

CELLULAR JAIL: A SYMBOL OF THE INDIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Dr. Anita Bhatt

Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Gargi College, University of Delhi

Abstract:

The Indian freedom struggle was a long and unending struggle against British rule. History has witnessed that from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, Assam to Gujarat both men and women participated in overwhelming numbers. Significantly, the story of India's freedom struggle is incomplete without discussing the contribution of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which was the most dangerous prison known as The Cellular Jail during the days of British rule. The land has been a witness to the brave freedom fighters who made sacrifices during the freedom struggle of India. The islands are beyond the legend of native tribes living in prehistoric conditions. In this framework, as a tribute to the martyrs of the freedom struggle, the study aim is to examine: a) what was the role of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Indian freedom struggle? b) What was the experience of the freedom fighters who were imprisoned in the Cellular Jail? Therefore, this study is based on the hypothesis: a) the Andaman and Nicobar Islands played a crucial role in the Indian freedom struggle, as it served as a prison for Indian freedom fighters and a source of inspiration for others to join the fight, b) the experience of the freedom fighters imprisoned in the Cellular Jail was characterized by inhumane treatment, torture, and hardship, but they persevered and continued to fight for India's freedom, c) the documentation of the story of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Cellular Jail in Indian history has been incomplete and inadequate, and the sacrifices of the freedom fighters have not been fully acknowledged.

Keywords: Andaman and Nicobar Islands, British, Cellular Jail, Freedom Struggle, Political Prisoner.

INTRODUCTION

While the Cellular Jail is indeed a historical landmark and tourist attraction, it is important to remember that it is also a site of great suffering and oppression by the British colonial rule in India. It is often considered a pilgrimage destination for freedom fighters.

The jail holds a special place in the hearts of many Indians, as it is a symbol of the sacrifices made by the freedom fighters who were imprisoned there. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, popularly also called Veer Savarkar used to say that “this is a great pilgrimage place¹, where many martyrs sacrificed their lives to ignite the light of freedom”. Contrary to popular belief, Cellular Jail in particular became a symbol of freedom struggle where many unsung heroes suffered horrifying torture and inhuman treatment. Their spirit of patriotism and sacrifice was utmost in our freedom struggle to achieve independence for their motherland. Similarly, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as a prominent part have added glorious chapters of India's freedom struggle. Indeed, it is time to revisit the role of islands because of their great historical importance to the country during colonial India.

The Cellular Jail is an old colonial prison situated in the Andaman and Nicobar islands. The term 'Kala Pani' is commonly used to refer to the Cellular Jail, and it means 'black water'. The term is a reference to the isolated location of the jail, which is surrounded by the sea on all sides. The word 'kala' means 'death' or 'time', and it is often used to signify the finality of a situation or the inevitability of death. The word 'pani' means 'water', and in this context, it refers to the sea that surrounds the jail.

NATIONALIST UPRISINGS AND THE 1857 REBELLION

Indeed, the mid-19th century was a significant period for the Andaman Islands, as well as for India as a whole. During this time, India was under British colonial rule, and the national movement for independence was beginning to gain momentum.

A large number of freedom fighters participated in a series of anti-colonial nationalist movements. Though there were several small-scale revolts against British rule in India throughout the 19th century, however, these revolts were confined to small centres, were poorly organized, lacked outside support, and, as a result, were easily suppressed. While the Indian Rebellion of 1857 also known as the Sepoy Mutiny or the First War of Independence was a major national uprising that is often considered a turning point in the struggle for Indian independence.

However, the rebellion was ultimately unsuccessful. The British were able to mobilize their military forces and quash the rebellion within a year, using brutal tactics and heavy firepower. The aftermath of the rebellion was marked by widespread violence and reprisals against the Indian population, particularly in the northern regions where the rebellion had been most active.

Despite its failure, it certainly challenged British supremacy. It served as a wake-up call for many Indians who had previously been complacent under British rule and inspired a new wave of nationalist and anti-colonial movements in the years that followed.

Why the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for a Penal Settlement?

Thus, 'Kala Pani' is a reminder of the inhumane conditions in which the prisoners were held, and the isolation and loneliness that they experienced while imprisoned in the jail. It was a jail punish political dissidents India's freedom fighters during India's freedom struggle.

But here the question arises why did the British consider building such a huge prison in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago only? Firstly, the Islands were considered to be strategically important for the British due to their location in the Bay of Bengal. The British wanted to establish a military outpost in the region to protect their interests in Southeast Asia, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were seen as ideal locations for this purpose.

Secondly, the British were facing a growing resistance movement in India, and they needed a place to imprison the political dissidents and freedom fighters who were agitating for independence. The Andaman and Nicobar islands were considered to be an ideal location for a prison due to their isolation and distance from the mainland. The islands were also difficult to escape from due to their remote location and the treacherous waters surrounding them.

Thirdly, the British wanted to use the islands as a penal colony to house criminals and other undesirables from the mainland. The prisoners were used as forced labour to develop the infrastructure of the islands, including building roads, constructing buildings, and clearing land for agriculture.

Ultimately, the British considered building a large prison in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago for strategic, political, and economic reasons. The prison was intended to serve as a military outpost, a place to imprison political dissidents and freedom fighters, and a penal colony for criminals and other undesirables from the mainland.

COMMISSION ON PENAL SETTLEMENT

After the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the British government took several measures to re-establish its paramount power in India. The British government established a penal colony in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in order to suppress the rebellion and maintain their control over India. The first attempt to colonize the islands was made in 1789 by the British East India Company, but it was abandoned due to a lack of resources and hostile indigenous tribes.

In 1857, the British Government set up the Andaman Committee to investigate the possibility of establishing a penal colony on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Dr Frederic John Mouat was appointed as the chief of the commission, with Dr G.R. Playfair and Lieutenant J.S. Heathcote serving as

his two additional associates. The committee was tasked with examining suitable sites for a convict settlement on the islands. After visiting the islands on December 8, 1857, the committee submitted a report to the Government of India on January 15, 1858, recommending the establishment of a penal settlement on South Andaman Island. Later, in 1858, the actual penal settlement was established to accommodate a large number of prisoners and isolate them from the mainland. Port Blair, the capital city of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, is named after the British colonialist Archibald Blair who established the first penal colony in the region.

THE TRANSPORTATION OF PRISONERS TO THE PENAL SETTLEMENT

The Andaman Islands have a complex history, with various powers vying for control over the archipelago. The British East India Company established a penal colony on the islands in 1858, in order to house Indian convicts who had previously been sent to other British colonies such as Singapore and Mauritius.

The first batch of 200 prisoners arrived in the Andaman Islands on March 10, 1858, under the supervision of Superintendent James Pattison Walker². Within three months, the number of convicts had increased to 773, and on June 16, 1858, a rebellion broke out among the prisoners against British rule.

Despite the rebellion, the British continued to transport more prisoners to the Andaman Islands. By September 28, 1858, the number of convicts had risen to about 1,330. The exact number of exiles is uncertain, but it is estimated that between 2,000 and 4,000 freedom fighters were sent to the islands between 1858 and 1860. from different regions of India. The prisoners were tasked with clearing the dense jungle and establishing a settlement on the islands. The hardships they had to endure were severe and often quite unbearable. This marked the beginning of the Andaman penal colony, which became notorious for its brutal treatment of prisoners.

BIRTH OF CELLULAR JAIL

In course of time, the settlement grew in size, thus making it difficult for prison authorities to provide safe custody and enforce strict discipline. Consequently, it was decided to construct a jail. Subsequently, based on the inspection report of Charles James Lyall and A.S. Lethbridge submitted proposals for the construction of a Cellular Jail near Port Blair. The construction of the prison started in 1896 and took 10 years to be completed in 1906³. The main objective behind the construction was to deport Indian political prisoners. The establishment of convict settlement was developed to crush the nationalist movement.

Inside the grand structure

The design was based on the concept of the Panopticon designed by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham. The architectural style which found in the British jails was also used for the Cellular Jail. The structure of the jail was like the 'spokes of a bicycle wheel'. At the centre, there is a massive three-storey structure. The centre tower stood as a tall watchtower with a large bell to raise the alarm. There are seven long concreted wings. Each cell wing had rows of single iron grill cells. About 30, 00,000 dark puce colour bricks and 20,000 cubic feet of local stone were used in the structure. The materials were brought from Burma (Myanmar) to construct the building. The Jail had nearly 696 cells and no dormitories and each cell measured 4.5 by 2.7 metres in size

with a ventilator located at a height of 3 metres⁴. Hence, solitary confinement in small cell gets its name as Cellular Jail.

In subsequent decades, many political prisoners under various cases against imperialist rule were deported to Cellular Jail such as conspiracy robbery, murder and other activities. The main ones are Alipur Bomb Case or Maniktala Conspiracy Case, the sensational murder identified as Nasik Conspiracy Case, Ghadr Party's Lahore Conspiracy Case and Banaras Conspiracy Case etc. There are other significant cases that contributed to the end of British rule in India like the Inter-Provincial Conspiracy Case, Dacca Conspiracy Case, Chittagong Armoury Case, and Gaya Conspiracy Case. Several revolutionaries, who survived, were sentenced to a prison term and deported to Andaman. Therewith, Wahabi rebels led by Syed Ahmed Bareilvi, Mopllah agitators of Malabar Coast under the prominent leaders of the rebellion were Ali Musaliyar and Variyankunnath Kunjahammed Haji, Rampa revolutionaries of Andhra led by Alluri Sitarama Raju, Manipur freedom fighters like Jodh Singh, Kula Chandra Singh and Luwang Ningthou, Tharwardy peasants of Burma under Saya San were also exiled to the remote archipelago.

Therefore, due to its remoteness from the mainland, this jail witnessed the most dreadful and formidable colonial prison. As a result, they were subjected to harsh punishments such as torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment like hard manual labour, complete isolation, scanty food and clothing, denial of toiletries, negligence of healthcare facilities, poor living conditions, an extension of their sentences or harsh punishments. Hereby, it is a historical prison built by the British on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands which reminds us of the darkest chapters during India's freedom struggle.

PRISON INMATES

The islands of Andaman and Nicobar played a very important role during the struggle for India's independence. Our freedom fighters made a great sacrifice to gain our Independence. Many patriots were prosecuted and sentenced to life imprisonment in the Cellular Jail, some of them were convicted at a very young age. It was designed by the British with the sole purpose of keeping the rebels isolated, far away from the mainland of India. The 'prisoners', on the other hand, were taken to a deep-water settlement, where there was no hope of escape nor their allies could establish any contact with them as surrounded on all sides by the sea.

The Prison Act, 1894

The manual is the legislations framework of Prison administration. According to the mandate, cellular confinement was the exception at the jail, it was not a normal occurrence. Convicts were allowed to talk amongst each other in hushed tones after their labour assignment for the day was done.

Most notable dissidents⁵ such as Savarkar brothers-Babarao and Vinayak Damodar (Nasik Conspiracy Case, 21 December 1909), Barindra Kumar Ghosh (Alipore Bomb Case, 2 May 1908), Batukeshwar Dutt (Assembly Bomb Case, 8 April 1929)⁶, Diwan Singh Kalepani (Punishment for his nationalistic views, April 1927), Fazl-e-Haq Khairabadi (Jehad against British 1857, sent to Kala Pani in 1858), Abdul Rahim Sadiqpuri (Wahabi Movement), Maulvi Liaquat Ali (Uprising of 1857), Nand Gopal (Seditious writing 1911), Bhai Parmanand (Lahore Conspiracy Case, 13 September 1915), Sachindra Nath Sanyal⁷ (Delhi Conspiracy Trial, 23 December 1912), Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna (Ghadar Conspiracy, February 1915), Subodh Roy (Chittagong Armoury Raid, 18 April 1930), Trailokyanath Chakravarty (Barisal Conspiracy Case, June 1913) Waman Daji Narayan Joshi (Jackson Murder Case, 30 December 1909) and Yogendra Shukla (Tirhut Conspiracy Case), among others, were prisoners of the Cellular Jail during the struggle for independence. They became prisoners and were kept in solitary confinement in the jail. This was the extreme form of punishment. The political prisoners were not

allowed to communicate with each other. For example, at the time, when Savarkar was serving his sentence at the Cellular jail, his elder brother Ganesh Savarkar was also a prisoner there. And yet these two brothers did not know that they were kept in the same jail for two years.

Alike, history cannot forget the contribution of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army comrades as a complemented to a momentous event in the history of Andaman and Nicobar islands through his commitment, struggle and spirit as a way of achieving Independence.

Apart from the aforementioned freedom fighters, we hardly know about the contribution of those martyrs who were all exiled to the Andaman. Their supreme sacrifice has enabled us to live in an independent nation especially Jatish Chandra Pal, Maulana Ahmadullah and Shadan Chandra Chatterjee. In addition, the prison has witnessed many unsung heroines as well who gave up their lives in the quest for freedom. These women convicts have remained in oblivion from the writing of history. A few compelling names are Bina Das (Bhaumik) and Kalyani Das (Bhattacharjee). These two Indian women revolutionaries and nationalists were the daughter of Beni Madhab Das and Sarala Devi, a renowned Brahma teacher and social reformer from Bengal. They were arrested and transported from Bengal to Andaman⁸ as these valiant revolutionaries were involved in cases of conspiracy against British colonial rule. Bina Das attempted to shoot Bengal's Governor Sir Stanley Jackson on February 6, 1932, as a protest against the detention of Indian nationalist leader Surya Sen. She was sentenced to nine years of arduous imprisonment in the Cellular Jail. Likewise, Kalyani Das, her elder sister was sentenced to transportation of life. She was also imprisoned in the same jail but was kept entirely separate with no danger of association with other convicts.

It is indeed unfortunate that the sacrifices of these young inmates who were incarcerated in the Cellular Jail are not widely known or recognized. But many remain unsung and even sometimes, unheard of. Here are the forgotten stories of six prisoners among children who were most particularly Anand Prasad Gupta (Chittagong Armoury Raid Case, 1930), Sahairam Das, Fakir Chandra Sen (The Chittagong Revolt, 1930), Sudhendu Bikash Dastidar and Hira Mohan Chatterjee – when transported to the Andamans were youths below 18 years of age. Unfortunately, history does not mention the sacrifice of these young inmates incarcerated in the Cellular Jail. The youngest convict was 15-year-old Haripada Bhattacharjee. He was arrested in connection with the Birbhum Conspiracy case on 17 February 1934.

Their contribution to the freedom struggle of India is significant and deserves to be remembered and celebrated. It is important to remember that the struggle for independence was not just fought by famous leaders and activists, but also by ordinary people, including young children, who were willing to make great sacrifices for the cause of freedom. Hence, their stories also give strength to all those who cherish freedom, justice and human dignity around the world. The fight was not merely for the political rights of self-determination from foreign rule but for freedom from tyranny as well. The saga of their exemplary courage and persuasion has served as an inspiration to the people of India.

<p>The Reformatory School Act, 1897⁹ Prohibited the transport of convicts younger than the age of 15 to Andaman.</p>
--

TALE OF HORROR

The story of the prison life of the prisoners here was quite grim. Sadly, many of them died under extremely harsh working conditions. The hardships of prison life include inhuman treatment. Punishment varied from painful solitary confinement to a starvation diet. This ranged from handcuffs to crossbar fetters for several days¹⁰. Another typical cruel punishment included standing handcuffed for a week. The specific nature of the work and the quota of each task were determined according to the classification of the prisoners.

The common labour tasks, to which political convicts were confined, were required to perform, usually manual labour. These were such as coir pounding, rope-making, gardening and drying copra etc. For any violation of the rules, they were subject to severe disciplinary penalties. The dreadful punishment followed for those who failed to complete the gruelling work assigned to these prisoners within the determined time often they were punished with the range of an extra hour of an arduous task.

Moreover, they faced hard labour such as grinding where every day the convict ended up chained like bullocks to oil mills. While describing the prison life Ullaskar Dutt (Alipore bomb case) narrates “In our village, only oxen are harnessed to the oil presses and even they cannot extract more than 16 pounds of mustard – oil in one day. Here, in the Cellular Jail, I was harnessed to the oil mill with two other prisoners and was required to produce eighty pounds of coconut oil by evening. The Jamadars would make us gallop and if our pace slackened, we were beaten mercilessly. We would stumble and fall, and be beaten senseless every day¹².” It was one of the most severe tasks that were more terrible and caused many deaths.

Dreaded Jailor

The prison was specifically known for malice treatment by the Irish jailor David Barry. He served as the chief superintendent of the Cellular Jail from 1909 to 1931. He was known for his extreme cruelty towards the prisoners, and his harsh treatment earned him the nickname of "Barry the Butcher." He was the self-proclaimed ‘God of Port Blair’. “While you are here, I am your god,” was the cry with which he welcomed prisoners¹¹. The aim of Barry's torture was to "tame the lions," as he put it. He believed that by breaking the will of the prisoners, he could turn them into submissive and obedient subjects of the British Empire.

Some died due to often unrelenting and tortures such as Baba Bhan Singh, a Ghadri martyr, who had been mercilessly beaten to death ruthlessly by David Barry's men. Many prisoners have been notorious to commit suicide in prison, e.g. Indu Bhushan Roy, Naringun Singh. They hanged themselves due to torture with a strand of torn kurta. It has been proven that prisoners find a way to shun the horrors of prison life. Another example of atrocities was Ram Rakha, a prisoner from Punjab who died of starvation. He went on a hunger strike to protest the removal of the sacred Brahmanical threads. Even sometimes British also tried force feeding the inmates on hunger strike. Three men – Bhagat Singh’s associates Mahavir Singh (Second Lahore conspiracy case), Mohan Kishore Namadas (convicted in Arms Act Case) and Mohit Moitra (also convicted in Arms Act Case) resistance came at a cost. They all died from force-feeding after milk seeped into their lungs, resulting in pneumonia.

Apart from hard labor prisoners were also the subject of painful and inhuman living surroundings. The solitary confinement in individual cells was not well equipped for convenience and comfort. They had no toilet facility. They were given only two clay bowls, one for water and the other in the corner of the prison tarmac-painted so that the prisoners could relieve themselves until the wee hours of the morning. They were forced to bear the foul smell all night. The severity of the atrocities is validated by numerous writings. As Savarkar, recounted in his biographical ‘The Story of My Transportation for Life’, “some prisoners found it impossible to control the call of nature and answered it on the floor of their cells. The prisoners had to sleep with their heads near the nuisance had committed”.

In another case, the prisoners were given poor diets and unhygienic food. The food was not only insufficient but unfit for human consumption. The suffering that was experienced by Barindra Kumar Ghosh at the Cellular jail was explained by him in his book ‘The Tale of my Exile.’ He unfolds, “The next morning we came out and washed our faces and then had for the first time the darshan of GANJI, otherwise called KANJI. It means boiled rice churned in water – one may say a sort of rice porridge. We were given each a dabbu full of this dainty.....“The daily ration per meal is as follows—Rice 6 oz, flour for roti 5 oz, dal 2 oz, salt 1 dram, oil ¾ dram and vegetable 8 oz..... “Each of us was

given an iron plate and an iron dish, red with rust and smeared with oil. These could not be cleansed at all¹³.

The Japanese brutal occupation

During World War II, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands came under Japanese control from 1942 to 1945. Initially, the Japanese were very friendly to the local garrison. But, things soon turned troubling. As Jayant Dasgupta recounts in his book “Japanese in Andaman & Nicobar Islands: Red Sun over Black Water,” they arrested a number of them under various charges such as espionage. In addition, the forced labour and sexual slavery that was imposed on the local population by the Japanese are deeply disturbing and reprehensible. For instance, an inhabitant of the Andaman Islands, Uttam Singh¹⁴.

It is commendable that Uttam Singh actively worked for the cause of Indian independence by joining the Indian Independence League in 1942. However, it is deeply unfortunate that he was arrested and imprisoned in the Cellular Jail, which was known for its inhumane treatment of prisoners. He was accused of espionage for the British is a testament to the challenges faced by those who opposed British colonial rule. The British authorities were quick to label any opposition as subversive or treasonous, and many freedom fighters like Uttam Singh were subjected to harsh punishment for their activities. The fact that he was later shot dead by the Japanese imperial army on January 30, 1944, which only adds to the tragedy of his story. Thus, during the tyrannical Japanese occupation, the Islands witnessed unprecedented inhuman atrocities and terror of the people of the Islands by the repressive Japanese forces.

Even inmates were not dispensed with proper clothes. He further recounts, “A half pant, a Kurta and a white cap were provided for each prisoner. But he was not provided with any change for taking bath except a langoti which hardly covered the nudity. “.....The langoti we were given to put on while bathing could not in the least defend any modesty. Thus when we had to change our clothes we were in as helpless a condition as Draupadi in the assembly of the Kauravas. There was no help. We hung our heads low and somehow finished the bathing affair. Then I understood that here there was no such thing as gentleman, not even perhaps such a thing as man. Here were only convicts.”¹⁵

In a nutshell, the historian Satadru Sen observes in *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict society in the Andaman Islands*, “...the Cellular jail in Port Blair as designed to function as a machine, stripping prisoners of their humanity - i.e. their criminal selves – in the process of Punishment and reform”.¹⁶

Thus, there are innumerable tales of such freedom fighters who deserve more prominence. Their contribution and sacrifice imprisoned and martyred in Port Blair’s Cellular Jail. It had witnessed heart-wrenching stories of struggle, suffering and sacrifices. Hence, the British meted out horrifying atrocities on political prisoners to break their national spirits. The Cellular Jail is the unique symbol of India’s revolutionary struggle for freedom who laid down their lives for us.

However, Barry’s tactics only served to strengthen the resolve of the prisoners and their supporters, who continued to fight for independence from British rule.

POLITICAL RESISTANCE

Despite its remote location in the Bay of Bengal, the penal settlement of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has many instances of political resistance by the political prisoners. They kept the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle alive through political resistance within the prison. Political prisoners lodged in the Cellular Jail united against the punitive rule and repression of the colonial prison government. This resulted in a series of hunger strikes, work shutdowns, and rumours of manufacturing or testing bombs

by political prisoners. The arrival of Indian revolutionaries marked the beginning of the transformation of the islands into a nationalist space as they were transported from various parts of colonial India.

The first resurgence of political resistance occurred from 1912 to 1915. They were named, classified and treated differently as political criminals. Alternatively, these Indian revolutionary nationalists were referred to as anarchists, terrorists and seditionists. Political prisoners in the Cellular Jail were indeed identified as ‘tagged convicts’ and were marked with special symbols on their clothing. This was a way for the jail authorities to keep track of the prisoners and to identify them based on their supposed crimes or affiliations.

In the case of the Cellular Jail, political prisoners were often marked with symbols such as a large "S" on the front of their clothing, indicating that they were seditionist prisoners. They might also be marked with a "C," denoting that they were conspiracy case prisoners. Also, the use of badges or symbols to mark political prisoners as "dangerous" was a common practice in the Cellular Jail. This was done in order to keep these prisoners under closer surveillance and to ensure that they did not escape or cause trouble.

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, in his memoirs, who was himself a political prisoner in the Cellular Jail, recalls that political prisoners were made to wear badges with the letter "D" inscribed on them. According to Savarkar, this stood for "dangerous" and was used to identify prisoners who were considered to be a threat to the British colonial system. The purpose was to prevent them from mixing with each other during meal times and working hours. The jail authorities believed that if political prisoners were allowed to mix with other prisoners, they might spread their ideas and beliefs, leading to a greater risk of rebellion or unrest.

Thus, due to brutal colonial repression the most notable convicts V.D. Savarkar, B.K. Ghosh, Bhai Parmanand, and Ullaskar Dutt went on strike in Cellular Jail as they were demanding the issue of status and degrading treatment in prison of those convicted of politically motivated crimes. They wanted to change the nomenclature used to describe those convicted of a political crime as ‘seditionist prisoners’. Instead “political prisoners” appeared as a flexible designation.

Apart from recognition, other demands of the prisoners revolved around better treatment in prison including reform of labour rules, access to extensive and varied diet needs, health-care facilities, library, sufficient reading and writing materials and communication with their family etc. Later, inside the prison were intersected by tensions between the political prisoners and the prison establishments due to the suicide of Indu Bhushan Roy in May 1912 and the ‘insanity’ of Ullaskar Dutta on June 10, 1912. Soon thereafter, this further increased the demand for maintaining order in the prison. Consequently, this led to the second general strike.

Thus, a few months later, some Cellular Jail distressed prisoners began a series of concerted hunger strikes and work stoppages to protest against the conditions in the prison. In September 1912, Latha Ram and Noni Gopal Mukherjee went on a hunger strike for 72 days to protest against the prevailing inhuman conditions¹⁷. Their protests were against the nature of their incarceration and demanded less harsh labour than that performed by a common convict. These political prisoners demanded equal status to the convicts of the penal settlement. In the end, the prison authorities agreed to some of the demands partially such as regarding working conditions and access to reading materials. On the other hand, they were refusing to grant status in prison as “political prisoners.”

Another organised strike took place in 1914 in which they demanded respite from lighter work tasks and sentences. Thereto, political offenders continued to raise their voices for the special status and treatment¹⁸ as ‘political prisoners’. As a result, on the basis of a consistent record of good conduct, the government officials agreed to assign lighter work to those political prisoners. Moreover, prisoners were not only given remission sentences but were also granted additional relief to read subjects such as books and newspapers. Importantly, the colonial government remained mute on the account of the ‘special class’ for prisoners convicted of political crimes.

Furthermore, the political prisoners in Cellular Jail again rebelled against the oppression of the jail administrators between 1932 and 1937. The second unified political resistance against the prison administration took place on January 3, 1933, and was a strenuous strike in the Cellular Jail that lasted till January 9, 1933. Political prisoners such as Bimal Kumar Das Gupta, Sushil Kumar Das Gupta, Probodh Chandra Roy, Prabir Goswami, Bimlendu Chakravorty, Barindra Kumar Ghosh, and Subodh Roy went on hunger strike. The prisoners outlined demands including healthy food, a nutritious diet for vegetarians, sanitary facilities such as pots with flat shaped instead of ‘lota’ (a round metal pot) for night urinals, soap for all prisoners, and latrine arrangements to be improved. Therewith, health care services and improved hospital systems. All cells with a separate area using a screen, bed sheets, towels etc.¹⁹

The prisoners galvanised the revolutionary movement through another third hunger strike by the inmates commenced on May 12, 1933. So about thirty-three prisoners²⁰ participated in the hunger strike like B.K. Dutta, Barindra Kumar Ghosh and Bhupal Ghosh participated. During the course of the strike, they demanded to take action within a specified period of one month to redressal of their grievances. Many of them decided not to work²¹.

Thus, the Cellular Jail, in particular, was built by the British as a deterrent to suppress the rebellion, preventing escape, preventing communication with accomplices outside the prison walls. But on the other hand, it proved to be a catalyst for the national movement, despite being located far from the mainland. More specifically, the panel settlement played a pivotal role in the India’s freedom struggle as the national movement in India matured and intensified during the twentieth century. Despite the inhuman sufferings of the nationalists, the heroic prisoners did not lose their spirit and started political resistance through literary and other activities like work stoppages, hunger strike within the jail. Then by the middle of 1935, a historic development surfaced in the Andaman which inspired of similar activities in other part of mainland India. Thus, very soon, the example of the Andaman prisoner inspired the detainee of different jails located in mainland India. Similar strike was taken up from prisoners of Alipore, Berhampur, Deoli and Bengal other jails.

MODERN HISTORY OF ANDAMAN'S CELLULAR JAIL

“Like the Bastille in Paris, which was liberated first in the French Revolution, setting free political prisoners, the Andamans, where our patriots suffered, is the first to be liberated in India’s fight for Independence. Part by part, Indian territory will be liberated, but it is always the first plot of land that holds the most significance.”

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands as the first territory liberated from British rule under the leadership of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army. On 29 December 1943, he unfurled the first independent Indian national flag over the islands and established Provisional Government of Azad Hind (Free India) as a national entity. Subsequently, he renamed the Andaman as “Shaheed Dweep” (Martyrs Island) and the Nicobar as “Swaraj Dweep” (Independence). Our freedom fighter like Netaji shown

their valour in fighting against the British rule. The immense sacrifice of our nationalists to achieve the independence and integrity of the nation gave new strength to India's freedom struggle.

Later in 1979, the former Prime Minister of India, Shri Morarji Desai gave permission to convert the Cellular jail as a national monument. Today more aptly known as 'Mukti Tirtha' has now become a symbol of our national resistance, a heroic struggle not just against imperialism but for the dignity of all. It is a time to remember with reverence and admiration that Andaman and Nicobar Islands are part of a great revolution in Indian history. This has been marked as a sanctified reminder of the tremendous despairs of brave freedom fighters in a great cause for our freedom. They were imprisoned there together for many years and were transported from various parts of colonial India.

CONCLUSION

In accordance with the theme 'Celebrating Unsung Freedom Fighters' it is time to enthuse new energy by remembering the significant contributions made by political prisoners of Andaman and Nicobar Islands whilst the country celebrates the 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of India's Independence. The idea of unsung heroes is inextricably linked with the element of inclusion under the campaign of "Dekho Apna Desh". Hence, these islands have been privileged to share emblematic and rich historical events through the journey of the freedom struggle, which goes beyond black water. Notably, when we look through the pages of the past, we find that the Cellular Jail is a symbol of untold miseries, sufferings and extreme atrocities imposed on prisoners who were fighting for the freedom of their motherland. In last, it helps us to understand that the Cellular Jail in Andaman and Nicobar Islands mark as one of the grimmest and dark eras of British rule in the Indian subcontinent.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Books

1. B.R. Tamta, *Andaman and Nicobar Islands* (National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1992).
2. G. R. P Wamanrao, *Andaman Ki Vyatha and Nicobar Ki Katha* (Nathe Publication Ltd, 2017).
3. Jayant Dasgupta, *Japanese in Andaman & Nicobar Islands: Red sun over black water* (New Delhi: Manas, 2002).
4. J.P. Mishra, *History of Andaman and Nicobar Islands* (Rajesh Publications, 2015).
5. Laxman. P. Mathur, *History of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, 1756-1966* (Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1968).
6. Laxman. P. Mathur, *Kala Pani: History of Andaman and Nicobar Islands with a Study of India's Freedom Struggle* (Delhi, Eastern Book Corporation, 1985).
7. N. Iqbal Singh, *The Andaman Story* (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978).
8. Pramod Kumar, *Hunger-strike in Andaman: repression and resistance of transported prisoners in Cellular Jail, 12 May-26 June 1933* (Lucknow: Martyrs Memorial and Freedom Struggle Research Centre: Distributed by New Royal Book Co., 2004).
9. R. C. Majumdar, *Penal Settlement in Andamans* (New Delhi, Gazetteers Unit, Department of Culture,
10. Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Publication Division, 1975).
11. R. Murthy, *Andaman and Nicobar Islands: A Saga of Freedom Struggle* (Kalpaz Publications, 2011).
12. S.N. Aggarwal, *The Heroes of Cellular Jail*, (Rupa, 2006).
13. Ujjwal Kumar Singh, *Political Prisoners in India, 1920-1977* (Oxford University Press, 1996).
14. Ullaskar Dutt, *Twelve Years of Prison Life* (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1924).

Articles

15. F.J. Mouat, "Narratives of an expedition to Andaman Islands in 1857," *Royal Geographical Society Journal*, vol. 32, 1862.

16. Habib Manzer and Ashfaque Ali, "Female convicts and Andamans penal settlement during second half of the nineteenth century," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 70, 2009-2010, pp. 635-642.
17. John Pincince, "De-centering Carl Schmitt: The Colonial State of Exception and the Criminalization of the Political in British India, 1905-1920," *Politica Comun*, vol 5, 2014.
18. Rashmi Singh, "Role of Andamans in the Freedom Movement," *A quarterly from Andaman and Nicobar Islands Administration*, August-October 2016.
19. R.V.R. Murthy, "Cellular Jail: A Century of Sacrifices," *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 67, no. 4, October December, 2006, pp. 10-12.
20. R.V.R. Murthy, "Penal System in Andaman," *Dialogue*, volume 10 no. 3, January-March, 2009.

Newspaper

21. Abhijit Bhattacharya, "Cellular Jail: Locked for life," National Herald, August 16, 2020.
22. Anirban Ganguly, "Savarkar Flame Illuminates Tales of Unsung Heroes," The New Indian Express, June 4, 2016.
23. C.A. Francis "A symbol of oppression," The Asian Age, January 20, 2018.
24. Cathy Scott-Clark and Adrian Levy, "Survivors of our hell," The Guardian, June 23, 2001.
25. Kavita Kanan Chandra, "Beyond the black waters," The Hindu, August 13, 2012.
26. Mukul & Shilpa Gupta, "Prisons of freedom," Deccan Herald, August 20, 2019.
27. P.A. Krishnan, "Untold Stories from Veer Savarkar's Life and Times," Outlook, October 15, 2021.
28. Robyn Wilson, "Inside Cellular Jail: the horrors and torture inflicted by the Raj on India's political activists," Independent, August 11, 2017.
29. Sanjukta Dasgupta, "A horrendous tale," The Statesman, November 26, 2017.
30. _____, "Cellular Jail: The Historical Indian Bastille on the Andaman Islands," The Free Press Journal, June 01, 2019.

1. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1764631>
2. <https://www.messynessychic.com/2015/10/15/buried-by-nature-the-dark-past-of-jungle-book-island/>
3. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1645292>
4. <https://www.culturalindia.net/monuments/cellular-jail.html>
5. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mukulb/12233065706>
6. <https://indiasfirstwarofindependence1857.blogspot.com/2010/09/freedom-fighters-of-sepoy-mutiny-1857.html>
7. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1599582>
8. https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.111039/2015.111039.Kala-Pani-History-Of-Andaman-Amp-Micobar-Islands_djvu.txt
9. <https://indianculture.nvli.in/stories/andaman-cellular-jail>
10. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1645292>
11. <https://yourstory.com/2017/08/cellular-jail-andaman-islands>
12. <http://db.and.nic.in/cellularjail/Stories/index9.htm>
13. https://savarkar.org/en/pdfs/barindra_kumar_ghosh.pdf
14. <https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/unsung-heroes-detail.htm?1015>
15. <http://db.and.nic.in/cellularjail/Stories/index9.htm>
16. <https://www.myindiamyglory.com/2019/09/09/prison-years-of-veer-savarkar-in-andaman-cellular-jail-an-ignored-saga/>
17. https://hritambhara.com/2019/04/12/terror-behind-the-walls-the-penal-colonies-part-iii/#_ftnref33
18. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/pc/1232227.0005.006?view=text;rgn=main>
19. IOR: Report On the Medical Aspects of the Hunger strike in the Cellular Jail, Port Blair, From Lieut. - F.A. Barker, O.B.E., I.M.S., Inspector-General of Prisons, Punjab to the Secretary to The Government of India, Home Department, Simla, June 22nd 1933, From Home Department, Government of India,

No. 26/F.70/4B/32-Jails to His Majesty's Under Secretary of State for India, India Office, London, the 27th July 1933, P&J 3026/1933.

20. <https://www.myindiamyglory.com/2019/09/09/prison-years-of-veer-savarkar-in-andaman-cellular-jail-an-ignored-saga/>
21. https://www.academia.edu/29459223/Oral_History_of_Cellular_jail_doc