



## Viels of Sielence: The Untold Story of Andaman Jail

<sup>1</sup>Amar Kumar Bharati and <sup>2</sup>Renuka Mastana

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of History, Guru Ghasidas University, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

<sup>2</sup>MA Student, Department of History, Guru Ghasidas University, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

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Corresponding Author: Amar Kumar Bharati

### Abstract

The Cellular Jail built in Andaman & Nicobar Islands during British rule, which is famously known as “Kaala Pani”. Since childhood we all have heard somewhere about Kaala Pani, which seems too interesting to know about, that what does it even mean? So, let us take look about the origin & history of Kaala Pani. The Cellular Jail which was colonial prison in past now remembered as National Memorial. The history of independent India is incomplete without Cellular Jail.

This work discusses, the colonial intentions, conditions inside the jail, treatment of political prisoners, hunger strikes that emerged within the walls. The study also Analyses the Long-Term consequences of the penal settlements including physical damage, mental health & its deep influence on the Indian Freedom Struggle. By spotting, the experiences of notable revolutionaries & the legacy of the jail, the article argues that the Cellular Jail remains a reminder of both colonial repression & the resistance of India’s freedom fighters. It’s preservation as National Memorial today highlights its timeless place in its lasting significance in reminding future generations of the cost of independence.

**Keywords:** Andaman Jail, Prisoners, Horror Life, Hunger Strike

### Introduction

The Prison which was built in the islands that’s the cellular jail in the southern part of the Andaman Islands which plays major role in the history of India. The Cellular Jail confront us with many stories which we can’t imagine. It tells about the lives of prisoners there, the inhumane torture, struggles & sacrifices which was there within the walls too far from the mainland but still connects the whole nation.

There are many personalities who spent their lives there & also many of them sacrificed their lives for freedom & basic facilities in the cell. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Ganesh Damodar Savarkar, Indubhushan Roy, Pandit Ramrakkha, Baba Bhan Singh, Mohan Kishore Namdas, Mohit Moitra, Subodh Roy, Baindra Kumar Ghosh, Abdul Rahim Sadiqpuri, Yogendra Shukla and many more who were there in jail.

So it’s not just a prison in the island but it’s a place which tells us resistance & struggle of our freedom fighters, a place where we find many unsaid stories of our independence & a place which makes us familiar with many prominent leaders, a place where we find pain & struggle at the same time. Thus, the Cellular Jail which was built to suppress the voices of revolutionaries became witness of

their unshaken courage & unity. Today it stand as a National Memorial, it remind us to remember what must never be forgotten.



Source: <https://elinepa.org/kala-pani/>

### Historical Background

After the revolt of 1857, the Britishers find it difficult to

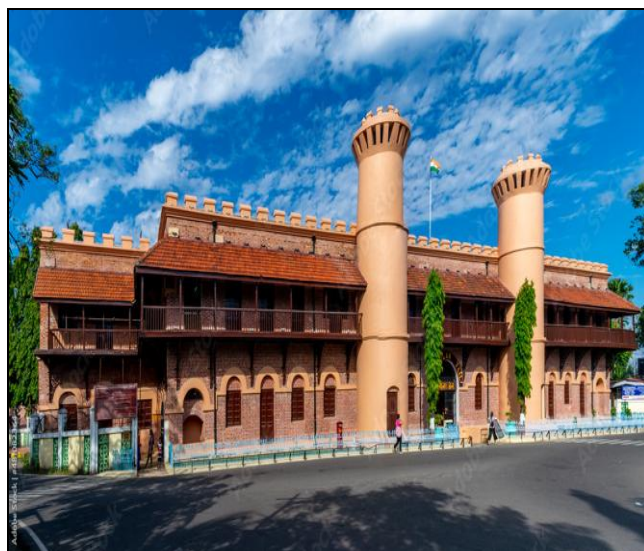
keep the thousands of patriots in Indian jails. Which comes as a challenge to the government because now people became more united & the rebel feeling was growing more stronger inside their hearts. So to suppress upcoming huge revolts like 1857 Revolt & to blow up fear inside their hearts they had to find some solution sooner. Seeing all these situations, F.J. Mount, Inspector of Indian Prisoner suggested establishing a prison colony in the Andaman Islands. British government accepted the plan & paved a path for this. Andaman Survey Committee was formed under chairmanship of Dr. F.J. Mount it also included Dr. G.R. Playfair, Lieutenant J.S. Hitcote. The Survey started on 8th December 1857 & the government accepted the report of Suvey Committee on 15th January 1858. On 22nd January 1858, Captain H. Man hoisted the Union Jack in Port Blair & formally started the British Rule in Andaman & Nicobar Island. And this is how the chapter of Kaala Pani was started.

The credit of establishing first prison colony in the Andaman & Nicobar Island goes to Lieutienant Archibald Blair because he went to Andaman & Nicobar Island way before 1857. Dr. J. P. Walker (British Naval Officer) comes with first batch of 200 convicts mostly freedom fighters & rebels from the 1857 uprisings, to the island. They were forced to clear the forests, build huts and make the area suitable for further settlement. The living conditions were extremely harsh & disease like- Malaria, Chlorea, Diarrhea & Dysentary were common so, many prisoners died due to the humid climate & lack of food and medicine.

By the 1860s & 1870s, the expanded the penal settlement. New batches of prisoners were brought from different places of India, especially after revolts & political movements. The size grew & it became difficult to hold all of them with the passage of time. So, Two member committee was formed headed by Sir Charles J. Lyall & Sir A.S. Lethbridge visited Port Blair in 1890 & recommended the construction of the Cellular jail in Port Blair, which started in 1896 and completed in 1906. The design of Cellular Jail was inspired by "Panopticon Theory" and this design reflected the British idea of total control & psychological punishment.

By the 1930s, growing criticism from Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi & Rabindranath Tagore, the government find it difficult to continue the penal settlement & it became the reason of closing penal settlement. And by the January 1938, all prisoners were repatriated to the mainland India and this is how the black chapter of Kaala Pani came to end. During World War 2, Japanese captured Andaman & Nicobar island from 1942 to 1945. Netaji Shubhas Chandra Bose visited cellular jail as head of provisional Government of India on 24th December 1943, there he called it Indian Bastille.

**Architecture:** Sir Charles J. Lyall & Sir A.S. Lethbridge visited portblair in 1890 & they recommend the construction of cellular jail. It started in 1896 & completed in 1906. The design was based on the Jeremy Betham's idea of the Panopticon. This model of prison enable a single constable to watchover all halls from a single place. There were single solitary cells which was designed in such a way that one prisoner is unable to see & talk with the another one end that's why it is called Cellular Jail.



**Source:** <https://stock.adobe.com/in/images/cellular-jail-port-blair-andaman-india/481082364>

The original building was a puce-coloured brick building. The bricks used in prison construction came from Burma. It was three storied building with seven wings. From above it looked like a giant radiating star. Each cell was 4.5 by 2.7 meters (14.8ft \* 8.9ft) in size with a ventilator located at a height of 3 meters (9.8ft). There were 693 solitary cells in total. The cells were made from thick brick walls to reduce sound. There where no dorimitories or common areas- only isolation, sielence and suffering.

The Jails architecture itself became a tool of punishment. Prisoners had to face lonliness, torture & inhumane treatment. However, over time the cellular jail came to represent something much greater. What was built to break the spirit of freedom fighters instead became a symbol of their courage & unity. The solitary cells became silent witness to their endurance and patriotism. The rays of the seven wings now often seen as representing the spread of freedoms light across India. The jail reminds us of the price paid for liberty & the unbreakable will of those who fight for it.

**The Day-to-Day Horrors:** We all have heard some kind of horror or terrifying stories in our life but the prisoners of Kaala Pani had spent there life like hell which was more dreadful beyond our imagination. There were assigned works for prisoners like rope-making, coir pounding, drying copra, gardening & manual labour and many more. The condition of jail was not in good condition, there was not even basic needs were fulfilled. Many notable prisoners who were alive after their sentence wrote books where we get to know about their foods, sanity, works, punishments, clothes & various horrifying stories.



**Source:** <https://andamantourism.org.in/cellular-jail-museum-port-blair>



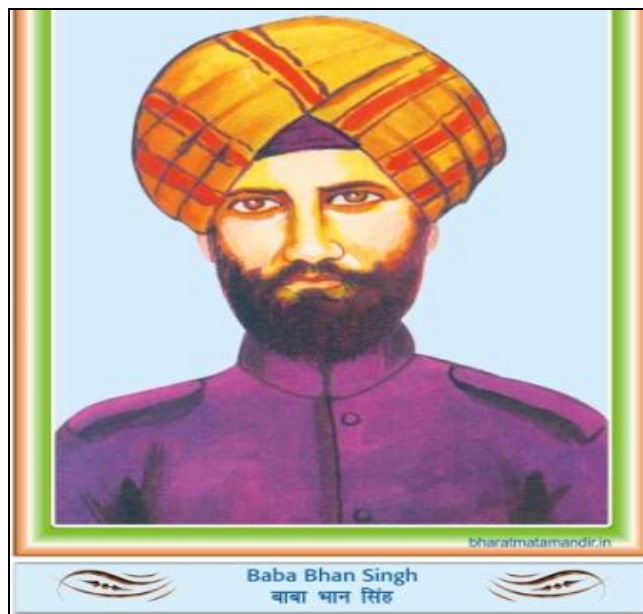
The solitary cells of prisoners were equipped with wooden bed, a blanket, an iron plate and an earthen pot. There was no provision for toilet. And the earthen pot was for urination which was not sufficient even for one time and there was fixed time for all this and one was not allowed to go other than that designated time. And if someone had to had to use toilet then they had to ask warden for permission, if he allowed then it's possible to go otherwise not. If the prisoner get some health issues like fever, head-ache, diarrhea or any other disease then it is not taken seriously there and taken to doctor very rarely.

There were 800 employees in the prison's kitchen. The cooks were filthy & suffered from various diseases. There sweat & resin dripping into cooked food but they were helpless & to survive they had to eat. Barindra Kumar Ghosh listed the daily ration: "6 ounces of rice, 5 ounces of flour for bread, 1 dram of salt, 3/4th of a dram of oil, & 8 ounces of vegetables. There was no discrimination between prisoners. A giant glutton like Koyala and a grasshopper like me received the same amount of food."

Barindra Kumar Ghosh also told about the food highlighting mainly Ganji - "The food was given in very small quantities. We saw Ganji for the first time in the second morning. This Ganji was cooked rice water. Some people also called this Kanji or Ganji. We were given a Dabbu (a spoon) among the tribals, which was half cut portion of a coconut bowl. This Ganji was tasteless because it was without salt. Every prisoner experienced low-salt in Dal & vegetables but not in Ganji. Apart from this everything had to be tasteless. This was not the case in mainland jail."

Veer Savarkar described eyewitness account of the hellish life in cellular jail in his book "Mazi Janmathep" as follows: In the Andamans, Political Prisoners were kept in separate solitary confinement cells. If they attempt to speak to each-other they were handcuffed and shackled. At the bathing pool or while eating, if someone attempted to communicate even with single gesture, they were punished by being made to stand in chains & shackles for seven days. And he described the most difficult task in prison was operating the oil press. As soon as we woke up in the morning we would be locked in the room wearing a loincloth & then manually rotating the oil press until evening.

Another horrifying incident that we found was that death of Baba Bhan Singh (Ghadri Martyr), who was beaten ruthlessly by David Barry's men. The life there was so dreadful, that many of them committed suicide like Indu Bhushan Roy, Narigun Singh. In the jail there was one more brutal treatment which was force feeding of milk. When the prisoner stoped eating or someone was on hunger strike then they forcefully feed them due to which they all lost their life, because there method was not proper. In force feeding, when they try to feed milk through the pipe from nose & milk seeped into there lungs instead of stomach, resulting in pneumonia. Some notable prisoners who died due to this activity are Mahavir Singh (Second Lahore Conspiracy Case), Mohan Kishore Namdas (convicted in arms act) & Mohit Moitra (also convicted in arms act) & there are many more.



Picture of Baba Bhan Singh

Source: <https://bharatmatamandir.in/baba-bhan-singh/>

The prisoners were employed in cane & bamboo work; coconut & mustard oil mills; husking of coconuts; drying copra; making of rope; carpet & net; weaving towels; coil & sisal hemp mat making; cleaning mustard seeds; hill cutting & other miscellaneous work. Many prisoners mainly political prisoners who once hold pen & paper now were shackled in tough works which they haven't imagined in their life. But still they choose to fight & also win in their battle. The physical torture, mental torture, inhumane treatments, brutal conditions & the hellish life were experienced by prisoners & they sacrifices didn't go vain but became the symbol of unity & strength & inspiration for Indians.

### Revolutionaries Martyred in cellular jail

There were many things that happened to them in cellular jail. They fight with the oppression till their last breathe and even died for the freedom. There are some information about them through which we got to know about them & their struggles. Indubhushan Roy, Mohit Moitra, Mahavir Singh, Mohan Kishore Namdas, Baba Bhan Singh, Pandit Ramakkha, Naringn Singh, Sher Al, Sahindanath Sanyal & man more who sacrificed their lives but never accepted British subjugation.

Indu Bhushan Roy: A story of young boy who was just 19 year old when taken to prison but filled with many aims & courage for the independence of India. He was filled revolutionary thoughts & ready to be martyred for his motherland. From an early age he was a member of Yuganter group & a devoted follower of Barindra Kumar Ghosh. He was arrested in Alipore bomb conspiracy case where he along with other revolutionaries threw bomb at the commissioner's house. He was sent to cellular jail for a sentence of 10 years of life imprisonments & his prisoner number was 31555.

When he arrived in cellular jail, he was filled with many laborious task, he was forced to do hard physical labour like working in oil mills which was one of the main reason of his illness. He was totally filled with oppression, inhumane torture & physical labour by Jailer Barry. He requested the jailer for not working in oil press but because of his illness he was mercilessly forced to work in oil press. And after that when he was unable to stand with all these he took major step & committed suicide. On 28th April, 1912, he tore the cloth from his coat & made a rope. Using this rope, he hanged himself from the window of his cell & committed suicide. Jailer Barry to hide the real truth fabricated the information to the government. But in reality Indubhushan's suicide exposes the inhumane torture in Cellular Jail.

Veer Savarkar had written in his biography, He clearly saw despair etched on Indu's face. In a brief conversation, Indu revealed that life had become meaningless to him. Vinayak tried to calm him down by saying that ten years would pass quickly. He himself had been sentenced to fifty years which he was enduring with prayer. But despite all his efforts to courage him he remained dejected. And one evening, exhausted with sweat dripping from his body & coconut husks stuck to his body, he staggered humbly to his cell. Mohan Kishore Namdas: Martyr Mohan Kishore Namdas was an Indian Revolutionary. Son of Rajgovind Namdas, a resident of Sarachar Bajitpur, Memansingh, Bengal. He was at high school at that time & active member of Anushilan Samiti. He had participated in many cover operations. He was arrested along with his comrades.

He was arrested under section 395/120 V of Indian penal code. On 31st May 1932 & sentenced for 7 years of imprisonment. He was Kept in the cellular jail, Midnapore for two days & later sent to cellular jail. In Cellular Jail A Hunger Strike was going on against the atrocities in the jail. On 12th May 1933, he also joined the strike. In the hunger strike his Health was getting pale & the jail authorities & doctors tried to force feed him milk through a rubber pipe. His lungs filled with milk & he passed away on May 26th 1933 at the age of 26 only.

Along with him in hunger strike of 1933 Many Political Prisoners participated. And due to force feeding of milk, Mahavir Singh & Mohit Moitra also died in the same hunger strike. And this is how we lost our three great revolutionaries.

### **The Prisoners driven to madness by inhumane torture**

The architecture of jail was punishment in itself. The solitary cells were filled with loneliness where prisoners were not even able to talk with each other and there was not even light, the quality of food, the work, the environment which is equal to mental torture. The prisoners faced harsh physical deterioration and immense suffering, some of them endured it but those who couldn't became mentally ill or taken their life. The main reason for their illness was working in oil press where they had to press 30 pounds of oil everyday as a form of hard labour.

Some prisoners which went mentally ill due to inhumane conditions in cellular jail are as: Jyotish Chandra, Ramcharan Das, Ullaskar Dutt, Nani Gopal Mukherjee and many more. Political prisoners who fell ill while working in oil mill with Veer Savarkar included Nani Gopal, Ramcharanlal Sharma, Baburam Hari, Hotilal Verma,

Kalidas Ghosh, Vidyabhushan Dee, Satish Chandra Chatterjee, Nagendranath Sarkar, Brijes Kumar Dutt, Ashwani Kumar Bose. Furthermore Suren Kumar, Phanidas Gupta, Bhupesh Banerjee, Suresh Das, Bhupesh Guha, Hriday Das, Vimal Chakreorty, Kumud Mukherjee, Dhinen Bhattacharya, Abhay Das etc. could not endure inhumane torture of the cellular jail for long. All of them went insane either permanently or temporarily.

### **Prisoners who were alive after the cellular jail**

In Cellular Jail many revolutionaries perished due to torture, disease and isolation but some number of prisoners survived their sentences and returned to mainland India, especially after the British decided to close the penal settlement in 1938.

### **Some prominent prisoners who were alive after the jail ceased functioning as colonial prison include**

- **Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (Veer Savarkar):** One of the notable person is Veer Savarkar who was transported in cellular jail in 1911 for two-life imprisonment. He was released in 1924, though with the restriction on his movement until 1937. And he remained active in politics until his death in 1966.
- **Batukeshwar Dutt:** A revolutionary who along with Bhagat Singh, threw a bomb in the central legislative assembly. He was imprisoned in cellular jail & later wrote books about his experiences.
- **Sachindranath Sanyal:** He was also a prominent revolutionary & Co-founder of the Hindustan Republican Association. He was imprisoned in cellular jail but after his release he wrote books about his experiences there which helped us to know the brutal torture.
- **Ullaskar Dutt:** He was involved in Alipore-Bomb Conspiracy Case, he was subjected to severe torture including electrocution which lead to mental instability.
- **Barindra Kumar Ghosh:** He gave us many notable writings about cellular jail. He was co-conspirators in the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy case, he was sentenced to life imprisonment in cellular jail. Released in 1929 & became a journalist & editor after his release.
- **Hemchandra Das:** Another revolutionaries from the Alipore Bomb Case who spent in the cellular jail & was eventually released.

And Bhai Parmanand, Yogendra Shukla, Shiv Verma, Hari Krishna Konar etc. are some prisoners who survived after cellular jail, while many perished due to brutal condition. A Significant number who survived were eventually released, particularly after the penal settlement was shut down for political prisoners in 1938.

### **Hunger Strikes in Cellular Jail**

The Cellular Jail in Andaman was a strategy to develop fear in the heart of revolutionaries & to tore them apart. The punishments of Kaala Pani was just a name for their cruel behavior & tortures. The conditions in cellular jail so bad and the British authority were not in mood of any reforms in jail. So the prisoners took the support of Hunger Strikes & Work Stoppage Strikes for some reforms there. And this also works for them because these movements in jail gain

attention from authority. There were total six major & minor strikes occur in jail from 1912 to 1937. And at last the political prisoners get freedom from the hellish life Kaala Pani.

- **First Hunger Strike:** The first hunger strike of cellular jail was done by Nanigopal Mukherjee (Bengali Revolutionary). He was the first to oppose the oil press wrk in cellular jail & due to this he got severe punishment like standing for a week in shackles and chain gang prisoner. But he fight & was on hunger strike for 72 days. After that he ended his hunger strike on 6th December, 1912 because his colleagues repeatedly requested but “Work stoppage strike” was going on. And on October 1913, Credac (Home member of Viceroy’s executive council) visited Andaman & talked to the prisoners where Vinayak Damodar Savarkar presented the demands of prisoners in front of him.
- **Second Hunger Strike:** This strike happened because their demands were not fulfilled. So, 16 political prisoners went on work stoppage strike in April, 1914. Government accepted some of their demand but main demands were ignored so the went on Hunger strike also. The government accepted their demand due to pressure but did not make any changes to the policy of Kaala Pani punishment. This was their first victory. Later, the prisoners decided to submit a memorandum of demands to the authorities & they decided to go on strike again if their demand were not met.
- **Third Hunger Strike:** Leaders of this strike were Sohan Singh Bhakna & Baba Prithvi Singh Azad. They drafted a memorandum to the jail authorities for better treatment. Authorities refused to accept their demands & became more oppressive. Then Baba Prithvi Singh Azad & Sohan Singh Bhakna began a hunger strike. Around 70 prisoners joined the strike. The prison authorities finally accepted their demands on 12th day of hunger strike. This was considered a major victory for the prisoners – their second successful protest.
- **Fourth Hunger Strike:** The strike started from 3rd January to 9th January, 1933. Seven prisoners started hunger strike in support of their 15 points demands - Bimal Kumar Das Gupta, Prabodh Chandra Rai, Prabir Goswami, Sushil Kumar Das Gupta, Vinlendu Chakravarti, Barindra Kumar Ghosh 2nd & Subodh Rai. Demands of the prisoners were –improved food (rice & vegetable diet) for C class prisoners, special diet for vegetarians, better pots, soap, hospitals & medical facilities, toilet facilities, cleanliness of cells & provision of sheets/towels. Strike lasted one week & ended after chief commissioner intervention.
- **Fifth Hunger Strike:** The fifth hunger strike in Andaman Jail was a historic event that shook the British government. Three brave sons of Mother India lost their lives due to force feeding of milk by prison official to stop the hunger strike. The strike started on 12th may, 1933, initially 29 political prisoner participated later increased to 45. On the sixth day of the strike the prison official forcefully feed the prisoners due to their weak conditions. And three died due to force feeding of milk; Mahavir Singh, Mohit Moitra and Mohan Kishore Namdas.

The strike lated for 46 days. When british officer Walker arrived, 55 were on hunger strike & 20 were on work stoppage strike. Many demands were met after Walker’s Inspection. The harsh treatment of prisoners became a national concern & began to know about the cruel treatment in Kaala Pani.

- **The Last & Sixth Hunger Strike:** Strike started on 24th July, 1937 with 187 Political prisoners for their demands. The demands were –Unconditional release of prisoners & convicted prisoners, ending deportation to the Andaman and transfer to Indian Jail. 72 prisoners began a supporting work stoppage. 230 out of 290 prisoners ultimately joined the strike including Batukeshwar Dutt. The strike lasted 45 days eventually an agreement was signed between Congress & Lord Linlithglow leading to prisoners transfer. Affidavits were signed by prisoners many agreed not to participate in future strikes or revolutionary activities. By December 31, 1937, 191 political prisoners had been repatriated. And By January, 1938, all political prisoners had left cellular jail, ending the era of large scale hunger strikes in Andamans.

## Conclusion

The Cellular Jail is not just a monument of bricks & iron- it is a living memory of sacrifice, struggle & strength. It was built to crush the nationality but became a symbol of strength, where many patriots sacrificed their lives. The cold walls of cellular jail told the stories of various freedom heroes like Veer Savarkar, Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Mahavir Singh & countless others who turned pain into power. Their writings & memoirs carried the message of freedom from island to mainland, awakening both ordinary Indians & leaders like Mahatma Gandhi & Nehru. The mainland people feel connected to them & tried to make them free from the prison.

There are many things that happened in cellular jail like the punishments, food, living condition of prisoners, the horrifying tortures which also make many of them mentally ill but due Hunger strikes, Work stoppage strike, sacrifice of fighters like Mahavir Singh, Mohit Moitra, Baba Bhan Singh and many others & efforts of great leaders which help in closing the Black chapter of Andaman Jail.

The Cellular Jail holds important place in the history of India. Now, it stands as a National Memorial, reminding every visitors that India’s independence was built not just through wars & protest, but also through the silent suffering of those behind the cold cells. The legacy of Andaman is a timeless truth- that freedom may be chained, but the spirit of nation can never be imprisoned.

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