



Chapter V

THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL

As a struggle for freedom gained momentum on mainland India, the need arose to construct a jail to use mainly for the solitary confinement of the freedom fighters, who were committed revolutionaries and intellectuals in order to break their spirit. The work on the three-storied structure with 7 wings radiating from a central watchtower began in 1896. As it had only individual cells numbering 698, it got the name Cellular Jail.

Even today the Cellular Jail is the single largest masonry structure in the islands. Within the confines of this jail all kinds of instruments of torture were installed like flogging stand, oil mill, bar fetters and the gallows with the facility to hang 3 persons at a time. A tyrant by the name David Barry was appointed as jailer who subjected the inmates to inhuman tortures.

With the completion of the jail in 1906 freedom fighters accused of various conspiracies were brought here. Though they were political prisoners they were made to perform tasks like turning the oil mill and pounding coconut husk to make rope. Any short fall in completing the task was met by severe punishment like flogging. Extreme torture and hard labour imposed upon the political prisoners led to strike. A decision to stop deportation of prisoners was taken in 1937 and the last batch of political prisoners left the islands in January 1938.



Oil Mill



Bar Fetters

It originally was a seven pronged, puce-coloured building with central tower acting as its fulcrum and a massive structure comprising honeycomb like corridors. The building was subsequently damaged and presently three out of the seven prongs are intact. The jail, now a place of pilgrimage for all freedom loving people, has been declared a National Memorial. The saga of the heroic freedom fighters in Kala Pani is brought alive in a moving sound and light show "Son-et-Lumiere", shown daily inside the jail compound. There is also a Museum, an Art Gallery, and a Photo Gallery, which are open on all days.