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Exploring the past: Historical tourism and cultural memory in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands

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Abstract
The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, located strategically in the Bay of Bengal, have played a crucial role in India's historical, cultural, and geopolitical development. Over the centuries, these islands have witnessed successive phases of colonial exploration, penal settlements, and indigenous resistance, each contributing to the complex narrative of India's colonial encounter and struggle for freedom. The establishment of the British penal colony and the construction of the Cellular Jail transformed the islands into a site of both oppression and heroism, where countless freedom fighters endured imprisonment and sacrifice. Simultaneously, the islands were home to diverse indigenous communities whose histories and cultures predate colonial contact, offering a vital perspective on resilience and adaptation in the face of external forces.
During the Second World War, the occupation by Japanese forces and the brief hoisting of the Indian national flag under the leadership of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose further enhanced the islands' symbolic and strategic significance in India's fight for independence. Today, landmarks such as Chatham Island, Ross Island (Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Island), Viper Island, Cellular Jail, Bhalidhan Vedi, Clock Tower, and Japanese Bunkers stand as tangible reminders of this layered past. Beyond their historical and touristic appeal, these sites embody narratives of endurance, sacrifice, and national identity. This paper traces the historical trajectory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, examines their contribution to the broader process of nation-building, and evaluates their continuing relevance within the framework of India's contemporary cultural memory and geopolitical discourse.

Keywords: Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Historical Tourism, Colonial History, Cellular Jail, Heritage Sites, Freedom Struggle, Cultural Memory, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose

1. Introduction
The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a Union Territory of India located in the Bay of Bengal, occupy a distinctive place in the historical and cultural imagination of the nation. Geographically positioned between 6° and 14° North latitude and 92° and 94° East longitude, the archipelago comprises 836 islands, islets, and rocky outcrops covering approximately 8,249 square kilometres. While the islands are ecologically rich and strategically significant, their deeper importance lies in their historical role as sites of colonial control, punishment, resistance, and memory.
Aligned in a north–south direction, the archipelago is divided into the Andaman and Nicobar groups, separated by the Ten Degree Channel. Landfall Island marks the northernmost point of the Andaman group, while Great Nicobar, home to Indira Point the southernmost tip of India marks the southern limit of the nation's territory. This remote geography, once perceived as isolation from the mainland, later became a defining factor in the colonial use of the islands as a space of exile and incarceration.
Historically, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were known to ancient geographers, traders, and travellers, indicating their long-standing presence in transoceanic networks of exchange. Classical and medieval sources refer to the islands through varied nomenclatures, reflecting their engagement with South and Southeast Asian maritime cultures (Portman, 1899; Majumdar, 1975) [18, 14]. However, despite this early recognition, the islands gradually acquired a darker symbolic meaning during the colonial period, culminating in their association with *Kala Pani* a place of banishment, suffering, and social death.
The transformation of the Andaman Islands into a penal colony under British rule marked a decisive rupture in their historical trajectory. The establishment of penal settlements, most notably the Cellular Jail, institutionalised the islands as spaces of surveillance, discipline,

and punishment, where thousands of political prisoners and freedom fighters were incarcerated under harsh conditions. Sites such as Ross Island, Viper Island, and Chatham Island emerged as central nodes within this carceral landscape, embedding the islands firmly within the narrative of India's anti-colonial resistance.

Over time, these once-feared islands evolved into powerful symbols of sacrifice, endurance, and nationalist struggle. In postcolonial India, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands have undergone a significant reinterpretation from spaces of colonial repression to heritage landscapes that commemorate the freedom movement and preserve collective memory. Through museums, memorials, and heritage tourism, these sites now function as places of education and reflection, linking past trauma with contemporary identity formation.

Thus, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands represent more than a geographical frontier; they embody a layered historical experience shaped by exile, resistance, and remembrance. Examining their transformation from *Kala Pani* to sites of national pride offers critical insights into how memory, heritage, and space contribute to the on-going construction of India's postcolonial identity an idea that resonates directly with the themes explored in this study.

2. Literature Review

Tourism, particularly heritage and historical tourism, has been widely studied as a tool for cultural preservation and national identity building. Scholars argue that heritage sites act as "living classrooms," linking citizens to their past while shaping a collective sense of belonging (Timothy & Boyd, 2003) [27].

In the Indian context, several studies highlight the role of historical monuments, museums, and memorials in strengthening national consciousness (Chakrabarty, 2001; Singh, 2012) [6]. The Cellular Jail in Port Blair has been extensively studied as both a site of trauma and memory, symbolizing colonial oppression and the sacrifices of freedom fighters (Chakraborty, 2010; Roy, 2018) [7]. It has become a cornerstone of India's "dark tourism" landscape, attracting visitors interested in experiencing places associated with suffering and struggle (Stone, 2006) [25].

Research on Andaman and Nicobar Islands tourism emphasizes their dual character: pristine natural beauty on one hand and deep historical significance on the other (Sarma, 2015) [21]. The penal settlements of Chatham, Ross, Viper, and the Cellular Jail are viewed not only as heritage sites but also as catalysts for fostering a sense of unity and resilience among Indians (Das, 2020) [9].

Globally, historical tourism has been linked to nation-building efforts. Anderson (1983) in his seminal work Imagined Communities notes that nations are built through shared memories and collective experiences. Heritage tourism serves as a powerful medium for transmitting such collective memory. In Southeast Asia, similar cases have been studied where colonial-era prisons and war memorials have been repositioned as sites of patriotic pride and reconciliation (Winter, 2007) [28].

Thus, existing literature indicates that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands' historical sites occupy a unique place in the broader discourse of heritage, memory, and nation building. However, there is still scope for more empirical research into how local communities, domestic tourists, and international visitors perceive these sites, and how they contribute to contemporary national identity.

3. Historical References

References to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands appear in several ancient and medieval texts, highlighting their enduring presence in regional mythologies and travel narratives. In the Hindu epic Ramayana, it is believed that Lord Rama, assisted by Hanuman, contemplated reaching Lanka through these islands to rescue Sita from Ravana. Although Rama ultimately crossed via Rameswaram, scholars suggest that the term Andaman derives from Handuman or Hanuman, the Malay appellation for the monkey god (Majumdar, 1975) [14].

In the 2nd century CE, the Greek geographer and astronomer Claudius Ptolemy referred to the islands in his cartographic descriptions of the Indian Ocean (Portman, 1899) [18]. Later, the 7th-century Chinese Buddhist monk I-Tsing, and 9th-century Arab travelers Abu Zaid Hasan and Sulaiman, mentioned the islands in their travel accounts, indicating early awareness of these territories within the trans-Asian maritime network (Majumdar, 1975) [14]. The Tanjore Inscription of 1050 CE, attributed to the Chola dynasty renowned for its naval power identified the islands as Nakkavaram, meaning "Land of the Naked," reflecting both ethnographic and geographical awareness among South Indian rulers.

The Venetian explorer Marco Polo, who passed through the region in 1290 CE en route to China, described the islands and their inhabitants, though his accounts were often generalized and based on second-hand reports. During this period, the islands were considered perilous, inhabited by Negrito tribes who were known to attack shipwrecked sailors.

By the 18th century, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands began to attract the attention of European colonial powers. As the British extended their dominance over Southeast Asian maritime routes, their ships frequently encountered navigational difficulties in these waters. To address these challenges, the British East India Company decided to explore and secure the islands as a potential naval station.

In 1789, Lord Cornwallis, then Governor-General of India, commissioned a survey of the Andaman Islands. Under the command of Lieutenant Archibald Blair and Lieutenant R. H. Colebrooke of the Royal Indian Navy, a detailed expedition was conducted from Calcutta. Their survey identified the present site of Port Blair as suitable for establishing a harbour and settlement. The resulting records offered the first authentic and systematic description of the islands' geography and inhabitants, laying the foundation for British colonial engagement in the region (Portman, 1899; Andaman and Nicobar Gazetteer, 1908) [18].

4. Chatham Island

Chatham Island, situated on the south western edge of Sri Vijaya Puram (Port Blair), holds the distinction of being the site of the first British settlement in the Andaman Islands. In 1789, under the direction of Captain Archibald Blair, the British established their initial outpost here with the objective of creating a strategic naval base to support maritime operations in the Bay of Bengal. However, the settlement was soon relocated to Port Cornwallis in North Andaman due to severe health challenges, hostile climatic conditions, inadequate communication facilities, and resistance from indigenous tribes (Portman, 1899; Andaman

and Nicobar Gazetteer, 1908) [18]. The project was ultimately abandoned in 1796.

For more than six decades thereafter, the islands remained largely uninhabited by outsiders. Following the First War of Independence in 1857, during which Indian soldiers and civilians rebelled against British rule, the colonial administration sought a remote location to confine political prisoners and revolutionaries. Consequently, in 1858, the British reoccupied the Andaman Islands to establish a penal colony that would isolate freedom fighters from the Indian mainland (Majumdar, 1975) [14].

On 4 March 1858, the first batch of approximately 200 freedom fighters departed from Calcutta aboard the Company's frigate Semiramis under the supervision of Dr. J. P. Walker, accompanied by two native doctors and sixty naval brigade guards. They arrived at Chatham Island on 10 March 1858, marking the beginning of the infamous Kala Pani (Black Water) Penal Settlement (Singh, 1978). The date is now commemorated annually to honour the martyrs of the First War of Independence.

Although the revolt of 1857 was suppressed, the British continued to transport subsequent groups of rebels including participants in the Wahabi Movement, the Manipur Revolt, and Burmese dissidents from Tharawaddy to the Andaman penal settlement (Sarma, 2015) [21]. At that time, there were no formal prison structures; the settlement itself served as an open-air prison. Prisoners endured extreme climatic conditions, tropical diseases such as malaria, scarcity of food and medicine, and frequent attacks from the Great Andamanese tribes. The combination of physical suffering and psychological isolation made life unbearable for the deportees (Roy, 2018).

Over time, the expression Kala Pani became synonymous with the Andaman penal settlements. Derived from the Sanskrit kāla (meaning "time" or "death"), it came to signify the "waters of death" a metaphor for exile, hopelessness, and perpetual suffering. To those condemned, it symbolized complete separation from their homeland and a life of relentless hardship.

In addition to the penal colony, the British established a sawmill on Chatham Island during the 19th century to exploit the region's rich forest resources. The Chatham Saw Mill, one of the oldest and largest in Asia, was used to process timber for export to Britain and for local construction. Remarkably, this mill remains operational to this day, serving as both a functional industrial unit and a historical landmark of colonial enterprise (Andaman and Nicobar Gazetteer, 1908).

5. Ross Island (Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Island)

Ross Island, now officially renamed Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Island, served as the administrative headquarters of the British Indian Penal Settlement. Situated at the entrance of Port Blair harbour on the eastern side of South Andaman, it played a pivotal role in the consolidation of British control over the archipelago. Due to the shortage of potable water on Chatham Island, Dr. James Pattison Walker, the first Superintendent of the penal colony, decided to relocate operations to Ross Island (Andaman and Nicobar Gazetteer, 1908).

Upon arrival, convicts shackled in irons and fetters were compelled to clear the island's dense tropical forests to construct the settlement. Lacking experience in felling large trees and constrained by chains, many prisoners were killed in worksite accidents. The brutal conditions prompted frequent escape attempts, with desperate convicts building makeshift rafts to flee toward Burma or mainland India. However, most were intercepted and killed by the Great Andamanese tribes, who fiercely resisted intrusion into their lands (Portman, 1899) [18].

The Government of India approved Walker's proposal to designate Ross Island as the official headquarters of the penal settlement. It thus became the nucleus of colonial administration and punishment in the Andamans, symbolizing both imperial authority and human suffering (Majumdar, 1975) [14].

One of the most notable historical episodes associated with Ross Island is the story of Dudh Nath Tiwari, a sepoy from the 14th Regiment of Native Infantry. Convicted of desertion by the Jehelum Commission, he was sentenced to transportation for life and arrived at Ross Island on 6 April 1858 from Karachi. Merely weeks later, on 23 April, Tiwari escaped along with several other convicts, intending to cross through Great Andaman to Burma. The group was captured by the Great Andamanese, and all were killed except Tiwari, who pleaded for mercy and was spared (Singh, 1978).

Tiwari lived among the Great Andamanese for over a year, adapting to their way of life and reportedly marrying tribal women. However, when he learned of an impending attack on the British camp at Aberdeen, he fled and informed the colonial authorities. On 18 May 1859, the Battle of Aberdeen took place an unequal confrontation between the British, armed with firearms, and the Great Andamanese warriors, who fought valiantly with bows and arrows (Sarma, 2015) [21]. Although the battle ended in British victory, it marked one of the earliest organized resistances by the indigenous people against colonial domination. In recognition of his assistance, Tiwari was pardoned by the British (Andaman and Nicobar Gazetteer, 1908).

Today, a memorial dedicated to the Battle of Aberdeen stands at the Water Sports Complex in Port Blair, honouring the courage of the Great Andamanese who fought against British oppression. Ross Island remains an evocative symbol of both colonial power and indigenous resilience a site where the intertwined narratives of punishment, survival, and resistance continue to shape the collective memory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

6. Viper Island

Viper Island, named after the vessel H.M.S. Viper that brought Lieutenant Archibald Blair to the Andaman Islands in 1789, occupies an important place in the history of British colonial administration. Before the construction of the Cellular Jail, Viper Island served as the main site of incarceration within the penal settlement and became notorious for its harsh conditions and oppressive environment (Portman, 1899) [18].

Constructed in the 1860s, the Viper Jail infamously known as the "Viper Chain Gang Jail" was designed to confine convicts under extreme conditions. Prisoners were subjected to hard labour, including clearing forests, quarrying stones, and constructing colonial infrastructure. The penal regime emphasized physical punishment, isolation, and humiliation as tools of control (Majumdar, 1975) [14].

Among its most notable inmates was Brij Kishore Singh Deo, popularly known as Maharaja Jagannath of Puri, who was imprisoned at Viper Jail and died there in 1879 (Andaman and Nicobar Gazetteer, 1908). Another

significant event associated with the island was the execution of Sher Ali, a Pashtun from Peshawar, who assassinated Lord Mayo, the Viceroy of India, on 8 February 1872 at Hopetown Jetty. Sher Ali was subsequently hanged at Viper Island, an act that underscored the deep resentment and political tensions of the colonial era (Singh, 1978).

With the completion of the Cellular Jail in 1906, the prominence of Viper Jail gradually diminished. The new structure architecturally designed to embody the ideology of isolation and surveillance became the central site of punishment for political prisoners and revolutionaries (Roy, 2018). Nevertheless, Viper Island remains a significant historical landmark, representing the early and brutal phase of the Andaman penal system that preceded the more structured, yet equally oppressive, regime of the Cellular Jail.

7. Construction and Architectural Design of the Cellular Jail

The Cellular Jail, commonly referred to as *Kala Pani*, stands as a significant architectural and historical structure associated with colonial penal practices in India. Conceived as a prison exclusively for solitary confinement, its design marked a departure from conventional ward-based incarceration systems. The architectural philosophy underlying the Cellular Jail reflected the British colonial objective of enforcing absolute isolation, with the explicit aim of psychologically and physically subduing political prisoners involved in anti-colonial activities (Sen, 2000).

The site selected for the construction of the Cellular Jail was Atlanta Point, situated on the eastern coast of Port Blair in South Andaman. Located on elevated terrain overlooking the sea and facing Ross Island—the administrative headquarters of the British colonial establishment—the site offered strategic advantages in terms of surveillance, security, and isolation. Construction commenced in 1894 during the tenure of Colonel Sir Richard C. Temple, who served as Chief Commissioner and Superintendent of the Andaman Penal Settlement, and was completed in 1906 (Andaman and Nicobar Gazetteer, 1908; Majumdar, 1973 [13]).

The structure was constructed using red bricks manufactured locally at brick kilns in Dundas Point and Minnie Bay. Historical records indicate that more than three million bricks were used in the construction process. Architecturally, the prison was designed around a central watchtower from which seven wings radiated outward in a radial pattern resembling the spokes of a wheel. This configuration enabled surveillance of all wings from a single vantage point, thereby limiting prisoner interaction and reinforcing strict disciplinary control (Sen, 2000).

Each of the seven wings rose to three storeys and collectively housed 696 individual cells. Each cell measured approximately 13.5 feet by 7.5 feet and was designed to accommodate a single inmate. Ventilation was provided through a small ventilator placed high on the cell wall, deliberately positioned to prevent visual contact or communication between prisoners. The architectural emphasis on isolation and constant observation bears resemblance to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon model, which prioritised surveillance as a mechanism of control and discipline (Foucault, 1977; Sen, 2000).

In addition to the cell blocks, a two-storeyed administrative structure was constructed near the main entrance. This block housed administrative offices, record rooms, punishment registers, and served as the primary access point to the prison complex. It functioned as the operational centre for colonial officials and wardens, reinforcing the institutional authority exercised over the incarcerated population (Andaman and Nicobar Gazetteer, 1908).

8. Life and Punishments in the Cellular Jail

Life inside the Cellular Jail was marked by extreme hardship, isolation, and systematic punishment. Under British colonial administration, the jail functioned not merely as a penal institution but as a coercive mechanism aimed at suppressing political dissent and breaking the morale of Indian revolutionaries involved in the anti-colonial movement (Majumdar, 1973; Sarkar, 1983) [13, 20].

Prisoners were subjected to arduous physical labour with deliberately excessive daily targets. Inmates were required to operate heavy manual oil mills to extract approximately 30 pounds of coconut oil or 10 pounds of mustard oil per day. These tasks demanded intense physical exertion and were performed under harsh climatic conditions. Failure to meet prescribed quotas resulted in punitive measures such as flogging, reduction of rations, or confinement in isolation cells (Savarkar, 1927; Port Blair Jail Records, cited in Sen, 2000) [29].

Corporal punishment and psychological coercion were integral to the disciplinary regime of the Cellular Jail. Prisoners were frequently subjected to flogging and prolonged solitary confinement in small, poorly ventilated cells. The routine use of restraints, including bar fetters, crossbar fetters, neck rings, and leg irons, led to severe physical injuries, infections, and long-term health complications. Inmates were issued coarse clothing and provided minimal dietary provisions, typically consisting of rice and diluted gruel, resulting in malnutrition and disease (Sarkar, 1983; Sen, 2000) [10].

The duration and severity of punishments varied significantly. Some prisoners were confined in handcuffs for several days, while others were forced to remain in iron fetters for months, with restricted mobility even during rest. The cumulative impact of forced labour, inadequate nutrition, and sustained punishment contributed to numerous deaths due to illness, exhaustion, and starvation. Contemporary accounts also record instances of attempted suicide, reflecting the extreme psychological distress endured by inmates (Savarkar, 1927; Majumdar, 1973) [28, 13].

The Cellular Jail thus emerged as a powerful symbol of colonial repression and authoritarian governance. Despite the severity of conditions, prisoners demonstrated remarkable psychological resistance and ideological commitment to the nationalist cause. Over time, the jail assumed a central position in the historiography of India's freedom struggle, symbolising both the brutality of colonial rule and the resilience and sacrifice of political prisoners (Sarkar, 1983) [10].

9. The Japanese Occupation of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1942–1945)

During the Second World War, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands assumed strategic importance due to their location between the Bay of Bengal and the principal maritime

routes of Southeast Asia (Sen, 2000; Bayly & Harper, 2007) [3]. Following the withdrawal of British administrative authorities, the Japanese Imperial Army occupied the islands on 23 March 1942. The occupation continued until 7 October 1945 and constitutes one of the most severe and disruptive phases in the history of the islands (Majumdar, 1973) [13].

In the initial stages, segments of the local population perceived the Japanese arrival as a possible alternative to British colonial rule. However, this expectation was short-lived. The Japanese administration soon established a rigid military regime characterised by surveillance, coercion, and widespread repression. Civilian life was placed under strict control, and numerous islanders were subjected to arrest, imprisonment, torture, or execution on allegations of assisting or sympathising with the British authorities (Sarkar, 1983; Sen, 2000) [10].

The Cellular Jail, previously used by the British as a penal institution for political prisoners, was repurposed by the Japanese as a detention and interrogation centre. Educated individuals, community leaders, and suspected dissidents were incarcerated and subjected to severe physical and psychological abuse. The occupation period also witnessed instances of mass executions, notably at Homfray Gunj, where civilians were publicly executed to instil fear and assert military authority (Sen, 2000; Government of India, 1998).

The Humfrey Gunj Martyrs' Memorial near Port Blair stands as a commemorative site honouring civilians who lost their lives during the occupation. The memorial reflects the enduring impact of wartime violence on the collective memory of the island population and highlights the experiences of ordinary individuals who suffered under successive regimes of control (Sen, 2000).

Despite the prevailing conditions of repression, the period also witnessed a symbolic political development. In December 1943, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose visited the Andaman and Nicobar Islands under the authority of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind. He hoisted the Indian national tricolour at Port Blair and renamed the islands Shaheed (Martyr) and Swaraj (Self-Rule). While the act did not result in effective administrative autonomy, it carried considerable symbolic significance within the wider context of India's anti-colonial struggle (Bose, 1961; Gordon, 1990).

The Japanese occupation concluded following Japan's surrender to the Allied forces in 1945, after which British control was re-established over the islands. The legacy of the occupation period remains integral to understanding the historical, political, and social transformations of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands during the mid-twentieth century (Bayly & Harper, 2007) [3].

10. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's Visit to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, 1943: Historical Significance and Administrative Implications

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's visit to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in December 1943 represents a significant episode in the history of India's freedom struggle. On 29 December 1943, Bose, in his capacity as the Supreme Commander of the Indian National Army (INA), arrived at Lamba Line Airport in Port Blair. He was accorded a ceremonial reception by the Andaman unit of the INA, underscoring the political and strategic importance of the islands within the framework of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind (Bose, 1961; Gordon, 1990).

A landmark event followed on 30 December 1943, when Bose hoisted the Indian national tricolour at the Gymkhana Ground, now known as Netaji Stadium, in Port Blair. The ceremony was attended by a large gathering of island residents and representatives of the Japanese administration. This event is widely interpreted as the first symbolic assertion of Indian sovereignty over territory declared free from British colonial control. Although the hoisting of the flag did not result in effective administrative autonomy, it carried substantial symbolic significance and served as a morale-enhancing gesture within the broader nationalist movement (Majumdar, 1973; Sarkar, 1983) [13, 20].

During his visit, Bose also inspected the Cellular Jail, which had earlier functioned as a major site of colonial repression and incarceration of political prisoners. However, contemporary accounts suggest that Japanese authorities restricted his access to certain sections of the prison, particularly the solitary confinement cells that had housed prominent freedom fighters. Consequently, Bose's exposure to the full extent of the prison's conditions and operations remained limited (Sen, 2000).

Following the visit, Bose appointed Colonel A. D. Loganathan as the Chief Commissioner of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and formally transferred administrative authority to the Provisional Government of Azad Hind. Despite this declaration, effective control over the islands continued to rest with the Japanese military administration. The continuation of coercive governance practices during this period resulted in widespread hardship for the island population, leaving a lasting imprint on local historical memory (Bayly & Harper, 2007; Sen, 2000) [3].

The historical significance of Bose's 1943 visit was officially acknowledged several decades later. On 30 December 2018, the Prime Minister of India hoisted a 150-foot-high national flag in Port Blair to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's hoisting of the tricolour. This commemoration reaffirmed the enduring political and symbolic relevance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands within the narrative of India's struggle for independence (Government of India, 2018).

11. Conclusion

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands constitute a historically significant space within India's colonial and postcolonial trajectory. Their evolution from a peripheral maritime zone to a central site of imperial control, penal discipline, and nationalist resistance highlights their enduring relevance in the study of colonial governance and freedom movements. The establishment of the British penal settlement, particularly the Cellular Jail, institutionalised mechanisms of surveillance, isolation, and punishment that were integral to the colonial strategy of suppressing political dissent.

Historical sites such as Chatham Island, Ross Island, and Viper Island collectively illustrate the functioning of the colonial penal apparatus and its social consequences. These spaces also reflect the responses of political prisoners and indigenous communities to imposed systems of control, thereby revealing multiple dimensions of resistance, adaptation, and survival. The period of Japanese occupation during the Second World War further reinforced the strategic importance of the islands while exposing the local population to successive regimes of coercive authority.

The visit of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in 1943 and the symbolic hoisting of the Indian national flag marked a significant moment in the political history of the islands, linking them directly to the broader narrative of India's struggle for independence. Although administrative authority remained constrained, the event contributed to the symbolic redefinition of the islands within nationalist discourse.

In the post-independence period, the reinterpretation of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as heritage and memorial landscapes has facilitated the preservation of historical memory and contributed to nation-building processes. Through institutionalised remembrance, historical tourism, and commemorative practices, former sites of punishment have been transformed into spaces of public engagement and historical reflection. The study thus demonstrates that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands function not merely as geographical entities but as historically constructed spaces that continue to shape India's cultural memory, political identity, and historiographical discourse.

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