



Rajasthan Association for Studies in English
Department of English

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(Deemed to be a University)

&

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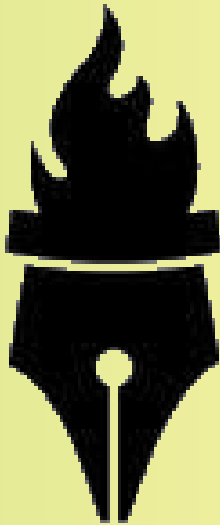
Cordially invite you to

XVIII Annual International Conference

(Hybrid Mode)

on

Writing in Restricted Spaces:
Writing for Freedom and
Freedom of Writing



November 20-21, 2021

CONCEPT NOTE

This is true Liberty when free born men
Having to advise the public may speak free,
Which he who can, and will, deserves high praise,
Who neither can nor will, may hold his peace;
What can be juster in a State

(A motto from Euripides' tragedy *The Suppliants* which the title page of *Areopagitica* bears-translated by John Milton)

The world faces new crises every day as we move ahead in time. Despite claims of progress and development, human life is fraught with misery. Rise of Taliban is a reminder of age old regimes of fundamentalist tendencies. Amidst the surging oceans of information the right to know the truth is shackled even as the instruments of information and free expression get bound to political and economic interests. Both the state and the non-state actors hold the voice of truth to ransom and those who dare to speak are confined to restrictions imposed by numerous means – both imposed by law as well as unlawful.

As a student of literature one is reminded of Dante's political work *On Monarchy* (1313) which was burnt as a heretical text by the papal authorities. Similarly one may recount *Historia del Concilio Tridentino* ('History of the Council of Trent'), a deeply critical account by the Venetian scholar and statesman Paolo Sarpi of the proceedings of the Council of Trent, convened by the Catholic Church from 1545 to 1563 to develop the policies of the Counter-Reformation. Sarpi's critique of the abuses of clerical power and defense of the authority of the Venetian republic to govern its own Church was considered so potentially incendiary that his work was smuggled out of Venice in installments and first published under a pseudonym in London in 1619. In his polemical work *Of Reformation* (1641) John Milton had warned the threat of clerical usurpation of political power .

Galileo, a contemporary of John Milton was placed under house arrest in Florence since 1633 for his belief that the Earth moved around the Sun. Milton had gone to meet



him. Tommaso Campanella wrote *Apologia pro Galileo* ('Defence of Galileo') in 1622. Campanella argued for the necessity of 'the freedom of philosophising' in Christian nations, perhaps himself echoing Galileo, who in several of his writings had quoted the dictum attributed to the Platonic philosopher Alcinoüs: 'The philosopher needs to think like a free-born man.' 'Philosophy' here encompasses 'natural philosophy', or what we call science: the modern concept of 'academic freedom' has roots in this 17th-century notion of 'philosophic freedom'. There are many more examples of authors pointing at the need to ensure writers' freedom to express and also of those who were persecuted for doing so.

The historian James Hankins, in his book *Virtue Politics* (2019), talks of Renaissance Italy: 'To speak with freedom, to advocate what was right, especially before a tyrant or a howling mob, was a great virtue that required other virtues such as prudence and courage.' This is equally true in 21st century India. George Orwell in his powerful essay 'The Prevention of Literature' (1946) considers the twin threats posed to 'intellectual liberty' by 'totalitarianism' and 'monopoly and bureaucracy'.



Louis Althusser talks of the forces that exercise checks on the free thinking of individuals. He mentions two such instruments, namely State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus. According to him the state apparatus includes administration, courts, government agencies, military, police and prison houses. They represent institutions which repress by the sheer violence of their authority. The Ideological State Apparatus includes institutions which do it more subtly. They exercise some sort of a hegemony which appears persuasive, tempting and less coercive. They include religion, educational institutions, NGOs, political parties, cultural institutions and programmes, media and above all market. According to Althusser they are less centralized and appear to be heterogeneous. However, they are, in truth, unified in serving the interest of the ruling classes.

These SAs and ISAs create restricted spaces. The more obvious ones are prisons. People spend years in prisons languishing there for want of enough strength, resources and



access to judicial intervention. Other restricted spaces may include government institutions, the corporate, private work places and media houses. This list is not exhaustive. Even family becomes a restricted space if one is not allowed to indulge in expressing discontent and dissent towards a dominant narrative. Despite all odds many authors have written about their struggle and experiences. This literature appears in different genres. Sometimes, while languishing in prison houses too people have composed prose, fiction and poetry.

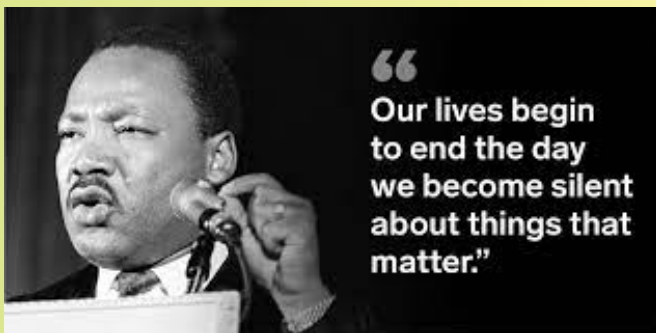
COVID-19 created self - imposed isolation and restricted free movement for months together in various countries of the world. Literature composed by people in their confinement would also make an interesting study.

Some of the famous works written in prison include *Letters from Birmingham Jail*, by Martin Luther King Jr., *Pisan Cantos*, by Ezra Pound, *Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes, *Conversations with Myself*, by Nelson Mandela, *Justine*, by the Marquis de Sade, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, by Rustichello da Pisa, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, by Sir Thomas Malory, *Our Lady of Flowers*, by Jean Genet, *De Profundis*, by Oscar Wilde, *History of the World Volume 1*, by Sir Walter Raleigh.

In India Mahatma Gandhi wrote *My Experiments with Truth* in Pune's Yerwada jail. *The Discovery of India* was the result of four years that Pandit Nehru spent in Ahmednagar prison. Jayaprakash Narayan wrote *Prison*



Diary while in prison. Revolutionary Sardar Bhagat Singh wrote four books while in Jail. But the only work that survived is his jail diary published with the title *The Jail Notebook and Other Writings*. Kobad Ghandy's *Fractured Freedom - A Prison Memoir* is an account of the jail experiences of an activist who had to spend ten



years in jail without anything unlawful proved against him. *Behind The Bars* by Sunetra Choudhury is a book containing prison tales of India's most famous people, *Black Warrant* by Sunil Gupta and Sunetra Choudhury is a record of the confessions of a Tihar Jailor. Some other works are *My Years in an Indian Prison* by Mary Tyler, *The Tale of My Exile* by Barindra Kumar Ghose, *Of Women 'Inside'* by Rani Dhavan Shankar Dass and *My Years in a Pakistani Prison* by Kishori Lal Sharma.

It would be interesting to explore and study the literature composed in restricted spaces. This will be an attempt to stand in solidarity with ones like John Milton and the entire lineage of authors in his tradition. Original research papers on the central theme of the conference or on any one of the themes suggested below are invited. The papers should conform to MLA handbook VIII edition and should be unpublished. Some of the suggested themes are:

1. Prison Literature
2. Letters from Convicts
3. Literature by authors in exile
4. Media Analysis/ Media Trial
5. Cinema of Resistance
6. Documentaries
7. Tales behind the Purdah
8. Psycho-analytical study of the authors in prison
9. Jail Writings of freedom fighters

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Please send your papers/abstracts by
Oct. 15th, 2021 at rasecon2021@gmail.com

Registration link: <https://forms.gle/13aEgZ6HgnNHjBzRA>

REGISTRATION FEE

Rs. 500.00 to be deposited in the Account of
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