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Author(s)	Miyamoto, Takashi
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A Genealogy of *Kālā Pānī*

Writings of an Indian Convict and their Colonial and Postcolonial Trajectory

Takashi Miyamoto

Introduction

The Hindustani term *kālā pānī* (black water, or the sea) has drawn the attention of various authors, including historians. It was long believed that Indian communities regarded crossing the sea as taboo since ancient times.[1] This prohibition against *kālā pānī* came to be discussed in many ways with the large-scale movement of people across the sea under the British rule in India. In the 19th century, the taboo of *kālā pānī* was discussed in the contexts of penal transportation, overseas deployment of soldiers, and migration under indentureship. Subsequently, this taboo was also widely debated in relation to overseas students, clerks, engineers and merchants.

Studies have focused on the experiences of Indian convicts and other migrants who crossed the *kālā pānī*.[2] Additionally, writers with roots in the South Asian migration to South America and Africa have created diasporic literature. They often portray sea crossings as acts of liberation from social constraints such as patriarchy and caste. Now, *kālā pānī* appears to have become a part of the discourse on self-representation, comparable to the Black Atlantic.[3] Conversely, within South Asia, the postcolonial experience of *kālā pānī*

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[1] See Anderson [2000: 16-18] for a discussion on the concept of *kālā pānī*.
[2] See Anderson [2000; 2007; 2012], Sen [2000], Yang [2021] for historiographies of penal transportation in British India. Numerous studies have explored Indian indentured labourers and other migrants; see the introduction of Bhardwaj and Misrahi-Barak [2022] for a review.
[3] Bates and Carter [2021] examined the history of the *kālā pānī* discourse, including the literary movements of contemporary South Asian diaspora writers.

discourse has been linked to the development of nationalist narratives. The Andaman Islands became India's major penal colony after the Indian Uprising of 1857. Unlike the descendants of South Asian migrants to South America and Africa, the descendants of convicts rarely produced their own stories as a diaspora. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, nationalist 'political' prisoners began to be sent to the colonies, and their voices came to overshadow those of the 'non-political' convicts. The voices of convicts were easily overwritten by stories of 'freedom fighters', and the Andaman Islands became a site for nationalist memory, while the penal colony itself came to be known as *kālā pānī*. However, the relationship between the historical narrative of penal transportation and nationalism has been historically shaped. In this paper, I focus on the text *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb* by Muḥammad Ja'afar Thānēsarī, which is frequently referred to in historical research as an account written by a convict sent to the Andamans.[4] I examine the historical context in which this book was written and trace the various ways it has been interpreted and utilized since its publication.

Penal Transportation and *Kālā Pānī*

Some ancient texts, such as the *Code of Manu*, describe crossing the sea as taboo [Bates and Carter 2021: 37]. The extent to which this belief was shared across Middle and Early Modern Indian societies remains uncertain. However, during the rule of the British East India Company, the theme of *kālā pānī* garnered significant attention and was widely discussed in English writings. References to Hindus' aversion to crossing the sea, driven by fears of losing their castes, even appeared in popular 19th-century English magazines for boys.[5]

These perceptions were widely debated regarding what constitutes appropriate punishment in India and emphasised in discussions about the effectiveness of penal transportation.[6] The history of penal transportation in colonial India dates back to the late 18th century. In 1788, Charles Cornwallis,

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[4] See Sen [2004] for a detailed discussion of Thānēsarī's book.
[5] For example, in 'A Troublesome Pet', *The Boy's Own Paper*, July 1, 1893, 755 (15): p. 639.
[6] For a general understanding of convict history, see Anderson ed. [2018] and Anderson [2021].

then Governor-General of Bengal, recommended the introduction of overseas penal transportation as part of the 'rule of law'. Penang, located on the Malay Peninsula, was established as a penal colony towards the end of the 18th century, and the Strait Settlements became the principal penal colony of East India in the first half of the 19th century. Although the Prison Discipline Committee of 1836–37 did not explicitly use the term *kālā pānī*, it held that crossing the sea would destroy Indian prisoners' ties to caste or society [RCP 1838: 97]. Penal transportation was therefore expected to have a deterrent effect on crime by instilling the fear of losing caste among the Indian population.

After the Indian Uprising of 1857, managing the large number of 'mutineers' arrested during its suppression became a significant challenge. In the Strait Settlements, which had undergone urbanisation by the 19th century, protests arose against the transportation of mutineers due to fears of social unrest. Consequently, the Government of India selected the Andaman Islands as a new penal colony. During the early years of the penal settlement, prisoners captured during the Indian Uprising of 1857 were sent to the Andamans. Over time, the majority of convicts comprised felons convicted of crimes such as murder, robbery, and sedition. Gradually, the term *kālā pānī* came to be understood as a reference to the Andaman penal colony itself.

However, the fear of *kālā pānī* as a punishment may have been perceived as diminishing by the late 19th century. The 1889 Jail Committee Report stated, 'it is not possible to ignore the fact that transportation is no longer a deterrent form of punishment' [RCJ 1889: 137]. Former convicts returning to the subcontinent after being released from the Andaman penal colony began sharing their experiences. According to the report, convicts' stories about leading comfortable lives, facilitated by 'tickets of leave', completely undermined the deterrent effect of penal transportation. In response to this report, C.J. Lyall, an Indian Civil Service officer, and A.S. Lethbridge, who had also served as a member of the 1889 Committee, examined the deterrent effect of transportation during their tour of Port Blair in 1890. They reported:

> Our visits to the Alipore and Presidency Jails and our inspection of the stations of the [Andaman] Penal Settlement have left no doubt in our minds that confinement within the walls of an Indian prison is now a much more

severe form of punishment than transportation, and we are convinced that this fact is well known to the criminal classes. [Lyall and Lethbridge 1890: 1-2]

With the rise of nationalist movements at the end of the 19th century, political prisoners were increasingly transported to the Andamans, where a large prison with a radiational design was built between 1896 and 1906. This new prison, known as the 'Cellular Jail', was designed to house prisoners in separate cells and to impose hard labour during the initial phase of their penal servitude. Political prisoners sent to the penal colony during this period left behind accounts of their experiences, which contributed to shaping the image of the Andamans as a site of memory for the nationalist movement. Such texts include Savarkar's account of his transportation [Sāvarkar 2000 (1966)] and his novel *Kālā Pānī* [Sāvarkar 2019 (1967)], both written in Marathi after his release. These texts played a key role in shaping the image of *kālā pānī* as a symbol of colonial cruelty. In post-independence Port Blair, monuments dedicated to freedom fighters have been erected, and the Cellular Jail has become a popular tourist attraction, serving as a monument to the brutality of colonial rule.[7]

Thus, in postcolonial South Asia, *kālā pānī* is often discussed in association with nationalist narratives. However, historians have also been interested in how *kālā pānī* was imagined in the subcontinent before the rise of the nationalist movement. One of the key texts that draws attention in this context is *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb* [1884/85], written by Muḥammad Ja'afar Thānēsarī. The book was written in Hindustani in the Persian script. However, most previous historical studies on Andaman penal transportation have relied on an English translation of the text, the original of which remains unclear.[8] Moreover, other texts written

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[7] For recent literature on colonial and post-colonial Andamans, see Sen [2010], Vaidik [2010], and Anderson, Mazumdar, and Pandya [2018]. Also, see Rath [2022] for a compilation of historical documents related to the Andamans.

[8] Satadru Sen, who wrote an article focusing on Thānēsarī's book, referred to 'an unpublished English translation' in his possession [Sen 2004: 118 note 6]. The translator in question is not mentioned in Sen's article, and whether Sen referred to the original Urdu text is unknown. The references in his article show the Urdū Markaz edition published in 1964 in Delhi, but it is unclear whether it is the source document for the English translation he used. After Sen's passing, the whereabouts

by Thānēsarī have not been sufficiently addressed in previous works. This study examines the experiences of his texts by reviewing how they were created, recast, and reinterpreted.

Thānēsarī and his Texts

Muḥammad Ja'afar Thānēsarī (1838–1905) was born in the town of Thānēsar, Punjab. Although his family was not wealthy, he gained literacy skills and became involved in court-related businesses such as writing petitions for clients. He eventually held important positions in the town. Meanwhile, he was deeply influenced by the thoughts of Saiyid Aḥmad Barēlvī (1786–1831), who had waged *jihad* against the Sikh kingdom in Punjab during the first half of the 19th century. Thānēsarī was arrested in 1864 for transferring funds to anti-British Muslim groups along the north-western frontier of British India. His original sentence was death, but it was commuted to penal transportation for life. He spent time in the Andaman penal colony from 1865 until he was finally released in 1884.

In addition to his Persian and Hindustani literacy skills, which he had acquired before his exile, Thānēsarī learned to read and write English while in the Andamans. Despite being a convict, British officials appreciated him as a scribe and language teacher. Among these officials was Richard C. Temple, who later became the Chief Commissioner of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and was known as an administrative anthropologist.

Encouraged by these British officials, Thānēsarī began writing books. The titles of three of his books, which can be translated as *History of Wonders* with subtle variations in Arabic word forms, display the Hijri year of publication in their chronograms. The themes of the books are, respectively, the history of Port Blair, an account of his life in the penal colony, and a biography of Saiyid Aḥmad Barēlvī.

***Tārīkh-e 'Ajīb* (History of Port Blair)**

His first book, with the English subtitle *History of Port Blair*, was published in

of his 'unpublished English translation' have remained unknown, but several historians have published works referring to it.

1879. It conveys the history of the Andaman Islands, which Thānēsarī wrote at the suggestion of the British officials who were learning Indian languages from him [Thānēsarī 1879]. The book was published by the renowned Munshi Navalkishor Press, which was actively publishing in Lucknow and Kanpur at the time.[9]

This book describes the geographical location of the Andaman Islands, the history of colonisation, climate and flora, products from the forests and sea (especially wood and shellfish), and customs of the Indigenous people. Thānēsarī's 'ethnographic' description of the Indigenous population was based on existing literature and his own observations. Notably, in his reflections on the origins of the Andamanese people, he offered an interpretation based on the Islamic view of human history, beginning with Adam. Thānēsarī also interpreted the Indigenous people's story of human origins in relation to the Flood of Noah.

Following these geographical and ethnographic observations, the subsequent chapters provide an institutional history of the penal colonies. They offer an overview of the law and administration in the settlement and illustrate the history of governance under successive Superintendents and Chief Commissioners. Thānēsarī also devoted a chapter to Lord Mayo, the Governor-General who was killed by a convict while visiting Port Blair. The book further details prison regulations, outlining the management system under which the convicts lived. It is evident from these accounts that, although a convict, Thānēsarī had access to English sources and could read and understand them adequately. It is also noteworthy that the narrative was written with a pro-British tone. This narrative seems to suggest that he had either somehow 'reformed' from his anti-British stance or was merely attempting to gain the favour and trust of British officials. In his book, Thānēsarī claimed that he was never anti-British.

In his book, Thānēsarī also demonstrates a keen interest in languages, including a table comparing the sentences from various languages spoken in the Andamans with those of Hindi (written in Persian script). The languages listed

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[9] I have seen different impressions of this book in Anjuman Taraqqī Urdū (Karachi), Punjab University Library (Lahore), and the Rekhta.org website, which shows the holdings of several libraries in India. Although different manuscripts for lithographic printing have been used, all the impressions were published by Munshi Navalkishor Press.

include Indigenous languages of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as well as Punjabi, Tamil, Burmese, and other languages spoken in the Indian Ocean region. His comparative linguistic table appears to be amateur work. However, given that Orientalists and administrative anthropologists in British India were greatly interested in languages, it can be understood that Thānēsarī was appropriating the colonial writing style about different cultures.

Thus, the first Hindustani history of the Andaman Islands was an amalgam of Islamic historical views, information from English literature, and the author's ethnographic observations. The text was a node in the existing network of references on the Andamans, presented by an author eager to demonstrate pro-British gestures.[10]

Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb (***Kālā Pānī***)

Thānēsarī's second book was written in 1302 Hijri (1884/85), shortly after his return to his hometown in Punjab [Thānēsarī 1884/85]. The book, which recounts his experiences from 1865 to 1884, including the circumstances before and after his penal transportation, has been reprinted several times under the title *Kālā Pānī*. This text is frequently cited in historical studies of the Andamans.

In this book, he first describes the events that led to his arrest, followed by the trial and sentence of penal transportation. He emphasises the hardships he endured in the prisons of Ambala, Lahore, and Bombay before reaching the Andamans while portraying life in the penal colony itself as relatively pleasant. He further highlights how his connections from his time in Punjab made him a welcomed figure within the society of the penal colony. In addition to serving as a scribe and language teacher, he earned money by writing petitions for other convicts using his English skills. He was also involved in the clandestine acquisition of goods from the Indian subcontinent, which allowed him to accumulate 8,000 rupees before his release in 1883.

Having left behind a wife and two children in Punjab, Thānēsarī married

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[10] The term 'network of references' here refers to Michel Foucault's discussion regarding the unities of discourse in his *Archaeology of Knowledge* [Foucault 1972: 23]. Edward Said's discussion, which refers to Foucault's text, is also significant for the present paper [Said 1983: ch 9].

twice in the Andamans. Although his second wife died shortly thereafter, upon his release, he returned with his third wife and eight children to Punjab, where his first wife and children awaited his return. After his return to Punjab, he capitalised on his language skills and the contacts he had developed with British officials in the Andamans to become a language teacher for British civil servants in Ambala. He was fortunate that Richard Temple, with whom he had become acquainted in the Andamans, was appointed Cantonment Magistrate in Ambala. At the end of the book, Thānēsarī notes that, with Temple's arrival, state surveillance against him in Ambala was relaxed.

Overall, Thānēsarī describes his life in the penal colony as relatively pleasant, though he also stresses how friendly he had been towards the colonial government even before his sentence. The book presents his story in three parts: first, a narrative of suffering until he arrived in the Andamans; second, a narrative of his life in the penal colony as a turning point; and third, a narrative of his return home with wealth and new family members. For him, the key point is to demonstrate that he had been pro-British from the outset and that his arrest was, in fact, a mistake. He does not hesitate to call himself a 'Wahhabi' and admits to sending money to the north-western frontier. However, in his narrative, this is consistent with his pro-British stance. Therefore, his exile should not be interpreted as a story of reformation. However, he does not frame his experience as one of colonial oppression. His suffering on the way to the penal colony is not depicted as an example of colonial tyranny; instead, he presents these hardships as occasional misfortunes, emphasising that divine protection enabled him to overcome them.

Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb has been repeatedly reprinted, with variants that differ in content, leading to confusion. Therefore, it is worthwhile to trace the history of the book's reprints.[11] The original edition is presumed to be the Maṭbaʻ-e Ṭempal Prēs edition, published in 1302 in the Hijri calendar [Thānēsarī 1884/85].[12] It was published in Ambala, where Thānēsarī resided at the time,

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[11]   An earlier version of this discussion was published in Miyamoto [2021: 13-17].
[12]   Jāmiʻah Hamdard (Delhi) and Anjuman Taraqqī Urdu (Karachi) own the original copy of the Maṭbaʻ-e Ṭempal Prēs edition, and I am currently working on a scholarly edition based on it.

and bears a letter of recommendation in English dated 21 April 1885 by Richard Temple. This edition contains passages not found in other editions and differs significantly in structure, as it is not divided into chapters, sections, or paragraphs. In addition, while *Kālā Pānī* (Black Water) is often used as the main title in other editions, this edition simply carries the title *Tawārīkh-e ʿAjīb*. From these features, it can be assumed that this edition is the original or something very close to the original work of Thānēsarī.

The Maḥbūb al-Maṭābaʿ edition does not mention the year of its publication, but based on its condition, it seems to be a relatively early variant [Thāēsarī *n.d.* (a)].[13] The Ṣūfī Prinṭing ēnḍ Pablishing Kampanī edition might be another early variant [Thānēsarī *n.d.* (b)] .[14] An edition titled *Islāmī Teḥrīk kā Mujāhid* (A Warrior of Islamic Movement) was published by Dakkan Pablisharz ēnḍ Prinṭarz [Thānēsarī 1948]. The main part of the book is *Tawārīkh-e ʿAjīb,* but Thānēsarī's preface is omitted. The Sang-e Mīl edition [Thānēsarī 1961 (a)] and the Shuʿāʿ-e Adab edition [Thānēsarī 1961 (b)][15] share the same handwriting, suggesting they likely used a common manuscript for lithographic printing. The Salmān Akēḍmī edition [Thānēsarī 1962] includes commentary and annotations by Muḥammad Aiyūb Qādirī.[16] Sakhāwat Mirzā edited a book containing a collection of Saiyid Aḥmad Barēlvī's letters and *Tawārīkh-e ʿAjīb* [Thānēsarī 1969 (a)]. Saiyid Aḥmad's letters are Persian texts originally included in Chapter 5 of *Tawārīkh-e ʿAjībah* [Thānēsarī (1891): 169-247]. In this edition, Sakhāwat Mirzā translated the letters into Urdu, and the full text of *Kālā Pānī* follows them. Another edition with a preface by Waḥīd al-Dīn Qāsmī, Secretary of All India Dīnī Taʿalīmī Board was also published [Thānēsarī 1969 (b)]. The Maktabah-e Ahl-e Hadīth Ṭrasṭ edition [Thānēsarī *n.d.* (d)] and Ṭāriq Akēḍmī edition [Thānēsarī 1977][17] likely shared a common manuscript for lithographic printing.

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[13] The Rekhta Foundation owns the original copy.
https://www.rekhta.org/ebook-detail/kala-pani-tawareekh-e-ajeeb-mohammad-jafar-thanesri-ebooks-1/ [Last accessed: 2024-03-28]

[14] https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/kala-pani-ya-tawareekh-e-ajeeb-mohammad-jafar-thanesri-ebooks-1 [Last accessed: 2024-03-28]

[15] https://archive.org/details/kala-pani [Last accessed: 2024-03-28]

[16] This book was republished from Idārah-e Yādgār-e Ghālib, Karachi [Thānēsarī 2015]. It was probably re-typed on a computer.

[17] According to the bibliographic information on the back cover of the eighth edition,

Although these manuscripts contain numerous errors and omissions, they are valuable as they illustrate how Thānēsarī was interpreted in later years through their additional commentaries. Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna, also published a version probably based on a copy it holds [Thānēsarī 2003].[18] In recent years, an edition compiled by Muḥammad Ḥāmid Sirāj has been published in both India and Pakistan [Thānēsarī 2016; 2018]. Additionally, there is a Lahore Book City edition [Thānēsarī 2022], and a WhatsApp community released an online text edition in 2022.[19]

Among the editions I have yet to identify, Jaweed Ashraf used the 'third reprint published in 1302 AH / 1899 [sic]'[20] as the original text for his English translation of the book [Khairabadi and Thanesari (Ashraf trans.) 2011: xviii]. Abdali used *Kālā Pānī: Tawārīkh-e ʿAjīb* (Lāhor: Iqbāl Akeḍmī, *n.d.*) as the original text for his abridged English translation [Thanesari (Abdali trans.) 2011]. Hedāyetullāh referred to *Kālāpānī: Dāstān-e ʿAjīb* (Dehlī: Urdū Markaz, 1964) in his Master's thesis [Hedāyetullāh 1970: 180]. Abdali also points out that *Tawārīkh-e ʿAjīb, al-maʿrūf, Tārīkh-e Kālā Pānī* (Faiṣalābād: Idārah-e Ishāʿat al-Maʿārif, 1974), edited by Abū Raiḥān Ẓiyā al-Raḥmān Fārūqī, is held by the Library of Congress.[21]

To date, several English translations have been published. Javed Ashraf performed a complete translation using a base text that appears to be an early variant of the book [Khairabadi and Thanesari (Ashraf Trans.) 2011]. However, there are some errors in his commentary and even in the title of the book: he referred to Penang as part of Burma in his commentary [*Ibid.*: x]; there is an incorrect conversion between the Hijri and Gregorian calendars; and the title of the book read 'Panel Settlement' when it should have read 'Penal Settlement'. The abridged translation by Abdali shows a more careful examination [Thanesari (Abdali Trans.) 2011]. However, he added supplementary information to his

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the first edition was published in 1975.

[18] https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/kala-pani-ya-tawareekh-e-ajeeb-mohammad-jafar-thanesri-ebooks-2 [Last accessed: 2024-03-28]

[19] https://اردو.com/کالا-پانی/مولانا-محمد-جعفر-تھانیسری/ادب[Last accessed: 2024-03-28]

[20] The Hijri calendar 1302 actually corresponds to the Christian year of 1884/85.

[21] https://lccn.loc.gov/2001310557 [Last accessed: 2024-03-28]

translated text outside the original. Further, he used a relatively new variant as the base text. There is also a translation by Madrasah Arabia Islamia, the publication year of which is unknown [Thanesari (Madrasah Arabia Islamia Trans.) *n.d.*]. Unfortunately, the translation is inaccurate and has many omissions, making it unsuitable for use in historical studies.

Tawārīkh-e ʿAjībah (Biography of Saiyid Aḥmad Barēlvī)

The last surviving work of Thānēsarī is a biography of Saiyid Aḥmad Barēlvī, believed to be the first biography of him written in Urdu. Barēlvī was a religious leader in the first half of the 19th century who waged *jihad* against the Sikh kingdom and was killed in the Battle of Balakot in 1831.

Muslims' loyalty to the colonial government was widely suspected in post-Mutiny India. Leading Muslim intellectuals, such as Saiyid Aḥmad Khān, made efforts to demonstrate a pro-British stance [Ahmad Khan 1872]. Conversely, among the few Muslim groups that continued to oppose British rule, some followed Barēlvī's ideology. For example, in his highly influential book *Indian Musalmaans*, W.W. Hunter expressed concern about Muslims influenced by Barēlvī. He specifically named Thānēsarī as one of the 'Wahhabi' anti-British fanatics [Hunter 1871: 87-98].

Thānēsarī attempted to refute Hunter's claims in several parts of his previous book. He argued that the accusation of being an anti-British activist was incorrect. While he did not deny being a 'Wahhabi', nor did he deny the ideological influence of Barēlvī, he sought to demonstrate that Barēlvī's 'Wahhabism'—and by extension, his own—was not anti-British.

Tavārīkh-e ʿAjībah [Thānēsarī 1891] can be seen as a part of his effort to demonstrate his ideological innocence.[22] He stated that the book's goal was to reveal the previously unknown accomplishments of Barēlvī to the public and provide an accurate account of his life. This goal was necessary to counter the

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[22] I have assumed that the Bilālī Stīm Prēs edition published from Ambala [Thānēsarī (1891)] may be the first edition. However, it is necessary to carefully compare it with the Maṭbaʿ Fārūqī edition published in Delhi [Thānēsarī 1891/92]. Subsequent reprints include the Ṣūfī Prinṭing ēnḍ Pablishing Kampanī edition [Thānēsarī *n.d.* (c)]. Nafīs Akēḍmī published a reprint [Thānēsarī 1968] and an Urdu translation of Barēlvī's letters originally written in Persian [Thānēsarī 1969].

malicious discourse against Muslims, as propagated by Hunter and others, which had influenced the *Sarkār-e Angrēz* (British government). Barēlvī's holiness is emphasised in this biography, and numerous miracles are recounted. According to Thānēsarī, Barēlvī was a Messiah descended from Adam, and his teachings and actions were unrelated to anti-British ideologies. Thānēsarī stresses that Barēlvī's *jihad* was aimed at the oppression of the Sikhs at the time and not at the British. He also writes that Barēlvī went into hiding during the Battle of Balakot but would eventually return as the Messiah.

Thus, while professing his devotion to Barēlvī, Thānēsarī argued that Barēlvī's ideology was not inherently anti-British. He sought to demonstrate his loyalty to the British Raj by portraying a 'harmless' image of Barēlvī. In this context, it is evident that Thānēsarī's *kālā pānī* experience was also framed as a narrative that affirmed his Islamic faith while simultaneously expressing his allegiance to British rule.

The Network of References in which Thānēsarī Wrote

Let me now examine the networks and links of the texts surrounding Thānēsarī's writings.[23] When closely analysing passages in *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb* [Thānēsarī 1884/85], where he refers to his earlier work [Thānēsarī 1879], some discrepancies emerge. By examining the variations in these descriptions, the evolutionary trajectory of a network of references may be observed.

Take, for example, Thānēsarī's description of the Indigenous people of the Andamans. In *Tārīkh-e 'Ajīb* [Thānēsarī 1879], he portrayed the physical characteristics of the Indigenous people as follows:

> Yeh lōg cār fuṭ sē pānc fuṭ cār inch tak ūncē mi*thl* Ḥabshiyōṇ kē siyāh fām gōl sar ānkhēṇ ubhrī hu'ī g*hūnghar wālē bāl*. Magar nihāyat maẓbūṭ hōtē haiṇ.

> These people are four to five feet four inches tall, black like Abyssinians, with round heads, eyes popped, and <u>curly hair</u>, but they are very robust.

[*Ibid.*: 15][24]

The expression 'ghūnghar wālē' is a common Hindustani descriptive phrase meaning 'curly' when referring to hair. Next, let us examine how it is described in *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb* [Thānēsarī 1884/85].

> Yeh lōg cār fuṭ sē pānc fuṭ cār inch tak ūncē miṯhl Ḥabshiyōn̲ kē siyāh fām gōl sar ānkhēn̲ ubhrī hu'ī sar par <u>bhēṛ kēsē bāl</u> magar nihāyat maẕbūṯ aur qavī hōtē hain̲.

> These people are four to five feet four inches tall, black like Abyssinians, with round heads, eyes popped, and <u>sheep-like hair</u> on their heads, but they are very robust and powerful. [*Ibid.*: 47]

Here, the expression is changed to 'sheep-like hair' (bhēṛ kēsē bāl). As the expressions in the rest of the sentences are similar, it is likely that the modifiers were intentionally substituted. This phrase in *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb* appears to have a textual origin. Frederic J. Mouat, Inspector General of Prisons in Bengal, conducted a research expedition to find a suitable location for establishing a penal colony in the Andamans after the Indian Uprising of 1857. In his account of his expedition, *Adventures and Researches among the Andaman Islanders*, he described the physical characteristics of the Indigenous people of the Andamans as follows:

> Their hair was of <u>a woolly texture</u>, and their noses of the orthodox flatness. Their lips were thick and projecting, giving an animal-like expression to their unpleasing countenances, which were rarely seen to be lighted up by any amiable feeling. [Mouat 1863: 275]

Mouat uses the adjective 'woolly' in several instances [*Ibid.*: 29, 44, 273, 282, 329, 339]. A word-for-word translation of this into Hindustani seems to be the

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[24] Words underlined by me for emphasis. Urdu texts were romanised and translated by me. The same applies to the following.

expression 'sheep-like hair' (bhēṛ kēsē bāl) in *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb*. However, Mouat's text is not the first instance of this expression. He referred to *Encyclopédie des Gens du Monde*, compiled in France between 1833 and 1844 [*Ibid.* 43-44].

> Ils sont d'une taille grèle, d'un teint noir; <u>ils ont les cheveux crépus et laineux</u> et le nez aplati.

> They are of a slender build with a dark complexion; <u>they have frizzy and woolly hair</u> and flat noses. [*Encyclopédie des Gens du Monde* 1833: 697]

An even older example of this expression can be found in a text by Colebrook, who explored the Andamans at the end of the 18th century.

> Their limbs are ill formed and slender, their bellies prominent, and, like the Africans, they have <u>woolly heads</u>, thick lips, and flat noses. [Colebrook 1799: 405-406]

The expression 'sheep-like' (bhēṛ kēsē) in Thānēsarī's *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb* appears to have originated from the English adjective 'woolly', which has long been used to describe the hair of the Indigenous people of the Andamans. The expression 'curly' (ghūnghar wālē) was likely replaced with 'sheep-like' owing to Thānēsarī reading books written in English. This change may seem trivial. However, it signifies a moment when Hindustani writings began to connect with the network of references that had developed over decades regarding the Andaman Islands. His newly acquired English proficiency and access to the archive of texts accumulated in the penal colony enabled this connection.

The texts subsequently added to this archive included works by anthropologists, such as Richard Temple and Radcliffe-Brown. Temple, who was acquainted with Thānēsarī, even wrote a letter of recommendation for *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb* while stationed in Ambala as Cantonment Magistrate. Thānēsarī's text emerged from this network.

Postcolonial Trajectory of Thānēsarī's *Kālā Pānī*

After the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the colonial textual network within which Thānēsarī's books had been written quickly fell into oblivion. His exile was subsequently 'misread' as a narrative of political activism.

Mas'ūd 'Ālam Nadvī, a prolific author closely associated with Abū al-A'lā Maudūdī, wrote about Thānēsarī's exile experience in his *Hindustān kī Pehlī Islāmī Taḥrīk* (Early Islamic Movements of Hindustan) [Nadvī (1952)], drawing on *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb*. In this work, Nadvī portrayed Thānēsarī as a figure who engaged in an anti-British struggle underpinned by strong Islamic faith. Despite Thānēsarī's explicit pro-British gestures in his writings, Nadvī interprets his movement as 'actually' aligning with broader political Muslim movements.[25]

Since independence, *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb* has been repeatedly reprinted under the title *Kālā Pānī*. Many editions were published in India and Pakistan, particularly during the 1960s and 70s.[26] These reprints established the work as a representative text on *kālā pānī* in Urdu literature. As a result, Thānēsarī's name became widely recognised as the author of this work. However, his two other works have not received much attention.[27] This seems to have led to *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb* being read in isolation, disconnected from the network of references within which it was originally written.

In the 1970s, Thānēsarī's image as a political Muslim became associated with that of 'freedom fighters'. In his *Jang-e Āzādī 1857* (Independence War of 1857), Muḥammad Ayūb Qādirī wrote about Thānēsarī [Qādirī 1976: 70-89]. Prior to this work, Qādirī had also compiled a scholarly edition of *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb* with

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[25] Shāhīn Fārūqī expressed a similar view, emphasising the ideological connection between Barēlvī and Thānēsarī in his preface to *Islāmī Teḥrīk kā Mujāhid* or *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb* [Thānēsarī 1948]. Likewise, Muḥammad Sarwar Tāriq and Muḥammad Khālid Saif emphasised the genealogical relationship between Thānēsarī and the thought of Ahl-e Hadīth in their commentaries [Thānēsarī *n.d.* (d); 1977].

[26] Among the copies printed in the 1970s and 1980s, I have identified impressions of the Tāriq Akēḍmī edition (1977; 1989) and the Sang-e Mīl edition (1972; 1982). It appears that both publishers have continuously produced reprints of the book. Raja refers to an impression of the Tāriq Akeḍemī edition printed in 2004 [Raja 2006: 59-64]. I have copies of the Sang-e Mīl edition printed in 1993 and 2018 in my possession. Other editions may have been published, but I have not identified hem.

[27] I was only able to locate reprints of *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajībah* from the late 1960s [Thānēsarī 1968; 1969].

commentaries [Thānēsarī 1962]. In Qādirī's writings, Thānēsarī was portrayed as both a *mujāhid* and a freedom fighter. Within the national framework of Pakistan, Qādirī found no contradiction in depicting Thānēsarī as simultaneously embodying both roles. Qādirī's views on Thānēsarī remain influential among contemporary authors.[28]

However, in recent years, Thānēsarī's image as a freedom fighter has been further emphasised, while his portrayal as a *mujāhid* has been marginalised. In 2010, Saʿīd published a directory of activists involved in the Indian Uprising of 1857. Thānēsarī was listed among the fighters of the 'war of independence' [Saʿīd 2010: 81-83]. The book was first published in Delhi, followed by a Pakistani edition released in Lahore two years later [Saʿīd 2012]. It was one of numerous books published in both India and Pakistan around 2007 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Indian Uprising. On that occasion, many publications referred to the uprising as the 'first war of independence', a term popularised earlier by Savarkar [Savarkar 1909].

With the rapid rise of Hindu nationalism in India, pressure on the Muslim community has intensified. In this context, an impetus emerged to highlight the role of Muslims in the 'first war of independence' as a way to underscore their contribution to the building of the Indian nation. At the same time, emphasising the Muslim contribution to the 'first war of independence' does not contradict the national narrative in Pakistan. Consequently, the 'first war of independence' of 1857 has been reaffirmed as a shared past that both Indian and Pakistani Muslims can safely talk about. Thānēsarī's writings are now interpreted within this context, even though they were not directly connected to the Uprising of 1857.

Conclusion

I examined the colonial and postcolonial trajectory of another *kālā pānī* discourse, distinct from the diasporic *kālā pānī* literature recently highlighted in scholarship. Thānēsarī's works were written as he learned English and encountered existing texts on the Andamans written in English. His text emerged

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[28] See, for example, the editor's preface to Thānēsarī [2018] by Muḥammad Ḥāmid Sirāj.

within a colonial network of references, wherein he developed a pro-British discourse through dialogue with other texts. In his writings, there was no contradiction between expressing a pro-British attitude and articulating his 'Wahhabi' Islamic faith. Furthermore, he improvised a writing strategy that portrayed Saiyid Aḥmad Barēlvī as a figure 'safe' for the colonial regime.

However, with the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, his texts began to be read differently. His narrative is now understood as a story of political Islam, and his writings have been reinterpreted as aligned with the narrative of nationalism. More recently, his writings have been referred to in discussions that seek to emphasise the contribution of Muslims in the 'first war of independence'. While the context and purports of his writings have faded into obscurity, *Tawārīkh-e 'Ajīb* has become *Kālā Pānī* and continues to be repurposed by various forces in different ways as a 'useful past' in the postcolonial nation-states.

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