

## Chapter-3

### Reflection of Trauma in *My Days in Prison*

Prison literature, most of the time, would come to mean testimonials and memoirs. These types of literature come out of jail that would be full of agony, struggle, grief, depression, etc. Prison writing always portrays the ordeal of the prisoners. Isolation from the family and the society makes the prisoner think about the world in two different ways. The inside of the four walls and the outer world, that is quite different. Prison is also part of society and its culture also differentiates the people from each other.

Prison writing is not a new concept; rather it was started in 450AD during the time of Boethius. There are different prisoners from long before to till now who wrote different books in both fictional and non-fictional genres. Jail is the place of confinement for the convict or for the under-trial prisoners (specific cases). So, no one can understand the jail culture without undergoing the experience of confinement. He/she can explain the bitter experience of the jail to the outer world. Prison writing is the only source that portrays the agony and suffering of the prisoners. In India, there are several books written on prison literature by many personalities during the time of their imprisonment.

The importance of prison writing is to bring the attention of the authority and the jail officials. It is a point of criticism for the jail authorities and the prisoners for their basic rights. Prison does not mean for punishment only rather it is used as a correctional or rehabilitation centre. Norman S Hayner and Ellis Ash have written in an article that “the penal institutions as they are today, the constant hostility between

guards and inmates are one of the major obstacles in the reformation of prisoners” (578). When the prisoners would be tortured and traumatized inside the four walls of the jail without the verdict of the court as criminals or innocents that lead to trauma and mental stress. There are several barracks inside the jails and every convict is to be detained with their respective crime. Under-trial prisoners would remain isolated from other convicts. Inmates who alleged of different cases were put behind the bars as a criminal. They will never forget the terrible nightmare that lived long last in their mind. People were put in jail because of a single allegation but they came out of it with several other cases. Their conscience and mind would be colonized for a lifetime. Even a physically free prisoner will not find freedom outside from the judgmental society. Qureshi says “Frustrated and disgusted with the system, many try to break free only to be imprisoned again” (1). It can be proved by the political prisoners only because the special cells have been established inside the jails. They can experience the real culture of the jail. The transparency behind the four walls of the jail can be expected from the political prisoners. So the literature is the source to get to know about the prisoners behind the walls. Humra Quraishi writes:

As citizens of the country, we should know what is happening behind those high walls with the inmates languishing inside with cut-offs from the world. Not to overlook this vital fact that almost seventy-five percent of the imprisoned are under trial and technically innocent. (Quraishi)

In recent times, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has been under conflict since the dispute started in 1989. The resistance started with the rise of terrorism and infiltration. Communal harmony among the people of Kashmir was broken because of insurgency. Instability and resistance in the valley lead to several detentions and

imprisonment taking place. People are detained from their home and sent them in different Indian jails. The illegal detention and disappearance were common practice in Kashmir by putting allegations on people. There are different Kashmiri in different jails but very few of them have written the ordeal of jail experience. In the contemporary era, three prison writers are there in Jammu and Kashmir, Iftikhar Gilani, Anjum Zamarud Habib, and Maqbool Ahmed. Iftikhar Gilani's *My Days in Prison* was the first prison memoir in Jammu and Kashmir. It was his first book written in the form of a prison memoir. He was a Kashmiri-based journalist in Delhi and also the editor of the *Kashmir Times* newspaper. He was imprisoned for seven months in Tihar Jail under the draconian case of the Official Secret Act (OSA).

Gilani's home was raided by Delhi police sharply at 4 o'clock in the morning without any information. His door was knocked and his wife says in Kashmiri *Kus tan chhhu darwazes peth* (somebody is at door) (Gilani 7). His interrogation started from the very first day to getting bail. His story about the jail experience was also heart-wrenching and full of terror and horror. It was unexpected for him to enter the jail and come out of it within a year. He was taken from his home on ninth June 2002 and his case was withdrawn after seven months in 2003. It was fortunate for him that a huge protest was being organized by his fellow journalists and humanrightsactivists for his bail. Saba Naqvi has written, "Earlier this year (2003) various threats and unfortunate circumstances forced him to leave India and take up a job in Turkey" (4).

Iftikhar Gilani's imprisonment and hard-working experience of the jail with several other jail inmates was written in his memoir *My Days in Prison*. It is divided into seven chapters and every chapter depicts different narratives. It starts with

chapter one 'Freedom Restored' because the very first thing that revolved in his mind was freedom from jail.

It was 9th June 2002, when Iftikhar Gilani was taken from his residence Malviya Nagar Delhi. The unprecedented raid at his home was very shocking and unexpected for the whole family. His home was searched by the Income Tax Department, but he believed this was used as an excuse to enter into his house. He was tortured and harassed at his residence along with his wife. More than sixty police personnel were at his home for investigation and started searching his home. His personal account and computer were checked by the police and a case was filed against him under OSA (1923) which is 14 years imprisonment. Official Secret Act (OSA) is an act like several other acts like Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) and Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA). It was a non-bailable offence for fourteen years of imprisonment. It is written that "The Official Secrets Act allows for holding a person guilty if he or she is in possession of any document that is calculated to be or might be or is intended to be, directly or indirectly, useful to the enemy" (PUDR). In fact, after seven months of imprisonment, he was found innocent by the honorable court and got bail.

This memoir is the story and experience of his seven-month imprisonment in Tihar Jail. It shows that how he was tortured and traumatized from his home to Tihar Jail. It was a depressing account which shows how a journalist the 'fourth pillar' of the country was suppressed as an under-trial prisoner. There are a number of journalists who have been working in the country and many of them were also shot dead in the streets of Srinagar. Shujaat Bukhari was one of the senior-most journalists from Kashmir who was killed in Srinagar and his case is still under review and the

killer is still unidentified. Earlier Iftikhar Gilani was working for *The Hindu* and later on, he switched to *The Rising Kashmir*, a newspaper in Jammu and Kashmir. Gilani was the first Kashmiri writer who wrote about the ordeal and agony that he experienced in Tihar Jail. Maqbool Ahmed was influenced by him and wrote a book after getting bail called “*Shabistan-e- Wajood*” and later on it was also translated into English.

Iftikhar Gilani’s *My Days in Prison* portrays how imprisonment causes trauma inside the jail and how life after imprisonment brings humiliation and stress. The whole world was divided for him between the outside world and Tihar Jail world. Behind the lofty high prison walls and iron bars, there was another world that showed different cultures and societies. He was thinking that now this world would be everything for him because he lost touch from the outside world. His seven months of imprisonment seem like many years spent inside the four walls which are connected with the sky. He was mentally disturbed and lost his memory. He forgot even the faces of his family members and particularly his children.

Gilani feels shocked after hearing the news that he was going to be released. His mind stopped working and he seemed to be a dumb man. His other jail inmates asked many questions to him and also wanted to share his happiness but his mind was baffled. He did not believe that he would set free and will be reunited with his wife and children. One of the famous European psychiatrists used the term ‘depersonalized’ during the time of the Nazi concentration camp. Whatever has happened to the liberated prisoner, psychologically imbalance overcomes his/her emotion. Depersonalization is a psychological term that Viktor E. Frankl discusses in his book *Man’s Search for Meaning* for newly-liberated prisoners. Unexpected things

when happening with prisoners for their happiness like freedom from jail leads to an imbalance of mental stress and consciousness. Frankl says “Psychologically what was happening to the liberated prisoners could be called Depersonalization. Everything appeared unreal, unlikely, as in a dream. We could not believe it was true” (95).

There are different narratives inside the jails that could be circulated within the jail premises only. It was very difficult for uneducated prisoners to write their suffering on a daily basis rather they can narrate their stories orally.

Prisoners wanted to unfold their stories with each other to overcome anxiety, trauma, and depression. Several poor prisoners are languishing in different Indian jails. Gilani says many prisoners were convicted of minor cases but they were not in such a condition to forward their cases and get bail. They have narrated many stories about their ordeal and struggle. He had carried all those tales to the outside world to portray the poor people who were behind the walls. Perhaps some political members do their best for their justice. Justice A.S. Anand in 2003 said: “Yes, nearly 75 percent of our jail population consists of under-trial, many of whom are innocent. A large number of under-trials languishing in jails even after getting bail because they are unable to raise the surety amount. In this context, we should consider the release of under-trials on personal bonds” (Qureshi 2). Being a Kashmiri journalist he was put in jail because he was close to his friends and relatives. He felt that the Kashmir politics and conflict were somehow the reason behind his incarceration.

Several questions were asked by the officials about the separatist leader Sayed Ali Shah Gilani and different narratives were also circulated in newspapers about the relation between them. Those narratives always hunt him more than that he was a

journalist and peace-loving who gave the price to Kashmir politics. Irfan Shams wrote, “I have nothing to do with SAS Gilani’s politics” (*Kashmir Life*). Kashmiri people were put behind the jail and detention camps on the basis suspicion and they are rotting in different jails. The Public Information Officer Report of Jammu and Kashmir shows that “90 percent of the prisoners lodged in jails of Jammu and Kashmir are under trial prisoners. Prison department Jammu said that less than 2 % of all individuals arrested in the military-related cases have been convicted” (*Awaz e PirPanjal* 2020).

It was also unexpected for Iftikhar Gilani to come out of jail in a very short period of time because the dramas he was already faced were very strange. His home was raided differently by police, IB and income tax officers, etc. without any information. The raiding parties were curious about his books and other personal documents rather than searching Income Tax related things like jewelry, money, and other assets. Search operation ended after several hours but they wanted him without having anything related to Income Tax or revenue. One of the members of the raided party said no need to convince them. They come for you-“they shall get you” (Gilani 21).

Gilani’s wife (Aanisa) was left alone in the whole building because Delhi police had informed them they had taken Gilani for investigation, not imprisonment. She was tortured and harassed both physically and mentally. Physical torture can hurt for a period of time only but mental torture will remain in the mind throughout life. It causes trauma and post-traumatic syndrome diseases (PTSD). One of the policemen asked him “*Ab raho choudah saal andar* (now you can stay inside for 14 years)” (Gilani 24). After hearing this horrible voice his hands and feet turned cold. He was

tortured and traumatized during the time and because of a single published paper found from his computer which was related to the Kashmir issue. He was put behind the bar only for a published article that was not a secret. Similar papers had already been published in different journals about the issues happening in society. So Gilani argues, it was not a crime to keep a research paper on a computer.

Interrogation under police custody causes psychological problems and mental stress. It was very difficult to come out of trauma that a person could face during the time of interrogation. Gilani says that before they started interrogation the IB official unfolded the third-degree torture techniques on him. He says “even those who had been picked up on mere suspicion were inhumanly tortured” (Gilani 35).

After the interrogation period and questioning session Gilani was sent to the Tihar Jail for his trial period. Life in jail seemed like a film in the cinema hall where there was a hero and a villain. Most of the time every prisoner was thinking about his release and everyone had a positive hope even some of them were lifetime prisoners. They always discussed their innocence with each other but it was useless for every inmate. They narrated their stories to the newcomers about the horror and trauma they faced as the old prisoners. Iftikhar Gilani had also hoped that he would be a free man very soon because he was a suspected convict. It was the first day of his court and he traveled in such a van like a wooden trolley with some iron grills. Every prisoner has been put into the barracks with his surname symbol arranged alphabetically. He was logged inside the trial room along with other few inmates and jail authority members. The first day of the trial started with a Nepali staff member who asked his name and slapped him without any reason. It was a signal for others to do the same with him.



They did the same and some of them said “*Sala, Gaddar, Pakistani Agent*, they were screaming” (Gilani 43).

People entered jail because of different reasons and it is no doubt, they can be tortured and harassed behind the bars. So, trauma is not new for them. Every prisoner inside the jail would go through trauma, either as a suspected prisoner or criminal. Prisoners who got bail would also face post-traumatic syndrome disease (PTSD). Prisoners can be institutionalized, before going back to society, because the jail norm and protocol can be followed by every inmate. They forced the prisoners to obey the order of the jail officials. This personal transformation is called “Institutionalization” (Thomas).

Trauma causes mainly after returning to the free world because of less support from society and family members. Family plays an important role to build the confidence of the prisoners to settle back in society. Emotional support always leads the prisoners to either a positive side or a negative. It is the emotional support that diagnoses the prisoner from trauma.

The behavior of the jail officials with the prisoners leads to more traumas. It was unexpected that the other inmates and officials were teaching the lesson of patriotism to Gilani. He thought that the other inmates who were already convicted of various crimes like some of them were under murderer cases also asking questions on nationalism. He was tortured in jail as given the task to clean the toilet with his own shirt. He was forced to put on the same shirt without washing till the arrangement of a new shirt. He was put inside a room known as a high-risk ward or “highlight word”

(Gilani 45). This ward is meant for high-risk prisoners and is not supposed to open their room for twenty-three hours.

It was an unexpected shock for Gilani to see the death room in the jail; he was not a criminal or a lifetime prisoner. He was put in the room which was just 6 by 8 feet long and without a window and a ventilator. He was a suspected prisoner but third-degree torture caused him trauma and mental stress.

Gilani had experienced the worst thing during his imprisonment which was isolation from the other human beings. He did not see the faces of other inmates or heard the voice of any human being. The harrowing written note he has seen on the board outside the death room is called “*Kaal Kothari*” (Gilani)- this notice board made him unconscious and sent chills down his spine. He spent his days and nights on the rough floor of the prison barracks. The hostile behavior of other jail inmates and officials was very aggressive and harsh towards him. His jail experiences were narrated as:

The moment I alighted from the jail vehicle, there was uproar just inside the main gate adjacent to the superintendent's office. He has come! There he is! Scores of voices rose. They were men in plain clothes, some convicts, some jail officials, and some under-trials, and they attacked me. I was beaten badly till I went unconscious and my ear and nose started bleeding. I was taunted as a terrorist, a traitor. (NWM 2003)

Racial discrimination was also very common inside the jail because of bribery. The treatment against foreigners in Tihar Jail was quite different from Indians. They were given different kinds of treatment, food, milk, dry fruits, and also not restricted

to be locked for the whole day. They got separate cells and also logged into the IGNOU ward that was meant for educated inmates.

Kiran Bedi played an important role in the reformation of the imprisonment system. She was the first woman lady to be recruited as IPS officer and was sent to Tihar Jail as inspector General of prisons. She made several changes and reforms in Tihar Jail. Besides reforming the vocational education and rehabilitation centre, she started *Vipassana* and Meditation programmes in the jail. She made several changes in the jail for the welfare of prisoners and also revamped the health system of the jail. She called it Tihar Ashram and also tried to make different changes in the education system. She wanted to reform the prison system in such a way that it could be like an institution or rehabilitation centre. Gilani says:

Kiran Bedi's efforts to bring about reforms in the prison system stemmed from her belief that a prison is an institution to correct people, not to punish them, for incarceration itself is a punishment that deprives prisoners of their liberty, choices and even clothes. If, along with this, they are subjected to more pain, prisoners may hurt society more once they go back to it. (85)

She also introduced many new programmes to rehabilitate the prisoner without harassing them. She banned many illegal things from the prison-like tobacco, cigarettes, etc. Unfortunately, all introduced programmes are functioning in papers but not in actual life. Complaint boxes are still outside the barrack and cell but no one is ready to put any paper because prisoners know that it would be opened by the jail staff itself.

Since cash was not permitted inside the jail, to purchase anything from the jail, they had to have jail coupons. He was penniless and not even in a condition to buy a toothbrush from the jail canteen. It was unexpected of him to ask for a meeting with his family members and other friends because of the heinous act that he had been accused of. It was unimagined that humanity is everywhere either in the jail or outside world. One of the jail officials handed over a fifty rupees coupon. No one was there to help him but it was an unexpected gift for him.

Frequent incidents of violence in the jail were a common practice, by the prisoners, with sharp things like shaving blades and knives. So, it was very difficult for new prisoners to be friends with each other. Prisoners were shifted without any information every week from barrack to cell, cell to Mullahiza ward, and vice versa. This practice was done only to make differences among the inmates, says Gilani in his memoir. So, the high-security prisoners who are detained under serious offence would be logged in highlight wards. Gilani says, “Consigning prisoners to the high-security ward, called ‘Highlight ward’ in Tihar parlance, is a serious punishment, entailing solitary confinement. The high security ward has its own ‘*Kasoori cells*’ (89).

The highlight ward is a black horrible dark room without a ventilator to keep highlight prisoners for security purposes. Long-term stays in those cells cause trauma among the prisoners and also cause psychological stress. Gilani has written that two prisoners were shifted in the highlight ward for a long period and they were mentally disturbed. He says that:

Two such prisoners were shifted to the general ward for their good conduct after three years in the highlight. One among them was chosen

to participate in the annual Olympics as he was a good cricketer. But he could bear to see so many humans and found the din of human voices intolerable. (Gilani 90)

It is very difficult for an individual to come out of a tortuous world where the law and security services and justice seem a far cry. This journey of Gilani's life was full of twists and turns inside the jail. It was a hopeless journey that he would reach on the destination point or not. On the very first day, he thought that it was a matter of just a few hours but all the hopes came to end when he entered Tihar Jail. Big walls of the jail and unfavorable environment seemed like he was put in a grave. He had heard different stories that were narrated by other inmates to him but it was a shocking experience for him to witness how easily innocent people were put behind the jail. So most of the people in Tihar Jail were innocent but not in such a condition to take legal justice. Even jail authorities knew the reality of the prisoner's innocence. He wrote that "Jail officials admit that more than 60 percent of the prisoners lodged there are innocents. In some cases many prisoners spent more years in jail than they would have had they been convicted" (Gilani 109).

Being a journalist, it was very unfortunate for Gilani to face such unbearable hostility from the jail officials. Mass media and journalism play an important role all over the world. It is the mirror of the society that it portrays. Media and democracy have a direct link with each other; media plays its role to bring the hidden things in front of society and democracy gives legal right to work in the field. Every individual of the state or country can vote for their right. One of the benefits of a democratic framework is the opportunity for articulation and the space that is given to contradiction by various segments of society. Social media is one of the main pillars

of democracy. Every citizen has the right to speak and give his/her suggestions. It has in particular, the following four columns: Judiciary, Legislative, Executive, and Media. The former three keep up an arrangement of governing rules in an Indian setting. While the last pillar of democracy (Media) is the most remarkable substance in the world, it guarantees straight forwardness in all three frameworks. It resembles a mirror that shows the genuine side. It makes us mindful of different social, monetary, and policy-driven issues that encompass a nation. With various new channels, papers, and online media stages which gave the most precise news covering a wide range of information. It portrays different major and minor issues of the government.

Iftikhar Gilani has written the role of media in his book, *My Days in Prison*. Many prisoners would rot in Tihar Jail because of suspected allegations. Journalists who always capture the news for their own business can put several other innocents behind the bar. Gilani's case was quite different from that of several other newspapers and magazines. He was also a part of such a powerful fraternity, so-called the fourth pillar of democracy but every prisoner doesn't have such favorable conditions. All over the world journalists made protests in his favor, and then the case concluded. He met with other prisoners during his imprisonment of seven months and spent days with those who were also in the jail under OSA. They were struggling in jail, because they don't have such legal power and support to prove them innocent. Gilani wrote:

We must ask ourselves whether in the mad rush of catching deadlines, headlines, and bylines, we have committed a gross violation of natural justice, whether the report filed by us would in effect amount to a condemnation of

some innocent person without affording him an opportunity to present his side of the story. (126)

Different stories have been planted against Iftikhar Gilani by the mass media. Several Newspapers had published the fake news about him that he was an agent of many agencies and provided the secrets of the nation to them. On being found innocent he was released from jail, all those news anchors started reporting favorably about him. So, the media plays an important role for every individual of the nation in both positive and negative. He was tortured both physically and mentally by watching the news on television and by reading what was written about him in newspapers. Gilani wrote, “I owned the torture I had to undergo on the day of my admission to gross misreporting by the newspapers” (130).

Whatever he experienced in the jail was the new culture of punishment and imprisonment. It would not be fair that a journalist or author can report and portray interesting stories. It is not always possible that the victim or officials are creating such stories but the factual points will come out of it. He had lost his friends, neighbors, relatives, and other journalist faith because he was a suspected victim of Official Secret Act.

It was unbelievable for him that he would be behind the bars and come out of it. In his entire life, he understands the meaning of pen and sword that “The pen is mightier than the sword but I learned during the incarceration at Tihar that the pen is a double-edged sword” (Gilani 122). He was through an unfortunate experience but later on, realized that he was fortunate that his well-wishers and God helped him to be released. During the period of imprisonment, Gilani has experienced that several

people in different jails are the victims of the Official Secrets Act. The tendency of the people who booked under such an act was around Delhi or inside the capital city. Most of the cases against the Official Secret Act came out after the attack on parliament. Different government employees had links with other terrorist agencies and several people were put behind the bars.

When an individual is put in jail different allegations come in front of him/her. His accounts were also searched, they found a file in his computer named 'Force' and considered him as an ISI agent. He was put behind bars and many new cases and charge sheets were presented against him related to pornography, fake accounts, pieces of jewelry, etc. He says that "the prosecution had also produced in the court details of some bank accounts saying that these were my accounts. I immediately demanded an investigation of the said accounts. These allegations vanished into thin air" (Gilani139).

It is impossible to forget the trauma of working under someone else's supervision. During the time of imprisonment, it is difficult for a person to forget his experience and emotional sentiments. Daily rounds of questioning on the same topic in the jail in front of jail officials cause mental harassment. Criminals or suspicious convicts are in the same category inside the barracks because of long-term trial period which is very common in Indian jails. Law and judiciary system takes a long time to conclude. Several prisoners are still under trial period but they have spent the same years in jail with equal punishment in their cases. If he/she could be declared as a criminal after the long trial period then again, he/she might have to spend the stipulated time.



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