

A STUDY OF JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN'S AND L.K.ADVANI'S PRISON DIARIES

N. Satyanarayana¹ & C. L. L. Jayaprada²

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India

²Retd. Professor, Department of English, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

Among many genres of life-writing, the study of diary has been a recent phenomenon. It is basically a study of the identity of the self and its exploration. Diary as a genre is variously defined by critics owing to its interdisciplinary nature. In the first half, this paper examines the origin, growth, and nature of diary writing in the world and analyses especially the tradition of writing a diary in prisons. In the second part, the article explores two prison diaries of political prisoners of India during the Emergency (1975). These are Prison Diary by Jayaprakash Narayan and A Prisoner's Scrap-Book by L.K.Advani. The diary of JP, pregnant with fiery words, points out the lacunae in the contemporary democratic system and stresses the need to restore the receding values in the minds of the law enforcing authority and calls for a total revolution. The diary of Advani chronicles of unflinching dedication towards achieving the vision of an ideal nation and his passionate effort to restore democracy in India through his writing. Writing diaries is a form of political action to both these writers.

KEYWORDS: *Prison Diaries, Emergency in India, Political Prisoners, Suppression of Fundamental Rights, Incarceration - Idealism of Great Leaders*

INTRODUCTION

“It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”

–Nelson Mandela

Diaries have always been a significant source in capturing the lives of legendary figures. They have been a popular form of literary writing right from ancient times. Origin of the diary could be traced to ancient Greek writings. The ancient philosophers of Greece used to observe the stars, relate day-to-day events with the movements of the stars and record carefully minutes details of day-to-day activities. Later on, Romans followed the same methods. Thus a variety of diaries for specific purposes came to be maintained since medieval times. The kings and rulers also maintained diaries which are a source of valuable information. Jayaseela Stephen observes in her article “Diaries of the Natives from Pondicherry and the Prose Development of Tamil in the Eighteenth Century” that

Although kings and rulers in the past have taken the trouble to leave behind records about the political and economic affairs in their kingdoms, it seems that diaries, as we understand them today, were maintained first time by the rulers of Sung

dynasty of China as early as in the twelfth and thirteen centuries (AD.1125-1212). They have recorded the daily events in the court. One of the specific features of the diaries is that they are private and are not meant for public use (Stephen 144).

The word diary is known by different words in different countries. English 'Diary,' or 'Journal,' German 'Tagebuch,' French 'Journal,' or 'Journal in time' and Russian 'Dnevnik' are all derived from the root meaning of 'of day'. Learning about great people's personal lives through diaries and letters is a privilege for the commoner. The genre archives personal writing of historical as well as literary figures. A recent statement by Irina Paperno speaks of the complexity of defining diary as a mode of writing or as a genre.

The diary, as uncertain genre uneasily balanced between literary and historical writing, between the spontaneity of reportage and reflectiveness of the crafted text, between selfhood and events, between subjectivity and objectivity, between the private and the public, constantly disturbs attempts to summarize its characteristics within formalized boundaries (Paperno 561).

Yet over the years, scholars used diaries as historical testimony, a literary form, or an autobiographical document. The diaries of Samuel Pepys, Marie Bashkirtseff, Anais Nin, Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, Mikhail Kuzmin, Witold Gombrowicz, Anne Frank, and Victor Klemperer are a testimony to enduring attraction of diaries for readers. The diary as a literary genre that reaches out across national borders is perhaps nowhere better exemplified than in the painstaking notes of Samuel Pepys. Pepys's diary covers the years from 1660 to 1669, crucial times in the history of London which include the Great Plague of 1665 and the Great Fire of 1666. They were subsequently published in eleven volumes. The critics have observed not only the pains and personal experiences expressed by the author but also a highly polished narrative technique of writing. Pepys wrote both of himself and the world he lived in. He was the first important person to chronicle the day to day personal events rather than business transactions in the diary. Gillespie observes,

When diaries are read subsequently, what is now 'the past' comes alive once more, and exists once more in the 'present'. The diary connects the writer of the 'now' with the reader of the 'then', offers a unique window on a specific period or event (Gillespie 621).

The significant example of diary writing that eventually led to the publication of path-breaking research is that of Charles Darwin. During his voyages, he maintained a record of biodiversity which later evolved into the volume, *The Origin of Species*. Darwin says that he allowed himself the satisfaction of writing a very brief abstract of his theory in pencil in 35 pages and later elaborating the same into 230 pages.

Diary writing in those days must have been an arduous process. It must have called for single-minded devotion day after day on the part of the diarist especially when he had to fulfill a variety of responsibilities as an individual. For many great people diary writing is not just recording of their daily routine, but a means of exploring their inner self in the entries. The Great Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy's renowned diaries reveal this angle.

What does his project mean? On the basis of his method of diary-keeping, Tolstoy's diaries can be viewed as a life-long experiment testing the possibilities and constraints of man's ability to know, improve, and represent him. From the age of eighteen to the age of eighty-two, Tolstoy kept asking in his diary: Who am I? How do I live? What is death? For him, the diary-writing was a project with far-reaching psychological, moral, philosophical significance (Paperno 568).

The above instances show how diary-keeping has actually shaped the writing and sharpened the thinking of statesmen, scientists, and writers in their chosen fields. Diaries of the legendary figures leave behind a remarkable legacy and provide valuable insights into the public and private life of individuals and the working of great creative minds.

While diary-keeping by free individuals has always been a creative work, for the people in captivity diary writing has been a source of sharing the thoughts on the oppressive and unjust system at work and a relief for themselves as it is the only way of communication with others. Any form of writing by the prisoners, in general, is termed as prison writing or prison literature. This includes the prison experiences and the ideas and reflections of the prisoner in the form of a memoir, diary, letters, poetry, autobiography, nonfiction, and fiction. Of these forms the prison diaries have attracted the attention of the intellectuals since the writers have often kept diaries to let the world know of the anguish of the incarceration.

In the paper an attempt is made to analyze the diaries of Jayaprakash Narayan, *Prison Diary* (1978) and Lal Krishna Advani, *A Prisoner's Scrap-Book* (1978). They both played a vital role in independent Indian politics, especially in the 1970s and 80s. Prison is the place for solitary reflection for detainees when they have a lot of time on hand. Both these prison writers naturally reflect on their own times, the conditions they live in and state of the troubled nation in an intense manner.

Prison writing has been regarded as a powerful means of self-expression and a means of expressing the voice of the suppressed in jail. At the same time, the writings reflect realistic accounts of misdeeds of authorities of those times. Most of the writings in jail are mature intellectually and spiritually. Prison writing also enables the writer to resist the trauma of his imprisonment and retain his cognitive abilities.

Diary writing in Prison is a multi-disciplinary genre of writing and it touches many aspects of human life. When a person is kept in captivity, the human mind reacts in two ways to the experiences of confinement. One may find prison conditions so painful that he may divert his thoughts in an entirely different direction, and the other may take confinement as a state of blissful solitude and an excellent opportunity to consider the past and speculate about the future. Thus one may become absolutely apathetic to the vile incarceration or reflect on prison life and voice the suffering in his writing. In general, the main motive behind the writings in prison is the strong urge of the writer to keep faith and sanity against all odds and strong determination to share with others the inner anguish at the state of affairs. The captive conditions prompt the anguished soul to strive hard to speak against the tyranny and to share his concerns with people. Historical evidence proves that prisons have been the birthplaces of many renowned writers and their greatest books. It has been proved repeatedly that the imprisonment could enchain body but it could not control a thinking mind. The diaries chosen here vividly depict the conditions of the Emergency, the misuse of democracy and the impending risk of the autocratic rule in India.

Jaya prakash Narayan and Advani during their confinement were determined to write against all odds. Lack of comfort did not deter them from writing their diaries *A Prison Diary* and *A Prisoner's Scrap-Book*. Unlike the common prisoners who wrote about their physical sufferings during their confinement, these two authors chose to describe the degrading social and oppressive political conditions of the times. They offer resistance against seemingly ordered disorder in organized establishments. They did not consider their detention as a personal issue limiting their freedom but described it as a broad arena of socio-political and economic turmoil in India. So the diaries are a powerful medium of expression not only of contemporary conditions prevailing in the Emergency period but also the consequences of the misuse of authority.

One of the finest Gandhian thinkers of modern India, Jaya parkash Narayan was born in Bihar. When he was in college, he participated in the Non-cooperation movement. He was a Marxist to the core at the beginning but he turned to practical socialism on the advice of Mahatma Gandhi. He remained one of the greatest devoted followers of Mahatma Gandhi. The resistance struggle he started against the imposition of the Emergency catapulted into a great movement that finally led to the defeat of Mrs. Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, in elections.

JP's diary spans the period from 21 July 1975 to 4th November 1975 in which his experiences during his solitary confinement are portrayed vividly. It is an expression of his struggle against the system as well as a description of the surroundings in which he was forced to live. This diary does not show any bitterness towards the powers but it shows an intense opposition towards state-sponsored anarchy and lynching of the constitutional missionary. The diary shows how a person would react to the circumstances in which his dreams crumble down when the government behaves contrary to reasonable constitutional prescriptions.

At the outset of the diary, Narayan expresses his anguish, confusion, and self-doubt, "My world lies in shambles all round me. I am afraid I shall not see it put together again in my lifetime. Maybe my nephews and nieces will see that. Maybe" (Prison Diary 1). It was recognition of the circumstances after nearly a month of reflection.

The author believed that youth had a decisive role in making or unmaking of any nation. He made it a point to write in his diary to keep a communicative link alive with his people. People liked his views, thoughts, and ideology because he is clear, transparent, sincere, and practical. During this period, he symbolized humanity itself.

The other objective would be to start a revolutionary movement of total change in society with the participation of the people, with the youth and students in the forefront perhaps, either with the cooperation of the government or in a confrontation with it (Prison Diary 49).

He says that the need of the hour for the country was a comprehensive struggle for change in all aspects that affect the society. In these lines, JP used his ideology to create awareness in people about the need for revolution. He thought that a popular movement against the excesses of the government would be successful only with the involvement of the students and people. His language is instructive and thought -provoking.

The writer draws on his mentor Gandhi's words which could identify the root of political and moral malaise. "Gandhi called parliamentary democracy a dictatorship of the majority. What genius had he to go to the very root of things! (Prison Diary 60)"

JP draws out a plan of total revolution which can free the country from its problems. He suggests that a man should possess the things which were enough to satisfy his minimum needs. "Man is both matter and spirit. His life must fulfill both his material and his spiritual needs" (Prison Diary 61). Extending his explanation to the moral - spiritual framework, JP analyses how the moral-spiritual aspects are interrelated.

This implies a voluntary limitation on consumption, which is a moral concept. I do not have asceticism in mind. That is for spiritual seekers. For the average man, for all of us, except those who accept asceticism as a way of spiritual perfection or a full material satisfaction is itself a spiritual life (Prison Diary 62).

Continuing his writing, on the same note, JP mentions in the postscript the end of the Autobiography of Russell. According to Russell, personal vision denotes taking care of things that are noble, gentle, beautiful and allowing to gain wisdom in ordinary day to day life. This social vision denotes his conceptualization of an ideal society, where hatred, greed, and envy die because there is nothing in the world to nourish them. This ideal society was earlier visualized by one of the greatest philosophers, Thomas Moore in his famous work Utopia, and later on visualization of this type of ideal society came to be known as utopian romanticism. JP was very much influenced by such Utopian Romanticism and his theory of total revolution was an ad mixer of Russell's ideology and Moore's utopian vision.

Narayan appeals to the people to fight for the right to recall their representatives to the parliament. "There was a need for a common citizen like me to speak on behalf of the people. While I disclaim any authority to speak for the people, I am placing here my views as a common citizen (Prison Diary, 125)." He explained that right to recall in a sine-qua-non for an effective democratic system. This right includes the awareness among the voters to choose the right person and awareness about the work and function of the elected representatives.

Finally, the writer hoped that his trust with the idea of total revolution would continue with him as long as God grants him good health. He urges every person to move the concept of total revolution ahead.

Finally, if God grants me better health in the coming months, I look forward to taking up my cry of total revolution and do whatever might lie in my power. Meanwhile, the work need not be stopped. Let everyone do his bit, singly or in co-operation with others. Here is a beacon light for our youth. I hope they will steer the course of their life towards that light. I am at their disposal even in my sick bed for advice and such guidance as I might be capable of giving (Prison Diary 128).

The above lines state his vision of a great nation and true democracy. He yearned for highly idealistic nobility and commonly useful democratic values. The purpose of diary writing is to alert voters to their duty of correcting elected representatives so that their work contributes to the smooth administration through which the fruits of parliamentary democracy reach the common man.

He conveyed his idea of total revolution through the pamphlet SampooranKranthi. His slogan then was "Die before democracy is dead".

Sampoornakrantiabnarahai.

Bhawiitihashamarahai (Prison Diary 128).

The slogan is meant to get the attention of the students and people towards the concept of total revolution and it turned into a house-hold word. Everybody wanted to campaign in elections not to get to power but to fight the corrupt ruling party like any law-abiding citizen. His style with its rapid pace and succinct sharpness of slogans give an impression of a living voice.

The other notable political prison writer during the Emergency in India is L. K. Advani. He is a charming orator and veteran parliamentarian, deeply interested in issues concerning constitutional law and electoral reforms. He had been also a journalist by profession before he joined active politics. He is a recipient of the award for an outstanding parliamentarian. He is widely regarded as a leader who combines intellectualism, integrity and mass appeal. His nineteen-month prison experiences in jail during the political emergency and his profound understanding of how Indian democracy functions are reflected in the insightful diary. The diary of L.K. Advani's A Prisoner's Scrap-Book visualizes and aspires for an ideal democratic nation.

During the Emergency, he was tested by many kinds of adversity and he spent those nineteen dark months behind bars, dispossessed of communication facilities, and even of personal contacts except for rare visits by his family. But he had amiable companions in prison, as well as a band of younger persons to exchange political ideas. As the scientist always thinks of new ideas, the patriotic intellectuals think of the problems of the nation. Those motivated him to write the diary. Jayaprada stated in her article "Writing becomes an act of self-recovery, a way of communicating with people and a way of creating a community and culture with oneself as a member" (Prison Writing in India 97). For Advani writing in Prison is also a means of creating a politically alert community of people.

A Prisoner's Scrap-Book has four parts, "A View From Behind the Bars", "Underground Literature," "Some Letters and Notes from Jail" and "Appendices". The paper focuses on the first part of his Scrap-Book "A View from the Behind the Bars" which is in the form of a diary.

"A View From Behind the Bars" can imply two things. It is a view of the happenings inside the jail and a view of the world from behind the bars. He thought that social, political and economic situations inside and outside the bars are to be reformed drastically. First of all, he commented that the personal freedom that is enjoyed by the individual outside cannot be substituted by any kind of comforts in the jail. For example, in his diary entry on February 23, 1975, he mentions the example of Gandhiji's arrest in Aga Khan Palace.

The British kept Gandhiji in the Aga Khan Palace but they knew that for Gandhiji that palatial mansion with all its comforts could never be a substitute for his own austere Sabarmati Ashram. The British, as far as I recall, never bragged about the money they were spending on Gandhiji (Scrap-Book 106).

Criticism of the British also expresses in a sarcastic way the bitter indictment of the contemporary government. Prisoners are always put under an observant eye which is very embarrassing to prisoners and is a kind of invasion upon the privacy of the individual. So these practices are depicted and deplored in the book.

Advani's sense of alienation and humiliation, as well as his amusement at the turn of events, is detailed thus.

The main room in the guest house has been allotted to me. Nayak and Kishan Singh have their luggage in a different room but as I am about to retire for the night Kishan Singh enters my room and apologetically asks, "May I sleep in here?" "Why not," I replied immediately without realizing that the idea is to keep a watch on me during the night also. Kishan Singh then mentions that he is the son of Anant Singh, a veteran freedom fighter of Karnataka. He says that he felt ashamed of doing this kind of job because those in detention at the moment are also freedom fighters (Scrap-Book 113).

In the Emergency, there were many violations of law but the prisoner always hopes against hope that justice would be done to him soon. Reading of prison experience gives solace.

In Solzhenitsyn's 'Cancer Ward' there is a touching passage about the feelings of political prisoners perennially looking forward to amnesty "Only a prisoner in his first year of sentence believes, every time he is summoned from his cell and told to collect his belongings, that he is being called to freedom. To him, every whisper of an amnesty sounds like the trumpets of archangels. But they call him out of his cell, read him some loathsome documents and shut him into another cell on the floor below even darker from the previous one but with the same stale, used up air. The amnesty is always

postponed—from the anniversary of victory to the anniversary of Revolution, from the anniversary of the Revolution to the Supreme Soviet session. Then it bursts like a bubble or is applied only to thieves, crooks, and deserters instead of those who fought in the war and suffered (Scrap-Book 141).

The comment reflects on the inner world of a detainee, his hope, and despair. Another interesting aspect of political prisoners' routine is reading extensively prison writing by others in order to gain insight and draw inspiration.

Advani cites that there were fabricated cases against the political prisoners in the Emergency. For example, the government tried to silence the voices of opposition to the failure of constitutional norms by arresting them. Later the leaders of the opposition are retained inside the jail by the framing of false charges. Advani describes the official discourse thus,

The law minister, H.R.Gokhale is reported as having said in Washington (May 1) that the number of political prisoners in India was not in thousands as stated by the Western Press, but only in hundreds! Gokhale said this while addressing the Federal Bar Association. He said that there were three categories of prisoners; firstly, political prisoners who believed in violence or had an affiliation with communal bodies. Their number was in hundreds. The second category was of anti-social elements. Their number had gone down because the crime had gone down. The third category was of economic offenders. This was a large number because Government had come down heavily on them! (Scrap-Book 125-126).

Amused by such comments, Advani records that it is a bankruptcy of philosophy that spreads canards about the opposition parties. He cites several such incidents which give a distorted picture of actual events.

He records the number of cases he and other political prisoners filed against the government on violation of norms in arresting numberless persons and most importantly on the undemocratic way constitutional amendments are made. These long drawn struggles are described elaborately in the pamphlets and they succeed.

Finally, the government was forced to declare election and release all the Political prisoners due to the success of multi-pronged struggle.

When he was finally released along with thousands of other prisoners, Advani receives piles of his blocked letters in which a friend writes, "They can steal your freedom but can't steal your hope." (Scrapbook 163) His diary is a celebration of hope and destiny.

The present study undertakes a close look into the prison writings of JP and Advani. There are a striking similarity and difference between the methods of approach of writings of JP and Advani. Both are visionaries and seekers after truth and justice in politics and public life. JP visualized a just society with Total Revolution which was seemingly a utopian concept but in truth thoroughly practical and original ideology. He thought that the social and political revolution would be imminent if social change is brought about. He believed that awareness should be created among the masses about their rights. Then only the foundations of a just society would be strong.

Similarly, Advani thought that by creating awareness among the people, the democratic society would be safeguarded against falling into the trap of dictatorship. In contrast, JP was an original thinker and he framed the ideology for just social and political order. Advani commented on various contemporary political issues and discussed in detail his fight to restore democracy through a series of legal battles.

Writing in prison serves as a counter inscription that voices the sufferings of prisoners and questions the power politics, even sanity of civilized living in its vivid descriptions. In other words, it is a medium to express the inner reflections of captive souls and also a form of political action for the detained.

Both the diaries assume a unique significance and role in the history of Indian literature which provides valuable insights into the relationship of public and private life. Through their writing both the writers urge the youth to rise to the occasion in the national reconstruction. Their stand in support of human rights and just causes of the mass of humanity stands vindicated in these two texts.

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