

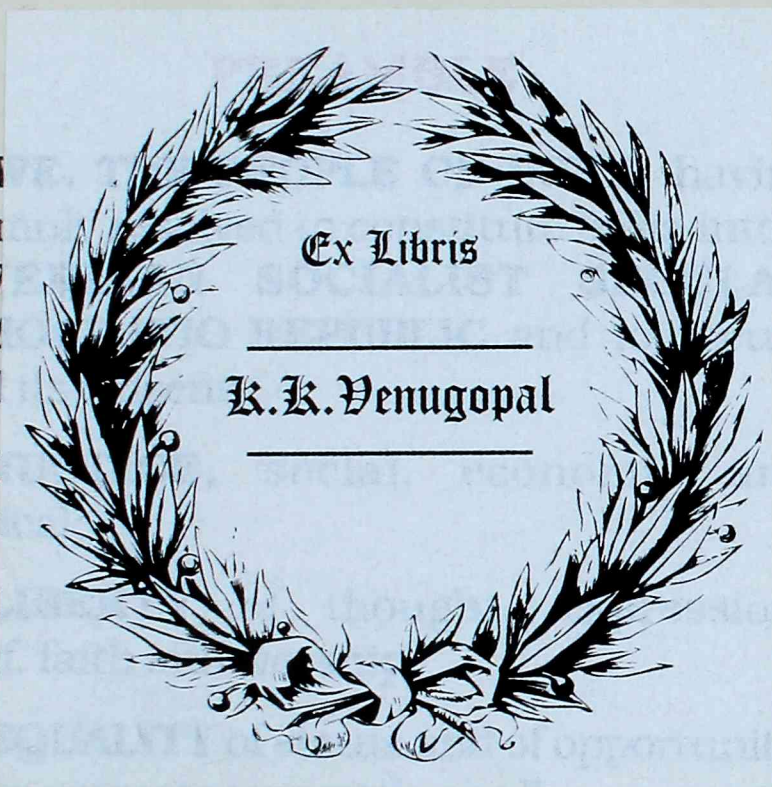


THE CELLULAR JAIL IN OUR FREEDOM STRUGGLE



S.N. AGGARWAL

THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA



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FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation;

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.**

2002
from

11/2022

out of print

THE CELLULAR JAIL IN OUR FREEDOM STRUGGLE

9/14/2015

S.N. AGGARWAL



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FOREWORD

It gives me the greatest pleasure in introducing to our young readers *The Cellular Jail in Our Freedom Struggle*, a book written by Justice S.N. Aggarwal, retired judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court. Justice Aggarwal also served as Law Secretary, Andaman and Nicobar Administration in the 1990s, and his interest in the Cellular Jail of Port Blair dates back to that period. I am given to understand that Justice Aggarwal belongs to a family of freedom fighters. During his childhood, he heard from his parents tales about the heroic deeds of nationalists and revolutionaries, especially of those who were sent to the Cellular Jail. This inspired him to research the contribution that nationalists incarcerated in this jail made to our anti-colonial movement. The result is a fine book, based on many primary and secondary materials that lie scattered in different archives and repositories from Port Blair to little known towns all over the country. The book explores how many young men chose the path of sacrifice and how they remained committed to their ideals. It also throws light on the nature of prison regimes and unmasks the brutalities used by the colonial power to suppress the national struggle.

This story about the brave heroes of British India's most notorious jail is intended to be used as non-textual reading material for children of the age group of 15 to 17 years. As you know, the NCERT's current History textbooks go far beyond issues related to high politics to discuss many different matters of culture and society. In consonance with this perspective, this book comments on the nature of British penal regimes and the role of ordinary people in the making of our national movement. This is perhaps the first history of a jail ever

to be written for school children in our country! We hope it will whet the students' appetite to know more about the many rivulets that formed the mighty Ganga that our national movement was.

New Delhi
11 March 2011

G. RAVINDRA
Director
National Council of Educational
Research and Training

PREFACE

This is a book about the notorious Cellular Jail of Port Blair, Andaman Islands. The solitary cells, torture chambers and other such structures of this jail recount the story of many Indians who valiantly fought against British rule. Deported to distant Andamans for daring to oppose colonial oppression, they faced extreme trials and tribulations. They underwent untold humiliation inside the jail — physical, mental and psychological — much of which is described here. The revolutionaries immortalised these islands by their sweat, blood and sacrifice. It is for this reason that in 1979 the Government of India transformed the erstwhile Cellular Jail into a National Memorial.

Our children would know that the country's freedom struggle threw up different types of leaders and various forms of resistance to colonial oppression. There was Gandhiji's non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience, effective method in its own right. But other freedom fighters felt compelled to use violent forms of protest even as their social and political ideas differed from each other. Apart from the patriots of 1857, some 600 revolutionaries, little known to today's school children and adults alike, were deported to the Cellular Jail in the Andamans during the period 1909-1938 to be incarcerated for life or for term imprisonments. This book seeks to capture their story.

I have written the book for children of the age group of 15 to 17 years. It is intended to be used as non-textual reading material in our schools. I hope it will help deepen the students' understanding of our national movement. It has been put together from my earlier work, *The Heroes of Cellular Jail*, published first in 1995 and subsequently in 2006.

I happen to come from a family of freedom fighters. When the elders used to narrate traumatic tales of young revolutionaries banished to *Kala Pani*, we

children would feel extremely moved. As I grew up, a number of questions arose in my mind: Who were these brave people and what moral fibre were they made of? Why did they voluntarily choose the path of sacrifice by waging struggle against a mighty empire? How did they remain committed for so long to their chosen ideals? Why were they deported to a distant island separated from the mainland by a thousand kilometers? Why were they held in solitary confinement? What are prison regimes all about and how much worse was the Cellular Jail from other prisons on the mainland?

My appointment as Law Secretary, Andaman and Nicobar Administration in the 1990s proved to be a great blessing. It gave me an opportunity to find answers to these issues. The research took me to different archives and libraries in the country and even to Lahore! I managed to lay my hands on the biographical accounts of many of the political prisoners of the Cellular Jail. I was also privileged to meet some of them. They had been invited to Port Blair in October 1990 when the famous Sound and Light show of the National Memorial was inaugurated. I felt I needed to retell the story for children, for the heroes of tomorrow. For, as the noted Hindi writer, Hazari Prasad Dwivedi put it, 'It will be a sad day when the new generation that has grown up after freedom's dawn forgets to respect these martyrs'.

S.N. AGGARWAL

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a book — let alone writing one for children — is never an easy task. Without the support I received from various quarters, the publication of this book would have remained a mere dream. This project has had the blessings of Acharya Sudhanshu Ji Maharaj who often recounts the sacrifices of revolutionary patriots in his discourses. I have always been encouraged by His Holiness to write about this rare class of patriots for the benefit of school children who are the future of our country.

I express my deep gratitude to the National Council of Educational Research and Training for accepting this project. In doing so, not only have they paid tribute to the hallowed memory of these patriots but they have also done great national service by helping our children learn something about a lesser-known chapter in the country's struggle for independence.

I am very grateful to Professor G. Ravindra presently officiating *Director* of the NCERT and Professor Krishna Kumar, former *Director*, NCERT. The moment Professor Krishna Kumar saw my *Heroes of Cellular Jail*, he felt it should be made accessible to school children, albeit in a simple and concise form. I have enormously benefited from the sage advice of Professor Savita Sinha, *Head*, Department of Education in the Social Sciences and Humanities, (DESSH) and Professor Neerja Shukla, *Head*, Publication Department, NCERT.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Anil Sethi of DESSH for his learning and erudition which are amply reflected in this book. His insights as a historian and his eagle-eyed accuracy meant that all facts were double-checked. He helped me improve the text and make it suitable for school children. Dr P.K. Mandal, Ms. Mily Roy Anand, Dr Seema S. Ojha and Dr Reetu Singh commented on the manuscript in its penultimate

stages and I have benefited from their advice. Mathew John, *Editorial Assistant*, NCERT, Vijayam Shankar Narayanan, *Editor*, NCERT, and Shveta Uppal, *Chief Editor*, NCERT performed their editorial duties to perfection and saved me from many an error. Pawan Kumar Barriar, *DTP Operator* at the Council helped prepare the manuscript for publication.

I am much beholden to Hon'ble Justice J.S. Khehar, formerly Judge, Punjab and Haryana High Court (now Hon'ble Chief Justice, Karnataka High Court) for his unstinted support and encouragement throughout the writing of this book.

I also express my gratitude to S.M.R. Baqar, former *Director General*, National Archives of India for his generous help in locating some rare documents. My grateful thanks are also due to Shri Iqbal Singh Sidhu, IAS for his continued moral support.

I am grateful to Dr Varada M. Nikalje, Department of Languages, NCERT and to Preeti Dewan of Delhi University for their useful suggestions. My thanks also go to Gurmit Singh of Desh Bhagat Yadgar Committee as well as Abdul Waseem and Rashida Iqbal, *Curator*, Cellular Jail who have been of great help in the collection of rare documents and visuals for this book. Judy and Geoffrey Kingscott and members of their family were kind enough to provide a photograph of Lord Mayo. It was equally kind of Dr Brajesh Singh, *Scientist*, CPRI, Shimla, to provide me with photographs out of his personal collection for the cover and for page 20. The Andaman and Nicobar administration helped me with a number of materials.

Veena Bhardwaj and RK Bansal of my office have spent many a diligent hour to prepare soft copies of the manuscript. Ritu Topa of Arrt Creations, New Delhi has done a remarkable job as designer, at times re-doing several pages with boundless enthusiasm – a hallmark of her work!

Creating a tertiary account of this kind inevitably means relying on a number of primary and secondary sources. My debt to various scholars and websites

would be evident from the bibliography of this work. I sincerely thank the authors of all the materials mentioned in the bibliography as well as many others whose writings provided materials and perspective. At times, it becomes difficult to recall all debts individually. Even so, the responsibility for any errors in this book rests entirely with me.

The contribution of T.C. Gupta, a former IAS officer of Punjab cadre, in the publication of this book can be compared to a gardener who nurtures a nascent sapling with all his dedication and brings it to blossom despite harsh weather conditions. His love and affection run silently through each page. I feel privileged to have such a close relative whom I would rather call my best friend.

My two little grandsons Parit and Takshit deserve special mention. They would often barge into my study and provide much-needed breaks. They have been a delightful distraction, something that authors need if they wish to be creative. They might even need it to finish their books!

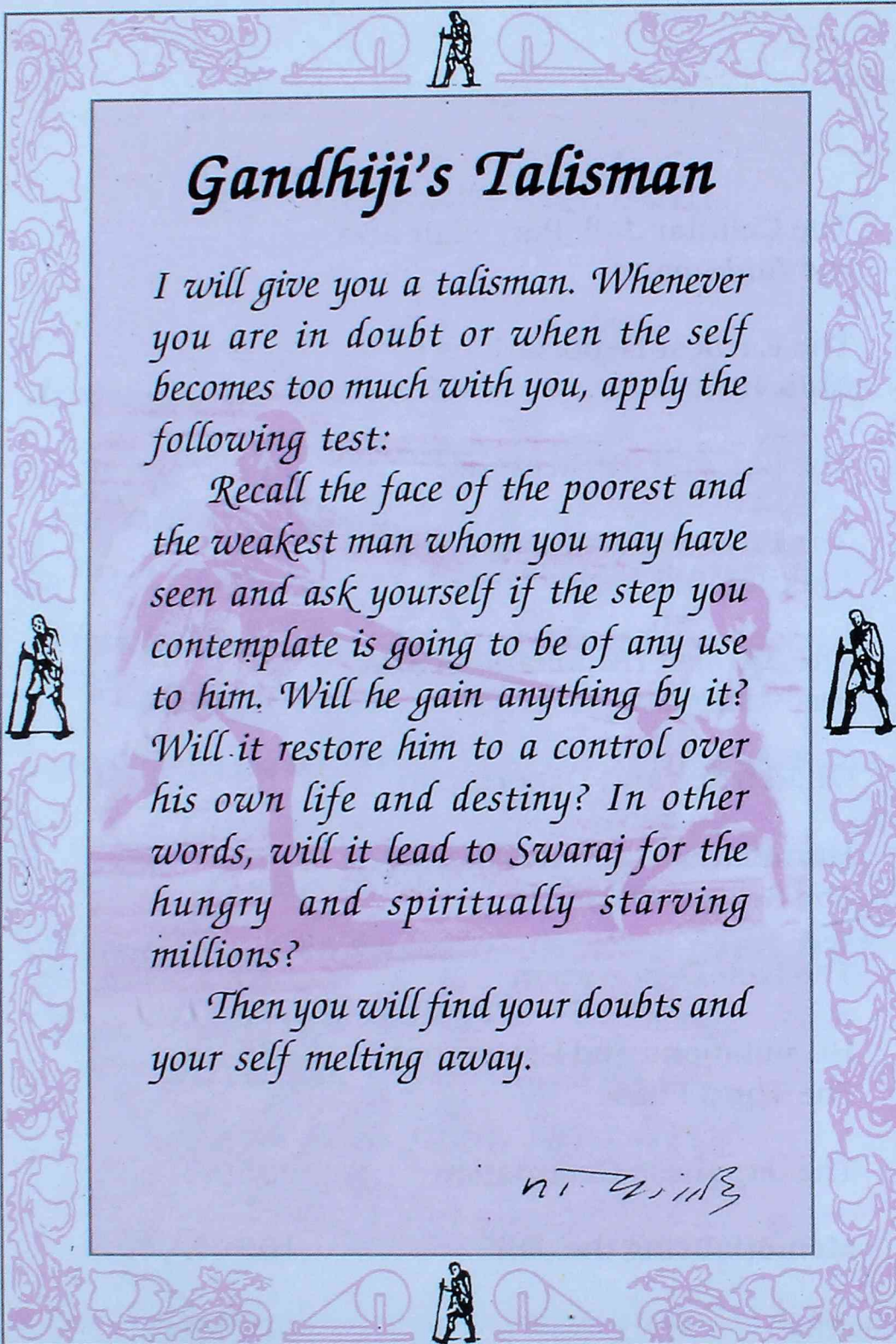
Our National Anthem

*Jana-gana-mana adhinayaka, jaya he
Bharata-bhagya-vidhata.
Punjab-Sindh-Gujarat-Maratha
Dravida-Utkala-Banga
Vindhya-Himachala-Yamuna-Ganga
Uchchhala-jaladhi-taranga.
Tava shubha name jage,
Tava shubha asisa mage,
Gahe tava jaya gatha.
Jana-gana-mangala-dayaka jaya he
Bharata-bhagya-vidhata.
Jaya he, jaya he, jaya he,
Jaya jaya jaya, jaya he!*

Our National Anthem, composed originally in Bangla by Rabindranath Tagore, was adopted in its Hindi version by the Constituent Assembly as the national anthem of India on 24 January 1950.

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Gandhiji's Talisman

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test:

Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions?

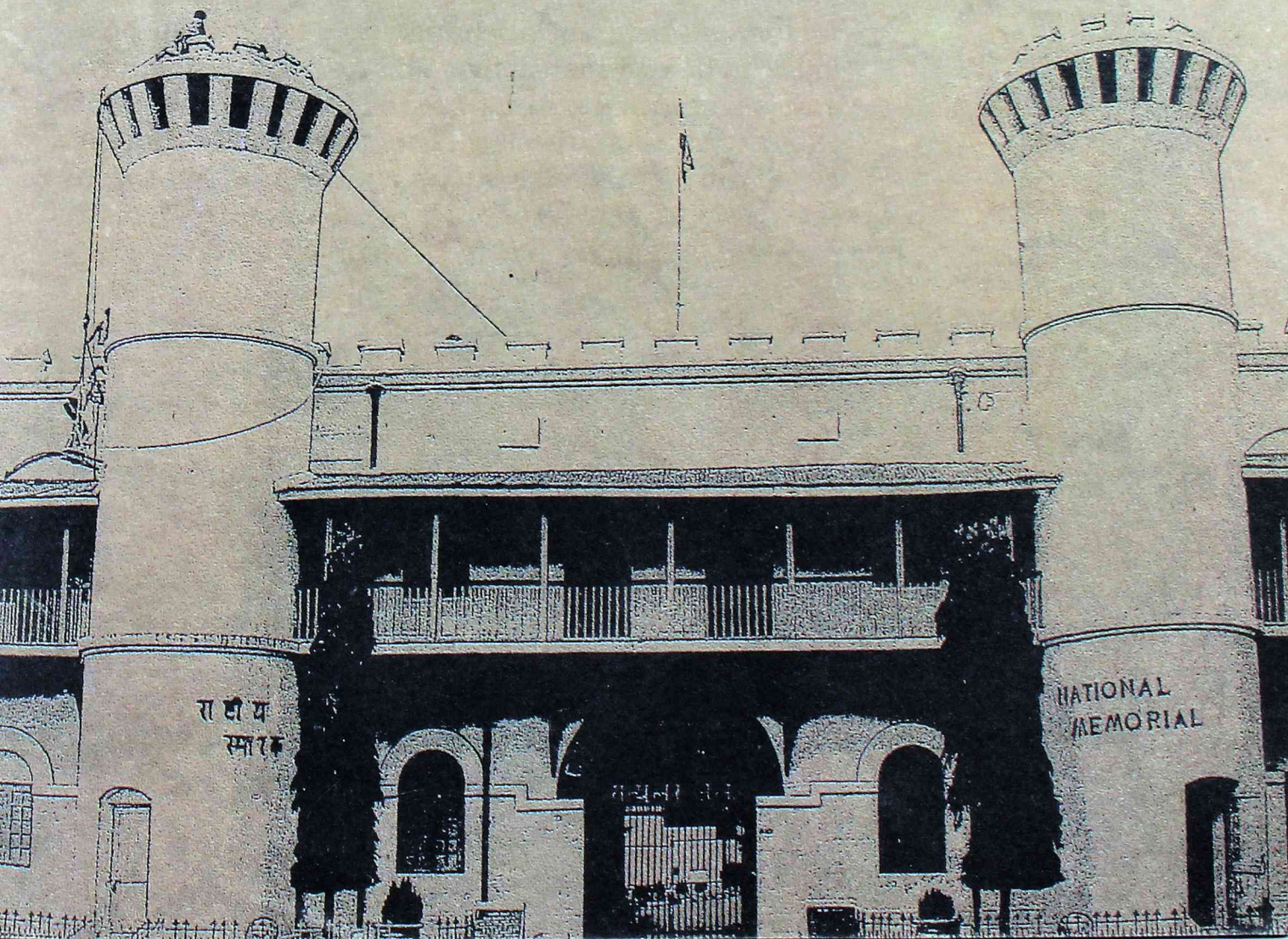
Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away.

M. K. Gandhi

CHAPTER 1

THE CELLULAR JAIL PORT BLAIR AND THE ANDAMANS

The Cellular Jail at Port Blair is now a national monument. Its dungeons and structures are witness to the immense sacrifices of numerous Indians who valiantly fought against British colonialism.



THE HISTORY OF A JAIL? WHAT CAN SUCH HISTORIES TELL US?

This is a book about what came to be known as the *kale pani ki saza* (the punishment of the 'black waters'). It recounts the story of the notorious Cellular Jail of Port Blair, Andaman Islands. The school histories that you have come across would not have included any narrative about jails. Are jails the subject-matter of history? Why do we seek to introduce you to the history of the Cellular Jail?

Until recently, school children were generally made to read political histories although at times they were taught aspects of cultural and economic history as well. But the NCERT's latest history textbooks go far beyond political events and processes. They discuss histories of livelihoods, leisure pursuits (such as games and novels) and everyday life because these too, tell us a lot about human life and how it has changed with the passage of time.

We would begin by emphasising that everything (including jails) has a history because all things, institutions and situations evolve and change, and history is about social change over time. Histories of jails can be very instructive. They can tell us about how states and societies discipline their citizens and punish those who break the law. They can trigger thoughts about our rights and duties as citizens; about the law itself, about how and why certain laws get framed; and about distinctions between ordinary criminals and political prisoners. At times, these histories can illumine the efforts of citizens to fight the injustices and oppression of states and speak to us about the heroic struggles of the people.

The Cellular Jail at Port Blair is now a national monument. A notable landmark, its dungeons and structures are witness to the immense sacrifices of numerous Indians who valiantly fought against British colonialism. **Deported** to distant Andamans for daring to oppose colonial oppression, they faced extreme trials

**Deported/
Deportation:**
the banishment or
expulsion of
somebody from his
or her country
Also: the forcible
expulsion of a
foreign national
from a country

and tribulations. The authorities humiliated and flogged them and used handcuffs, standing handcuffs, bars, chain-bars and cross-bars to demoralise them.

The revolutionaries immortalised these islands by their sweat and blood, in the process converting them into places of pilgrimage. Above all, therefore, the history of the Cellular Jail throws a shaft of illuminating light on the making of India's freedom struggle, especially on the sterling contributions of our revolutionary nationalists. For about 29 years (1909–1938) the history of the Andaman Islands was interwoven with the history of the national movement and the life and work of many revolutionaries.

This book identifies the various phases of the revolutionary movement, the deportation of the revolutionaries to the Andamans, their deeds of bravery and the punishments and tortures inflicted upon them in the Cellular Jail. The history of the jail has been discussed chronologically. It has been constructed

The façade of the Cellular Jail
The towers now carry the words 'National Memorial'





Left: Nicobarese men
Right: Nicobarese women
at prayer

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, piracy was common near these islands with Nancowry being the seat of power. The pirates plundered, scuttled the boats of their victims, and murdered the crew of numerous British vessels. This led the British to establish the first-ever settlement in the Andamans in September 1789 on Chatham Island on the south-east bay of the Great Andamans, then named as Port Cornwallis, but later re-named as Port Blair. This settlement was formed on the lines of several such arrangements then in existence to put down piracy and check the killing of ship-wrecked crews. It consisted of free settlers from Bengal and a few hundred convicts. For various reasons the settlement was withdrawn in 1796; the free settlers were sent back to Bengal and the prisoners to Penang in Malaysia. A fresh settlement was established in 1858, a year after the rebellion of 1857. After India gained independence in 1947, the islands were incorporated into the Indian Union and administered as a Union Territory by the Government of India.

The Great Andamanese, the Jarawas, the Sentinalese, the Onges, the Nicobarese and the Shompens are the six native tribes which inhabit these islands. The population of these tribes, except that of the Nicobarese, is negligible. The Great Andamanese are only 51 in number and they reside in the Strait

Island. Similarly, the number of Onges is also only about a hundred and they live in the Little Andaman Island. The Jarawas are more than 200 in number and reside at two to three different places. The Sentinalese are also about 100 in number.

The other two tribes, namely, the Nicobarese and the Shompens are living in the Nicobar group of islands. The number of the Nicobarese is more than 28,000. The number of the Shompens is estimated to be 400 and they reside in the interior of the Great Nicobar island.

The Andaman tribes belong to what is known as the Negrito stock but the Nicobarese and the Shompens are of Mongoloid origin. The Andamanese, the Onges, the Jarawas and the Sentinalese speak different languages which are not mutually understood among the various tribes. The Nicobarese have different dialects. The Shompens, too, speak in a dialect of their own. Until 1858 these tribal groups were the sole inhabitants of the islands. People from various parts of the mainland began to settle in the Andamans only after 1857.

The Sentinalese go fishing



WHY KALA PANI?

The Andamans are often referred to as *kala pani* but the reasons for this infamous name are obscure. Some people maintain that the colour of the sea water of these islands was black—either in itself, or because of the reflection of thick and dark clouds which caused the sky to often remain overcast. Others believe that the expression *kala pani* is derived from the Sanskrit word *kala*, which means ‘time of death’. *Kala pani*, therefore, meant the waters of death, a place of death from where only the luckiest returned alive.

Neither the soil nor the water of these picturesque islands is black. Yet, because of the inhuman brutalities inflicted by the British imperial rulers on the political prisoners fighting for the liberation of their motherland, and deported from the mainland, these islands came to be called *kala pani*.

Kala pani or ‘Black Waters’ virtually meant cruel and inhuman treatment of the prisoners. A sentence of deportation to *kala pani* was a warrant for throwing a prisoner in living hell to lead the life of a beast or worse. This could be worse than the death penalty. Indian revolutionaries were condemned to *kala pani* to undergo such severe punishments, but they in turn immortalised these islands by their sacrifices. The phrase *kala pani* therefore symbolises the trials and tribulations faced by the brave political prisoners sent to the Andamans.

Working at the oil-mill and with coconuts

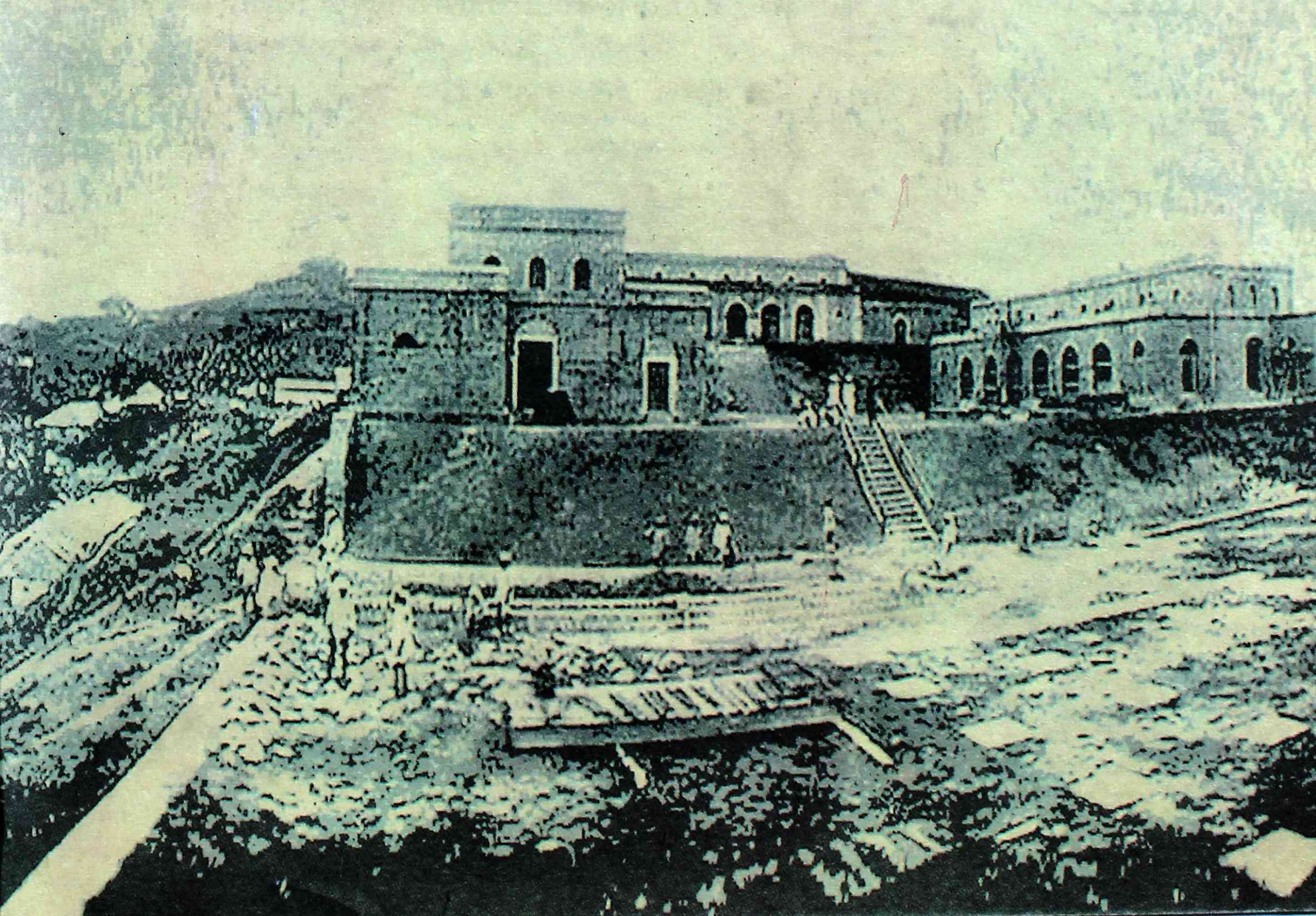
Apart from punishments and other humiliations, *kala pani* meant back-breaking work



CHAPTER 2

THE EARLIEST DEPORTATIONS TO *KALA PANI*

In the middle of the nineteenth century the British resolved to create a penal settlement in the Andamans. After 1857 this increasingly became a settlement not just for punishing rebels but also for physically removing them from the body politic of the colonial jewel the British wished to rule and control.



A PENAL COLONY FOR THE REBELS OF 1857

As discussed in the previous chapter, the first settlement, established in September 1789, was abandoned in 1796. A host of considerations including maritime changes, increase in piracy in the Bay of Bengal and the need to set up a penal station impelled the British to think of the Andamans as a site for a **penal** colony. Thus started the second phase of the penal settlement. After a great deal of debate and discussion and after conducting many surveys, it was decided in January 1858 to set-up a convict settlement for prisoners of heinous crimes.

When established, the rebels of 1857 were, in the main, the first inmates of this settlement. These included Fazl-ul-Haq of the United Provinces, Garabdas Patel of Gujarat, Maulvi Syed Alauddin of Hyderabad and Bahadur Goanburah of Assam. Leaders of the Wahabi Movement, notably, Abdul Rahim Sadiqpuri, were also deported to the Andamans as were the Kuka rebels of the Punjab. Thus, the Andamans were considered to be a convenient place for the confinement of prominent rebels, away from the ordinary convicts lodged in Indian jails, lest they infect them with revolutionary ideas and infuse in them the spirit of hatred against the government. Such prisoners, it was felt, were men of fervour and a class by themselves.

Penal:

connected with
or used for
punishment,
especially by law

Creating a penal settlement
Gang labour of chained
convicts was used to
“develop” this area of
Port Blair, 1880



Formal Annexation and the Arrival of Prisoners

The Andaman Islands were formally annexed when Captain Henry Mann, Executive Engineer and Superintendent of Convicts at Moulmein, raised the Union Jack at Port Blair on 22 January 1858. The first batch of political prisoners arrived at Port Blair on 10 March 1858 under the supervision of a naval officer, J.P. Walker. This marked the beginning of the painful and shocking saga of the earliest patriots condemned to the *kala pani*. Thereafter, 216 freedom fighters from Punjab were brought to Karachi (now in Pakistan), from where they were sent to the Andamans in April 1858. Rising from obscurity the jailhouse was soon to acquire the notoriety of the "grand Indian Bastille", catapulting the islands into a momentous historical trajectory.

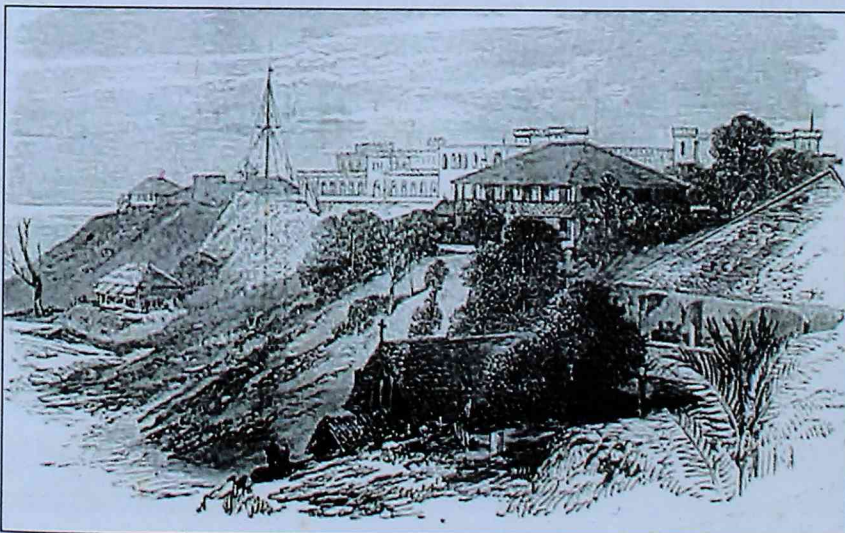
The headquarters of the penal settlement were set up at Ross Island on 7 May 1858. Huts were built to accommodate 1000 convicts. On 8 October 1858 the Viper Island was also occupied. It was also used as an open jail. For reinforcing strict discipline, a jail was constructed there in 1867. Those who violated discipline were tied with iron chains at Viper Island and for this reason this jail was called the Viper Chain Gang Jail. On 8 February 1864 a penal settlement of 500 convicts was set up at Port Mouat. The penal settlement centred on the harbour of Port Blair which included the Ross, Chatham and Viper Islands as well.

Below left: The headquarters of the penal establishment at Ross Island

The Illustrated London News carried this picture on 24 February 1872

Below right: A view of the Viper Island

The red domed building was used to house the gallows



Aborigines:
people inhabiting a
land from the
earliest times or
from before the
arrival of colonists.

Unpleasant Weather Conditions

The convicts at these settlements had to work for nine hours a day in the trying climate of these tropical islands and in unhealthy conditions which resulted in a high rate of mortality. They were exposed to such hostile climate that severe sickness visited them frequently. A number of them could not bear it and lost their lives, while many remained sick in hospital. The rate of death was staggeringly high, coming to 24 per cent of the total number. The number of convicts received in the Andamans in the period from 10 March 1858 to 20 October 1859 was 3697. Of these, 1365 persons died because of disease.

HARDSHIPS AND CRUELTIES

The Jail Superintendent, J.P. Walker was very harsh to the convicts, especially mutineers, resulting in escape bids by some of them. Even the lesser British officials in charge of the convicts tried all sorts of savage methods of punishment. The convicts were handcuffed in pairs and these handcuffs were never unlocked again

The Magnitude of the Task!



The magnitude of the task of clearing the primeval jungle of the Andaman islands can only be appreciated by those who have witnessed the nature of the vegetation and the difficulty of effecting a clearance. The jungle was so dense and its entanglement by gigantic creepers so complete, as to render it impassable, except along the few pathways used by the **aborigines**. The jungle, so far as is known, is continuous, no open plains having been observed. Even when cut, often trees cannot be got to fall without great force, nor brushwood removed when cut owing to the intricate binding by creepers of great strength. There is great difficulty even during the present dry weather in getting brushwood that has been several days felled to burn and the largest heaps are constantly extinguished at night by the very heavy dew that falls drenching everything exposed.

J. P. Walker, Jail Superintendent

during the working hours. Many of them were assigned work on the beach. While at work, an iron bar was passed through the fetters of a number of them and the bar was fastened to the earth. The prisoners were made to work here in this manner in a sitting posture. The convicts were made to work barefoot in face of wind and tide, burning sun, and blustering rain. Their only protection was the blankets, sails or canvasses hung over the trunks of the trees. The tents in which the convicts lived were insufficient protection as they would rot in the rain and would shred to pieces in a matter of days. For the first few years, convicts were made to sleep in wooden huts, on unboarded floors, and damp bedding, and were given measly rations. It was only from 1865 onwards that iron-framed barracks began to be put up for the convicts.

Political Prisoners Clear the Jungles

On arrival the political prisoners were immediately sent to clear the jungles in the Chatham Island and also at Pheonix Bay. Three gangs of twenty-five men each were also asked to clear the Ross Island. The task of clearing the jungles, given to the heroes of 1857, involved the hardest possible labour. Such hard labour proved to be very tough for all, but especially for the *maulvis* (men of Islamic learning) and the *zamindars* (landowners).

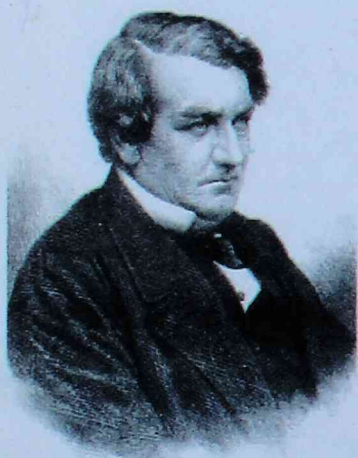
Attacks by Native People

Even while working under the command of the British officials, the life of the prisoners was not safe from the attacks of the native people who saw them as outsiders and intruders. On 5 April 1858, about 248 helpless convicts engaged in digging wells, constructing huts and clearing the jungles were attacked by 200 local men. Some of the prisoners were killed and many injured. On 14 April, 446 convicts were attacked by another group of 1500 armed with axes and knives in addition to bows and arrows and the prisoners suffered deaths and injuries. By the end of 1858, about 170 convicts were killed in this manner.

To convict:
to declare
somebody guilty of
a crime in a court
of law

Escapes and Executions

The cruelties inflicted on political prisoners sometimes exceeded the limits of their forbearance. Some mutineers, therefore, preferred to end their lives rather than continue with a wretched existence. One mutineer, Niranjani Singh, who was **convicted** for desertion committed suicide by hanging himself in the Ross Island. Four others committed suicide by drowning themselves. Narain, a 'freedom fighter', tried to escape on the fourth day of his arrival in the Andamans. He was recaptured and executed on the same day. On 18 March 1858, twenty-one persons escaped and on 23 March 1858, another eleven persons escaped from Ross Island. But the dauntless spirit of the freedom fighters could not be subdued. On 1 April 1859, a group of 500 Punjabi prisoners assaulted Dr Walker but he survived the attack.



Lord Mayo

MURDER OF LORD MAYO

Lord Mayo, the then Viceroy of India, visited the Andaman Islands on 8 February 1872. The authorities had made special arrangements for his safety. That very day, shortly before dusk, Lord Mayo visited Mount Harriet to ascertain the suitability of building a sanatorium for the convicts and also to enjoy the splendid sunset. As ill luck would have it, Lord Mayo



The pier at Mount Harriet,
Hope Town where Lord
Mayo was killed

Sher Ali and His Victim



His Private Secretary was instantly at his side helping him up the bank. "Byrne", he said quietly, "they've hit me." Then in a louder voice, which was heard on the pier, "It's all right, I don't think I am much hurt." In another minute he was sitting under the smoky glare of the re-lit torches, in a rude native cart at the side of the jetty, his legs hanging loosely down. As they lifted him bodily on to the cart they saw a great dark patch on the back of his coat. The blood came streaming out, and men tried to staunch it with their handkerchiefs. For a moment or two he sat up in the cart, then fell heavily backwards, "Lift up my head," he said finally. Those were his last words.

They carried him down into the steam launch, some silently believing him dead. Others, angry

with themselves for the surmise, cut open his coat, and stopped the wound with hastily-torn strips of cloth and the palms of their hands. Others kept rubbing his feet and legs. Three supported his head. The assassin lay tied and stunned a few yards from him. As the launch shot on in the darkness, eight bells rang across the water from the ship. When it came near the frigate, where the guests stood waiting for dinner, and jesting about some fish which they had caught for the meal, the lights in the launch were suddenly extinguished to hide what was going on inside. They lifted Lord Mayo gently into his cabin; when he was laid down on the cot, every one saw that he was dead...

After a while the assassin was brought on board where the poor victim was lying. The Foreign Secretary asked him why he had committed such a murder. Without flinching he replied, "*Khuda ne hukm diya.*" "By order of God." Then he was asked who his accomplice was, and he answered, "*Mera sharik koi admī nahin; mera sharik khuda hai.*" "Among men I have no accomplice; God is my partner." Next morning when he was called to plead, he said, "*Han main ne kiya.*" "Yes, I did it."

F.A.M. Dass, *The Andaman Islands* (Madras, 1937)



The gallows at Viper Island
It was here that Sher Ali
was hanged to death

was in fact moving towards a death trap laid by Sher Ali who, inspired by the Wahabi Movement, had been keenly waiting for a long time to kill a white man of high status. Sher Ali was a Pathan from the North West Frontier, an ex-convict who had served a sentence of transportation for life at the Andamans. On the basis of his good conduct in the jail, he had been granted permission to live outside and was now stationed at Hope Town. After Lord Mayo climbed down the Mount Harriet and stepped forward to descend the jetty stairs to board the launch, Sher

Ali swiftly pounced upon him and stabbed him.

Sher Ali was convicted by the Chief Commissioner, Port Blair, sitting as Sessions Judge, and he was sentenced to be hanged by the neck till death. The High Court of Bengal confirmed the sentence. Sher Ali was executed at the Viper Island.

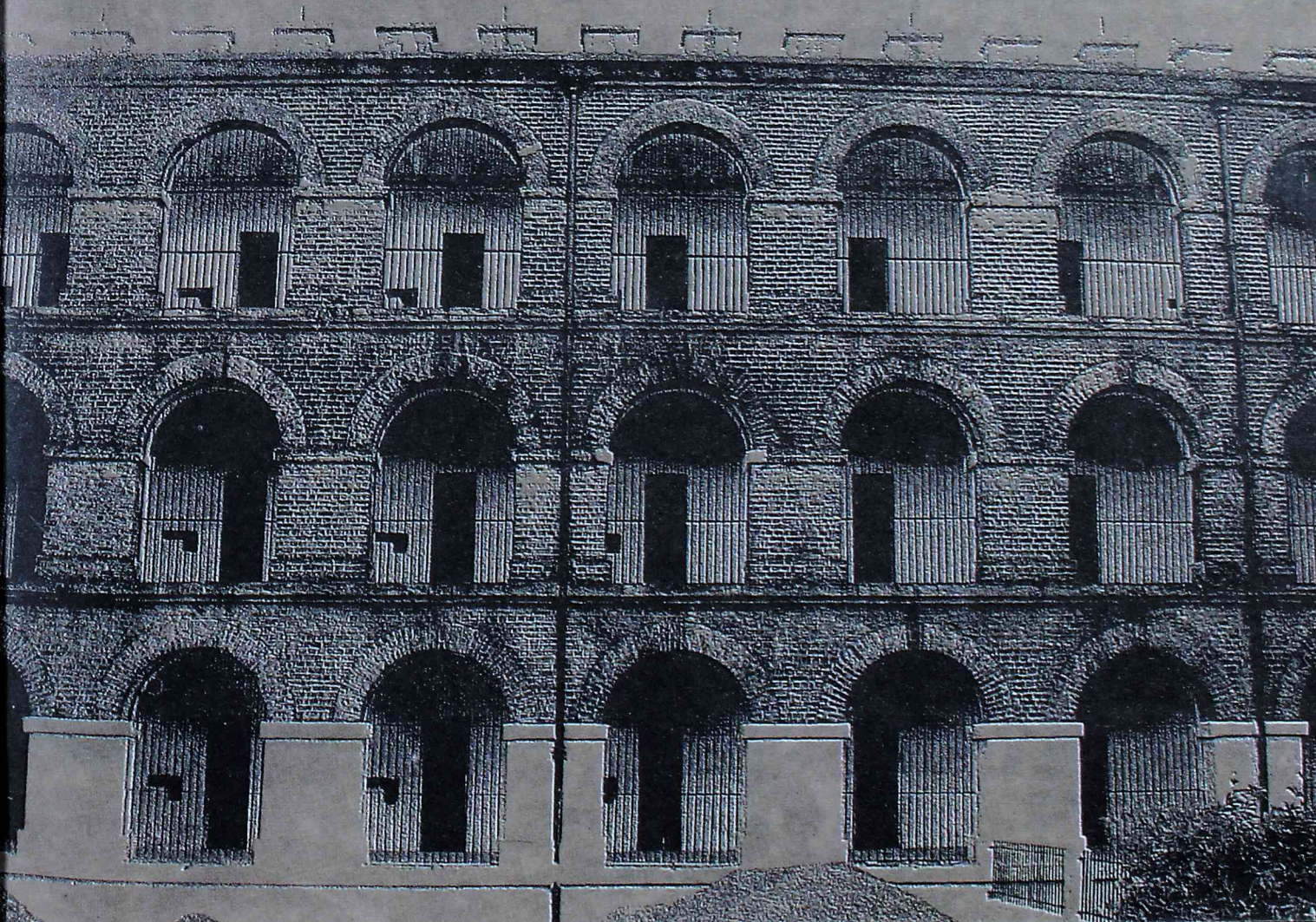
CONCLUDING REMARKS

While the first phase of colonisation of the Andamans (1789-1796) was undistinguished, the establishment of the penal settlement in the second phase unlocked new possibilities in the imperial framework. Historians have noted that during J.P. Walker's tenure 3697 prisoners had been received in the Andamans. Some of them were hanged, some died of disease, with only 1837 alive as on 20 October 1859. Labour was the chief source of expense in colonisation and the use of convict labour in clearing the jungles was a cheap alternative. The convicts, on release, were sought to be "rehabilitated" to ensure their self-sustenance. By 1905, land measuring 25,189 acres had been cleared of jungles and 10,364 acres brought under actual cultivation. By 1906, the population of settlers on the islands had increased to 14,696, most of them being "rehabilitated" ex-convicts.

CHAPTER 3

THE JAIL AND ITS STRUCTURE

The Cellular Jail is a massive brick and mortar structure resembling a great fort. In colonial times it symbolised the authority of the rulers and their designs to crush Indian resistance as also the dauntless spirit of those who challenged the British Empire.



WHY WAS THE CELLULAR JAIL BUILT?

You have already read that prisoners used to be housed in barracks in Port Blair, the Ross Island and also in concrete structures on the Viper Island before the construction of the Cellular Jail. In 1890, the British Government in India formed a committee consisting of C.J. Lyall of the Bengal Civil Service and Surgeon-Major A.S. Lethbridge, Inspector-General of Jails, Bengal to inspect the penal settlement at Port Blair and to study the jail system. The Lyall and Lethbridge Committee, as it came to be known, suggested in its report that the



A model of the Jail showing its seven wings, each connected to a central tower.

confinement of convicts in the Andamans be made more severe. The doctrine followed was that a “prison regime must be **punitive** and humiliating, even more dreadful than the hangman’s noose” so as to exercise deterrence through fear. Such a fear must be instilled in those convicted as also in those who may display a potential to wage war against the government. It was with these ends in view that the Lyall and Lethbridge Committee proposed the construction of the Cellular Jail and the government approved the proposal.

The construction of the Jail began in 1896 and by 1897 about 400 cells of the jail were ready for occupation. It was fully completed in 1906. Built on the sea-coast at Atlanta Point in Aberdeen at a height of sixty feet from sea-level, the building was a massive brick and mortar structure resembling a great fort. This unique structure symbolised the authority of the colonial rulers and their designs to crush the political protests of the enslaved country. Within a few years of its functioning, it also came to represent the harrowing cries of dauntless spirits who had dared to challenge the might of the British Empire.

Punitive:
intended as
punishment

THE STRUCTURE OF THE JAIL

In all, the Cellular Jail had 698 cells. It had seven wings, each departing towards different directions from

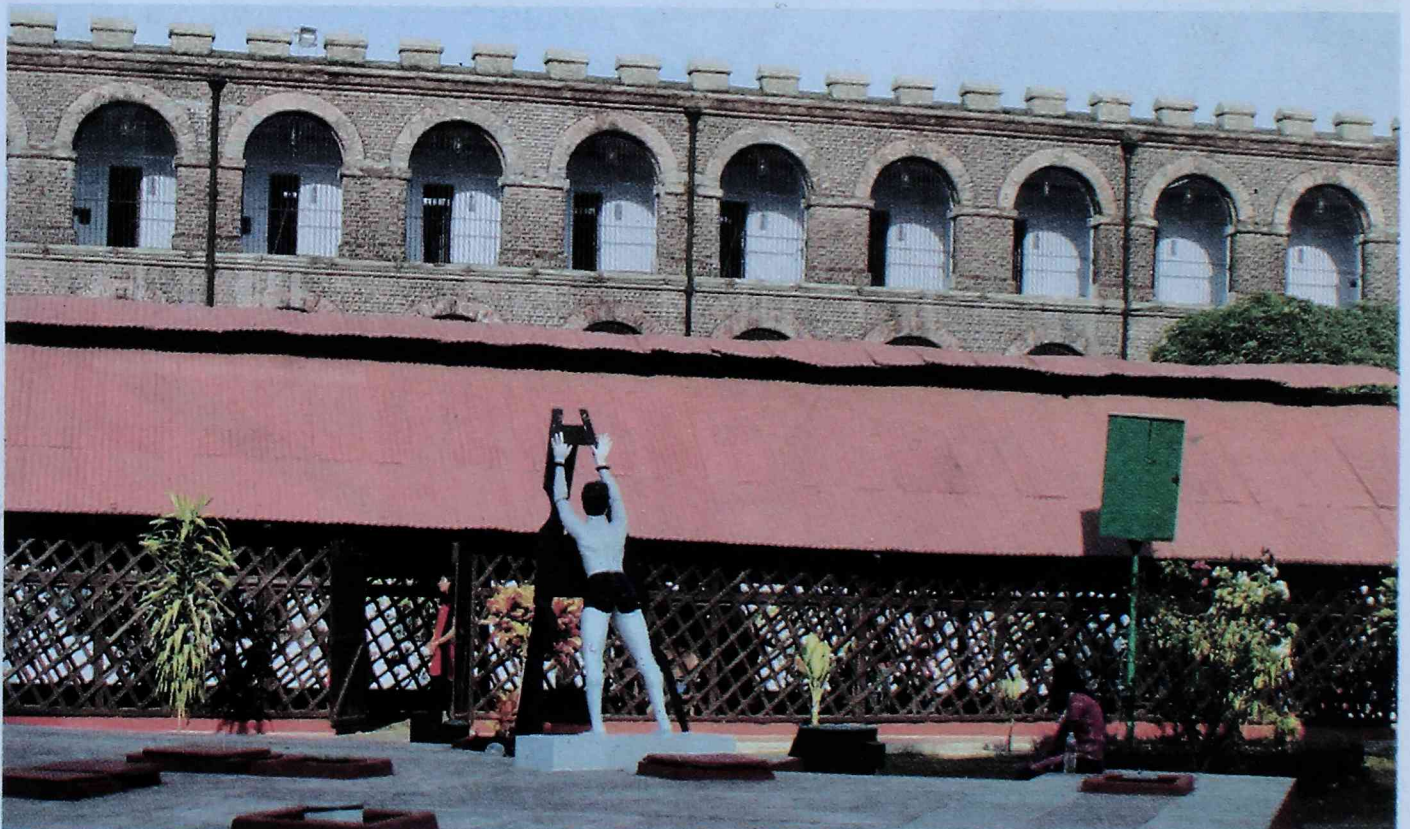
a central tower and each wing had three storeys. The central tower, representing a three-storeyed pillar or a minaret, had a fourth storey also, probably to facilitate the watch and ward. Since each wing was like the spokes of a wheel or the ribs of an umbrella and the central part like a fulcrum, the egress and ingress from each wing and each storey to another was possible through the central part known as the control tower. The tower housed a bell that tolled the hour and in an emergency, sounded the alarm. A guard was posted on each of the three storeys in the central fulcrum. To get a clear, complete and unobstructed view of the verandah that faced the cells on each floor of each wing, all he had to do was to walk round. One **convict warden** used to be on night duty in each wing and on each floor. Therefore, at any given time there used to be twenty-one warders on duty on three floors and seven wings of the jail. Their duty changed every three hours. All in all eighty-four convict-warders remained on duty each night.

The jail was quite unusual in its structure. At the entrance, overlooking the iron gates was the

Convict Warden:
a prisoner who is given the duties of a guard in the jail

Individual cells in a row and a model showing flogging

This jail is called the Cellular Jail because it consisted just of cells; there were no dormitories



Top: The ventilator of the cells, seen from the outside

Bottom: A unique architectural feature: the back side of one wing faces the facade of the other

This was meant to facilitate the complete isolation of inmates housed in each wing.

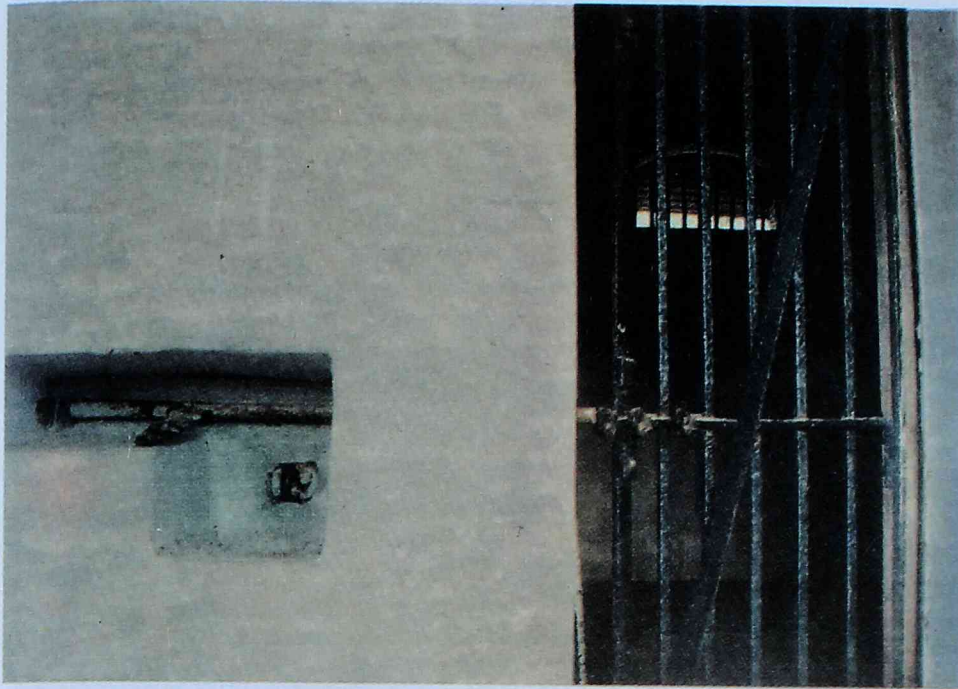


administrative block. On entering the main gate was a high-roofed corridor and then there was a small courtyard on the right hand. It was here that the first 'sermons' were administered to convicts to demoralise them, to tame them into submission. The elevation of the jail building was visible from here. It looked weird and frightening. On the further right of this courtyard was the kitchen compound, divided by the British into a Hindu kitchen and a Muslim one. Adjoining this compound were the gallows. On the left, after crossing the corridor was a hospital for prisoners.

Each block had a courtyard with a workshop where the prisoners worked during the day. It also had a water tank, one cubit wide and ten cubits long, to hold water and a latrine near it.

The jail had no barracks or dormitories. The size of each cell was thirteen and a half feet by seven feet. Each cell had a door made of iron bars with an opening into the verandah. The doors of the cells were shut by means of iron bolts and locks from outside and their location





Left: A typical cell at the Cellular Jail

Locking arrangements were placed away from the door, far out of the reach of the inmate

Below: Bridges connecting the wings to the central tower

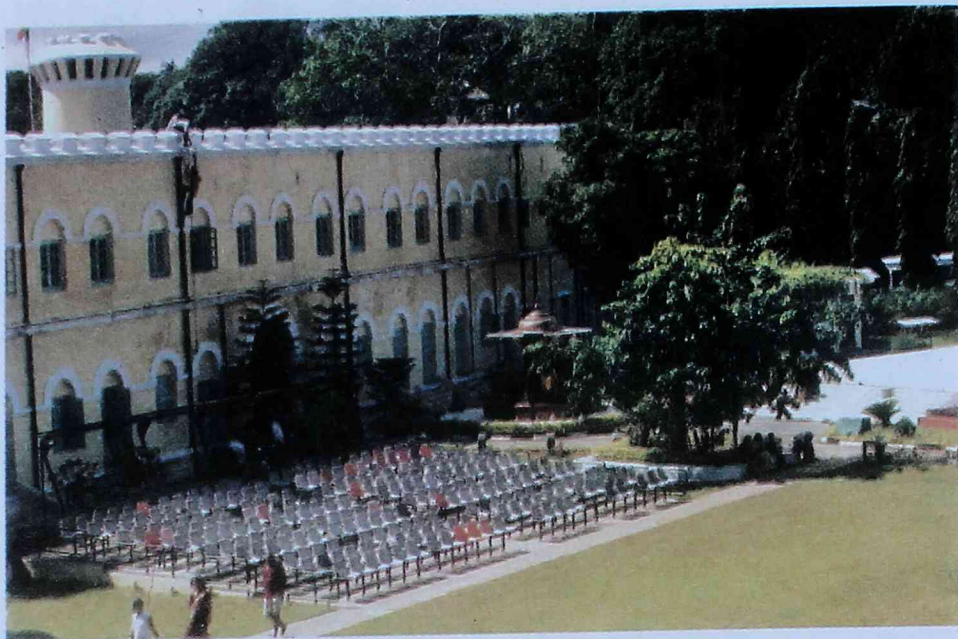
was such that they could not be opened by the inmates from inside even if one had the opportunity to do so. The cells were laid out in a row. The verandah, about four feet wide, ran all along the front of the cells. On the opposite side of the cells, iron railings were fixed into the arched pillars that supported the roof of the verandah.

In order to minimise the chance of dialogue among the prisoners and to isolate them from each other, the front portion of each wing was made to face the rear of the other. Each cell had a ventilator in the back wall at an inaccessible height, and built in a manner that made any contact with others impossible.

The jail has, over a period of time, suffered many ravages brought about by nature and man. The earthquake of 1941 and the Japanese invaders caused substantial damage to the building. Four of the seven wings of



The Sound and Light show at the jail premises
This compound, located just beyond the main gate, was used to humiliate and demoralise prisoners on arrival



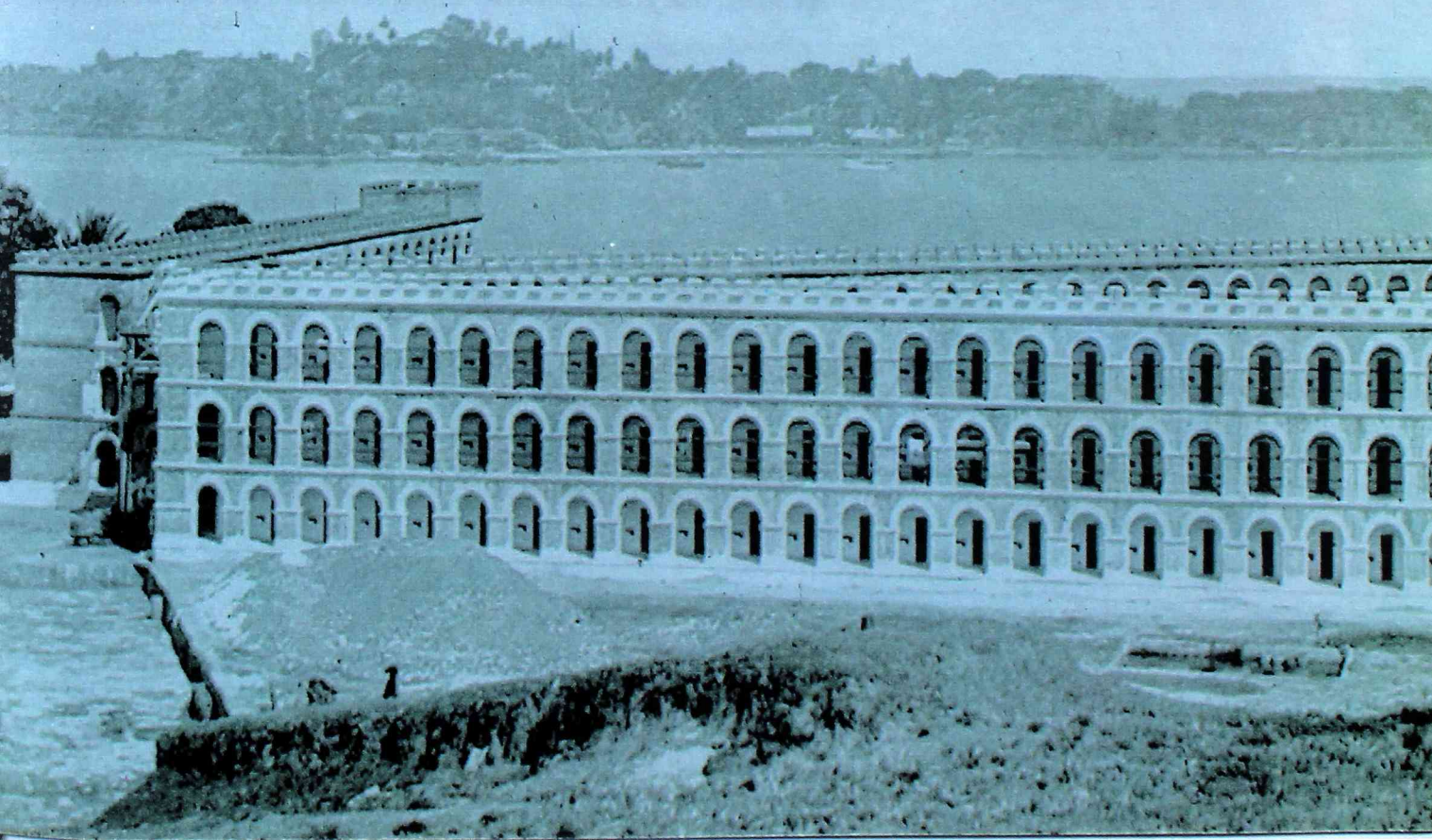
this massive starfish-like structure have since been pulled down, two by the Japanese and two have made way for the G.B. Pant Hospital. What have been preserved, at considerable effort and expense, are three wings (1, 6 and 7) and the watch tower.

The Cellular Jail was dedicated to the nation on 11 February 1979 by the then Prime Minister, Morarji Desai. The jail marked its centenary year on 10 March 2006.

CHAPTER 4

THE FIRST DEPORTATIONS TO THE CELLULAR JAIL

This chapter and the next discuss the life, travails and traumas of the first batch of revolutionary nationalists at the jail. Their activities have been placed here in the context of the rise of radical nationalism in the opening decades of the twentieth century.



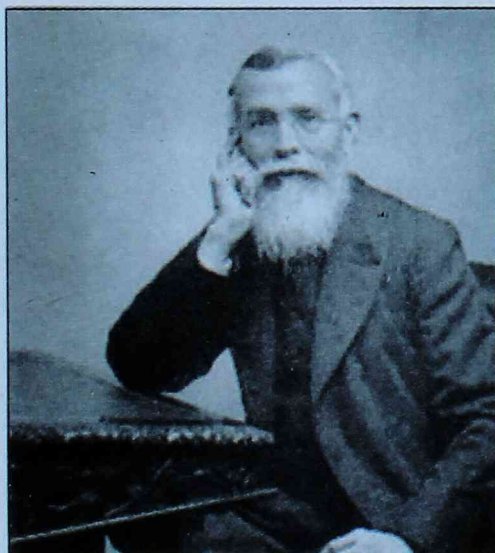
Chapter 2 had focussed on political prisoners brought to the Andamans in the nineteenth century, especially those who had participated in the rebellion of 1857. These prisoners, as you have seen, were not housed in the Cellular Jail, for this prison was established only at the turn of the last century.

In the twentieth century, nationalist prisoners were deported to the Cellular Jail in three significant phases: from 1909 to 1914, from 1915 to 1921 and from 1932 to 1938. Although a large number of women participated in the national movement, all of the deported prisoners happened to be men. This chapter and the next discuss the life, travails and traumas of the first batch of nationalists at this jail. But in order to focus on their political activities, we must first grasp the basic features of the national movement of that period.

INDIAN NATIONALISM, CIRCA 1900

The period between the 1880s and the beginning of the First World War (1914-18) was a turbulent era in the history of Indian nationalism. The first twenty years of the Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, were marked by what may be called 'moderate' objectives and methods. The moderates such as Surendranath Banerjea, Dadabhai Naoroji, M.G. Ranade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale raised many significant demands. Above all, they asked the British rulers to put an end

*Moderate leaders
Gopal Krishna Gokhale,
Dadabhai Naoroji and
Surendranath Banerjea*





From left to right: Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal

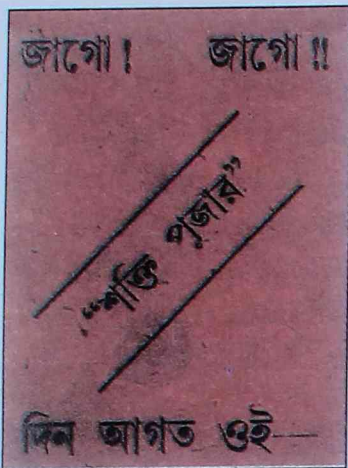
These radical Congressmen were affectionately known as “Lal”, “Bal” and “Pal”

to the drain of wealth to England and to Indianise the administration. But they believed that the British government was a positive force and would accept the just demands of Indians. Consequently, their methods were limited to prayer and petition. The Moderate Congress passed resolutions and urged the government to take action. Radical nationalists in Bengal, Maharashtra, Punjab and Tamil Nadu questioned the efficacy of this approach.

Leaders such as Bipin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and V. O. Chidambaram Pillai were beginning to explore more radical objectives and methods. They criticised the Moderates for their “politics of prayers”, and emphasised the importance of self-reliance and constructive work. They taught the people to rely on their own strength, not on the “good” intentions of the government. People must fight for *swaraj*. As Tilak put it in his immortal words, ‘Swaraj is my birthright and I will have it’. He popularised two annual festivals, one in honour of Lord Ganapati, and the other to celebrate the brave deeds of the Maratha hero, Shivaji. He told the British that if patriotism is a crime, he was a criminal. Two revolutionaries in Pune, Damodar Chapekar and Bal Krishna Chapekar formed an organisation called the ‘Society for the Removal of Obstacles’ for purposes of imparting physical and



V.O. Chidambaram Pillai



Awake, Awake, a Bengali political pamphlet banned by the British around 1908

military training to men devoting their lives to the cause of the freedom struggle. They killed Plague Commissioner Rand, and kissed the gallows in 1897. The Savarkar brothers (G.D. Savarkar and V.D. Savarkar) founded a society called 'Mitra Mela' in 1899 on the lines of the 'Hindu Mela' in Bengal.

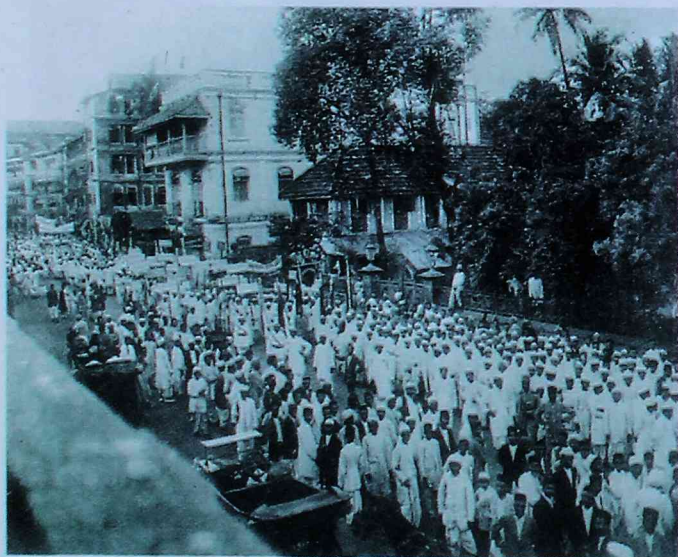
In Bengal itself, the revolutionaries were beginning to jolt the British Raj. The Anushilan Samiti was formed in 1902. Many eminent leaders such as Aurobindo Ghose, C.R. Das and and Bipin Chandra Pal joined it. In 1903, Barindra Kumar Ghose went to Baroda where he received training in revolutionary activities from his brother Aurobindo. The oath administered to him, as an Anushilan member, with a sword and a copy of the *Srimad Bhagavadgita* held in his hands, was: 'As long as there is life in me and as long as India is not liberated from her chains of subjection, I will carry on the work of revolution. If at any time I disclose a single word or a single event of the Samiti or harm it in any way, it shall be at the cost of my life'.

In 1905 Viceroy Curzon partitioned Bengal. At that time Bengal was the largest province of British India and included Bihar and parts of Orissa. The British divided Bengal for reasons of administrative convenience. But what did administrative convenience mean? Whose convenience did the British have in mind? Clearly, this division was intended to benefit

British officials and businessmen. Even so, instead of removing non-Bengali areas from the province, the government separated East Bengal and merged it with Assam. Perhaps the main British motives were to curtail the influence of Bengali politicians, to checkmate the revolutionary movement of the province and to split the Bengali people on communal lines.

By 1908, Bengal was in turmoil. The partition of Bengal had incited the people to rise in revolt against the

Thousands joined the demonstrations during the Swadeshi movement



British. The agitation against the partition of Bengal had virtually become a war for independence. As the British official, Sir Valentine Chirol observed, "the question of partition itself receded into the background and the issue until then successfully veiled and now openly raised was not whether Bengal should be the one unpartitioned province or two partitioned provinces under the British Rule but *whether British Rule itself was to endure in Bengal or for the matter of that anywhere in India*". (Emphasis added).

The dare-devil members of various self-help societies were willing to suffer any punishment for the cause of their motherland. The government pressed repressive laws into service to silence the voice of the agitating people. Bhupendranath Dutta, editor of *Jugantar*, was arrested on 5 July 1907. He was prosecuted for publishing two articles, 'Free from Fear' and 'Big Stick Medicine'. He was convicted and sentenced and his printing press confiscated. Yet, the *Jugantar* reached its readers in time because it was secretly printed at another press. There were strong demonstrations against Dutta's conviction. Keshub Chandra Sen,



Keshub Chandra Sen

Can Our Rule Last? Minto and Morley on the Agitation against the Partition of Bengal

Speaking about the impact of the Bengal agitation, Lord Minto, the then Governor-General of India, wrote to Lord Morley, then Secretary of State for India: "We all feel that we are mere sojourners in the land, only camping and on the march".

Morley wrote back: "Your way of putting this helps me to realise how intensely artificial and unnatural is our mighty Raj and it sets one wondering whether it can possibly last. It surely cannot and our only business is to do what we can to make the next transition, whatever it may turn out to be, something of an improvement".



Lord Minto

Seditious:

conduct or speech provoking rebellion or challenging the authority of the state



Khudiram Bose

proprietor of *Sonar Bangla*, was also convicted for **seditious** publications around the same time. Aurobindo Ghose too was prosecuted in 1907 for publishing an article titled 'Politics for Indians'.

The public use of the slogan, *Vande Mataram* was banned. But such was the courage of the Bengali youth that one Sushil Sen raised the cry of *Vande Mataram* even in the midst of court proceedings in a case against

Bipin Chandra Pal. The presiding magistrate felt annoyed and directed a sergeant to apprehend Sushil Sen. But before the sergeant could arrest him, Sushil Sen assaulted the sergeant in the court room itself. Sen was sentenced to fifteen lashes at a public flogging. With every blow, the cry of *Vande Mataram* rang out loud and clear. This was such a popular slogan that the Swadeshi Movement in deltaic Andhra was known as the *Vande Mataram* Movement. Khudiram Bose of Midnapur and Prafulla

Chaki of Rangpur, both teenagers, undertook to kill the magistrate referred to above to avenge the flogging of Sushil Sen. On the evening of 30 April 1908, they threw a bomb on a coach coming out of the magistrate's residence mistaking it to be occupied by him although it was actually occupied by two other persons. Both occupants were killed. Khudiram Bose was arrested while Prafulla Chaki committed suicide by shooting himself when he was cornered by the police on 2 May 1908. Khudiram was prosecuted and sentenced to death. He was executed on 19 August 1908 with the ubiquitous *Vande Mataram* on his lips. He was one of the earliest martyrs of the century.

In the Punjab, the radical nationalist trail was blazed by Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh (uncle of Bhagat Singh). Public meetings were organised at various places in the province and revolution against the government openly propagated. Sufi Amba Prasad, Pindi Dass, Lal Chand Falak and other patriots made exhorting speeches. Ajit Singh, Pindi Dass and Sufi

Amba Prasad formed the *Anjuman Muhibbane Vatan* ('Society for the Motherland') to provide a platform for radical young men. Banke Dayal's *Pagrhi Sambhal Jatta* deeply touched the hearts and minds of the people. The situation had become so explosive that the Lieutenant Governor of the province, Denzil Ibetson, reported to the higher authorities that "everywhere they could sense a new wind blowing through men's minds".

Banke Dayal and *Pagrhi Sambhal Jatta*

Banke Dayal was a police inspector. He left his job to join the freedom struggle. He recited his poem 'Pagrhi Sambhal Jatta', written in Punjabi, to a crowd of thousands on 22 March 1907 in Lyallpur after a rousing speech by Lala Lajpat Rai. Some of you would be familiar with the opening lines of the poem:

*Pagrhi sambhal Jatta, pagrhi sambhal oye
Lutt liya mall tera, haal behal oye*

The English translation of the complete poem is as follows:

Wake up, O peasant! Look after your dignity!
Robbed of your property,
You are being driven to a state of penury.
You wake up in the wee hours and toil in the fields,
Yet nobody cares for you.
You are deprived of your grain and left only with chaff,
Why this discrimination against you?
Take the reins of your future in your hands,
Rise to shape your destiny without loss of time.
Wake up, O peasant! Look after your dignity!

THE DEPORTATIONS OF 1909-1914

These political activities alarmed provincial governments throughout the country. It was resolved in this context to send revolutionary convicts to the Andamans so that they may be 'purged' from mainland India. Current government policy, however, largely permitted only **life convicts** to be sent there. **Term-convicts** could be sent



Banke Dayal

Life convicts:
prisoners serving sentences for their entire life or a considerably long period thereof
Term-convicts:
prisoners serving sentences for a specific period of time



Hoti Lal Varma

to *kala pani* but with the sanction of the Government of India. Sir John Hewett, the Governor of the United Provinces, sought in 1909 to deport the term-convicts Hoti Lal Varma and Babu Ram Hari, editors of the *Swarajya* weekly of Allahabad to the Andamans and argued that keeping them in the jails of the United Province was dangerous. Lord Minto disapproved of the proposal on the ground that this would be tantamount to blatant discrimination against political prisoners.

At about the same time, a group of revolutionary nationalists was convicted in Calcutta, in what came to be known as the Alipore Bomb Case. While some members of this group had to serve life sentences, others were given term imprisonments. The Bengal Government now forwarded a proposal for deporting these term-convicts to the Andamans. This time the Government of India accepted the proposal for the reason that 'the real ground for transporting them is the same which was recognised as valid after the mutiny, i.e. the desirability of getting them out of India'. Thus, the political prisoners of the Alipore Bomb Case were the first batch to enter the portals of this jail.

Swarajya!

Raizada Shanti Narain Bhatnagar of Shamli (UP), born in Shimla and educated in Lahore, strongly felt that there was need to propagate nationalism in the United Provinces. He resigned his Government job and thought of publishing a weekly from Allahabad. He installed the press there and the first publication of *Swarajya* was released on Diwali day, 9 November 1907. A renowned freedom fighter Moti Lal Ghosh had wished him all success but had forewarned:

'May *Swarajya* prove an active champion in the cause of political advancement of the country but in so doing be prepared to keep one foot in jail and your successor ready to take your place.'

This Urdu journal made a glorious contribution to patriotic propaganda. Established in November 1907, till its publication was stopped by the authorities in 1910, it published 75 issues under ten successive editors. Almost all of its editors were prosecuted and sentenced to long term imprisonments. Four of them were sent to the Andamans to undergo rigorous sentences.

The Alipore prisoners were dispatched to the Cellular Jail in December 1909 with instructions to the Superintendent of the jail that they be regarded as especially “dangerous”. They were not to work together nor were they to be placed with Bengali convicts. The latter too were seen to be dangerous as the number of Bengali revolutionaries was quite large. Further, the Alipore convicts were not to be employed in sedentary clerical work. As a rule they should be made to perform hard “gang labour”.

The Alipore case paved the way for obtaining easy approval of the Government of India for deporting term-convicts to the dreaded jail. Now, Hoti Lal Varma and Babu Ram Hari, successive editors of *Swarajya* weekly, were also deported to the Cellular Jail.

Meanwhile, in the Bombay Presidency (now Maharashtra), Ganesh Damodar Savarkar (elder brother of V.D. Savarkar) was arrested on 28 February 1909, and booked in the Nasik Conspiracy Case for waging war against the Crown. He was sentenced to



Vinayak Damodar Savarkar

Bondage: slavery

Madan Lal Dhingra on the assassination of Colonel Sir William Curzon Wylie

I admit... I attempted to shed English blood as a humble revenge for the inhuman hangings and deportations of patriotic Indian youth. In this attempt I have consulted none but my own conscience; I have conspired with none but my own duty.

I believe that a nation held in **bondage** with the help of foreign bayonets is in perpetual state of war. Since open battle is rendered impossible to a disarmed race, I attacked by surprise; since guns were denied to me, I drew forth my pistol and fired.

As a Hindu, I feel that a wrong done to my country is an insult to God. Poor in health and intellect, a son like myself has nothing else to offer to the Mother but his own blood, and so I have sacrificed the same on her altar...

The only lesson required in India at present is to learn how to die and the only way to teach it, is by dying ourselves. Therefore, I die and glory in my martyrdom.

My only prayer to God is: May I be re-born of the same Mother and may I re-die in the same sacred cause till the cause is successful and she stands free for the good of humanity and the glory of God.



Madan Lal Dhingra

transportation for life by the Sessions Judge, Nasik, in June 1909 and the sentence was confirmed by the Bombay High Court a few months later. After the political prisoners of the Alipore Bomb Case were deported to the Andamans, G.D. Savarkar was also sent there.

The exceptionally excessive punishment meted out to political prisoners on the basis of trumped up charges enraged revolutionaries all over the country including overseas Indians. This became the immediate cause for Madan Lal Dhingra to assassinate Colonel Sir William Curzon Wylie, political ADC to the Secretary of State, at a gathering at the Imperial Institute in London on 1 July 1909.

After the sentence of death was pronounced, Dhingra, as composed as ever, thanked the judge and said: "I thank you, Sir. I feel proud that I am giving my insignificant life for the good of my country". Dhingra also expressed his last wishes as 'One, that he should get a small mirror so that he may be sure of going to the gallows with the same cheerful face. Second, that he should be cremated with Hindu rites. ... His clothes and belongings should be sold and the money should be used for some national cause'.

He was hanged to death on 17 August 1909.

Let us return to Nasik. Jackson, the District Magistrate of Nasik, was killed in that city on 21 December 1909. This led to the arrest and prosecution of seven Chitpavan Brahmins in the case called the Nasik Conspiracy Case. A.L. Kanhare, K.G. Karve and V.N. Deshpande were sentenced to death on 29 March 1910, while Daji Narayan Joshi, S.R. Somen and G.B. Vaidya were sentenced to transportation for life and D.P. Joshi was awarded rigorous imprisonment for two years. Daji Narayan Joshi alias Waman, was also deported to the Andamans to undergo his sentence.

Similarly, some young revolutionaries convicted in the Khulna Conspiracy Case (1910), the teenager Nani Gopal Mukherjee who threw a bomb on a motor car which was expected to carry a CID officer of Calcutta in 1911 and Pulin Behari Das along with Jyotirmay Roy,



Nand Gopal

convicted in political crimes the same year, were also deported to the Andamans.

After Babu Ram Hari was sent to jail, Nand Gopal had resumed the publication of *Swarajya*. He had managed to edit nearly a dozen issues of the journal when he was re-arrested and prosecuted on 19 November 1909 for publishing three *seditious* articles. He too was convicted and deported to the Andamans. Thereafter, the young Ladha Ram of Varaichanwala in district Gujarat (now in Pakistan), who had just returned from Southeast Asia after amassing a lot of wealth preferred to join the revolutionary struggle to a life of comfort. Justifying this choice, he told his family and well-wishers: 'How can I refuse the call of freedom?' Similarly, he told his wife: 'I love you with all my heart, but my love for my country has no equal'. Like his predecessors-in-office he, too, was arrested and prosecuted on 22 March 1910 for writing three 'offending' articles and was sentenced to transportation for ten years for each one of the three offences. He was deported to the Andamans.

V.D. Savarkar, has left an account of the life of the prisoners in Andamans in his book *My Transportation for Life*.

In 1907, Savarkar celebrated the golden jubilee of the uprising of 1857 in London which he termed as 'The Indian War of Independence'. With the object of honouring the martyrs, he gathered a multitude of Indian youth and imbued them with the spirit to fight for freedom. During this period, he circulated a two-leaf pamphlet entitled, *O Martyr!*, considered by his compatriots to be "a blast in London that set the Thames on fire". The British looked upon it as 'a capsule full of patriotism'.

Savarkar was arrested in 1910 in London for the offence of "waging war against the King Emperor" and was deported to India aboard the ship S. S. Morea. The vessel touched Marseilles on 6 July 1910. Savarkar went to the water-closet of the ship. Stripping himself practically of all his clothes, he escaped through the



Ladha Ram

The Brave "Field Marshall"!

Due to his rare bravery and courage, Ladha Ram earned the sobriquet of "Field-Marshal" from his comrades in the Cellular Jail. Ladha Ram breathed his last on 5 January 1966 in a forlorn colony of New Delhi, in extreme poverty, without medicine and without any hospital treatment, leaving his old widow behind him to mourn his loss.

Abet:

to assist somebody to do something, especially something illegal

Repatriate:

to send somebody back to his or her country or homeland

pot-hole into the sea, swam ashore and ran three metres into the French territory. He was soon caught by the French police. He could not speak French and so could not reveal his identity as a political refugee to his captors. The French police handed him back to the British police.

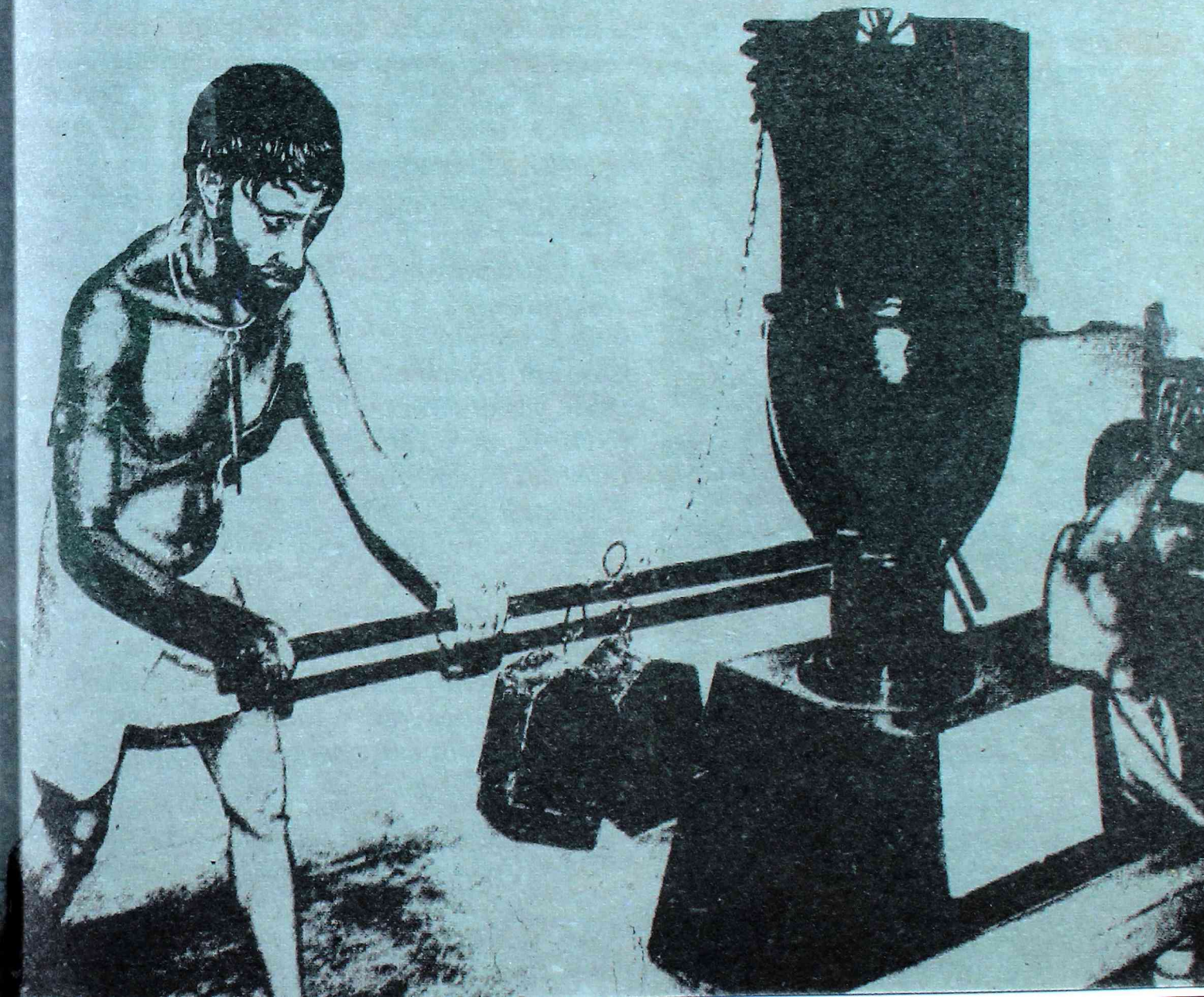
Brought back to Bombay, Savarkar was tried by a Special Tribunal. He was sentenced to life imprisonment on 23 December 1910. He was again charged with **abetment** for the murder of Jackson, Collector of Nasik. He was convicted in this case and sentenced to transportation for life on 30 January 1911. He was brought to the Andamans in the vessel S.S. Maharaja on the morning of 4 July 1911 with the badge of fifty years' sentence around his neck.

He was **repatriated** in 1921.

CHAPTER 5

THE EARLIEST HUMILIATIONS AND RESISTANCE

It was the British policy that
“a prison regime must be punitive
and humiliating, even more dreadful
than the hangman’s noose”.



Tindal/Tandeel:
a relatively high
position in the
graded system of
jail administration,
higher than the
convict warder and
petty officer

The deportees discussed in the last chapter were brought to the Andamans, huddled together and in chains, in congested bunks of ships. After journeying for three to four days, the ships anchored some three miles away from Port Blair from where the prisoners had their first glimpse of the Cellular Jail. The revolutionaries, in fetters, were led to the Cellular Jail on foot with beds over their heads and utensils in hand. The big iron gates devoured them as it were. They were taken to an open courtyard inside from where the inner structure presented a ghastly appearance. They were provided with jail uniforms, consisting of shorts, a shirt measuring a little below the waist and a white cap. Contrary to the practice in the jails of the Indian mainland, the sacred thread of the Hindus (*janeu*) was removed from their person.

REPRESSION AND TORTURE

Atrocity in the chair?
The chair used by David
Barrie, the jailor

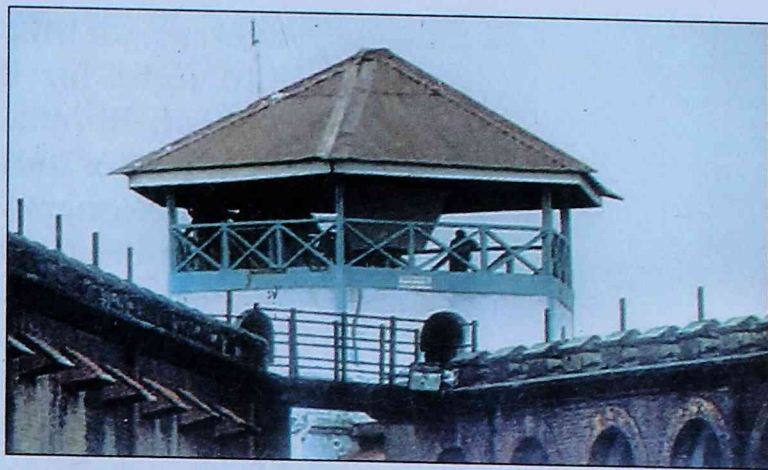


David Barrie, an Irish man, was the jailor. He was exceedingly cruel to political prisoners who thought of him to be a terror. From prisoners such as Barin Ghose we know of the terrifying lecture that Barrie used to deliver to new entrants: 'And do you see me? My name is D. Barrie. I am a most obedient servant to the simple and straightforward, but to the crooked, I am four times as crooked. If you disobey me, may God help you. At least I will not, that is certain. Remember also that God does not come within three miles of Port Blair. The red turbans you see there, are warders. And, those in black uniform are petty officers. You must obey them'.

Barrie the oppressor was assisted by lesser gods: warders, petty officers, **tindals** and *jamadars* appointed from among ordinary convicts after they had spent five to seven years in the jail. These hardcore criminals derived sadistic pleasure in torturing political prisoners and took full

advantage of Barrie's 'protection'. They abused and humiliated prisoners, slapping them on the slightest pretext. They were adept in the art of inventing excuses of disobedience.

Khoyedad was an ex-prisoner and a jail official. He outdid Barrie in making the life of political prisoners most miserable. The simple ritual of personal search was turned by him into a humiliating drill, described graphically by Barin Ghose. With the ringing of the bell and the order, '*khare ho jao*', the prisoners had to stand up. They had to remove their shirts and caps and offer themselves for a search. The "system-loving" and sadistic Khoyedad complicated this daily exercise with a thousand intricacies.



*The top of the central tower
This space housed the
central bell through
which the jailor regulated
the routines of the
prisoners*

'Dangerous' Prisoners, 'Despicable Wretches'!

As we have seen, the revolutionaries were convicted for political offences. Indeed, in his letter to the provincial governments, Lord Minto, the Governor-General of India had referred to these prisoners as political prisoners. But they were denied privileges permissible to political prisoners. This is evident from a Government letter of 2 August 1910 which directed the Chief Commissioner, Andamans not to refer to these patriotic heroes as 'political prisoners' as this would 'tend to give them a spurious importance'. Responding to this letter, the Chief Commissioner ensured the compliance of the directive.

Barrie, of course, always took the precaution to avoid calling these patriots nationalists, revolutionaries or political prisoners by any of those words. 'There is none here of that kind', he used to say and he termed them contemptuously as the 'despicable lot', 'vagrant wretches' and 'scum of the society'. They were to be treated only as 'dangerous prisoners' and were ordered to wear a badge with the letter D (for 'Dangerous!') round their necks.

Even so, all this did not deter the heroes of Cellular Jail to fight for due recognition of their status. Hrishikesh Kanjilal and G.D. Savarkar wrote to the Government of India for treating all such prisoners as political prisoners, but the government informed the Superintendent of the jail in November 1912 that 'the prisoners should be clearly given to understand that they were not to be considered as political prisoners'. Nani Gopal Mukherjee continued a grim battle to get the government to concede this demand. On the other hand, the reality was that the revolutionaries were treated even worse than 'ordinary prisoners'.

Solitary Cells

A distinctive feature of the Cellular Jail was that each prisoner was confined to a solitary cell. This was perhaps the only jail in the country where solitary confinement was the rule. No exceptions were permitted. In fact, the Cellular Jail had no arrangements for confinement in groups!

Prison cell overlooking a verandah which too would remain locked



Such solitary confinement was designed to break down the political prisoners mentally and psychologically. It alienated them from their comrades, from the larger world of the jail and perhaps even from themselves!

They were confined to small dingy cells. The cell 'offered' a low bedstead hardly wide enough to permit comfortable sleep. The prisoners had to be most vigilant. A careless turn could land them on the floor! But much worse was the fact that thrown into these dark cells, many were driven to commit suicide. Or else, they were left to languish and die, a thousand miles away from the mainland and their loved ones.

The physical, mental and emotional effects of forced isolation which solitary confinement entails can be very destructive. It can make a person lose his or her mind. Deprived of social interaction, reasonable mental stimuli, exposure to the natural world and almost everything that makes life human and bearable, a prisoner starts slipping into a state of mental disarray. The thinking pattern begins to break down. Convicts start to hallucinate and show signs of irrational anger and obsessive behaviour. This ultimately leads to psychotic disorders.

Work Routines

There were rules and regulations for assignment of work to the prisoners. While prisoners below twenty years of age could not be assigned hard manual work, those above that age were to be assigned work in accordance with their physical fitness. Literates were to be employed in the press.

But these rules were not observed with regard to political prisoners. They were assigned hard manual labour and of the kind and quantum that broke their backs. Abuses and humiliations were intentionally hurled upon them so as to reduce them into becoming mental and physical wrecks. Coir-pounding, rope-making and oil-grinding were some of the severest tasks at which they were employed.



Yoked to the oil-mill

A prisoner was given the work of coir-pounding. The beating of dry and hard remains of coconut shells day-long, and day after day, caused his palms to bleed. When he showed his injured hands to the Superintendent of the jail and requested for a change in assignment, he was deputed to the oil-mill—a still harder job.

Manual kohlu plying

Oil-grinding was the hardest work and is described in the memoirs of

our heroes as causing enormous misery. There were two processes of working the oil-grinding mill in the Cellular Jail. One was similar to the system in which bullocks were yoked to the handle of the mill and they moved round it continuously; only in this case, prisoners were substituted for bullocks. In the other process, the handle was moved by the hands of the prisoner who had to run round and round the mill. In both cases the prisoners were to work until 30 pounds of coconut oil or 10 pounds of mustard oil was produced.

The torture of working at the oil-mill, the wretched commands used in the supervision, the beating and punishments which followed the failure to complete the allotted work and the pitiable conditions of the political prisoners have been described in detail in *My Transportation for Life*. Dinner was to be denied to 'offending' inmates or they were to be handcuffed. Punishments were to be intensified with subsequent failures to fulfil stipulations.



Working with coconuts

Toil Outside the Cells

As life inside the jail was quite ghastly and unbearable, many prisoners wanted to work outside. Work seemed to be lighter and the food better. There was freedom of company and speech. Admission to the hospital

outside was much easier than admission to the jail hospital. Political prisoners, therefore, fought for this 'relief'. After the first general strike in the Cellular Jail, some of them were sent to work outside.

Barindra was sent to work as a labourer under a mason. Ullaskar was engaged to dig up the earth and make bricks. Some were sent to the forests to hew wood while others were sent to pull rickshaws or to work at the embankments. Political prisoners were intentionally assigned most degrading and humiliating work. The working hours were long, at least for manual work: from 6 to 10 in the morning and 1 to 4.30 in the afternoon. They were exposed to rain or to the scorching sun. Their ration was stolen and sold in the villages. Medical facilities, other than hospital admission, available to ordinary prisoners were denied to them. Working outside proved to be as tough, and one by one, the prisoners came back to their dungeons of the Cellular Jail once again.

Daily diet

Wholesome food could not be expected in such circumstances. *Kanji*, gruel of rice churned in water, saltless and tasteless, *dal* and a little vegetable were doled out to the convicts in *dabbus*, (broken halves of coconut shells). At times, the *kanji* smelt of kerosene oil. The daily ration, as per the rules, consisted of rice 6 **ounce (oz.)**, flour for *rotis* 5 oz., dal 2 oz., salt 1 dram, oil $\frac{3}{4}$ **dram** and vegetable 8 oz. for every prisoner irrespective of his needs. But did this quantity of daily food reach the prisoners? The prisoners' quota of wheat *chapattis* was often appropriated by convict warders through various threats. They had to remain content with rice gruel.

The cooks and caterers in the jail were intimidating and some of them were stricken with diseases. *Kacha* and unskinned green plantain, roots, stalks and leaves boiled together with sand gravel and excretions of mice, these were served to the inmates! They had to 'devour' such 'dainty' dishes with hungry glee, in dirty iron utensils almost impossible to clean.



Pots for prisoners, one for food, one for drinking water and one for passing urine and stools

Ounce (oz.):
a unit for
measuring weight,
equal to 28.35
grams.

Dram:
an ancient Greek
weight that
measure $\frac{1}{6}$ th of
an ounce

The prisoners were seated in rows for meals, irrespective of the weather. If somebody moved away from their row to seek shelter, he was abused and punished. Besides, the petty officers never gave them sufficient time to finish their meals. When the *jamadars* announced the end of lunch or dinner, the inmates had to stop eating and leave.

Toilets and Baths

Of all the hardships of prison-life—gruelling work, inedible food, little or no clothing, thrashing and humiliation, none was as annoying and disgusting as its closely regulated use of urinals and lavatories. There were no urinals or lavatories near the cells for use at night. Only an earthen pot painted with tar was kept in a corner of the cell during the night. This was utterly disgusting as it was difficult to answer the call of nature in this pot. Morning, noon and evening—these were the only hours when prisoners were let off for this purpose and at a stated time only.

Inmates were forced to bathe in the open. A loin cloth was provided during bathing but this skimpy cloth was hardly sufficient for the purpose. Convicts had to bathe virtually in the nude. This obviously outraged their dignity. As Barin Ghose bemoaned, “The *langoti* we were given to put on while bathing could not in the least defend our modesty. Thus, when we had to change our clothes, we were in as helpless a condition as was Draupadi in the assembly of the Kauravas. We could only submit to our fate. ... We hung our heads low and somehow finished the bathing affair...”

Denial of Medical Facilities

The jail did have rudimentary medical facilities but the prisoners could not easily access them. If the inmates complained of common ailments such as headache and stomach ache, they were condemned for ‘feigning’ illnesses. Prisoners with fevers were treated while still locked in their cells. Once, Ganesh Savarkar had a

severe headache. The doctor asked him to bring his bedding to the hospital as he was to be kept under observation. When Barrie saw Savarkar going to the hospital, he shouted “*O bomb gole wala, kidhar jata hai?*” (O chucker of bombs, where are you going?) and abused the *jamadar* accompanying him. When the *jamadar* told him that Sarvarkar was going to the hospital on the doctor’s advice, Barrie said, “*Kaun hai ... doctor babu?*” (Who is this doctor Babu?). He abused the *jamadar* and ordered that Savarkar be taken back to work. He was confined to the cell and put on *kohlu* work. This is only one instance of the administration’s callousness towards the sick.

Cut off from the Outside World

Incarcerated in the Andaman jail, the political prisoners were totally cut-off from the outside world. In the jails of the mainland, prisoners were allowed to meet their relatives on stipulated days and to write and receive letters. In the Andamans, however, prisoners could write only one letter a year, which too was censored. The prisoners were told to be brief and write about unobjectionable matters. If anybody violated this rule, his letter was destroyed. No representation or complaint against the jail authorities could be sent to the higher British authorities. The prisoners were even denied reading material. All conversation was illegal and violative of the “Barrie principle” of administration. It was an arduous task for the political prisoners confined in the Cellular Jail to inform their countrymen about the brutal and inhuman treatment they were constantly subjected to.

Suicide and Insanity

We have seen that the Cellular Jail was virtual hell. Tedious labour and humiliation had exhausted the inmates. There were those who wished to get rid of such a life. On the night of 28 April 1912, Indubhusan Roy committed suicide in his cell, by tearing his shirt, making a rope of it and hanging himself from the skylight.



Statue of Indubhusan Roy set up in the park facing the jail



Ullaskar Dutt

But Barrie propagated the idea that Indu had done himself to death in a fit of insanity arising from personal quarrels. He tutored the *jamadar*, the warder and the petty officer to orchestrate this explanation. Indu's comrades contested this lie and asserted the truth.

Later on, Barrie came out with another version. He argued that Indu had read certain books on theosophy and that these had 'softened' his brain. Theosophy led its devotees to practise yoga and yoga with its breathing exercises and other conditions of the body had a bad effect on the brain, claimed Barrie. The Chief Commissioner of Andamans in his letter dated 30 May 1912 to the Home Ministry gave a concocted version of the circumstances leading to Indu's suicide to conceal the severe torture meted out to him.

Ullaskar Dutt, a convict in the Alipore Bomb Case was a jovial fellow, who had been praised for his idealism by the trial judge himself. Intellectually inclined, he also made his companions forget their misery by regaling them with witty remarks and jokes. He too had to undergo excruciating torture that led to his insanity.

Ullaskar was sent to the mental hospital in the Andamans and then to the Madras Lunatic Asylum where he stayed for 12 years and regained normalcy. His memoirs reveal the agonising life of the Cellular Jail. Ullaskar's cries had pained his comrades beyond description and cast a pall of gloom on them. The real nature of a prison was revealed to them. As Barin Ghose wrote, "There was no hope for any one to keep body and soul together and return to his country. Some would die by hanging, others would die by going mad. So we asked ourselves, why should we tamely accept suffering, if death was the only end?... The more we suffered the more it made us smile. The course of true love is never indeed smooth. And yet, pain is pain and we felt the sufferings".

EPIC STRUGGLES IN THE JAIL

Administering physical and mental torture to these political prisoners was a deliberate plan. The rulers felt such brutal humiliation would keep them 'in check'. The jail authorities, however, failed to measure the

magnitude of the national spirit in the revolutionary patriots and the intensity of the fire of protest burning in their hearts.

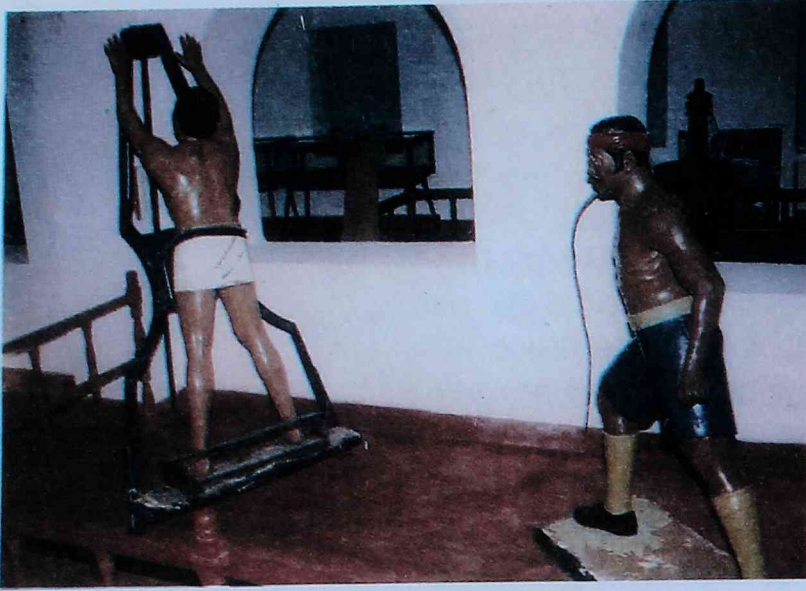
Open Resistance

The first voice of resistance was raised in 1911 by the editor Nand Gopal who had been sentenced to transportation for ten years for writing 'seditious' articles in his weekly *Swarajya*. Nand Gopal staged passive resistance against working on the oil-mill. One day, he started working on the oil-mill without caring for the quantity of oil which he was supposed to extract. He also took his time over bathing and eating. While the other prisoners returned to the mill after finishing their meals, Nand Gopal had barely eaten three to four morsels. The officials abused him for wasting his time but he ignored them.

Ultimately Barrie, the dreaded one, reached on the scene. His arrival normally led to flogging or thrashing

Resistance always invited punishment. Models showing punishments with fetters (left to right): chain fetters, bar fetters and cross bar fetters





Model depicting flogging

but Nand Gopal remained completely unmoved. Barrie shouted at Nand Gopal for wasting his time in finishing his meal, but the latter answered that he was not sitting idle and was only chewing it well as this was crucial for proper digestion. The enraged Barrie shouted that the convict would be challaned for violating the rules. Nand Gopal told Barrie that 10 a.m. to 12 noon was

the time to rest, and by deploying the hapless prisoners on work during the recess period, he himself was violating the rules. Barrie felt insulted. He threatened Nand Gopal and ordered him to complete his work but left the place in a huff. For the first time Barrie felt the erosion of his authority.

Nand Gopal was brought to his cell after he had finished his meal. The warders asked him to start working on the oil-mill. But Nand Gopal picked up his blanket and went to sleep. The officials returned after sometime and were surprised to see Nand Gopal snoring. The *jamadar* abused him, but Nand Gopal simply signalled the *jamadar* to leave and not to disturb him. At 12 noon Nand Gopal returned to his work on the oil-mill. At the end of the day his output of oil was just 15 pounds, half the day's quota. His defiant attitude annoyed the authorities but they dare not say anything to him. Nand Gopal had been brave to point out the rules and this had made them nervous. His example emboldened other political prisoners to grasp the significance of everyday resistance.

The First Strike

With the refusal of the political prisoners to work on the oil-mill began the first strike in the Cellular Jail. Rigorous measures were adopted by the jail authorities

to punish the strikers. *Kanji*, could not be given to the strikers for more than four days; yet it was served to all the strikers for weeks together continuously. Several forms of punishments were inflicted on them one after another. They were kept in solitary confinement and were not allowed to communicate with each other. But they did not flinch. They held out against all odds. The patriots stood united like a rock and succeeded in defeating the plans of the British although it was at the cost of numerous penalties and physical sufferings. The authorities relented and assured them work outside the jail with no work on the oil-mills.

This was the first major victory of the political prisoners in their epic struggle.

Informing the Nation

Mention may be made here of the convicts' success in informing their countrymen about the nightmarish conditions in the Andaman Jail.

The British plan of withholding information about the inhuman treatment meted out by them to political prisoners and about the hellish life led by them in the Cellular Jail was thwarted by these strong-willed revolutionaries. Hoti Lal, the ex-editor of *Swarajya*, undergoing sentence in the Cellular Jail, wrote a three-page letter, secretly, covering all aspects of the distressing life of the political prisoners in the jail. He signed the letter and mentioned the number of his cell. He took an ordinary prisoner into confidence – a prisoner returning to Calcutta after completing his jail term. He requested him to deliver the letter to Surendranath Banerjee, editor of the *Bengalee*. The plan succeeded and Surendranath Banerjee published Hoti Lal's account of the horrible life of the political prisoners in the Andamans in full.

The articles exposed the authorities for (i) providing inedible diet on the slightest pretext, (ii) forcing the prisoners to work in jungles involving hard labour, (iii) forcing them to work in spite of ill-health, and (iv) consequential loss of weight by many of them who were

virtually reduced to skeletons. A leading article to the same effect was also published in the *Tribune* on 3 May 1912.

This stirred the Indians and public criticism of the government intensified. The British authorities had to defend themselves with their back to the wall. This was the second major victory of the political prisoners.

By this time Nani Gopal of Chinsura, Pulin Behari Das of Dacca and some other patriots had also arrived in the Cellular Jail.

Second General and Hunger Strike

The suicide by Indubhusan Roy and Ullaskar's insanity led to the second general strike.

The political prisoners prepared a charter of demands which included (i) proper food, (ii) release from hard labour, and (iii) freedom to associate with each other. It was sent to the authorities. Since the prisoners were aware that the authorities would not concede any demand, they had already planned the next course of action— a general strike. A few political prisoners initiated the strike but others continued joining it, day by day. The authorities resorted to repressive measures such as the use of handcuffs, fetters, standing handcuffs and crossbars. A cut in diet was also ordered. The strikers were locked up in one block, separated from other prisoners and hefty warders were deployed to supervise them. They were strictly disallowed from communicating with each other.

But the strikers were political prisoners. They were a determined lot. On the arrival of Barrie, they refused to stand up. They talked to each other loudly and were audible to other prisoners, locked in cells at a distance. The abusive language used by the jail officials was countered by a language of resistance that was clear, fearless and forceful. When the warders assaulted one or the other of the revolutionaries, the latter cautioned them with dire consequences.

Ultimately, the authorities had to concede a few demands. Some ten to twelve prisoners were sent out to guard coconut trees. Their duty was to see that the fruits were not stolen. Each of them was posted at an isolated spot so that they could not meet or converse with each other. Hoti Lal Varma, Nand Gopal and Vaman Joshi, however, were not sent outside and the strike continued.

During the general strike, none of the political prisoners yielded to the penalties and pressures of the jail authorities. Nani Gopal proved to be the toughest fighter. Savarkar gives a detailed account of Nani's heroism in *My Transportation for Life*. He tells us that Nani refused to bend and showed utter defiance of their illegal orders. He would not come out of his cell when ordered to do so. He would not stand up before the jail officials. He would have to be forcibly lifted and taken to the water reservoir for a public bath. His behaviour gave the authorities sleepless nights.

Barrie thought that two or three sharp raps with a cane were bound to bring a political prisoner to his knees and decided to resort to caning and took Nani to the flogging stand. However, the political prisoners warned the jail authorities about the terrible consequences of this measure. The authorities were frightened. The order of caning was cancelled. Nani Gopal was taken to Viper Island. He went on hunger strike. Four days later he was brought back to the Cellular Jail and force feeding was resorted to but the brave Nani continued the hunger strike. He became lean and emaciated, reduced to a skeleton. And yet, he would not give up his resolve. Though he was exhausted and helpless, fasting for more than a month and a half, the authorities did not hesitate to hang him up by the hand-cuffs. Consequently, many political prisoners also joined the hunger strike. Nani Gopal had now been on hunger strike for seventy two days.

The prisoners' punishment uniform made of jute
Prisoners were sometimes made to wear this uniform as punishment; it caused immense irritation to the skin



In this long-drawn struggle the political prisoners were able to get some concessions. The jail authorities permitted them to sit together, read books or hold discussions, but their rigorous work routines continued and they were asked not to resort to strikes or agitations. They were, however, allowed to sing patriotic songs. This was a major victory for the political prisoners.

“The collection of these dangerous men in one place is wrong”

Before leaving for the Andamans, Sir Craddock had opined:

It seems to me clear that the collection of these dangerous men in one place is wrong, and that the correct policy would be to scatter them over the jails in India and Burma. The mischief that anyone can do in one place is infinitesimal beside the mischief that they can do altogether. However, I can discuss all these questions on the spot best.

The Government is Made to Think

These two successive strikes, publication of prisoners' letters in newspapers, newspaper reports about their terrible hardships, consequent public agitation and questions raised in the Imperial Legislative Council at last convinced the Government of India that there was something rotten in the settlement at Port Blair. An official of high rank, the Home Member of the Governor-General's Council, Sir Reginald H. Craddock, visited the Andamans in October 1913 to see things for himself.

Although his visit was kept secret from the political prisoners, they still learnt about it. Birendra Chandra Sen, Upendra Nath Banerjee, Nand Gopal, Hoti Lal Varma and Pulin Behari Das appeared before him. Without caring for the consequences, they accused the jail authorities of depriving them of their basic rights. The revolutionaries handed over petitions to him for the government's consideration. Sir Craddock submitted his report on 23 November 1913 and annexed with it the petitions submitted to him by the political prisoners which contained first hand information about their life in the Cellular Jail.

In his report he reiterated his earlier opinion that has been stated in the box.

Third and Last Strike

Surprisingly, no action was taken on Craddock's report. The prisoners decided to fight again. In a new manifesto submitted to the jail authorities, they made three principal demands:

1. That as political prisoners, they should have all the privileges of the first class;
2. That they should, otherwise, be put in the category of ordinary prisoners, given all the facilities accorded to them and the periodical visit to this jail be permitted to the members of their families; or
3. They should be sent back to serve their term in the jails of India, so that they may get all the facilities of that jail life, including reduction in the period of the sentence after a certificate of good behaviour.

Obviously, the authorities were in no mood to accept any of these demands. They then resorted to another strike in April 1914 with all its hardships, the only weapon available to them.

Repatriation

Ultimately adopting the view of Sir Craddock, the Government of India took a 'final' decision on the fate of political prisoners in the Andamans in April 1914. The authorities were compelled to enter into a settlement with the political prisoners and the 1914 strike came to an end. A notification was issued by the authorities to the following effect:

1. All the prisoners who were sentenced to a definite period of time, short of life-sentence, shall be sent back to their respective prisons in India, where the remission of their sentence will be duly considered and followed.
2. Prisoners for life-sentence shall be detained in the prison for a continuous period of fourteen years, whereafter they will be set free for some labour of light character. This shall operate only in the case of those prisoners who give proof of good behaviour during their period of incarceration.
3. During the period of fourteen years, the prisoner shall be given decent food to eat and decent clothes to wear. After five years, he shall be allowed to cook his own food and given from twelve annas to a rupee per month as his pocket allowance.

The term prisoners were brought back to the mainland in three batches leaving the Andamans on 23 May 1914 (for Calcutta), 18 June 1914 (for Madras) and 10 September 1914 (for Madras).

Even so, many revolutionaries undergoing life imprisonment had to undergo the hard life of the Cellular Jail for another couple of years.

CHAPTER 6

GHADARITES AND DEPORTATION

The Ghadr Movement was one of two chief contributions of Indians living abroad to the cause of India's freedom struggle during the first two decades of the twentieth century.





The flag of the Ghadr
(Ghadar) Party

THE GHADR (GHADAR) MOVEMENT

After the British government decided in April 1914 to stop the deportation of political prisoners to the Andamans, the majority of them were repatriated to the jails of the mainland by September 1914. But revolutionary activities continued and gained unprecedented intensity in 1915.

The gates of the Cellular Jail were therefore re-opened to imprison and punish political prisoners. Many revolutionaries were sent to the Andamans. Among these were numerous Punjabis, mainly Sikhs, convicted in sham trials like the Lahore Conspiracy Case and other related cases. These revolutionaries, well settled in various countries such as Canada, America, the Philippines, Burma, Hong Kong, China and Japan, had come to India to wage war against the British. They were either leaders or members of the Ghadr Party or were influenced by its ideology and patriotic fervour. To know about them it would be important to understand the Ghadr movement which became a powerful force in the northern part of the country.

There were several factors contributing to the origin of the Ghadr Party. The first, and by far the most important, was the discrimination against Indians in Canada and the United States. In the US where a strong colour bar existed against the Blacks, Indians also became its victims. According to Lala Lajpat Rai, Indians living abroad suffered from three types of prejudices—colour prejudice, race prejudice and prejudice of religion. Furthermore, there was a strong clash of interests between American and Indian workers. Indians were willing to work for very low wages while the Americans were used to handsome remuneration for their work. This led to unhealthy competition and consequent tensions between them. Indians were insulted, humiliated and despised by their white colleagues and neighbours. This made Indian immigrants realise that those who had no rights at home were also deprived of their rights abroad. However, the majority of American citizens were sympathetic to Indians and to their patriotic spirit.

Similar factors were responsible for arousing the hostility of Indian immigrants in Canada where the Government passed very stiff laws leading to serious hardships for them. All this had the cumulative effect of turning many Indian immigrants against the colonial rulers and organising themselves for an armed revolution to win independence from the British.

The Dera of Pt. Kanshi Ram at St. John became an important centre of political activity. Activists such as Sohan Singh Bhakna, Bhai Harnam Singh Tundilat, Bhai Udham Singh Kasel, Ram Rakha and Bhai Isher Singh Marhana started holding frequent meetings to discuss their problems and to provide leadership to their countrymen. India House at St. John was set up as a home and a centre for the visiting Indian teachers and students. A revolutionary society, the Hindustan Association of Pacific Coast was formed in 1912 with its headquarters at Portland. However it was after the arrival of Lala Har Dayal and Bhai Parmanand on 25 March 1913 at St. John that political activities began to gain momentum. Meetings were held in various cities and the final action plan was formulated on 21 April 1913. This was the beginning of the Ghadr movement.

The Ghadr Party established its office at 436, Hill Street in San Francisco with the objective of liberating India from British slavery through armed struggle and establishing a national government on the basis of equality and justice. The publication of the Urdu weekly *Ghadr* was started on 1 November 1913. The Punjabi edition of the weekly was launched on 8 December 1913.

Lala Har Dayal had expected war between England and Germany during the mid-1910s, which was thought to be the best opportunity to mount an armed revolution against the British for the country's liberation. Teams of dedicated young Ghadr workers were sent to different places to acquire various skills such as guerrilla warfare, bomb making and flying and repairing aircraft.

***Kamagatamaru* patriots**

The *Kamagatamaru* incident needs special mention in relation to the Ghadr Movement. The *Kamagatamaru*



Lala Har Dayal

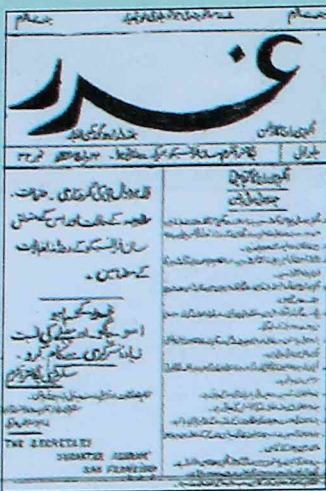
Brilliant Intellectual!

Educated at St. Stephen's College, Delhi and Oxford University, Har Dayal could play chess, count the ringing of a bell, recite Arabic verses and solve an arithmetic problem at the same time. Founding Secretary of the Ghadr Party, he was also the founding editor of the Urdu edition of the *Ghadr* weekly.

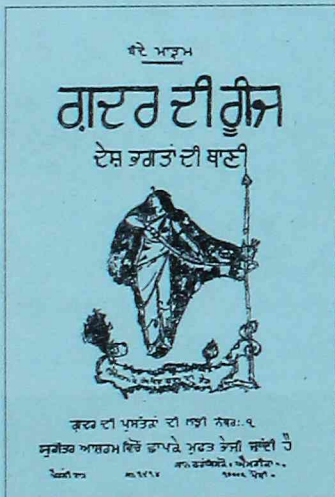


Sohan Singh Bhakna, the founding President of the Ghadr Party

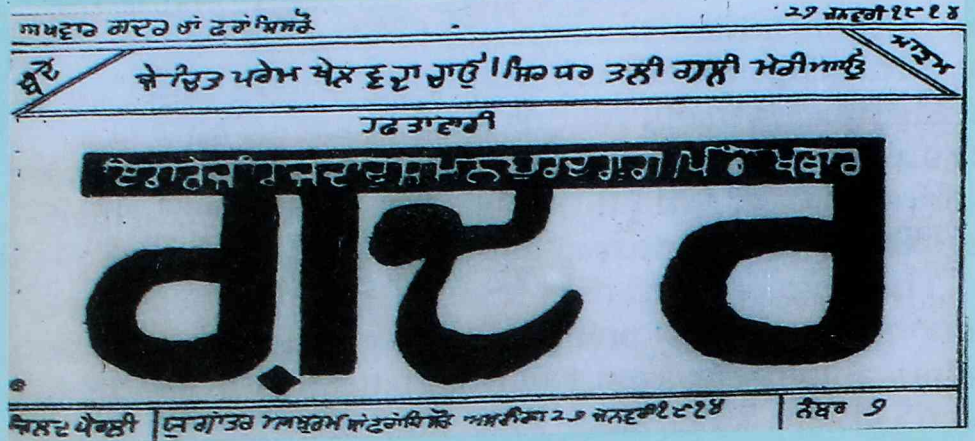
Right: The front page of the Ghadr weekly that began to be published from San Francisco in 1913→



The Urdu edition of Ghadr, the earliest of the Ghadr journals. The Party's literature was published in many languages.



Ghadr di Gunj (The Echo of Revolt), a compilation of nationalist and socialist literature of the Ghadrites. The Ghadr Party took its name from these journals and books.



Ghadr

On the front page of this Weekly was published Angrezi Raj Da Kacha Chitha (Expose of the British Raj). Vande Mataram appeared on the right and left upper corners with the following couplet in the centre on the front page:

*Jau tau prem khelan kaa chaho
Sir dhar tali gali meri aao*

If you have innate love for your motherland
Be prepared to lay your life for it.

A page in each issue was devoted to printing the heroic deeds of freedom fighters from V.D. Savarkar's book, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*. Half a page was devoted to details about the British plunder of India. Another half was devoted to local problems of Indian settlers. The front page carried a regular message: "56 years have elapsed since the last mutiny of 1857, another one is urgently needed." The simplicity of the journal's thought and style increased its circulation enormously, each copy being read by several groups of people. The weekly was printed on a hand machine.

The patriotic fervour of the revolutionaries was reflected in songs such as the following one which Kartar Singh Saraba used to recite while working on the printing machine:

*Sewa desh di jindrhey barhi aukhi
gallan karnian dher sukhalian ne
jinah desh sewa vich pair paya
unhan lakhan musibatan jhalian ne*

The path of service to the motherland, my dear, is strewn with hardships. It is very easy to boast.

But those who served the country have had to make innumerable sacrifices.

ship with hundreds of Punjabis intending to settle in Canada had left Hong Kong on 4 April 1914 and after touching Shanghai in China, Moji and Yokohama in Japan, it reached Vancouver on 23 May 1914. The passengers, however, were not permitted by the Canadian authorities to enter the country. The ship, with the passengers on board, was forced to leave Canada although it was allowed to pick up rations for the return journey. The passengers were disgusted with the authorities, particularly the British. The *Ghadr* exposed this harassment by the authorities in a special issue. On its return journey, the ship halted at Yokohama, where Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna delivered *Ghadr* literature and weapons to Baba Gurdit Singh, leader of the expedition.

Declaration of War against the British

Meanwhile, the First World War broke out on 25 July 1914. The British declared war with Germany on 4 August 1914 and the *Ghadr* Party declared war against the British, the next day. An advertisement for recruiting brave soldiers needed to fight for Hindustan

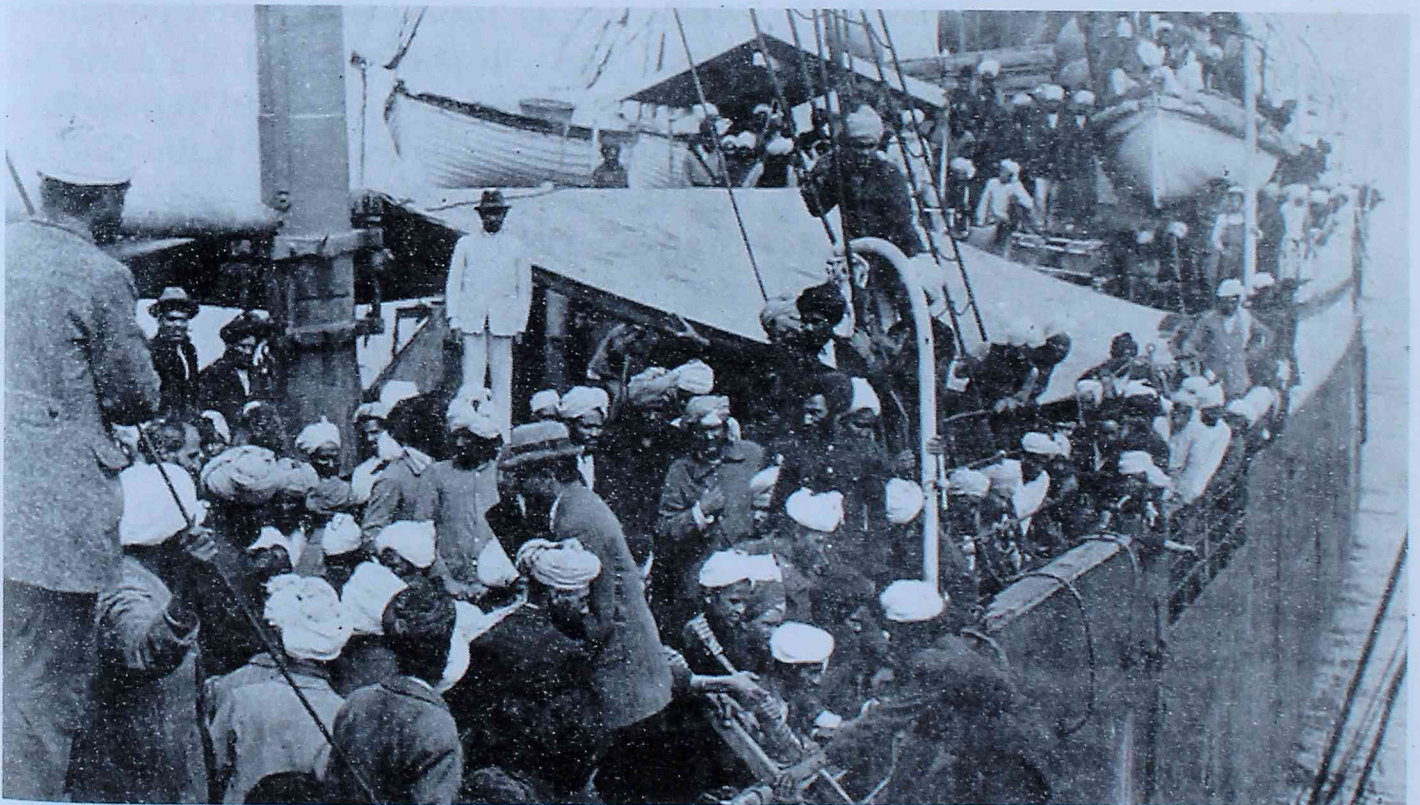


Baba Gurdit Singh

Punjabis, mainly Sikhs, aboard the Kamagatamaru in Vancouver's English Bay, 1914

Not allowed to anchor in Canada, the ship returned to India.

This event served as a catalyst for the *Ghadr* Movement



Ordinance:

an enactment made
by an authority

Stringent: strict**Exhort:**

urge or advise
strongly or
earnestly

was published in the *Ghadr* weekly with the 'allurements' of death as 'salary', martyrdom as 'award', freedom of the country as 'pension' and with Hindustan as the 'field of war'. The message was: "Go to India, stir up rebellion in every corner of the country". Fired with revolutionary zeal, Ghadarites left for India.

Legislative Measures by the British

The British authorities received prior information about the arrival of the Ghadr Party leaders and workers in India. They armed themselves with legislative measures by issuing the 'Foreigners' **Ordinance** on 29 August 1914 in order to prevent the entry of 'undesirable aliens' in India. The provincial governments were also empowered to punish or imprison them without trial. Since the returning people were Punjabis, the Punjab government sent its police to Calcutta to help the Bengal police in apprehending the 'suspects'. The revolutionaries got prior information of these **stringent** measures and some were able to escape the police dragnet. Pt. Jagat Ram and Kartar Singh Saraba reached Punjab via Madras.

Arrival in India

Kamagatamaru was the first ship to reach Calcutta on 27 September 1914 after the issuance of the 'Ingress into India Ordinance'. The passengers were subjected to bullets at Budge Budge Ghat. This left 19 dead and 21 injured, 72 were arrested while many others went missing. Indians returning from different countries to India were subjected to shockingly violent treatment—searched, beaten, shot or arrested. In spite of these setbacks, those who escaped assumed false names to prevent detection and started planning revolutionary activities, **exhorting** the people to rise in revolt against the British, publishing material, collecting money, material and arms for waging war against the colonial rulers.

Planning and Action

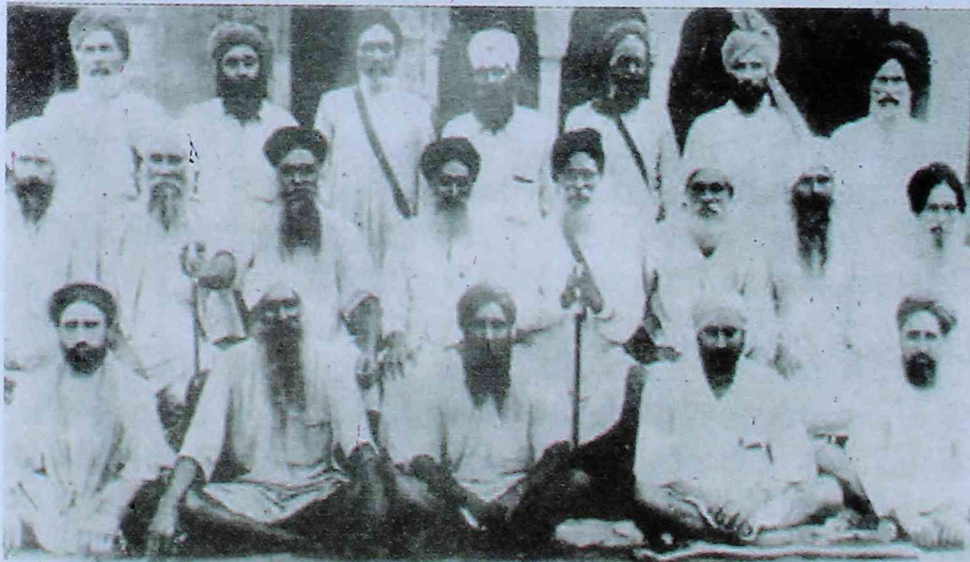
The Ghadarites decided that they would infiltrate into the ranks of the soldiers in various cantonments and

inspire them to rise in revolt against the British. Specific areas were allocated to each member for this purpose. Bhai Hirda Ram, for instance, was sent to Jalandhar Cantonment, Kartar Singh Saraba to Ferozepur, Bhai Harnam Singh Kahuta to Jhelum, Rawalpindi, Peshawar and Mardan, Piara Singh Langeri to frontier stations of Banu Kohat to instigate troops there. Kartar Singh Saraba visited Ambala, Meerut, Kanpur, Agra, Allahabad, Dinapur, Benaras, Lucknow and Faizabad military cantonments to inspire the troops to join the national struggle for liberation. Vishnu Ganesh Pingle was assigned work in Meerut Cantonment. Pt. Jagat Ram Hariana went to the independent area of western frontiers for weapons where he was arrested on 23 November 1914.

The task of attacking the magazines successfully in all the barracks was not possible because it was fraught with danger. Therefore, to start with, the Ghadr leaders selected two cantonments as their targets — Mian Mir Cantonment of Lahore and Ferozepur Cantonment. Both were strategically very important as these controlled the entire Punjab and Northern Command magazines. Once the Ghadr workers seized these magazines, the jawans of all other barracks were also to rise in revolt. The Ghadarites did suffer some reverses in the Pheru Shehar incident on 27 November, when an encounter took place with the police in which



Rash Behari Bose



Members of the Ghadr Party

Subvert:

overturn,
overthrow or
upset

Commutated:

here, change to a
less severe
sentence

some of them were killed, and a few others, including Kanshi Ram Marholi, were arrested and subsequently prosecuted and executed. Vishnu Ganesh Pingle, Kartar Singh Saraba and Parmanand Jhansi played a leading role and Rash Behari Bose also joined the struggle.

Final Assault

The date of the final assault on the British Raj was fixed as 21 February 1915. It was decided to attack the Mian Mir and Ferozepur Cantonments on this date. It was also decided that 128 Pioneer Regiment in Meerut, under the command of Bhai Phula Singh, and 12 Cavalry Regiment, under the command of Bhai Isher Singh, would rise in revolt and take control of Meerut. They were to move to Delhi under the command of Vishnu Ganesh Pingle and to declare the establishment of the Indian republic. At this point the jawans in all the barracks from Bannu up to Dinapur were to rise in revolt in their own areas. Kartar Singh Saraba was to be in Ferozepur while Vishnu Ganesh Pingle was to be in Meerut for leading the 128 Pioneer and 12 Cavalry Regiment to Delhi.

Traitors Failed Them

But success eluded the Ghadr leaders as traitors had entered the ranks. The plan was leaked to the British police and they foiled the attack. The Ghadr leaders decided to advance the date of the attack to 19 February 1915. But this too was leaked out resulting in large-scale arrests. Thus, the movement suffered a setback. Yet as O' Dwyer, the Governor of Punjab, stated "the Ghadr movement was by far the most serious attempt to **subvert** the British rule in India".

DEPORTATIONS DURING 1915-1921

Lahore Conspiracy Case

The unsuccessful bid of the Ghadarites resulted in the arrest of prominent leaders who were imprisoned in the Lahore Central Jail. They were prosecuted in what came to be called the Lahore Conspiracy Case.

The judgement was announced on 13 September 1915. Twenty-four of them, including Kartar Singh Saraba and Sohan Singh Bhakna, were sentenced to death. They accepted the judgement boldly. Twenty-seven were sentenced to transportation for life, six were sentenced to term-imprisonments and four were acquitted. Jawala Singh was one of those sentenced to transportation for life but asked the judges why they had stopped short of awarding the death sentence.

Who Should Apologise?



Sohan Lal Pathak, a Ghadr patriot who sneaked into the headquarters of the 23rd Artillery Battalion in the Memion Cantonment to contact the link official for provoking the jawans, was also arrested on 14 August 1915. The trial of Sohan Lal Pathak took place in Mandalay in December 1915 for waging war against the Crown. Sohan Lal did not budge during the grueling interrogation. Once when the Lt. Governor of Burma came to the jail for inspection, he told Sohan Lal Pathak to submit an apology after which his life would be saved. Sohan Lal Pathak told the Lieutenant-Governor that injustice and cruelties were being perpetrated by the British; they had entered India by force and were ruling the country by force and if somebody had to apologize, it should be the British. When he was being taken to the gallows, a British magistrate, on the orders of the higher authorities, again tried to persuade him to submit an apology following which his death sentence would be commuted. But Sohan Lal Pathak simply smiled and declined. On the repeated persuasions of the magistrate, Pathak told him to get on with his job and let him do his. He attained martyrdom on the gallows on 10 February 1916 in the Mandalay jail.

The sentences were too severe and revengeful. The public strongly protested against this vindictive judgment and it was highly criticised in the national press. Lord Hardinge was alarmed at the public outburst. He commuted the death sentence of seventeen convicts to life imprisonment. The death sentences of seven patriots namely, Kartar Singh Saraba, Vishnu Ganesh Pingle, Jagat Singh Sursingh,



Kartar Singh Saraba

Exemplary courage!

Kartar Singh Saraba was a man of rare courage. After hearing the death sentence, he came out of the court singing a patriotic song. The exemplary courage of these revolutionaries can be gauged from their statements. Kartar Singh often used to say: "Let us be hanged quickly so that we may be reborn to take up the work where we left it." Vishnu Ganesh Pingle offered his last prayers to the almighty at the gallows thus: "O Lord! Thou knowest our hearts. The sacred cause for which we lay down (sic) our lives, we entrust to thy care. This is our last prayer."



Vishnu Ganesh Pingle

Harnam Singh Sialkoti, Bakshish Singh Gilwali, Surain Singh son of Bur Singh and Surain Singh son of Isher Singh, both of village Gilwali were maintained. They were hanged to death in the Central Jail, Lahore on 17 November 1915 and attained martyrdom. Forty of their comrades, convicted and sentenced in this case, were transported to the Andamans in batches.

Mandalay Conspiracy Cases

Many other Ghadr leaders sentenced in the Mandalay Conspiracy Cases were also sent to the Andamans. As in Lahore, a special tribunal was set up under the Defence of India Act in Mandalay with respect to the two Mandalay conspiracy cases. In the first Mandalay Conspiracy Case (1916) Babu Harnam Singh Sahri, Chalia Ram Sahnewal (Ludhiana), Bhai Wasawa Singh Wara (Hoshiarpur), Bhai Narain Singh Balo, Bhai Naranjan Singh Sangatpura, Bhai Pala Singh Sherpur (Ludhiana) were sentenced to death and executed. Kirpa Ram was sentenced to death, but his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Six patriots, namely Chet Ram, Jiwan Singh, Bhai Kapur Singh Mohi, Hardit Singh, Kirpa Ram, and Budha Singh, convicted in this case were sent to the Andamans to undergo their sentence. In the second Mandalay Conspiracy Case (1917), some more patriots were convicted. Muztaba Hussain alias Mul Chand, Babu Amar Singh Engineer, and Ali Ahmed Sadiqui, were sentenced to death. However, their death sentences were commuted to transportation for life and they were sent to the Andamans. Ram Rakha Sasoli was sentenced to transportation for life. He was also sent to the Andamans.

Trial of Jawans

Some of the jawans of 23 Cavalry involved in the Ghadr movement were sentenced to death and executed while Bishen Singh Dhotian (son of Jiwan Singh), Bishen Singh Dhotian (son of Ram Singh), Natha Singh Dhotian, Kehar Singh alias Kesri, Chanan Singh Dhand Kasel and Nand Singh Raike Burjan were sent to the Andamans. Master Chattar Singh Sangla, who had attempted to murder Professor Duncliff in the house of the Principal, Khalsa College, Amritsar, on 16 December 1914 was arrested. Sentenced to transportation for life, he, too, was

sent to the Andamans. Sachindranath Sanyal, a first rank revolutionary, was a link between Punjab Ghadr leaders and Rash Behari Bose. Sachindranath Sanyal was sentenced to transportation for life to the Andamans in 1916 while others were awarded term imprisonments. Randhir Singh (convicted in Gurudwara Rakab Ganj case) and Govindcharan Kar were also sent to the Andamans.

Bengal Revolutionaries

In Bengal too, the revolutionary patriots were keeping the British administration on tenterhooks. By the time the police tried to nab persons involved in one political crime, another was committed. These patriots were later arrested, tried, convicted, sentenced and sent to the Andamans. Jatindra Nath Mukherji was a well-known leader of the Bengal revolutionaries. Towards the end of March 1915, Jatin, along with his trusted lieutenants Manoranjan Gupta, Chittapriya Ray, Naren Bhattacharya, Niren Dasgupta and Jyotish proceeded towards Balasore. In September 1915, the police surrounded the group. In the exchange of fire, Chittapriya Ray was fatally hit. Jatin Mukherjee and Jyotish were injured. Jatin succumbed to his wounds a few days later. Niren Dasgupta and Manoranjan Gupta were captured, tried and sentenced to death, while Jyotish Pal was sentenced to transportation for life and sent to the Andamans.

In the Raja Bazar Bomb Case (1914), Sasanka Sekhar Hazra alias Amrita Lal Hazra, Dinesh Chandra Sengupta, Chandra Sekhar De and Sarda Charanguha were arrested. Later, Kalipada Ghosh alias Upendra Lal Ray Chaudhari, and Khagendra Nath Chaudhari were also arrested in this case from different places. All six were prosecuted and committed to the court of the Sessions Judge, Alipore for trial. The verdict of 'not guilty' was given by the assessors, but the judgement was reserved. When the judgement was announced in June, all the accused, except Khagendra Nath Chaudhari, were convicted. Each of them was sentenced to transportation for ten years. Amrita Lal Hazra was sentenced to transportation for fifteen years. He was deported to the Andamans.

In the Barisal Conspiracy Case too, Madan Mohan Bhaumik, Trailokyanath Chakraborty and Khagendra

Elicit: evoke

Nath Chaudhari were deported to the Andamans. Several revolutionary patriots were arrested in Pragpur Dacoity Case, including Ashu Lahiri, Gopen Roy, Kshitish Sanyal and Phani Roy. Three of them were sentenced to transportation for seventeen years each, while the fourth was sentenced to transportation for eight years. All four were sent to the Andamans.

A number of arrests were made in what was known as the Shibpur Dacoity Case and the arrested revolutionaries were tried by a Special Commissioner appointed under the Defence of India Act. The judgement was announced on 15 February 1916. Naren Ghosh Choudhary, Nikhil Guha Roy, Surendra Nath Biswas, Sanukal Chatterjee, Satya Ranjan Basu, Jatindra Nath Nandi, Kalicharan Dass, Bhupendra Nath Ghosh, Harendra Nath Kaviyatirtha were sentenced to transportation to the Andamans for ten years.

The unabated revolutionary fervour of these patriots continued to **elicit** a repressive response from the government. After the Jallianwala Bagh episode, the entire nation was up in arms against the British. On 15 April 1919, the residents of Chuharkana in the Punjab destroyed a railway bridge, uprooted a railway line and set the railway station on fire. The police fired at them. Some were killed, many were injured and about 40 arrested. Thirty leaders, including Teja Singh Chuharkana and Kartar Singh Jabbar, were prosecuted. The judgement was announced on 22 May 1919. Seventeen of them were sentenced to transportation for life while Kartar Singh Jabbar, Teja Singh Chuharkana, Kahan Singh Chuharkana, Jagir Singh Muridke, Maina Singh Nankherke and Mehar Din Lohar were sentenced to death. Their death sentences were, however, commuted to transportation for life and they were sent to the Andamans. Master Raja Ram, Mahasha Rattan Chand and Chaudhary Bugha Mal convicted in the Martial Law trials of the late 1910s were also deported to the Andamans.

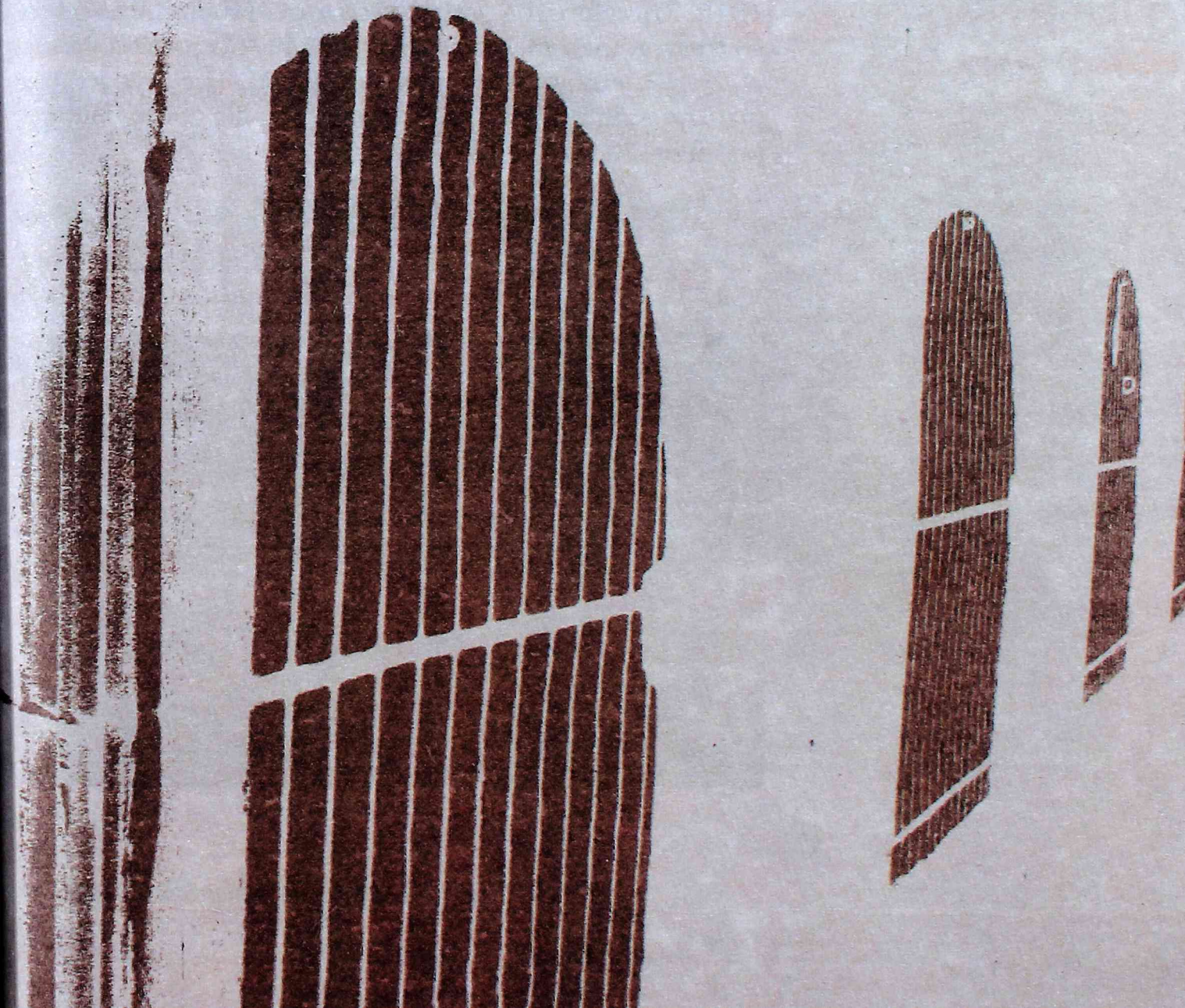
Some other patriots convicted and sentenced for political crimes were also sent to the Andamans during 1915-1921. The cases under which they were convicted, however, are yet to be identified.

CHAPTER 7

HUMILIATIONS AND RESISTANCE
THE SECOND PHASE

“No one chained a slave without chaining himself.”

Mahatma Gandhi to Eton students, 1931



HUMILIATIONS AND TORTURE

The three-day voyage to the Andamans in the ship S.S. Maharaja was a forewarning of the kind of life awaiting the prisoners in the jail. They were put in the stinking bunk of the ship with stern orders not to go to the upper deck. On reaching the Andamans, they were made to walk from the port to the Cellular Jail, their beddings on their heads and iron bowls in their hands. Barrie, the jailor, was the first person who mocked their arrival with the derisive taunt that "*Bombwalas*, asking for *swaraj*, will get only the oil-mill to grind."

We know of the treatment meted out to Ghadarites and other political prisoners at the Cellular Jail from memoirs written by inmates. Barindra Kumar Ghose and Upendra Banerjee, deported in 1909, and V.D. Savarkar, deported in 1911, were not repatriated in 1914 and were still there when political prisoners started arriving in 1915. Therefore the graphic account of their life as given by them in their memoirs also relates to this period. Many of these memoirs were later published. They record the torturous, anguished and humiliating life of the political prisoners in the Cellular Jail.

The Same Savage Treatment

These prisoners, who arrived at the Cellular Jail from 1915 to 1921, received savage treatment at the hands

Three nooses together
Normally Indian jails have no more than a single arrangement for gallows. The abnormal feature of the Cellular Jail as shown in this picture underscores its macabre character



of David Barrie and his equally sadistic minions. At Barrie's instigation, petty officials hurled abuses and inflicted violence. Some of the prisoners were made to live in cage-like cells, fed on unhygienic food, required to relieve themselves in the cells during the night, and to endure various kinds of physical torture devised to break them both in body and spirit. They were not allowed to converse with each other. A jail uniform was given to them, including short breeches to be worn while at work. As has been pointed out in Chapter 5, the sacred thread (*janeu*) of the Hindu prisoners was removed. Flogging bare bodies with wet canes, solitary confinement for long periods in small, dark and unhygienic cells, standing handcuffs, fetters, and a reduced diet were some of the methods of physical and psychological torture commonly inflicted on them. Since medical aid was often denied to the political prisoners, many of them contracted dangerous diseases.

Hard Manual Labour

Prisoners were assigned hard and back-breaking work. They were made to work overtime much beyond the

The Three Big Dacoits!

Baba Wasakha Singh has described the life of political prisoners at the Cellular Jail in a short Punjabi poem. It begins with the line, "*Andaman vich daku ne tin vadde*". The English translation of the poem is as follows:

The Chief Commissioner, Murray and Barrie
are the three great dacoits of the Andamans,
Each outdoing the other in inflicting punishments.
I, Wasakha Singh, have seen it myself and I write,
They were cunning, merciless and satan-like in
sucking the prisoners' blood.



Baba Wasakha Singh

Oakum:
hemp, jute or
coconut fibres

prescribed hours so that they completed their daily quota. The warders and petty officers kept a strict watch, always ready with their abuses and blows. Prisoners unable to complete the allotted work were subjected to cane thrashing, flogging and various other ingenious methods of torture.

The authorities did not spare even the sick prisoners. Trailokyanath Chakraborty's case is a glaring example of the oppressions inflicted on the sick. Not only was he made to work till he collapsed but was also denied medical treatment. Another political prisoner could not complete his daily quota of picking **oakum** due to his delicate constitution. He suffered punishment including caning from time to time.

Violation of Jail Rules

According to the jail rules, the work of the prisoner was not to be checked in the first fifteen days of his arrival in the jail. This rule was violated in the case of political prisoners. According to the rules, after the expiry of three months of continuous hard-labour, the prisoners were to be put on light work for the next three months but the prisoners were denied this opportunity. Any attempt to express empathy and solidarity towards other prisoners was met with derision. Having suffered innumerable tortures inflicted on them by the authorities, many of the prisoners attained martyrdom in the jail.

VALIANT RESISTANCE

The revolutionaries brought to the Andamans during this period, like their predecessors, were also men of courage and indomitable spirit. They decided to stand up to the tyranny of the authorities and preserve human dignity as also the sacred cause for which they were fighting. On the second day of their stay in the jail, the Ghadr patriots were deployed on *kohlu* work but they refused in unison. It jolted Barrie, the jailor, who had never expected disobedience. He, however, assessed the

situation and assigned to them the work of coir-pounding. The patriots registered their first victory.

Retaliation by Parmanand Jhansi

To torture them, the revengeful Barrie gave them dry coir for pounding which was a difficult task as compared to working with green coir. Obviously, the assigned work could not be completed. This was construed as an act of indiscipline. Barrie tried to be violent with Jhansi but the latter retaliated. In the words of Bhai Parmanand:

When the Jailor got up from his chair with a view to use violence towards him, Parmanand (Jhansi) gave him a push which precipitated him back into the chair, which being overturned, he fell down on the floor. The tandeel and the jamadars, awe-struck at this unheard of audacity gave Parmanand [Jhansi] a sound thrashing till he began to bleed in the head...Meanwhile the whole jail rang with the cry that Barrie Sahib had been assaulted. Even the tandeel and petty officers who were outwardly very submissive to Barrie and would cringe and flatter him in his presence were glad at this discomfiture. He was so harsh and tyrannical that all were glad at heart.

An inquiry conducted about this episode only confirmed Jhansi's 'guilt' and 30 lashes were inflicted on his naked body. He took it without a murmur. He was also sentenced to solitary confinement for six months with fetters. This treatment sent shock waves among the prisoners who resorted to a strike to protest against the abusive language used by Barrie and the physical and mental torture inflicted on Jhansi. They withdrew the strike on an assurance by the authorities that such incidents would not be repeated and the sentence awarded to Jhansi would be withdrawn. This episode of resistance highlights the defiant spirit of the prisoners in the face of relentless torture.



Parmanand Jhansi



Bhai Parmanand

Martyrdom of Baba Bhan Singh

In February 1917, Baba Bhan Singh was showing his day's work to the jail officials. He was insulted and abused by a British constable. Baba Bhan Singh was equally abusive to the constable. The Jail Superintendent awarded him fetters and confinement for six months. He was given reduced diet, standing handcuffs and also locked in the cell. Reacting to such an unjust punishment, Bhan Singh stopped standing up before the jailor. Barrie rebuked Bhan Singh on a couple of occasions but Bhan Singh ignored this high-handedness. One day, in June 1917 Bhan Singh who was locked in his cell was singing loudly. He was also banging his handcuffs. Barrie passed by and abused him. Bhan Singh responded with equal fervour. Barrie called the *jamadars* and asked them to give Bhan Singh a severe beating. A number of convict warders entered his cell and thrashed Bhan Singh mercilessly in Barrie's presence. Bhan Singh started crying and some political prisoners ran to save him. He was thrashed so severely that he had become unconscious. He was admitted to hospital. He did not recover, his condition worsened and he expired within a month. He joined the ranks of those martyrs who had sacrificed their lives in the Cellular Jail for the cause of their motherland.

General Strike and Hunger Strike

The murderous assault on Baba Bhan Singh was an act of outrage. The next day a deputation of political prisoners



Statue of Baba Bhan Singh

waited on the Superintendent and demanded full investigation. Instead the Superintendent threatened them. It led to a general strike. The strikers were penalised with bar fetters, standing handcuffs and solitary confinement for six months and reduced ration for a week. It was decided that two of the strikers would present a charter of demands. When the authorities refused to entertain a memorandum presented by the strikers, Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna resorted to hunger strike. Baba Prithvi Singh Azad also joined the hunger strike. The jail authorities surrendered and entertained the charter of demands. This was a victory for the political prisoners and Sohan Singh Bhakna called off the hunger strike although Baba Prithvi Singh Azad called it off only after many fellow prisoners persuaded him to do so.

By now, however, about a hundred political prisoners had joined the general strike. Never in the long history of the Andamans had a strike on such a large scale been organised. Never had it lasted for such a long time either. The duration of the strike had exhausted the jail authorities. Not only did the government's frequent queries embarrass them, they also felt a total loss of authority in the jail. They agreed to assign light work to the political prisoners provided the strike was called off. They also agreed to consider other demands.

The weight of handcuffs and shackles and solitary confinement for six months had taken a heavy toll on the health of the political prisoners. This was true of almost all the strikers including the sturdy Sikh peasants. Some of them even showed symptoms of tuberculosis and insanity. It was this situation that



Baba Prithvi Singh Azad



Statue of Pandit Ram Rakha

induced the patriots to withdraw the strike but only when they were assured of the acceptance of their demands. They secured the right to send long letters home, the right to have normal, non-alkaline water for bathing, soap and oil for the Sikhs, better food for the prisoners, and lastly, light work as their daily routine.

Martyrdom of Ram Rakha

Ram Rakha, a Punjabi Brahmin, convicted in the second Mandalay conspiracy case, reached the Cellular Jail in 1917. He was asked to remove the sacred thread (*janeu*) from his person. On his refusal to do so, the warders forcibly removed it. Unable to tolerate this affront, he resorted to hunger strike and the authorities, in turn, undertook force-feeding. After a month he contracted an infection and attained martyrdom within two months of his arrival in the Cellular Jail. With regard to the wearing of the sacred thread, the authorities had to yield ultimately and the Hindu prisoners were allowed to wear the sacred thread.

Fight by Jyotish Chander Pal

Heroic resistance was displayed by Jyotish Chander Pal too. One day, the warder came to his room to serve him food. Jyotish told him that the stinking pot kept inside his room for answering the call of nature should be first taken away and cleaned. The warder refused and went away. Jyotish had to spend the whole night by the side of the stinking pot in a small, ill-ventilated and closed room. He threw away the food and proceeded on a hunger strike. After some days he started passing blood in his stools and was hospitalised. Within a month he became mentally challenged and was removed to a mental hospital. He died at Berhampore Jail in Bengal on 4 December 1924. His last message was, "Do not think that my soul is fast asleep in heaven. If my love for the country is passionate and sincere, I shall take birth immediately and return to my country to serve her. Be sure of it."

The Sun Sets on Barrie

We know that Barrie had been a tyrant but his ego too was ultimately crushed. Once the self-styled 'demi-god' of Port Blair, he was now a pale shadow of himself. Barrie fell grievously sick and was evacuated to the mainland. Seriously incapacitated, he had to be helped by two persons while boarding the steamer. Suffering from the curses of hundreds of political prisoners, **nemesis** had finally caught up with him. Soon after reaching India, Barrie breathed his last and his death brought to an end a murky chapter in the history of Cellular Jail.

The 'Chhotta Barrie' Mirza Khan, the convict warder, who was equally cruel also suffered paralysis and was released after his sentence was commuted.

Threat of Strike Sufficient

Barrie's successor followed the earlier formulae of torture. He tortured a new political prisoner from Gujarat, by tying him to the oil-mill. Once tied to the oil-mill, the ordinary prisoners were asked to run it. He obviously got dragged and bruised. The political prisoners decided to protest against such torture by going on a hunger strike. The jailor, afraid of the wrath of the prisoners, denied having tied the prisoner to the oil-mill. The jailor was warned that anybody trying to torture prisoners must think twice before doing so. Now, even a mere threat of strike was sufficient to move jail officials.

General Amnesty and the Closure of Cellular Jail

We have seen that the life of political prisoners in the Andamans was hellish. A letter about their life, smuggled out of the Cellular Jail and published in the *Modern Review* of Calcutta in June 1918, also enraged the Indian people. Protest rallies were held to compel the British government to transfer the political prisoners to the mainland's jails. The torture stories of the Cellular

Nemesis:
punishment that is deserved, especially when it results in somebody's downfall.

Jail now received wide publicity in the national press and the demand for closing down the jail was raised throughout the country.

Worried by constant agitation and bowing to the popular demand of the Indian people, the British government declared general amnesty for the political prisoners in the Andamans. This was a red-letter day in the history of the Cellular Jail. Most of the revolutionary convicts numbering about 150 from Bengal, Punjab and Gujarat, including Barin Ghose, Trailokyanath Chakraborty and Bhai Parmanand, were released and repatriated in 1920 either to the mainland's jails or were set free. Nonetheless, about thirty political prisoners continued to be lodged in the Cellular Jail. This last group was repatriated to the mainland only in 1921.

The government announced that it was its intention to abolish the Andamans as a penal settlement. Even so, contrary to their declared policy, the British continued to send political prisoners to the Anadamans off and on until they finally revised the policy in 1932.

Vishnu Saran Dublis of the Kakori Conspiracy Case, Kotiaha Korabu of Vishakhapatnam, the Mappilas of Malabar and the Babbar Akalis of Punjab were incarcerated in this jail in the mid 1920s.

CHAPTER 8

THE LAST DEPORTATION

“Terrorism is never [our] object and [we] cannot be called “terrorists”... Our object is to try incessantly to organise a band of selfless...workers [for] the political and social emancipation of our country”

Hindustan Republican Association

The Tribune

Price One Lakh

LAKHNAO, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 1931.

DHAGAT SINGH, RAJGURU AND SUKHDEV EXECUTED.

NO "LAST INTERVIEW" WITH RELATIONS.

Shouts Emerge From Jail. **HEAD BODIES SECRETLY DISPOSED OF** **Scrapped to Distant Place.**



DECEASED MEN'S BODIES DISPOSED.
The bodies of the three revolutionaries who were executed in the Lahore Jail on Wednesday were secretly disposed of by the British authorities. It is reported that the bodies were taken to a place some distance from the jail and were cremated there. The British authorities are said to have been very anxious to prevent any public demonstration in connection with the disposal of the bodies.

DEATH MESSAGES.
The following messages were received from the three revolutionaries on the day of their execution:—
Dhagat Singh: "I am going to meet my Lord. I shall be with you again in a few days."
Rajguru: "I am going to meet my Lord. I shall be with you again in a few days."
Sukhdev: "I am going to meet my Lord. I shall be with you again in a few days."

MASS ALL INDIA NATIONALISM

As noted in the previous chapter, in 1922 the Government of India had decided to abolish the penal settlement in the Andamans altogether and to abolish the punishment of transportation especially for political prisoners; yet on 12 July 1932, Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State, announced in the House of Commons that the Government of India proposed to transfer 100 convicted 'terrorists' to the Andamans. Though the decision to send political prisoners to the dreaded *kala pani* was strongly criticised by the public and the press in India, the Government was bent upon punishing the revolutionaries of the 1920s by sending them to the Andamans. In order to understand the ideas of these young men let us first discuss the political environment of the early 1920s.

A special session of the Indian National Congress was held in Calcutta on 4 September 1920, with Lala Lajpat Rai as President. It was here that Mahatma Gandhi proposed a non-violent, non-cooperation movement which demanded *swaraj* (independence) within a year. There was an enthusiastic response to his call. Although the revolutionaries did not subscribe to non-violence, they wholeheartedly joined the peaceful Non-Cooperation Movement. However, the abrupt withdrawal of this movement by Gandhiji after the Chauri Chaura incident on 5 February 1922 (when 22 policemen were burnt alive by a group of rioting peasants), left the revolutionaries shocked and bewildered.



Ashfaqulla

First Revolutionary Salvo

The revolutionaries reactivated their secret organisations and started recruiting youth and mobilising money and weapons to fight the ultimate battle with the British rulers. Sachindranath Sanyal (who after his release from the Andaman jail in 1920 was leading a settled married life in U.P.) and Jogesh Chandra Chatterji floated the party, 'Hindustan Republican Association'. Important revolutionaries such as Ram Prasad Bismil of Shahjahanpur,

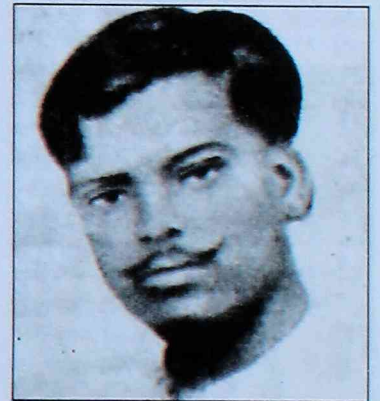
“We are revolutionaries, not terrorists”

This is how the pamphlet, *Revolutionary* distinguished between revolution and terrorism:

A few words more about terrorism and anarchism. These two words ... are invariably being misapplied whenever any reference to the revolutionaries is to be made because it is so very convenient to denounce the revolutionaries under that name. The Indian revolutionaries are neither terrorists nor anarchists. They never aim at spreading anarchy in the land, and therefore, they can never properly be called “anarchists”. Terrorism is never their object and they cannot be called “terrorists”... *Our object is to try incessantly to organise a band of selfless and devoted workers who will devote their best energies, towards the political and social emancipation of their country* [Emphasis author’s]. They will always remember that the making of nations requires the self-sacrifice of thousands of obscure men and women, who care more for the idea of their country than for their own comfort or interest, their own lives and the lives of those whom they love.

Ashfaqulla, Rajendra Lahiri, Chandra Sekhar Azad, Manmathnath Gupta and other devoted workers joined the association. Bejoy Kumar Sinha and Bhagat Singh were also closely associated with it. A constitution was drafted for the association. In January 1925, copies of a pamphlet *Revolutionary* were distributed throughout the country exhorting people to revolt. Signed by Vijay Kumar, President, Central Council of the Party, it sought to distinguish terrorism and anarchism from the nobler cause of revolution.

The first major strike of the revolutionaries was the looting of a government treasury from a running train on the Saharanpur-Lucknow route near Kakori railway station on 9 August 1925. A criminal case, known as the Kakori Conspiracy case, was registered. Many revolutionaries were arrested and prosecuted in this case. Ram Prasad Bismil, Roshan Singh, Ashfaqulla and Rajendra Nath Lahiri were sentenced to death. Sachindra Nath Bakshi, Sachindranath Sanyal, Govinda Charan Kar, Jogesh Chandra Chatterji and Mukandi Lal were sentenced to transportation for life. Raj Kumar Sinha, Suresh Chandra Bhattacharya,



Chandra Sekhar Azad



Rajendra Nath Lahiri



Ram Prasad Bismil



Thakur Roshan Singh



Bhagwati Charan Vohra,
Durga Devi and their son
Sachindra

The couple were members of the Nau Jawan Bharat Sabha. Vohra died in 1930 when a bomb exploded in his hand. He was experimenting with bombs because he wanted to rescue Bhagat Singh and his comrades

Vishnu Saran Dublis and Ram Kishan Khatri were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for ten years. Manmathnath Gupta was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for fourteen years and five others were sentenced to term imprisonments.

When the judgement was pronounced on 6 April 1927, the court room resounded with Maulana Hasrat Mohani's *ghazal* loudly recited by Bismil and his companions:

*"Sarfaroshi ki tamanna ab hamaray dil me hai,
Dekhna hai zor kitna bazuay qatil mein hai"*
(In our determination to challenge the might of the murderous rulers, we are ever willing to lay down our lives.)

On 17 December 1927, Rajendra Nath Lahiri was hanged in Gonda jail, while Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla and Thakur Roshan Singh kissed the gallows two days later. Vishnu Saran Dublis was originally lodged in Naini central jail. He was, however, falsely implicated in a jail riot case there and was sentenced to another term of five years. He was sent to the Andamans to undergo both the sentences.

Revolutionary Activities in the Punjab

In the Punjab, Bhagat Singh, was in the forefront of many revolutionary activities. In 1927, he founded the 'Naujawan Bharat Sabha' at Lahore. Many revolutionary groups from the United Provinces, Punjab, Rajputana, and Bengal held a meeting at the Feroze Shah Kotla grounds in Delhi on 8 and 9 September 1928. Important revolutionaries, including Bhagat Singh, Batukeshwar Dutt, Bejoy Kumar Sinha, Jitendra Nath Dass, Yashpal, Chandra Sekhar Azad, Bhagwati Charan Vohra, Shivram Rajguru and Mahabir Singh attended this meeting. They renamed the "Hindustan Republican Association" as 'Hindustan Socialist Republican Association'. Another wing, the 'Hindustan Socialist Republican Army' (HSRA) was also formed with Chandra Sekhar Azad as its chief commander.

An incident of 30 October 1928 gave further momentum to political developments. Lala Lajpat Rai



Left and Right: Both Bhagat Singh

Note the striking change in appearance.

Revolutionaries were often compelled to alter their looks and attire

was leading a huge procession towards the railway station of Lahore to protest against the arrival of the Simon Commission. The police resorted to a lathi-charge in which Lajpat Rai was seriously injured. He succumbed to injuries on 17 November 1928. The revolutionaries vowed to avenge his death. They planned to kill Scott, the Superintendent of Police, Lahore. Jai Gopal was deputed to keep watch on the movements of Scott. The killing of Scott was fixed for 17 December 1928. When J.P. Saunders, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, came out from the office in the evening, riding a motor cycle, Jai Gopal mistook him for Scott and signalled accordingly to Bhagat Singh and Rajguru who were waiting in **ambush** for him. As soon as he came within firing distance, they shot him dead, exactly one month after the death of Lala Lajpat Rai. The authorities were stunned by this courageous act. The extent of the revolutionaries' daring and courage can be gauged from the manner in which they plastered the walls of Lahore with posters the very next day. They owned up their act. They proclaimed that in Saunders had died an agent of the British authority in India—the most tyrannical form of government in the world.

On 20 December 1928, Bhagat Singh sneaked out of Lahore and reached Calcutta by rail, having travelled there in disguise. Durga Devi, a revolutionary in her own right, put her son Sachindra in Bhagat Singh's lap and accompanied him from Lahore to Calcutta.

Ambush:
an unexpected
attack from a
hidden position

“ In man has died the limb of a cruel institution”

This was one of the posters plastered by the HSRA on the walls of Lahore after avenging the death of Lajpat Rai by killing Saunders:

The Hindustan Socialist Republican Army.

NOTICE

Beware! Ye Bureaucrats!!

J.P. Saunders is dead! Lala Lajpat Rai is avenged!

Really, it is horrible to imagine that so lowly and violent hands as those of an ordinary police official—J.P. Saunders—could ever dare to touch in such an outrageous way the body of one so old, so revered and so loved by 300 millions of people of the land, and thus cause his death. The youth and manhood of India was challenged by this insult hurled down on the head of the Indian nationhood.

And, let the world know that India still lives; that the blood of the Indian youth has not been totally cooled down and that they can still risk their lives when the honour of their nation is at stake. And, it is proved through this act by those obscure youngmen who are ever persecuted, condemned and denounced even by their own people.

Beware'. Ye Tyrants!! Beware!!

Do not injure the feelings of a down-trodden and oppressed nation. Think twice before perpetrating such a **diabolical** deed. Despite strict guards against the smuggling of arms, the revolvers will ever continue to flow in—if not sufficient at present for an armed revolt then at least sufficient to avenge the national insults. In spite of all the denunciations and condemnations of their own kith and kin, and ruthless repression and persecution by the enemies, a party of youngmen will ever live to teach a lesson to the haughty rulers. They will ever be so bold as to cry even amidst the raging storm of opposition and repression, even on the scaffold, “Long live the Revolution”.

Sorry for the death of a man! But in man has died the limb of an institution which is so cruel, so lowly and so base that it must be abolished. In man has died an agent of the British Authority in India — the most tyrannical form of government in the world.

Sorry for the bloodshed of a human being but the sacrifice of individuals at the altar of the Revolution that will bring freedom to all, rendering the exploitation of man by man impossible—is inevitable

Long Live the Revolution

18 December 1928
Punjab

Balraj
Commander-in-Charge

Shivram Rajguru also travelled posing as their servant. Chandra Sekhar Azad accompanied by Kishori Lal left Lahore on 25 December 1928 for Delhi. Kishori Lal left him there and returned to Lahore. A criminal case, namely, Lahore Conspiracy Case, was registered and the police sprung into action by conducting raids and searches and making arrests. But Bhagat Singh, with other revolutionary patriots, was planning something more sensational.

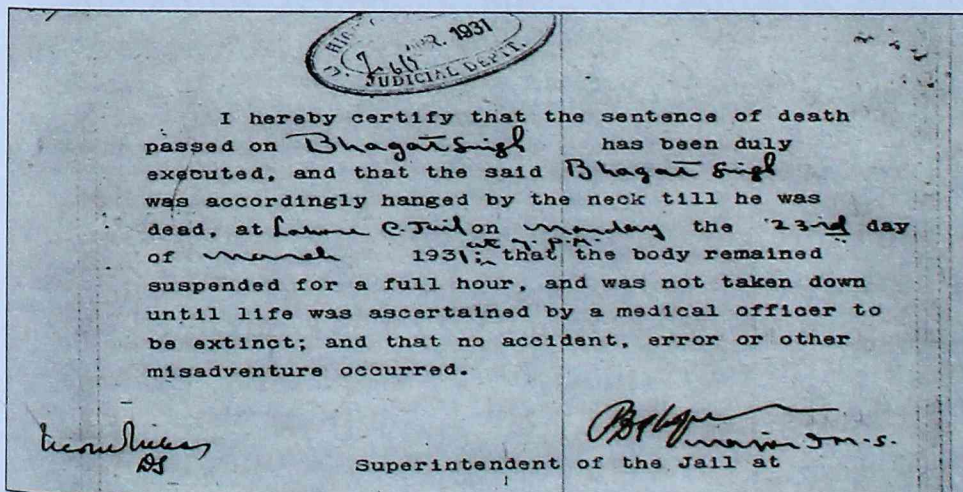
On 8 April 1929, when the proceedings in the Legislative Assembly were in progress, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt suddenly threw two bombs in quick succession from the visitor's gallery. Their intention was not to kill anybody but to 'make the deaf hear' and awaken the British rulers to the long arm of the revolutionaries. The incident caused complete chaos in the Assembly. Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt raised slogans "Inquilab Zindabad" (Long live revolution) and "Samrajya ka nash ho" (Down with imperialism). They then threw pamphlets in the Assembly and offered themselves for arrest. They were committed to the court of the Sessions Judge, Delhi. Bhagat Singh read out his detailed statement in the court on 6 June 1929. Asaf Ali, the noted nationalist leader, was the defence counsel. The judgment was pronounced on 12 June 1929, and both were sentenced to life imprisonment.

A special tribunal was set up in the Lahore Conspiracy Case. The trial before the tribunal started

Diabolical
extremely cruel
or evil



Bhagat Singh's comrades,
Rajguru (top) and Sukhdev
(below)



Certificate of Bhagat Singh's execution

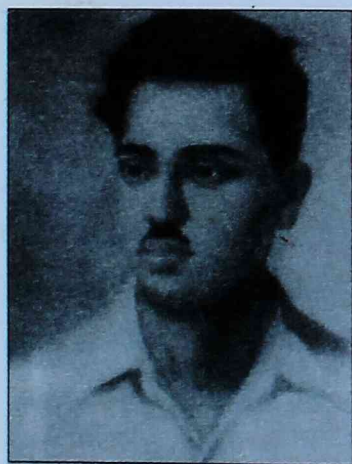
Abscond:
to run away
secretly, especially
to avoid arrest or
prosecution

on 10 July 1930. The political prisoners used to raise patriotic slogans in the court. They used to sing: “*Mera rang de basanti chola, Ma, mera rang de basanti chola*” [O, my dear mother, dress me in (sacrificial) saffron-coloured robes, (prepare me for making the supreme sacrifice)] was their favourite song which had a mesmerising effect on the youth. The judgement was delivered on 7 October 1930. Bhagat Singh, Shivram Rajguru and Sukhdev were sentenced to death. Kishori Lal Rattan, Sheo (Shiv) Varma, Dr. Gaya Prasad, Jai Dev Kapur, Bejoy Kumar Sinha, Mahabir Singh and Kamal Nath Tiwari were sentenced to life imprisonment; Kundan Lal Gupta was sentenced to seven years while Prem Dutt got five years. Three others were acquitted. Of the **absconders**, Chandra Sekhar Azad attained martyrdom in an encounter with the police in Azad Park, Allahabad in February 1931. Bhagwati Charan died in a bomb explosion in May 1930 when he was rehearsing the bomb attack planned for the escape of Bhagat Singh. Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were taken to the gallows at 7.00 p.m. on 23 March 1931. On their way they had cheerfully raised the slogans “*Inquilab Zindabad*”, “Down with Union Jack” and “Down with British Imperialism”.

Gaya Prasad, Jai Dev Kapur, Kundan Lal, Bejoy Kumar Sinha, Kamal Nath Tewari, Mahabir Singh and Sheo Varma who had been convicted along with Shaheed Bhagat Singh in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, were deported to the Andamans. Batukeshwar Dutt convicted in the Delhi Assembly Bomb case was also sent to the Andamans.

The Bengal Revolutionaries

The Chittagong Armoury Raid Case was yet another startling and most daring revolutionary act by the youth. This well-planned raid was conducted on 18 April 1930 with Surya Sen, a committed revolutionary, as leader of the group. The revolutionaries were able to capture the armouries and a huge amount of arms



Batukeshwar Dutt, sent to the Andamans

and ammunition. Everything went according to plan and Surya Sen was given a guard of honour. As the revolutionary Kalpana Dutt put it about the 'Battle of Jalalabad Hill' (near Dhaka), "A regular pitched battle went on till dusk when the troops were forced to fall back. Many were killed on both sides. Among Chittagong's revolutionary youth, Jalalabad Hill became a saga of unyielding resistance".

A skirmish took place on 6 May when some revolutionaries were killed by the British police. Some were wounded as well and a number of them were arrested. They were booked in a criminal case. Thirteen of them were sentenced to transportation for life. Surya Sen, Kalpana Dutt and Tarakeshwar Dastidar were arrested. In June 1933, a Supplementary Chittagong Armoury Raid case was put up for trial in which Surya

A Golden Dream: Surya Sen's Last Wish



Surya Sen

Idealism and unity is my last message. The rope is hanging over my head. Death is knocking at my door. The mind is soaring towards eternity. This is the time for *sadhna*. This is the time for preparation to embrace death as a friend and this is the time to recall the light of other days as well as sweet remembrances of you all, my dear brothers and sisters. Break the monotony of my life and cheer me up. At such a pleasant, at such a solemn moment, what shall I leave behind for you?

Only one thing – that is my dream a golden dream, a dream of free India. How auspicious a moment it was when I first saw it. Throughout my life, most passionately and untiringly I have pursued it like a lunatic. I know not how far I have proceeded towards the fulfilment of my dream. I know not where I am compelled to stop my pursuit. If the icy hands of death touch you before the goal is achieved then give the charge of your pursuits to your followers as I do today.

Onwards my comrades! My comrades onwards! Never fall back. The day of bondage is disappearing and the dawn of freedom is ushered in. Be up and doing. Never be disappointed. Success is sure. Never forget, the 18th April, 1930, the day of the eastern revolution in Chittagong. Keep fresh in your memory, the fights of Jalalabad, Julda, Chandan Nagar and Dhalghat. Write in red letters in the core of your heart the names of all noble patriots who have sacrificed their lives at the altar of India's freedom.

My earnest appeal to you! There should be no division in your organisation. My blessings to you all inside and outside jail. Fare you well! Long live revolution. Bande Mataram.

Sen and Tarakeshwar Dastidar were sentenced to death while Kalpana Dutt was sentenced to transportation for life on 14 August 1933. Surya Sen was hanged to death on the night of 12 January 1934 in Chittagong jail and he joined the ranks of martyrs.

Ganesh Ghose, Haripada Bhattacharya, Faqir Chandra Sengupta, Himangshu Bhowmik, Kali Kinker Dey, Lal Mohan Sen, Phanindra Lal Nandi, Ranadhir Dasgupta, Sahay Ram Das, Subodh Kumar Choudhari, Subodh Roy, Sudhir Ranjan Choudhari, Kalipada Chakravarty and Sukhdendu Dastidar, convicted and sentenced in this case, were deported to the Andamans.

Another daring attack that came to be known as the Hilly Railway Station Case was committed by the revolutionaries on 28 October 1933. They were arrested, tried and convicted on various counts. Pran Krishna Chakraborty, Satyabrata Chakraborty, Hrishikesh Bhattacharjee, Saroj Kumar Basu, Hari Pada Basu, Prafulla Narain Sanyal, Abdul Kader Choudhury, Kiron Chandra De and Ram Krishna Sardar were sentenced in this case and sent to the Cellular Jail.

Many other revolutionary patriots were also convicted in sham trials and deported to the Andamans.

CELLULAR JAIL AGAIN, 1932-1938

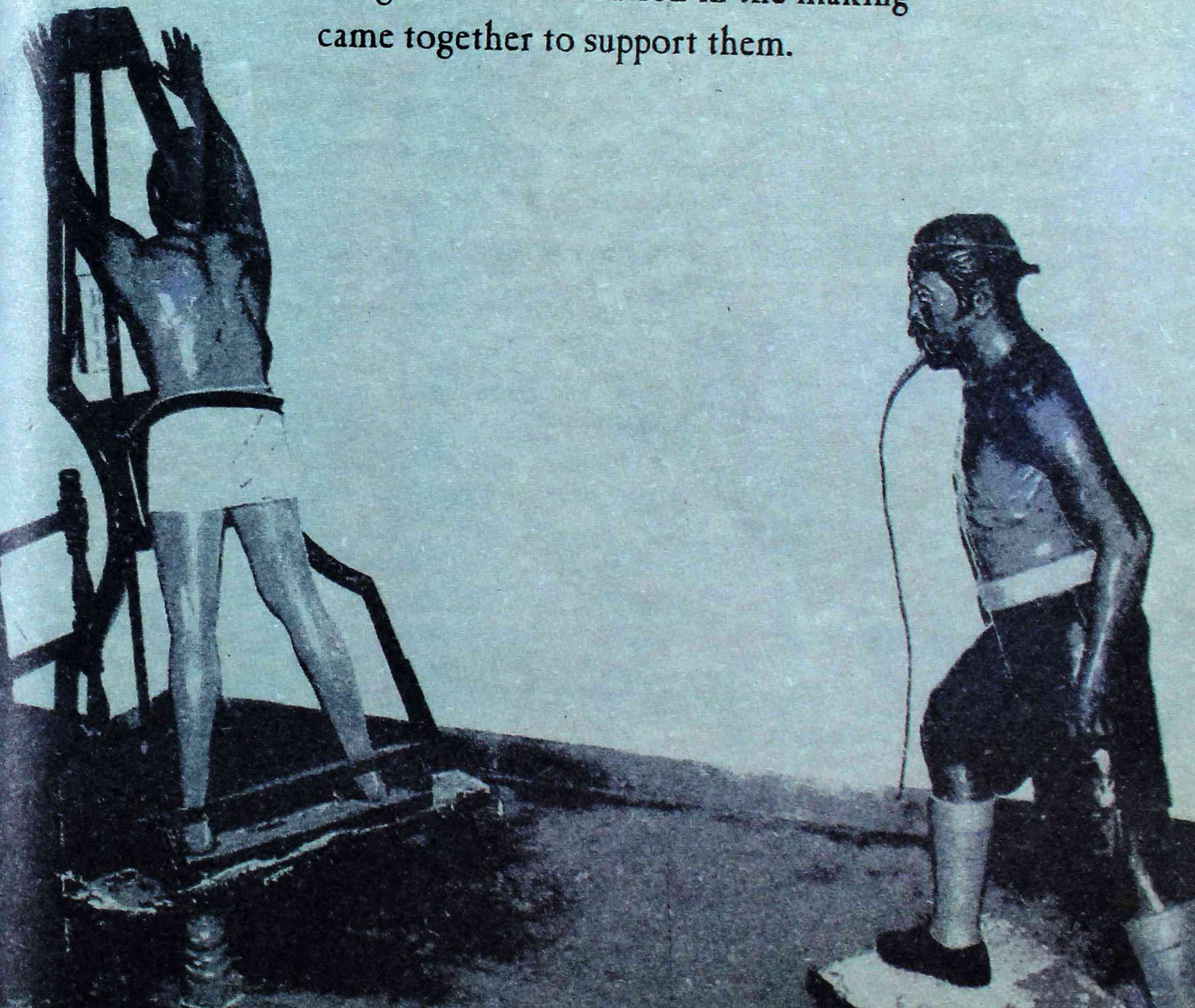
After the jail was re-opened, the first batch of 25 political prisoners from Bengal, including those convicted in the Chittagong Armoury Raid case, was transferred to the Andamans on 15 August 1932. By April 1933, the number of political prisoners in the Cellular Jail had risen to 100. By the end of 1934, the number of political prisoners in the Andaman jail had gone up to 200 and in October 1936 up to 310. According to the available records, the number of political prisoners deported to the Andamans during this period was 386. While, Bejoy Kumar Sinha, one of the Andaman prisoners, puts it at more than 400.

CHAPTER 9

HUMILIATIONS AND RESISTANCE

THE THIRD PHASE

In the 1930s, the revolutionaries in the Jail organised epic struggles for prison reforms, linked as these were with the larger issue of Indian freedom. They came from different corners of the land and different segments of the nation-in-the-making came together to support them.



AGONISING EXPERIENCES

Dark Dungeons and Hard Manual Labour

Much has been said in the previous chapters about the living conditions of the prisoners at the Cellular Jail. Bejoy Kumar Sinha, a prisoner himself, describes these conditions, at some length in his book, *In Andamans: The Indian Bastille* (first published in 1939) just as Savarkar, Ghose and Bhai Parmanand had done so before him. A comparative analysis of all these accounts reveals how these conditions worsened in the 1930s. Sinha speaks of dark and dingy cells with their rough and damp floors thickly coated with moss. Scorpions and other reptiles often crawled into these dungeons and sometimes stung the prisoners.

The food was not fit for human consumption. There were worms in the bread and boiled wild grass was served instead of vegetables. Rain water, full of insects, was used as drinking water. Prisoners were not allowed to meet each other. The guards carried out physical

A memo dated 12 September 1934 requesting a medical officer to examine whether a convict is in a fit state of health to undergo the punishment of 20 stripes along with the reply of the medical officer

D. O. 22. C. C. A. N. 481.

(9)

No. _____

To: The *Jail* MEDICAL OFFICER,

Has the honour to request that the Medical Officer *Cell Jail* will be good enough to examine the convict, number and name as per margin, and to certify whether ~~he is~~ ^{is} in a fit state of health to undergo corporal punishment of *20 (twenty)* stripes.

This punishment has been confirmed by the Chief Commissioner, vide his No. _____

dated *Collector Jail* }
Dated *12-9-34* } *S. N. ...*
District Officer, *Cell Jail*.

CERTIFICATE

I have examined the convict as per margin and certify that ~~he is~~ ^{is} in fit state of health to undergo the punishment awarded.

Dated *12.9.34* } *...*
Medical Officer, *...*

MGIPC-57-VII-3-286-21-7-32-206

P. 10

torture and their behaviour was insulting. Life was unbearable. In the jails of the mainland, political prisoners were never given any hard manual task. But in the Andamans, they were forced into hard labour involving such tasks as coir pounding.

Punishments

Flogging was the worst punishment inflicted on prisoners. Sinha writes that to be stripped naked and tied to the flogging frame was a most painful experience. Physical suffering apart, the mind was tormented at this outrage of human dignity. Fetters, cross-bar fetters, and standing handcuffs were imposed on the political prisoners on flimsy grounds.

The political prisoners usually narrated their grievances to every important person who visited the jail. The Home Member, Sir Henry Craik also went to Port Blair in April 1936. Craik told journalists that the Andamans was a 'Prisoners' Paradise'. The people of India who knew the plight of the political prisoners were not taken in by these false rosy descriptions. They missed no opportunity to protest against gross violations of basic human rights.

COMBATIVE DEFIANCE AND REPATRIATION

The First Hunger Strike

The indignities and humiliations occurring on a daily basis were discussed by the political prisoners in April 1933 and they planned a hunger strike. They sent a written representation to the government enumerating their demands and served a one-month ultimatum. No concrete step to redress their grievances was taken by the authorities. An indefinite hunger strike began on 12 May 1933.

An exhibit from the Memorial depicting the harrowing conditions of the Jail

These facts, as you would know, have been discussed in detail in Chapter 5

LIFE IN THE CELLULAR JAIL

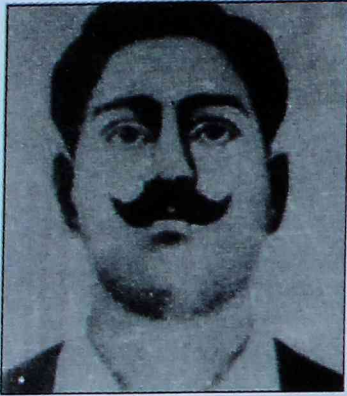
ACCOMMODATION - 13½' BY 7' CELL, WITHOUT ANY PROVISION FOR URINALS & LAVATORIES,

WATER - FRESH WATER FOR DRINKING ONLY, SEA WATER WAS USED FOR BATHING. **FOOD** - BOILED RICE IN WATER WITHOUT SALT, ROTI, DAL, & VEGETABLE FULL OF WORMS.

DRESS - A HALF PANT, KURTA & A WHITE CAP. **WORK** - A FIXED QUOTA OF WORK WAS ALOTTED TO ALL PRISIONERS; COIR

POUNDRING - ROPE MAKING - OIL GRINDING ETC. **PUNISHMENT** - IF THEY FAILED TO MEET THE ALOTTED WORK QUOTA WITH IN SPECIFIED TIME - BARBARIC

PUNISHMENT FOLLOWS - GUNNY BAG UNIFORMS, INVALID DIETS, BAR FETTERS, NECK RING SHACKLES, HANDCUFFS FOR A WEEK & FETTERS FOR SIX MONTHS TO SOLITARY CONFINEMENT.



Mahabir Singh

An example of Mahabir's poetry

Despite the torture and the humiliation, these prisoners had the spirit for versification

The strike completely unnerved the jail administration. But the senior European Medical Officer moved about with an air of indifference and nonchalance. He remarked that he wanted to 'teach a lesson' to the political prisoners.

The Martyrdom of Mahabir, Mohit and Mohan

The condition of some of the prisoners who were on hunger strike soon began deteriorating. This became a cause of concern to the authorities who decided to start the process of force-feeding. But such was the determination of the prisoners that they resolved to resist force-feeding so that they may die, thereby paving the way to victory. Mahabir Singh was a party to this decision and chose to lead the way. Sinha gives a painful account of the circumstances leading to Mahabir's death. The feeding process started with the insertion of a rubber tube through one of his nostrils. Mahabir offered resistance and coughed hard with the result that the feeding tube was dislodged from the gullet and entered the adjoining windpipe. When his pulse rate started dropping and he was losing consciousness, the doctors realized the gravity of the situation and decided to shift him to the hospital. Mahabir attained martyrdom before he could be brought to the hospital. The jail administration, however, concealed the facts and sent a report to the Home Secretary, Government of Punjab, stating the cause of death of Mahabir Singh as "due to shock".

“मैंने देखा मृत्यु निमंत्रण उसके द्वार आया ।
अत्याचारी से आगे बढ़ जो पहले टकराया ।
बन्द हो गया मेरा भी आज भाग्य का द्वार ।
लेकिन कहो बिना बलि किसने पायी आजादी उपहार।”
“शहीद महावीर सिंह”

Revolutionaries' Salutations to a Departed Comrade

The manner in which the prisoners paid their last respects to Mahabir is thus described by Sinha:

The strikers used to raise slogans daily at 8 p.m. That night it was memorable. Long before the scheduled hour, they were all at the doors of their cells. Complete silence reigned. Just as the jail gong sounded eight times, up went their voices, loud and resonant: 'Inquilab Zindabad'. The echo had not yet died down when the air was rent again: 'Inquilab Zindabad'. In front was stretched the vast expanse of blue water. In the distance were visible the shining lights of the Island King's palace—the Chief Commissioner's bungalow. For the third time they roared 'Inquilab Zindabad'. Then there was eerie silence. They felt thrilled. They had collectively given their revolutionary salutations to their departed comrade.

The struggle soon became grimmer. After Mahabir's death new prisoners joined the strike and the number of strikers crossed the 50 mark. The authorities kept force-feeding the other strikers. When Mohit and Mohan were being force-fed, the tube found its way into their lungs, causing death in both cases.

The news of the martyrdom of these patriots reached India and caused widespread resentment throughout the country. Unable to counter the mounting public pressure through various forums, the Government of India decided to send Colonel Barker of the Indian Medical Services (Inspector-General of Prisons in Punjab) to the Andamans to make inquiries on the spot but Barker was largely unsympathetic towards the plight of the prisoners.

The Strikers' Achievements

One day, all of a sudden, the Deputy Commissioner along with the Senior Medical Officer arrived with other high officials and the strikers were brought to the Central Tower. They were taken there on stretchers, one after another, barring those few whose condition did not permit them to be taken even on stretchers. The authorities then assured the strikers that all their grievances would be heard and they would get necessary amenities after the withdrawal of the strike.



Statue of Mohit Moitra installed in the park facing the jail

The political prisoners after consultation among themselves called off the strike on 26 June 1933, the forty-sixth day after its commencement.

The jail authorities were already committed to conceding substantial demands. The prisoners were provided bedsheets, mosquito-nets, pillows and pillow covers, bathing towels and wooden beds. The quality of food was improved. Some variety was introduced in vegetables and lentils. Fish was to be supplied, whenever available, on alternate days. The kitchen was entrusted to them for proper arrangements. Equitable privileges were given irrespective of the categories of the prisoners. Arrangements were made both for indoor and outdoor games. Parallel and horizontal bars were provided for physical exercise. They were allowed to subscribe to magazines, both Indian and foreign. They could also receive books in parcels from friends and relatives and could purchase books with their money deposited at the jail gate. Proper furniture in the reading room and proper lights in the cells up to ten in the night were also arranged. All punishments were withdrawn. Association and communication with each other was allowed. Schedules of work were reduced. Heavier forms of work were abolished.

Thus, after some very hard struggles, the political prisoners were able to register a significant achievement in this Bastille of a jail that had been constructed with the singular purpose of demoralising the political prisoners.

Last Battle: Larger Issues

By 1937, owing to some hard-won battles, the life of political prisoners in the Cellular Jail had become comparatively easy. They also realized that there was a tremendous upsurge of mass movement in the country. The Congress had come to power in seven out of eleven provinces and had formed governments there. The prisoners felt that under the Congress tricolour millions of their hungry and half naked brethren had the hope of deliverance. They aligned themselves with the cause of the nation. But they also wished that their repatriation should be seen as one among several national



Statue of Mohan Kishore Namadas installed in the park facing the jail

demands. They correctly asserted that the treatment meted out to them was vindictive in the extreme and was against all canons of modern **penology**.

They, therefore, questioned the re-opening of the Cellular Jail in 1932 and the deportation of more than 400 political prisoners there after that date. This position was not borne out of any self-centredness. The atrocities inflicted upon them were not simply a matter of torturing individual revolutionaries. They were in fact aimed at crushing revolution in the country and in maintaining the grip of a colonial government over an exploited nation. Consequently, they were as concerned about the plight of nationalists such as Comrade Jogesh Chatterji and Comrade Sachin Bakshi who had been on hunger strikes in U.P. jails. Thus determined to fight the British Raj on larger issues relating to India's freedom, these prisoners gave a representation to the government on 9 July 1937 reiterating that they too would go on mass hunger strike.

No reply was received from the government till 23 July 1937. This led the political prisoners to write a last letter to the administration announcing that they would begin a hunger strike. The Chief Commissioner, however, told them that the Government had no desire for any wholesale release or repatriation and if they proceeded to go on hunger strike they would render themselves liable to prosecution.

Hunger Strike

One hundred eighty-three political prisoners started the hunger strike on the morning of 24 July 1937. Those who could not be on hunger strike for health reasons struck work. Despite the strikes, the revolutionaries did not feel the usual oppression of a heavy prison environment. They were full of joy and hope. They moved about freely and fearlessly. Talking and reading was their routine. They felt the dye had been cast and they had no anxiety. They raised their battle cry every morning and evening. Their voices rolled on, thundering from yard to yard, echoing throughout the settlement. The slogans were, '*Inquilab Zindabad*' (Long Live Revolution) and '*Angrez Sarkar Murdabad*' (Down with British Raj).

Penology:
the theory and practice of how crime is punished, how prisons are managed, and how rehabilitation is handled

The jail authorities were also careful not to take any steps which might precipitate the situation.

After three to four days some of the political prisoners began to feel acute weakness but the Senior Medical Officer, Captain Choudhari, was always on the lookout to provide medical aid. Force-feeding was started under his personal supervision. This time adequate precautions were taken to avoid any mishap. The number of hunger strikers was increasing by the day. It reached a total of 230 out of 290 political prisoners. The jail authorities were trying to persuade the prisoners to call-off the strike but they felt that they were in the thick of a battle that could be decisive.

Messages from the Mainland

The Government had broadcast from Simla the news of this hunger strike, giving brief summary of the prisoners' demands. The message of the strike reached the mainland through ordinary prisoners as well who were returning home after completing their term. As a result the revolutionaries started receiving messages, letters, telegrams from their parents, relatives and friends imploring them to withdraw the hunger strike. Rabindranath Tagore sent a telegram requesting the political prisoners to discontinue their strike.

The revolutionaries also received a telegraphic message from Congress leaders, Bulabhai Desai, Satyamurti and Asaf Ali, urging them to discontinue their strike. This made the strikers ponder over their action once again. Less than a week thereafter they received another telegram from Jawaharlal Nehru, acting on behalf of the Working Committee of the Congress, appealing to them to call off the hunger strike. These messages were treated with respect and serious consideration but the political prisoners sincerely felt that the struggle could not be abandoned in the middle.

The political prisoners also came to know that a tremendous movement had developed throughout the country in their support, both inside and outside the jails. By now it had attained many successes. Hundreds of their comrades in Deoli, Behrampore, Alipore and other jails had joined the struggle. Mass hunger strikes in numerous

prisons created a huge support base among political prisoners. This was a historic development, and in these circumstances, the revolutionaries could not think of an abrupt end to their struggle.

During the fourth week of the strike, yet another communication was received from the Bengal Government, now run by the Congress, urging the political prisoners to abandon their strike. The Bihar Premier, also a Congressman, sent similar requests to the political prisoners. The revolutionaries expressed thanks by return wire but expressed regret for being unable to discontinue the strike since no assurances regarding their demands had been forthcoming from the Government of India. Events were moving rapidly. The same evening another telegram was received from Bulabhai Desai, Satyamurti and Mohan Lal Sexena stating that the Central Assembly had passed a motion asking for the immediate repatriation of the Andaman political prisoners and also calling upon the political prisoners themselves to withdraw the hunger strike. The revolutionaries felt that the cause of their hunger strike was not being fully understood by fellow-citizens and compatriots. They wished to convince them that they were waging a war of independence, not a mere battle for repatriation.

Gandhiji's Message

The nation's citizens were extremely concerned about the health of the hunger strikers in the Cellular Jail

*Left to Right:
Bimal Bhowmick, Adhir
Kr. Nag and Karthick
Chandra Sarkar ex-inmates
of the jail photographed in
March 2006 when they
met in the jail during its
centenary observances*



particularly because they were aware that a few years earlier some of the political prisoners had died while on hunger strike. A flood of telegrams reached Port Blair from persons of all walks of life earnestly appealing to the political prisoners to give up their strike. Mahatma Gandhi also made an appeal, on behalf of the whole nation, to the strikers to discontinue it. The political prisoners came to know of this when they were called to the Central Tower of the jail in the morning of 28 August 1937 and the Chief Commissioner himself produced a bundle of telegrams including that of Mahatma Gandhi.

The message of Mahatma Gandhi had a deep effect on the political prisoners. They were convinced that the entire nation was behind them. Yet, they wished that the nation should allow them to continue their struggle and permit some of them to die in its course. After two hours of impassioned debate, the revolutionaries decided "to suspend the strike and bow before the national mandate". The strike was brought to an end after 36 days on 30 August 1937.

Repatriation

The Government of India ordered the repatriation of political prisoners in the Andaman Islands on 14 September 1937.

It was on 22 September 1937 that 76 of these prisoners including all from Assam, Madras, Bihar and Punjab boarded the Maharaja for their journey back home. Bejoy Kumar Sinha, whose account of the life of the jail in the 1930s we have used to construct this history, was also among them. The journey to the mainland was uncomfortable; even so the thought of going back to their beloved homes and to their people had imbued them with a renewed enthusiasm for life. Just short of Calcutta, once again the revolutionaries raised their old slogans – slogans that had been the source of life for them in the dismal conditions of the Cellular Jail.

The last batch of political prisoners left the Andamans on 18 January 1938. The revolutionaries had indeed demonstrated through thought and action that they had been "prisoners of hope"!

CHAPTER 10

THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

30 December 1943: Netaji hoisted an Indian flag on liberated Indian soil at Port Blair, Andaman Islands, the first occasion of its kind in the history of colonial India.



With the departure of the last batch of political prisoners in January 1938, it was thought that, now at least, the long tale of brutal tortures had finally ended and the curtain had come down on that horror of horrors, the dreaded Cellular Jail in the Andamans. But that was not to be because yet another imperial power knocked on India's doors during the Second World War. This war was a global conflict that involved, directly or indirectly, a large number of nations. Japan, as you would know, was one of the Axis powers and was ranged along with Germany and Italy against the Allies, Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the United States of America. Ultimately, the Allies defeated the Axis but in 1941-42 the latter appeared to be in the ascendance.

The ships of the Imperial Japanese Navy swooped on the islands of Ross and Chatham, entry points to Port Blair, in March 1942. The Japanese occupied the territory and established complete control, ousting the British, within two days of entry. They left the islands only in October 1945 after the Axis powers lost the Second World War to the Allies. Their occupation of the islands was marked by a fresh spell of brutalities, but with a couple of differences. Firstly, the victimisation of the people was far worse than what the British had attempted. Secondly, the victims of the Japanese were mostly local residents of the islands. Among them, the name of Dr Diwan Singh, a medical doctor, shines brightly. Diwan Singh happily opted to remain behind to serve the local people. In due course, in the face of the Japanese onslaught, he had to lay down his life for the cause of humanity.

DR DIWAN SINGH KALEPANI

Dr Diwan Singh was a medical officer in the Indian Army under the British. Although transferred to the Andamans as a punishment for his nationalist views and his sympathetic attitude to freedom fighters while on the mainland, he utilized his time on the islands by immersing himself in the people's welfare. Dr Diwan Singh became an inseparable part of the islanders. He



Dr. Diwan Singh Kalepani

turned the infamous phrase *kala pani* on its head by suffixing it to his name and calling himself Kalepani. While the Japanese treated the humans as beasts and derived sadistic pleasure by punishing them, he engaged himself, heart and soul, in ameliorating the plight of the local population. He built a Gurudwara not for Sikhs alone but for every individual to pray according to his faith and religious belief. He was also instrumental in setting up an educational institution where both boys and girls studied with enthusiasm. In April 1942, a branch of the Indian Independence League was set up with Dr Diwan Singh as its President. A branch of the Azad Hind Fauj or Indian National Army (INA) was also raised in the Andamans with his efforts.

A few months after their arrival on the islands, the Japanese started misbehaving with the local people and treating them as slaves. This caused a lot of resentment and Dr Diwan Singh became a spokesperson of the people.

The Allied planes often attacked the Japanese warships and cut their supply lines. The Japanese suspected the hand of Indian spies. They were quick to **implicate** some islanders in a sham case known as First Spy Case. Arrested indiscriminately, they were put in a wing of the Cellular Jail. Seven of them labelled as 'spies' were taken to Dugnabad and shot dead. Numerous other islanders were also arrested and on 30 January 1944, forty-four of them were taken to a place known as Homfraygunj and were shot dead. Dr Diwan Singh too was not spared. Arrested in what was called the Second Spy Case he was put through the worst kind of third degree torture. He was brutalised thus for a long period of eighty-two days and ultimately breathed his last on 14 January 1944. A man of culture, an idealist and a social activist of unconquerable spirit, he suffered for his principles and attained martyrdom for his people. 'Waheguru Waheguru' were the last words on his lips. Furthermore, on 4 August 1945, some islanders were thrown into the sea at Havelock where they met a watery grave.

Implicate:
show a person to
be involved in a
crime

If the Andamanese suffered at the hands of the Japanese, so did the Nicobarese. Many were subjected to the most barbaric cruelties while many were even tortured to death.

VISIT OF NETAJI SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose visited Port Blair during its occupation by the Japanese. He came as 'the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind' after Japan decided to hand over the islands to a provisional government of Indians. But in order to understand the significance of Bose's visit, we first need to understand the man and the leader.

Subhas Chandra Bose was born on 23 January 1897. He received his education in Cuttack and Calcutta. He attained a high score in the Civil Service examinations and joined the coveted Indian Civil Service. He took his first conscious step as a revolutionary by resigning from the service in protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the repressive Rowlatt Act of 1919. "The best way", he said, "to end a government is to withdraw from it".

Though elected President of the Indian National Congress for two consecutive terms, he resigned from the post following ideological differences with Mahatma Gandhi. He felt that Mahatma Gandhi's policy of non-violence would never be sufficient to secure India's independence and advocated violent resistance. He

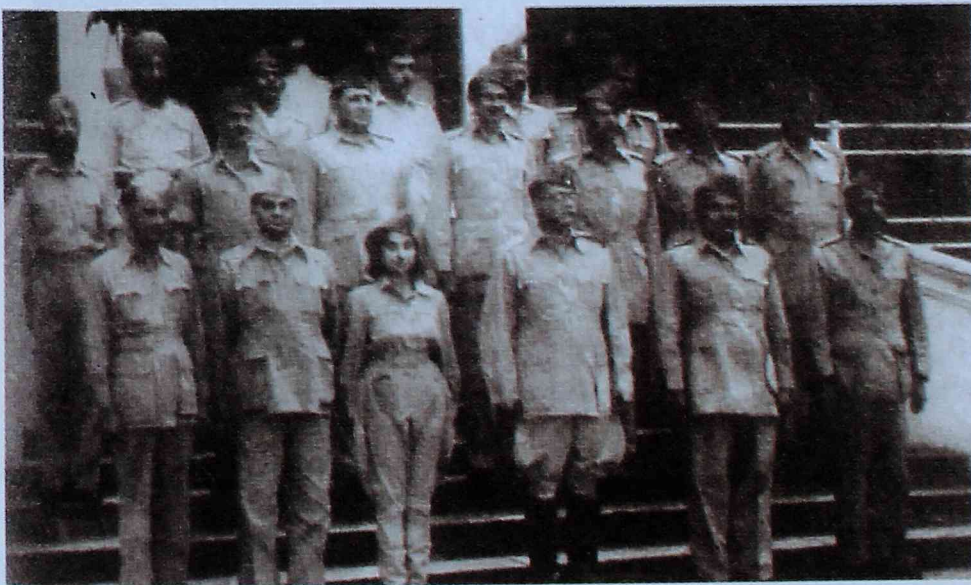


established a separate political outfit, the All India Forward Bloc and called for complete and immediate independence of India from British rule. The British authorities imprisoned him for the eleventh time in July 1940.

Subhas Chandra Bose dramatically escaped on 16 January 1941 when he was under house arrest in Calcutta. He travelled thousands of miles **incognito** and reached Peshawar from where he crossed into Afghanistan. He reached Moscow on 20 March 1941 and Berlin on 3 April 1941. He mobilised Indians in an organisation called the Free India Centre in November 1941 and the words *Jai Hind* (Victory to India) were introduced as a form of greeting for all Indians fighting for the freedom of their country. He was given the title *Netaji* by the Indians in Germany where he spent two years.

From Germany, Bose reached Tokyo in May 1943. Japan had agreed to extend full support including monetary help to him for pursuing the goal of Indian independence by bringing Indians settled in south-east Asia under one flag and by using the services of Indians taken as prisoners of war by Japan. Accordingly from there he went to Singapore which had come under Japanese occupation in February 1942. At a historic public meeting held in Singapore on 4 July 1943, Rash Behari Bose handed over the reins of his party, the Indian Independence League, to Netaji.

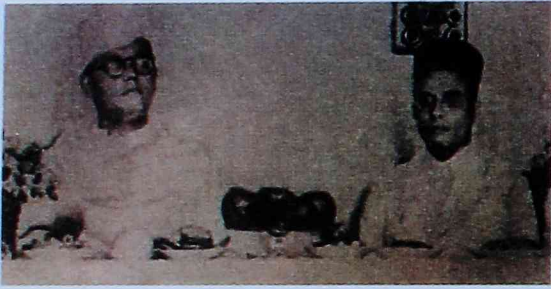
Incognito:
with one's name
or identity kept
secret



Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose with officers of the Indian National Army

It was at this time that Netaji came into contact with the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army or INA) in Singapore which had already been formed by local Indians. Netaji was requested to inspect the INA on 5 July 1943 at the city hall square when he gave the stirring war cry of *Dilli Chalo*. He took over as Supreme Commander of the Indian National Army on 26 August 1943 and appeared in military uniform for the first time, exhorting his companions thus:

"Tum mujhe khoon do, main tumhe azadi dunga"
(Give me blood, I will give you freedom).



Netaji at a meeting with V.D. Savarkar in June 1940.

Netaji wished to confer with various shades of Indian political opinion before deciding on his final assault against the British

The provisional government of Azad Hind was formed on 21 October 1943 in Singapore. A proclamation was issued under the signatures of Subhas Chandra Bose as head of state, prime minister and minister for foreign affairs.

The provisional government of Azad Hind was recognised by Japan on 23 October 1943, and was also recognised by Germany, Italy, Manchuko, the Philippines, Burma, National China, Hungary and Croatia. The provisional government declared war on the United Kingdom and the United States of America on 24 October 1943.

The Assembly of the Greater East Asiatic Nations opened its session in Tokyo on 5 November 1943. Premier Tojo announced in this Assembly on 6 November 1943, Japan's decision to hand over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the Indians.

On 8 November 1943, Netaji announced in a press release that the return of the Andamans to the Indians would be the first territory to be liberated from the British yoke. Netaji had said that by the acquisition of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, the provisional government had become a national entity in fact as well as in name. The liberation of the Andamans had symbolic significance because the British had always used the islands as a jail for political prisoners. Part by part, Indian territory would be liberated, but it was always the first plot of land that was significant. In the

memory of these martyrs, the Andamans were renamed as *Shaheed*; Nicobar was given the name *Swaraj*.

At mid-day on 29 December 1943, Netaji as Head of State of the provisional government of Azad Hind, reached the Andamans.

On the following day, he hoisted an Indian flag on liberated Indian soil, the first act of its kind in the history of British rule in India. All the ceremonies of regaining lost territory from the enemy were held with joy and jubilation. Patriotic songs were sung in chorus by the people present.



Netaji's last message to fellow-Indians in South-East Asia 16 August 1945

Brothers and sisters! A glorious chapter in the history of struggle for freedom has just come to a close and, in that chapter, the sons and daughters of India in East Asia will have an undying place.

You set a shining example of patriotism and self-sacrifice by pouring out men, money and material into the struggle for India's independence. I shall never forget the spontaneity and enthusiasm with which you responded to my call for Total Mobilisation. You sent an unending stream of your

“साथियों। मेरे सिपाहियों। तुम्हारे युद्ध का नारा है—चलो दिल्ली। चलो दिल्ली। न मालूम आज़ादी की इस लड़ाई में हममें से कौन जीवित बचे। मैं इतना अवश्य जानता हूँ कि अन्त में विजय हमारी होगी।”

—नेताजी

sons and daughters to the camps to be trained as soldiers of the Azad Hind Fauj and of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Money and materials, you poured lavishly into the war chest of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind. In short, you did your duty as true sons and daughters of India.

I regret, more than you do, that your sufferings and sacrifices have not borne immediate fruit. But they have not gone in vain, because they have ensured the emancipation of our Motherland and will serve as an undying inspiration to Indians all over the world. Posterity will bless your name and will talk with pride about your offerings at the altar of India's freedom, and about your positive achievements as well.

In this unprecedented crisis in our history, I have only one word to say. Do not be depressed at our temporary failure. Be of good cheer and keep up your spirits. Above all, never for a moment falter in your faith in India's destiny. There is no power on earth that can keep India enslaved. India shall be free, and before long.

Jai Hind!



*The last available
photograph of Netaji.
17 August 1945: Saigon
Airport, Vietnam*

The Japanese forces took precautions in keeping Netaji away from those cells where hundreds of local people including Diwan Singh Kalepani were detained and tortured. None of the local people got the opportunity to inform Netaji of the dark deeds of the Japanese forces.

The administration of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was formally handed over to the Azad Hind Government on 17 February 1944. From here, the Indian National Army began to prepare attacking British India along the Indo-Burmese border. In 1944, half of the province of Assam and a small portion of Bengal had been captured by the Azad Hind Fauj. Chittagong was expected to fall at any moment and the troops had occupied a part of the town of Imphal. In April 1945, the situation suddenly changed and Subhas Chandra Bose was advised to leave Burma on 24 April 1945.

Netaji carried on the struggle for Indian independence. He is believed to have died in an air crash in Taipei (now Taiwan) on 18 August 1945. The British re-captured the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in October 1945.

The British attempted to punish the INA men for defying the Raj. They put the INA men on trial. In the first instance they tried three officers, namely, Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, Shah Nawaz Khan and P.K. Sehgal at the Red Fort, New Delhi. The trial attracted so much national anger and uproar (including strong protests from Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru) that the British Government felt compelled to drop the case against them.

India gained independence in August 1947. This, as Jawaharlal Nehru said, was a very special moment, a moment "which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance". The sacrifices of Subhash Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army contributed to the ferment of the 1940s which compelled the British to leave the jewel they were so proud of.

CHAPTER 11

MEMORIALISING THE JAIL

“If we can transmit to the new generation...
the patriotism [of the Andaman freedom-fighters],
...their courage, their capacity for sacrifice, then
we would have done something significant today.”

K.R. Narayanan
Former President of India



MEMORIALISING A “NATIONALIST” JAIL

By all accounts, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands have become a ‘sanctified’ place because of the sacrifices made by the country’s freedom fighters. Immediately after Independence, the Ex-Andaman Political Prisoners Fraternity Circle took up the issue with the Government of India for preserving the Cellular Jail as a National Memorial. The proposal was accepted.

The jail was declared a National Memorial on 11 February 1979. It was dedicated to the nation by the then Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, in the presence of a number of revolutionaries who had been incarcerated in this jail during the colonial period. In his inaugural address, the Prime Minister desired that a centre of research dedicated to understanding the contribution of these patriots to the freedom struggle be established. The Ex-Andaman Political Prisoners Fraternity Circle wanted that the record of the case-history tickets of each political prisoner incarcerated in the jail be prepared and kept in the jail library for future generations. A beginning was thus made to memorialise the contribution of the revolutionaries who underwent sentences in the jail.



The ancient peepal tree in the jail compound and arrangements for the Son et Lumiere
The tree is a leading protagonist in the Sound and Light show. So in many ways this peepal became a people’s tree— an emblem of the courage and fortitude of the revolutionaries



The ground floor of what was once the administrative wing of the jail now contains a photo gallery and a museum housing other memorabilia. On the second floor of the central tower are engraved the names of 513 freedom fighters who were kept there. There are six archways connecting an inner hexagon to an outer circle. Marble slabs, carrying the names of revolutionaries, adorn either side of each archway. Six more such slabs have been installed in the circular corridor that runs around the hexagon. The first floor of the tower displays a wooden board containing twelve names of those who attained martyrdom in the islands. This is not a complete list of all the persons who sacrificed their lives at the Cellular Jail. The issue needs to be researched and a full list prepared and displayed.

The articles in the museum include utensils given to the prisoners, models of prisoners working on the oil-mill and a jail uniform made of coarse jute. There is also a wooden bed, about one foot high with a blanket. There are models of prisoners in cross-bar fetters, bar fetters and chain fetters. The rooms on the first floor above the museum now house a library. The public park facing the jail is adorned with bronze statues of revolutionaries, handcuffed and manacled.

A significant structure of the National Memorial is the National Column. This was raised on the site of the jail hospital in February 1985 "in the sacred memory of the heroes of the First War of Indian Independence, 1857 and all those brave sons of India who were incarcerated in these islands during their ceaseless struggle for freedom of our beloved motherland". And close to the national column, *Swatantriya Jyot* (Flame of Independence) burns incessantly. It was set up in August 2004.

In many ways the centrepiece of the Memorial is the moving *Son et Lumiere* (Sound and Light show) inaugurated in



The poster for the *Son et Lumiere*

The *Swatantriya Jyot* installed near the entrance of the jail on 9 August 2004, the 62nd anniversary of the Quit India Movement





“War of Independence”
gallery housed in the Jail’s
workshop

October 1990 in the presence of a number of freedom fighters who had spent some of the best days of their lives languishing in the Cellular Jail. An ancient *peepal* tree narrates the traumatic experiences of the revolutionaries. Different voices representing various protagonists such as Sher Ali, V.D. Savarkar, Ullaskar Dutt, Sohan Singh Bhakna, Bhai Parmanand and Mahabir Singh as

well as the villain, David Barrie bring alive the suffering and resistance that have formed the subject of this book.

The building also contains the National Memorial Art Gallery established in 1993 which carries paintings of the jail and its brave inmates. Many of the artists are not so well-known, so this is a tribute of ordinary Indian citizens to the courage and fortitude of the revolutionaries. Adjoining the Art Gallery is the Netaji Gallery, inaugurated in January 1997. Many photographs relating to Netaji, passages from his writings, the heroic deeds of the Indian National Army and a picture of the car used by Netaji in the Andamans are displayed here!

In 2004, one of the jail’s workshops was converted into a “Gallery on War of Independence”. The gallery houses busts of Indubhusan, Mohit Moitra, Mahabir Singh, Mohan Kishore Namadev, Baba Bhan Singh and Ram Rakha who had attained martyrdom in the jail. A part of the gallery is devoted to the life and work of V.D. Savarkar while the rest depicts the freedom movement as a whole.

On 4 May 2002 the airport at Port Blair was renamed as Veer Savarkar Airport in recognition of his contributions to the freedom movement.

You would have noticed how specific exhibit-spaces, galleries, paintings and exhibits have been commissioned from time to time. The history of the government’s efforts at constructing the Memorial throws



Statues of the Andaman heroes in the Veer Savarkar Park located across the road from the Cellular Jail

up fascinating questions. How exactly are memorials to be built? Which designs are to be chosen? What is to be memorialised and to what extent? If any of you become museologists, designers, conservationists, architects or historians on growing up, you will be called upon to resolve such questions.

IN LIEU OF AN EPILOGUE

Despite the risk of repetition, it needs to be underscored that the heroes of this book, who began their lives as ordinary people and gradually attained extraordinary qualities, sacrificed everything for liberating India and ushering in a dawn of freedom. How many of them gave up a life of luxury and comfort and opted for the long and arduous journey of suffering? How many of them languished in prison cells for long spells? How many died of hunger strikes and brutalities inflicted on them in prisons? How many were sent to the gallows?

In recounting the story of the Cellular Jail, I have touched only the tip of the iceberg. I have barely succeeded in laying bare the dreaded regime of torture and authoritarian control. Much more research and documentation is urgently needed to form a firmer

“दिन खून का हमारे प्यारो न भूल जाना,
 खुशियों में अपनी हम पर आँसू बहाते जाना।
 सैय्याद ने हमारे चुन-चुन के फूल तोड़े,
 वीरान इस चमन में अब गुल खिलाते जाना।
 गोली को खाकर सोए जलियाँ नै बाग में हम।
 सूनी पड़ी कब्र पर दिया जलाते जाना
 हिन्द और मुस्लिमों की होती हैं आज होली।
 बहते हमारे रंग में दामन भिगीते जाना।
 कुछ कैद में पड़े हैं हम कब्र में पड़े हैं।
 दो बूंद आँसू इन पर भी बहाते जाना।”

“बिस्मिल”

picture of grim resistance to colonial highhandedness and injustice.

What did the revolutionaries ask in return for their sacrifices? Ram Prasad Bismil, revolutionary *par excellence* and poet, the great hero of the Kakori Conspiracy Case, hanged after a phony trial, had this for an answer:

*Din Khoon Ka Hamare Pyaro Na Bhul Jana,
 Khushion Mein Apni, Ham Par Aansu Bahate Jana.
 Saiyaad Ne Hamare Chun-Chun Ke Phul Torhe,
 Viran Es Chaman Mein Ab Gul Khillate Jana.
 Goli Ko Kha kar Soye Jalliane Bagh Mein Hum,
 Sunni Parhi Kabar Par Diya Jalate Jana.
 Hindu Aur Muslimon Ki Hotti Hai Aaj Holi,
 Behte Hamare Rang Mein Daman Bhigote Jana.
 Kuchh Kaid Mein Parhhe Hai Ham Kabar Mein
 Parhhe Hai,
 Do Boond Aansoo In Par Bhi Bahate Jana.*

Don't ever forget the day of our execution,
 Shed tears amidst the joys you celebrate,
 The tormentors plucked our best flowers,
 Keep this desert alive by planting new ones.
 Some of us were laid to rest at the Jallianwala
 Bagh with bullets,
 Keep alive our memory by lighting a lamp.
 Today happens to be Holi for Muslims and Hindus,



Soak yourself in our sacrifice.

Some are languishing in jails, others in the grave,

Remember to shed a tear or two in their memory.

In other words, imagine you are at the Cellular Jail, Port Blair. It is twilight. The sun is setting into the Bay of Bengal. Gradually darkness descends upon the Jail. You are watching the sound and light show. The silhouettes of these brave revolutionaries seem to rise up and whisper into your ears:

When you go home

Tell them of us, and say,

"For your tomorrow

We gave our today!"

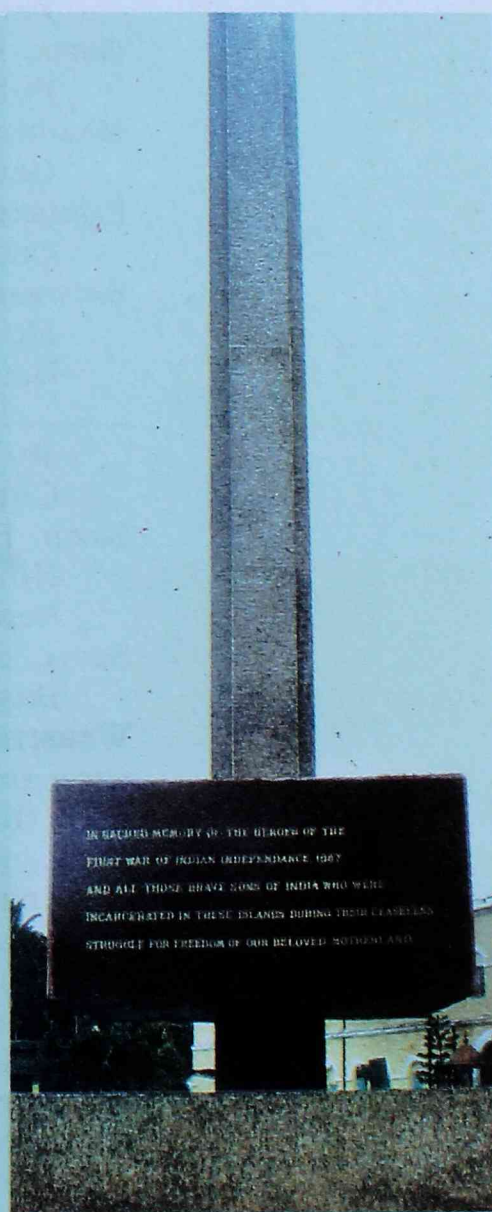
National Column, raised in memory of freedom fighters detained in the jail

Built on the site of the jail hospital, this monument was dedicated to the nation on 23 February 1985

Memorialising the Cellular Jail

From the address of Professor Ram Kapse, the then Lt. Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The address was published in The Hindu when the Cellular Jail observed its centenary in 2006. Note how Professor Kapse memorialises the jail:

The Cellular Jail is the most prominent landmark of Port Blair, or, for that matter the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The first stop for any dignitary visiting the Islands is the Martyrs Memorial inside the Jail. Many familiar with the history of the freedom struggle are moved to tears at the sight of the flogging stand, oil mill, and the other instruments of torture on display in the Jail museum. A 'must' on the itinerary of all tourists is the 'Sound & Light Show' every evening, which brings to life a dark chapter in the history of the Islands as a penal settlement. The Jail will mark its centenary on 10 March 2006. It has been a long journey for the Jail - from a torture machine to a National Memorial, from a dreaded prison to a place of pilgrimage, a place where the memories of brave freedom fighters are revived and patriotic fervour surges through the veins of the visitors. The centenary of the Cellular Jail is a big event, not just for the Islanders but also for the entire country.



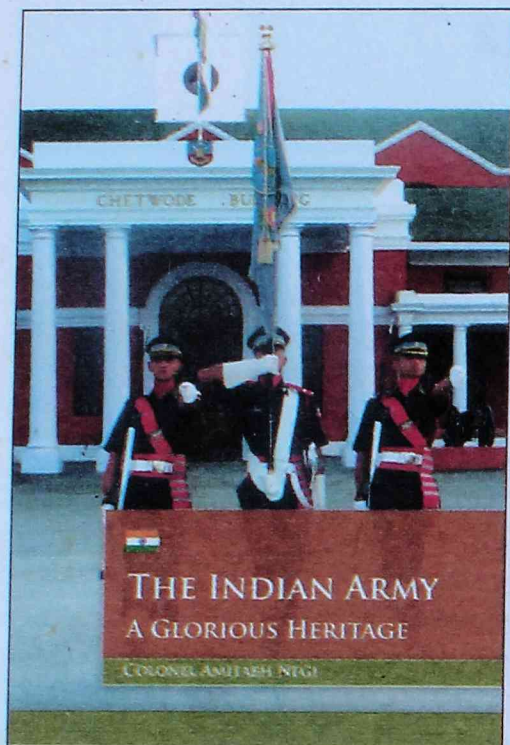
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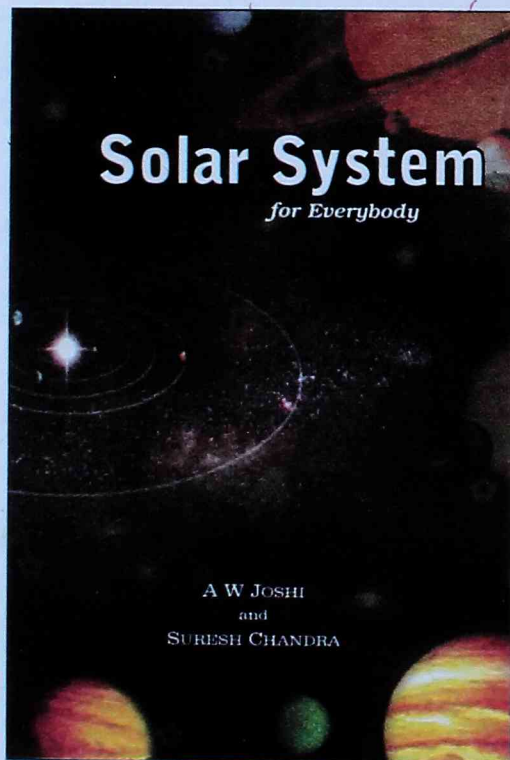
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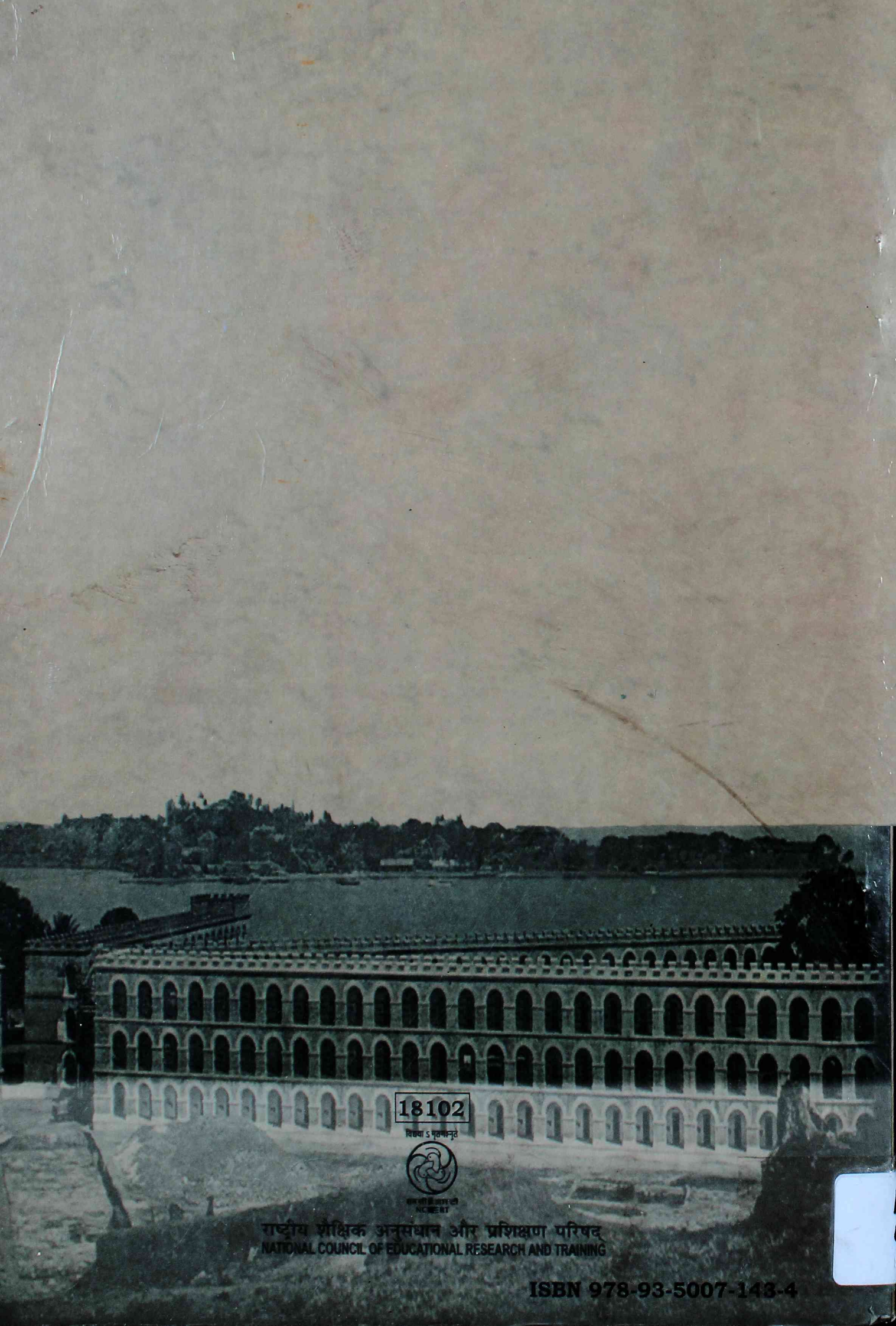
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(b.1945)

President of the State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, Punjab, Justice S.N. Aggarwal has served as a judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court as well as Law Secretary of the Andaman and Nicobar Administration. Posted at Port Blair in the latter capacity during 1990-1992, he felt inspired to document the history of the dreaded Cellular Jail and its relationship to the Indian freedom struggle.

This book, intended to remind young readers of the immense sacrifices of numerous Indians who valiantly fought for freedom, is based on many primary and secondary works including the author's *The Heroes of Cellular Jail* (Patiala, Punjab University Press, 1995).

Justice Aggarwal has also written two other books on law: *Law on Religious and Charitable Endowment* and *Law on Maintenance*.



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