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**REWRITING THE DAYS OF SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE IN
ANDAMANS DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION IN 1943**

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***Abstract:** This paper is an attempt to trace the reason for attitude of people towards the Japanese and their ally Subhas Chandra Bose during the Japanese occupation of Andaman Islands. The visit of Subhas Chandra Bose during the Occupation rekindled a hope for lasting peace but was shattered because of the Indian leader who believed in a normalcy of situation prevailed under the rule of foreigner. Before regarding Bose as a failure, the conduct of Bose in Andamans during Japanese Occupation needs further evaluation as none of the biographers of Bose have been able to justify his conduct in the Andaman Islands.*

My paper is not an attempt to make a statement on Subhas Chandra Bose or his days in Andamans, but it tries to re-examine the ingenious acts of Japanese government that left him unaware of incidents occurred in the land- even when he was the head of government of Andamans, in a chronological manner and to examine the reason for the attitude that exists among the people of Andamans against the Netaji.

Full Paper

The geographical location of Andaman group of Islands numbering 204, large and small, lies between the 10th to 14th parallel North latitude and the 22nd to 24th meridian of East longitude, 590 miles away from the mouth of the river Hooghly and 219 miles in length. This group of islands is also known as Bay islands because of their geographical spread in the Bay of Bengal (Iqbal Singh. 9). The modern history of Andaman Islands could be traced back to the year 1789. The first topographic survey that reported the suitability of Islands for human settlement was conducted by the Lt. Archibald Blair, the hydrographer of British East India Company and Colonel. R.H. Colebrook, the Surveyor general of India after the orders of the Governor General of India, Lord Cornwallis. (Pandey, 6).

It was almost six decades of Archibald Blair's settlement, the idea of re-establishing a penal settlement germinated in the minds of the British rulers, during the outbreak of the revolt of 1857. The British found it practically impossible to

accommodate the large number of mutineers, deserters and rebels arrested by the British in the Indian jails or in other penal settlements in South East Asia. The situation thus forced the British rulers to seek a new place to establish a penal settlement and the Andaman group of islands came into their active consideration (Iqbal Singh. 18).

The government of India hastened the matter and appointed the "Andaman Committee" on 20th November 1857, to visit the island and to select the best site for the establishment of the penal settlement. The committee was comprised of Dr. Fred J. Mont, Dr. George R. PlayFair, M.D and J.S. Heatcot, the Lt. I.N. The committee visited the island on 8th December 1857 and recommended the establishment of the penal settlement on the site of Blair's old settlement, known as the old harbor till then. The site was later renamed as Port Blair in the honor of Captain Blair who discovered, surveyed and established it sixty-nine years ago in 1788-1789. This proposal was accepted by the government of India on 15th January 1858. (Portman, 208)

However, on 23 March 1942, imperial Japan assumed control over the islands from the British without even a solitary shot or slaughter. The only Indian territory that came under the Japanese occupation during the Second World War was Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Many people thought that the Asiatic brethren, the Japanese, had come as a God sent blessing to save them from the British. Happiness and joviality, short lived though, prevailed everywhere and everyone who had been shown a certain amount of favors by the Japanese was donning a mask of exclusiveness. The Japanese started employing the locals. When all departmental posts were filled up, it was seen that persons who could not ordinarily have risen beyond subordinate ranks in their sphere of activity found themselves holding gazetted ranks under the Japanese. Prisoners who were all practically in the labor force and getting prisoner rate of pay, barring those who were independent of the government and were following their trade as agriculturists and artisans, were elated because many of them now received promotions and other appointments in

order to fill up the gap caused by the evacuation. From time to time, the Japanese said that they came such a long way, merely to liberate the Asiatic from the pernicious yoke of foreigners. To prove themselves, they quoted what they did for Philippines, Netherland East Indies, Burma and Malaya(Mathur. 88-90). They had given Home Rule to all these places, promised to give the same to the Andamans, and thus achieved their ultimate object of stabilizing a long anticipated co-prosperity sphere of South East Asia. People of the islands, seeing that their victory had been magical, believed not only in the strength of the Japanese nation but also in their intention about stabilizing the co-prosperity sphere and Home Rule. Moreover, in order to make the residents believe them, the Japanese beheaded Mr. A. G. Byrd, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner and Supply Officer, in public on the charge of espionage and released the Indian who was arrested with him as co-accused. This helped them to demonstrate that they hated the Englishmen and loved the Indians but the happiness they promised was short lived.

After a few days, Japanese air personnel visited and surveyed the land and decided to complete the task begun by the British. When the work on an aerodrome was started by the Japanese, all the prisoners who were at large were rounded up and all men on whom the Japanese could lay their hands on were forced to work on this airstrip. Farmers were hampered in their work and so were others who followed other professions. People in general, had to work on the aerodrome in the same way as on Burma-Siam railroad and they began to feel the relish of the co-prosperity sphere. The suffering, which continued for the rest of the three and a half years of the Japanese occupation, thus began in the islands of Bengal(Narang, 46-47).

Those who were a little slack at work were given severe beating. Incidental injuries and diseases among the workers were treated with contempt. Food, which was all rationed by this time, caused much suffering among the manual labors. People fell ill and died, as medicines of all kinds were reserved for the fighting force. Hard work, diseases, maltreatment and malnourishment, which were the attributes of the penal settlement earlier, became the lot of everyone now. In about three months, the airstrip was serviceable and planes started coming in. A regular service was established between Burma and Singapore. Simultaneously, an aerodrome was constructed at Car Nicobar in the Nicobar group of Islands. The Japanese, who were intoxicated by the success, now began to enjoy life. They ordered the gathering of all women, young widows and maids, in their recreation club house. Honorable men hid their women, but the Indians who had become the

favorites of the Japanese, unearthed many of them. The unfortunate women, some after the capture made good their escape. Many were morose and dejected. Therefore, the process of engaging women locally was abandoned altogether after a while and these women were replaced by Japanese comfort girls(Sareen, 150-151).

As a large number of Indians came into the hands of the Japanese in Malaya, Burma and other South-East Asian countries, they got Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose from Germany under certain arrangements with the European army of the axis powers. The world came to know about this incident only after his miraculous arrival at Singapore. His arrival gave hope to Indians and courage to the Japanese. After his arrival, a South East Asian Conference with the representatives of Burma, Malaya, Netherland East Indies (now Indonesia), Philippines and occupied China was convened at Tokyo. As Subhas Chandra Bose represented no Indian territory, he refused to take part in the conference as a representative of India; but on the insistence of the Japanese government, he took part as an observer.

In this conference, it was declared by the then Japanese Prime Minister Tojo that the territory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, being a part of the Indian sub-continent will be placed under him. This gave Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose the feeling that he became the status of the Head of an Indian province and is treated as other Heads of Government in South East Asia. But no diplomatic documents were exchanged at that time and the events that followed in the Andamans after this declaration by the Japanese Government proved that their declaration was a mere mockery.(Krishna, p 59).

Hugh Toye, in *The Springing Tiger*, called this transfer of Andaman and Nicobar Islands to Netaji's Provisional Government a "specious fiction" (p 149). Subhas Chandra Bose visited the Islands towards the end of 1943 with an objective to appoint an Indian Chief Commissioner who would be in charge of the administration of Andaman and Nicobar. Bose installed Loganadhan as Chief Commissioner and the Japanese admiral in charge of the administration though agreed to the appointment but told him that for cogent strategic reasons, there could be no complete hand-over during the war. He added that if the Commissioner (Loganadhan) was prepared to cooperate, some department of civil administration could be transferred to his control(Ministry of External Affairs, pp73-74).

The Japanese Government also made sure that the I.N.A. would rank as an Allied army under Japanese operational command and not as

something subordinate to the Japanese military forces, even when they did not keep their promise to hand over the occupied Indian territory to the Provisional Government of Azad Hind. The administration of the Andaman Islands remained with the Japanese military authorities and Loganadhan was nothing more than a civilian administrator exercising partial powers of control. The command of the Andaman Islands was denied and Japanese transferred only a portion of their Authority. (Ministry of External Affairs, pp73 - 104). Loganadhan was powerless to influence the Japanese who systematically shot any Indian they felt was a spy of the British. On 30 Jan 1944, 44 Indian were shot dead on suspicion of spying. This is famous as the Humfreygang massacre.

The so called 'spy case' was in full swing when Subhas Chandra Bose visited Andamans. When unheard tortures perpetrated within the walls of the Cellular Jail, outside the walls, considerable panic prevailed. As Subhas Chandra Bose's visit could not be put off and the islands could not be brought hurriedly to normalcy, precautions by various ingenious methods were taken to hide the abnormality prevailing on the Islands and to keep Subhas Chandra Bose in the dark about the tortures on Indians. They made sure that no member of the public was given a chance to speak to Bose freely, and some Japanese officials were always present to report the conversation that took place between Bose and a few Indians whom the Japanese allowed him to meet.

On Subhas Chandra Bose's arrival at the aerodrome, a selected band of officials were made to stand in two rows at the aerodrome. This band which had apparently gone to welcome Subhas Chandra Bose were all picked up overnight as the news of Subhas Chandra Bose's arrival was kept off from the public on account of the war exigencies. He met them without speaking to any, as if he was inspecting a guard of honor. He, with his staff was then carried to the erstwhile Government House at Ross Island. The road from the aerodrome to Aberdeen Jetty, that included a crossing by boat to reach Ross Island, was ordered to be lined up by men, women and children. Subhas Chandra Bose was unaware of this order and if he thought that this entire crowd had come to pay him homage, no one dispelled the wrong impression. The Japanese were cautious enough, as they were considerably afraid of any leakage of the news of the torture that they were perpetrating in Andamans (Hayashida, p 102).

It ought to be mentioned here that when Ross Island was the then capital of Andamans. The Government House, the Central Hospital with the office of the Senior Medical Officer, the Central Supply Stores with the Office of the Supply

Officer, the Secretariat and the Cantonment with one company of English soldiers were located there. On account of all those activities, there was regular service of steam launches between it and Aberdeen which connected it with the mainland. But during the time of the general evacuation during the Japanese Invasion, everything was shifted to Aberdeen for fear of naval bombardment by the enemy. Consequently, the launches plying between Ross and Aberdeen were also stopped. The Japanese did not resume this service because the island was barren when they came; neither did they populate it. Therefore, the objective of the Japanese, as is apparent, was not actually to honor Subhas Chandra Bose by giving him the use of the derelict Government House but to segregate or isolate him on this unpopulated island. But all this was done in the name of security measures. There was no one on this island to give him news about the conditions prevailing in the Andamans. It must be recorded here that Subhas Chandra Bose, being as a casual visitor who saw the islands for the first time and who was quite unaware of the torture and maltreatment meted out to Indians on ground of espionage, took everything there as normal and never suspected that the Japanese officials would deliberately hoodwink him. The only two occasions he was taken out of Ross Island was done very cautiously; once ceremoniously to a crowded meeting at the only maidan of Port Blair and once on a prearranged tour of outlying villages after visiting the Jail.

A public meeting was arranged on the Gymkhana maidan of Port Blair in which a large number of people were ordered to attend. Subhas Chandra Bose came from Ross and reached the maidan in a ceremonious procession made up of Japanese officers in a number of cars. As usual no Indians from the Andamans were included in this procession. On arrival, he went up the rostrum and unfurled the Indian National flag, the first one to be hoisted on an 'Indian territory'. The Chairman of the Andaman branch of the Indian Independence League, Mr. Rama Krishna, gave a welcome address and presented a purse for the I.N.A., after which Subhas Chandra Bose addressed the gathering. He was again very ceremoniously driven back to Ross without meeting any of the residents. No one from the Andamans accompanied him (Fay, p61).

The second visit out of the Ross Island was to the jail according to the itinerary of Subhas Chandra Bose. At the time of his visit, there were barely a score of actual imprisoned persons in the Jail, though there were more than a hundred persons undergoing tortures and interrogations daily because of the so-called spy case. He was shown a score of persons only, who were the actual

prisoners and were at various jobs such as cleaning the garden, planting vegetables, sweeping the compound and cooking for the prisoners and such other routine jail work. He was taken to one or two wings to show him that there were hardly any prisoners to fill such a large jail and consequently that it was practically empty. No Indians from the administration were allowed to accompany him on this occasion too. Mohindar Singh Dhillon later have asserted that Mushtaq Ali had the opportunity to inform Bose about the torture on the suspect of the Spy Case and has requested Netaji that during his visit to the Cellular Jail on the next day, he should ask to be shown the sixth wing of the jail. It is also said that Netaji was singled out the case of Diwan Singh and the torture he was subjected to. (Dhillon, pp 272-73). But the members of PGI who went to Andaman with Bose deny that fact that he was informed about the torture in the jail. However, the fact was Bose never saw the wing in which tortured people were lodged. If only he had seen the persons whose skins were missing from thighs, scrotum, abdomen and chest and could not wear any apparel; those who had no flesh on their breeches; those who had burns by petrol fire; those who could not walk straight as a result of constant kneeling on sticks; or those who had deep knife cuts all over the fleshy parts of their bodies on which salt had been sprinkled, things could have been different. Subhas Chandra Bose was taken to the jail deliberately, so that when news reached him by some chance later at his headquarters at Singapore, he might be confused or deny those reports as he had seen nothing wrong there when he actually visited it. Probably that could have been the ulterior motive of the Japanese in showing him the jail.

From there he was taken to certain villages with a number of army and naval officers surrounding him. When the news reached the villages that Subhas Chandra Bose was coming to them, the general feeling was that they would get a chance to speak to him face to face and tell him or his staff about some of their sufferings. But to the disappointment of all, that chance never came. He saw some of the villagers from a distance and some others he had a near view. At some places he was made to meet some villagers in a crowd. Things were so arranged that he heard no one from the crowd but had to speak to the crowd. The moment the Japanese thought that someone would stand up to talk to him, the meeting was abruptly made to a close before anyone realizing what the next move.

It is true that if he had heard a few Indians, he would have got some picture of the suffering in the islands. No Indians, either officers of the administration or members of the public, accompanied him as the Japanese religiously

prevented that. All vehicles of transport were under Japanese control and no one could accompany him even if one wanted to do so. In other words, he spoke to the public but actually spoke to no one in particular, nor did he hear anyone (Krishna, p 62). Subhas Chandra Bose never doubted these motifs of Japanese government, not even for once.

Once a dinner party was arranged for Subhas Chandra Bose and his staff by the Admiral-in-Charge of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Government House at Ross; but not at his own residence at Aberdeen where the visiting members of the Royal family of Japan stayed. It is unusual that one who possesses a spacious place himself ever gives a dinner party in someone else's house. Was it the fear that Subhas Chandra Bose or his staff would come into contact with someone, while coming to and from Ross, whom the Japanese did not want them to contact? Was there also a fear that the contact would result in his discovery about the arrests and tortures that were going on in Port Blair and about the forced labor that was being employed all over?

The dinner was attended by some of the military officers and Japanese civil officers. The Indian heads of departments were also invited. The latter were barely half a dozen in number. He was heavily surrounded by these officers and when he was talking to Indians after the dinner, one or two of the Intelligence Department whom the Indians knew very well were always present. Similar was the case when anyone spoke to one of Subhas Chandra Bose's staff consisting of five officers. The plan was well-conceived and executed. Subhas Chandra Bose in his magnanimity or on account of his faith on the Japanese was apparently not aware of any of this. (Krishna, pp 106-108). Even when Subhas Chandra Bose gave a return dinner party to the Admiral and a number of Japanese officers, the same Indians who were invited before, were invited. The same guard was kept on them after the dinner when they sat in the drawing room with Bose. The talk of Indians was all guarded seeing that Intelligence Department was vigilant. It was all planned as if they knew the consequences of loose talk. As he was to leave the following morning and as he had no chance to meet any of the members of the public although he saw them everywhere, the Chairman of the Andaman branch of the Indian Independence League, Mr. Rama Krishna, suggested to him whether it would be possible for him to visit the headquarters of the League and meet the Working Committee before he took off for Singapore. He readily accepted the invitation of his own Independence League. But this was an unexpected event in the cut and dried programme of the Japanese. As all vehicles were in the charge

of the Japanese, Subhas Chandra Bose had to inform them of his movement(Fay, p65).

The Japanese were visibly perturbed at the turn of the event. They never wished anyone of the Indian community to speak to him without their knowledge. They were perplexed momentarily but their ingenuity gave birth to a novel idea that ceased the disclosure of the actual facts. The headquarters of the Independence League was in the centre of the only bazaar and everyone was struck with amazement when they saw men, women and children, even children in arms, were driven to the headquarters by the police, under the orders of the Japanese, from 2 a.m. onwards. These people were dragged out of their beds and not all knew why they were herded so in the hall of the Local Born Association (then the headquarters of the Indian Independence League). When Mr. Rama Krishna arrived there to arrange for Subhas Chandra Bose's reception and ordered these people out, he was politely told by an Inspector of Police on duty that those people had gathered there by the order of the Japanese. When a few members of the League and practically all the members of the working committee arrived a little earlier than 8 a.m., they found that the hall was filled up to capacity and that they could not enter the hall. There was utter confusion in the hall. Subhas Chandra Bose arrived at the appointed time of 8 a.m., with an unusual retinue of Japanese naval and army officers. Members of the league were lost in the crowd. With great difficulty, a way was found for him and others to enter the hall. Thus this incident also gave no chance for Subhas Chandra Bose to speak to anyone individually. The Chairman of the League gave a short welcome speech after which Subhas Chandra Bose addressed the crowd formally.

What was actually contemplated in inviting him to the headquarters- that he and his staff might find an opportunity to mix with a few persons other than the heads of departments who he had already seen twice at the two dinner parties failed. The idea was that he might get a clue to the true position and suffering and panic of the populace here. This was not supposed to happen as the Japanese had forestalled it. Apart from that, the number of Japanese officers that accompanied Subhas Chandra Bose was exceptionally large on this occasion.

Outwardly the Japanese maintained that the large crowd was attracted there by his name and personality. How could they be attracted by his name and personality when no one knew about his coming except a dozen persons who were called by the Chairman of the League by a notice circulated in the middle of the night? Netaji never contemplated on it. And finally when he came out

of the hall, the last to bid him farewell, the Chairman asked him to take over the administration as soon as possible to which he immediately agreed. By the end of December 1943 Subhas Chandra Bose left the place. In a month he sent Col. Loganathan as Chief Commissioner with three officers and a stenographer. However, the Japanese never gave over the charge of the islands to Col. Loganathan and his arrival was a mere farce (Fay, pp-66-68).

A month after Subhas Chandra Bose's departure, the much-dreaded Spy Case came to an end. Thirty three persons were shot dead and the like number were given long terms of imprisonment. They were shot because they had been rendered physically so useless that prolongation of life in those bodies was impossible. Even if they had been released, most of them would have died in a short time but that short time would have been enough to advertise the Japanese barbarity. Or they would have remained cripples throughout the rest of their lives. Although the news of the torture had reached the public but its magnitude was known only to a few who happened to be confined with them in the jail. The bodies of those who were shot after the cases were decided, were not delivered to friends and relatives for disposal according to their religion lest the relatives and friends find the anti-mortem marks of violence on the dead bodies and learnt about the barbarity of treatment meted out. This took place before the arrival of Col. Loganathan and his staff in February 1944. How many died on account of torture inside the jail is not yet known as their dead bodies were done away with.(Lal, pp-102-105).

Later that year in Singapore, Subhas Chandra Bose met with Col. Loganathan, who had returned for consultation bitterly disappointed at the failure of his administration. The only department taken over was that of Education; the Japanese had prevented or hindered all other work and had continued their harsh oppression of the islanders. Savage torture and blackmail supported this rule of terror, of which the educated were the main victims. There were some cases of mass killing also near Havelock Island. The chief Commissioner had been quite unable to stop it, though his personal influence may have been felt in a few individual cases. Whatever might be said in Tokyo, the local Japanese would not part with their authority. Bose who intended to appoint a new Chief Commissioner changed his mind. The Andamans were too exposed for the new strategic situation; Subhas Chandra Bose's provisional Government might have to write off its commitment and turn to what was more worth saving (Hugh, p 132). Bose as the head of the

Government of Andaman may be held responsible for some, if not all of those unhappy events.

The Japanese occupation and their attitude towards the local people initially gave the people hope of a peaceful time from the Asiatic brethren who had come as a God sent blessing to them. But later in history Andamans has to undergo its worst time with total chaos and atrocities, which affected it politically and economically. The people of Andamans never experienced such kind of treatment from the British government. Even the visit of Subhas Chandra Bose was a false hope for the people of Andamans as he saw only the Andaman shown to him by Japanese. Japan is notorious for her war crimes during the Second World War and subsequently has acknowledged it also; but the atrocities in Andamans are never mentioned in this acknowledgment of war crimes.

Bose renamed Andaman as "Shahid Dweep" (Martyr Islands) and Nicobar as "Swaraj Dweep" (Self Rule Islands) but the islands are still known by their old names. On August 22, 1969, the question of changing the names of Andaman and Nicobar Islands to Shahid Dweep and Swaraj Dweep brought forth by Samar Guha during the session of the parliament, but was opposed by K. R. Ganesh, Deputy Minister, elected from the same constituency. He replied that, three-fourths of the island had been completely annihilated by the Japanese fascists, thousands were thrown in the sea, thousands were decimated and hundreds were jailed. When Samar Guha asked whether this happened before or after Netaji, to know why they don't want change the names given by Netaji, Ganesh categorically replied: "My answer is — before, during and afterwards". He then firmly asserted that the history of the islands did not start in 1943, but in 1857. The name of Andaman is in our soul and we are not going to allow any to change it (Dasgupta, pp 76-77). The statement is a proof that people had a feeling of bitterness with the visit of Bose in Andaman and in his inability to bring to an end to the atrocities of Japanese. Had he

known the real fact, he would certainly have taken suitable action, as he was very courageous person to ignore any misdeed.

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