LITERARY MERIT AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PRISON WRITINGS IN THE PRE AND POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD
CHAPTER-IV
LITERARY MERIT AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PRISON WRITINGS IN THE PRE AND POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Literary merit is the quality shared by all works of fiction that are considered to have aesthetic value. The concept of "literary merit" has been criticized as being necessarily subjective, since personal taste determines aesthetic value, and has been derided as a "relic of a scholarly elite". Despite these criticisms, many criteria have been suggested to determine literary merit including: standing the test of time, realistic characters, emotional complexity, originality, and concern with truth.

Literature is an imaginative recreation, representation and an expression different from reportage. In prison writings it is an expression of birth of suppressed feelings it is the exact mirror of life we lead. According to Milton: ‘A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.’

The prison writings are literature in all respects since they appeal to reader’s heart and soul. Although they deal with social problems and political issues, economics etc, they are not text books of Sociology, History, Political Science and Economics because they are first and foremost works of art. No apology is needed for considering themas pieces of literary excellence.

Prisoners had the opportunity to write about the time of their incarceration, and through process they not only shed light on some corners of political life of contemporary India, but also demonstrate that political prisoners, in the face of torture and fear of execution, are able to create a
culture, like any other social group, in which we find joy and humour alongside depression and fear, as well as a passion for artistic and literary creativity which runs against the ideological brain washing system of the authorities.

They should invite the reader to read and read again. The first quality of literature is to move you. All prison writings may not be of top rank, in respect of literary values; all the same they are literature written with utmost sincerity and urgency. There are poetical qualities, in most of the writings they were poets at heart. The political prisoners were not illiterate persons. They have written emotional and imaginative writings, with wit, humour, irony, and style. Most of them have enduring quality. They transport the reader to the pre independence period. The reader feels the graphic descriptions of torture meted out to the prisoners in Andaman penal colonies and in execution of young freedom fighters like Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev, Chandrashekhar Azad, move the readers to tears.

Instead of taking all the works published from 1908 to 2008, for considering their literary merit, I have taken the works of most representative persons like Sri Aurobindo, Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajaji.

*Tales of Prison Life* is Aurobindo’s account of his experiences as an under trial prisoner in Alipore Jail, Calcutta. Arrested for conspiracy in May 1908, Aurobindo spent one full year in jail while the British Government, in a protracted trial, tried to implicate him in various revolutionary activities. Sri Aurobindo makes clears his plan of writing:

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.
It is not the aim of these essays to provide an intimate journal of my life in the prison. I wish to mention only a few external details, but I have thought it better to mention at least once, in the beginning the main theme of the prison life. Else readers may think that suffering is the only item of prison life. I can’t say there were no inconveniences, but on the whole the time passed quite happily.¹

The poet in Sri Aurobindo soon gets accustomed to the routine of the jail and writes thus:

In the beginning during solitary imprisonment, the mind was a little uneasy. But after three days of prayer and meditation an unshakeable peace and faith again overwhelmed the being.²

The vivid picture of the society, and the treatment of the Britishers towards the citizens of the country is depicted thus:

We all came from gentlemanly stock; many were scions of landlords; some were, in terms of there family, education, quality and character. The equals of highest classes in England. The charge on which we had been arrested, that too was not ordinary murder, theft or dacoity; it was an attempt at insurrection to liberate the country from yoke or conspiracy tending towards armed conflict.³

The description of the prison cell Sri. Aurobindo gives as under:

There were six contiguous rooms like that, in prison parlance these were known as the ‘six decrees’. Decrees’ stood for rooms for special punishment- those who are condemned to solitary
imprisonment by the orders of either the judge or the jail superintendent have to stay in these caves.4

He gives the graphic picture of the bowl, which served multipurpose:

The bowl was free from all caste restrictions, beyond the discrimination: in the prison cell it helped in the act of ablution. Later with the same bowl I gargled, bathed; a little later when I had to take my food, the lentil soup or vegetable soup was poured into the same container; I drank water out of it and washed my mouth. Such an all-purpose priceless object can be only in a British prison.5

Note the biting irony implied in this account.

The poetic way of putting the common things like wind and blazing sunlight are expressed thus:

It was then hot summer, in my little room the wind was almost forbidden to enter. But the fierce and blazing sunlight of may had free excess to it. The entire room would burn like an oven. While being locked thus the only way to lessen ones irresistible thirst was the tepid water in the small tin container. That is why when I recollect my prison life, instead of anger or sorrow I feel like laughing.6

The solitary confinement at Alipore, did not curb his poetic zeal, he composed a poem "Invitation" from Alipore Jail (1908-09)

With wind and the weather beating round me
Up to the hill and the moorland I go.
Who will come with me? Who will climb with me?
Wade through the brook and tramp through the snow?
Not in the petty circle of cities
Cramped by your doors and your walls I dwell;
   Over me God is blue in the welkin,
Against me the wind and the storm rebel.

   I sport with solitude here in my regions,
Of misadventure have made me a friend.
Who would live largely? Who would live freely?
   Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend.

   I am the lord of tempest and mountain,
   I am the Spirit of freedom and pride.
Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger
Who shares my kingdom and walks at my side.\(^7\)

Writings of Sri. Aurobindo who employed winged words in his writings give us the touching—heart rending picture of the conditions prevailed in Calcutta in the first decade of the previous century.

*An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, by Gandhiji, was a sort of a trend setter. As a writer of autobiography Gandhiji’s place is very important. His autobiography, deals with his constant search for truth, besides describing the contemporary social and political conditions and events: these also bring into prominence his personality. Gandhiji’s autobiography is complex and deep in spite of its simplicity; Nehru’s autobiography is remarkable for sensitivity. As a matchless piece of personal revelation, Gandhiji’s autobiography is a classic in world literature.
Gandhiji’s prose style has a Biblical simplicity, precision and brevity. He avoided figurative language, i.e. ornamental way of expression. Bhabani Bhattacharya observes:

His pen faithfully followed his changing moods. But one thing is certain; he was never at a loss for the right word. His mastery of simple, direct, lucid English and the invariably high standard of his massive productivity strongly influenced the writing of the time.⁸

Commenting on Gandhiji’s place as a writer in Indian English prose, and the new direction which Gandhiji’s gave to Indian literature K.R. Shrinivas Iyengar remarks:

Gandhi exercised a potent influence on our languages and literature, both directly through his writings in English and Gujarati and indirectly through the movements generated by his revolutionary thought and practice.... No apology is needed therefore for considering Gandhi as a writer and has formative influence on the writers of his time.⁹

Indian English writers followed the Gandhian example of clarity, lucidity, directness and brevity. M.K. Naik observes:

In keeping with his own conception of art and literature he used a simple, transparent and energetic style which eschewed all oratorical flourishes and communicated with directness of an arrow hitting its mark.¹⁰

Gandhi’s prose is a model of simple, direct and biblical style. For Gandhiji always put the right word in a right place.
Nehru’s autobiography pertains to his involvement in Indian political life. It is a historical narrative. An Autobiography concentrates on the life story of the author no doubt, but Nehru’s work is contemporary history seen from his eyes. Truly speaking, his An Autobiography is neither a personal document, nor history in the true sense of the term. It is a mixture of both, a sort of personal account of the past as he himself called it. What is worth noting is, contemporary India was Nehru’s main focus, that is why it came nearer to being a depiction of history than personal details. He did not expect his autobiography to be judged as a historical work, and if done so it might be found defective. To avoid that he wrote in the Preface: “The fact this resembles superficially such a survey is to mislead the reader and lead him to attach a wider importance to it than it deserves”. It is true that it has got both historical importance’s and literary merit. The reader may attach much importance to the historical narrative than it really deserves. Nehru’s contribution to the shaping of modern Indian consciousness is as significant as his contribution to the making of modern India.

Nehru has poet in him and the Auobiography has rare descriptions. He has a special way of putting the things:

One misses many things in prison, but perhaps most of all one misses the sound of women’s voices and children’s laughter. The sounds one usually hears are not of the pleasantest. The voices are harsh and minatory, and the language brutal and largely consisting of swear-words. Once I remember being struck by a new want. I was in the Lucknow District Gaol and I realised suddenly that I had not heard a dog bark for seven or eight months.
Rabindra Nath Tagore referred to Jawaharlal as the “Rituraj”, representing the season of youth and triumphant joy. Subsequently, in a letter written to Nehru in May 1936, he spoke of Nehru’s *Autobiography* as a book through which “there runs a deep current of humanity which overpasses the tangles of facts and leads us to the person who is greater than his deeds and truer than his surroundings”. It was a rare tribute from one of our greatest poets and artists. Nehru has special concern for the changing cycle of seasons and the effect of nature on his surroundings:

The winter had denuded almost all the trees of their leaves, and they stood naked and bare. Even four magnificent peepal trees, which stood in front of the goal gate, much to my surprise, dropped nearly all their leaves. Gaunt and cheerless they stood there, till the spring air warmed them up again and sent a message of life to their innermost cells. Suddenly there was a stir both in the peepals and the other trees, and an air of mystery surrounded them as of secret operations going on behind the scenes; and I would be It was a gray and cheering sight. And then, very rapidly, the leaves would come out in their millions and glisten in the sun light and play about in the breeze. How wonderful is the sudden change from bud to leaf.¹²

He has special concern for the squirrels of Lucknow jail and amidst his busy schedule also he takes care of a wounded baby squirrel:

Then there were squirrels, crowds of them it trees were about. They would become very venturesome and come right near us. In Lucknow Goal I used to sit reading almost without moving for considerable periods. And a squirrel would climb up my leg and sit on my knee and have a look round. And then it would look into my eyes and realise that I was not a tree or whatever it had taken me for. Fear would disable it for a moment, and then
it would scamper away. Little baby squirrel would sometimes
fall down from the trees. The mother would come after them,
roll them up into a little ball, and carry them off to safety.
Occasionally the baby got baby squirrel and looked after them.
They were so tiny that it was a problem how to feed them. The
problem was, however, solved rather ingeniously. Fountain-pen
filler, with a little cotton wool attached to it, made an efficient
feeding bottle.¹³

Chakravarty Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) 1878-1972 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. He published his A Jail Diary in 1941, written in the Vellore
Central jail, 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 is an example of realistic writing: There are rare passages in the diary:
which are realistic in character.

A carpenter spoke yesterday to me what typically represents
the atmosphere in all prisons now: “When will all this end, sir?
“Soon”, said I, “We should wait. But what is it you want to
come to an end ?” “When will what they all say is coming –
Swaraj –come ? When will of work from us every day and give
food without enough salt and whole dal which is not boiled, and all for half a man’s stomach?14

The entry in the diary on 11-2-22 Saturday, gives a detailed account of the condition of the Vellore jail where, Rajaji was imprisoned. It reads thus:

The night was insufferable. The mosquitoes fill the cell. The breeze outside whistle through the leaves of the trees all the night long, but inside the cell there is not the least movement of air. The single window is too high and marrow, and the cell door is in between two projections of masonry which affectively keep out all movement of air. The mosquitoes seem to be a violent type, for they sting sharply and through thick Khaddar, and get in through the least little gap in your covering which you may keep open for breathing. I suppose putting one in a cell of this sort, with a single whole six feet from the floor for a window, is 'special treatment' for political prisoners. Perhaps I am too bitter, but after a sleepless night this may be excused.15

He gives a realistic picture of the hospital and the open bathing place, and the arrangement of furniture in his ward:

The hospital is a regular hell for bugs. I am told all the wards are the same. In the blocks there are lice and fleas besides. The prisoners' blankets and clothes see washing only once in a way and as for a bath it is hurried through in a crowded competition, and in quantities of water which it would be a real miracle for a man, who has not seen a jail, to see full flow over body and cloth. There are taps and beautiful-looking enclosures with shower—bath pipes overhead, which may please a visitor, but
the latter do not work. My cell and the other cells in this solitary confinement block are comparatively free from bugs and lice. There is no furniture but only a brick and more platform for bed, and the roof is an arched masonry work. The door is of iron-bar frame. There is no crowding, hence the place is free from vermin.16

Rajaji gives his frank opinion of the jail, and how he spent his tenure of three months in the jail on the last day of his release:

Now that I am in “touching distance” of my discharge from jail, I may that these three months that I have spent here have been one of the happiest periods of my life. The last twenty days that I have been here in the non-co-operatirs, block has indeed been an uninterrupted period of enjoying that has passed away like a single day-especially since the four rooms were all converted into one single general ward by opening up the archways. The place has become more like a college hostel, remaining us of the happy days of youth, and we have hardly felt that it was a days of youth, and e have hardly felt that it was a prison.17

H. Y. Sharada Prasad, was an eminent journalist, writer and translator. He was well known as information advisor to prime ministers of India-Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. He was imprisoned in Quit India movement his A Window on the Wall, Quit India Prison Dairy of a 19 year old gives his opinion about the fellow prisoners thus:

A set of people I cannot again live with in my life, nor can I meet the like of them. The best of rural life and some of the best principled men. They are good examples to show how vigorous
our rural leadership is, how intelligent though illiterate or sparsely literate.18

In one of the entries of 16-03-1943 he gives his mental status thus:

I did not get sleep soon. Perhaps it was three when I slept. But for two full hours I was all those unforgettable pictures. Those fairy visions of my ‘childhood’ –until a year ago –were received. I pictured myself travelling through all those magic lands, those gorgeous and awe-inspiring structures (both) man-made and natural.19

He feels benefitted for having gone to jail so that he had an opportunity to have friends:

My pilgrimages to prison have proved of inestimable value to me if not for other things, for this –that I have come into contact with some of the purest and most spotless of persons.20

From the above, writers we come to a conclusion, that they had the rare gift of expressing themselves, in a most imaginary way to transport the reader to the freedom movement and after. So they are rare literary writings from prison.

ii. Historically, and at the time of Independence, the socio-economic scene in rural India has been characterised by widespread inequalities, especially in the ownership of land and wealth. A small minority of big landholders owned a major portion of the agricultural land, while millions of small peasants weighed down by perpetual indebtedness eked out a precarious existence on tiny fragmented holdings. More than half of the cultivated land was under tenancy and the bulk of the tenants enjoyed no security of tenure or fixity of rent. At the bottom of the agrarian pyramid,
there was a vast army of landless agricultural workers whose social and economic status was pathetic.

The British rule affected the Indian social system in another way also. The new economic policy followed by the British colonial administration had an unsettling impact on the Indian social structure. The economic policy resulted in the emergence of certain new classes in the Indian society. These new classes primarily comprised landless labour, moneylenders, zamindars, peasant proprietors, urban proletariat, capitalists and above all, a new middle classes. Thus the traditional social structure was certainly undermined by the process of urbanisation and industrialisation coupled with a new legal and judicial system.

Bipin Chandra, a well known historian writes about the freedom struggle thus:

The freedom struggle was also a struggle for economic development. In time an economic ideology developed which was to dominate the views of independent India. The national movement accepted, with near unanimity, the need to develop India on the basis of industrialization which in turn was to be independent of foreign capital and was to rely on the indigenous capital goods sector. A crucial role was assigned to the public sector and, in the 1930s there was a commitment for economic planning.21

The nationalist movement was a multi-layered, multidimensional process, which involved different sections of people, with different aims and visions for the future. Unlike the social reformers, Gandhi had realised some of the negative consequences of colonial rule on women's economic status. This realisation strengthened his decision to launch the khadi movement.
which would offer to the masses of women an immediate, open channel for their participation in the national struggle. Even more, Gandhi used women's role in the khadi movement to convince men that women's participation as equals was essential if the Swadeshi or boycott movement was to succeed, an argument that he extended later to the winning of full freedom for India, and nation-building. Gandhi puts his views to improve the standard of the people thus:

“I am not interested freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing the people from social shackles and economic dependence because social freedom and economic freedom should go together.”22

The social, political and economic conditions were affected by the oppressive rule of the British. The prison writings reveal all the problems faced by the nationals and they have given the exact picture of the period, in which they are written. All the writers have reacted in their own way and tried their best to find solutions to the problems.

The works of the political prisoners are analysed from the socio-political perspectives. We have taken the representative writers for the analysis. In the pre-independence and post-independence age, instead of all the works chronologically, concentration is on autobiographies, diaries and letters of prominent writers.

I. Autobiographies

An autobiography is a work of self—revelation. Memoir, journal, diary, letters, all these may be grouped together under the head of personal revelation, which may be a conscious or unconscious—self—portrayal by the subject. The Autobiography is a journey down memory lane, “emotions recollected in tranquility”. It is in some ways more revealing in its portrayal
of the drama of that period and those who played the major roles in it, than any scholarly, historical account. And the story is told with great sincerity, eloquence and artistic skill. The artistic imagination is in full play in the selection of impressions, events and characters from the mass of memories and material collected or recollected. What makes the Autobiography a great work of art and literature is its inimitable style of personal narration, its lyricism, the glow of poetry "the rapture at nature's loveliness in all its shifting moods"; in the beauty of its flora and fauna, the searching self-analysis and the candid comments on contemporary men and events that were making history and becoming part of history.

The story of My Deportation (1908) is the first of available prison writings by Lala Lajpat 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:
He gives the picture of the political disturbances which took place in Punjab, especially Rawalpindi, Lahore and Peshawar area. He minutely observes the rule of the colonial government, their repressive administration and effect on public. In his *The story of My Deportation*:

The situation in Punjab has become critical. The arrest of the leaders at Rawalpindi and subsequent proceedings show that the Government has entered on a policy of repression... The Government have evidently decided to strike at the leaders irrespective of the political opinions held by them and to terrorise the smaller fry and the public. The arrests at Pindi are the first signal.  

In another context, he gives the picture of the social conditions prevailed in those days:

Pardon me for this sermon. In my judgement this was necessary. I am told that the Punjab is dead and demolished. All public life has ceased to function and everybody is afraid. Lawyers have refused to defend political offenders” and newspaper have ceased publication. Friendship, Love, sympathy, comradeship and fellow feeling have all disappeared. Everyone is for himself and the devil for the rest.

The six months imprisonment of Lajapat Rai gave a new dimension to Indian nationalism. The constitutional leaders who had pinned their hopes and experiences on Government began to lose ground in the country because of this stunning blow. The repressive dose on the part of the government evoked strongest protest in various parts of the country. In such conditions the ‘Moderates’ beliefs and ideology received a setback, and the people now became more receptive to radical and revolutionary preaching. Viewed in
this context, Lajapat Rai’s deportation lent new energy, dynamism and force to Indian nationalism.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*

Gandhiji named his autobiography *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, meaning that he was conscious of doing something which was original and fresh, something which had not been attempted. Gandhiji was, in the real sense of the term, an original thinker, a man full of creative thinking which is needed for a writer. He gave apt names to the journals which he launched, and his autobiography also throws light on his creative thinking. The title of the autobiography is very unusual. So creating something new is the quest of a writer. Gandhiji wrote his autobiography at a time when the tradition of writing autobiographies had just made a beginning. He declared in the Preface to his autobiography that the hint for writing was not his own, but was pressed upon him by some of his colleagues. When he was in prison, which he calls ‘Yervada Mandir’, he got a lot of free time, and he thought upon the request of his colleagues and started writing. Gandhiji as a writer had a definite intention; he wanted to propagate the ideals he believed in. He states: “There can be no room for untruth in my writings, because it is my unshakable belief that there is no religion other than truth and because I am capable of rejecting aught that is obtained at the cost of truth. My writing cannot but be free from hatred towards and individual because, it is my firm belief that it is love that sustains the earth......... As for giving ides, I have some originality. But, writing is a by-product.” Gandhiji expressed himself and his ideas in a plain, distinctive and impressive manner and conveyed his views and feelings to the reader. He wrote truthfully and without fear of anybody, because he even loved his enemy. He was sincere in his thoughts, words and deeds. His style
reflects the transparent sincerity and frankness of his heart. In fact, perfectly sincerity, truthfulness and frankness were his chief aims in writing.

He clearly and straightforwardly revealed his objective: “I write as the spirit moves me at the time of writing.” “I write to propagate my ideas.” And again he says: “The reader can have no idea propagate my idea of the restraint I have to exercise in the choice of topics and my vocabulary. It is training for me. It enables me to peep into myself and to make discoveries of my weakness. Often my vanity dictates a smart expression or my anger a harsh adjective. It is a terrible ordeal but a fine exercise to remove these weeds.

The struggle for freedom was not merely political in character; it was a struggle for the regeneration of the entire life of the nation. The leaders of the struggle were men and women of action, inspired by a lofty vision, which encompassed philosophy, science, literature and varied fields of culture. For them India’s freedom was a necessary condition for a successful and durable renaissance of the country. What is more, they viewed the Indian struggle as a part of the wider struggle of suppressed humanity, and they believed that India was fighting not merely for its own freedom but also for the great cause of ending colonialism in the entire world. As we look back on the pages of the history of this great struggle, we find ourselves witnessing something so unusual that every event had in it something unique and unparalleled. To fight a mighty empire without arms and by sheer force of thought, will and spirit would have normally been dismissed as a sheer impossibility. But in retrospect it appears that the programmes of boycott, swadeshi, non-co-operation and civil disobedience represented an innovative political experimentation which was in harmony with the fundamental genius of Indian culture and the spirit of the times. In his intuitive
understanding of the capability and mood of the people lay the real strength of Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi believed in revealing himself. He regarded secrecy as the enemy of freedom—not only the freedom of India but the freedom of man. He exposed even the innermost personal thoughts which individuals usually regard as private. In nearly a half-century of prolific writing, speaking, and subjecting his ideas to the test of actions, he painted a detailed self-portrait of his mind, heart, and soul.

Writing for Gandhiji was an instrument to explain, to clarify, to reveal his thoughts and ideas. Writing also enabled him to look into himself. These writings established him as a writer of distinction among Indian masters of English.

His autobiography covers his childhood, his education and South African Days. The years from 1915 to 1927 are dealt in the V part of the book, where he writes his experiments under forty four titles. It was through his pen and the magnetism of his personality that he awakened the Indian masses. He expressed their feelings in a sober and restrained manner. He had a knack of selecting the aptest titles for his articles. His autobiography gained popularity for its chase style and the honest confessions of its author. Gandhi spent a large amount of time enduring some form of arrest by the British, but never ceased writing during those times.

But if his prison experiences were so crucial to Gandhi, why so little said about them in his autobiography? One reason is that The Story of My Experiments with Truth is a highly selective account of Gandhi’s life, which, rather than attempting to give a complete account of his life, uses certain personal episodes to illustrate moral “truths” and weaknesses.
His first taste of prison in India left Gandhi appalled at the intransigence of the authorities and their determination to starve him of the “oxygen of publicity”, but also at the conduct of his fellow Indians—convicts and officials alike. Prison was no longer “paradise”, or even a convenient model for how Indian society might reform itself. On the contrary, he now saw prisons as “hot-beds of vice and degradation”, full of corruption, and a depth of moral depravity he had not expected to find among Indians.

Gandhiji as a writer had a definite intention; he wanted to propagate the ideals he believed in. He states: “There can be no room for untruth in my writings, because it is my unshakable belief that there is no religion other than truth and because I am capable of rejecting aught that is obtained at the cost of truth. My writing cannot but be free from hatred towards and individual because, it is my firm belief that it is love that sustains the earth......... As for giving ideas, I have some originality. But, writing is a by-product.” Gandhiji expressed himself and his ideas in a plain, distinctive and impressive manner and conveyed his views and feelings to the reader. He wrote truthfully and without fear of anybody, because he even loved his enemy. He was sincere in his thoughts, words and deeds. His style reflects the transparent sincerity and frankness of his heart. In fact, perfectly sincerity, truthfulness and frankness were his chief aims in writing.

People who do not know Gandhiji’s personality and have only read his writings are apt to think that he is a priestly type, extremely puritanical, long faced, Calvinistic, and a kill-joy, something like the priests in black gowns taking their rounds. But his writings do him an injustice; he is far greater than what he writes, and it is not quite fair to quote what he has written and criticise it. He is greater than the words he has used. He writes: “A writer could be illimitably more than the words he spins out......A writer is his thought, his dream, his dedication, provided of course, that he gives all these
an outer habitation in terms of language: or that is the compulsion he lives for. Without that, he could be an idealist, a man of wisdom, a seer, but certainly not a writer. "A writer is more than his words."

Writing about Gandhian literature, Dr. Naik in his A History of Indian English Literature opines that:

Gandhi's writings are a mine of stimulating thought on political, social, economic, cultural and spiritual issues. He was no erudite scholar, by no means an original thinker with razor-sharp mind, nor a brilliant theoretician. But solidly grounded in ancient Indian tradition, he possessed a profound moral earnestness which enabled him to rediscover the ethical values of the tradition; and with his convictions supported by similar trends in ancient and modern Western thought, he boldly applied his findings to the political and social realities of colonial India.\(^{25}\)

His contribution to thought and action has been so original and great that he has left his impression not only on India but also on the whole world. His intellectual career had a beginning in South Africa. While he was championing the cause of Indians. Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins in "Freedom at Midnight":

His means of communication with his followers were primitive. He wrote much of his correspondence himself in long hand, and talked: to his discipies, to prayer meetings, to the caucuses of his Congress Party. He employed none of the techniques for conditioning the masses to the dictates of a demagogue or a clique of ideologues. Yet his message had penetrated a nation bereft of modern communications because Gandhi had a genius
for the simple gesture that spoke to India's soul. Those gestures were all unorthodox. Paradoxically, in a land ravaged by cynical famine, where hunger had been a malediction for centuries, the most devastating tactic Gandhi had devised was the simple act of depriving himself of food—a fast. He had humbled Great Britain by sipping water and bicarbonate of soda."

Social reform was for Gandhi only an inevitable part of the struggle for true swaraj. He believed that the social re-ordering and political Swaraj must go hand in hand. In the economic sphere, Gandhi totally rejected the concept of the 'economic man', and refused to divorce economics from ethics. He preached sarvodaya—ethical socialism which was to be achieved through decentralisation of industry, the establishment of rural communities composed of small, manageable units co-operatively knit together, swadeshi and khadi-spinning.

Gandhi saw no point in continuing the story beyond 1920 because it was already known to the public, his life having been lived (however unwillingly) in the limelight, in the continual blaze of controversy and political action. The latter part of Gandhi’s life till he fell at the hands of an assassin on 30 January 1948 on his way to prayer was in considerable measure the life of the nation as well.

An Autobiography

Jawaharlal Nehru’s An Autobiography (In and out of Prison: An Autobiographical Narrative with Musings on Recent Events in India) was his most accomplished piece of writing. It was written entirely in prison. He began to write it in Almora prison in June 1934 and finished it in 1935. His chief object in writing was to engage himself in some fruitful work in order
to relieve ‘the long solitude of gaol life’ and review past events in India. His attempt was to trace his own mental development, and not to write a survey of Indian history. In more than four decades of writing to convince, persuade, engage, describe, attack, defend, reminisce, synthesise, and understand, Nehru wrote upon every possible subject on which opinions were divided, from cow slaughter to public health to the national flag and anthem to divorce.

Non cooperation Movement also saw the involvement of Jawaharlal Nehru who plunged himself into the Indian freedom struggle during this time. A London educated lawyer, Nehru had spent his time touring the nation and spreading Gandhian ideas and making himself acquainted with the problems of the common people. He expresses his inability to speak Hindi and face the public, his shyness thus:

These peasants took away the shyness from me and taught me to speak in public. Till then I hardly spoke at a public gathering; I was frightened at the prospect, especially if the speaking was to be done in Hindustani, as it almost always was. But I could not possibly avoid addressing these peasant gatherings, and how could I be shy of these poor unsophisticated people? I did not know the arts of oratory and so I spoke to them, man to man, and told them what I had in my mind and in my heart. Whether the gathering consisted of a few persons or of ten thousand or more I stuck to my conversational and rather personal method of speaking, and I found that, whatever might be lacking in it, I could at least go on. I was fluent enough. Perhaps many of them could not understand a great deal of what I said. My language or my thought was not simple enough for them. Many did not hear...
me when the gathering was very large for my voice did not carry far. But all this did not matter much to them when once they had given their confidence and faith to a person.28

Nehru’s autobiography pertains to his involvement in Indian political life. It is a historical narrative. An Autobiography concentrates on the life history of the author no doubt, but Nehru’s work is contemporary history seen from his eyes. Truly speaking, his An Autobiography is neither a personal document, nor history in the true sense of the term. It is a mixture of both, a sort of personal account of the past as he himself called it. What is worth noting is, contemporary India was Nehru’s main focus, that is why it came nearer to being a depiction of history than personal details. He did not expect his autobiography to be judged as a historical work, and if done so it might be found defective. To avoid that he wrote in the Preface: “The fact this resembles superficially such a survey is to mislead the reader and lead him to attach a wider importance to it than it deserves”. It is true that it has got both historical importance’s and literary merit. The reader may attach much importance to the historical narrative than it really deserves. Nehru’s contribution to the shaping of modern Indian consciousness is as significant as his contribution to the making of modern India.

Nehru’s autobiography consists of the history of major political events of the period. His autobiography gives us a description of the political events; in him we find both an autobiographer and a historian. He is a sort of an observer of the events.

*The Autobiography* has apt quotations from a number of poets and writers; Shakespeare, Mary Coleridge, Wordsworth, Blake, Arnold, Browning, Hopkins, Markham, Eliot and Li Tai Po, to name a few. These readings had become a part of his life and experience. The well known lines
of Robert Frost, which were found on Nehru’s jotting pad after his death, echo his own feelings about “promises to keep” and about “miles to go before I sleep”. He had cultivated the detachment to retire at times from the life of activity to that cloistered chamber of his mind, and live for a while another life, to laugh at his own and other men’s follies”. He possessed that rare sensibility which great poets have, in which disparate fragmentary experiences the rough and tumble of politics, the beauty and majesty of natural landscapes, the silences and the noises of prison life, the headiness of power and popularity, the idealism and opportunism of individuals, treasures of literature got amalgamated to form new unified wholes, and found artistic expression in his writing. The many literary allusions and quotations in his works never seemed laboured. They seem to come in naturally in tune with the tone and temper of what he says. For example, in his devastating comment on the Indian liberals whom he called the “Dull-Brigade”, sombre in their looks, dull in their writing and conversation.Nehru has a special concern for the common man and he expresses:

The Indian saw the Englishman function only as an official with all the inhumanity of the machine and with all the passion of a behaviour of a person acting as an individual and obeying his own impulses from his behaviour as an official or a unit in an army. The solider, stiffening to attention, drops his humanity and acting as automation, shoots and kills inoffensive and harmless persons who have done him no ill. So also, I thought, the police officer who would hesitate to do unkindness to an individual would, the day after, direct a lathi charge on innocent people. He would not think of himself as an individual then, nor will he consider as individuals those crowds whom he beats down and shoots.29
The end of the World War found India in a state of suppressed excitement. Industrialisation had spread and the capitalist class had grown in wealth and power. This handful at the top had prospered and was greedy for more power and opportunity to invest their savings and add to their wealth. The great majority, however, were not so fortunate and looked forward to a lightening of the burdens that crushed them.

A reader of the newspapers would hardly imagine that a vast peasantry and millions of workers existed in India or had any importance. The British-owned Anglo-Indian newspapers were full of the doings of high officials; English social life in the big cities and in the hill stations was described at great length with its parties, fancy-dress balls and amateur theatricals. Indian politics, from the Indian point of view, were almost completely ignored by them, even the Congress sessions being disposed of in a few lines on a back page. They were not considered news of any value except when some Indian, prominent or otherwise, slanged or criticised the Congress and its pretensions. Occasionally there was a brief reference to a strike, and the rural areas only came into prominence when there was a riot.

There was certainly this hatred and anger in India in 1921 against the British but, in comparison with other countries similarly situated, it was extraordinarily little. Undoubtedly this was due to Gandhiji’s insistence on the implications of non-violence.

Deshbandhu Das gave a stirring message to Bengal:

“I feel the handcuffs on my wrists and the weight of iron chains on my body. It is the agony of bondage. The whole of India is a vast prison”

Prison was still an unknown place, the idea of going there still a novelty. I was sitting rather late one day in the congress office at Allahabad
trying to clear up arrears of work. An excited clerk told me that the police had come with a search warrant and were surrounding the office building. I was of course, a little excited also, for it was my first experience of the kind, but the desire to show off was strong, the wish to appear perfectly cool and collected, unaffected by the comings and goings of the police. So I asked a clerk to accompany the police officer in his search round the office rooms, and insisted on the rest of the staff carrying on their usual work and ignoring the police. A little later a friend and a colleague, who had been arrested just outside the office, came to me, accompanied by a policeman, to bid me good-bye. I was so full of the conceit that I must treat these novel occurrences as everyday happenings that I treated my colleague in a most unfeeling manner. Casually I asked him and the policeman to wait till I had finished the letter I was writing. Soon news came of other arrests in the city. I decided at last to go home and see what was happening there. I found the inevitable police searching part of the large house and learnt that they had come to arrest both father and me.

We bathed in public and washed our clothes in public and ran around the barrack for exercise, and talked and argued till we had largely exhausted each other’s capacity for intelligent conservation. It was the dull side of family life, magnified a hundred-fold, with few of its graces and compensations, and all this among people of all kinds and tastes. It was a great nervous strain for all of us. And often I yearned for solitude. In later years I was to have enough of this solitude and privacy in prison, when for months I would see no one except an occasional goal official. Again I lived in a state of nervous tension, but this time I longed for suitable company. I thought then sometimes, almost with envy, of my crowded existence in the Lucknow District Gaol in 1922, and yet I knew well enough that of the two I preferred the solitude, provided at least that I could write.
Nehru is keen on minute details. He gives the exact picture of the prison as follows:

One misses many things in prison, but perhaps most of all one misses the sound of women’s voices and children’s laughter. The sounds one usually hears are not of the pleasantest. The voices are harsh and minatory, and the language brutal and largely consisting of swear-words. Once I remember being struck by a new want. I was in the Lucknow District Gaol and I realised suddenly that I had not heard a dog bark for seven or eight months.31

Tilak’s militancy landed him in jail, thanks to an unfair and partial judicial system. Tilak accepted this verdict as a rule of destiny, even though it was a gross miscarriage of justice. He went to Mandalay jail in Burma and suffered six gruelling years in isolation. 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.

Even though Tilak knew that his sentence was unjust, he was not interested in getting a conditional release:

......if I accept any conditions of the kind you mention, I shall have to live as a dead man, practically amongst you hereafter. To say the least I do not like that kind of life. It is true that my activity is not confined to politics, and I can do some literary work even if I be prohibited from taking part in politics..... you know that I have never lived exclusively for my family or myself alone, but have always endeavoured to do my duty to the public. Now judge what would be the moral effect of my
effacing from public life, for the sake of few years personal comfort? In the family matters the most important is superintendence of the education of my sons; but I think I can leave that to friends like you during my imprisonment. I lost my parents (both) at fifteen and my sons won’t be worse in this respect than myself.32

Tilak was again in the thick of the National movement and his views differed from those of Gandhiji and others. In his letters written during this period we find that he held to his views steadfast and never compromised on his principles.

In 1924, Subhas Chandra Bose was convicted and imprisoned in the infamous Mandalay Jail in Burma. He used his time in jail to write letters, but since he was aware that they had to pass through the British Censors, his letters from jail are different in style and content than his other letters. Bose was moved by the hard life led by the prisoners at Mandalay which prompted him to think of prison reforms:

What is most urgently called for is a new outlook based on sympathy for the convict. His wrong impulses must be regarded as symptomatic of a psychological derangement and remedies should be devised accordingly. The penalising mood which may well be assumed to be the inspiration of jail prescription has to give place to a new orientation guided by a flair for true reform.33

Having experienced the hard life at Mandalay, Bose was all admiration for Tilak who spent six years in that prison earlier. He says:

Not till I actually arrived here, did I realise that within the four walls of this jail amid the most dismal surroundings-the late
Lokamanya wrote his famous commentary on the Gita which in my humble opinion, has placed him in the same rank with intellectual giants like Sankara and Ramanuja.\textsuperscript{34}

Bose is a consummate master of the English language. He can make his style simple or elevated, lyrical or logical to suit his subject. Here is a description of a whirlwind:

Before the screens could be lowered, the dust like a moving canopy completely shrouded us. Not without difficulty, the screens were lowered but so high was the wind that they began to float in the air and served only to add to the music of the scene. The dust lay thick all over the room and not even the remotest corner was free from its touch. The wind persisted and titles began to blow off the roof. The wooden structure began to croak much like a ship tossed about on a stormy sea. Papers began to fly, lanterns were smitten down and suddenly articles began to take wings. But the wrath of heaven did not last long and the ‘twice blest’ drops of mercy soon began to fall from above.\textsuperscript{35}

Gandhi’s style is simple and direct. As K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar says, “With Gandhi came a break with the old Macaulayan tradition of public speaking and formal writing. But Gandhi’s mastery of language, however deceptively or dis alarmingly bare and simple, was never less than adequate to the place, mood or occasion.” Gandhi’s open letter to Hitler amply demonstrates this:

We have no doubt your bravery or devotion to your Fatherland, nor do we believe that you are the monster described by your opponents. But your own writings and pronouncements and
those of your friends and admirers leave no room for doubt that many of your acts are monstrous and unbecoming of human dignity especially in the estimation of men like me who believe in universal friendliness.

Gandhi’s political heir, Jawaharlal Nehru, as a letter writer shows considerable finesse. In a letter to Bharati Sarabhai, he confesses: I am a fairly good letter writer so far as business are concerned. But I hate writing personal letters in a hurry and unless I am in the mood for them.

Since most of Nehru’s letters were written from prison where he was definitely not in a hurry, his own estimate of being a good epistoler becomes nearly true as we keep reading the never-ending stream of letters he wrote.

Nehru’s plunge into the Non co-operation Movement brought out his latent abilities as an organiser. He rose quickly in the Congress and during the freedom movement was jailed seven times. As K.R.Srinivas Iyengar says, Nehru made the best use of his time in jail by writing letters. In his letter to his sister Krishna, he says:

I may be kept in prison but nobody is going to take from me my dignity and composure. Whining and complaining are not in my line. Nor are outbursts of strong language good enough.

Like so many other freedom fighters Nehru does not consider prison life to be a bane: “Prison always serves as a tonic to me, a change from the horrible dullness of normal life.”

Nehru feels that in prison he can effectively cut himself off from the worries and responsibilities that fetter him outside and think of the problems in a larger perspective:
..... We are surrounded by overwhelming problems from which none of us can run away.... Life is difficult enough and it grows in complexity. There is a shallowness and shabbiness about it which hurts continually, if we have the misfortune to be sensitive and to have any ideals. Yet we must face it, understand it and accept it, while at the same time we have to struggle against its evil and crudity. We are all the prisoners of the myths of the past and the emotions of the present with just a little elbow room perhaps.

Nehru is often concerned with the past as well as the future. C.D.Narasimhaiah once quoted Eliot to show how in Glimpses of World History, time past and time present are present in time future. We can see this refrain in the last letter of Glimpses.

Glimpses of World History is in fact a bunch of letters addresses to Indira from jail. Nehru says: “These letters of mine are but superficial sketches joined together by a thin thread.” But we know they are by no means superficial. Nehru adopted the letter form to make History more intimate. In fact when he thinks of getting these letters published, he writes to Horace Alexander: “They deal with World history in a sort of jumpy way with a connecting link and there are many personal and intimate touches in them.”

Nehru’s letters are not only chronicles of history but also excellent specimens of what good letters should be. They are more informal, more intimate and more personal than any other letters of the period. Like the English letters of the eighteenth century, Nehru’s letters abound in news and views. They can also be substitutes for an essay or a travelogue. Above all they are eminently literary because they are written in a style which is not contrived a style which is graceful and cultured and a style full of sincerity.

125
In fact his own estimation that he is a fairly good letter writer is an understatement. He is one of our outstanding letter-writers.

The letters of political personages take us to the ring seat of India's freedom movement. In these letters, History and biography meet. We see how moderate politics gave rise to militancy to return to the Gandhian ideal of Satyagraha and non-co-operation. We also come across the impact of Gandhi on the thinking of many national leaders.

"Glimpses of World History" was written in different prisons in India during the three years between October 1930 and August 1933. The author was serving sentences of imprisonment inflicted on him for his part in the struggle for Indian freedom and his opposition to British domination of his country. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru took advantage of his enforced rest, his "leisure and detachment", as he calls it, to write on world history. He wrote it in the form of letters to his young daughter, whose education he had little opportunity of supervising owing to his periodic absences in prison. These letters were gathered together when Pandit Nehru had a brief respite, prior to his last period of two years in gaol after being arrested once again on 12th February 1934 and sentenced for "sedition".

Jayaprakash Narayan (1902-79) was one of the most prominent leaders and thinkers produced by India in modern times. Although never seeking power for himself, he played a major role not only in the struggle for independence, but also in the Socialist and Sarvodaya movements and finally in the movement against authoritarianism (1974-7), popularly known as the J.P. movement.

"This series of volumes has been planned with a view to presenting as full a picture as possible of the evolution of J.P.'s political life and thought through his writings, speeches and letters. As he was in many ways
a mirror of his times, it is hoped that the series will also provide an idea of the main currents of ideas and movements during the times in which he lived and worked.

"The items included in this volume, among other things, illumine the nature of J.P.'s role in our struggle for freedom during the period of the Second World War. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are his letters to his comrades addressed from his cell in the special camp jail at Deoli (Rajasthan) in 1941 and his two letters to all freedom fighters sent from the underground in 1943, after his daring escape from the Hazaribagh Central Prison. Many of these items, particularly J.P.'s jottings, comments on books and letters while imprisoned in the Lahore Fort and Agra Central Prison (1943-6) also provide us an insight into the significant changes then taking place in his socio-political thinking—a precursor of the later shift in his credo, first from Marxism to democratic socialism and then to Gandhism or Sarvodaya." (jacket)

The Preamble to the Constitution of India sets out Justice - social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and opportunity and Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and integrity of the nation as the objectives. What makes the Constitution significant to the conditions and problems of the large masses of poor people of India is the socio economic soul of it.

The Constitution set out the fundamental rights of the citizens, especially, equality, freedom of speech and expression, protection of life and liberty, non discrimination, abolition of untouchability and prohibition of forced labour. The Directive Principles of State Policy envisaged a social order in which justice - social, economic and political - will inform all institutions of national life, minimising of inequalities of income status and
opportunities, the right to adequate means of livelihood as well as the equitable control and ownership of material resources of the community.

Eminent personalities of undivided India had an occasion to serve the mother land sacrificing to liberate her from the clutches of colonial rule. British were not in favour of to provide freedom to India. The nationalist, historians, specially the most recent ones show an awareness of the exploitive character of colonialism, but on the whole they feel that the national movement was result and spread and realisation of the idea or spirit nationalism or liberty. They also take full cognizance of the process of India becoming a nation, and see the national movement as a movement of the people.

II. Diaries

The diary is a day to day record, sometimes descriptive sometimes narrative of the author who maintains for his own purpose.

*A Jail Diary*

Rajaji’s *A Jail Diary*, written in the Vellore Central jail, covers a period of nearly four months from 21-12-1921 to 20-03-1922. A call for non-co-operation with the then British government had just been given by Gandhiji. Indians including all leading Congressmen and freedom fighters, throughout the country, responded positively to the call of Gandhiji. In consequence, all Indian jails were overcrowded with political prisoners. Rajaji too was put in Prison for not less than four months, and that is where he wrote his *A Jail Diary*.

Rajaji’s A Jail Diary holds a unique place among Indian English diaries, mainly for three reasons. In the first instance, this is the first English prison diary written by an Indian. Secondly, by that time Rajaji had proved
himself a master of English prose through his published English version of *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. Thirdly, 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. No reader can miss the diarist’s aesthetic sense in his honest and sincere recording of what was happening in the country and his love for the country.

**Prison Days**

*Prison Days* of Vijalakshmi Pandit, which 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. 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.

*Prison Days* recording the hardships of jail life in general and her own jail life in particular 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.”
A Prison Diary

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.

Prison Diary records Jayaprakash Narayan's thought during his imprisonment. He reconstructs the planning and must have preceded the proclamation of emergency, he analyzes the forces in Indian society that allowed it to occur, and he delineates his own vision of the good society and the 'total revolution' it would require. This is a sensitive and moving document, a portrait of a promethean figure.

S.S. Biradar in his published thesis on Prison Diaries, evaluates Rajaji with other diarists of the age thus:

JP’s prison dairy is quite different from those of Rajaji, Mrs. Pandit and Advani, though the three diarists write sitting in jail. It is JP who thinks and writes about the development of industry in India. He advocates the encouragement of the development of small scale industry, rural industry and cottage industry: ‘Industrial development should therefore take the line of medium industry, small industry, and rural industry development.  

In one of the entries dated July 26, JP feels sad for the murder of democracy in emergency period:
Today I have completed one full month of my detention. I must say this one month has been like a year. Maybe it is due to the break in the habit of jail-going for 30 years. More correctly 29 years. Indhiraji’s regime may be remembered in history for its many achievement or lack of them – its most notable achievement is the murder of democracy. P.5 Prison Dairy.\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{A Prison Diary}

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 \textit{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.”

\textbf{III. Letters}

In these letters the giants of our nationalist struggle explain their ideas and ideologies. We do not see them from a distance. They tell us not only about themselves but about their contemporaries. Be it the mutual dislike of Nehru and Subhas Bose, Boses admiration for Tilak, or be it the hero-worship of Gokhale by Srinivasa Sastri—everything is laid bare in these letters. We come across Gandhi’s special affection towards Nehru, Tilak’s concern for his family, Nehru’s aversion for M.N. Roy and many such intimate details which biographers might miss. Our National heroes are portrayed in their letters not so much as heroes but as living human beings with their idiosyncrasies and their follies.
Lala Lajapat Rai’s Letters

Lala Lajapat Rai was an indefatigable letter writer. A great humanist, he abhorred injustice. As a reformist he wanted to achieve his goals by working with people in a spirit of co-operation. In a letter he writes:

The country will never be free, it will not deserve to be free, as long as it does not produce leaders, who will look to the people, rather than to the authorities, for inspiration, for guidance, for light. Having seen some of the best parts of the world, I have come to the conclusion that the Indian masses are comparatively more intelligent, more sober, and more amenable to reason than any other people similarly situated. We have to make them conscious of their great potentialities by working with them in a spirit of co-operation and not working for them in a spirit of patronage.

Lajapat Rai’s concern for the poor downtrodden

Lajapat Rai’s letters are different from others because most of his letters are “open letters”. Letters to newspapers and periodicals expressly intended for publication. They are therefore less intimate. His letters usually take the form of essays and speeches and are often very lengthy, sometimes running into twenty five printed page! Normally one or two pet themes are taken up in a letter and they are fully dealt with in a vigorous and forceful language. The predominant tone of his letters is indicative of his concern for his people. There is always an undercurrent of patriotism in them:

How can you, of dark, sombre, fog ridden and misty claims, who are born of a chill atmosphere, of treacherously changing weather, who count hours of sunshine and months of darkness
and fog and rain and snow and sleet, enter into the feelings of one whose country is a perpetual sunshine, and where universal light reigns a country where weather is neither treacherous nor continually and rapidly changing, where beautiful dawns, starry nights, moonlit fields, resplendent waters, snow lad hills one’s mind with the sublimity, grandeur and beauty of nature; where one needs no stimulants to make him feel lighter and happier. An Indian needs no alcohol to forget his troubles. 

In one of Rai’s letters written from Lahore prison in 1922, we get an assessment of a great leader by a co-worker. In a warm tribute to Gandhiji very much before Gandhian movement gained momentum Lajpat Rai writes:

His (Gandhiji’s) leadership and personal contact with him, has made us more truthful, more courageous, more self-sacrificing and simpler and purer, in the manner and habits of our living. He has brought home to us as no one else could, the value and virtue of living absolutely in the open, concealing nothing, hiding nothing, playing no tricks, no dodges which are ordinarily associated with political movements.... He has also instilled in us a spirit of discipline, self-confidence and suffering in the cause of truth, which was somewhat lacking before.... His greatest service, however, lies in the closer understanding between Hindus and Mohamedans which has been brought under his aegis and inspiration... Never before. In the experience of living men did a leader so successfully and unfailingly appreciate the genius successfully and unfailingly appreciate the genius of his people and felt their pulse as Mahatma Gandhi has done in the course of the last three years. I wonder, if ever in the history of India a single person has had
so much influence over the masses of India as Mahatmaji acquired. I have no hesitation in saying not only that he is the greatest Indian living but he is one of the greatest men of all ages, all times and all countries.  

Since Rai basically uses the letter form to expound his thoughts political, social or philosophical he makes use of a style which is coherent and logical. He uses rhetoric frequently to stress his point as seen from an excerpt from a letter:

Can this world, full of injustices, inequalities, ruelities and barbarities, be the handiwork of a good God? While hundreds and thousands of wicked people, people without brains, without a head or heart, immoral and cruel people, tyrants, oppressors, exploiters and selfish people are living in luxury and in any possible way insulting, trampling under foot, grinding into dust and also mocking their victims, these latter are living lives of untold misery degradation, disgrace and of sheer want.

Rai once admitted that he is an emotional person. Hence a rich and ornamental style is also used by him whenever there is a need for embellishment. An ornamentative style Burke's is also evident in some of his letters:

...the word exile is perhaps the most cursed in the dictionary of man. It dries up the springs of affection; it deprives its victims of the sweet babblings and hispings of the little ones with whom every man of age love to beguile the evening of his days; it closes the avenues of all comfort that are associated with that sweet word home; it shuts the doors of heaven and makes life a continued agony, hanging on the slender thread of such pity and
hospitality, as one may receive from the generous and kind hearted foreigner.  

Lalaji also uses sarcasm, irony and wit to forcefully drive his point home. In his letters Lala Lajpat Rai emerges as a person who was a great patriot, a person who was moved by the misery of India’s starving millions, a person who believed that the oppressive rule of the British was the main cause of India’s ills. His concern for educational reforms, his distaste for caste system and his reformatory zeal are evident in his letters. As a prose writer he uses an elegant style displaying a mastery over language. It is rather sad that his literary abilities have been glossed over by many critics.

Tilak

Tilak wrote a letter every month to his nephew in English. Tilak’s letters, despite showing restraint, were written in an optimistic and reassuring manner for the sake of his wife and children. He was reticent in his writings, but his intense love for his wife and children found expression through his letters. When he was in Mandalay, his two sons Rambhau and Bapu were young high-school students. Tilak was anxious about them and keen to know whether proper education was being imparted or not. It is no use merely to cram for passing the examinations.” In another letter he sent detailed instructions on how the boys should study different subjects for passing the matriculation examination. These letters reveal the deep affection he had for his sons.

All through his sojourn in jail, Tilak’s concern was the welfare of his family. He was very much worried about the education of his two sons and in almost every letter he wrote, he has mentioned this. He wanted his children to be both physically and mentally alert and gave detailed instructions to both his children as well as his teachers as to how they should
learn. He was terribly disappointed that despite his efforts his children failed. He writes: “I want good results and not excuses. It is only a bad workman that quarrels with his tools, or as we say in Marathi ‘A bad dancer blames the dancing ground’. You must be prepared against all contingencies, and never get into the habit of attributing your failure to this or that excuse.” He continues: “If you cannot prepare yourselves so as to pass so simple examination as the Matric, what can we expect of you in a number of other things that you will have to do in your life?... one who conquers these difficulties is a hero and one who complains of them is a coward and good for nothing.

In June 1912 Tilak’s wife, Smt. Satyabhamabai, passed away due to diabetes. The letter Tilak wrote on hearing this news brings out beautifully his softness; but unlike Srinivasa Sastri Tilak faces the blow boldly:

Your wire was a very great and heavy blow. I am used to take my misfortunes calmly; but I confess that the present shook me considerably. According to the beliefs ingrained in us it is not undesirable that the wife should die before her husband. What grieved me most is my enforced absence from her side at this critical time... One chapter of my life is closed and I am afraid it won’t be long before another will be.  

.....The task of looking after the physical and intellectual development of my sons falls on you now with greater responsibility; and I shall be still further grieved if I were to find it not properly attended to.... Let them remember that I was left an orphan when I was much younger than either of them. Misfortunes should brace us up for greater self-dependence. Both Rambhau and Bapu should therefore take a
lesson from this bereavement and if they do that I am sure God will not forsake them. See that their time is not lost in useless grief. The inevitable must be faced boldly.\textsuperscript{46}

Tilak was an idealist and very much cared for the institutions he had set up. He detested dishonesty and adored thoroughness. He wanted Indians to study abroad and in a letter moots the idea of establishing a Hindu Education Fund to send students to England for High studies. Though he was in jail miles away from his hometown, he never lost his cool. Some of his letters from jail show that he had a sense of humour too. He says:

Meiktila is an Indian name, being the Burmese corruption of Sanskrit Mithila, the town of Janak in Ramayana. So I have come down to the name sake of Janaka’s ancient town and I have only to see whether I get my SITA—I mean my LIBERTY at this place.\textsuperscript{47}

After his release from jail Tilak was again in the thick of the national movement and his views differed from those of Gandhiji and others. In his letters written during this period we find that he held to his views steadfast and never compromised on his principles. In his letter to Dadabhoi Naoroji he writes:

….I have never been, nor am I in any way against the Congress. Constitutional agitation, I shall be the last person to decry. But I am rather sanguine by temperament, and think that we must push our efforts to their logical extreme…. If we wish to get any rights or privileges we must agitate in England in a missionary spirit…. What I then said was that the annual session of the Congress is, like the croaking of frogs in the rains, only a seasonal activity; and we cannot hope to gain
much by it unless our efforts are supplemented by a persistent agitation in England. 48

As earlier stated, Tilak’s letters are devoid of artistic embellishments. His style is essentially Victorian and he could wield the language with ease:

My gratitude was enhanced by the knowledge of what you wrote in your very first letter to me you wanted me to join you as a friend and not as a servant in what you regarded as the last days of your life.... The course of time, has however preferred not to the uniformly propitious; and I have realised that you have not been satisfied with my conducting of the paper ‘Mahratta’ for the last two or three years.... We have been as it were silently drifting away and I often think I have put your good nature and patience to a most severe strain. 49

Subhas Chandra Bose

In his autobiography, *An Indian Pilgrim*, Subhas Chandra Bose says, “My letters are interesting in as much as they show the working of my mind in 1920. That year Bose who was twenty three years old had passed the ICS examination. He however refused the job he was offered. In a letter he explains to Sarat, his brother:

But for a man of my temperament who has been feeding on ideas which might be called eccentric the line of least resistance is not the best line to follow. Life loses half its interest if there is no struggle—if there are no risks to be take... on principle I cannot accept the idea of being part of a machinery which has outlived the days of its usefulness, and stands at present for all that is connected with conservatism, selfish power, heartlessness and red-tapism. 50
Subhas Bose was a young person who was fired by idealism and wanted to serve the cause of the country. In another letter he says:

A life of sacrifice to start with, plain living and high thinking, whole-hearted devotion to the country’s cause- all these are highly enchanting to my imagination and inclination.  

Within the next four years Bose was in the thick of the nationalist movement. In 1924, he was convicted and imprisoned in the infamous Mandalay Jail in Burma. He used his time in jail to write letters, but since he was aware that they had to pass through the British Censors, his letters from jail are different in style and content than his other letters. Bose was moved by the hard life led by the prisoners at Mandalay which prompted him to think of prison reforms:

What is most urgently called for is a new outlook based on sympathy for the convict. His wrong impulses must be regarded as symptomatic of a psychological derangement and remedies should be devised accordingly. The penalising mood which may well be assumed to be the inspiration of jail prescription has to give place to a new orientation guided by a flair for true reform.

Having experienced the had life at Mandalay, Bose was all admiration for Tilak who spent six years in that prison earlier. He say:

Not till I actually arrived here, did I realise that within the four walls of this jail amid the most dismal surrounding- the late Lokamanya wrote his famous commentary on the Gita which, in my humble opinion, has placed him in the same rank with intellectual giants like Sankara and Ramanuja.
Jawaharlal Nehru

Gandhi’s political heir, Jawaharlal Nehru, as a letter writer shows considerable finesse. In a letter to Bharati Sarabhai, he confesses: I am a fairly good letter writer so far as business letters are concerned. But I hate writing personal letters in a hurry and unless I am in the mood for them.

Since most of Nehru’s letters were written from prison where he was definitely not in a hurry, his own estimate of being a good epistoler becomes nearly true as we keep reading the never-ending stream of letters he wrote.

During the freedom movement was jailed seven times. As K.N.Srinivasa Iyengar says. Nehru made the best use of his time in jail by writing letters. In his letter to his sister Krishna, he says:

I may be kept in prison but nobody is going to take from me my dignity and composure. Whining and complaining are not in my life. Nor are outbursts of strong language good enough.54

Like so many other freedom fighters Nehru does not consider prison life to be a bane: “Prison always serves as a tonic to me, a change from the horrible dullness of normal life.

Nehru feels that in prison he can effectively cut himself off from the worries and responsibilities that fetter him outside and think of the problems in a larger perspective:

... We are surrounded by overwhelming problems from which none of us can run away.... Life is difficult enough and it grows in complexity. There is a shallowness and shabbiness about it which hurts continually, if we have the misfortune to be sensitive and to have any ideals. Yet we must face it, understand it and accept it, while at the same time we have to
struggle against its evil and crudity. We are all the prisoners of the myths of the past and the emotions of the present with just a little elbow room perhaps.\textsuperscript{55}

Glimpses of World History is in fact a bunch of letters addressed to Indira from jail. Nehru says: “These letters of mine are but superficial sketches joined together by a thin thread. But we know they are by no means superficial. Nehru adopted the letter form to make History more intimate. In fact when he thinks of getting these letters published, he writes to Horace Alexander: “They deal with World history in a sort of jumpy way with a connecting link, and there are many personal and intimate touches in them.

In his monograph of Nehru, C.D. Narasimhaiah observes:

The letters taken as a whole, are an eloquent tribute to the quality of English used by Indians of an older generation and the adequacy of it as a creative medium for us. Nehru is acknowledged to be one of the best writers of English and his Letters help us to confirm the widely prevalent view of him as an outstanding writer of English\textsuperscript{56}.

Nehru’s letter are not only chronicles of history but also excellent specimens of what good letters should be. They are more informal, more intimate and more personal then any other letters of the period. Like the English letters of the eighteenth century, Nehru’s letters abound in news and views. They can also be substitutes for an essay or a travelogue. Above all they are eminently literary because they are written in a style which is not contrived, a style which is graceful and cultured, and a style full of sincerity.

The letters of political personages take us to the ring seat of India’s freedom movement. In these letters, history and biography meet. We see
how moderate politics gave rise to militancy to return to the Gandhian ideal of Satyagraha and non-cooperation. We also come across the impact of Gandhi on the thinking of many national leaders. We see the growth of Congress. We see the shaping of Gandhi’s mind. History could never come so close to us.

Nehru wrote lengthy letters to the concerned officers about the difficulties faced by the fellow prisoners thus:

TO THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF PRISONS, UNITED PROVINCES, LUCKNOW

Sir,

For some time past various complaints have appeared in the public press in regard to the bad treatment accorded to the satyagrahi prisoners in the Camp Jail in Lucknow. Recently some very amazing charges have so appeared, which state that on at least two occasions lathi charges were made on the prisoners by orders of the jail staff and a large number were badly injured; that the conditions prevailing in the jail are abominable in the extreme; that food is frequently not given and when given is utterly unfit for human consumption; that about 200 of the prisoners were put in fetters and a large number in solitary cells; that prisoners are deliberately starved and kept in such a manner that they grow faint and utterly weak; that threats are continually being held out to them and are sometimes translated into attacks upon them; that sanitary conditions are non-existent; that there is no proper medical arrangement; that no newspapers or books are provided or allowed; that letters are seldom, if ever, received or dispatched that two deaths recently took place among the prisoners, who were removed to King George's Medical Hospital on the point of death, where they expired within a few hours; that even when the Inspector General inspected the jail, the
prisoners were locked up in their barracks and were thus unable to approach him. These are some of the charges made. I am not aware of any official denial of these charges, and, in any event, such official denials seldom err on the side of veracity and little faith is attached to them.

I have refrained from addressing you on this subject, in spite of repeated complaints appearing publicly about the Lucknow Camp Jail and other jails in the province, as I had no desire to interfere in any way with the jail administration of the province. That administration, and the Provincial Government behind it, are notoriously backward and incompetent, and the ideas that govern them in regard to the treatment of prisoners are reminiscent of the middle ages. But when gross, deliberate and inhuman ill-treatment is added to the general incompetence, it becomes difficult to tolerate this state of affairs and to submit to it with quiet resignation. You have been good enough to accord me various conveniences and privileges which ordinarily are denied to the average prisoner. But these very conveniences and privileges become hateful to me when I realise that my friends and colleagues are being subjected to a treatment which can only be called barbarous. As you are no doubt aware, it has been our general policy to submit to jail discipline, unless this is considered humiliating. On the whole, we have all done this, and we have even put up with conditions which were deliberately meant to harass and annoy, but there is a limit to this and I fear, that if the conditions in the Lucknow Camp Jail are any indication of the policy of the Government functioning "at present, it may become necessary for us to revise our policy and to refuse to submit to jail discipline, and invite the consequences of such disobedience.

I have ventured to write to you on this subject as it is of considerable importance and likely to have far-reaching
consequences. I cannot re-main a silent spectator of the insults to and the sufferings of my colleagues.57

On hearing the sad demise of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Nehru deeply affected expresses his feelings thus:

TO KRISHNA KIRPALAM

My dear Krishna,

Just a month ago you wrote to me and soon after I received the Tagore Birthday Number of the Visvabharati Quarterly. I liked this Birthday Number very much and some of the pictures and articles were good.

How long ago it all seems! People must die some time or other and Gurudeva could not have lived much longer. And yet his death came as a grievous shock to me and the thought that I would never see his beautiful face and hear his gentle voice again oppressed me terribly. Ever since I came to prison this thought had haunted me. I wanted to see him once again so much. Not that I had anything special to say to him, and certainly I had no desire to trouble him in any way. Perhaps the premonition that I was not fated to see him again itself added to the grieving.

However all that is over and, instead of sorrow, let us rather congratulate ourselves that we were privileged to come in contact with this great and magnificent person. Perhaps it is as well that he died when lie was still pouring out song and poem and poetry what amazing creative vitality he had! I would have hated to see him fade away gradually. He died, as he should, in. the fullness of his glory.

I have met many big people in various parts of the world. But I have no doubt in my mind that the two biggest I have had the privilege of meeting have been Gandhi and Tagore. I think they have been the two outstanding
personalities in the world during the last quarter of a century. As time goes by, I am sure, this will be recognised, when all the generals and field marshals and dictators and shouting politicians are long dead and largely forgotten.

It amazes me that India in spite of her present conditions (or is it because of it?) should produce these two mighty men in the course of one generation. And that also convinces me of the deep vitality of India and I am filled with hope, and the petty troubles and conflicts of the day seem very trivial and unimportant before this astonishing fact the continuity of the idea that is India from long ages to the present day. China affects me in the same way. India and China: how can they perish?

There is another aspect which continually surprises me. Both Gurudeva and Gandhiji took much from the West and from other countries, especially Gurudeva. Neither was narrowly national. Their message was for the world and yet both were 100% India's children, and the inheritors, representatives and expositors of her age-long culture. How intensely Indian both have been, in spite of all their wider knowledge and culture. The surprising thing is that both of these men with so much in common and drawing inspiration from the same wells of wisdom and thought and culture, should differ from each other so greatly! No two persons could probably differ so much as Gandhi and Tagore!

Again I think of the richness of India's age-long cultural genius which can throw up in the same generation two such master-types, typical of her in even' way, yet representing different aspects of her many-sided personality.58

The Autobiographies, Diaries and letters show us the care and concern they had for the country and countrymen. They are the masters of English language and have employed the language powerfully to express their feelings.
REFERENCES

2. Ibid, p. 11
3. Ibid, p. 20
4. Ibid, p. 26
5. Ibid, p. 15
6. Ibid, p. 106
7. Ibid, p. 20
12. Ibid, p. 354
13. Ibid, p. 356
15. Ibid, p. 99
16. Ibid, p. 48
17. Ibid, p. 139
19. Ibid, p. 36-37
20. Ibid, p. 60
22. Mahatma Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, p. 120
23. Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Story of My Deportation*, p. 95
24. Ibid, p. 27.
30. Babani Bhattacharya, *Gandhi the Writer, p.72*
31. M.D. Vidwan, *Letters of Lokamanya Tilak, p.45*
33. Sisir K. Bose *Netaji's correspondence, p.45*
34. Ibid, p.49.
35. Ibid, p.36.
36. Iyengar K. R. S, *Indian Writing in English, p.78*
37. Ibid, p.89.
38. Biradar S.S, *Indian English Diaries by Freedom Fighters, p.103*
40. V.C. Joshi, *Lala Lajapatri Writings and Speeches, p.337.*
41. Ibid, p.90,91.
42. Ibid, p.110.
43. Ibid, p.112.
44. Ibid, p.129.
45. M.D. Vidwan *Letters of Lokamanya Tilak, p.72.***
46. Ibid, p.78.
47. Ibid, p.87.
49. Ibid, p.89.
50. Sisir K. Bose *Netaji's correspondence, p.32.***
51. Ibid, p.57.
52. Ibid, p.61.
55. Jawaharlal Nehru *Letter and Diaries, p.175.***
56. Narasimiah C D, *Jawaharlal Nehru, p.15.***
57. Jawaharlal Nehru *Letter and Diaries, p.190.***