

***PRISON VOICE–***

***THE MISSIONARY MOUTH PIECE OF INDIAN PRISON MINISTRY***

**By Neeta Khandpekar**

**Abstract**

A small but very important national monthly namely the Prison Voice of Prison Ministry, India is published every month from Bangalore highlighting news related to prisons all over India. It is the mouth piece of Missionary congregations which are actively involved in social work in prisons all over india. Two prominent tools namely Prison Voice and Poetry have been employed in the present work for the study of contemporary social history. Poems written by fathers and sisters working in the prison cells display their involvement in this work. This study indirectly addresses the psychology of the prison in-mates which is rarely known to the common people. The paper is more descriptive in nature, objectively portraying conditions existing in the prison. The study can give impetus to the students undergoing course in social history of India.

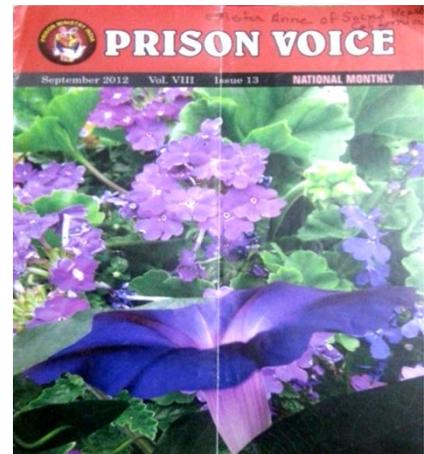
**Key Words** Prison Ministry, Prison Voice, Poems, Contemporary Social History, India

### **Introduction**

THE PRISON MINISTRY came into existence in India on March 1, 1986 and on Sept 1989, it got officially recognized.<sup>1</sup> St. Maximilian Mary Kolbe<sup>2</sup> 1894-1941 is regarded the patron Saint of PRISON MINISTRY. Maximilian Kolbe the great saint accepted death for another fellow prisoner one who was the only bread winner. Today he is known as a holy prisoner, saint of the concentration camp, saint of the press, saint of the Aviation, saint of the poor, saint of the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> Prison Voice (PV) is a national monthly of Prison Ministry of India published since 2003 from Bangalore, India. In the present work various issues of *Prison Voice* (PV) are used to highlight the life of Prison Inmates and the help rendered by various missionary congregations in this regard. Prison refers to a building where criminals or people awaiting trial are confined and a Jail (Gaol) is a place for holding people accused or convicted of a crime. In the Nineteenth century Newspapers like Bombay Guardian (BG) one comes across the word **House of correction** used for Jails in Mumbai<sup>4</sup>. I would like to begin and end this paper with a poem., as poem can be used as a tool for the study contemporary history.

### **I'M Human Tool (BY Richard Reibow)<sup>5</sup>**

I was born a human being in a world that knew no bounds,  
I also did a lot of things, and traveled lots of grounds.  
I even did numerous things that helped to make me grow;  
Some I am paying for, yes you reap what you sow  
I was born a human being; sure I made a few mistakes,  
But humanism is not a title that one can forsake.  
I notice that how recently it seems to be the norm,  
Society has given up on me, they think I can't conform.  
That's really not the half of it, or the part that hurts the most.  
I was born a human being, now they call me an animal.  
Although I'm here for committing a crime,  
I'm human just like you.



All I ask is for a chance to re-enter society<sup>6</sup>,  
And be looked upon as a human being, cause I was born one.  
I'm paying my dues to society, by serving all this time;  
To label me an animal is a much greater crime.

Below are the highlights covered by PV. The write-up cellular jail- The man on man<sup>7</sup> speaks about history of Andaman island, this article is continued on page 22, 23 of Aug 2007 PV wherein Sebastian gives details of many freedom fighters who suffered the British torture in this jail. P.D. Mathew's write-up **Know about the Police** highlights when can a police officer arrest a person without a warrant<sup>8</sup>?. Mathew continues his write-up **Warrant of Arrest** which speaks of what is a warrant? And other questions related to it are discussed. His write-up **Summons to Produce, Document or Other Things., Information to the Police and their powers to Investigate.** This talks of FIR and how to file an FIR?<sup>9</sup> He further writes, What you should know about the Police., Bail and Sureties<sup>10</sup>. Mathew also wrote Cases in which compensations were awarded, Interim compensation paid to the father for the death of his son in police custody, Compensation to mother for the death of her son caused by the police (Role of *Saheli*, a women's resource centre in Delhi shown)<sup>11</sup>.

Alcohol and Narcotic addictions by Major S.R. David (a retired I.S.S.) talks how alcohol and narcotics are a menace to our orderly lives both within the family and in the society. It shows how the rich and poor indulge in this evil.<sup>12</sup> In December 2007 PV he wrote 'Hang them Not' which speaks against Death Penalty. PV December 2007 issue describes how Japan does not tell death row Prisoners that they are to be hanged until the last possible minute which is incompatible with articles 2,7 AND 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Human Rights according to the United Nations human Rights.

Analysis write-up by David entitled There is Life after prison talks of the wonderful work the Prison Ministry India is doing not only to reform but to release prisoners.<sup>13</sup> Adv. Sebastian

Vadakumpadan wrote Shanti Yagna Meditation for the PMI Volunteers frequent write-ups on Women in Prisons (showing increasing number of women are ending up behind bars.) *Times of India* articles are often quoted. Suggestions for the women prisoners like education should be made compulsory for illiterate women prisoners.<sup>14</sup> Advocate Siji Malayil of Court of Karnataka wrote Laws against Domestic Violence and Abuse. He discussed in 1983 domestic violence was recognized as a specific criminal offence by the introduction of section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code.<sup>15</sup> Often articles from Prison Manual are seen like Pregnancy of women prisoner which focus on the child birth in prison, children of women prisoners, welfare of the children of the women prisoners.<sup>16</sup> Female criminality in India has been a neglected subject of study. Imprisonment of mother with dependent young child is a problematic issue. The children of women prisoners living with them in jails are being deprived of their basic rights, entitlements and amenities for their development.<sup>17</sup> The state of women prisoners is more distressful. Thus living conditions are pathetic. Female wards in prisons are mostly over crowded. General health care of women prisoners in many prisons is not up to the mark.

Sri M.B. Biradara wrote Human Rights VS Captial Punishment<sup>18</sup> This highlight civil society means educated, sober or cultured society. IT IS BASED UPON THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN RIGHTS which are essential not merely to fulfill biological needs of the mankind but as well as for the dignity of the individual. Fr. Josekutty Kalayil MST wrote Prison is a land in which no sun rises with heat of lie and no moon appears with the comfort of sleep. Arpit Johari wrote Citizens Role in the Prison's and Prisoner's Reformation<sup>19</sup>.

### **NIMHANS Study on Prisoners**

The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) Bangalore launched a study on the mental health of prison inmates on March 1 2008. The study is aimed at helping the prisons Department obtain a better understanding of the inmates and improve its functioning.<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes we see published works from Encyclopedia published series wise in PV. Women's Human Rights: An introduction.<sup>21</sup>

The Situation of Women in Indian Prisons (Covers Prison Ministry Unit reports)<sup>22</sup>. Since May 2010 The PV covered articles by Professors with distinguished experience. Dr. Kunjumon Chacko wrote The Spiritual causes of Youth Crime<sup>23</sup>, C Thomas Abraham wrote Familial Factors contributing to Youth crime. Dr Ruble Raj wrote Educational Aspects of crime.<sup>24</sup>

The most enduring article till today for me has been an interview entitled The Nun who made prison her convent<sup>25</sup> it's about Sister Anne Montgomery, Religious of the Sacred Heart California one of the legends in the US peace movement who spent over three years in Prison for many civil disobedience actions against war, including seven plowshares anti-nuclear disarmament actions; many years teaching in Harlem and many years living with the Christian Peacemaker Team in Hebron, Palestine-Israel. She also traveled to many of the world's Warzones, and went to Iraq at least 15 times since 1990 she learned that our wars are not about freedom but oil and global political control. She died of cancer in 2012.

Sister Bernard N cube (known as *Mma Rona* i.e.our mother) is the only nun ever to be charged with political offences in South Africa. She was held in solitary confinement for 16 months. She wrote "Our prisons are man-made hells on earth", places of torture and suffering. You are just kept there in that cage. Time and Space seem non-existent because you just live from day to day. You need a strong spirit in you to build you up in these periods because you have nothing else.

With no one to speak to, nothing to read except her Bible and no contact with the outside world, Sister N cube's faith and commitment to her community Only deepened during detention. 'I have a deeper strength than ever and a deeper commitment. The Bible meant a lot to me, it was an answer to my situation in a very realistic way. The Bible spoke for itself in detention. I had never had so much time to study it. The Bible is the foundation of "Politics" it addresses itself to

the structural sins of society. The sins of society are a major rebellion against God and the fundamental causes of war and bloodshed. Our society does not; address itself to the rebellion against humanity<sup>26</sup>.

The experience of imprisonment does not occur in isolation for a man with a family, and the prison wall can never be complete barriers to the emotional currents which flow between a man and his wife and children. Too often in prison work, the family is thought of as some external appendage, remote and irrelevant to the processes of treatment and training, rather than as a continuous influence upon the man in custody<sup>27</sup>. The improvement of facilities for contact between the prisoner and his family is sought for. There is little doubt that the majority of Prisoner's families live in conditions of considerable poverty. The concept of treatment of offenders has undergone a great transition in the past few decades and the old ideas of confining the prisoners to the four walls of prison no longer hold good. The protection of society cannot be achieved merely by confining the prisoners behind the bars but by planning for diagnosis and treatment so that the offender comes back to the society as a reformed individual<sup>28</sup>.

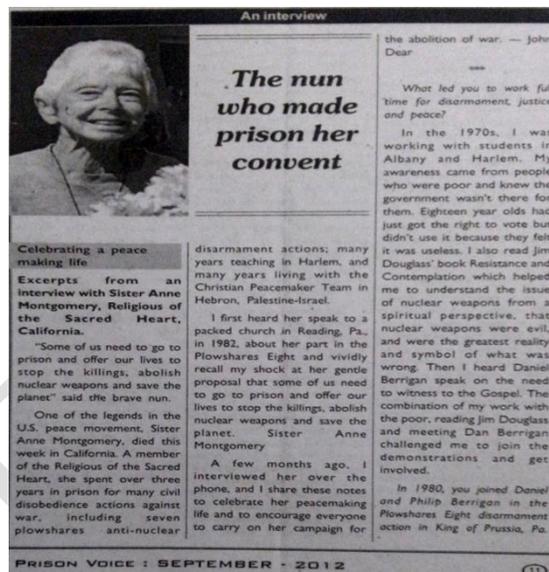
**Paro's Kids and other prison stories**<sup>29</sup> is a collection of prison writings from the Indian subcontinent. It is written by political prisoners one is in the form of a prison diary by Arun Ferreira<sup>30</sup> depicting the everyday life in the prison. In all this is a mosaic of prison writings by political prisoners. The question of prison labour was first recommended for inclusion in the United Nations programme of work by the first Group of experts in the field of the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders which was convened in August 1949. The project was then defined as "the role of prison labour in the training of the prisoners and in the economy of the institution as well as in its relationship to the national economy."<sup>31</sup>

A four page write-up entitled A Journey to open prisons of our country<sup>32</sup> discussed Sanganer Open camp which is one of the 7 open prisons in Rajasthan. The use of open prisons in India started when Rajasthan's reformist Governor. Sampooranand who was inspired by the Hindi film Do Aankhen Baarah haat started open jail on an experimental basis in 1963. Near Paithan in

Maharashtra there is open *Karagraha* called 'Swatantrapur' coincidentally the Hindi film mentioned above was shot here. Before independence Appasaheb of Aundh Sansthan with the help of Morris Freedman established free colony of prisoners.<sup>33</sup>

**“TO BE” (poem by Paul Fernandes cfc)<sup>34</sup>**

Set us free, set us free, set us free  
Is a cry we hear.  
And get excited, and talk about  
What we can do, what we can do.  
One said, I miss my family  
The other said, I robbed  
To hear those words  
And do nothing is all one could do.  
That is the time one realizes,  
It's not what one does  
That makes all the difference,  
But just to “Be” there, and listen,  
Is what they expect us to do.  
May be one day, while we  
“Be” there for them.  
We may realize, while doing that  
We have set a prisoner free  
That is inside us.



Of the family valuable treasures have come out from Prison through Books written by Mahatma Gandhi, J Nehru, Fr, Peter Joseph De Cloriviere while their imprisonment<sup>35</sup>. Ex- Super cop now MP Kiran Bedi when asked a question on What has been the most satisfying experience in your career so far? She replied for DNA Newspaper, It has to be my Tihar Prison assignment. It was

an exceedingly satisfying and life changing experience. The reforms affected lives of almost 10,000 prisoners everyday, which in turn affected the lives of their family members. The entire experience made me a better human being. In Maharashtra we have Mrs Swati Sathe who took up charge as Senior Superintendent of the infamous Arthur Road Jail in 2002 . She became first woman jail superintendent in India with the background in Prison administration.<sup>36</sup>

I end my paper with a poem entitled **CRY OF A CHILD IN PRISON** written by Bernard D'Sa<sup>37</sup>

This place is like a wild forest  
My father was eaten up and  
My mother was fed to the animal  
I can't go out and play  
Neither can I play inside  
My innocent smile has been taken away  
I am not sure of any thing  
Neither can I be aware of things  
Neither can I express myself  
I know that I shall be fed to the animals  
And then I shall meet my parents  
Till then I shall sit and pray for them.  
A Child Born in Prison  
Is it a ancestral curse or a disguised blessing  
My mother gave me birth in prison late evening  
No visitors, no excitement but bitter mourning  
Said my mother as I grew up with tears flowing.  
I never knew the world beyond four high walls  
Why I am here for strangers' beck and call  
AM I BELONG TO ONLY to my beloved mother



No person here whom I could call my father..... article by Sr. Alice Crasta SCCG, Secunderabad.<sup>38</sup>

Thus in nutshell the article highlights Prison voice's attempt to objectively portray objectively conditions existing in the prison. The poems composed by the fathers and sisters of various congregations working in the cells are heart touching. Missionary zeal and support for the upliftment of the conditions existing in prison are mind boggling. Prison Voice thus forms a rare link between the prison in-mates, missionaries and society. This study of this magazine published regularly is helpful to students of contemporary history in constructing social issues from micro efforts.

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-  <sup>2</sup> On February 17, 1941, Fr, Maximilian Kolbe was arrested by the German Gestapo and on May 25 was transferred to Auschwitz as prisoner# 16670 . He was executed with an injection of carbolic acid on August 14,1941 at the age of 47 years. Pope John Paul canonized Kolbe on Oct 10, 1982 as a Martyr of Charity and “Patron saint of our difficult century.”
-  <sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. (2013). Prison Voice. 05. 2013.
-  <sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. (1901). House of Correction. Bombay Guardian, Bombay, 05.01.1901.
-  <sup>5</sup> Reibow, R. (2008). I'M Human Tool. Prison Voice, Bangalore 04.2008.
-  <sup>6</sup> The Book named *Prisoners are People* by Kenyan J Scudder (published from New York 1952) is an unembellished account of men in prison who are given an opportunity to regain their self-respect and to prepare constructively for the day of release when they will return.
-  <sup>7</sup> Vadakumpadan, S. (2007). Cellular Jail- The Man on Man. Prison Voice, Bangalore 06.2007.
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-  <sup>26</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. (1988). *Cries of Freedom. Women in Detention in South Africa*. London: Catholic Institute for International Relations.
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-  <sup>29</sup> Printed and published by Amit Bhattacharyya, for the Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners(CRPP formed in April 2008), New Delhi 2013
-  <sup>30</sup> He was arrested in May 2007 in Nagpur and released in January 2012 from Nagpur Central Prison.
-  <sup>31</sup> *Prison Labour* , United Nations Dept of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 1955, p.vi
-  <sup>32</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. (2013). *A Journey to open prisons of our country*. Prison Voice, Bangalore 07. 2013.
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-  <sup>37</sup> Her many poems like *Lost in Prison* are published in PV
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### **Bio**

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