

A Study on the History of Andaman & Nicobar Islands

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Introduction :

The Andaman & Nicobar are a group of picturesque Islands, big and small, inhabited and uninhabited, a total of 572 islands, islets and rocks lying in the South Eastern Part of the Bay of Bengal. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands were shrouded in mystery for centuries because of their inaccessibility. These are the paragon of beauty and present a landscape full with scenic and picturesque extravaganza. These islands shimmer like emeralds in the Bay of Bengal. The dense forest which cover these islands and the innumerable exotic flowers and birds create a highly poetic and romantic atmosphere. "Here the white beaches on the edge of a meandering coastline have palm trees that sway to the rhythm of the Sea. The beat of tribal drums haunts the stillness and technicolour fish steer their way through crystal clear water." This addition of strangeness to beauty which is responsible for creating the infinite romantic impact may be described in the following famous lines of Keats.

History :

The history of these islands could be divided into 4 broad periods:

- a) The Pre-colonial era
- b) The British regime
- c) The Japanese regime
- d) Indian control

a) The Pre-colonial era :

Rajendra Chola I (1014 to 1042 CE), one of the Tamil Chola dynasty kings, occupied Andaman and Nicobar Islands to use it as a strategic naval base to launch a naval expedition against Sriwijaya Empire (a Hindu-Malay empire based on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia). The Cholas called the 'Nicobar' island as 'Nakkavaram' which is inscribed on the Tanjore inscription of 1050 CE. Nakkavaram in Tamil means "naked man" or "land of the naked" which should have been evolved to the modern name "Nicobar". Marco Polo (12-13th Century CE) also referred this island as 'Necuverann'.

The name of the island has always been 'Andaman' and might represent Handuman, the Malay form of Hanuman. The islands provided a temporary maritime base for ships of the Marathas in the 17th century. The legendary admiral Kanhoji Angre established naval supremacy with a base in the islands and is credited with attaching those islands to India.

b) The British Regime :

The British regime of Andaman and Nicobar Islands falls under the modern history of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which began in 1788. In 1788, Lord Cornwallis, the governor-general of India, sent Lieutenant Archibald Blair and Lieutenant R.H. Colebrook to find the suitability of the island for housing the British Colony. On the recommendation of these two officers of the British regime in Andaman and Nicobar Islands that the first settlements were established on Chattam Islands, a small island near Port Cornwallis.

But after 1857, the British regime at Andaman and Nicobar Islands founded a penal settlement in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The prison, which came to be known as Cellular Jail or 'Kalapani', was established with an intention to house the criminals, especially the rebels, charges against disloyalty towards the British Regime. In Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the British regime founded the first prison at Viper Island, housing nearly 200 prisoners. During this time, thousands of people were brought to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, who led to live of exile. The prisoners brought in the Cellular Jail were kept under successive Superintendents, who tortured them gruesomely. The prisoners were made to suffer dire consequences for their revolt against the British Government.

c) The Japanese Regime :

World War II brought another series of changes in the life of the andamans, during the war, the Japanese occupied Andamans on March 21, 1942 and kept the region under their effective control till October 8, 1945. Initially the Japanese behaved cordially towards the locals, but became harsh and suspicious after instances came to their notice of some locals maintaining contacts with the British, as a result a large number of innocent people were killed, one such place where the massacre occurred is humfrigunj, but one good result of the Japanese occupation was making the Andaman's self-sufficient, at least in food production. The naval blockade created an acute food crisis and the Japanese compelled the local people to bring more land under cultivation they also constructed roads. When Netaji Subash Chandra Bose arrived in Port Blair on December 29, 1943 and was given a ceremonial welcome after that he hoisted the national flag at Port Blair on 30th December, 1943 for the first time during the British regime in India on October 8, 1945, the Japanese surrendered to the South East Asia command at Port Blair. The government quickly restored normalcy in the area and started rehabilitation work.

d) Indian Control :

The islands were only nominally put under the authority of the Arzi Hukumate Azad Hind of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, and the Islands were practically under Japanese control, who committed tremendous atrocities. Netaji visited the islands during the war, and renamed them as "Shaheed-dweep" (Martyr Island) & "Swaraj-dweep" (Self-rule Island). General Loganathan, of the Indian National Army was

made the Governor of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands on 22 February, 1944 he along with four INA officers - Major Mansoor Ali Alvi, Sub. Lt. Md. Iqbal, Lt. Suba Singh and stenographer Srinivasan - arrived at 8000Lambaline Airport in Port Blair. On 21 March 1944, the Headquarters of the Civil Administration was established near the Gurudwara at Aberdeen Bazaar. On 2 October 1944, Col. Loganathan handed over the charge to Maj. Alvi and left Port Blair, never to return. The islands were re-occupied by British and Indian troops of the 116th Indian Infantry Brigade on 7 October 1945, to whom the remaining Japanese garrison surrendered. At the independence of both India (1947) and Burma (1948), the departing British announced their intention to resettle all Anglo-Indians and Anglo-Burmese on the islands to form their own nation, although this never materialized. It became part of the Indian union in 1956. It was declared a union territory on 1956.

Conclusion :

Andaman and Nicobar experienced a gruesome past during the Indian Independence struggle. The region was addressed as “Kala Pani”, meaning black water. The Cellular Jail of Andaman and Nicobar Islands is its most popular spot and that’s where nightmares came to life. During the Sepoy Mutiny or the first Indian freedom struggle movement, British blindly fired the crowd and even tied them in cannons and blew them away. They perhaps thought it was not enough and decided to establish a penal settlement, which took place in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

References :

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