, 2003, p. 197; Pieris, 2009, pp. 69, 270). *Regulation XVII of 1817* categorised the convicts as those accused of criminal offences who were liable to be whipped, imprisoned and transported for life (Mclane, 1993, pp. 75–76). In 1844, the Sudder Courts of Calcutta, Bombay and Agra passed an Act to transport or imprison offenders beyond sea for life. However, deportation did not apply to the offenders who were physically unfit for transportation (Government of Bengal, 1836; Smith, 1845, p. 159).

Before dealing with the theme in detail, it may be pertinent to note that the phrase "colonising the penal body" denotes extracting convicts' physical labour. For using the convicts' labour, the British brought South Asian offenders from the 1820s to the 1870s to their newly occupied lands in the Malay Peninsula. Table 1 shows the approximate number of South Asian convicts transported to Southeast Asia.

### Convictism in the Malay Peninsula

South Asian convicts were disembarked at the Malay port cities, particularly Penang, Singapore and Malacca. Soon after occupying Penang (Prince of Wales Island, 1786), Governor-General Cornwallis recommended the transportation of convicts there (Yang, 2003, p. 192). The first batch of convicts was sent to Penang in 1790. It has been recorded that the British brought 100 convicts from Penang to Malacca in 1805. Later, the British Government ceded Malacca to the Dutch authority in 1808. However, the number of convicts was not increased until 1825, when it was surrendered to the British power in exchange for Bencoolen (Yang, 2003, pp. 197–198; Sandhu and Wheatley, 1983, p. 255). Convicts increased by 284 in Malacca in the mid-1830s (Yang, 2003, p. 198).

Singapore became a penal station for South Asian criminals in the 1820s [2]. Table 2 shows the approximate number of South Asian convicts in Singapore between 1825 and 1873. After the Sepoy Revolt of 1857–1858, the number of transportees increased by 2000 (Rai, 2014, p. 14). Aiyar recommended that there were 2,319 convicts in the Singapore Jail in 1857. He further suggested that down to 1873, Malacca, Penang and Singapore were the “Sydney of India”, comparing overseas destinations of European convicts (Aiyar, 1938, p. 4).

### Dealing with the ambiguities: rescuing the “Bengali” convicts from the generic term “Indian”

The term “Indian” has been used/ing in the colonial and postcolonial records of present-day Malaysia and Singapore to denote all people coming from what is today’s South Asia because the region was under the jurisdiction of “British India” (Metcalf, 2007, p. xii). Risley and Gait noted that the people of British India were enumerated under the head of “Indian” in the census (Risley & Gait, 1903, p. 91). Though most convict labourers were of different ethnic origin and hailed from Madras, Bombay and Bengal, they were known as “Indian”. Despite these terminological ambiguities, it is still possible to recover the Bengalis within the South

| Place of transportation                          | Period    | Number of convicts |
|--|-----------|--------------------|
| Military Transports                              | 1790–1820 | 3,000              |
| Bencoolen  | 1787–1825 | 4,000              |
| Straits Settlements (Malacca, Penang, Singapore) | 1790–1860 | 20,000             |
| Arakan and Tenasserim (Present Myanmar)          | 1828–1862 | 5,000–7,000        |
| Andaman Islands                                  | 1858–1943 | 50,000             |

**Source(s):** Clare Anderson, “Sepoys, Servants and Settlers: Convict Transportation in the Indian Ocean, 1787–1945”, in *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, edited by Ian Brown and Frank Dikotter (London: Hurst, 2007), pp. 185–220; G. S. V. Prasad and N Kanakarathnam, “Colonial India and transportation: Indian convicts in South East Asia and elsewhere”, *International Journal of Applied Research*, 1, 13 (2015), p. 8

**Table 1.**  
Number of South Asian convicts at the Ocean’s margins

| Year      | Number of convicts |
|-----------|--------------------|
| 1825      | 800–900            |
| 1826      | 83                 |
| 1830s     | 901                |
| 1843–1844 | 1,292              |
| 1855–56   | 1,845              |
| 1860      | 2,275              |
| 1863      | 1,964              |
| 1873      | 1,127              |

**Source(s):** Interpolated from different sources: *Annals of Indian Administration in the Year 1862–63* (Serampore: Marshall D’cruz, 1863), 19; *Annals of Indian Administration in the Year 1859–60* (Serampore: Marshall D’cruz, 1860), 370; *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (hereinafter *SFPMA*) 9 January 1846; *SFPMA*, 18 June 1857; *SFPMA*, 25 June 1857; Anoma Pieris, *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes: A Penal History of Singapore’s Plural Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 59; Anand A. Yang, “Indian Convict Workers in Southeast Asia in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,” *Journal of World History*, 14, 2 (2003): 198; J. F. A. McNair and W. D. Bayliss, *Prisoners Their Own Warders: A Record of the Convicts Prison at Singapore in the Straits Settlements established 1825, discontinued 1873, together with a cursory history of the convict establishments at Bencoolen, Penang, and Malacca from the year 1797* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co., 1899), 41, 146

**Table 2.**  
Number of South Asian convicts in Singapore’s Jail, 1825–1873

Asian diasporic space [3]. The rereading of census reports and reviewing the historical information are the alternative ways to deal with the ambiguities in the colonial records, as follows:

First, the Bengalis committed primarily structural offences. For example, in the wake of changing the agricultural system by the British-instituted Permanent Settlement of 1793 and the decline of the cottage industry in Bengal caused property-related crimes, including burglary, dacoity and housebreaking. The British transported such criminals to their newly occupied lands. After the recommendation of Warren Hastings, Governor-General of Bengal (1772–1785), on the deportation of the convicts to Bencoolen [4], the Supreme Court in Calcutta sentenced a section of offenders to deport there in 1787, perhaps that was the early batch of Bengali convicts in Bencoolen (Yang, 2003, p. 191). Robbery with violence was one consequence of economic deprivation, and such crimes were higher than other mischiefs in Bengal during the mid-19th century (Table 3).

Apart from economic-related crimes, political deportation also took place in Bengal. Some convicts transported to Penang from the Bengal Presidency were not criminals but “political offenders” who fought against or resisted the EIC rule. When the local chieftain revolted against the expansion of the EIC, particularly mutineers and revolutionaries were exiled in the late 19th century (Hunter, 1875, pp. 124–125). After the revolt of 1857, a cargo of political offenders from Alipore was brought to Singapore (SFPMA, 30 January 1919). The first rebel prisoners arrived on 19 October by the *Earl Grey*, which transported 17 males and 2 females, amongst whom five were reported to be mutineers (Rai, 2013, p. 402).

Second, Clare Anderson has informed us that the Bengali convicts came from the different regions of the Bengal Presidency, mainly from the lower part (Rajshahi and Twenty-Four Parganas). Sunil Amrith suggested that convicts’ labourers, both Hindus and Muslims, were transported from Bengal and North India to the penal settlements in Singapore, Penang and Malacca (Amrith, 2011). Convicts were sent to Alipur Jail near the Calcutta port. They waited there for transportation to different colonies by a chartered ship (Anderson, 2005:52).

Third, Bangla language was spoken amongst South Asian convict labourers (*Straits Times* (hereinafter *ST*), 5 June 1855, p. 4; *SFPMA*, 7 June 1855, p. 4; *SFPMA*, 8 December 1859, p. 4). However, it is difficult to provide an exact figure of the Bengali convicts. Sporadic data reveal that the Bengali convicts were deported to the Straits Settlements almost yearly until the mid-19th century. About 122 convicts were sent from Bengal in 1837 and worked in different places in Singapore (Yang, 2003, p. 198). By 1841, there were nearly 1,200 South Asian convicts in Singapore alone. The number rose to 1,500 by 1845 (Turnbull, 1970, p. 87). In 1851, the ship *Krishna* brought 56 convicts and 15 guards from Calcutta to Singapore (*SFPMA*, 25 July 1851, p. 2). Around that year, Bengali convicts were 113, 408 and 10 in Chinatown, Kampung Gelam and Country Districts (Pieris, 2009, p. 238). Table 4 shows the number of Bengali prisoners in Singapore from 1825 to 1857.

| Crimes                                   | Number of convicts |
|--|--------------------|
| Murder                                   | 18                 |
| Burglary                                 | 05                 |
| Robbery with violence                    | 63                 |
| Piracy                                   | 01                 |
| Forgery                                  | 01                 |
| Arson                                    | 04                 |
| Treason                                  | 12                 |
| Returning from transportation and escape | 01                 |

**Source(s):** Anoma Pieris, *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes: A Penal History of Singapore’s Plural Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 239

**Table 3.**  
Classification of crimes  
committed by the  
Bengalis, 1851 [5]

SEAMJ  
23,1

8

**Table 4.**  
Number of Bengali  
convicts in Singapore,  
1825–1858

| Year    | Number of convicts |
|---------|--------------------|
| 1825    | 122                |
| 1826    | 23                 |
| 1850–51 | 540                |
| 1852    | 595                |
| 1855–56 | 1,845              |
| 1857–58 | 890                |

**Source(s):** Interpolated from different sources: J. F. A. McNair and W. D. Bayliss, *Prisoners Their Own Warders: A Record of the Convicts Prison at Singapore in the Straits Settlements established 1825, discontinued 1873, together with a cursory history of the convict establishments at Bencoolen, Penang, and Malacca from the year 1797* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co., 1899), 39, 41; Anoma Pieris, *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes: A Penal History of Singapore's Plural Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 238, 240; *SFPMA*, 18 and 25 June 1857

Fourth, by the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, the British handed over Bencoolen to the Dutch, but the British brought “Free Bengalis” from Bencoolen to British Malaya ([British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/F/4/1184/30747](#); [Riddick, 2006](#), p. 35; [Kim, 1993](#), p. 267; [Amrith, 2013](#), p. 76). The “Free Bengalis” might be the Bengali convicts who already have consumed their conviction period. Though South Asian convicts were initially confined to Bencoolen, they were deported to the Straits Settlements following the Anglo-Dutch Treaty ([Kim, 1993](#), p. 267). In 1824, the largest body of convicts was sent from Bengal to Penang (998) and Malacca (579) ([Yang, 2003](#), pp. 197–198). The number increased to 3,856 in the three settlements in 1856 (*Annals of Indian Administration, 1856*, p. 291; [Nasution, 2014](#), p. 168). The number of Bengali convicts was high in Singapore than in other settlement areas. Though sources did not explain the reasons behind it, we can presume that during the mid-1850s, several peasant revolts, including the Santhal Rebellion (1855–1856), took place in present-day Jharkhand, West Bengal and Bangladesh against both the EIC and Zamindari system. Therefore, the colonial authority probably transported rebellious peasants as convicts to Singapore – the capital city of the Straits Settlements.

The above discussion shows that the convicts were deported to Singapore, Malacca and Penang between 1824 and 1857. They were supposed to be relatively better positioned among other Indian convicts in the Malay Peninsula. As the Bengalis are rescued from the ambiguities of Indian convicts, the convicts’ governance will be discussed in the next section.

### Governance of the convicts

Stamford Raffles was appointed as the Governor-General of Bencoolen in 1817. He provided important information regarding the management and treatment of the convicts who came from Bengal and Madras. Raffles noted that convicts from Bengal started arriving in Bencoolen in 1787, and at the time of his reporting, there were about 500 of them. In 1823, the number increased to about 900 ([McNair & Bayliss, 1899](#), pp. vii, 7). He favoured freeing these convicts after punishment and permitting them to reside or be citizens in the penal colony. He proposed to divide these convicts into three classes. The first class was to enjoy most civil liberties and be permitted to settle on land secured to them and their children, provided that they had been in residence in Bencoolen for three years. The Second Class was to be employed in ordinary labour. The third class, or men with records of most notorious crimes, was to perform more arduous labour and be confined at night ([McNair & Bayliss, 1899](#), pp. 3–6).

To easily recognise a convict’s crime, jail clerks inscribed letters on their foreheads in their vernacular languages, including Bangla. The tattooing or stamping on the penal body was called *godna/godena*. It is called *ulki* in Bangla. With few exceptions, tattooed convicts came

from eastern Bengal districts or Burma (Anderson, 2004, pp. 15–24). In 1817, 13 Bengali convicts marked on the forehead in Bangla script, charged with violent robbery in the Rangpur district of Bengal and were transported to Penang (Anderson, 2004, p. 34). Ramdoolub Gope, a *Dom* [6], was convicted for dacoity with murder and arson in Murshidabad and had a tattoo or *ulki* (Anderson, 2004, pp. 83, 85) [7]. The Bengal government abolished the *godna* or tattoo system in 1849.

When the convicts were disembarked at a penal station in Malaya, they went under the supervision of an Executive Engineer assisted by several workers, including a warder and an overseer of artificers and roads. All petty officers, such as *asduffadars*, *tindals*, peons and orderlies, were raised among the convicts (McNair & Bayliss, 1899, p. 89). Therefore, some convicts were recruited to manage fellow convicts. For instance, in 1825, when the convicts were disembarked in Singapore, they were placed initially in a *godown* under the supervision of four petty officers of Chittagong origin (McNair & Bayliss, 1899, p. 39). The court orders fixed the length of deportation. If the conviction was for a lifetime (up to 20 years), the convict’s life would be 16 years. If it was for 17 years, then the deportation period was for 12 years. If the conviction was for 7 years, transportation was for 6 years. Whatever the length of punishment for the female convicts, they were only transported for 3 to 5 years (McNair & Bayliss, 1899, p. 85).

All transported convicts were categorised into six classes according to the length of deportation and punishment (Table 5). First Class consisted of trustworthy convicts who were eligible to be hired as workers, and their criminal records were not severe. The Second Class consisted of convicted petty officers, including peons, *jomadars* (collectors), orderlies, *punkah* (large cloth fan) pullers, servants and those who worked unchained in hospitals and public offices. Third Class convicts were those who completed the probationary period and worked with one leg chained. The fourth class consisted of fresh arrivals and those who were degraded from other classes. For eighteen months, this class worked in construction areas, including roads, bridges, and culverts with heavy leg chains. If their conduct improved, their chains were removed after eight months, and they were promoted to the Second Class. Fifth Class consisted of the most dreadful criminals, such as murderers, thugs, dacoits, and deserters. The colonial government provided special instructions regarding them and forced them to do hard labour with chains. Sixth Class consisted of aged people or superannuated convicts who were engaged in light work without iron chains (*Annals of Indian Administration, 1856*, p. 291; *SFPMA*, 25 June 1857, p. 3; McNair & Bayliss, 1899, pp. 84–85; Nasution, 2014, p. 167). After completing the length of punishment, convicts received a ‘Ticket of Leave’ [8] (TOL) for leaving the colonies. In 1861, F. J. Mouat, the Inspector General of Jail in the Lower Bengal Province, visited the Straits Settlements and remarked that the TOL system was very successful and effective (McNair & Bayliss, 1899, pp. 10–11).

| Classes | Penang |        | Malacca |        | Singapore |        |
|---------|--------|--------|---------|--------|-----------|--------|
|         | Male   | Female | Male    | Female | Male      | Female |
| First   | 45     | 21     | 23      | 00     | 61        | 00     |
| Second  | 11     | 00     | 11      | 00     | 09        | 00     |
| Third   | 32     | 00     | 142     | 00     | 381       | 00     |
| Fourth  | 142    | 00     | 17      | 00     | 38        | 00     |
| Fifth   | 03     | 00     | 36      | 00     | 09        | 00     |
| Six     | 75     | 08     | 16      | 00     | 33        | 59     |

**Source(s):** Anoma Pieris, *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes: A Penal History of Singapore’s Plural Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 241

**Table 5.**  
Classification of the  
Bengali convicts in the  
Straits  
Settlements, 1856

### Convicts' reaction to the transportation order

Many convicts opposed the transportation for life beyond the seas vehemently as they compared crossing the "*kala pani*" (taboo referring to ill fate because of crossing an ocean) as bad as "*jeta junaza*" (living tomb) (McNair and Bayliss, 1899, p. 9). For instance, the three judges of the Provincial Courts of Appeal in Calcutta reported that transportation was "considered by many [convicts] as more severe punishment than death". The same observation was echoed in the following statement of one Bakarganj judge: "Natives in general dread it [deportation beyond the seas] more than hanging, and persons under that sentence have repeatedly requested me to get their sentences changed to death in preference" (Yang, 2003, p. 188). After the deportation of convicts, sometimes they committed suicide or attempted to escape. A Bengali convict hanged himself on 10 December 1851, soon after he arrived in Singapore (SFPMA, 12 December 1851, p. 2).

The question is, why did the Bengal government still issue such socially unacceptable transportation Acts? Answers were laid down in the interpretation of racial capitalism. The colonial authority intended to extract the penal labour and minimise the labour cost in the deportation colonies. The British occupied new lands on the Indian Ocean rim during the late 18th century. As a newly occupied land, the British Government needed more workforce in Malaya. Meanwhile, the Malacca slaveholders passed the resolutions, which allowed the extinction of Slavery at Malacca on 28 November 1829 (SFPMA, 24 February 1842; Northrup, 1995, pp. 17–18) [9]. In Singapore, slavery was abolished in 1823 (Newbold, 1839, p. 281). However, an enormous labour force was still demanded to support the flourishing colonial economy. Therefore, convict labourers were transported as an alternate way to support the flourishing British colonial economy in Malaya. Such convict labour was profitable because that was a new mode of labour extraction. As Foucault suggested, "it [the penalty of prisoners] was more efficient and profitable in terms of the economy. . . .subject them to some exemplary penalty. . . .a new mode of exercise of power in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (1980, p. 38). David Arnold (1993) showed how such "new mode of power" colonised the labouring body of convicts. The transportation of convicts is considered a form of "forced migration".

### Involvement of convict labourers in diverse sectors

South Asian convicts met a high demand for manual labourers in Southeast Asia. The economic value of South Asian convicts' labour was incomparable. A Resident of Fort Marlborough (Bengkulen, West Sumatra) echoed similarly. He wanted Bengal convicts because their labour cost was less than the "usual price of labour of a Malay", and they were vital for cultivating coffee and spices in West Sumatra (Yang, 2003, p. 195). In 1800, the Governor of Prince of Wales Island remarked that convict labour was significant in public services and making roads because non-convict labourers were expensive. The following discussion shows the importance of South Asian penal labour in constructing the Straits Settlements' development.

First, South Asian carceral community provided an endless stream of manual labourers for establishing and consolidating British Empire in the Asia Pacific region. They rode carts, made railways, and repaired drains and roads in the Straits Settlements. For example, they constructed North Bridge Road, South Bridge Road, Serangoon Road and Thomson Road (Earl, 1837, p. 353; ST, 24 March 1909, p. 10; Aiyar, 1938, p. 4). This carceral community was brought from Bengal, Madras and Bombay (Annals of Indian Administration, 1856, p. 291; Pieris, 2009, p. 147). Bengalis, among other South Asian convicts, erected many government buildings and religious places in Singapore (Earl, 1837, p. 353; Mahajani, 1960, pp. 95–96; Pieris, 2009, p. 147). For example, they made St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sri Mariamman Temple, government House (now the Istana) and City Hall. The Inspector General of Jail in Lower



Bengal Province suggested that convicts constructed many public buildings, including the St. Andrew's Cathedral (*ST*, 14 May 1870, p. 1; [McNair & Bayliss, 1899](#), pp. 10–11, 72).

In 1857, the *Free Press* reported that the convict labourers erected several heavy establishments for the defence of Singapore harbour, made lighthouses and completed other improvements. Singapore received all advantages and civilised facilities from the convict's labourers (*SFPMA*, 25 June 1857, p. 3; *SFPMA*, 16 February 1860, p. 3). The convicts were also deployed as a means of conveyance for carrying the correspondence of the public offices (*ST*, 8 June 1872, p. 5).

Second, besides the infrastructural development, convict labour was badly needed in the Straits Settlements to clean jungles and canals and fill up swamps. McNair reported that though convicts had no aptitude, they cut and burnt jungle near the town of Penang for the levelling ground and worked at the Town Conservancy at Malacca (*SFPMA*, 15 August 1861, p. 3; [McNair & Bayliss, 1899](#), p. 8). In 1837, *Singapore Chronicle* reported that Singapore was a jungle and a nest of pirates. However, it is now a large, beautiful, flourishing town filled with a busy population. The port city is crowded with shipping from a quarter of the globe. Undoubtedly, all operations were done by employing "rude" convicts (*Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, hereinafter *SCCR*, 8 April 1837, p. 2).

Third, convicts were trained as bricklayers, blacksmiths and carpenters to work in these professions. They made bricks, dug and burnt coral for lime, quarried stone for foundations, felled timbers in the government's forests, and prepared it for the roof, door and window frames. For example, they built the surrounding wall of a jail near the Brass Basa or Wet Rice Canal. It cost only ₹12,000 for the government because convict labourers worked with convict-made materials, such as bricks. However, it was estimated by the Superintending Engineer that if the free labourers did the same work, it would cost about ₹100,000 ([McNair & Bayliss, 1899](#), p. 71). It seems that the government saved ₹88,000 or 88% money from the estimated expenditure. This example reflects the profit from using convict labourers in the public sector.

Fourth, the colonial government deployed Bengali convicts as hunters to reduce tiger attacks in populated areas in Singapore. Even the Governor of Singapore requested the Bengal government to send half a dozen *shikaries*. Though the killing of tigers is judged environmentally sensitive today, in those days, these activities posed an immediate and direct threat to these poor and vulnerable workers at the fringe and away from home. The Governor employed some convicts to beat in the jungle once a month with *tom-toms* (native drums) to frighten and drive away from the tigers. McNair, Comptroller-General of Convicts, made three parties with some South Asian convicts, and each party consisted of three transportees. The first party was sent to the Bukit Timah or Central district, another to the Serangoon and Changi or Eastern district, and the remaining group was sent to the Choo Choo Kang or Western district ([McNair & Bayliss, 1899](#), pp. 50, 51–52).

Fifth, the Government of Singapore paid a certain amount of money monthly to encourage the convicts to show good conduct and to be experts in craftsmanship and artisans (*SFPMA*, 25 June 1857, p. 3). In 1825, convicts were appointed for the first time as "their own warders", which proved successful. Bonham, the Resident of Singapore, informed us that the convicts worked willingly, showed well-behaved, were discharged from peons or warders [10], and selected five "Madraseses" and five "Bengalees" to supervise their fellow convicts. Each warder was paid a monthly wage of \$3. In addition to his ordinary rations, clothing and annual blanket, each convict received a monthly allowance of 50 cents to purchase condiments and salt ([McNair & Bayliss, 1899](#), p. 40; [Pieris, 2009](#), p. 60).

Sixth, some Bengali convicts spoke English and were well-trained in photography. In his memoir, McNair described the setting up of a photographic studio inside the Central Jail in Singapore, and the training of two intelligent Bengali convicts from Calcutta in photographic techniques, who spoke in English ([McNair & Bayliss, 1899](#), p. 107; [Anderson, 2004](#), p. 193).

The colonial authority forcefully assigned convicts duties, and those who were unable to finish their works sometimes attempted to flee. This section of convicts was either eaten by tigers or seized by the authority or local Malay people. *Free Press* suggested that the country was a dense jungle if the convicts could escape from tigers, pretty sure of falling into the hands of the Malays (*SFPMA*, 25 June 1857, p. 3). A Bengali convict with shackles was working in Penang. Though he was recaptured, he ran away to be freed (*ST*, 7 February 1849, p. 6).

The above discussion shows that South Asian convicts contributed to the rapid expansion of public works and infrastructure for more than 50 years in the Straits Settlements (*Siddique & Shotam*, 1990, p. 9). However, an antipathy to convict transportation emerged in the mid-1850s, which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Public sensitivities and cease to continue the convict transportation**

The colonial authority stopped bringing South Asian convicts to the Straits Settlements mainly for three reasons: resistance against convict transportation in the colonies, the economic value of convict labour was reduced, and a new policy was taken for convict transportation.

1. The residents of Singapore vetoed the transportation of convicts into their society in the 1850s. Such sentiment became strong following the Sepoy Revolt of 1857–1858, which triggered a significant increase in the passage of convicts. Some European merchants wrote to the Governor of Straits Settlements that:

...commercial settlements like Penang and Singapore and especially the latter, should no longer be used as penal stations. So [as] long as these settlements were in their infancy, a body of convicts proved beneficial in the formation of roads, digging canals, &c., but now. . . a large commercial city such as Singapore. . . with a trade of ten millions sterling, a harbor crowded with shipping, and large population earnestly engaged in mercantile and tradal[trade] pursuits, is no longer a proper place for the reception of criminals of India and most especially for that of the late sepoy[s] of the Bengal army, men whose hands have been imbrued in the blood of women and children and whose hearts are full of hatred and revenge (*Yang*, 2003, p. 206).

With the increase of public awareness against the convicts' transportation, a civilian committee was formed to submit a petition to the colonial authority in Singapore, requesting not to bring more convicts, including the mutineers from India. Simultaneously, the Government of India appointed a committee in 1857 under the Inspector General of Jail in Lower Bengal Province. The committee recommended establishing a penal colony in the Andaman Islands or transporting convicts to the West Indies, and the Indian government accepted those recommendations (*McNair & Bayliss*, 1899, p. 143).

2. Convict labourers supported the colonial economy initially. However, on the one hand, the demand for this workforce decreased gradually, and the expenditure on convict maintenance was increasing in the Straits Settlements on the other. Therefore, it put pressure on the local revenue (*SFPMA*, 25 July 1851, p. 2). *Table 6* shows that the expenditure on convict maintenance increased by 32.75% within 20 years.
3. The Government of India speculated that it might be profitable if they confined the convicts in the Alipur Jail in Calcutta rather than transporting them to the Straits Settlements. Meanwhile, the prison was renovated and enlarged its size. Therefore, the government could easily confine the convicts within the jail, and their hard labour might support the Bengal economy (*Yang*, 2003, p. 194).

The above discussions show that the colonial government prohibited and discouraged disembarking South Asian convicts in the Straits Settlements. Therefore, the next question is

how the colonial government dealt with the convicts who were already transported to the Straits Settlements that will take place in the section.

**Integration processes and fabric of the cosmopolitan city**

A section of convicts stayed back in the Straits Settlements in three specific ways: through the depletion of conviction, by receiving a “Ticket of Leave” and by taking the opportunity of the government’s special pardon. In these three ways, some Bengali convicts integrated gradually into mainstream society and became a part of the cosmopolitan British Malaya. These three specific ways are discussed below.

First, generally, after the completion of the imprisonment period, South Asian convicts mostly returned to their homeland. However, at a later date, some of them resided in the Straits Settlements. For example, Sandhu suggested that felons returned about 60% in the 1830s, whereas very few returned in the 1850s (Siddique & Shotam, 1990, p. 9). They settled and merged with the local population. Table 7 shows the convicts who stayed in Singapore after completing the conviction period in the 1850s.

Second, many South Asian convicts were steadily well-behaved and were not threatening in the Straits Settlement; they were valuable and dynamic in many respects. They obtained a Ticket for Leave and merged with the mainstream community. In 1857, after serving 16 years in the Straits Settlements and showing good behaviour, 551 convicts obtained TOL, and several were allowed to marry (SFPMA, 25 June 1857, p. 3). As the TOL system allowed the convicts to work and earn money, they obtained the right to purchase and sell their property. Some of them saved a sum of money. A Bengali freed convict died in 1865 and left \$50,000 in savings. The entitlements of convicts’ land ownership and material possessions were central to discussing their civil rights from 1855 to 1857 (Pieris, 2009, pp. 154, 259; Buckley, 1965, p. 723).

Third, following the separation of 1867 from British India, the Governor of the Straits Settlements allowed the convicts whose offence was minor to merge unconditionally with the mainstream society by using the power of pardon (Aiyar, 1938, p. 4; Mahajani, 1960, pp. 95–96;

| Year      | Location            | No. of convicts | Per head Ex. | Total expenditure |
|-----------|---------------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|
| 1843–1844 | Singapore           | 1,292           | 44.49        | 57,475            |
| 1855–1856 | Straits Settlements | 3,845           | 45.90        | 176,480           |
| 1856–1857 | Straits Settlements | N/A             | N/A          | 337,426           |
| 1859–1860 | Straits Settlements | N/A             | N/A          | 117,577           |
| 1862–1863 | Singapore           | 1,964           | 63.36        | 124,448           |
|           | Penang              | 1,008           | 62.77        | 63,270            |
|           | Malacca             | 552             | 66.15        | 36,519            |

**Sources(s):** Interpolated from different sources: SFPMA, 9 January 1846, 1; SFPMA, 25 June 1857, 3; SFPMA, 18 June 1857, 3; *Annals of Indian Administration in the Year 1856–7* (Serampore: Marshall D’cruz, 1858), 147; *Annals of Indian Administration in the Year 1859–60* (Serampore: Marshall D’cruz, 1860), 370; *Annals of Indian Administration in the Year 1862–63* (Serampore: Marshall D’cruz, 1863), 19

**Table 6.** Expenditure on the convicts (in Dollar)

| Name of convicts    | Type of offences | When expired | Class of convicts |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Dullah              | Stabbing         | 1855         | 3                 |
| Anunda Pursaud      | Robbery          | 1855         | 3                 |
| Juddonath Day       | Murder           | 1857         | 5                 |
| Ducktburee (female) | Murder           | 1859         | NA                |

**Source(s):** SFPMA, 16 February 1860, 3

**Table 7.** List of some Bengali convicts who stayed back in Singapore, 1855–59

Koh *et al.*, 2006, p. 248). Many of those pardoned unconditionally returned to their own country; however, when they found uncongenial relationships in their homeland, they returned to the Straits Settlements and started petty businesses like shopkeepers, cowkeepers, artificers and cartmen. Some of them were sub-assistant overseers in the Public Works Department. Thus, these groups of convicts settled in Penang, Malacca and Singapore. However, serious criminals, including *thuggee*, murderers, dacoits, mutineers and professional poisoners, were pardoned gradually, for instance, when they continued their satisfactory conduct after completing the imprisonment (McNair & Bayliss, 1899, pp. 144–145).

There were few records on the number of Bengali convicts who took the opportunity of pardon and stayed back in the Straits Settlements. Siddique and Shotam interviewed a descendant of a Bengali convict. The interviewee recalled that her great-grandfather was a convict and was transported to Singapore in the 1820s. After completing his punishment, he brought his family to Singapore. The interviewee remembered that her grandfather was born in Singapore but returned to Kalighat (presently in Kolkata) to marry a Bengali woman. After that, the newlyweds returned to Singapore, and their offspring, including the interviewee's mother, was born in Singapore (Siddique & Shotam, 1990, p. 10). She further remembered the source of information how she knew her ancestral history:

You know how I know? I know when my grandfather's sister was here. She was older than my grandfather. I went sometimes, and I used to ask her tell me the story, lah. When I asked her they [the] story, she said, Okay. I had better tell you the story of our family. Then I say, Okay. Then I know. (Siddique & Shotam, 1990, p. 10).

The question is why the convicts returned home to get married. It might be for two reasons: preferring a Bengali bride and the scarcity of women in the Straits Settlements. Even some villages were often without a woman, as a report of the Straits Settlements stated in 1856 (*Annals of Indian Administration, 1856*, p. 291). Though it is unknown the ratio of convicts' integration, many male convicts married local women and became a part of the Jawi Pekan or Indo-Malay community (Siddique & Shotam, 1990, p. 9). The afterlife of deportation in British Malaya sheds light on the convicts' social integration and quotidian life.

### Conclusion

Most postcolonial academics and experts tend to focus on historical migrations in the global south to exclude the histories of “subaltern” groups and their exemplary contributions [11]. Though convicts are considered a member of the subaltern groups, their transportation life and the making of cosmopolitan space have been overlooked in historical literature. Some historians have reconstructed the global histories of convict labourers at the time of British imperialism [12]. Their works have drawn our attention. It demonstrates the narrative of cosmopolitanism and the history of punishment.

In the Asian context, scholars rarely focused on convict histories (Datta, 2021; Solomon, 2016). The Bengali convicts in the Straits Settlements, one of the oldest migrant sections, have largely been ignored in historical literature. They were categorised under the generic term “Indian” (Rai, 2014). However, the Permanent Settlement caused several peasant resistances, including Santhal Rebellion. Some of these rebellious and other offenders from eastern Bengal were deported as “social capital” to British Malaya. Most offenders received several years of punishment, and jail authority marked tattoos on offenders' foreheads for easy recognition. They worked with or without heavy chains, generated colonial capital, and contributed to constructing public and religious institutions and infrastructures. Their manual labour was invaluable for the colonial economy and development. They were also recruited to hunt tigers and supervise their fellow convicts.

After receiving TOL or a special pardon from the government, some convicts started petty businesses, married local women, and became an integral part of mainstream society and

colonial statecraft. Though the British colonial government banned convicts' transportation from South Asia in the 1870s, and they left Malaya and South Asia in the mid-1950s, Malaysia and Singapore still have the legacy of convict transportation. The carceral community fostered a Malaya cosmopolitan society. This paper is a new look at mobility studies through the history of South Asian convicts, particularly the Bengalis in the Straits Settlements, in general, global convict histories. It also opens up future research windows, particularly the interactions between convicts and non-convicts.

## Notes

1. Around 30,000–50,000 convicts were shipped from Britain to the North American colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries. Some 160,000 convicts travelled to Australia in the 18th and 19th centuries.
2. A convict prison was established in 1825 in Singapore and discontinued in 1873 – a detailed history of the convict establishments at Bencoolen, Penang and Malacca from 1797.
3. For an exploration of the limitations of colonial records and challenges in recovering the history of Bengali migrations, see Gazi Mizanur Rahman, 'Transnational History and Colonial Records: Locating Bengali Mobility in the British Malaya', *Journal of Maritime Studies and National Integration*, 3, 2 (2019): 97–112.
4. The British EIC established a Presidency in Bencoolen in 1785; however, it was degraded to a Residency placed under the Bengal Presidency.
5. Following the Permanent Settlement, a series of peasant resistance against the colonial state, agents, and policies occurred in Bengal; therefore, it should be mentioned here that the colonial government and courts categorised crimes and prisoners as murderers, thugs, burglary, dacoits, piracy, arson, treason and deserters. It is a one-sided interpretation; however, we do not know the victims' voices.
6. *Doms* occupied the lower rungs of the rigid caste hierarchy and were assigned the traditional tasks of cremating dead bodies.
7. Some convicts were not marked. For instance, three out of nine Hindu women were not marked by tattoos in 1847. They were shipped from Bengal to Penang, and their conviction was to be with a gang of thugs.
8. After spending a certain period of punishment, permission was given to the convicts, which allowed them to leave penal colonies or stations.
9. For details on the slave trade and its abolition across the world, see Eric Williams *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).
10. Colonial states and authorities fixed the parameters of well-behaves. They decided who belonged to well-behaviours or not.
11. Many subjects such as peasant, coolie, woman, older people, transgender, indigenous community, untouchable caste, minor ethnic group, enslaved people and convict are included in these groups, as per the discussion of the historians of *Subaltern Studies*.
12. Recently, some scholars have been working on the history of convicts from a global perspective, see Christian G. De Vito and Alex Lichtenstein, "Writing a Global History of Convict Labour", *Internationaal Instituut Voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IRSH)* 58 (2013): 285–325; Christian G. De Vito, Clare Anderson, and Ulbe Bosma, "Transportation, Deportation and Exile", 1–24; For South Asian context, see Indrani Chatterjee, "Colouring Subalternity: Slaves, Concubines and Social Orphans in Early Colonial India" in *Subaltern Studies X: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, edited by Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, Susie Tharu, 49–97 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999). David Arnold, 'The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge and Penology in Nineteenth-Century India' in *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha* edited by David Arnold and David Hardiman, 148–187 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

**References**

- Aiyar, K. A. N. (1938). *Indian problems in Malaya: A brief survey in relation to emigration*. The India Office: Kuala Lumpur.
- Amrith, S. (2011). *Islam in the Bay of Bengal: Between Tamil and Malay worlds*. Public Lecturer at Tufts University. 14 November 2011. Available from: <https://corpora.tufts.edu/catalog/tufts:MS165.002.001.00006?transcript> (accessed 14 October 2017).
- Amrith, S. (2013). *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The furies of nature and the fortunes of migrants*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Anderson, C. (2000). *Convicts in the Indian Ocean: Transportation from South Asia to Mauritius 1815–53*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Anderson, C. (2004). *Legible bodies: Race, criminality and colonialism in South Asia*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Anderson, C. (2005). The Bel Ombre Rebellion: Indian convicts in Mauritius, 1815–53. In Campbell, G. (Ed.), *Abolition and its Aftermath in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (pp. 46–59). London & New York: Routledge.
- Anderson, C. (2007). Sepoys, servants and settlers: Convict transportation in the Indian Ocean, 1787–1945. In Ian, B., & Frank, D. (Eds.), *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (pp. 185–220). London: Hurst.
- Anderson, C. (2018). The British Indian Empire, 1789–1939. In Clare, A. (Ed.), *A Global History of Convicts and Penal Colonies* (pp. 211–244). London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Annals of Indian Administration (1856) *Annals of Indian Administration 1856*. Serampore: Marshall D'cruz.
- Annals of Indian Administration (1856–7) *Annals of Indian Administration in the Year 1856–7*. Serampore: Marshall D'cruz.
- Annals of Indian Administration (1859–60) *Annals of Indian Administration in the Year 1859–60*. Serampore: Marshall D'cruz.
- Annals of Indian Administration (18562–63) *Annals of Indian Administration in the Year 1862–63*. Serampore: Marshall D'cruz.
- Arnold, D. (1993). *Colonizing the body: State medicine and epidemic disease in nineteenth-century India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Arnold, D. (1994). The colonial prison: Power, knowledge and Penology in nineteenth-century India. In David, A., & David, H. (Eds.), *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha* (pp. 148–187). Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Bengal, Government of (1836). *The Acts of the Supreme government, Part I, 1834 and 1835, in continuation of the regulations of Supreme government from 1793 to 1834*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *The field of cultural production*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.
- British Library, India office records and private papers, 'correspondence of the Bengal government with the Penang government and the government of the Dutch East Indies regarding the removal from Bencoolen of certain free Bengalis, emancipated Caffrees and convicts', IOR/F/4/1184/30747: September 1826-March 1829.
- Buckley, C. B. (1965). *An anecdotal history of old times in Singapore*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.
- Chatterjee, I. (1999). Colouring subalternity: Slaves, Concubines and social Orphans in early colonial India. In Bhadra, G., Prakash, G., & Tharu, S. (Eds.), *Subaltern Studies X: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (pp. 49–97). Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Datta, A. (2021). *Fleeting agencies: A social history of Indian coolie women in British Malaya*. *Global South Asians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- De Vito, C., G., Clare, A., & Ulbe, B. (2018). Transportation, deportation and exile: Perspectives from the colonies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Internationaal Instituut Voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IRSH), Special Issue, 63*, 1–24.
- De Vito, C. G., & Lichtenstein, A. (2013). Writing a global history of convict labour. *Internationaal Instituut Voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IRSH)*, 58, 285–325.
- Earl, G. W. (1837). *The eastern seas, or voyages and adventures in the Indian Archipelago in 1832–33–34*. London: W.H. Allen.
- Engels, F. (1892). *The condition of the working class in England in 1844*. London: Sonnenschein & Co.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other Writings 1972–1977*. Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Hunter, W. W. (1875). *A statistical account of Bengal* (Vol. V). London: Trubner and Co.
- Kim, K. K. (1993). Malay attitudes towards Indians. In Sandhu, K. S., & Mani, A. (Eds.), *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia* (pp. 266–287). Singapore: Times Academic Press and ISEAS.
- Koh, T. T. B., Auger, T., Yap, J., & Ng, W. C. (Eds.) (2006). *Singapore: The Encyclopedia*. Singapore: Didier Millet.
- Lenin, V. (1917). *Imperialism: The highest stage of capitalism*. Petrograd: Zhizn i Znaniye (Life and Knowledge) Publishers.
- Leong, N. (2013). Racial capitalism. *Harvard Law Review*, 126(8), 2151–2226.
- Mahajani, U. (1960). *The role of the Indian minorities in Burma and Malaya*. Bombay: Vora & Co.
- Marx, K. (1993). *Das kapital: A critique of political economy*. London: Penguin Classics.
- Mclane, J. R. (1993). *Land and local kingship in eighteenth-century Bengal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McNair, J. F. A., & Bayliss, W. D. (1899). *Prisoners their own warders: A record of the convicts prison at Singapore in the Straits settlements established 1825, discontinued 1873, together with a cursory history of the convict establishments at Bencoolen, Penang, and Malacca from the year 1797*. Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co.
- Metcalfe, T. R. (2007). *Imperial connections: India in the Indian Ocean arena, 1860–1920*. London: University of California Press.
- Nasution, K. S. (2014). *The Chulia in Penang: Patronage and place-making around the Kapitan Kling Mosque 1786–1957*. Penang: Areca Books.
- Newbold, T. J. (1839). *Political and statistical account of the British settlements in the states of Malacca, Pinang, and Singapore with a history of the Malayan states on the Peninsula of Malacca* (Vol. 1). London: John Murray.
- Northrup, D. (1995). *Indentured labor in the age of imperialism 1834–1922*. Studies in Comparative World History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pieris, A. (2009). *Hidden hands and divided landscapes: A penal history of Singapore's plural society*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Prasad, G. S. V., & Kanakarathnam, N. (2015). Colonial India and transportation: Indian convicts in South East Asia and elsewhere. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 1(13), 5–8.
- Rahman, G. M. (2019). Transnational history and colonial records: Locating Bengali mobility in the British Malaya. *Journal of Maritime Studies and National Integration*, 3(2), 97–112.
- Rai, R. (2013). The 1857 panic and the fabrication of an Indian 'Menace' in Singapore. *Modern Asian Studies*, 47(2), 365–405.
- Rai, R. (2014). *Indians in Singapore, 1819–1945: Diaspora in the colonial port city*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Ricci, R. (Ed.) (2016). *Exile in Colonial Asia: Kings, Convicts, Commemoration*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

- Riddick, J. F. (2006). *The history of British India: A chronology*. London: Praeger.
- Risley, H. H., & Gait, E. A. (1903). *Census of India*. 1901 (Vol. I). India: Calcutta: Government Printing, 1903. Part-I, Report.
- Robinson, C. J. (2000). *Black marxism: The making of the black radical tradition*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.
- Sandhu, K. S. (1968). Tamil and other Indian convicts in the Straits Settlements, A.D. 1790–1873. *Proceedings of the First International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies, 1*, 197–208.
- Sandhu, K. S., & Wheatley, P. (Eds.) (1983). *Melaka: The Transformation of a Malay Capital c. 1400–1980* (Vol. 1). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schultz, T. W. (1981). *Investing in people: The economics of population quality*. California: University of California Press.
- Siddique, S., & Shotam, N. P. (1990). *Singapore's little India: Past, present, and future*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Smith, S. (1845). *The Bengal Almanac for 1845 with a companion and appendix*. Calcutta: Bengal-Hurkaru and Chronicle Press.
- Solomon, J. (2016). *A subaltern history of the Indian diaspora in Singapore: The gradual disappearance of untouchability 1872–1965*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Tan, B. (2015). Convict labour in colonial Singapore. *BiblioAsia, 11*(03), 36–42, October–December.
- Turnbull, C. M. (1970). Convicts in the Straits settlements 1826–1867. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 43*(1 (217)), 87–103.
- Williams, E. (1944). *Capitalism & slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Yang, A. A. (2003). Indian convict workers in Southeast Asia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. *Journal of World History, 14*(2), 179–208.
- Yang, A. A. (2021). *Empire of convicts: Indian penal labor in colonial Southeast Asia*. California: University of California Press.

#### **Newspapers [the year at the right represents the first issuing date and place]**

- Straits Times, Singapore, 1845.
- Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register, Singapore, 1824.
- Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser, Singapore, 1835.

#### **Further reading**

- Rahman, G. M. (2022). Colonising the penal capital: Locating the Bengali convicts in cosmopolitan British Malaya. *Asian Studies, The Twelfth International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 12), ICAS Conference Proceedings, 1*, 569–582, Jun 2022. doi: [10.5117/9789048557820/ICAS.2022.066](https://doi.org/10.5117/9789048557820/ICAS.2022.066).

#### **Corresponding author**

Gazi Mizanur Rahman can be contacted at: [rahmangazi@yahoo.com](mailto:rahmangazi@yahoo.com), [gazi.mizanur@bracu.ac.bd](mailto:gazi.mizanur@bracu.ac.bd)

---

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

[www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)

Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)