Indigenous Place Names in the Present Great Andamanese language

Place names have always caught our fascination as there are people and communities who traditionally attach place names with their personal names, as witnessed in South of India. Andaman Islands also represent a rich variety of place names ranging from the indigenous native names to the names kept by the colonizers and the settlers. Place names give us immense information on the culture and priorities of the people residing there. Place names like 'Puta-Tang', 'Jirka-Tang', 'Karma-Tang' and 'Phul-Tang' are all indigenous names. Notice that all these names end in 'Tang' which is actually a modified version of the Great Andamanese word *tong* meaning 'tree'.

Great Andamanese who inhabited the Great Andaman Islands once upon a time, were people who were close to nature, their life was symbiotically connected with the surrounding ecosystem. The usual custom of naming places by these islanders primarily consisted of naming the place after the abundant natural resources of that particular area. Therefore, we come across names such as '*Maro Phong'* (literally Honey-Hole) where honey was found in abundance.

Moreover, place names also indicated the unique topographical feature of the camping area of the indigenous community. Therefore, we have '*Rat-Phor*' (literally big-bamboo-small bamboo), an area near today's Mayabander. Similarlay, an obsolete name like 'Bol Phong' (Bol fish-hole) was used by the Great Andamanese to indicate the region of the present Long Island.

The reality is that each hunter-gatherer community maintained a repertoire of place names according to their relationship to the region and area inhabited by them.

In E.H. Man's dictionary of 'Bea Language' (a southern Great Andamanese language), we come across various place names across the length and breadth of the Andaman Islands. An interesting observation is that 'Bea' people who inhabited the southern Andaman had provided place names even for the northern regions of the Andaman Islands. The truth is that, when they accompanied the British colonizers in their Island expeditions, they were asked to tell the place names, and the clever Bea men instantly gratified them by uttering a new place name by looking at the visual and topographical landscape, which was fully descriptive of the new place.

The native islanders usually kept themselves confined to their respective territories. However, when the British colonizers coaxed them to come out of their abode and took them for various island expeditions, it also gave rise to strengthening of mythology and folktales in the communities. For example, when 'Bea' people were shown the present 'Saddle point' the second highest hill in the Andamans, they were convinced that it was none other than '*Puluga-Chang'* (the abode of the first man).

The tradition of place-naming by the Great Andamanese tribe 'Jero' is equally interesting. Jero were primarily seacoast dwellers and usually kept place names after the seascape. For example, we find place names like 'Toro-Tec'(turtles-leaf) for a place near Mayabander

implying that turtles were in abundance in the sea near this area. It is not surprising that Jero, who were extremely fond of turtle meat so much so they would risk their lives for hunting turtle, found it wittingly suitable to keep this name for the area.

Also, their name for Port Blair, the administrative capital of the colonizers, 'Lao-ter-Nyo' (literally 'house of evils') sounds equally appropriate because it reminds us of the misery the Great Andamanese were brought to by their sojourn in Port Blair.

It is sad that Britishers replaced these names by English names which are very opaque as they fail to relate to the ecology of the land. Consider the following table.

Table 1. Place names of the Andaman Islands used by the present Great Andamanese tribe

Great Andamanese Place Names	Gloss	Post Colonial Names
Khringkosho	A Pujjukar name	Strait Island
Phoco Toye	A place where Phoco flower is found	Islet in front of the Strait Island
Siampsu	A Pujjukar name	An islet by the side of the Strait Island
Jiro-Tauro	Place where Jiro tree is found	An islet near Strait Island's light house
Kachawa	A Pujjukar name	An islet behind the Strait Island
Ilumu Tauro	The island of Onges (Little Andaman)	Little Andaman
Thi-tar-siro	Land near the open sea	Havelock island
Kokolot Barach	A Pujjukar name	An islet near Havelock Island's jetty
Bilikhu-tara-Phong	Cave of Bilikhu, the supernatural in Great Andamanese	Interview Island
Tebi-Shiro	Shores of the open sea	Neil Island as well as for an Island near Mayabander
Boa	land	Baratang Island
Lurua	The first fire/flame was found here	Bluff Island
Rait- Phor	Named after the two kinds of bamboos	Mayabander

	Rait and Phor.	
Mauntenga	Not known	Land fall Island
*Sorobul	Dangerous area	Jarawa areas (South Andaman)
Marakele	Present Great Andamanese still use this name	Andaman archipelago
Boing Taina	Associated with the story of Maya Lephai [whose wife eloped with No]	An island of Jarawas near Bluff Island, Northern part of the Jarawa reserve
Mara Tong	Place where Mar tree is found	A place in Mayabander where Great Andamanese used to live (Now a helipad area)
Gop-ta Pelang	A Pujjukar name. Where animals were killed and butchered.	Name for Chouldari in Pujjukar language
Lao-tara Nyo	House of evils or foreigners	Port Blair
Jirik-ta Phong	A place where Jirik lives	English Island
Thi-ta-umul	A place with lots of undergrowth	Diglipur

* Great Andamanese always considered Jarawas dangerous.

Note: 1. These names are from the present language spoken by the Great Andamanese.

2. Pujjukar is an extinct language once spoken in these islands.