



Title: Can South Asian Prison Literature Contribute to the Global Literary Heritage?

Thesis Paper

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Certificate of Completion

This is to confirm that Animas Debnath Plabon (ID: 221-10-920) from the Department of English, Daffodil International University, has completed the thesis entitled “Can South Asian Prison Literature Contribute to the Global Literary Heritage?” under my academic supervision. During the research process, he worked hard and showed his dedication to learning and I extend my best wishes for his future academic and professional endeavors.



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Declaration

I am Animas Debnath Plabon, hereby declare that I have done the research “ “Can South Asian Prison Literature Contribute to the Global Literary Heritage?” on my own by having the guideline from my supervisor, except where others sources are acknowledged in citation or reference section. I have read the guidelines for project paper submission given by the Department of English at Daffodil International University and have accepted all the mentioned terms and conditions. The work is my intellectual contribution to the field of theories. This thesis paper was completed during the fall semester 2024, under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Mohammed Shamsul Hoque, who is a Professor in the Department of English at Daffodil International University. I can recognize the consequences of academic improbity and taking responsibility for the contents. Besides, I can assure that no part of this paper has been published without proper citation.



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Abstract

This study examines the importance of South Asian prison writings by Benazir Bhutto, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with a focus on how they have evolved due to their resistance, psychological resilience, socio-political commentary, and colonial and postcolonial struggles. According to postcolonial theory, trauma theory and Marxist theory, the research involves a qualitative and comparative thematic approach. The study also compares these South Asian prison literatures with globally accepted writing such as *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela, to examine the global significance of these writings. The findings explore South Asian prison literature is very crucial for global literary canon because of the exploration powerful themes, history and culture. Moreover, it highlights imprisonment as a place for introspection, transformation and enhancing ideologies to resist against oppression.

Keywords: Prison literature, postcolonial theory, trauma theory, resistance, Marxism, South Asia.

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Introduction

Prison writing is the most necessary tool for showcasing colonial and postcolonial struggles. From the late 19th century through decolonization, the prison was a crucial place for political leaders to generate ideas about justice, identity, and independence. During the British Raj, imprisonment was a standard tool of repression used to suppress opposition. It framed the moral code of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's Satyagraha as well as Jawaharlal Nehru's humanism of history. After the Partition, the carceral state persisted in various forms such as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's repeated imprisonments under Pakistani rule. It highlighted East Pakistan's internal colonialism which ultimately led to the Bangladesh Liberation War. Benazir Bhutto's imprisonment under General Zia-ul-Haq highlights post-authoritarian afterlives within a formally postcolonial polity. Read together, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927) and *The Discovery of India* (2008 ed.), *The Unfinished Memoirs* (2012), *The Prison Diaries* (2017), and *If I Am Assassinated* (1979) chart a South Asian genealogy of prison literature, where the cell is transmuted from a site of subjection into a laboratory for ethics, memory, and strategy.

This study contextualizes these texts as world resistance literature and inquires whether and how they should be considered part of a global literary heritage. Drawing on comparative lessons from Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* (2008), this analysis argues that South Asian prison narratives are more than suffering tales: they theorize power (both colonial and postcolonial), nonviolent modes of resistance, and transform trauma into a form of political imagination. Methodologically, the study uses a qualitative comparative thematic analysis grounded in postcolonial theory, trauma theory, and Marxism to map three recurring themes: resistance against oppression, psychological resilience and transformation, and vision and hope for the future.

This study is grounded in the socio-political and psychological aspects of South Asian prison literature with a special focus on the works of Benazir Bhutto, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. These leaders transformed a place of detention into a space for reflection, resistance, and transformation. Previous studies have focused on political dimensions, but the psychological, comparative, and global contexts have been underexplored.

Moreover, the prison literature reveals how strong and moral people can be. Throughout the world, some people have given prison an intellectual and moral cast (Fyodor Dostoevsky, Antonio Gramsci, Nelson Mandela). Dostoevsky's *Notes from a Dead House* was used to portray his time spent as an inmate in Tsarist Russia, while the *Prison Notebooks* of Gramsci put a particular emphasis on cultural hegemony and political consciousness. Through Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*, the perception of imprisonment was later transformed into a vision of freedom for all. These texts represent that the prison is a place of self-examination and ethical reflection. Nevertheless, the vast majority of conversations about prison literature have centered on Western or African stories, making South Asian experiences somewhat less examined.

In South Asia, acts of imprisonment not only were political facts but also became an essential experience through which the leaders built their moral and national imagination. Imprisonments were an important milestone in the Indian Freedom Movement and especially contributed to Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of Satyagraha (the force of truth). He transformed imprisonment into a means of moral uplift and political reckoning. Jawaharlal Nehru spent considerable time reflecting on what it meant to be Indian, examining the cultural history and the humanist values he pondered during his lengthy incarceration, as detailed in *The Discovery of India*. For most of his life, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was in prison because of Pakistan's oppression. That is what he writes about in his *Unfinished Memoirs* and *The Prison Diaries*: the emotional and political vertigo

that was to become Bangladesh. Also, the late Benazir Bhutto wrote *If I Am Assassinated* during his detention by General Zia-ul-Haq's military regime, which shows the domination and resistance. Taken together, their literary works merge personal agony with national vision.

While South Asian prison narratives are equally crucial, they have not received as much attention from scholars worldwide as those from Western or African prisons. Most of the research conducted so far has focused on the historical and political roles they played, rather than the literary and psychological aspects of their prison writings. According to postcolonial, trauma and Marxist theories, this study fills the gap by examining how these South Asian writers' narratives turn prisons into places of introspection and transformation. Moreover, their writings emphasize national history, freedom, identity and justice. By comparing these South Asian prison writings and global prison writing, for example, *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela, this study reflects the significance and ethical depth of South Asian prison writings.

Literature Review

Most of the prison writings directly analyze the political implications of writing, in particular how it contributes to the growth of national movements and ideologies (Schenk and Fremouw, 2012; Larson, 2010). This is what highlights the importance of political awakening in prison. But it does tend to forget about the deep relationship between individual change and political transformation. Gandhi's faith in nonviolence, Nehru's vision of a secular India, Bhutto's battle for justice and Rahman's engagement with Bengali nationalism were all strengthened by their incarceration. Thakur (2025) notes that these texts are primarily treated as isolated from each other in the critical tradition, rather than being studied comparatively, and such an approach has, by and large, limited

the appreciation of their common theme. Franklin (1977) and Freeman (2009) are two such scholars who have constructed paradigms to profile accounts of life in prison from different parts of the globe. Nevertheless, South Asian prison writings are not frequently added to that larger frame. Nevertheless, there is a lot in common with the leaders of South Asia, and Nelson Mandela, as well as Malcolm, who continue to endure unjust imprisonment, and are not branded as global resistance literature.

A significant omission is the under-examined aspects of psychology and emotions of incarceration. While present research has focused on the political implications of imprisonment, it rarely considers the process through which these leaders' sense of self is turned in prison (Gready, 1993; Dearey et al., 2021). Other recent studies also believe that imprisonment in South Asia is more than a political event but a mental and cultural tradition, as well. Bandyopadhyay (2023) introduces the idea of a carceral culture that explains how the prison environment of punishment and control is distributed throughout social life outside of jail. Such a wider outlook provides the linkage between the emotional strength elucidated in the works of Gandhi, Nehru, Bhutto, and Rahman and the surveillance system that is never ending in postcolonial societies. The situation of the prisoners in South Asian countries is abhorrently bad as almost every prisoner in this country has a mental health issue (Arafat et al., 2024).

Yang (2023) shows how the colonial Indian prisons were constructed with the platform of convict labor in terms of prison- handicraft complex and how imprisonment turned to be a punishment and a profitable business enterprise. The history influenced the succeeding leaders who associated dignity and working with moral strength. Bandyopadhyay (2024) in the article about the carceral state of India reveals that the consequences of colonial coercion are still felt on the modern

governance. What these works have shown is that trauma, work, and power interconnect in the South Asian prison literature corpus.

The specific notion of “prison poetics” carried by Larson (2010) is specifically relevant, and it assumes that incarceration may trigger considerable self-revelation and enlightenment on morality. Nevertheless, this has not been extensively exercised in South Asia whereby imprisonment was usually a combination of colonial imposition as well as personal initiative. The other way that such emotional and ideological changes can be seen is that the realization of the control over self, by execution of self-control and reflection in prison may have reshaped their ideas about the state and freedom once released.

It is also notable that the intersectional outlook was not present in studying South Asian prison literature. It is that which has plagued the texts which handle Gandhi, Nehru and Rahman in specific ways; they place an unreasonable amount of time upon national politics as opposed to class, gender and marginal differences. As an example, *The Unfinished Memoirs* written by Rahman comments on the nationalism of Bengali people, yet the author speaks nothing about women or the poor people (Prothom Alo., 2018). Also, as Schenk and Fremouw (2012) observe, lived experiences and social determination of behavior and thought in prison are implied by the individual experience and social backgrounds; though, South Asian accounts seldom reflect intersectional lenses.

These texts also need to be placed in the world literary canon. Comparisons might be made with *Long Walk to Freedom* (Mandela, 2008) and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, but no sustained attempt to connect the work of South Asian prisons with other resistance texts in the world has been made (Gready, 1993). It would not only give credit to the worth of this literature, but also place their perspectives on colonialism, nationalism, and postcolonial identity in their context.

Lastly, little has been said regarding the persistent presence of these prison writings on contemporary political thought. Even though the importance of such writings has been examined in the context of criminology studies, their influence on modern freedom and justice movements has not been well studied (Dearey et al., 2021). They remain timeless since they have subjects such as perseverance, self-actualization and moral strength, which are universal.

To conclude, even though it is true that the writings of Gandhi, Nehru, Bhutto, and Rahman in prison have been discussed in the frames of their political and historical importance, there is still a specific demand to conduct a comparative, interdisciplinary study. A subsequent study is needed to describe the dialectic between their inner and ideological metamorphoses while in prison and broader narratives of resistance, identity, and nationhood for both South Asia and also within global prison literatures.

Based on these findings, there is a clear deficiency in research regarding the intersection of South Asian prison writing with global traditions of resistance literature. Although scholarship has examined these texts from historical or political viewpoints, there has been limited comparative and theoretical analysis that considers their psychological, cultural, and global significance. The current study fills this gap by comparing the Prison Writings of Gandhi, Nehru, Bhutto and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*. It is also intended to be a reminder that prisons are not only places of silence and repression, but also places of intellectual and moral freedom, places from which collective opposition emerges.

Research Questions

1. What are the main themes of South Asian prison literature, as reflected in Bhutto's *If I Am Assassinated*, Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth*, Nehru's *The Discovery of India* and Rahman's *The Unfinished Memoirs* and *The Prison Diaries*?
2. What are the ways these writers contemplate or work through personal suffering and transformation, and how is this embedded in relation to broader political struggles of their time?
3. How does South Asian prison literature serve global narratives of resistance and movements towards justice, freedom and social transformation?

Objectives

1. To study the themes in South Asian literatures of Benazir Bhutto, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.
2. To explore the significance of South Asian prison literature and the need to incorporate it into global literary studies.

Theoretical Framework

This analysis uses an interdisciplinary theoretical approach, drawing on postcolonialism, trauma theory and Marxism to read South Asian prison writing, namely the writing of Benazir Bhutto Mahatma Gandhi Jawaharlal Nehru Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Postcolonial theory in relation to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) explains the ways these authors challenge colonial hegemony while articulating imprisonment as a tactic of resistance against imperial power. Their writings

portray, on the one hand, personal suffering and, on the other, a collective battle for independence and self-determination.

The trauma theory which has been presented by Cathy Caruth (1996) and Dominick LaCapra (2002) is a source that can be used as resources to comprehend the psychological dynamics of incarceration and articulation of trauma on paper. The writings are a documentation and a remedy, transforming suffering into power and ownership of that larger healing that resistance creates.

The Prison and Its Alternative Marxist theory challenges imprisonment to the conflict, exploitation, and systemic inequality over classes of people. In continuation of Karl Marx on the oppression which is inherent to a capitalistic system and Arthur (1982) on alienation, this suggests that imprisonment serves as a proxy to depict the struggle between politics and economy along with political and economic struggles that constitute colonial and postcolonial systems.

Their concurrent reading can provide an idea of a complete perspective of the intersecting of South Asian prison literature with politics, psychologies and socio-economics. When shedding light on the unity of the postcolonial resistance, trauma rehabilitation and Marxist critique of the works also reveal how these can essentially be viewed as not simply personal narratives but highly political ones that reject narratives of freedom, justice and human perseverance.

Methodology

The research involved a qualitative, comparative thematic analysis approach to South Asian prison literature comprising Benazir Bhutto's *If I Am Assassinated*; Mahatma Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*; Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's *The Unfinished Memoirs* and *The Prison Diaries*. These texts were selected for their historical

value and the unprecedented intimacy of personal reflection found in South Asian political prison literature.

Through the two-step coding process, the study found 24 open codes and 12 axial codes. After refining, the axial codes were brought together into three themes. These are:

- i. Resistance to Oppression
- ii. Psychological Resilience and Transformation
- iii. Vision and Hope for the Future

Aftermath the thematic analysis, the selected South Asian texts were compared to Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*, a global prison narrative. The study involved this text because it is globally recognized, and it has thematic and structural similarities with the South Asian Prison Literature.

This study acknowledges that a small sample size restricts general appeal, but these texts represent an equitable contribution to our exploration of political imprisonment and its legacy within global literary culture.

Findings

This study discusses some aspects of South Asian prison literature drawing examples from Benazir Bhutto's *If I Am Assassinated*, Mahatma Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's *The Unfinished Memoirs* and *The Prison Diaries*. The three theories used to conduct the analysis were the

postcolonial theory, Marxist theory and trauma theory. The findings also provide some valuable insights on the intimate and political features of incarceration and its contributions to the discourses of global struggle.

1. Central Themes in South Asian Prison Literature

There were three general themes on the thematic analysis that included resistance to oppression, psychological resilience and transformation, and vision and hope of the future. Such anxieties are not merely able to mirror the biographies of the individual writers, but also are related to more sociopolitical facts:

1.1 Resistance to Oppression:

Benazir Bhutto's, Mahatma Gandhi's, Jawaharlal Nehru's, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's prison writings represent the resistance to oppression. *If I Am Assassinated* by Benazir Bhutto shows resistance—a military dictatorship while he is being locked inside a death cell. His struggle with General Zia-ul-Haq's regime makes him a prison-house of resistance and expression. According to post-colonialism, this resistance of Bhutto's is the fight against an "imperial mindset". He is incapable of recourse to the weapon, so writing becomes his form of battle (the pen is his voice; it's also his power).

In the "Death Cell and History" section, Bhutto states, "I am confined in a death cell and have no access to the material needed for effectively refuting the false and scandalous allegations in these 'White Papers.' But nevertheless... I have attempted a reply... to keep the record straight" (Bhutto, 1979). In writing under such extreme conditions, he shows how language can be made into a tool of resistance. This is an instance of what Cathy Caruth, the founder of trauma theory, describes as

trauma's necessity — that to tell one's pain is a method for regaining agency and even translating suffering into strength. In her writing, Bhutto turns solitude into power, she chooses to speak and not to be silenced.

A deep sense of obligation to her country also courses through: "More than my life is at stake. Without any doubt, the future of Pakistan is at stake" (Bhutto, 1979, p.1). It echoes the views of Marxism. His bodily trauma is the micro-connection to the societal struggle. This fight that Bhutto goes through is not only his but also his peoples. He says, "Had, it not been on inside betrayal, I would have not suffered the fate I am suffering" (Bhutto, 1979, p.17). It is the influence of foreign obstruction and political corruption. Accordingly, the fight that Bhutto made is not merely political, but a more fundamental philosophical fight against oppression and injustice.

The Story of My Experiments with Truth by Mahatma Gandhi has spiritual and moral guideline, political pamphlet against political and social slavery. His Satyagraha or truth-force philosophy modifies the notions of power it does not accept any violent revolt nor passivity. Mahatma Gandhi believes that resistance is a spiritual path. In the prism of postcolonialism, his opposition can be viewed as indigestion to the imperialism which made colonized people, who were weak or inferior. Gandhi reverses this image and makes it a source of moral courage and self-esteem.

His struggle against racial discrimination in South Africa is his first step into a life long struggle. He recollects, "What brings you here? This moment is as much a provocation to the colonial government and voice as it is a personal challenge--a personal challenge because I have come here at the beck and call of my fellow countrymen to ask them to take my advice" (Gandhi, 1927, p.290). As Edward Said states that resistance begins first of all in claiming the right to speak. Gandhi's quiet insistence on conversation embodies this self-assertion (and the refusal to be shamed).

Gandhi also fought against oppression in his own community. He reflects, “The fact that good Hindus do not scruple to help an Ashram where we go the length of dining with the untouchables is no small proof” (Gandhi, 1927, p.446). Here he criticizes the caste system and class division in India. According to Marxist humanism, Gandhi’s incorporation of the wretched reveals his struggle against not only social but also economic. Therefore, his resistance works against the British colonizers and social injustice.

Nonviolence, Gandhi reminds us, is not the weapon of the weak; it is the expression of historic power. He says, “‘Passive resistance’ was too narrowly construed... I had to demur... and explain the real nature of the Indian movement” (Gandhi, 1927, p.358). This reveals that his approach was not passive acceptance but an active and rigorous pursuit for truth. In trauma theory, his method of fasting is one way to turn pain into power — a form of healing by sacrificing himself.

In *The Discovery of India* by Jawaharlal Nehru, the author retrieves the past of India from colonial historiography. His self-incriminating remark in it, “It is more than twenty months since we were brought here, more than twenty months of my ninth term of imprisonment” (Nehru, 2008, p.15), is a hint of enduring as a way of conscience. To Nehru, going to prison signifies sometimes of reflection at which rebellion is the first thing that comes to mind.

In his denunciation of the British imperialism, he is passionate and morally indignant. According to him, “Famine came, he says, grotesque, staggering, hideous beyond language... it was man-made, a creeping slow thing of horror, which left nothing to redeem it” (Nehru, 2008, p.16), it shows the Marxist nature of his opposition the understanding that economic exploitation and the oppression of classes was the fundamental difference between colonial subjugation. It is not a natural but a created event that Nehru understands famine to have been a product of a capitalist system that commodified human life.

Nehru also reverses cultural oppression by recovering the intellectual challenge. He writes, “They were forced to study in their schools and colleges so-called histories which disparage India's past in every way” (Nehru, 2008, p.291). This rewriting of India’s story is a postcolonial intervention against epistemic violence. As Dominick LaCapra’s trauma theory argues, to work through trauma is also to construct meaning; Nehru’s historical meditations do just that. His scholarship turns bereavement into awareness, a kind of what Marx would call “productive resistance” — knowledge weaponized against ideological domination.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman mentions his fight against the oppression of East Pakistan by the West Pakistan in *The Unfinished Memoirs* and *The Prison Diaries* which represents an anti-colonial resistance in a postcolonial context. According to Rahman, “conspiracy politics began shortly after the creation of Pakistan... Jinnah’s death marked the beginning of open political conspiracies” (Rahman, 2012, p. 75, 78), reflects structures of domination produced internally where independence could not bring change. Through postcolonial theory, this phenomenon as a re-inscription of power where former colonies repeat their traditions in new guise.

Rahman showcases resistance as cultural and linguistic. He asserts that “In a democratic state, the majority's demands must prevail” (Rahman, 2012, p. 100) during the Bengali Language Movement represents both identity struggle and democratic principle.

The oppression that followed, including the horrific killings of February 21, 1952—“This tragic event underscored the Bengali people's determination and willingness to sacrifice for their mother tongue” (Rahman, 2012, p. 212)—shows resistance through martyrdom. Trauma theory detects these momentary experiences as collective traumas toward national consciousness; these sufferings end up being the common ground of national identity.

Economically, the Marxist nature of resistance reflects through Rahman's *Six-Point Movements*. He asserts "the Six-Point Movement was essential for regional development and the elimination of economic disparities" Rahman (2012, 2017). This illustrates class struggle: East Pakistan as the oppressed laboring body of a divided nation. He criticizes of economic deprivation represents the structural violence of capitalist centralization, where one region's loss is another's privilege. He mentions that "Ittefaq was ordered not to print any news about the June 7 strike" (Rahman, 2017, p. 62) showcases how authoritarian control transforms silence into an instrument of authority—but merely recalling it is an act that converts censorship into testimony, trauma into truth.

Bhutto's, Gandhi's, Nehru's, and Rahman's prison literatures turns resistance from a political act into a human experience. Here postcolonial theory, trauma theory and Marxism help to understand defiance against domination, suffering as healing and rebirth, and systematic exploitation, objectification, and inequality.

1.2 Psychological Resilience and Transformation:

The prison writings of Benazir Bhutto, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman portray the theme of *Psychological Resilience and Transformation*. The leaders were faced Imprisonment which is not merely as a political punishment but as a deep psychological trial that tested their mental strength and endurance.

In Benazir Bhutto's *If I Am Assassinated*, the author highlights When he was being imprisoned in a death cell, he says that he lost his basic rights and his allies were stripped away. Additionally, he turns the psychological distress into moral resistance. He states, "More there is my life is at stake. There is no mistaking his change of face into a national icon of perseverance and political

sustainability, the future of Pakistan is in danger, as he says” (Bhutto, 1979, p.1). His own pain shows how it is possible to find stronger sense of responsibility and identity through trauma.

Another aspect that brings out the strength of the intellectual during the time of seclusion is evident in how Bhutto does not give in to his voice despite his captivity. He writes “I am in a death cell, and that there is nothing here to study up to effectively refute the spurious and scandalous charges involved in these White Papers. However, despite all my weaknesses, I have made an effort in responding to the reply” (Bhutto, 1979). It features reclaiming agency through trauma theory which is a process in which the truth becomes a form of healing and resistance.

Bhutto says “vitate the climate of opinion against me” (Bhutto, 1979, p.7) and thoughts about death are an indication of the change of consciousness. He also notices pain as sacrifice that evidences the idea of LaCapra on the working through the trauma when the suffering is converted into something representing oneself instead of being conquered.

The Story of My Experiments with Truth by Mahatma Gandhi turns the prison to the laboratory of morality and spirituality. In his turn, he states, “I have been through deep self-introspection, have searched myself through and through, and analyzed and studied every psychological situation”, (Gandhi, 1927, p.18). This is a psychological strength in his statement. It is also based on the self-exploration and the pursuit of truth that is constant that relates to Caruth the re-experiencing of the trauma-making sense by remembering painful memories.

Gandhi envisions the truth as Satya and self-control as brahmacharya as the components of sustainability. He writes, “so long as thought is not under complete control of the will, brahmacharya in its fullness is absent” (Gandhi, 1927, p.239). It reflects he turns psychological struggle into moral discipline.

Gandhi's vision connects with LaCapra's idea (turning trauma through ethical involvement). His statement, "unless the striker's rally... I will not touch any food" (Gandhi, 1927, p.478), showcases how self-suffering becomes a moral weapon and he gives purpose to his suffering. He believed that resilience is built through continuous struggle. He states "the eventual decision was the cumulative impact of those unsuccessful efforts" (Gandhi, 1927, p.235). It is a way of inner liberation in jail according to his vision.

The Discovery of India by Jawaharlal Nehru is an intellectual and emotional growth as imprisonment. Introspection is through isolation, which is turned by Nehru into vision. According to him, "time in prison appears to alter its character. The present is only somewhat real, as there is a lack of feeling and sensation that may divide it with the dead past" (Nehru, 2008, p.20). It reproduces the feeling of time dislocation. It is a psychological numbness of the prison. Trauma theory also proposes this disorder to be the first stage of healing, where the mind rebuilt and discovered a reason to survive.

Jawaharlal Nehru incorporates the mental breakup into creativity and he turns imprisonment into the period of historical meditations and cultural rediscovery. He writes, "To mix it with the present and carry it to the future, to break with it where it cannot be thus united, to make of all this the trembling and vibrating substance of thought and action--that is life" (Nehru, 2008, p.21), which is his intellectual change, and in which case trauma is translated into productivity.

Instead of breaking in the constraint, emotional balance is the manifestation of resilience in Nehru. He says, "there is perhaps some more poise and balance, some feeling of detachment, a more peace of mind" (Nehru, 2008, p. 24), which is the conception of working through trauma (achieving understanding instead of repression) by LaCapra, where he relates to his calmness. Through his

intellectual strength, Nehru brings out the power of trauma of imprisonment in nurturing intellectual strength.

The Unfinished Memoirs and *The Prison Diaries* represent psychological resilience and transformation. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's resilience emerges through pain under systemic oppression. His statement, "I have spent half of my life in prison" (Rahman, 2017, p. 106), shows both exhaustion and endurance. Through trauma theory, it represents a chronic trauma (one that would break a lesser spirit but instead fortifies the individual).

Despite isolation and illness, he remains emotionally strong and his resilience showcases a sense of duty toward his people. He mentions, "Sir, don't worry, God has given me the strength to stand against tyranny and injustice" (Rahman, 2017). According to Caruth's idea, this confidence transforms his helplessness into hope and strength.

Rahman remains defiant even in describing censorship and injustice: "Ittefaq was ordered not to print any news about the June 7 strike" (Rahman, 2017, p. 62). His statement reflects repression as moral testimony. According to his writings, his resilience is both psychological and historical where the oppressors sought to erase the truth. He mentions, "It hurt to leave them, but I had to because I was committed to serving my country" (Rahman, 2012, p. 164). This statement reflects the pain of isolation from his family. Moreover, it also shows his emotional sacrifice to serve his people.

To sum up, the writings of Bhutto, Gandhi, Nehru, and Rahman, prison writings, show how traumatic experiences may result in personal and political development.

1.3 Hope and Vision for the Future:

The themes of hope and vision for the future are also visible in the prison writings by Benazir Bhutto, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In *If I Am Assassinated* Benazir Bhutto indicates his perspective on transformation. For example, his grief gives rise to a new political vision and he hopes for Pakistan's future, believing that democracy and justice will prevail over dictatorship.

Bhutto's reflections display his strong mentality and endurance, despite the isolation (during imprisonment) and death threats. He states, "I am aware of the importance of global politics. This is the moment for me to thank those world leaders and their countries for the solicitude shown towards me. In so doing, they have paid a tribute to the people of Pakistan" (Bhutto, 1979, p. 180). His statement reveals *Caruth's* (1996) idea of "speaking through trauma" and *LaCapra's* (2002) concept of "working through" suffering.

Bhutto's reflection also carries undertones of postcolonial resistance, as he envisions a Pakistan free from military dictatorship, corruption and foreign hegemony. He added: "The country wants the Constitution, The Nation wants Democracy, The People want Parliament, The Provinces want Autonomy, The Proletariat and the Peasantry want the Pakistan People's Party" (Bhutto, 1979, p. 153). It suggests the Marxist ideas of "collective struggle and class solidarity". In doing so, Bhutto personalizes the political system; taking democracy away from being an abstract structure but as a moral and social need that exists based on the people's will.

He writes "this is the moment for quiet and sincere negotiations between brothers, without malice or prejudice" (Bhutto, 1979, p. 221) which reflects his psychological resilience and call for unity. This situation connects with the Marx's concept of productivity. Bhutto transforms his suffering during his prison life into productivity and his hope is thus a revolutionary act, a reminder that the oppressed can reclaim power through moral conviction and democratic solidarity.

Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* reflects his vision for the future where his philosophy of *Satya* (truth) and *Ahimsa* (non-violence) will establish. Gandhi's confinement becomes a place for introspection. He writes, "what I want to achieve – what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha" (Gandhi, 1927, p.17), which reflects both a spirituality and moral agency from imperial oppression.

According to *postcolonial theory*, Gandhi criticizes colonial domination. He states "the seeker after truth should be humbler than the dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but the seeker after truth should so humble himself that even the dust could crush him" (Gandhi, 1927, p.19), Which exemplifies his hope is grounded in reforming the human spirit and *trauma sublimation*: he transforms collective pain into moral elevation. *Marxism* (a critique of capitalist consumer culture imposed by colonial systems) also connects with Gandhi's emphasis on *Khadi* and simple living. Marx's vision of human emancipation from alienation and exploitation reflects through Gandhi's rejection of industrial greed. According to *trauma theory*, Gandhi transforms the pain of racism, humiliation and imprisonment into a collective hope and he always believed that individual consciousness can lead to the redemption of the nation.

Jawaharlal Nehru highlights his hope and vision for a free and progressive India and he makes the imprisonment as a place for introspection in *The Discovery of India*. Moreover, he also reconstructs India's intellectual and cultural identity. He states, "the future is dark, uncertain. But we can see part of the way leading to it and can tread it with firm steps, remembering that nothing that can happen is likely to overcome the spirit of man which has survived so many perils" (Nehru, 2008, p.33), which reflects the postcolonial resilience.

Nehru gives focus on education, science, and industrial progress in his writing and he believes human productivity as the foundation of liberation. This context also aligns with *Marxist lens* and he envisions a democratic India where intellectual growth upholds justice. He writes, “Yet I am convinced that the methods and approach of science have revolutionized human life more than anything else in the long course of history, and have opened doors and avenues of further and even more radical change” (Nehru, 2008, p.31). It shows his faith in progress as a collective and material pursuit.

According to “works through”, Nehru finds an opportunity for renewal through colonial humiliation. He states “it is the thought of this particular heritage and its application to the present that has long filled my mind, and it is about this that I should like to write... preparing it for the next stages of thought and action” (Nehru, 2008, p.37). It represents a mind healing through productivity. This connects with *LaCapra's* idea of intellectual productivity after trauma. Through *postcolonialism*, Nehru shapes India's past to its modern destiny.

Nehru's hope is not merely political rather he envisions a world where freedom, science, and human dignity coexist.

In *The Unfinished Memoirs* and *The Prison Diaries*, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman envisions for a free country where his people can secure their identity and independence. Rahman imagines imprisonment as a place of transformation where his pain is converted into purpose. According to the postcolonial theory, He states, “I went to jail, but let me tell you one thing, you will not accept this unjust order to get your head in silence... Many will go to jail, but you should protest and go to jail” (Rahman, 2012, p. 271), which exemplifies he calls for collective unity and stand strongly to resist against the injustice .

Through *Marxist perspective*, Rahman criticizes socio-economic disparity between East and West Pakistan which reflects the capitalist exploitation and class inequality. According to his vision of autonomy, he believes a society where productivity benefits the people rather than a ruling class. He also concerns about women's education and he writes "educating women would not only make them aware of their rights but also enable them to contribute significantly to the state's development" (Rahman, 2017, p. 99) It aligns with Marx's concept of social empowerment (people can develop through education and equality). Through his hope, this also reflects a collective productive force can help to develop our society and empower us to stand against injustice.

According to *trauma theory*, Rahman showcases the process of resilience and how to transform suffering into productivity. Through Rahman's writings, imprisonment shapes his moral vision and it empowers him to focus on equality, freedom, and justice.

Bhutto's, Gandhi's, Nehru's, and Rahman's prison writings strongly represent the theme of *Hope and Vision for the Future* and their hopes are both a psychological and political to take stand against oppression.

2. South Asian Prison Literature: Contributions to Global Literary Studies

South Asian prison writings of Benazir Bhutto, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, align powerfully with Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*. These texts showcase prison becomes a place for personal, moral and ideological transformation. In *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela writes, "the cell was damp and cold, and the light that filtered through the high window was dim. The silence was suffocating" (Mandela, 2008, p.356-359), this statement reflects the emotional burden of imprisonment and this painful experience aligns with Gandhi's

The Story of My Experiments with Truth. Gandhi reflects the moral growth through silence and hardship. He states, “Silence has now become part of my spiritual being... it is the most effective way of attaining self-purification” (Gandhi, 1927, p. 86). Moreover, it is clear that both leaders transform pain, endurance and isolation into psychological strength, political discipline and spiritual weapon against injustice.

Moreover, Mandela states, “I never lost hope that this great transformation would occur” and “I always knew that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity” (Mandela, 2008, p. 542), which aligns with Nehru’s statement. For example, Nehru writes in *The Discovery of India*: “The future is dark, uncertain. But we can see part of the way leading to it and can tread it with firm steps” (Nehru, 1927, p. 33). The two authors understand courage as endurance sustained by moral conviction. Nehru’s belief in reason and education which is the reflection of Mandela’s belief in resilience and harmony—they both bet on the human will as the key to beat down oppression.

The Unfinished Memoirs by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman reflects a similar change in suffering into determination. He states “You will not accept this unjust order to get your head in silence. It should be stopped publicly. The countrymen are ready; you just have to lead. Many will go to jail, but you should protest and go to jail” (Rahman, 2012, p. 271). Mandela’s own words in many ways mirror this collective act of disobedience: “The liberation struggle was not a battle against any one group or color, but a fight against a system of repression” (Mandela, 2008, p. 540). For both Rahman and Mandela testify to the fact that freedom is neither in physical release nor in breaking of the oppressed but in their unbreakable unity, where resilience of endurance becomes significant political tool of resistance.

Benazir Bhutto's *If I Am Assassinated* echoes Mandela's musings on leadership and democratic obligation. Bhutto Writes, "the country wants the Constitution, The Nation wants Democracy, The People want Parliament, The Provinces want Autonomy, The Proletariat and the Peasantry want the Pakistan People's Party" (Bhutto, 2008, p. 153), in his text. Mandela articulates a similar democratic vision and he reflects he stays behind the flock, allowing the nimblest to move ahead, and then the others follow.

Mandela writes, "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin" and "people must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love" (Mandela, 2008, p.542) in *Long Walk to Freedom* which connect with Gandhi's, Nehru's, Bhutto's and Rahman's political perspectives. Each author establishes hope as a revolutionary force. Gandhi's moral optimism, Nehru's belief in the progress of reason, Bhutto's appeal for democracy and Rahman's vision of freedom also represent the same.

Discussion

The study presents a deeply human story of resistance, psychological resilience, visionary nation-building and transformation in the prison narratives of Benazir Bhutto, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. According to the theories (postcolonial, trauma, and Marxist theories), this study highlights how imprisonment turns into a place of self-discovery and transformation. Each writer, confined by political dictatorships, used imprisonment as a place where they thought, questioned, and reshaped ideas of freedom, identity and justice.

The results of this analysis indicate that Benazir Bhutto, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's writings in prison, offer a truly human account of struggle, psychological insight, nation-building and change vision. This research is a representation of the way in which imprisonment becomes a self-discovery place as proposed in postcolonial, trauma, and Marxist theories. Both authors were limited by the political conditions but instead of a goal, prison was a starting point a place to think, challenge and redefine their ideas of freedom and justice.

If I Am Assassinated, by Bhutto, demonstrates how the military regime's corruption and violation of democracy could create a stronger people by making them feel alone. In Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, jail becomes a spiritual trial by which truth and discipline are weapons of resistance. In Nehru's *The Discovery of India*, where people rediscover who they are, where their nation came from. A certain portion of Rahman's memoirs, penned in exile as *The Unfinished Memoirs* and later as *The Prison Diaries*, demonstrates the horror of political persecution in East Pakistan. They also demonstrate how deeply he loves his people, and wants them to be free. These leaders found moral clarity and political purpose. Their narratives turn suffering into strength and solitude into vision.

The findings are novel and reinforce earlier studies of the predominantly historical, political writing in prison (Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Thakur, 2025; Gready, 1993). Previous research acknowledged the political impact of these leaders' writings, but tended to ignore their emotional, psychological and introspective layers that informed their experiences.

Previous scholarship, such as Franklin (1977) and Freeman (2009), were often concerned with Western authors including Dostoevsky and Malcolm X; this study instead relocates consideration to South Asia in order to relativize these works within their plural comparative context. It shows

how themes of identity, gender, and class link South Asian prison narratives to the corpus of global resistance literature as well as their distinct cultural as well as historical depth.

The findings also support Larson's (2010) concept of "prison poetics" to the extent that incarceration can encourage creative expression. Yet, this essay takes Larson's arguments further to project a South Asian view framed by colonial wound, gendered suppression and national resistances. Bhutto's personal and political introspections, for example, contribute an important perspective that is absent from the male-centric conversations about prison writing.

Likewise, the study discusses Gready's (1993) model of prison literature as a technology of resistance but extends it with trauma theory. Gandhi's spiritual training, Nehru's rediscovery of history, Rahman's exposure of censorship and Bhutto's resistance are all examples whereby writing became both a means of survival mechanism of protest.

According to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Gandhi and Nehru refute colonial discourses that Indian people need moral and intellectual independence. Rahman shows how postcolonial Pakistan portrays colonial hierarchies, and Bhutto describes military authoritarianism which is a reflection of neo-colonial dominion. Through trauma theory, Gandhi's spiritual discipline, Rahman's fight for identity, Bhutto's independence, and Nehru's self-discovery through studying history illustrate how trauma can create a deeper sense of effects.

In Marxist perspective, these texts can give an insight on how the intersection of class, power and ideology are. They offer an insight into the location of class and power/ ideology through a Marxist approach. Nehru and Rahman relate poverty and persecution by the political sphere. Gandhi and Bhutto, even though they represent the welfare of all men as one social destiny. Combined, these

structures imply that the prison experience turned out to be an anti-colonial, anti-racism, and renewing place of resistance, thought, and growth to these leaders.

This study provides important information to the world of literature by placing the South Asian prison writing in the larger perspective of resistance literature. It argues that such as Mandela, Malcolm X deserve as much or as little celebration as Gandhi, Nehru, Rahman and Bhutto do on grounds that their works are all founded on resistance, conscience and redemption. With the analysis of these stories through the perspective of trauma and political theory, the research places imprisonment, not merely as an act of politics but rather humanity; within this is pain, thought and transformation. It also shows how writing in prison is used as a form of weapon to fight against the form of systematic oppression.

The current research however recognizes its limitations. The male writings are the focus and this is an indication of the unconsciousness of writings concerned with women. It would preferably extend its coverage to more marginal authors like Aung San Suu Kyi or Irom Sharmila, and apply comparative transnational methods in order to bring South Asian prison stories to the fore with those of Africa as well as Latin America and the Middle East.

Conclusion

Through the research, it is determined that the South Asian prison literature is not a mere localized expression of political history, it is also part and parcel of world literary heritage. The examination of the writings of Bhutto, Gandhi, Nehru and Rahman in the prism of postcolonial, trauma and Marxist lenses demonstrates that their experience of imprisonment transcends the boundaries of

nations; their struggles resonate with the world in its pursuit of justice and freedom. In addition, their works are a demonstration of hope and change. The prison is not only a place of defeat but awakening as their words make it out to be a place that purifies the truth, strengthens conscience and reinvents freedom. Having made South Asian voices part of the global canon of prison literature, the project restates the fact that resistance, reflection and renewal are not a national, ideological or other dialects, but the dialects of human liberation.

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