

COLOURS OF THE CAGE

DEPICTING THEORETICAL VS. HARD CORE REALITIES OF THE PRISON LIFE

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Abstract

To be holistic in its approach, education ought to result in character building and not merely a tool to impart knowledge and pass information without having essential touch of moral values. It is rightly said "Education without morals creates maniacs". Arun Ferreira, the author of the book Colours of the Cage claims that the basis of his book is made on three important pillars – statistics, experience and the ruling of the courts. The basic aspects of these types of writing shall also be explored, and analyzed from both theoretical and practical perspective and its effect on the society. The world in the present context has become a cage for the majority of people both physically as well as mentally. The people all over the world are struggling to seek revolutionary changes in all respects. These kinds of real life stories should be embedded into our education system so that the hard core realities come in front of the general people and also to the people who are at higher positions in the judiciary system. This study is an attempt to understand and analyze whether practical aspects of experience shared by prisoners in their books are beneficial to establish and convert some theoretical aspects or not. The paper focuses on how Arun Ferreira through his narrative wanted to express about the treatment of political prisoners, the severe condition of jails, human rights' violation, corruption, suppression, ruling of the courts etc. The main aim of this paper is to respect undeniable truths of the Indian prisons as well as some important prison reform measures suggested by Arun Ferreira as a human right activist.

Introduction

Education is needed to equip the person with mental weapons to fight against the challenges of the life. To be holistic in its approach, education ought to result in character building and not merely impart knowledge and pass information without having essential touch of moral values. It is rightly said "Education without morals creates maniacs".

Instead, It Should Be

The role of education is not merely to impart knowledge and spread information by neglecting the moral values. It is a powerful weapon to be used in character building.

Science which lacks humanity and commerce, sans social values and education, sans character is worthless or even devastating for the mankind. Thus, it is important to make students good before making them smart. Spiritual values need to be imparted to the students to enable them to learn humility. Cultural values if inculcated, in formative years can play a vital role in this direction. The institution of marriage and the Indian Family System are now being seen across the globe as holistic life support systems which results in lower divorce rate, lesser estranged children and reduced old age homes for elderly destitute. The Prime Minister of United Kingdom had in recent past endorsed the need for “Back to Basics”. India survived the global economic slowdown and financial crisis surely by virtue of sticking to their basic tradition of saving for rainy days unlike the western world which relied more on borrowings and loans to lead a life of ultra luxury.

Several of the ethical principles of the yester years such as adherence to the truth, non -violence, temperance in speech, tolerance and charity, are fast losing their appeal amongst the masses. Education system seems to be lethargic in getting to the crux of the problem although, a larger lot is spent on organising seminars and conferences to revitalise the education by anchoring on value education.

As early as 1986 , the National Policy on Education that created a gap between the formal education system in India’s varied culture and traditions, needs to be bridged through enrichment of curricula transforming education to a forceful tool for cultivation of rich social and moral values.

While such schemes might plant some lofty ideas in the minds of the participants, but concrete action is needed to accomplish much more. Since the young minds of the pupils get shaped through their exposure to all sort of films which intrude into their brains through mass media and internet in this world of consumerism. Research studies have established nexus between TV and movie viewing and violent/ criminal behaviour of students.

Value or moral education will do much to brace up the system but it needs to be done with a sense of mission by the dedicated mentors who can lead by setting personal examples and become role models and ideals for the students in particular and the society at large. Children may not do what you tell them to do, but they will certainly do whenever they see you are doing it.

Holistic approach to education ought to lay emphasis on value education. There has been a steady deterioration in the value system in the society as a whole. It is a result of lack of the value education. This is the age of information overload, with the advent of World Wide Web, providing enormous information at a click of a button but it does not do enough to separate the corn from the chaff. The above thought is being made more clear with the help of the below anecdote.

Once upon a time a very famous professor and an illiterate old farmer were travelling together on a boat. They entered into conversation with each other:

Professor : What is your profession gentleman?

Farmer : I am a farmer, sir!

Professor : Have you studied Geology, since your livelihood comes from the land?

Farmer : No sir, I haven’t.

- Professor : Then you have wasted a quarter of life dear. By the way, you might have studied Oceanography.
- Farmer : No sir, I haven't studied that either.
- Professor : Then you happen to waste half of your life dear, but then you ought to have studied Metrology.
- Farmer : I am afraid, sir I haven't even heard of that.
- Professor : In that case you have ruined three-quarters of your life, poor fellow. (The scene changes and suddenly the boat starts sinking, and by now the illiterate farmer had some touch of logic and asked the frightened professor).
- Farmer : O learned professor! Have you studied 'Swimology' (swimming)?
- Professor : No, I have never jumped into the water.
- Farmer : Then sir, whole of your life is at risk now.

The moral of the story is that one should develop a holistic approach in teaching education and practice to achieve something must go hand in hand.

Objective of the Study

The study is an attempt to understand and analyze whether practical aspects of experience shared by prisoners in their books are beneficial to establish and convert some theoretical aspects or not. This research paper endeavours to seek the following objectives:

- To assess the reason behind writing like a severe experience faced by them
- To examine and understand how these type of writings are useful to make balance between theoretical and practical aspects
- To look into the affirmative and negative aspect of creative expression in this form that raise voice against important issues and policies
- To understand and evaluate the scope of change that occur after the publicity of these type of texts by the media

Research Methodology

The thoughts and ideas shared by educationists, professionals, social activists, lawyers, parents, students and many more will be studied critically for the proposed research paper. The basic aspects of these types of writing shall also be explored, and analyzed from both theoretical and practical perspective and its effect on society.

Review of Literature

Research studies have proved that crime and severe punishment are actually not correlated. The discourse of early nineteenth century attributed crime to the human psyche in the form of pathology. A recent movie, *Haider* has depicted forms of tortures prevalent in the Indian prisons and has also tried to capture torture related scenes but there, 41 scenes were cut by the censor board and still the response to the *Colours of the Cage* has been welcomed by the mainstream newspapers and social media. From this, it becomes evident

that this kind of narrative has at least been able to touch hearts of people and who in turn have tried to bring the same in front of the general public in terms of media, coverage etc.

The famous notes written by Bhagat Singh later became part of national folklore in the form of *The Jail Notebook and Other Writings* presents an argument about the hunger strikes and Special Jail Committee. *Captive Imagination: Letters from Prison* is another collection of thirteen essays written by Varavara Rao. This talks about his tenure in the jail where he had spent 10 years during Emergency Period as a political prisoner. Mary Tyler's book *My Years in an Indian Prison* describes about the condition of the prisoners from Hazaribagh and Jamshedpur jails and cites the case of 55 years old Gulabi. Another Urdu Sahitya Akademi award winning book, *My Days in Prison* written by Iftikhar Gilani, delhi bureau chief and journalist, also talks about the shocking story of injustice and imprisonment without bail under the OSA (Official Secret Act).

Prison No. 100: The Story of My Ordeal in an Indian Prison by Anjum Zamarud Habib, the founder of the 'Khawateen Markaz', is an account of her torture at Tihar Jail who was falsely implicated under POTA in the year 2003. Chetan Mahajan wrote a daily journal, to remain sane in jail and later it became a memoir called *The Bad Boys of Bokaro Jail*. He says, "In our life, we are in some or the other way in bondage which we place around ourselves". According to him, we all have the strength to liberate ourselves from these chains if we start thinking differently about life. In the same manner it appears that Arun Ferreira's narrative is trying to say authoritatively like the Oscar Wilde's well known aphorism, "One of the many lessons that one learns in prison is, that things are what they are and will be what they will be."

This narrative is like a synonym or a miniature version of *The Gulag Archipelago* written by Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn set in the 21st century. It is a book required to be read in colleges as this is a kind of a clinical or a therapeutic document.

Discussion and Findings

The author of the book *Colours of the Cage*, Arun Ferreira has made a good effort to gain an insight into the conditions of the people who stay as prisoners, irrespective of the fact that they are proven guilty or not. Since, he was also jailed, so with the help of his own practical experiences faced during the imprisonment that was forced upon him, the author has written a book.

Arun Ferreira belongs to the East Indian Community and graduated from the esteemed St. Xavier's College, Mumbai and since his college days, Arun has been a human right activist. As a cartoonist, his expressions have been carried in the newspapers and magazines. His cartoons are mostly on the social and political scenarios. He is presently pursuing a degree course in Law and doing a research work on the history of democratic rights movement in Mumbai. After he got released from jail in 2012, he has been actively fighting for the political prisoners in order to give them their democratic rights. He wants the society to contribute for prison reforms.

Arun Ferreira was arrested by the Nagpur military on the accusation of being a naxalite in May 2007, and thereafter, he was convicted as a murderer, a rapist, and a swindler. He was also charged for possessing arms.

He was re-arrested by the police as he was about to come out of the jail in September 2011 when he was declared cleared of all the charges against him. It was now five years of his age that had gone in vain and for something which he did not even commit at all. His book *Colours of a Cage* shells out deadly comments that were obvious to come out over his stay of these unwanted forced years in prison. He has explained the brutal experiences he faced in jail and how he succumbed to atrocities.

The world in the present context has become a cage for the majority of people both physically and mentally. The people all over the world are struggling to seek revolutionary changes in all respects. People are able to discuss and express their dreadful experiences that have happened with them in the past – the one which they were not able to express during the legal proceeding in the court since at that point in time, it was considered to be irrelevant as far as their proceedings were concerned. These kinds of painful experiences forced the sufferer to express his or her anguish in the written form where he/she can narrate these hard-core truth explicitly and fearlessly without thinking of the consequences.

In this way, the sufferer thinks of himself in a better position of expressing his double authorship which means one has the mettle to express the brutality of the crime and secondly, he is able to express the same in the written form without any fright. The outcome of this kind of literature is; one that he is able to stand for his rights and ready to fight with the others and at the same time forces a victim to give a thought over his/her points so that the people come along with him/her to fight against this kind of injustice prevailing in the prisons as well in the society. *Colours of the Cage* is one such prison memoir which gives the reader to ponder over time and again as to how the author has fought for his rights and had the courage to present his deadly experiences of five years of vital age spent in the prison. *Colours of the Cage* provides a podium for the way in which the people try to express their opinion for the service of people, represent their struggles, their thoughts, bent of mind and art.

The real motive of prisons, as generally we usually tend to understand, is to transform convicts or criminals into law abiding citizens by motivating them to change themselves and their mind set and develop a distaste for crime and criminal behaviours. But in reality, this seems to be far away from the actual practices. It need not be always true as those who have spent their times in jails as under trials have different narrations to tell and discuss because there is a difference between theory and practices.

A factual narrative, *The Bad Boys of Bokaro Jail* by Chetan Mahajan, is thought infuriating, witty and poignant. It will give you an idea about the Indian prison and its conditions you had never seen it before. He comments, “We watch and read many things about the prison life but nothing prepares you for the ways in which inmates and cops run them. Arun says, “To make me some-more fair to their demands, they stretched out my physique completely, regulating an updated chronicle of a Gothic woe technique of sketch (though there was no quartering). My arms were tied to a window grill high above a belligerent while dual policemen stood on my outstretched thighs to keep me pinned to a floor.”

These kinds of real life stories should be embedded into our education system so that the hard core realities come in front of the general people and also to the people who claim to be at higher positions in the Indian judiciary system. All this should also be made ‘go-live’ by the media and the interviews of such people who

have suffered should be shared with the people so that the cruelty which innocent people face without any reason is made to be felt to everyone. This cannot decrease Arun's misery but at least would show the world the facts and the bottlenecks that still remain in our system. This actually should be reviewed by the educationists, law bodies, politicians, military and all those who may be concerned in one or the other way.

Fyodor Dostoevsky famously said, "The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons." Anyone interested in knowing, how civilized we are, must read these books to begin with.

Media, one of the fieriest and the fastest medium of current happenings, should be on the informative front too and that too in a participative manner. It should not only give a rosy picture of the jail but on the other side, should also bring to the people the dark side of the prisons, where the prisoners are living and are being tortured inhumanly.

The life in Indian jails, as portrayed by the painful experiences of the writer is tormenting, depressing, subduing and sometimes criminalising and devoid of even basic human needs, leave aside legal or human rights. This unethical and inhumane treatment resultantly fails to reform the convicts, and provide inhumanly environment to the prisoners. One of the reasons being, overcrowding in jails due to either slow process of *challan* by the investigators and subsequently *tarik pe tarik* (postponement of the courts partly due to lack of judges and also increased rate of crimes). A common remedy seems to be lying following a holistic approach which basically address the ills of human psyche, be it of the tormentor jailor, or the greedy lawyer, or an inefficient judge or an unsympathetic political system. A recent judgement to release all under trials, who have served major part of their possible jail term, is a very welcome step in improving conditions in the jails.

Anand Patwardhan, a famous documentary film maker, in one of his typical documentary "Prisoners of Conscience" (1978) says, "If the walls of the jails could speak, they would speak of terror, but they would speak also of courage."

It is but natural that the hard rock walls of the jail will not speak of the inner cruelties happening inside the jail. It is because of the courageous people like Arun who stood in front to share the heart throbbing experiences through his prison memoir.

To curtail crimes and criminals, we need to have a holistic approach as followed in the Homeopathic system of medicine in which small doses of medicines are given to induce body into a cycle of curing itself. The external medicine only attempts to aid and guide the body's self curing system whereas the present system seems to working more like strong allopathic antibiotics which kills even beneficial /friendly organisms in its attempt to kill harmful ones. Now even harmful ones are becoming increasingly drug resistant and posing serious threat to the survival of the mankind on this planet.

The *Colours of the Cage* narrates the most horrifying glimpses of the cruel torture done by the police on the prisoners who were not even liable to be there. By force and by the virtue of the power, they had been convicted to the extreme extent possible. These innocent creatures underwent the most

gruesome of the tortures that could be possible, which was actually unlawful in the eyes of law that no prisoner may be tortured when he or she is in custody as per the mandate passed by the Supreme Court of India under 1996 judgement. The police then tried to cover up the story of these wounds which were obvious when every two days, the prisoners were taken for a medical check-up. The police even tried to conceal the facts and tried to move the doctors to develop reports that these wounds were not the recent ones and that these were fierce people who were very dangerous in the eyes of law and termed as terrorists.

Conclusion

The author claims that the basis of *Colours of the Cage* is made on three important pillars – statistics, experience and the ruling of the courts. These kinds of genuine experiences should be given weightage by the common man and the experience shared by Arun should be taken as a gift, not a curse to help political prisoners after their release. Due to these atrocities, Arun is now fighting for political prisoners and publishing illustration in the online magazine, DailyO.

As Arundhati Roy has rightly commented, “Arun Ferreira gives us a clear-eyed, unsentimental account of custodial torture, years of imprisonment on false cases and the flagrant violation of procedure that passes as the rule of law”.

This narrative is not a celluloid or a familiar novelistic version but a real story of brutal picture behind the bars. It is a memoir of astounding power about a prisoner’s obdurate fight for justice and the triumph of human will and not just a tormenting narration of life in prison. The point to be noted here is that the narrator does not portray bitterness towards any individual but against system as a whole.

Through this book Arun suggested important measures for prison reforms that included:-

- treat all the prisoners according to the internationally recognized principles
- recognized prisoners of war and treat them according to the Geneva Convention
- Indian Prison Act of the colonial era should be withdrawn
- National Security Act, Armed Forces Special Powers Act etc. should stand revoked and many more such reform measures suggested.

Colours of the Cage is just not a story but a bold beginning and a hope to educate and agitate.

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