

“A Study of Torture, Trauma, and Agony in Prison Diary: *Prisoner No 100: An Account of My Days and Nights in an Indian Prison* by Anjum Zamrud Habib”

Ahsan Ul Haq Magray
 PhD Candidate
 Deptt: of English
 Kashmir University,
 Email: ahsanulhaq045@gmail.com

Abstract

Prisons have always been a source of writing ordeals, sufferings and traumatic experiences. Anjum Zamrud Habib, the political activist from Kashmir wrote her diary during her incarceration in an Indian prison Tihar Ashram or jail. The diary is regarded as one of the important pieces of Indian Prison Writing. The following paper unravels the ordeal, miseries, humiliation and trauma of the writer and her other women inmates. The paper also studies it as a testimonial of prison literature emerging from India.

Keywords: Tihar Jail, ordeal, humiliation, pain, traumatic experiences, Prison Literature.

Introduction

Anjum Zamrud Habib a political activist and Chairperson of the Muslim Khawateen Markaz from Kashmir. In 2003, she was arrested and was taken to custody and later sent to Tihar jail for five years of rigorous imprisonment. As recorded in an interview and her prison diary she was returning from the Thai Embassy to get her Visa for Bangkok to attend a seminar. The verdict pronounced much before the formal judgment was conveyed to her in the courtroom-five year's rigorous imprisonment in Delhi's Tihar Jail. The years of appalling torture and trauma at Tihar Jail and her tryst with other inmates in the 'high risk' ward of Tihar jail led to the book *Prisoner no 100: The story of Ordeal in Indian Prison* (2014). The book is available in three languages English, Urdu, and Hindi; originally it was written in Urdu entitled *Qadi No100* (2009).

History and world literature is a testimony to the fact that several writers when incarcerated produced their great works in narrow cells and high bars of a prison. Anicius Boethius wrote *Consolation of Philosophy*, John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* Gramsci jotted down *The Prison Notes*, are only few to name few examples. Prison Literature from India is very rich and old written in different languages of the country. Bal Gangadhar Tilak penned down the entire script with pencil, of his masterly and scared book the *Bhagavad Gita* (1915) while he was in jail at Mandalay, Burma. M k Gandhi was imprisoned by the Britishers, he wrote a lot of his autobiography *My Experiments from Truth*(1927) in Yarwada jail in Maharashtra. *Jail Diary* by Bhagat Singh written between 1929-1932, J Lal Nehru who described his visits to prisons as 'pilgrimages' wrote three great pieces in prison *Glimpses of World History* (1934), *An Autobiography* (1936) and *The Discovery of India* (1964). Prolific Indian Statesmen and writer Abul Kalam Azad wrote his classic *Gubhar e Khatir* (1946) in prison, , etc proves the fact that there are a number of prison writings ranging in different genres. Kashmiri Poet and writer Ghulam Nabi Khayal wrote a poetry collection in a Srinagar jail entitled *Zanjir Haun Saaz* (1963) in vernacular language. Anjum also, narrates in her memoir that: "Incarceration can bind physically but cannot bind one's conscience; no jail can cuff one's thoughts or imagination".

Prisoner No100: An The Story of Ordeal in Indian Prison is an account, penned down during and after her long five years incarceration in Tihar jail. It was during this span of five long years that she remained the victim of worst circumstances and struggled to maintain her dignity and resistance years. The diary presents, her life in a prison cell, where all her freedom and liberty were curtailed. The walls touching the sky are meant to limit their freedom and action; no doubt these walls restrict the everyday actions and moment of prisoners but they echo the voice of great personalities like Anjum and other notable prison writers. But for these prolific writers and artists, incarceration meant another way out to express themselves. She talks in her memoir about the barbaric torture and treatment imposed upon political prisoners in Tihar Jail. Centuries ago famously Richard Lovelace penned down in a prison:

*Stone Walls do not a prison make,
Nor Iron bars a cage (To Althea, from prison)*

Prisoner No. 100 is Anjum Zamrud Habib's personal account of five years in jail, nearly all of them as an under trial. She is one of the numerous victims of the draconian POTA – Prevention of Terrorism Act 2002, a successor to a similarly notorious TADA – Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, which lapsed in 1995, of which she became the victim. The text provides an account and experience of trauma, torture, and humiliation faced by the writer. The diary exemplifies for whom and which purpose such laws are, only to curb the freedom of expression and free will.

It illustrates and elaborates how regionalism, nationalism, religious and racist basis operate in jail, not only among the inmates but also among the wardens and authorities as well. It brings the fact and horror of the old saying “justice delayed is justice denied”. While how cruelly in the clutches of arrogant the once life is spoiled and destroyed at all. Her only crime was to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The diary describe her shock and bewilderment of arrest and jail and sense of being abandoned by his political comrades but there is no denying the fact that the book is moving life story of a woman's extraordinary life. Anjum was often compared and called ‘Zainab Gazali’. Zainab Al Ghazali was an Egyptian, who had suffered the worst in Egypt's prison during the rule of Adul Nasar and his government. Gazali recorded her ordeal in *Zindnan Ki Shub was Roz(Days from My Life)* in prison. Gazali's text is one of the world-famous texts of Pris-Lit.

The diary delves into the realm of prison and its system .No doubt it is story of her five years' incarceration in jail and her on and off from Tihar jail to Patiala Court House, she was waiting for her trail and was counting the days on fingers, it is very horrible and painful to learn that she was badly treated by all jail inmates and authorities except few throughout her five years. Not only this on a number of times she was beaten, abused and tortured, by inmates and some women wardens. Not only this, her health got deteriorated and the medical treatment was denied. Most of the time she remained in utter confusion and suspension how to get out from this jail? The diary also shows the corruption, and favouritism prevailing in the jail. Few women inmates had good relation with prison authorities, The Habshi women folk had scared all the staff, at several times she was thrashed by some Habshi women inmates. But whatever the task she was assigned, she performed with full dedication and labour whether it was candle making, sewing, teaching or any other. Diary endows with a background of the rural town of Kashmir who suddenly found herself

in an alien world of five hundred women all detainees in Tahir jail, most of them are neither polite nor civilized, who are biased to her.

Page after page there is torture, pain, humiliation and traumatic experience seen. Written in an utter difficult time brings the fact to point, that being physically caged couldn't put the lock in the once strong will to life making. During most of her five years she was kept without charge, denied bail again and again, supposedly due to the crime she was accused of. She at several times exposes that hatred commented by other prisoner and authorities on her was most traumatic for her. She says no prisoner is treated well, but she was shunned mostly and was often treated as anti-Indian and was called "Dash Daraho". Moreover; authorities have managed all Muslims prisoners to be alienated from her. She recalls that NGO's and research scholars come to prison but only to collect data and relevant material for their own ends, but it never proved any help to any prisoner. Their research didn't benefit any inmate; they only looked for their subject matter. Whenever any NGO come to prison premises, many women believe that they would help in their release and their pleas would reach to the corridors of higher authorities, but nothing happens. The farce of jail reform and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) interventions in jails which seem to be predominant with corruption, nepotism, religious bias. The almost two hundred pages of this text contains her day to day life in prison, her visits from Tihar to Patilia Court and other courts, her frequent and increasing illness, the denial of her bail, her relatives visits, the quarrels of inmates, the corruption and nepotism prevailing in the jail, writing letters to her family, eagerly waiting for her release and much more, celebrating and sharing her joy and sorrows. The text is not only her story but the debasement of humanity the prisoner's face..

One may assert without qualms, *Prisoner NO 100* is an excellent piece of art which qualifies the genre of Prison Literature Lit. The act of writing such a piece of art, therefore, signifies the way in which these texts live on, far beyond the high walls that are meant to confine. Anjum had worked out through his loss, and trauma, and had transferred Jail into a test of religious sensibility and found reasons for survival as Nietzsche's prescription goes "He who has why to live can bear any how".

References:

- Iqbal, Javid. "Prisoner No 100: Zamrud Habib's Blood-Curdling Tale." *Greater Kashmir*. Jun, 16,2011. Zamrud- Habib's- Blood-Curdling -Tale-greater-Kashmir-com.
- Prison Writings in India. edited by Srinath C.N. Sahitya Akademi, 2014.
- Zamrood, Anjum. *Prisoner No 100: An Account of My Days and Nights in Indian Prison. Zuban Publications, 2015.*

Qadi No 100. Penguin Zuban, 2011.