

**NMML**  
**OCCASIONAL PAPER**  
**HISTORY AND SOCIETY**

**New Series**

**S. No. 89**

**Oral History of Cellular Jail**  
**Colonial and post-colonial discourse,**  
**1890-1979**

**Pramod Kumar Srivastava**  
Emeritus Fellow (UGC), Department of Western History  
University of Lucknow



**Nehru Memorial Museum and Library**

**2017**

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*Published by*

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library  
Teen Murti House  
New Delhi-110011

e-mail: [director.nmml@gov.in](mailto:director.nmml@gov.in)

ISBN : 978-93-84793-05-0

## **Colonial and post-colonial discourse on Cellular Jail, Andaman Islands, 1890-1979<sup>1</sup>**

**Pramod Kumar Srivastava**

### **Abstract**

*From the time of Herodotus, history has been recognized as an authentic branch of knowledge. Voltaire, Jules Michelet, William Gordon and many others produced their celebrated historical works on the basis of interviews of common people. Until the late nineteenth century oral sources remained undisputed and contributed significantly to history writing, besides written sources. Though Leopold von Ranke questioned the objectivity of oral evidences, 'orality' in history writing continued throughout the world. The foundation of first modern oral history archives at Columbia University in 1948, commencement of an oral history programme in 1954 in University of California, the first oral history programme at Harry S. Truman Library in 1960, and the founding of Oral History Association in 1967 and International Oral History Association in 1987 promoted emergence of national oral history organizations in many countries. In this very tradition, Oral History Association of India was founded in 2013. The present paper deals with the history of Cellular Jail on the basis of both official documents and interviews of transported prisoners. It deals with the objective of constructing a 'jail within a jail', its structural marvel, hunger strikes undertaken by political prisoners, the Japanese occupation of the Cellular Jail, and finally its partial dismantlement. The paper concludes with the Jail becoming a National Monument in 1979.*

### **Memories, Histories, and Oral History**

The known, recorded, remembered, and documented acts done by man alone is history. The role of a professional historian is to unearth, record, and present the unrecorded, unremembered, and unknown human acts. But the role of an oral historian is twofold: one, to record and present the unrecorded memories of the acts done by man in the past thereby authenticating the objective historical sources for professional historians; two, preserve the same as first-hand information or testimony of an eyewitness as primary historical source for future generations of oral historians.

Three thousand years ago, scribes of Zhou dynasty in China collected the sayings of the people for the use of court historians. The Spanish chroniclers of sixteenth century relied on oral sources

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<sup>1</sup>Lecture delivered on 24 October 2016 at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

to reconstruct the history of the inhabitants—from the Aztecs to the Incas—of the Americas conquered by Europeans.<sup>2</sup>

There are of course innumerable historian and non-historian scholars involved in collecting oral evidences in post-colonial India but unfortunately oral history, as true branch of knowledge is yet to find its recognition. At the same time very few university history departments have included it in their curriculum. In 1987 this author began interviewing freedom fighters and revolutionaries transported to the penal settlement of Andamans without having any idea of oral history as an independent discipline. After interviewing a number of participants of civil disobedience movement of 1930, Quit India Movement of 1942, INA and transported revolutionaries<sup>3</sup>, the author learnt the significance of such interviews for writing the history of India's freedom struggle in particular and history in general. It was on the basis of interviews of transported prisoners that the author wrote the history of hunger strikes in the Cellular Jail of Andaman Islands<sup>4</sup>, which was not possible from written official documents alone.

The Cellular Jail was the most significant embodiment of the history of revolutionary movement of India, erased from the pages of written documentation of freedom struggle. This generation of history makers were fast fading away. The author made an endeavour to preserve their oral testimony for the theoretical and empirical documentation of the revolutionary movement of India, a significant yet forgotten aspect of anti-colonial struggle in India. Between 1987 and 1996, many of these revolutionaries from London, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and West Bengal were interviewed and documented with partial financial assistance from Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi; and Martyrs Memorial and Freedom Struggle Research Centre, Lucknow. In 2010 the Randforce Associates, New York, digitized the 25 hour-long interviews of 19 political prisoners. They were Satyo Chakravorty, Shiv Verma, Achyut Ghatak, Varin Ghosh, Jaidev Kapoor, Thakur Ram Singh, Anand Gupta, Bimal Bhattacharya, Bankim Chakravorty, Bidhu Bhusan, DN Chowdhury, Sudhanshu Das Gupta, Haripada Choudhury, Jyotish Majumdar, Bhagwan Biswas, Moni Ganguli, Sitanshu D. Ray, Prafulla Majumdar, Provot Chakravorty, Prafulla Kumar Sanyal, Subodh Roy, and Ram Chandra Das, all transported between 1932 and 1937. In 2006 the author also interviewed GS Pandey, Hari Kishan, Hari Ram and M.A. Muztaba who had vivid memories of Japanese occupation of Andaman Islands during 1942-1945; and Hasan Ali, an archivist and Govind Raju, the editor of the *Light of Andaman*, a weekly newspaper published from Port Blair.

The creation of British colonial state, the *Kala Pani* or black (or death) waters, as imprinted on the consciousness of the horrified colonized subjects, symbolized also an unknown mysterious destination from where no prisoner ever thought of coming back alive. It is a mystery even today from where this dreaded term *Kala Pani* originated and why this destination of convict settlement at Andamans acquired such mystifying connotation in the masses in the mainland. It may have originated after the book *Kala Pani: Tarikh-e-Ajeeb* (The Black Waters: A Strange Story) written in Urdu by Maulana Mohammad Zafar Thanasari was published in 1884.<sup>5</sup> It may also have the connotation of transportation beyond seas that was a prohibited venture in accordance with the

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<sup>2</sup> Jaksic, Ivan 2003, pp. 19-20.

<sup>3</sup> Srivastava, Pramod Kumar. 1992, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Srivastava, Pramod Kumar. 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Thanasari, Maulana Muhammad Zafar 1964. The book has been reprinted multiple times with slightly different titles.

Hindu religious beliefs. During British colonialism in India transportation for life as a punishment was reserved for rebels and hardened criminals whose sentence of death was commuted to imprisonment for life or whose crime was not considered severe enough to punish him with death sentence. In the early decades of twentieth century the colonial state began transporting for a period of definite term of years also those political prisoners who were considered dangerous for the colonial state and required additional surveillance and disciplining.

### Cellular Jail

In 1890, Mr. C.J. Lyall and Surgeon-Major Lethbridge visited the penal settlement for the purpose of examining closely the conditions of labour and discipline existing there. The main object of their enquiry was to ascertain whether the regulations at the settlement were sufficiently stringent and penal in their character to have their full deterrent effect and in the absence of it, to make suggestions.<sup>6</sup> In view of making the earlier stages of imprisonment in the settlement more penal, the Commissioner's suggestion of a preliminary stage of separate confinement for a period of six months in cells on the plan adopted in the Madras close prisons was accepted by the colonial government.<sup>7</sup> It was this recommendation on the basis of which construction of a Cellular Jail at Port Blair was approved.

The site for the proposed Cellular Jail was finally selected at Atlanta point in Aberdeen in place of the one previously selected between Pahargaon and Protherapore. Lethbridge prepared the sketch of Cellular Jail and the plan was made by the Sub-engineer W.G. Mac Quillen, who estimated its cost besides locally available material, to be Rs. 2, 58,764 and the convict labour charges of Rs. 1, 62,708.<sup>8</sup> Around twenty million bricks were used to erect this massive building with the help of the labour of around twelve hundred convicts both men and women everyday.<sup>9</sup> About 20,000 cubic feet of local stone chips were used and some building materials were also brought in from Burma. The lime was obtained by burning raw coral collected from the innumerable reefs around the islands. The bricks were made at Dundas Point and Navy Bay Kilns were used for the construction of the jail building.<sup>10</sup>

The Cellular Jail was a 'prison within a prison', not 'a city within a city'.<sup>11</sup> It was also not a 'space between two worlds', 'between the crime and the return to right and virtue' as an English model, which added in addition 'isolation' to 'correction'<sup>12</sup> in the penology of a natural state. Instead, the inherent colonial state invented multiple penalties for hostile consciousness. The colonial criminal was subjected to deportation to an unknown mystical destination along with 'isolation' and 'correction' in the Cellular Jail. Based upon the principle of Bentham's *Panopticon*,<sup>13</sup> it was a well built and scientifically planned three storeyed fine building standing

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<sup>6</sup> Andaman and Nicobar Archives, Port Blair, hereinafter cited as ANA: Review of the Report on the working of the Penal Settlement of Port Blair by Mr. C.J.Lyall and Dr. Lethbridge, February, File R/146 of 1891, Political Department (Jails) 1892, Government of Bengal, Resolution, Extract from the Proceedings of the Government of India in the Home Department (Port Blair), under date Simla, the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1891, No. 9, No. 10P.B./850-864, File R/146/1.

<sup>7</sup> ANA: Resolution 9, Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Roy, Priten and Swapnesh Choudhury. 2006. pp. 20-23.

<sup>9</sup> Sen, Satadru. 2000. p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Roy, Priten and Swapnesh Choudhury. 2006. p.23.

<sup>11</sup> Sen, Satadru. Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, Michel. 1991. pp. 122-123.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 200.

on a bold promontory close to the sea, about 100 feet above the sea level.<sup>14</sup> It had seven wings connected to a central tower. Each cell was about 7½ feet wide and 13½ feet long, and had a door with iron grating in the front and a window at the back. The cells were so distributed in the respective wings that it contained total 689 cells.<sup>15</sup>

Along with the seven star-shaped three storeyed wings of the Cellular Jail there was also a Workshop and Hanging Room for punishment by death. Dr. Bhupal Chandra Bose, incarcerated in the Cellular Jail during 1932-38, has provided a vivid description of the Cellular Jail.<sup>16</sup> In that theoretical scheme also warders, located in a central tower, commanded an unobstructed view of the entire prison. The cells were like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor was alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. ‘So effectively does the Penopticon manipulate space and facilitate surveillance that brutal punishments are redundant. The Penopticon, ‘this “marvellous machine” as Foucault described it, was to induce in each prisoner a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.’<sup>17</sup>

Under the convict system in force prior to 1921 a convict was ‘used to be kept in Cellular Jail for the first six months after his arrival in the Andamans. Thereafter for a period of 9½ years he remained a member of a labour corps, lived in barracks, was fed and clothed by the State and earned a small gratuity in cash. After that he earned a “ticket of leave” and was allowed to live a semi-independent life and to earn his livelihood. After a total period of 20 to 25 years he was released and had to leave the settlement. In addition to the convict population there was before 1921 a permanent population of “local-born” persons (about 3,000 according to the 1921 census) who found private employment in the islands as cultivators, traders or Government employees.’<sup>18</sup>

### **Hunger Strikes at Cellular Jail**

Nani Gopal was the first known militant nationalist who used hunger strike as a political protest in the penal settlement at Andaman Islands. The idea of undertaking hunger strike or fast unto death either to get redressed certain grievances or even for the purpose of enforcing whimsical personal demands has always been present in the Indian ethos. The tradition of hunger strike may be witnessed in number of mythological stories and folktales well known to the average Indian mind. However, the first known hunger strike used as a political weapon was undertaken by political prisoners of the penal settlement at Andaman Islands in 1912.<sup>19</sup> Immediately thereafter, Mahatma Gandhi, at the last stage of his stay in South Africa, observed hunger strike, as a non-violent weapon, to teach moral principles to his followers.<sup>20</sup> Later, he also used it at several occasion, as an effective non-violent political weapon to enforce his will without inflicting any

<sup>14</sup> India Office Records and Library, London, hereinafter cited as IOR: Terrorist Prisoners in the Andamans, Council of State, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1933, p. 251, P&J 3932/1933.

<sup>15</sup> Wing 1 contained 105 cells, wing 2 contained 102 cells, wing 3 contained 150 cells, wing 4 contained 53 cells, wing 5 contained 93 cells, wing 6 contained 60 cells, wing 7 contained 126 cells; and total number of cells was 689. A Memorial to the Nation, Cellular Jail, Centenary Year, 1906-2006, published by Directorate of Sports, Arts & Culture, and Andaman and Nicobar Administration, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Bose, Dr. Bhupal Chandra. June 1982. pp. 52-53.

<sup>17</sup> Arnold, David. 1994. p. 149.

<sup>18</sup> IOR: Andamans and Nicobar Islands, Extract from Chapter XVIII of Interim Report of the General Purposes Sub-Committee of the Retrenchment Advisory Committee, December 1931, Part II.

<sup>19</sup> Mathur, L.P., 1985. pp. 81-84.

<sup>20</sup> Tendulkar, D.G., 1951. p. 150.

physical injury to his adversary. The members of the *Hindustan Socialist Republican Association* (HSRA) branch of militant nationalists of India, arrested in second Lahore Conspiracy Case,<sup>21</sup> also used hunger strike as a political weapon to protest that their grievances in the prisons were not being redressed. In fact, the purpose of those hunger strikes was not confined to protest alone but was aimed also at generating public opinion in the favour of their political ideology. Such political prisoners in the mainland jails undertook a number of hunger strikes during their period of conviction. Yatindra Nath Das, a member of Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, died on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1929 in Lahore prison after sitting for hunger strike for 63 days.<sup>22</sup> Hunger strikes had become popular with both the political streams—Gandhi's non-violent movement and the militant nationalist's revolutionary methodology of nationalist movement of India.

After the violent incident of Chauri Chaura, Mahatma Gandhi recalled the non-cooperation movement in February 1922. Deeply disillusioned with Gandhi's commitment to ideals of non-violence various revolutionary organizations such as *Bharat Naujawan Sabha* in Punjab, Hindustan Republican Association in United Provinces (Later Hindustan Socialist Republican Association) and a revolutionary party under the leadership of Master Surya Sen in Chittagaon, Bengal, emerged. Their vision of revolution was not limited to achieve political freedom from British colonialism but included also complete freedom from social, economic, and cultural exploitation. The theocratic militancy had been replaced by the secular and socialist revolutionary idealism. Threatened thoroughly by the upsurge of innumerable conspiracy cases including Kakori train dacoity, Saunder's assassination, Assembly bomb case and Chittagong raid, and many other such violent incidents, the colonial state once again took recourse to sentencing capital punishments and transportation for life or for various terms to such militant revolutionaries.

The lull and calm prevailing in the Cellular Jail since the abandonment of transportation of political prisoners in 1921, once again was threatened after resumption of their transportation in 1932. On January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1933, within six months of their arrival seven political prisoners of the first batch, Bimal Kumar Das Gupta, Sushil Kumar Das Gupta, Probodh Chandra Roy, Prabir Goswami, Bimalendu Chakravorty, Varindra (Barindra) Kumar Ghosh,<sup>23</sup> and Subodh Roy sat on hunger strike in order to obtain certain concessions.<sup>24</sup> The hurriedly called and unplanned strike lasted only for six days. In this strike, artificial feeding was not used because of the general satisfactory condition of the strikers. Regular disciplinary action was taken against these hunger

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<sup>21</sup> To avenge the death of Lala Lajpat Rai, a prominent Congress leader of Punjab, members of HSRA murdered J.P. Saunders, a police officer alleged to be responsible for the unfortunate demise of the said leader. On December 19, 1928 Lala Lajpat Rai was leading a procession in Lahore to protest against the Simon Commission sent from England to prepare a report for the purpose of proposed Constitutional reform. In the police assault on procession he was deeply wounded and later succumbed to it. In this historic Lahore Conspiracy case three revolutionaries Sardar Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev were hanged and seven others- Mahabir Singh, Kishori Lal, Bijoy Kumar Sinha, Shiv Verma, Gaya Prasad, Jaideo Kapoor, Kamal Nath Tewari, and B.K.Dutta were given life terms; and Kundan Lal and Prem Dutta were sentenced for 7 and 5 years respectively.

<sup>22</sup> Verma, Shiv .1991. p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> This Varindra Kumar Ghosh was arrested in 1929 under Arms Act who is different from Varindra Kumar Ghosh of Manick Tolla bomb conspiracy transported in 1910.

<sup>24</sup> 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 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 27<sup>th</sup> July 1933, P&J 3026/1933.

strikers under the direct orders of the Chief Commissioner.<sup>25</sup>

After the initial failure, they decided to commence the next hunger strike only after the arrival of another batch of political prisoners. The arrival of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lahore conspiracy case convicts, well experienced in hunger strikes in mainland jails, gave the colonial machinery an ultimatum of one month time to redress their grievances. The hunger strikers were demanding light in their cell till 10 p.m., weekly and monthly newspapers, right of petitioning both Central and Local Governments, an extensive and varied diet including a choice of vegetables and tooth powder, paste, and sandals etc. Achyut Ghatak, a participant in the hunger strike, recalled:

When we arrived in Andamans no one of us could think of returning back alive. It was a jungle. No sooner we were in the jail compound it appeared as if we were in hell. I went in the third batch. Those who had arrived in the first and the second batch had made enough preparations. They were waiting for the arrival of the third batch to commence their joint struggle against the jail Superintendent. There was no arrangement of electricity. Mosquitoes were plenty but mosquito net was not provided. Food was deplorable. In those conditions we all decided that it was preferable to die sooner by observing hunger strike than to die slowly.<sup>26</sup>

Bidhu Bhusan Sen, a participant in these hunger strikes recalled:

There were big scorpions in the cells. Its biting resulted into high fever. In the morning we were provided *lapsi* (an item made up of boiled rice and water) without salt. Food was worst. I was class 3 prisoner.<sup>27</sup>

Dhirendra Nath Choudhury, a convict of Maniktala Dacoity Case, recalled:

Cells were in deplorable condition...a number of scorpions were found in the cells. In each cell one convict was incarcerated. The cells were 10 feet long and 6 feet broad. In each cell there was an iron door and a small window. The cells were so dark that one could see only after shutting his eyes for a while. We were provided very dirty food to eat. ...We were given the work of choir pounding.<sup>28</sup>

But the colonial machinery refused to concede to pressure tactics and said that ‘nothing could be done’. Thereafter, they took one-month time to think individually to consider their participation in the planned hunger strike, which was not to be broken until achieving its ultimate end. There were 56 prisoners in division three out of which 23 decided to ultimately participate in the hunger strike. Rest of them decided not to work.<sup>29</sup> The political prisoners, serving life imprisonment had refused to participate on the well-known pretext that their participation would cost them their hard earned privileges and concessions.<sup>30</sup>

According to a communiqué sent by the Government of India to the Secretary of State, 29 political convicts in C class, transported after August 1932 to the Cellular Jail of the Andaman Islands, at the instigation of K.B.Dutt [sic- B.K. Dutta], Lahore conspiracy convict, commenced on a hunger-strike on May 12, 1933 because their grievances were not being redressed.<sup>31</sup> Kamal

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Interview of Achyut Ghatak, Appendix-IV, Srivastava, Pramod Kumar . 2004. pp. 51-59.

<sup>27</sup> Interview of Bidhu Bhusan Sen, Appendix- VII, Srivastava, Pramod Kumar. 2004. pp. 69-76.

<sup>28</sup> Interview of Dhirendra Nath Choudhury, Appendix- IX, Srivastava, Pramod Kumar .2004. pp. 80-89.

<sup>29</sup> Interview of Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Appendix- XXII, *ibid.*, pp. 156-168.

<sup>30</sup> Interview of Dhirendra Nath Choudhury, *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> IOR: From Home Department, Government of India to Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, 21<sup>st</sup> May, 1933 No. 1273, repeating telegram from Andamans, 18<sup>th</sup> May for information, P&J 1941/1933.



Nath and Batukeshwar Dutta<sup>32</sup> were locked up in Yard No. 7 away from all other people. They had been held by the authorities as the prime movers behind the strike and consequently had been completely segregated. The rest of the hunger strikers were in Yard No. 5.<sup>33</sup>

At 12.24 a.m. on 18<sup>th</sup> morning, Mahabir Singh,<sup>34</sup> a Lahore Conspiracy convict died. The post mortem examination report said that the death was due to shock and “not due to any carelessness in the administration of food”. Three other convicts were serious but condition of the remaining was quite satisfactory.<sup>35</sup> The propriety of medical treatment given to deceased convict Mahabir Singh was challenged in the Council of State.<sup>36</sup>

After the death of Mahabir Singh another hunger striker Bidhu Bhusan Sen was hospitalized for infection in his lungs. He had started bleeding through his nostrils but his condition was stabilized thereafter.<sup>37</sup> Another convict named Mankrishna Nama Das, a Bengali political prisoner, died of pneumonia on the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> May 1933. The Senior Medical Officer assured the Chief Commissioner that his death was due to natural causes and was in no way accelerated by his abstinence from food for one day. The Senior Medical Officer, reported "pneumonia started in consequence of reduced power of resistance to illness caused by hunger-strike and its progress was in no way accelerated by forcible feeding."<sup>38</sup> The medical report submitted to explain death of Mankrishna Nama Das also attracted attention of the members of the Council of State.<sup>39</sup> Another political prisoner Mohit Mohan Maitra<sup>40</sup> convicted in connection with the militant movement in Bengal and transferred to the Cellular Jail, Andamans died of double lobar pneumonia. He started hunger strike on May 12, and on the 19<sup>th</sup> developed pneumonia from which he died 9 days later on the 28<sup>th</sup> May. It was again said that his vitality was impaired by the hunger strike.<sup>41</sup>

The hunger strike of May-June 1933 by the revolutionary convicts in the Cellular Jail surcharged the lull created in the political scene of India because of politico-nationalist vacuum created due

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<sup>32</sup> B.K. Dutta and Kamal Nath Tewari both sentenced for life transportation were convicts of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lahore Conspiracy case and had the experience of participating in three hunger strikes in Lahore Borstal jail and Lahore Central Jail during their trial from July to October 1929. One of their comrades Yatindra Nath Das died after 63 days. Srivastava, Pramod Kumar. 2013. pp. 68-71.

<sup>33</sup> Sinha, Bejoy Kumar. 1939. pp. 39-40.

<sup>34</sup> Verma, Shiv. 2008. pp. xxi, 105-117.

<sup>35</sup> IOR: From Government of India, Home Department to Secretary of State for India, repeating telegram of 18<sup>th</sup> May from Chief Commissioner, Andaman and Nicobar islands, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1933, No. 1273, P&J 1941 of 1933.

<sup>36</sup> IOR: Vinayak Vithal Kalikar, Council of State, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1933, P&J 3932/1933.

<sup>37</sup> Interview of Vidhu Bhusan Sen, Srivastava, Pramod Kumar, (August 1998), Appendix- IX, p. 38.

<sup>38</sup> IOR: From Home Department, Government of India to Secretary of State for India, dated Simla, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1933 No. 1417, repeating telegram from Andamans, June 5<sup>th</sup> for information, P&J 2210/1933.

<sup>39</sup> IOR: Vinayak Vithal Kalikar, Council of State, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1933, P&J 3932/1933.

<sup>40</sup> A great confusion has been created by the version of Bejoy Kumar Sinha about the names Mankrishna Nam Das and Mohit Mohan Maitra died during the hunger strike. In his book *The Indian Bastille* Mr. Sinha has mentioned them as Mohit and Mohan (Ibid. p. 32). In his book *History of the Andaman Islands, 1756-1966* (1968), L. P. Mathur has rightly mentioned the death of Man Krishna Nam Das on 26 May 1933, of pneumonia. However, in his next book *Kala Pani* (1985) Mathur mentioned them as Mohit Maitra and Mohan Kishore Manodas (sic-Namodas) (Ibid. p. 112). It appears that Mr. Mathur committed this mistake because this time he was influenced by R. C. Majumdar's comment made in his footnotes of Chapter II. Majumdar commented; 'According to the Bengali booklet *Muktitirtha Andaman*, Mohan Kishore had the surname Namodas. It is not unlikely that Mathur's Man Krishna Nam Das is the same as Mohan Kishore Namodas. [Majumdar, (1975), p.316]. In fact, in 1933, there was no political prisoner in Cellular Jail whose name was Mohan Kishore or Mohan Kishore Namodas. As against this the names of two prisoners who died, other than Mahabir Singh in the said hunger strike, were Man Krishna Nam Das and Mohit Mohan Maitra.

<sup>41</sup> IOR: Press Communiqué issued by Home Department, Simla, the 31<sup>st</sup> May 1933, Enclosure No. 2, From Home Department, Government of India, No. 21/F.70/4-B/32-Lails, to His Majesty's Under Secretary of State for India, London, Simla, the 19<sup>th</sup> June 1933, P&J 2445/1933.

to the near demolition of revolutionary organizations after elimination of its prominent leaders and also suspension of civil disobedience movement by Gandhi in May 1933. The spirit of freedom kept alive even from behind the bars at the cost of their lives in an unknown mysterious destination became instrumental in keeping the nationalist spirit burning awhile in existing demoralized political scenario in the mainland.

Lieutenant-Colonel Barker who arrived at Port Blair on the afternoon of June 14<sup>th</sup>,<sup>42</sup> found fifty-eight prisoners on hunger strike in addition to 20 others on work strike.<sup>43</sup> Barker recommended several improvements in the prisoners' diet and the conditions of existing cells.<sup>44</sup> Barker later claimed that the measures adopted soon started showing results. But by June 22<sup>nd</sup> none of the hunger strikers had given in.

Dhirendra Nath Choudhury recalled:

Finally, an uneasy Government of India sent an officer for enquiry. He consulted the Chief Commissioner of Andamans. He even passed by our cells. He returned after two-three days. After his departure the Chief Commissioner sent the Jail Superintendent to negotiate with us. The Jail Superintendent told us that the Chief Commissioner would accept all our demands. We were also told that more was to come; the Chief Commissioner would provide us such privileges that we could never dream of. We told him that there would not be any individual decision there will be only collective decision. Thereafter, we gathered at one place and were told that whatever decision we had to take, it would be today, before the arrival of the enquiry officer of Madras. Seeing the logic of the situation, we abandoned the hunger strike.<sup>45</sup>

Bejoy Kumar Sinha<sup>46</sup> has also confirmed this statement.<sup>47</sup> The Government of India received news from the Chief Commissioner, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, that all prisoners abandoned the hunger strike on June 26<sup>th</sup>.<sup>48</sup> The press communiqué mentioned that the prisoners abandoned the hunger strike unconditionally. Sir Harry Haig, the Home Member, contradicted the prevailing public opinion. He asserted in the Council of State:

'They said that an impression prevailed that the hunger strike had been given up on terms. There is absolutely no foundation for that story, Sir. The hunger strike was given up unconditionally, and I may inform the House that those who took part in it were as a punishment for this breach of discipline deprived of certain privileges for a period of two months. The privileges were restored at the end of August after the two months had expired. So I hope we shall hear nothing more about the hunger-strike having been given up on conditions.'<sup>49</sup>

So far the hunger strike was concerned it was admitted that they had certain grievances. Some of those grievances were redressed in January 1934 by framing rules by the Chief Commissioner,

<sup>42</sup> 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 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 27<sup>th</sup> July 1933, P&J 3026/1933.

<sup>43</sup> Out of total 55 prisoners on hunger strike, 35 were B class and rest 20 were C class convicts. Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Srivastava, Pramod Kumar 2004. pp. 84-85.

<sup>46</sup> Sinha Bejoy Kumar, Shiv Verma and Jaideo Kapoor, convicts of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lahore Conspiracy case had arrived at Port Blair on 14<sup>th</sup> June in the same ship, which carried Barker, were not on hunger strike. Srivastava, Pramod Kumar 2003. p. 93.

<sup>47</sup> Sinha, Bejoy Kumar. 1939. p. 42.

<sup>48</sup> IOR: Communiqué, dated Simla, the 27<sup>th</sup> June 1933, P&J 3932 of 1933.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands, under section 60 of the Prisons Act 1894 to regulate the classification and treatment of convicted prisoners.<sup>50</sup> It was stated in the communiqué as well as later in the Lower House in reply to certain questions that their grievances were not taken into consideration because they threatened to strike. In the Council of State Mr. Kalikar, a Member declared:

My submission is that if their grievances were genuine-and it seems that some of their grievances were genuine because some of the grievances were redressed afterwards by the Government. The Government could have taken their grievances into account from the beginning and avoided this difficult hunger-strike which caused the death of these three unfortunate prisoners. The grievances of these political prisoners were about proper diet, supply of light, newspapers like Statesman, proper and timely medical aid and correspondence with their relatives and Government. Some of the grievances have been remedied and I therefore submit that Government committed a blunder in not paying attention to the grievances of these political prisoners in the beginning so that this catastrophe could have been easily avoided.<sup>51</sup>

Regarding the debate in the Council of State on the subject Hunger-Strike of the political prisoners at Andamans Cellular Jail Mr. Clausen, the Under Secretary of State for India, commented:

The fact that after the hunger-strike ended the authorities recognised and remedied certain grievances makes it difficult to say convincingly however true it may be that the hunger-strike was entirely without justification or might not have been avoided; especially if it is the case (as suggested in the supplementary questions in the Assembly on August 23<sup>rd</sup>) that the prisoners made representations, before threatening to strike, which were not properly handled by the authorities. (We know privately that the jail superintendent, now transferred, was not very good at dealing with terrorist prisoners, of whom he was nervous).<sup>52</sup>

### **Political University**

The highly planned hunger strikes by revolutionary convicts during May-June 1933, found its desired objective of subduing colonial machinery of its repressive measures. The jail administration not only redressed all the grievances of the hunger strikers but provided them many unasked-for privileges also. The kitchen came under the control of convicts, discrimination among different class of political prisoners vanished, a playground was provided for playing football, volleyball, tennis and badminton and above all they were allowed to hold political classes inside the jail. They were allowed to arrange books from outside.<sup>53</sup> Shiv Verma, Dr. Narayan Roy, Jaideo Kapoor were their teachers on Marxism. The day-to-day life in the Cellular Jail improved considerably and it almost took the shape of a political university. The jail administration had provided them a spacious room created after a merger of two cells. Even a bell was hung at the central tower. From 8 in the morning to 12 in the noon classes resumed. 12 to 3 p.m. was time for lunch and rest. 3 to 5 were again for the classes. 5 onward were for games. The

<sup>50</sup> See Appendix-2, Srivastava, Pramod Kumar. 2004. pp. 42-49.

<sup>51</sup> IOR: Vinayak Vithal Kalikar, Council of State, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1933, P&J 3932/1933.

<sup>52</sup> IOR: Minute Paper, Debate in Council of State, Hunger strike of Terrorist Prisoner, Andaman Cellular Jail, Received P&J Dept 31Oct 1933, P&J 3932/1933.

<sup>53</sup> See interview of Shiv Verma in Srivastava, Pramod Kumar (2004), and Sinha (1939).

following four years in the Cellular Jail were passed by inmates in serious studies, exchange of views, heated debates, political formations like *communist consolidation*, printing of jail newspaper like *The Call*, and political struggles among communist and non-communist followers. Many of them became communists only during the phase of jail life. Majority of communist cadre of Bengal were trained theoretically and ideologically during the Andamans phase. The jailor was not worried about the kind of growing political ideologies among the prisoners but his only concern was maintaining peace within the jail premises. He used to say 'I do not care whether you are becoming communist or Bolshevik, but have peace in the jail. If there is peace in the jail my annual increment of 100 rupees is guaranteed, which is my only concern.'<sup>54</sup>

### **Festival of Protest**

The Cellular Jail witnessed one more protest hunger strike by the political prisoners in the last phase of its existence. On July 24, 1937, 187 political prisoners of Cellular Jail undertook hunger strike and 72 went on work strike. The nature of the hunger strike, the grievances of the political prisoners and response of the jail administration all were in complete departure from the earlier experiences. The spirit of the protest was conspicuous by the absence of past hostile consciousness on the part of political prisoners and recourse to repressive measures by the colonial machinery as well. The occasion of hunger strike had arisen not in the Cellular Jail but in the recent political formation in the mainland. The release of political prisoners by the Congress governments formed in the provinces after the provincial elections of 1937 had instigated them to formulate their demands,<sup>55</sup> which included, (1) the unconditional release of all detenus, State prisoners, and convicted political prisoners; (2) the withdrawal of orders of internment and the repeal of repressive laws; (3) the abolition of system of deporting political prisoners to the Andamans and the return of those already there to India; and (4) the granting of all political prisoners as 'B' class prisoners entitled to certain privileges. Neither their grievances had its roots in the Cellular Jail nor did its solution lie with the jail administration. The nature of the grievances and the demands of the hunger strikers determined the overall nature of the hunger strike and response of the jail administration. Though the number of hunger strikers was immense but jail administration encountered no threat or challenge in dealing with them. The artificial or forced feeding was not required. The last hunger strike at the Cellular Jail was more like a festival of protest.

However, a good deal of sympathy had been aroused in Bengal in support of the hunger strikers, and a number of demonstrations took place in Calcutta and other places. Subhas Chandra Bose threatened to start a campaign on behalf of the hunger strikers, throughout Bengal, if steps were not taken to repatriate them. In the Deoli detention camp 150 detenus started a hunger strike in sympathy with the hunger strikers.<sup>56</sup> Later, Mahatma Gandhi intervened and an agreement between him and Viceroy Lord Linlithgow paved the way for the release of those political prisoners ready to give an undertaking of a declaration of not taking part, in future, in any kind of violent activities. All hunger strikers agreed to give such declaration and the hunger strike was abandoned on August 30<sup>th</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> For transformation of Cellular Jail taking shape of a political university alias Marxist University after May-June 1933 hunger strike see interviews of Shiv Verma, Jaideo Kapoor, Bankim Chakravorty, Dharendra Nath Choudhury, Provat Chakravorty, Ram Chandra Das in Srivastava, Pramod Kumar (2004); and memoirs of Sudhanshu Dasgupta (1985).

<sup>55</sup> IOR: Draft Note to the Cabinet, P&J 3784/37.

<sup>56</sup> IOR: Draft Note to the Cabinet, P&J 3784/37.

The political prisoners of penal settlement were ultimately transferred in phases to mainland prisons. Out of 300 political prisoners in the Cellular Jail on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1937, 191 were repatriated until 31<sup>st</sup> December 1937, leaving 109 political prisoners from Bengal.<sup>57</sup> The last batch of 109 terrorist prisoners left Andamans on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1938.<sup>58</sup>

### Cellular Jail under Japanese Occupation

Japanese occupation of Andaman Islands during World War II, from March 1942 to October 1945, threatened the very rationale of British colonial state in India, the future leadership of Nehru in Indian National Congress, and existing loyalties of an artificial society grown under British colonialism.

The first Japanese plane came over Andaman and Nicobar Islands on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1942.<sup>59</sup> The same day, Manila and the Cavite were captured by the Japanese troops.<sup>60</sup> With each Japanese victory the British administration in the Andaman Islands was getting disturbed and many left the Islands on 9<sup>th</sup> January by a naval ship *Alanga*.<sup>61</sup> Kuala Lumpur was captured by troops of General Yamashita's Twenty-fifth Army on 11 January, and "fortress Singapore" came under siege on 31 January.<sup>62</sup> In January Japan also launched a campaign to occupy the Dutch East Indies; and Burma, after having a ten years alliance with Japan, declared war on the Allies on 25<sup>th</sup> January. After the fall of Singapore on 15<sup>th</sup> February the Gorkha Battalion, which was recently sent, also left on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1942.<sup>63</sup> The evacuation of Rangoon on 7<sup>th</sup> March by the British<sup>64</sup> prompted the British administration at Port Blair to desert it completely on 13<sup>th</sup> March<sup>65</sup> leaving the islanders on their own and at the mercy of the Japanese forces, expected to land on at any moment. Four senior European officers, Mr. Radice, the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Mc Carthy, Superintendent of Police, Lt. Commander Waters, Engineer and Harbour Master, and Mr. N. H. Young, the jailor, holding charge of important departments, surreptitiously left Andamans in a small motor boat and reached Madras the very moment the Japanese forces were advancing towards those Islands. The evacuation and the final disappearance of those officers created a vacuum in the administration and gave a clue to the public of the impending calamity.<sup>66</sup>

Some villagers saw a Japanese ship along the east coast of Port Blair in the early part of the night of 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1942. The landing of Japanese troops at Port Blair commenced on the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1942 at 3 am at Corbyn's Cove.<sup>67</sup> The Japanese occupation got over within twelve hours of landing, without any resistance from people or nominal administration left in the islands after evacuation. All Englishmen and Anglo-Indians arrested by the Japanese forces were confined to Ross Islands, from where there was no scope of escape.

<sup>57</sup> IOR: From Joint Secretary to the Government of India to His Majesty's Under Secretary of State for India, Public and Judicial Department, dated New Delhi 14 January 1938, P&J 359 of 1938, No. F. 5/1/38-Jails, GOI, Home Department.

<sup>58</sup> IOR: Telegram from Home Department Government of India to the Secretary of State, No. F. 5/14/37-Jails dated 7<sup>th</sup> January 1938.

<sup>59</sup> Interview of Hari Kishan by the Author, Port Blair, 21 November 2006.

<sup>60</sup> Stockwell, A. J. 1992. p. 331.

<sup>61</sup> Roy Chowdhury. 2004. p. 115.

<sup>62</sup> Stockwell, *ibid*.

<sup>63</sup> Roy Chowdhury, *ibid*.

<sup>64</sup> Stockwell, A. J. 1992. p. 331.

<sup>65</sup> Roy Chowdhury, *ibid*.

<sup>66</sup> Ram Krishna. Andaman under Japanese Occupation. 1942-1945, S. No. 25, Cellular Jail, Port Blair, p.1.

<sup>67</sup> Interview of Hari Kishan, *ibid*.

Immediately after occupying Andaman and Nicobar Islands the Japanese opened a Japanese language and culture school, known as *Kyoshoneau*, at Bamboo Flat on the top of the hill, besides Mount Harriet in a doctor's bungalow. Sixty students were enrolled out of which 30 were Indians and 30 were Burmese including 1 Nicobari. There were four *Hanchos*, a group captain over 15 boys. In the six-month course only Japanese language and culture were taught by the two teachers, *Saito Sa* and *Yagi Sa*. It was a boarding school, and only one holiday was given on the last day of the month.<sup>68</sup>

One of the first official acts of the Japanese was to release all prisoners from the Cellular Jail to signify the end of British dominion and to exploit local sentiments as being their liberator. The sole motive was to propagate the view that Japan was an Asian nation like India and that the Allies were their common enemy. It also implied that Japan came to liberate India from British yoke. The idea of 'the greater co-prosperity sphere', and 'Asia for Asians' were the popular slogans in the air since Japan began its quest for conquest in South East Asia.

The emotive slogan had influenced differently the common Indians and their political leaders in the mainland. Nehru, the most popular leader in the Congress was eagerly waiting for an opportunity to extend full cooperation in the war efforts in favour of western democracies while Bose, who was no less popular than Nehru, especially after his mysterious escape from British captivity in January 1941, was siding with the anti-democratic Axis powers. Indian opinion accordingly was sharply divided over Japanese onslaught and the release of all political prisoners by and large sent the message about the Japanese army as being their liberator. Exactly after a month of Japanese occupation of Andaman Islands, on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1942 Gandhi dispatched a proposal, which was a complete somersault from his earlier stand of unconditional support to the Allied Cause.<sup>69</sup> The proposal that he sent through Mira Ben, was for consideration at Congress working Committee to be held on 24 April to 1 May 1942.<sup>70</sup> His charismatic mind perceived immediately following the Andamans debacle that any further support to British might drive Indian popular nationalist ethos in favour of Bose. His very proposal became the foundation stone of his historic Quit India Movement.

The public opinion in the Andamans was also sharply divided along two different kinds of colonialisms. Those in favour of the Japanese emphasized that, 'not a single rape was committed during Japanese occupation. Women were honoured very much.'<sup>71</sup>

On the third day of the occupation a few Japanese soldiers were chasing some chickens in the densely populated central square of Aberdeen village and caught hold of the birds for fun, which was objected by a few young men. One of them Zulfiqar Ali, fired an air gun at the soldiers. The humiliated soldiers ran away only to return later with vengeance. The entire area was combed in search for Zulfiqar Ali who was hiding to save his life. His house was set on fire, which engulfed all the adjacent houses built of timber. The soldiers returned after threatening the people of the area to hand over the boy latest by next morning. Zulfiqar Ali surrendered on the morning of 25<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Interview of Hari Kishan, *ibid*.

<sup>69</sup> Gandhi's statement to the Press, September 5, 1939, *Harijan*, 9-9-39, CWMG (1977), vol. LXX, pp. 161-162.

<sup>70</sup> Gandhi to Nehru, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1942. quoted from *Young Indian*, August 1993, p. iv.

<sup>71</sup> Interview of Hari Kishan, *ibid*.

March to the Japanese army. He was tortured brutally and executed by a firing squad in front of the horrified residents of the square.<sup>72</sup>

After three or four months of occupation Allied aircrafts began to bomb Japanese cargo ships. The frequency of such bombardments and submarine attacks on Japanese cargo ships arriving at harbours increased considerably towards the end of 1942. The exact timing of such bombardments and submarine attacks led to the suspicion of spying which was not possible without the tacit support of the islanders. It led to the surprise arrests of the islanders by the Japanese administration in October 1942. Around 500 educated men of Andaman were arrested. All were tortured. All were later released except seven, Narayan Rao, Ittar Singh, Gopal Krishna, Abdul Khaliq, Dr. Surendra Nath Nag, Chote Singh and Suba Khan. Four members from each family were /picked up and all seven persons were killed in the *Buchadkhana* (slaughterhouse).<sup>73</sup> The four members of each family were selected to watch the killing just to terrorise the residents. The Japanese wanted to give the message that what could happen to those helping allied forces. There were total five spy cases. It is not clear exactly who was decoding the messages and sending these to allied forces. Since McCarthy, the British Intelligence Officer, was sending messages difficult to be decoded by Japanese, educated people were the target of Japanese army.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, they tortured the educated Indians who could decode these messages. Tortures included beating, water treatment, electric shock treatment, burning, piercing the fingernails etc. The arrests, investigations, tortures, and sham trials lasted for three months.

Dennis McCarthy was the leader of the British intelligence mission to the Andamans. It was later revealed that the secret mission had the title of ‘Operation Baldhead-236.’ It resulted in the start of the second spy case at the end of August 1943, which began with the arrest of two ex-convicts, Ratan Chand and Faizul Hussain, the supervisors of the labour force. Thereafter, mass arrests ensued in October as a consequence of the findings of their interrogation. The number of arrested people exceeded six hundred including prominent citizens like Dr. Diwan Singh,<sup>75</sup> and his associate, Kesar Singh. All these prisoners were confined in the six wings of the Cellular Jail. They were tortured for around three months. The dead body of Dr. Singh was found in his cell on 14 January 1944. Hari Kishan recollects that 44 people were arrested and killed on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1944.<sup>76</sup>

Subhas Chandra Bose, who had quietly slipped away from his confinement at home in Calcutta in the month of January 1941, miraculously reappeared in Singapore at the end of 1943. A South East Asian Conference with the representatives from Burma, Malaya, The Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), Philippines, and Occupied China was convened in Tokyo on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1943,<sup>77</sup> in which Bose participated as observer delegate since he was not representing any Indian territory. The Imperial Japanese Government announced on 6<sup>th</sup> November that it was ready to hand over the Andaman and Nicobar islands to the Provisional Government as “initial evidence” of its willingness to help India’s struggle for independence.<sup>78</sup> Later a provisional government of India

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<sup>72</sup> Interview of Mr. Gauri Shanker Pandey, Port Blair, 22 November 2006.

<sup>73</sup> Interview of Hari Kishan, *ibid*.

<sup>74</sup> Interview of M.A. Muztaba Port Blair, 23 November 2006.

<sup>75</sup> Member of Peace Committee designated Chief Medical Officer and President Doctor’s Association.

<sup>76</sup> Interview of Hari Kishan, *ibid*.

<sup>77</sup> Sareen, T.R. .1986. p.121.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*. p. 122.

with Subhas Chandra Bose as its President was established at Singapore. The Indian National Army was also created comprising of prisoners of war with Japan and an Indian Independence League was formed with Indians living in South East Asia. Immediately thereafter, Bose made a visit to Port Blair in December and a ceremonial transfer of Andaman and Nicobar Islands took place renaming them the *Shahid* (Martyr) and *Swaraj* (Self-rule) Islands.

Bose landed at Port Blair on the morning of 29<sup>th</sup> December and left it in the night of the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1943. No Indian was allowed to talk to Bose throughout his stay in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. He was apprised by an Indian interpreter about the men imprisoned in the Cellular Jail in the 'spy case'.<sup>79</sup> During his short stay at Port Blair the itinerary of Bose was so arranged by the Japanese administration that no islander could find an opportunity to meet him and reveal the truth about the plight of the islanders perpetrated on the islands and also behind the walls of the Cellular Jail under the pretext of spy cases. The major events of his itinerary at Port Blair were a dinner thrown in his honour by the Admiral in charge of the Islands, hoisting of national flag ceremony, a public meeting, visit to certain villages, a visit to Cellular Jail, a public meeting called in lieu of meeting with the working committee of the Indian Independence League (IIL) and a return dinner thrown by him for the Admiral and the Japanese Officers. Indian Independence League also donated Rs. 10,000/- to Bose. Mrs. Ichamati Nag, the President and Mrs. Ruth Meshach, Secretary, women's wing of IIL presented Jewellery worth Rs. 5000/-.<sup>80</sup>

One month after the departure of Bose, the President of the provisional government of India, the second spy case came to an end. On 30 January 1944, the day of the spring festival, *Basant Panchmi*, forty-four persons were picked up for death sentence. The victims were loaded in 3 trucks and taken to a far off place called 'Homfrey Gunj' about 18 kilometres away from Port Blair and were shot dead.<sup>81</sup>

The destruction of the Japanese ships by the Allied sub-marines was so extensive that ships could be seen going down with full cargo off the coast of Port Blair. In such a tense atmosphere, a fishing motorboat encountered a sub-marine, which not only damaged the motorboat but men in the sub-marine also shot dead a Japanese watch guard. Under the pretext of the third spy case all the fishermen along with the master and the crew of the motorboat were arrested. The master and the crew were later released after interrogation but the fishermen were severely tortured and later hanged inside the Cellular Jail.<sup>82</sup> A fresh wave of arrests began in month of June 1944 but this time the arrests were done in the name of the Chief Commissioner. This was the fourth spy case with the difference that no one was executed. In the month of September under the fifth and the last spy case several islanders were arrested for alleged espionage.

The serial aerial bombing of June 1945 by the Allies forced many people to abandon the Andaman Islands in search of some safer destination though under the risk of peril. The Japanese intercepted one of the boats carrying some thirty souls on board, men, women, and children. All of them were tied to trees and slaughtered in cold blood.

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<sup>79</sup> Interview of Hari Kishan, *ibid*.

<sup>80</sup> Interview of Gauri Shanker Pandey, *ibid*.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>82</sup> Ram, Krishna 1942-45, pp. 46-47.



By the end of June, 1945 four to five hundred people were rounded up overnight from the Aberdeen area and detained in the vacant wings of the Cellular Jail. They were told that sufficient land was not available in Port Blair for further cultivation therefore they were being transported to produce more food by bringing virgin forests under cultivation

There were in total around seven hundred including many prisoners. In the early hours of next morning, at about two, near Havelock Island, the sleeping passengers were forcibly awakened and told to jump overboard.<sup>83</sup> A similar drama was enacted at the same time in Garacharma village, about six miles from Aberdeen.<sup>84</sup>

The last round up was ordered to begin on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1945. The Japanese were picking up people since morning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. The rendezvous point was Port Mount Village, 14 miles from Aberdeen. But, on the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> the round up stopped abruptly. Telegraphic communication from Japan informed that Japan had surrendered. That meant that all her conquered territory should maintain status quo. From the 15<sup>th</sup> morning it was seen that the Japanese were burning all records in the headquarters of the Admiral and the Civil Governor.<sup>85</sup> On 21<sup>st</sup> August the Governor accepted in a public meeting that Japan had accepted the peace terms. A Proclamation was issued on 23<sup>rd</sup> September in the name of Louis Mountbatten, the Admiral of South East Asia Command, declaring termination of Japanese occupation. On 7<sup>th</sup> October 1945 came the American and British forces to reoccupy the Islands. On 9<sup>th</sup> October 1945 the formal surrender documents were signed at a brief ceremony at Gymkhana grounds off Aberdeen on the seashore.

### Demolition of Cellular Jail

Cellular Jail again came into news in 1969 when people in India came to know that the ‘marvellous machine’ erected by the British colonial regime was being demolished by the Government of India itself. Achyut Ghatak, transported as an Explosive Act convict recalled:

The Government had planned to demolish the Cellular Jail and construct a hospital in the memory of Govind Ballabh Pant. In Calcutta there was a Fraternity Circle.<sup>86</sup> It was not a registered organization still we used to convene meetings and discuss various issues. Later, when we came to know about demolition at the Cellular Jail we immediately sent a few people on behalf of the Fraternity Circle. These five who were sent to Andamans were Vishwanath Mathur, Samar Ghosh, Bangeshwar, Vijay Bannerjee and Vinay Ghosh. The government spread the propaganda that some parts of the Jail were demolished by Japanese bombing. These people came to know that there was no bombing by the Japanese. The Government of India for the purpose of constructing a hospital in its place was demolishing the Jail. The political leaders in opposition also raised questions. At that time Bhupesh Guha, Kamal Nath Tewari and others were in the opposition. Along with them a few other Members of Parliament also raised questions. Later, the Government conceded that the initiative to demolish was its own. Thereafter, the demolition stopped. This was around 1968.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.pp. 63-65.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.p.66.

<sup>85</sup> Gauri Shanker Pandey claims that Japanese burnt the jail documents while torturing the prisoners by making its pitt roll and burning the prisoners. Interview of Gauri Shanker Pandey, *ibid*.

<sup>86</sup> It was “Ex-Andaman Fraternity Circle” founded in Kolkata immediately after Indian independence by transported political prisoners.

<sup>87</sup> Interview of Achyut Ghatak, Srivastava Pramod Kumar (2004, pp. 51-59).

Varindra Ghosh, transported as Arms Act convict;<sup>88</sup> Jyotish Majumdar, transported as Inter-Provincial Conspiracy Case convict;<sup>89</sup> and Ram Chandra Das transported as Charmugaria Post Office Robbery Case convict<sup>90</sup> also recalled the event concerning demolition of Cellular Jail. However, in reply to an un-starred question regarding demolition of Cellular Jail by the Government of India in Lok Sabha on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1969, it was reported:

Wings 3 & 4 of the Cellular Jail were demolished during the Japanese occupation and wing 5 was also partially demolished during that period. Since wing 5 had cracked at several places and was beyond economical repairs, its demolition was sanctioned in March 1960 and by the end of 1960, was completely demolished. Wing no. 2 was also in a dilapidated condition and was likely to collapse at any time. Its demolition was sanctioned in March 1963 and it was demolished by March 1968. Only the Central Tower and three wings are now left.<sup>91</sup>

So far the government's claim that the wings 3, 4, and 5 of the Cellular Jail were demolished during the Japanese occupation has no ground, as there are no records, official or unofficial, regarding such action during Japanese occupation. As against this there are many residents of Port Blair who witnessed demolition of Cellular Jail by the Public Works Department of the Government of India.<sup>92</sup> It is a fact that there was no war either at the time of Japanese occupation of the islands in March 1942 or at the time of Japanese surrender in 1945. There was certainly a single event of bombardment by Japanese in March 1942 but it was confined to Chatam alone. There is a reference of earthquake on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1941, which damaged only the top floor of the Central Tower of Cellular Jail that was repaired at the same time. That earthquake damaged a mosque in the bazar, of course.<sup>93</sup>

The exact time and period of the demolition of Cellular Jail is not known but it is clear from the Government's answer in the Parliament on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1969 that the demolition for the first time was approved in 1960 i.e. at the time of the Government of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India himself. The demolition of other wings was also approved by his Government in 1963 before his death in 1964, and implemented during his daughter's regime in 1968. It is interesting to note that during all those years when the Government of India was approving the demolition of the various wings of the Cellular Jail the ex-Andaman political prisoners were raising their voices for converting it into a National Monument of sacrifice and martyrdom upon the altar of freedom struggle. It was, however, converted into a national Monument at the time of the non-Congress Government of Morarji Desai on 11 February 1979.

## Conclusion

The British colonial state invented multiple penalties for the hostile consciousness of its subjugated Indian subjects. The incarcerated political prisoners during pre-abandonment period between 1909 and 1921 resorted to many kinds of response and resistance to repressive justice of colonial machinery including 'escape', 'assault', suicide, individual hunger strikes and work strikes. An interesting fact about these resistances is that no habitual criminal ever attempted to escape, assault, or underwent hunger or work strike. Political prisoners alone, whose 'bodies were

<sup>88</sup> Interview of Varindra Ghosh, *Ibid.* pp. 156-168.

<sup>89</sup> Interview of Jyotish Majumdar, *Ibid.* p. 104.

<sup>90</sup> Interview of Ram Chandra Das, *Ibid.* p. 111.

<sup>91</sup> ANA, F. No. 41-1/69-Home, 1969 (H-982).

<sup>92</sup> Interview of M.A. Muztaba, *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Interview of Hasan Ali, Port Blair, 22 November 2006.

colonized but souls were free' made all such attempts. In the absence of the interviews of individuals involved in those historical events the present generation of historians are handicapped in presenting histories from convict's point of view. But interviews of many political prisoners of post-abandonment period between 1932 and 1938; and residents during Japanese occupation between 1942 and 1945 provide the other side of story replete with colonial retribution, inhuman disciplining and surveillance without having any reformatory approach, which is altogether absent in the official documents. The six stormy years at Cellular Jail witnessed three historical hunger strikes taking a toll of three political prisoners symbolizing both an extension of revolutionary movement in mainland and an independent meticulous and well-planned response of political prisoners to the criminal justice of the mighty colonial state. The correction of grievances following hunger strike of 1933, and transformation of Cellular Jail into a 'Political University' was only colonial face saving. The collective memories of those transported revolutionaries duly authenticated and substituted with the official colonial documents provide the complete picture of colonial criminal justice and without oral history of Cellular Jail, the history of freedom struggle of India is also not only incomplete but has fallacy of lopsided generalization.

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