PRISON LITERATURE
IN INDIAN CONTEXT
CHAPTER-III
PRISON LITERATURE IN INDIAN CONTEXT:
A BRIEF SURVEY

Literature produced behind the bars may be termed as ‘prison
literature’. India’s prison literature is quite affluent. Perhaps the peace and
quiet of the prison house seems to have inspired many a writer to express
themselves in English as well as in vernacular languages. K.
Satchidanandanand, secretary, Central Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi identifies
the prison literature in four broad categories, at a National seminar on
"Prison Writing in India" organised by the Central Sahitya Akademi and
Dhvanyaloka on 25th, 26th and 27th September, 2004 in Mysore.

“In India, there were at least four major occasions in the recent
past of prison being used as an ideological instrument for
suppressing dissent or generating consent for the ruling class,
ideology, or group. The first was the pre-1947 anti-colonial
struggle, the second the communist uprising of the 1950s, the
third being the Emergency, and the fourth the Maoist uprising
of the late Sixties and the early Seventies, he said. All these
were occasions when the establishment was challenged and the
status quo sought to be subverted from 'different points of
views with varying ideological biases.'”

Each of these periods has produced an interesting collection of prison
writings of all genres -- autobiographies, letters, diaries and memoirs. They
explain the personal forces behind some well-known events and bring to
light many unknown facts of the freedom movement. It is exciting to enter
the private lives of these men of eminence, to watch the circumstances of
their growth, with their passions, prejudices and emotional involvements.
Politicians and other well-known people in the past have termed jails as their 'teaching laboratories'. Many world leaders took advantage of the solitude that their jail sentence provided and wrote masterpieces, the lessons of which still echo in the hallways of history.

The period from the mid 1890s to the mid 1940s brought a relatively large number of educated and articulate middle-class men and women into the jails of British India. It gave them exceptional opportunities to observe state and society through the prism of the prison and even, in many cases, the freedom to read and to write about their jail experience from within the walls of the prison itself.

The literature produced behind the bars is surveyed from Lala Lajapat Rai to Iftikar Gilani i.e from 1908 to 2008. There are forty five writers expressing their ideas on various topics. We get a variety of literature, depending upon the writer's ability and skill in the use of English language. Some of the books were originally written in their mother tongues and were translated to English either by themselves or by others under their close supervision Autobiographies, Diaries, Memoirs, Reminiscences and letters depict the days of freedom struggle and successive years after independence.

_The story of My Deportation (1908)_ is the first of available prison writings by Lala Lajapat Rai (1865-1928). He was one of the triumvirate of ‘Lal,Bal,Pal’ of the extremist fame in the freedom struggle during the first decade of the present century. He was not only a powerful orator but was also a prolific and versatile writer. He was not simply a publicist but a genuine patriot who produced a number of books of lasting value containing his mature reflection on men and matters. In the writings and speeches of Lala Lajpat Rai, an earnestness of purpose and fervent advocacy for the improvement of the national character and social efficiency are all along
reflected. He sustained severe injuries by the police when leading a non-violent protest against the Simon Commission and died less than three weeks later. Lala Lajpat Rai was deported to Mandalay, Burma (Myanmar) for taking part in political agitation in the Punjab, without trial in May 1907. He writes about his life in exile from 9th May 1907 to the 18th November 1907. It reveals most poignantly the human side of the great leader. However, he was allowed to return when the viceroy, Lord Minto, decided that there was insufficient evidence to hold him for subversion. Lajapat Rai depicts the scorching heat thus:

The sun at Mandalay is so scorching that one does not feel inclined to go out for a walk so long as the sun is not sufficiently down to make it agreeable. Hence it was impossible to take long walks either in the evening or in the morning. ²

The loneliness and enforced leisure are depicted thus:

My chief concern in my exile was loneliness. I have never before felt so solitary. Having been sociable all my life the present enforced solitariness must be very trying to me.³

*Tales of Prison Life* (1910), an account of his experiences as an undertrial prisoner in Alipore Jail, Calcutta by Sri *Aurobindo* (1872-1950). He played a leading role in India’s freedom struggle from 1908. He was one of the pioneers of political awakening in India. He edited the English daily *Bande Mataram* and wrote fearless and pointed editorials. He openly advocated the boycott of British goods, British courts and everything British. He asked the people to prepare themselves for passive resistance.
Sri Aurobindo was arrested for conspiracy in May 1908, he spent one full year in jail while the British Government, in a protracted trial, tried to implicate him in various revolutionary activities. Acquitted and released in May 1909, he wrote a series of articles in Bengali in the journal *Suprabhat* describing his life in prison and courtroom. The Bengali writings are translated by late professor Sisir Kumar Ghosh of Santiniketan. Here are two excerpts from the book, Aurobindo puts it thus:

There stretched before me a year’s imprisonment during which period all my relations would cease, that for a whole year I would have to live, beyond the pale of society, like an animal in the cage.\(^4\)

The jail authorities gave an inhuman treatment to the under trials and convicted in the same way:

On the top of the door, at eye level, there was a small hole or opening. After the door had been bolted the sentry peeped, from time to time. In order to find out what the convict was doing.\(^5\)

The solitary confinement at Alipore was a unique lesson in love. His way of looking at prison life is totally philosophical. Though imprisoned he embodies the spirit of freedom and pride.

*Through Solitude and Sorrows* (1910) by *Shyam Sunder Chakravarty* (1869-1932) is a revolutionary’s prison account. He was a revolutionary from Bengal, in his early days devoted his attention to strikes and labour problems. He was an active member of the Bande Mataram group, headed by Krishnakant Mitra with associates like Subhod Chandra Mallik, Ashvinikumar Dutta and Manoranjan Guha Takurta, were deported many a time for their anti-government activities.
Shyam Sunder Chakravarty, who along with Lala Lajpat Rai and others, was deported in 1907 by the government, dwells chiefly upon his prison experiences in his autobiography *Through Solitude and Sorrows*.

B.K. Ghose (1880-1959) recalls his prison experiences in *The Tale Of my Exile* (1922), Barindrakumar Ghose, a well-known revolutionary of Bengal, brother of Sri Aurobindo. In 1902, with the help of Jatindranath Bannerjee started forming several revolutionary groups. In 1906, in the heydays of the Swadeshi Movement, he started publishing *Yugantar*, a Bengali weekly and a revolutionary organization also named *Yugantar*, formed by the inner circle of Anushilan Samiti. The popularity of *Yugantar* among the younger generations and activists compelled the British Government to be sceptical about Barindra Kumar Ghose's motive. In 1907, he started the Maniktala group with Bagha Jatin and a few young revolutionary activists for the collection of arms and ammunitions and manufacturing explosives. After the attempted killing of Kingsford by Khudiram Basu and Prafulla Chaki, the police through their intense investigation arrested Barindra Kumar Ghose on 2nd May in 1908 and along with him many of his comrades were also arrested. Barindra Kumar Ghose was sentenced to death by the trial known as Alipore Bomb Case. Later the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment and was sent to the Cellular Jail in Andaman in 1909.

While in Andaman prison, he wrote *The Tale Of my Exile* (1922). In it he writes of his harrowing prison experience. He, along with Ullaskar Dutt, was sentenced to transportation for life and sent to the Andaman in 1909 in the Alipore Bomb case. Though the account is confined to his prison days, it reveals his undiminished tenacity of purpose and flaming patriotism.
Twelve years of Prison Life (1924) is a Ullaskar Dutt’s memoir.

He was a convict in Alipore Bomb Case, and an intellectual who often made his companions forget their desolation by regaling jokes and lighter verses. He too fell victim to the excruciating torture that led him to insanity. He was chained and suspended in his cell for a week. On the very first day he was found hanging handcuffed with acute fever and signs of insanity. His heart rending cries filled the whole atmosphere.

His other works are Dvipantar Katha (The Tale of Deportation) and Amar Karabajan (My Prison Life) translated into English as Twelve Years of Prison Life (1924). Dutt was sent to mental hospital in Andamans and then to the Madras Lunatic Asylum in January 1913, where he stayed for twelve years. He regained normalcy and lived to pen down his memoirs revealing the agonising life in the cellular jail.

Jail Life (1924) by Subramaniya Siva (1884-1925) describes his jail experience. Subramanya Siva was a firebrand revolutionary from Tamil Nadu. He was closely associated with V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subramanya Bharathy and inspired many young men to join the freedom movement. He was arrested many times between 1908 and 1922 for his anti-imperialist activities. While serving his last prison term, he was afflicted by leprosy and was ordered to be shifted to Salem jail. Since leprosy was regarded then as a contagious disease, the British authorities forbade him to travel by rail. As a result of this, Subramanya Siva traversed the whole length of Madras province on foot though his whole body was covered with sores. For fear of the British authorities, not many people came forward to help him. However, this did not deter Siva. He continued his fight for independence. While the Freedom Movement made him an orator and the jail life made him an author. He published "Gnana Bhanu", a collection of
poems. Siva disagreed many things with Gandhian Philosophy. He believed in violence for violent methods would benefit most when constitutional methods had failed.

_The Indian Struggle (1920-34) is Subhas Chandra Bose's_ (1897-1945?) _unique auto biography_ and _In Burmese Prisons_ contains an account of Bose’s experiences in Burmese prisons. Subhas Chandra Bose was a fierce fighter and a popular mass leader in the political field in pre-independence India. He was the president of the Indian National Congress in 1937 and 1939, and founded a nationalist force called the Indian National Army. He was jailed 11 (eleven) times between 1920 and 1941 for periods varying between six months and three years. He was the leader of the youth wing of the Congress Party, in the forefront of the trade union movement in India and organized _Service League_, another wing of Congress. He was admired for his great skills in organization development.

In the Madras Penitentiary itself Bose prepared the first draft of _The Indian Struggle_, an autobiography of about 100 pages. That was smuggled out of jail and printed in Coimbatore. But Bose has not mentioned this in his preface to the book, which was later published in Britain in 1935.

Bose was deported to Burma in 1923. _In Burmese Prisons_ is a fascinating collection of Netaji’s correspondence of the period from May 1923 to July 1926. Such a large collection of letters, mostly written by Netaji and many written to him, relating to the early phase of Netaji’s public life, was posthumously published in an organised fashion in 1981. His letters from prison demonstrate his deep involvement in the city’s problems in those days. The letters, which he wrote to the Government and jail authorities, many of which were found among his prison papers from Burma, provide some material relating to the unequal and bitter battle that a political
prisoner in a subject country has to fight against the alien power. Altogether his correspondence is not merely personal, formal or political, but significantly historical. Bose’s letters cover a very wide array of topics --- art, music, literature, nature, education, folk culture, civic affairs, criminology, spirituality, and of course politics. Of numerous letters to Sarat Chandra Bose, the most evocative perhaps is the one describing a dust storm followed by a torrential rain in Mandalay jail.

**Mahatma Gandhi’s (1869-1948) prison writings include his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth, Songs from prison* and *Yerawada Mandir.*

*My Experiments with Truth (1927 and 1929)* is an outstanding autobiography. Albert Einstein’s remarks about M.K. Gandhi speak volumes. ‘A man who has confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being, and thus at all times risen superior. Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.’ The first edition of Gandhiji’s Autobiography was published in two volumes, Vol. I in 1927 and Vol. II in 1929. The English translation appeared serially in Young India. It was translated into English from Gujarati by Mahadev Desai. Chapters XXIX-XLIII of Part V were translated by Pyarelal during Desai’s absence in Bardoli at the time of the Bardoli Agrarian Inquiry by the Broomfield Committee in 1928-29.

*Songs from Prison. (Translations of Indian Lyrics made in Jail, 1934)*

During his prison term in 1930, Gandhi translated into English a number of Indian devotional poems. He sent them to John S. Holyland, who published them in a book form with some adaptations as *Songs from prison.*

Gandhi translated into English several of the verses (Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, etc). He loved to translate poems to make use of enforced leisure in prison.

**Yerawada Mandir (1932):** Gandhi regarded jail as a Mandir. It made no difference whether he was in jail or out of jail. It was all the same to him.


**The Jail Note Book (1994) by Bhagat Singh (1907-1931):** Bhagat Singh, a revolutionary, a fierce freedom fighter was dead against the imperial government and wanted to avenge the death of Lala Lajpat Rai. The revolutionaries planned to kill Scott, superintendent of police, Lahore. On 17th December 1928, exactly one month after the martyrdom of Lala Lajpat Rai, J.R. Saunders, an assistant superintendent of police was shot dead near the SP’s office and the D.A.V College, Lahore. Jai Gopal, Raj Guru, Bhagat Singh, Chander Shekhar Azad and Sukhdev carried out this mission and made a successful escapade. This gutsy act bewildered the authorities beyond measure. Bhagat Singh was hanged. He had left behind the manuscript of *The Jail Note Book*, which ran to three hundred four pages. He wrote this Jail Diary during his internment in the Central Jail Lahore, which was later published with an introduction by Chaman Lal. The original document was taken from National Archives of
India, New Delhi. His interests vary from English Literature, Russian Literature, French History and many more.

Bhagat Singh read and wrote so much; one can only marvel at the explosion of talent at the age of 21 years-plus. He wrote letters to members of his family and friends, jail and court officials, and penned major articles including Why I am an Atheist. His Letters to young political workers. Here is a specimen of:

“Revolution is made by labouring intellectuals and hardworking activists. Unfortunately, the intellectual side of the Indian Revolution has always remained weak. As a result, the essential elements of the revolution as well as the effects of work accomplished have not been sufficiently addressed. Therefore, it is necessary for a revolutionary to consider studying and reflection a sacred duty.”

The Spirits Pilgrimage is a memoir cum autobiography of Mirabehn (Madeline Slade) (1891-1981). Mirabehn came to India at the age of thirty-three renouncing an aristocratic upbringing in order to be with Gandhi and his cause. Mirabehn, became Gandhiji’s disciple and soon she came to know of Gandhi since the day she landed in India. She spent next 33 years of her life working with him becoming his only western woman disciple. Even after the death of Gandhi, she spent another ten years in India working on different community projects. She was not just a secretary or assistant, but a diplomatic adviser and project manager. On occasion she was even sent by Gandhi to represent him in negotiations with British officials. She stayed on in India until 1959, continuing her work to improve the lives of the poor. Her total dedication was rock-like, as it required her to face a much harder life than she would have had at home in England: stressful political situations
and imprisonment, extremely hot humid climate, poor sanitation, typhoid and repeated bouts of malaria, living in mud huts with scorpions and ticks, hard daily physical labor, language and cultural barriers. It is a memoir-cum-autobiography of Madeline Slade. This memoir contains subtle expressions of her despairs and disappointments, love and longings in her life and unexplainable sorrow and the feelings of incompleteness appearing in her memoir stand as the true testimonials of her 'tumultuous' times in India.

This is her story in her own words, told as though to the reader sitting in front of her. It also contains her philosophical commentaries on Gandhi and his work.

_Tarjuman al-Quran, (1931),_ Urdu translation and commentary and _Ghubar-e-Khatir_ (Sallies of Mind), a collection of letters by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958) are unique examples in prison writings. Azad was imprisoned twice in a row during the civil disobedience period, and then released in 1936 along with the other Congress leaders. It was during these periods of imprisonment that the Maulana was able to complete the first edition of his famous _Tarjuman al-Quran_, his Urdu translation and commentary on the Quran. His autobiography, _India Wins Freedom_ was dictated to Humayun Kabir, after many years, describing the real incidents of the freedom struggle. Among his writings, _Tarjuman-ul-Quran_ published in 1931, occupies the pride of place. It was essentially a commentary on the sacred text of Islam, which he used to demonstrate the moral legitimacy of India as a homeland for the Muslim community in sub-continent. He desired to co ordinate the teachings of Islam with the principles of human welfare and for this it was necessary to cleanse the Islamic principles of the myths and superstitions which had crept into them. Tarjuman ul-Quran turned out to be a highly successful commentary as it reflected Azad’s amazingly vast
store of knowledge, his clarity of mind, his phenomenal memory and his extra-ordinary power of expression and communication. *Ghubar-e-Khatir* (Sallies of Mind) is the last of Maulana's writings and perhaps the most unique one. Whereas his earlier writings whether journalistic or academic dealt with either religion or politics, here he takes leave of both the preoccupations and uses the solitude of political incarceration to give expression to his innermost thoughts on various phenomena of life. Writing letters was his favourite pass time. So he wrote letters, when he was detained in the Ahmednagar Fort, to Nawab Salar Jung, Habibur Rahman Khan Sherwani- a renowned theologian with the Nizam's Government at Hyderabad, which were never posted. These letters convey, in balanced and dignified manner, the essence of Azad's mature experience.

*Glimpses of World History* (1934), *Autobiography* (1936), *The Discovery of India*, *A Bunch of Old Letters* were among the most significant prison writings of Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964).

He was the first premier and architect of modern India. Nehru is at his best while writing about his jail experience. He spent several years behind prison bars, and the fact that he wrote his autobiography in jail has set the tone of the book, contemplative and analytical. Boredom is an inevitable experience in the solitude of jail but Nehru kept himself occupied in reading and writing; yet he would long for a thousand and one small things of life beyond the prison walls.

*Glimpses of World History 'Being Further Letters to his Daughter, Written in Prison, and Containing a Rambling account of History of Young People'.* On New Year's Day, 1931, Jawaharlal Nehru began a remarkable series of letters on the history of the world to his daughter Indira, then thirteen years old. Over the next thirty months, Nehru wrote nearly two
hundred letters in this series, which were later published as *Glimpses of World History*. It is the story of formation and growth of the world. The account of geology and biology is, however interspersed with a touch of personal feeling. The large movement of planetary life is immediately related to his personal hopes and fears. The sorrow and joy of life became in their turn integrated in the larger life of the universe.

*(In and out of Prison: An Autobiographical Narrative with Musings on Recent Events in India)* was his most accomplished piece of writing. This book was written entirely in prison. Nehru’s attempt was to trace his own mental development, and not to make a survey of Indian history. As a story of India’s national struggle, it is unsurpassed, as a sympathetic study of the character of the men who then shaped India’s destiny, it has no equal. A feeling for the drama of life is matched by a deep insight into the motives of man. At once lyrical and epic, it displays Nehru’s manifold qualities as a writer and man. The story of his own life is fused in the story of the nation and its struggle for freedom and liberty. The poignancy of personal sorrow that broods over its pages.

*The Discovery of India*, (1944) was written in Ahmednagar fort prison between April to September 1944. It was his ninth term of imprisonment Nehru wrote his books to relive the monotony and boredom of jail life. He remained entirely cut off from all news of the outside world. No interviews and other contacts. The prison life – one is compelled to lead a passive and inactive life. He had plenty of leisure in jail to complete his task within an allotted period of time. It runs to well over 400 pages and covers over 4000 years of India’s history from the Vedic period to the mid-20th century. It discusses many periods of social transformation in India’s long history. *The Discovery of India* is a revolutionary leader’s instrument of
propaganda it is a skilful arrangement of selected historical events building up the cumulative effect of India's urge to freedom.

*A Bunch of Old Letters* (1958) is a collection of letters, spanning three decades from the birth of his daughter Indira in 1917 to the achievement of India's Independence, was first published in November 1958. Nehru had for some years contemplated such a collection, and he set himself to work on it when, after more than a decade in the Prime Minister's office, he was feeling particularly disaffected with political life. He longed for the real leisure needed to write a book. Instead, his authorial energies went into the making of this collection. Once selected, he instructed his private secretary, M.O. Mathai, to have the letters retyped (with spelling errors corrected, dates checked) and arranged chronologically; and he then went about preparing explanatory notes, to be inserted wherever he felt necessary. Of the 368 letters that Nehru chose to publish in *A Bunch of Old Letters*, just 38 are written by Nehru himself. But the skill of the great letter-writer, as that of the conversationalist, is not only what they themselves write, but what they are able to get others to write to them. In these letters we get a sense of how Nehru appeared to colleagues as well as antagonists.

*My Days in Prison* (1934) by Urmila Shastri gives a glimpse of a time in history and tells the story a common citizen of the country, a woman, fighting for Indian independence and going to jail. In the year 1930 during in the Civil Disobedience Movement led by Mahatma Gandhi millions of Indians bought and publicly set British goods on fire. Among them was Urmila Shastri, who joined the movement as a volunteer for the Congress. She was arrested on the grounds of both picketing and instigating university students against the Government with the words: 'Who knows whom the shining rays of tomorrow's sun will awaken with the golden chains of imprisonment and the sacrifices demanded of mother-love?' The British
magistrate asked her to apologise so that he could acquit her under a facade of justice. Instead, she chose to go to jail no matter what trouble it meant. Regular fights, the obscene forms of entertainment, the beatings, the blatant abuse of authority, the constant need to escape reality, Shastri describes her personal experience and observations in the prison. The naked face of cruelty and barbarism which is revealed through the treatment of prisoners has a far reaching effect on the author and her heartfelt anguish is revealed through each and every chapter. Her faith in the Mahatma's message also piques with each day spent in prison witnessing the loss of humanity.

The fetid smells, the unhygienic conditions, the inadequate and more often inedible food, the multitude of vectors leading to illnesses - all these circumstances describe the oppressiveness faced by the prisoners. The apathy shown by the warden and other persons in authority stir feelings of anger and help one understand the reasons behind the author's conviction of loss of humanity with the stronghold of the British causing psychological trauma. The inhumane treatment meted out is truly disturbing in nature which resonate in one's mind.

The piquant manner in which she is attached to Meerut, the effects of solitude and isolation on the author touches the reader to the quick in an inexplicable manner. Her powerful words laced with pain and determination strikes a chord with the reader.

M.N.Roy (1886-1954)’s *Fragments of a Prisoner's Diary: Letters from Jail* (1940) is remarkable for its threefold interest. It presents a panorama of the great Leftist movements in Europe, which rose to prominence during and after the First World War...... Its second interest is its lurid, but in my opinion, truthful analysis of the mind and the impossibilities of our political leadership. Nowhere have Mr. Gandhi and
Gandhism been subjected to such scorching criticism as in this volume; but I don't suppose they will shrivel up.... In this field of criticism, intended to be fruitful and good, though bound to be unpleasant, Mr Roy displays a power of insight and analysis and bold and frank expression which even those who feel annoyed will have to admire. I wonder if he can succeed in shocking the Hindu mind into realism and rationalism. He is an iconoclast in the land of idols.....

Thirdly, the book is a revelation, unconscious, true, unvarnished, of one of the most remarkable personalities of contemporary India, perhaps the most remarkable. From hints and incidental statements we can gather that physically Mr Roy has been all over the world, not as a tourist, but as a participator in movements, surface or underground, which aim at a Leftist renovation of the world, her face restored to socialist freshness and smiles and after removing the tear furrowed capitalistic wrinkles.... If any person makes a collection of all the books mentioned in these letters from jail, it would make a complete, dynamic library of modernism in many of its branches, both thought and life.

_Economy of Permanence (1948)_ by J.C.Kumarappa (1892-1952) was written during his imprisonment in Nasik prison. He was forced to take over the editorship of _Young India_ from Gandhiji in 1932. His vigorous articles sent him to jail. He was released after two and a half years in Nasik Prison, in 1934. Soon he was called by Gandhiji to help one of the biggest relief operations after Bihar earthquake. He was put in charge of accounts in helping Rajendr Prasad for almost a year. He wrote two books during his imprisonment, _'Economy of Permanence' and Practice and Precepts of Jesus_, which were considered to be splendid work in those days. Like Antonio Gramsci's _'Prison Diary'_ Kumarappa's work also had great importance in universal value. Since Gandhiji found universal value in those
two books, in his capacity as the Chancellor of the National University, he conferred on him Doctor of Village Industries (DVI) and Doctor of Divinity (DD) respectively. However, after his release from the prison, his health completely broke down and he took rest at the guesthouse of Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur. In *Economy of Permanence: A Quest for Social Order Based on Non-Violence* (1948), Kumarappa sets down his ideas on economics. In nature, creatures co-exist in such a way that each fulfills its necessary role. "In this way, nature enlists the co-operation of all its units, each working for itself and in the process helping other units to get along their own too. When this works out harmoniously and violence does not break the chain, we have an economy of permanence. "In an economy of permanence, everybody helped each other out. In contrast, there was the economy of transience, in which everyone tried to do well only for him/herself. An economy of transience was violent; it chewed up nature. His favourite example for this was the way pesticides and chemical fertilisers were used to produce crops in ever increasing amounts. Sure, the crops got produced, but after a while the soil got spoilt: no more lush green fields. An economy of permanence, on the other hand, did not destroy nature.

*The Story of My Life* by Bhai Paramanand (dates not available) was written in Cellular Jail in Andaman. He was arrested in connection with the First Lahore Conspiracy Case and was sentenced to death in 1915. The sentence was later commuted to one of transportation for life: he was imprisoned in the Andaman Islands until 1920 and subjected to hard labour. In protest against such harsh treatment of political prisoners, Bhai Parmanand went on hunger strike for two months. The King-Emperor, George V released him in 1920 as the result of a general amnesty order. His *The Story of My Life* was published in 1934. It provides the moving account of Bhai Paramanand, who was deported to Cellular Jail of Andaman.
pages of the book transport the reader to Andamans. The journey begins with the imprisonment in Central Jail, Lahore to the New life he assumes after five years. It was translated by N. Sundra Iyer and Lal Chand. Here is a specimen of his writing:

The jail authorities counted us in the usual fashion and let us in and kept us in barracks which accommodated other prisoners bound for the "Blackwater." With fetters on hands and legs, carrying blankets, clothes and mats on our heads and two iron bowls in our hands we must have been a strange spectacle as we entered the barracks and spreading our beds lay down to sleep.  

Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1928)’s Letters and Other Writings are more important than his Gita Rahasya. Most of the letters he wrote are from Mandalay jail. He knew that all his letters would be censored by the jail authorities and so did not care much about embellishments. He wrote more or less in a businesslike manner.

Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the father of Indian unrest, infused a new spirit of militancy into the congress activities. He drew the lower middle class into the freedom struggle. His approach was strong fare for the moderate party in the Indian National Congress, which believed in making “loyal” representations to the government for small reforms. Tilak aimed at Swarajya (Independence), not piecemeal reforms, and attempted to persuade the Congress to adopt his militant programme. The government prosecuted Tilak on a charge of sedition and inciting terrorism and deported him to Mandalay, Burma (Myanmar), to serve a sentence of six years' imprisonment. He handled the injustice philosophically, saying,
It may be the will of the Providence that the cause I represent may prosper more by my sufferings than by my remaining free.”8

He wrote *Srimad Bhagavad Gita Rahasya* (1935) in Mandalay jail. The Bhagawadgita-Rahasya ("Secret of the Bhagavadgītā"), was his magnum opus an original exposition of the most sacred book of the Hindus. Tilak discarded the orthodox interpretation that the Bhagavadgītā taught the ideal of renunciation; in his view it taught selfless service to humanity. Tilak interprets Gita as the scripture of Karma Yoga. The book consists of two parts. The first part is the philosophical exposition and the second part consists of the Gita, its translation and commentary. For Tilak *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* becomes the gospel of work. It teaches him the art of fighting for freedom.

B.K.Sinha wrote *Memoirs of a Revolutionary Andaman: The Indian Bastille* (1939) in the Cellular Jail of Andaman. He was one of the young revolutionaries in the group of Bhagat Singh and Chandra Shekhar Azad who were deported to Andamans.

After a farce of trial three of the accused in the Lahore conspiracy Case (1929) were sent to the gallows and many others, including the author, were sentenced to varying periods of imprisonment. After being kept in various prisons in the mainland, the author with a host of others were finally sent to Andamans. Sinha puts it.

After my conviction I was moved from one jail to another in different provience as a ‘C’ class prisoner. From Lahore to Multan, from Multan to Rajahmandry, and then to Andamana and back again to Punjab- I have been tossed from one prison to
another all these years, till I have just been released from Lucknow District Jail, on medical grounds.

His Memoirs of a Revolutionary Andaman : The Indian Bastille unfolds, against the grim backdrop of the Cellular Jail of Port Blair, the moving and profoundly tragic story of the epic struggle of the revolutionaries, many of the fine specimens of study individuals, against the horror and cruelty of a soulless prison system. The treatment meted out in the prison was vindictive to the extreme which dehumanised the inmates and killed their very soul. Not all who went into the cell came out alive; several went insane. The fierce struggle of the prisoners, especially their first hunger strike, during which one of the inmates died, aroused nationwide sympathy.

Chakravarty Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) 1878-1972 wrote A Jail Diary (1941), in the Vellore Central Jail. Rajaji was the most maverick of all the national leaders. His political career from a chief minister of a state to governor of a state, to governor-general of India, to a minister of central government and ending up again as the chief minister of Madras is outstanding. He has been praised for his sharp intellect and power of analysis. His A Jail Diary, covers a period of nearly four months from 21-12-1921 to 20-03-1922. It holds a unique place among Indian English diaries. His Diary remains a historic document on the non co-operation movement, a unique chapter in the history of our freedom struggle. Like Gandhiji, Rajaji was a prolific bilingual writer. All the writings of Rajaji are marked by terseness, lucidity and literary flavour. A Jail Diary is about the feelings, ideas and daily chats of its author during the days of his imprisonment.

Rajaji here compares India to a jail, and all Indians to convicts. Political subjugation is nothing less than imprisonment, in his
... view. The spirit of the country lies languishing in a prison, without the iron bars.¹⁰

The author of *My Trip to Pakistan (1944)* Yusuf Meherally (1903-1950) was first arrested in 1930 and sentenced to four months’ imprisonment. Again in 1932, he was charged with conspiracy and sentenced to two years imprisonment. Being one of the founder-members of the Congress Socialist Party, he was arrested in connection with the Individual Satyagraha in 1940, and was released the next year. Later, during a tour of Punjab, he was arrested again on a charge of having defied a prohibitory order. While still in Lahore jail, he was elected the Mayor of Bombay. He was at that time the General Secretary of the Congress Socialist Party and accepted the mayoral office, only on the express condition that he would be allowed to devote himself to Party work as usual. He created a new precedent by personally attending to citizen’s complaints on civic matters; he initiated the system of quick dispatch of files and put down official slackness with an iron hand. While in Lahore jail for nearly a year he wrote his satirical masterpiece *My Trip to Pakistan*. Politics and personalities of Punjab were dealt with in such great detail that even long residents of the province had something to learn from it.

*The Gandhian plan* (1944), by Shriman Narayan Agarwal (1912-) is a significant book, which caught the attention of all the followers of Gandhi. A veteran Gandhian, Shriman Narayan Agarwal worked with Gandhi and Nehru in Sevagram and was the principal of a college in Vardha, actively participated in satyagraha activities. He was a member of the parliament and governor of Gujarat. His book *The Gandhian plan* (1944), was published at a time when, except Gandhiji all other national leaders were still under detention. The book was read widely in the country and the attention of our leaders too was attracted towards it in jails. Even Pandit Nehru spent some
time reading it in Ahmednagar jail and used quotations from it liberally in writing his own book *Discovery of India*. What he says about his book is very revealing.

'I decided to write economic plan in accordance with Gandhiji’s ideas on the subject. Luckily, the jailor allowed me to obtain all the necessary books from the library of my college at Wardha, and I devoted most of my time to reading books and jotting down points for my treatise. I do not think I spent so much time in serious study even during my student days at the Allahabad University. But all this study in jail proved very helpful in enabling me to finalise the type script of the *Gandhian Plan* soon after my release.'

Vijayalakshmi Pandit (1900-1990)’s *Prison Days (1946)* is autobiographical in content and form. When Mahatma Gandhi gave a call to the women of the country, Mrs. Pandit entered into the freedom struggle and offered her services to the nation wholeheartedly like her father Motilal and brother Jawaharlal. In fact, the Nehru family as a whole— including male and female, major and minor ones— came forward to form the vanguard of freedom fighters at the call of the Mahatma. She wrote her *Prison Days (1946)* in Naini Jail. It covers a period of about ten months from 12 August, 1942 to 11 June, 1943, was intermittently written in Naini Jail during the days of the author’s imprisonment.

*Prison Days* recording the hardships of jail life in general and her own jail life in particular was meant to let posterity know the grim stories that were enacted behind the prison gates, as the diarist herself makes clear in the preface to the Diary: “This (Prison Days) may help in giving a picture of the conditions prevailing in one of the better run jails of the United Provinces.”
Pattabhi Sitaramayya (1880-1959), the author of *Feathers and Stones* (1946) was arrested with the entire committee and incarcerated for three years without outside contact in the fort at Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, while serving on the Congress Working Committee, when *Quit India* was launched in 1942. During this time he maintained a detailed diary of day-to-day life during imprisonment, which was published later as *Feathers and Stones*. He is also the author of *The History of the Congress* published in 1935 with an introductory note by the Rajendra Prasad. His other popular publication was *Gandhi and Gandhism*. The account of the days spent in a jail by Pattabhi Sitaramayya can be availed from the book *Feathers and Stones*. Though he penned this book during his stay in jail, it was published later.

The author of *India Divided* (1946) and *Autobiography* (1957), Dr. Rajendra Prasad (1884-1963) was the first president of the Republic of India. An independence activist and a prominent Gandhian, was a close associate of Gandhi from the time of Champaran Satyagraha in 1916. Inspite of being detained in jail, Rajendra Prasad would keep writing something or the other. *India Divided* is an important historical document. The question of the partition of India into Muslim and Hindu zones assumed importance after the All India Muslim League passed a resolution in its favour in March 1940 in Lahore. Most of the *India Divided* was written in prison and it was published in 1946, a year before India was partitioned. It specifically examines the theory that the Hindus and Muslims of India were two nations, and concludes that the solution for the Hindu-Muslim issue should be sought in the formation of a secular state, with cultural autonomy for the different groups that make up the nation. It traces the origins and growth of the Hindu-Muslim conflict, gives the summary of the several schemes for the partition of India which were put forth, and points out the essential ambiguity of the Lahore Resolution. Finally, it deals with the resources of
the Muslim-majority states and shows how the suggested scheme of Partition was impracticable, and proposes a new solution to the Hindu-Muslim question.

Dr Rajendra Prasad wrote his 1900 page *Autobiography*, while he was in prison between 1942 and 1945. First published in Hindi, it takes us through his childhood, his life in his village Chapra, his early education with his teacher ‘Maulvi Saheb’, his years as a student in Calcutta, his marriage at the age of twelve and his legal practice. It discusses not only his personal tribulations, but is also an examination of the last years of British colonial rule in India. As a freedom fighter and a close associate of Gandhi, Dr.Prasad was privy to political developments in the decades before independence. He records Gandhi’s influence on him, the call for non-co-operation in Bihar as part of Gandhiji’s larger all-India movement, the boycott of foreign goods, the shadow of communalism and the Hindu-Muslim question, Satyagraha and social reform.

*Mazi Janmathep" (My Life Sentence),(1947)*byV.D.Savarkar(1883-1966) is a moving account of his life in jail.

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the sole inspiration, and moving spirit of the conspiracy extending over a number of years, was sentenced to transportation for life and forfeiture of all his property. Another accused person Keshav Shripad Chandvadkar was sentenced to transportation for fifteen years. Three other accused persons were sentenced to ten years' Rigorous Imprisonment, one 7 years, 5 five years, 4 four years, 3 three years, 2 two years, and the remaining 4 six months each. The case concluded and the sentences were passed on 24th December 1910. During his incarceration, Savarkar's views began turning increasingly towards Hindu cultural and political nationalism, and the next phase of his life remained dedicated to
this cause. In the brief period he spent at the Ratnagiri jail, Savarkar wrote his ideological treatise – *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*. Smuggled out of the prison, it was published by Savarkar’s supporters under his alias "Maharatta." In this work, Savarkar promotes a radical new vision of Hindu social and political consciousness. Savarkar began describing a "Hindu" as a patriotic inhabitant of Bharatavarsha, venturing beyond a religious identity. While emphasising the need for patriotic and social unity of all Hindu communities, he described Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism as one and the same. He outlined his vision of a "Hindu Rashtra" (*Hindu Nation*) as "Akhand Bharat" (*United India*), purportedly stretching across the entire Indian subcontinent.

Veer Savarkar wrote more than 10,000 pages in the Marathi language. His literary works in Marathi include "Kamala", "Mazi Janmathep" (My Life Sentence), and most famously "1857 - The First War of Independence", about what the British referred to as the Sepoy Mutiny. Savarkar popularised the term 'First War of Independence'. Another noted book was "Kale Pani" (similar to Life Sentence, but on the island prison on the Andamans), which reflected the treatment of Indian freedom fighters by the British.

When in the Cellular jail, Savarkar was denied pen and paper. He composed and wrote his poems on the prison walls with thorns and pebbles, memorised thousand lines of his poetry for years till other prisoners returning home brought them to India. Savarkar is credited with several popular neologisms in *Marathi* and *Hindi*, like "Hutatma" (Martyr), "Mahapaur" (Mayor), *Digdarshak* (leader or director, one who points in the right direction).
Thorns and Thistles: Autobiography of a Revolutionary (1948) by Gulab Singh is a memoir of a revolutionary. Gulab Singh was an active member of H.S.R.A.(Hindustan Socialist Republican Army), revolutionary group which aimed to overthrow the Britishers through militant activities. He was accused in Second Lahore Conspiracy case.

Thorns and Thistles is the memoir of Gulab Singh’s activities as a member of a revolutionary party working for the freedom of India and his long term imprisonment from 1930 to 1946. His gaol term began at the tender age of seventeen when he was arrested in a bomb case in Lahore. The best period of his life was spent behind prison bars. The most remarkable experience described in the book is that of his mental agony when he lived under sentence of death that was later commuted into life-imprisonment.

History of Orissa by Dr. Harekrishna Mahtab (1899-1975) was written when he was in jail along with other national leaders. Harekrishna Mahtab underwent several terms of imprisonment, suffering enough privation and hardship. He served post-Independence India with distinction in various capacities has been considered as the ‘Builder of Modern Orissa’. He served as Chief Minister of Orissa, Governor of Bombay and as a Union Minister. From 1933-37 he worked for the upliftment of Harijans in the "Gandhi Karm Mandir Ashram" at Agarpara and also at Jhadapipal village, north Balasore.

In 1942 British imprisoned him for speaking publicly against the British raj. He spent some time at Bardoloi with Mahatma Gandhi. During the national Movement he was imprisoned for seven times and for a total period of about eight years. Along with other national leaders he was imprisoned from August 1942 to April 1945 and he spent this time writing a
history of Orissa, 3 novels and a number of poems. He has written as many as 24 books in English and Oriya.

*From Primitive Communism to Slavery* is a major work of S.A. Dange (1899 - 1991) was published in 1949. Shripad Amrit Dange was a founding member of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and a stalwart of Indian trade union movement. During the British Raj, Dange was arrested by the British authorities for communist and trade union activities and was jailed for an overall period of 13 years. After India's Independence, a series of events like Sino-Soviet split, Sino-Indian war, and the revelation that while in jail, Dange had written letters to the British Government, offering to cooperate with Britain against Germany in the World War II, led to a split in the Communist Party of India, in 1964. The breakaway Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) emerged stronger both in terms of membership and their performance in the Indian Elections. Dange who remained the Chairman of the CPI till 1978, was removed in that year because the majority of party workers were against Dange's political line of supporting Indian National Congress, and Indira Gandhi, the then Congress Prime Minister. He was expelled from the CPI in 1981. He joined the All India Communist Party (AICP), and later, United Communist Party of India. Towards the end, Dange got increasingly marginalized in the Indian Communist movement. He was also a well-known writer and was the founder of *Socialist* the first socialist weekly in India.

The book attempted to analyze stages of growth of society in ancient India. The author had painfully researched ancient scriptures and other sources to make it a definitive tome. Engels’ book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* was the kind of road map he used. He analyzed the ancient epics to arrive at the reasons for origin of private
property in India. The first draft of the book was written in Yerawada Jail between October 1942 and January 1943.

MAHADEV DESAI (1892-1942)’s *Day to Day with Gandhi (1953)* is a diary kept by him in order to play the Boswell to Gandhi. Mahadev Desai who worked as Gandhiji’s secretary for 25 years with unmatched devotion and affection. He created a sensation by bringing out a hand-written cyclostyled newspaper, *Independent*, from Allahabad, after the printing press was confiscated by the British government. Desai was sentenced to one year rigorous imprisonment for his writing. In prison, Desai saw that the jail authorities mistreated prisoners, frequently flogging them. His report describing the life inside an Indian jail, published in *Young India* and *Navajivan*, compelled the British authorities to bring about some drastic jail reform measures.

Mahadev Desai, Gandhi’s Boswell, was privileged to be in close association with Gandhi. So he was able to show the Mahatma off the stage and below the platform, and wrote several books on the non-violent struggles led by Gandhi in India, and a diary called *Day to Day with Gandhi* in nine volumes. Besides keeping a day-to-day diary, Desai also contributed regularly to *Young India* and *Navajivan*, two journals of which Gandhi was the editor. During Gandhi’s incarceration, Mahadev Desai took up the responsibility of the editorship of *Navajivan*, also the credit translating Gandhi’s autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, into English goes to him only.

*Even Behind the Bars*(1961)by Kakasaheb Kalelkar (1885-1981), originally written in Gujarati, was translated by Sarojini Nanavati into English. Duttatreyya Balakrushna Kalelkar, popularly known as Kakasaheb Kalelkar, was a true Gandhian. He was a scholar of Indian culture,
historian, educationist and journalist. After independence he was made chairman of backward classes committee in 1953. In 1922, after the imprisonment of Gandhi on a charge of sedition, the responsibility of editing *Navjivan* fell on Kakasaheb Kalelkar’s shoulders. He too was imprisoned on similar charges of sedition for one year in 1923. *Even Behind the Bars*, was originally written in Gujarati as ‘ *Ottervati Divaro* ’ and was later translated by Sarojini Nanavati in English.

*My Life and Struggle (1969) by Badasha Khan (Abdul Gafar Khan) (1890-1988)* is an autobiography. Popularly known as Frontier Gandhi, Badshah Khan was a tribal chieftain, a bearded giant, had devoted his life to carrying Gandhi’s message of love and passive resistance to Pathan tribesmen to whom the blood feud and the vendetta were an integral part of existence. The autobiography of Badashah Khan was narrated to K.B. Narang. The Faktuni leader gives a moving account of his arrests and imprisonment. The chapters bear significant titles ‘Why were We arrested,’ ‘Hijrat Campaign’ ‘A Change of Prisons,’ ‘Life in British Prisons’. The opinions expressed are plain.

*Memoirs of an Unrepentant Communist (1975)* by A.S.R.Chari is an exciting account of his arrests and imprisonments during freedom struggle. A.S.R.Chari was a Congressman in 1930, the second is the suspected communist in 1940 and for the third time as a well known communist in 1949. A well known pleader and freedom fighter succumbs in the court hall in Hyderabad.

The exciting younger days of freedom fighting in Bombay, his political arrests, imprisonment and -most important- his attraction towards the Communist movement and ideology are depicted. Here is a specimen:
In the ‘B’ class at Nasik we had a fine assemblage of prisoners. There were Gandhiji’s Ashram Lieutenant like Ravishankar Maharaj, Mohanlal Pandya, Narharibhai Parekh and Mashruwalla, leaders of the Forest Satyagraha in Sangamner from Maharashtra Muslim leaders like Maulana Abdul Surti and Ali Bahadur, and versatile artists like Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. Above all, it was here I came into personal contact with my first live communist – S.G.Sardesi, now a well known communist leader of Maharashtra. 12

555 Days in Jail Recollections of a Misa Detenu (1978) by Haridwari Lal, contains a moving and objective account of about 19 months of the Author’s detention under MISA in different jails, liberally interspersed with touches of humour and sarcasm, and incisive comments on the operation of the country’s political system. The portraits of some eminent men detained along with the author also figure in the book.

To come to the story of my own arrest, I was pulled out of a bus bound for Chadigarh, on the outskirts of Delhi, in the evening of 26th June, 1975, by some of Bansl Lal’s hired hoodlums detained me there for the next few days in the High Court for pursuing my writ petition against my expulsion from the State Assembly, fixed for hearing at Chandigarh on 2nd July, 197513.

A Prisoner’s Scrap-Book, by L.K.Advani is a scathing criticism of the Emergency. It covers a period from 26-06-1975 to 18-01-1977. It is an important addition not only to the treasure of Indian English diaries, but also to the literature on the Emergency, with some insights into the JP movement.
In the shadow of Gallows by C.A. Balan is a compelling account of the 11 years the author, a communist trade Unionist, spent in jail waiting to be hanged on charges of murder, and his reflections on justice, prisons and the dark humanity on both sides of a prison bar.

Jayaprakash Narayan (1902-1979)'s Prison Diary (1978) is a heroic document. Jayaprakash Narayan widely known as JP, Loknayak, was an Indian independence activist and political leader, remembered especially for leading the opposition to Indira Gandhi in the 1970s and for giving a call for peaceful Total Revolution. After being jailed in 1932 for civil disobedience against British rule, Narayan was imprisoned in Nasik Jail, where he met Ram Manohar Lohia, Minoo Masani, Achyut Patwardhan, Ashok Mehta, Yusuf Desai and other national leaders. After his release, the Congress Socialist Party, or (CSP), a left-wing group within the Congress, was formed with Acharya Narendra Deva as President and Narayan as General secretary. When Mahatma Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement in August, 1942, Yogendra Shukla scaled the wall of Hazaribagh Central Jail along with Jayaprakash Narayan, Suraj Narayan Singh, Gulab Chand Gupta, Ramnandan Mishra and Shaligram Singh with a view to starting underground movement for freedom.

JP could not sit idle when politics began at last to drift to an authoritarian rule. He was imprisoned on the eve of promulgation of Emergency in June 1975 but was released next year on account of shattered health and an unaccountable kidney trouble. But physically weak JP saw in the encircling gloom a ray of hope. He inspired political parties other than the ruling one to combine as a single Janata Party against dictatorship and the smothering of all freedoms under Emergency regime.
After his arrest, JP was kept in solitary confinement in the Chandigarh Medical Institute. Since it was detention in the ward of a super speciality hospital declared as jail. He did try to keep a dairy of events in between bouts of demoralisation, depression and ill health, but could manage only fifty nine day’s of entry during the 139 days he was in detention. Most of the entries are patchy and brief.

JP’s *A Prison Diary* becomes important to both general readers and literary critics for four obvious reasons: Firstly, it deals with the Emergency imposed for the first time in free India; Secondly, its author is JP who had, after Gandhi, the greatest attraction for the Indian masses by reason of his simple but heroic deeds; thirdly, “the Diary reads as a human and heroic document.”

Lastly, the diary becomes a vehicle for its author to pour out his agonized thoughts and to set forth his theory of total revolution.

*Reflections of a detenue (1978) by Balraj Madhok(1920- )* gives a revealing account of the Emergency. Balraj Madhok was a president of Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS) and a senior politician of India in 1960s. He assisted Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in formation of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh in 1951, which in 1980 got transformed into Bharatiya Janta Party. He was the first secretary of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh. He scripted the first manifesto of the Party. He was arrested during Emergency and was imprisoned for 18 months, (1975–1977). He initially joined the Janata Party but later resigned in 1979 and revived the Bharatiya Jana Sangh under the name Akhil Bharatiya Jana Sangh, but was not successful.

*Snehalata Reddi’s A Prison Diary* deals with the excesses of the Emergency. Snehalata Reddy, A versatile genius (a dancer, artist, director, socialist and above all a humanitarian), was imprisoned on May 1, 1976
without any specific charges made against her. During her imprisonment she maintained and wrote a diary. Extracts from her diary under the title *A Prison Diary* were published in 1977 by U.R. Ananth Murthy. The diary is very slender but its contents expose the excesses of Emergency. In a dark barracks of Bangalore Central Jail, being deprived of human companionship and activities, Snehalata began to unburden her heart into the diary because “paper has more patience than man.”

**H.Y. Sharada Prasad’s A Window on the Wall Quit India Prison Diary of a 19 year old** is a posthumous publication. Sharada Prasad was imprisoned twice at the age of 19 in the quit India movement, his first term 10 August 1942 to December 1942 and second term 20 February 1943 to 19 July 1943. During his life time Sharada Prasad had never considered this diary for publication, nor he made use of its contents for an elaborate narrative on his prison life. For freedom fighter H.S. Doreswamy, it was like reliving his own prison days. He said

> It was students who played a vital role in the 1942 Quit India Movement. “All the big leaders were in prison and student leaders like Sharada Prasad kept the movement charged,”.¹⁴

This posthumous publication was the prison diary of a 19-year-old resident of Mysore who had been arrested for his role in the Quit India movement of 1942. H.Y. Sharada Prasad, who was then a student leader in Maharaja’s College, Mysore. In another entry, written in February 1943 while Mahatma Gandhi was on a fast in prison in Pune, Sharada Prasad remarks that:

> “Gandhi’s life, sacred as it is, unique as it is, is not too great a price to be paid for the independence of our country and for the crumbling of an empire”.¹⁵
The 19-year-old diarist writes insightfully about politics and politicians, and about plain humanity. Consider this comparison of prison-mates with travelling companions:

Jail friends are like railway friends. The difference is one of degree; you meet them, know them for a while and part at odd times and scatter away. Rarely do you meet again. You retain a few impressions; and outside you recognize them with difficulty. In jail, you are almost equals. Outside, the difference is vast.”16

Sharada Prasad was studying for an honours degree in English literature at the time he was imprisoned. In his diary, he reflects on what life in jail would do for his appreciation of literature and language. While teaching poetry to a fellow prisoner named Venugopal, he “realized how soon I had forgotten my Honours learning. I am also getting to feel that my appreciation of poetry now will not be as ‘aesthetic’ or half as ‘aesthetic’ as a year ago. Those were days of Arcadian hedonism. But now the consciousness that life is not poetry or music but stomach, stomach and stomach, illiteracy, ignorance, egotism, prejudice, jealousy and envy come home to me.

Diaries of a Freedom Fighter (2008) by Gudleppa Hallikeri (1906–1971) is also a posthumous publication. He was a man of varied interests. He was an Indian freedom fighter who is a native of Hosaritti in Haveri district of Karnataka state. Hallikeri worked with many other freedom fighters such as Mahatma Gandhi, Mailar Mahadevappa and Sanikoppa, using peace protests and keeping far way from violence. The Diaries from 1942 to 1972 are brought together in one volume, and its stray writings are edited by S.H.Patil. The first entry is on 12th November and his imprisonment during
Quit India movement. Though the entries are upto 1971, we get the political and cultural scenario of Karnataka in the movement.

Iftikhar Gilani’s *My Days In Prison* (2008) gives an account of harrowing experiences of his prison life. A shocking story of trial, temerity and triumph. His supposed crime: providing information to Pakistan's ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) on the deployment of armed forces in Jammu and Kashmir. The punishment: fourteen years in jail. My Days in Prison is Iftikhar Gilani’s chilling account of the nightmare that followed. Iftikhar Gilani’s harrowing experience reveals in a flash the deep-rooted prejudice against Kashmir and Kashmiris among the so-called elite in Delhi, persons running institutions which are supposed to be fair, and reveals also the deep commitment to human rights in many sections of Indian society in academia as well as in the media.

The brief survey of Indian Prison writings will provide the necessary background for the form wise analysis of select prison writings from socio-political perspectives.
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5. Ibid, p-5.
6. Bhagat Singh’s *Jail Note Book*,p.39
13. Ibid,P.10
15. Ibid,p.22