Significance of Narrating Island-ness:
Andaman and Nicobar Islands in Contemporary Indian Writing

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COVID 19 reminded us that "no man is an island" rather our diseases, geographies, bodies and futures are connected. For us who live on the mainland in India, the Andaman and Nicobar are beautiful, green islands that are also markers of our borders. Recently they have been part of news reports as the most significant outposts of our identity as a nation and subcontinent in the tropics. Initially these islands seemed like an exotic dreamland sold by tourist agencies and LTC (Leave Travel Concession) packages given to Central Government Employees which included Lecturers such as me. In these tourism narratives, the island-ness of the Andaman and Nicobar means a lush, untouched landscape that lies tucked away from the dust, pollution and noise of city life that most of us inhabit. They are almost imaginary rather than real. For mainlanders, 'island-ness' often means isolation and remoteness that needs to be preserved for its 'exotic' locales, flora, fauna and peoples. However, these islands are part of India, the nation state and South Asia, the subcontinent. India just celebrated its platinum jubilee year in 2022, but as a subcontinent, it has a much longer history stretching back thousands of years. At its southernmost tip, about 1200 km from mainland, lie the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Andaman Sea. These islands comprise the 'largest archipelago system in the Bay of Bengal, consisting of about 306 islands and 206 rocks and rocky outcrops. Only 38 of these islands are inhabited (Sekhsaria 2019, xxix).' The islands are inhabited by the Great Andamenese, the Onge, the Jarawa and the Sentinelese communities. These island communities hardly make it to

mainland news. Since December 2004, the case has been different. In 2004, the tsunami and earthquake created havoc and caused large-scale devastation in the islands as well as Southeast Asia. The tsunami was a wakeup call about how little we know about the Earth we inhabit and how our pasts, present and future across the islands, South Asia and Southeast Asia are connected. In the aftermath of the calamity, discussions on sustainability and development in islands became prime subjects.

In environmental and sustainability discourse, islands either become 'high-profile symbols of transforming planetary conditions' or 'laboratories' (Pugh and Chandler 2021, 6) to study the ramifications of climate change, tourism, consumerist acquisition and construction on a smaller scale. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a test case in the same format. To think about them in the context of ecology, sustainability and literature, I choose two narratives, one fiction and another journalistic reportage. It is important to note that both narrators were former journalists and live in Mumbai, however like me none of them is native to Andaman and Nicobar Islands as such.

Pankaj Sekhsaria teaches at the Centre for Technology Alternatives for Rural Areas at IIT Bombay.[1] He has been a chronicler of the region's history and environment and the *Islands in Flux*: *The Andaman Nicobar Story* (2017, 2019) is a compilation of his reportage on the region which he has been visiting and studying. His text documents the history of environmental crises and development policies that have influenced the archipelago in almost the last three decades. The 2019 edition of his book includes a reprint of an academic paper published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, a set of appendices consisting of Supreme Court Judgements on the Andaman Trunk Road and two articles by fellow journalists Zubair Ahmed and Janaki Lenin and an updated timeline of the history of the islands. In Sekhsaria's reportage, most statements are buttressed with textual evidence that includes reports, statistics, personal interviews, photographs, field trips and observations made by the author over the last three decades.

1 https://www.ctara.iitb.ac.in/en/faculty-profile/prof-pankaj-sekhsaria

Latitudes of Longing (2018) is Shubhangi Swarup's first novel, which is divided into four novellas called 'Islands', 'Faultline', 'Valley' and 'Snow Desert'. Her narrative begins from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and then leaps and bounds across Myanmar to Kathmandu to end in the Kashmir Valley. Zikmund (2020) puts it succinctly when they argue that the "four disparate stories are connected like a baton being passed between runners in a relay race." The first novella is set in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, where Swarup locates the story of an Indian couple, the Oxford educated scientist and India's first Commonwealth Scholar Girija Prasad and his clairvoyant wife Chanda Devi who is a gold medallist in Mathematics and Sanskrit. Girija Prasad lands up in the Islands as he is given the task of setting up the National Forestry Service by the first Prime Minister in the first year of Indian Independence in 1948. Along with the couple, their cottage is inhabited by ghosts such as a goat that doesn't stop bleating, Lord Goodenough the British official, a Japanese soldier, among others. Chanda Devi can see and communicate with them. She "feels for ghosts and enjoys the laconic company of trees (2019, 5)." A devout believer in ritual worship and a vegetarian, Chanda Devi saves Girija Prasad from a crocodile attack and he is enamored by her powers to feel and be in sync with nature's beauty, mystery and power on these islands. Very early into the marriage, Girija Prasad gives up eating meat and focuses all his attention on his wife and cataloging and documenting the flora and fauna of the islands. They have a daughter who loves the sea but dreams of snow. In the second novella, we read about Rose Mary who is from the Karen nation that escaped persecution in Myanmar and settled in the middle Andaman district.[2] Caught in an abusive marriage, Rose Mary had to give up her young son and later she became a domestic help with Girija Prasad and Chanda Devi at Goodenough Bungalow. Meanwhile the boy names himself Plato and begins his life as a student activist and Communist who learns to fight against the Military Junta. The novella tells the story of Rose Mary's attempt to help her son escape Myanmar/Burma with the help of a sixty year old Thapa, a small-time trafficker who brings Plato's news to his mother. Thapa's story is set in Kathmandu and the backdrop of the Himalayas. The last novella called Snow Desert features Apo, the eighty-seven year old grand old man who lives in the Drakpo region of Southeastern Tibet. Originally named Tashi Yeshe, he lived in Changthang only to settle in the Valley

2 For more on the Karen people see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karen_people_in_the_Andaman_Islands

later. In this last novella, Apo meets Rana, the grandson of Girija Prasad who has also become a scientist and works for the Indian Army at the Kshirsagar Glacial Complex. Rana studies the Karakoram Mountains and always carries a sea shell which belongs to his mother, Devi. The seashell reminds us of the origins of his family as well as the living species that first inhabited the sea, the land and the tallest mountains. Each novella including the last one in *Latitudes of Longing* is linked to another like a series of Russian dolls with a core of archipelagic and anthropocenic thought that connects the human with the non-human.

Girija Prasad explains this connection to his grandson whom he meets as a ghost: "Just like I learnt about mountains by studying the islands. If you reflect upon it, you will see connections and relationships illuminating the most disconnected things (2021, 310-311)". Swarup connects all landscapes and characters in one giant sweep of language, time and wordplay. From the erstwhile past that connected Andaman and Nicobar Islands to Burma and Southeast Asia as well as the Himalayas, we read about links between amber, butterflies, saffron and Cheemo, the mythical creature of the Tibetans. Her narrative straddles multiple contexts of time and history from the colonial to the contemporary and the Anthropocene.[3]

We can unravel strands of her narrative to reveal the complex status of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the national imagination as well as Swarup's own privileged position as a writer in Indian literature in English. Her fictional representation engages with the history of the islands through British colonial rule, late nineteenth century capitalism and development under the Indian government since 1948. However, at one level at the heart of her representation lies the Anthropocene, at another level it is a postcolonial narrative which traces the colonial past of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands under the British and then the Japanese.

3 The term Anthropocene was first used by Paul Crutzen in 1999 when he wanted to describe the geological effect Homo Sapiens began to have on the global system. Later he built on it to argue how human beings had driven the earth-system into a new geological epoch. This conceptual framework was soon shared and had influential and controversial responses, marked by the formation of the Anthropocene Working Group in 2009 led by Jan Zalaciewicz, a Paleobiologist. For more see Will Steffen, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen and John McNeill, 'The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives,' Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society 369 (2011): 842-67.

The novel engages with the theme of wider geological change taking place with global warming and tsunamis, yet there lies a 'central paradox of simultaneous sovereignty and vulnerability' of human beings in the Anthropocene (Baishya and Kumar 2022, 305). Addressing postcolonial ecocriticism and Anthropocene studies is a complex task ridden with debates (Huggan and Tiffin 2010). However, Baishya and Kumar reiterate the significance of using the Anthropocene as a conceptual framework when they posit:

> Colonialism and capitalism have remade the planet drastically and pushed us towards the crises we are beset with today. Instead of an undifferentiated anthropos, a particular section of the human species that benefited his-torically from colonialism and capitalism are at the root of the Anthropocene crisis. Although we agree broadly with the critiques of the undifferentiated anthropos in these critiques of monohumanist narratives, we continue to use the term Anthropocene because, as a geophysical stratigraphic marker, the term encompasses a lot more than just the globalizing histories of colonialism and capitalism (2022, 308).

However, I would argue that the postcolonial strand is so intricately entwined with the Anthropocene in the context of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands that we must begin to address their 'island-ness' through issues of language and the location of the writer in English. It is necessary to acknowledge that we, the author of this paper, Sekhsaria and Swarup whose narratives are studied, are not original inhabitants of these islands we choose to study. Our acts of naming and nomenclature of these islands make them the basic block on which our comprehension and narration of their 'island-ness' is based.

Naming and Nomenclature in English/Hindi: Colonial to Postcolonial Imaginaries

Swarup's choice of English as a language and her text as part of the larger corpus of Indian fiction in English is significant in postcolonial contexts. This also reveals a bold shift among these narratives which attempt to grapple with the Anthropocene. She alludes to the Pangea when all continents were connected, shows the interlocked histories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Myanmar and

the glacial warming that threatens the Himalayas leading to the transformation of Karakoram mountains. In his book, the *Great Derangement*: *Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), Amitav Ghosh says that the cataclysmic occurrences of the tsunami or the tornado that hit Delhi in 1978 when he was in the University initially seem to be uncanny and strange experiences. But as Ghosh writes, in the history of the novel, fantasy and fairytale or romance narratives prior to the modern novel always included natural calamities and disasters (Ghosh 2016, 21). It is only in the modern novel, that a "relocation of the unheard-of toward the background (takes place)… while the everyday moves into the foreground (22)."[4] In the context of the realist novel, the novel (till recently) has never "been forced to confront the centrality of the improbable (Ghosh 2016:22)". For Ghosh, it is hard to incoprorate the ecological crisis[5] into fictional representation:

> …the Anthropocene presents a challenge not only to the arts and humanities but also to our common-sense understandings and beyond that to contemporary culture in general… for let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination (12).

In one way Swarup is forging a new narrative by attempting to represent ecological crisis, the threat toward climate and culture through a non-realist mode of representation. However, when she chooses English to produce the island-ness of the Andaman and Nicobar, her narrative collides with earlier colonial articulations of 'culture' and 'representation'. Indian writing English is always haunted by its colonial inheritance and Swarup inadvertently reinforces that when she chooses to begin the story of the Andamans with the politics of naming. She narrates,

> In the Andamans, species lacked names. For the longest time, no one could colonize the islands, for the impenetrable thicket hid more than just natural history. It hid tribes left behind by the original littoral migration across the Indian

4 Franco Moretti ed. 'Serious Century: From Vermeer to Austen' in The Novel, Volume (2006): 372 cited in Ghosh 2016: 22.

5 For more on Himalayan crisis, see Vaishnavi Chandrashekar,'As Himalayan Glaciers Melt, a Water Crisis Looms in South Asia,' https://e360.yale.edu/features/himalayas-glaciers-climate-change. October 3, 2022.

> Ocean. People who preferred to read minds over the obfuscations of language and clothed themselves in nothing but primitive wrath. Who were equipped with only bow and arrows to fend off the syphilis of civilization (2017, 9).

Is Swarup using an ironic tone or has her fantastic mode/frame coalesced with Lord Goodenough's perspective as a British colonizer? Beginning with the colonial practice of naming Andamans and their location as a primary site or 'origin story' for a scientist makes her fictional storytelling much weaker in comparison to Sekhsaria's reportage.

Sekhsaria's use of non-fictional representation coupled with its insightful critique of capitalism, contemporary governmental policies begins with a powerful reminder that we are discussing lands that belong to indigenous communities of the Andamanese, the Onge, the Jarawas and the Sentinelese. Enriching our understanding of their histories and knowledge systems, he reminds us that all these communities have their own names for the islands we speak of as Andaman and Nicobar. For example, Little Andaman Island is called Ilumu Tauro (the island of the Onges) and Neil Island is called Tebi-Shiro (Shores of the open sea) by the present Great Andamanese tribe (2019, 17-18) and more [6]. How can we begin to think of 'islands' and 'island-ness' without even referring to these names? On their colonial past, we have work by historians such as Aparna Vaidik (2010) but what about the history prior to that? In contemporary times, when these islands are named yet again, how do we understand their 'island-ness'?

Recently Prime Minister Narendra Modi has renamed 21 islands by names of 21 Param Vir Chakra awardees as well as the three main islands in January 2022 when he celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Indian Government first made by the Azad Hind Army led by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. According to the official Press Release by the Press Information Bureau:

> Prime Minister Modi said, "The voices of that unprecedented passion along with immense pain are still heard from the cells of the Cellular Jail today." The Prime Minister lamented that the identity of Andaman was associated with the symbols of slavery instead of the memories of the freedom struggle and said, "Even the

6 Sekhsaria shares a long table of names of islands drawn from Anvita Abbi's Dictionary of the Great Andamanese Language (2012).

> names of our islands had the imprint of slavery." The Prime Minister recalled his visit to Port Blair four-five years ago to rename the three main islands and informed, "Today Ross Island has become Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Island, Havelock and Neil Islands have become Swaraj and Shaheed Islands." He noted that the names, Swaraj and Shaheed were given by Netaji himself but no importance was given even after independence." (23 January 2023, Delhi).

Sekhsaria reminds us that:

> First, the British called them something else and now, we want to call them something else again. If indeed the places have to be renamed, should not an effort first be made to find out what the original people had named them, why they were so named, what their significance was and which names are still in use by them (2019, 19).

The Islands might seem 'isolated' or physically 'remote' from the mainland but in no way are they marginal to the political imagination or ideology of nation-hood rather they have always been significant for the making of the Indian nation-state. Their history as a penal settlement around Cellular Jail under British colonial rule and as a physical territory marking the sea-scape of the Indian peninsula shapes their present status.

Islandness, Anthropocene and Crisis of Representation in Fiction

In her study of the non-human agency in Swarup's novel, Rahn (2021) praises her style as it "envisions the agentic diversity of India's environment" and its attempts at "counterbalancing human ideas of temporality with planetary logics of deep time… for more open and equivocal manners of reflection (351)." To illustrate, in the last novella called Snow Desert, we witness a conversation between the Scientist Rana and Apo about K2 or Kechu as Apo insists on calling it. Apo reminds the young Scientist that

> When human bloodshed seeps into the cracks of the land, the earth's scabs and wounds cannot heal… They can only fester. Your violence and your wars are like gangrene to the earth's flesh. You possess gadgets that can take you to the moon,

> yet you are blind to the mountains and rivers right in front of you. We have hacked Hindustan into a hundred islands with our borders, mutinies and wars. It is crumbling into the ocean. The Kechu is rising because the Himalayas are sinking (298).

Rana is shocked by the way Apo articulates and explains what the scientists have been trying to study for ages. He has met the ghost of his grandfather Girija Prasad who reminds him the importance of learning, and openness to the ideas of deep time and the non-human. Samanta Biswas and Niranjana Chakraborty reiterate that the nonhuman plays a significant role in the *Latitudes of Longing*. In it 'the non-human could be the landscape that dreams, the amber that could well have been Plato, the woman who talks to trees, and the old man who can predict earthquakes (2022, 20).' Apart from their cartographic and historical significance these islands are extremely diverse in the flora and fauna which are endemic to them but how does climate change affect them? It is this natural diversity that forms the basis of their 'island-ness' as isolated and to be preserved, but do we want to preserve it for touristic consumption or to prevent any harm to a fragile and frail environment we inhabit?

Flora and Fauna in Abundance and Nonhuman Diversity

Discussing Climate change and history, Dipesh Chakrabarty raises a complex question:

> The literature on climate change thus reconfigures an older debate on anthropocentricism and so-called nonanthropocentricism that has long exercised philosophers and scholars interested in environmental ethics: do we value the nonhuman for its own sake or because it is good for us? (2014, 19)

Citing it as a moral rift within the anthropocene, Chakrabarty delineates the longer history of religious thought and philosophic tradition which reminds us that the human species is not at the center of this Earth or the planetary system. Both Sekhsaria and Swarup's narratives reiterate that we cannot afford to neglect the havoc wreaked by the human species as it endangers this Earth and puts its fellow species of non-humans at risk. Sekhsaria's narrative highlights the non-human diversity of the Islands by providing a rich corpus of information on the

animals, insects, birds and more. For example, he tells us about the neglected status of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as nesting grounds of the eight species of threatened turtles (2019, 98-99, 102-104). The turtles' grounds are most threatened by dogs, which were brought to the islands by the British around 1860s which makes one realize the direct consequence of colonial expansion. The deeper continuities with the erstwhile colonial policies of introducing the logging industry, sand mining and the subsequent Indian government's political policies post Independence not include relocation of migrants and establishment of settlements. Whether it is the people of Karen nation from Burma who figure through the character of Rose Mary and Plato in the '*Latitudes of Longing*', or the East Pakistani refugees that Sekhsaria mentions or the setting up of Andaman Public Works Division which brought in administrative staff from the mainland, these Islands have had too many outsiders settle in now. The Andamanese, the Onge, the Jarawas, the Sentinelese have been denied any agency or representation for so many years even though it is their nations that the British and later Indian government continues to exploit and dominate.

Home to more than 400 types of coral reef, more than 214 species of butterflies and the high level of endemism with about 40 percent of the 244 species and subspecies in the case of birds and 60 percent of the 58 species of mammals, these islands have been rich "due to the isolation of the islands from mainland Asia (2019, 109)." The Islands boast of rich biodiversity and the flora and fauna endemic to the Islands are far from completely documented or classified. A new species of birds, fungi or insect is found every few years.

So how do we articulate this 'island-ness'? Does the answer lie in perceiving it in terms of alterity or isolation? Where do we locate the peoples who have always inhabited these islands and have the most complex histories? What about the interaction or conflict between the indigenous communities and settlers, traders and travelers whose numbers increase each day? At one level the loss of habitat and extinction in terms of diversity is high especially with rising numbers of tourists and development plans by Niti Ayog since 2018.

Kala pani or Cellular Jail tourism being promoted today is centric to the idea or symbolism of patriotic pilgrimage. The consequences of this footfall will be

huge in these islands (Sekhsaria 2019, 163-166). Although, for decades most on the mainland have associated development with expansion in infrastructure and scientific progress. For example the setting up of the largest matchbox factory or logging industry under the British and then the newly independent Indian state (Sekhsaria 2019, 23-32) or the construction of the Andaman trunk road (Abraham 2018, 15-16) that runs through the Protected Area meant to preserve the Onge and Jarawa tribes, the repercussions of these actions have threatened the islanders and the islands with disease and violence. Despite the Supreme Court Judgment in 2018, the local administration continues to neglect the threat to island ecologies and indigenous communities. Sekhsaria's statistical analysis reveals the steady decline in the population of the Great Andamanese, Onge and the Jarawas in comparison to the large numbers of outsiders and the conflicted nature of our national vision (Sekhsaria 66). Mainland narratives on these islands do not address the Indian nation's negligence towards the precarious and fragile nature of the island ecosystem and the continued discrimination and marginalization of lives and rights of the communities indigenous to the islands. The islands again made it to national news in 2018 when they had another uninvited traveller.

Missionaries and Military: From Colonial to Postcolonial Nation-Making

In 2018, the death of the American missionary John Chau at the hands of the Sentinelese Tribe, indigenous to the islands made it to international headlines. Chau's death became a subject of international debate and the role of missionaries as well as the rights of the indigenous islanders (Conroy 2019). To add to it, the transformed coastline due to the Tsunami in 2004 has made the Nicobar Island complex the subject of great military interest. The Indian State has announced plans to invest Rs 5,650 crore to develop an inclusive military infrastructure to strengthen the Andaman and Nicobar Command. The island that was devastated during the tsunami and saw the largest number of human loss, might now become an important military outpost and asset as the Indian State tries to secure its position and supremacy in the Indo-Pacific waters (Pant and Bose 2023; Abraham 2018, 02).

There is a constant tussle to make Andamans more 'Indian' both culturally as well as ethnically and to bolster the security of the Indian nation-state through them. Like other islands, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are seen as isolated, biologically diverse yet in need to be connected to secure the political boundaries of our nation. Battisti et al (2022) refer to this as the 'isolation-connection-dialectic' in the context of islands across the world:

> Due to their specific position in the national spaces and narratives, insular territories have been traditionally granted a differentiated legal status. Remoteness, thus, does not mean, isolation but it can entail strong territorial sovereignty when it comes to maritime borders. As a result of this isolation-connection-dialectic, many countries, most of them continental, include within their national borders, insular territories, distributed, all over the Earth's surface. Even a hybrid socio-political ensemble like the European Union recognises outermost regions, overseas countries, and territories within its territorial realm. Many of these are islands (2022, 4)

Moving in a radically different direction, Itty Abraham (2018) pushes us to alter our 'frame' or perspective on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Instead of seeing them as outposts to a territorial state in need of protection we need to:

> …locate the Andamans in relation to nearby Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia, as well as narratives that begin by acknowledging the islands as a global maritime junction, rather than reducing it to a remote possession of the Indian mainland or other metropolitan centers. Hence, to come to terms with the Andamans today requires us to … restore the archipelago to the western littoral of the Andaman Sea by redrawing the geographies of this maritime space (Abraham 2018, 5).

Abraham does this by 'imagining the archipelago as a "sea of islands" that have long-standing relations with the coastlines and communities to the east and south – "Southeast Asia" – as well as with the people and customs of the more familiar continental mainland to the west and north – "South Asia" (2018, 5).

We need more studies on both fronts, the larger archipelagic connections and the more focused specific analysis on the way settlers have transformed these islands. The future of Andman and Nicobar Islands is caught and lies entangled amidst

geo-political conversations. It is time we tried to address the anthropocene, the archipelagic and the post-colonial simultaneously. In *Latitudes of Longing*, these islands are connected, fragmented and yet broken in fantastic, circulatory frames beyond the present-ness of time and the rootedness of land towards the larger swathes and sweep of the anthropocene. For academics like me, our narratives need to be somewhere midway. Moving beyond the representation of the archipelago, we need to adopt archipelagic thinking. Island-ness has to become a conceptual model of thought and not merely a subject of our narration. Writing about archipelagic thinking, the gifted Caribbean scholar, Eduardo Glissant of the *Treatise of the Whole World* says:

> We are all young and ancient, on the horizons. Atavistic cultures and composite cultures, former colonizers and colonized, oppressed and oppressors today.... The advantage of an island is that one can go right round it, but an even more precious advantage is that the trip can never be finished. And see how most of the islands in the world form archipelagos with others. Every archipelagic thought is a trembling thought of non-presumption, but also of openness and sharing (2018, 143).

Conclusion

Swarup's narrative jumps from one cartographic, political and geographical frame to another in complex yet beautiful leaps through time and contexts. Her stories show the intricate connections between islands, fault lines, valleys, mountains and snow deserts as well as the flora and fauna. The scientific temperament of Girija Prasad and his grandson Rana has to make way for the intuitive and spiritual Chanda Devi who speaks to the trees as well as Apo who predicts earthquakes. The sea shell that Rana carries is a reminder of his mother as well as the sound of waves where life first began. The Andaman centipede that Rose Mary kills to save human life or the tree that commits suicide by giving it all to its seeds, are all symbols as well as examples of nonhuman that can share with humans the intricate yet complex web of knowledge, intuition and deep time. The question is if we are keen to listen.

In this paper, I showed how the narratives of Swarup and Sekhsaria engage with island-ness of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as cultural and geographical

peripheries of the Indian nation to remind us that they are not mere outposts rather crucibles where human life began and where the first signs of threat are most visible. As a species and as a nation-state, our carbon footprint, egocentric consumerism and search for development and military prowess is trying to imitate Western models of capitalism, territorial ambitions and discourse on development. This blinkered vision threatens the world of the original inhabitants of these islands and their futures. To align our interests with them requires us to first locate our own distance as citizens of the mainland and see ourselves as 'outsiders' to their 'island-ness'. Our narratives, whether academic, journalistic or fictional when written in English run the risk of mis-representation and incorrect articulation because it is not a language native to the islands. We need to think through archipelagos and to narrate 'island-ness' we must inhabit multiple frames of mind, across cartographic, geological and nationalistic imaginaries while being cautious to the crisis we precipitate as Indians and as human beings.

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