

Azad's Letters from Ahmednagar Fort Prison: A Reading of *Ghubar e Khatir* as a Prison Narrative

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Abstract:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a prominent freedom fighter and religious scholar from India, was imprisoned by the British colonial administration many times before India gained independence in 1947. Between 1942 and 1945, the British administration incarcerated him at the Ahmadnagar Fort Prison. It was in this prison that the Maulana wrote one of the masterpieces of Urdu literature in the form of a collection of letters which he addressed to one of his closest friends, Nawab Sadr Yar Jung, Maulana Habibur Rahman Shirwani. The letters are Maulana's reflections on a host of issues: his love for tea, his love for solitude, philosophy, religion, aesthetics, ethics, sin, and the concept of God. As a piece of Prison Literature, *Ghubar e Khatir* could be studied as an extraordinary piece of communication that a confined writer makes with his friend by imagining him in a state of dialogue with him; and, these letters show the imprisoned writer and his resilience to continue to read and write despite his solitary confinement as a human will to survive through writing. In fact, these letters show the capacity of the human mind to create meanings, seek consolations, and heal physical wounds through such a profound engagement with reading and writing. In the present paper, an attempt shall be made to read Maulana's *Ghubar e Khatir* as a prison narrative, and an attempt shall also be made to see how the world within the writer helps him overcome the pain of solitary confinement.

Keywords: *Ghubar e Khatir*; Maulana Abul Kalam Azad; prison narrative; consolations; healing; survival

Introduction:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was arrested by the British colonial administration many times during the Indian movement for freedom. However, on August 9th, 1942, he was arrested for the last time when the Indian National Congress organized a crucial meeting in Bombay, where one of the most significant resolutions of the meeting was the declaration of the Quit India Movement. In other words, the British Colonial Administration was asked to leave India and cease administering and controlling it (1967, 7). As the meeting concluded late on the night of August 8th, the next day, early in the British police arrested the top Congressmen and imprisoned them at the Ahmadnagar Fort. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Jawahar Lal Nehru were also incarcerated at the same jail. It was during this period of incarceration that Maulana wrote *Ghubar-e-Khatir*.

Ghubar e Khatir

The collection of letters titled *Ghubar e Khatir* has been translated into English as *Sallies of Mind*, published by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata. The expression "*Ghubar e Khatir*" is very spontaneous in nature and requires little explanation. Syeda Hameed's explanation would be quite appropriate in this regard.

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“ We learn that as a child, he was fascinated with balloons filled with helium gas. What intrigued him more was the *betaabi* (restlessness) of the gas to escape, which became apparent when he pricked the balloon with a needle. The title of this epistolary collection, *Ghubar e Khatir*, was probably inspired by this single childhood memory. He then says that his present state of mind is similar; as if now he is filled with some potent substance that eagerly waits for the prick of the needle. One night, it seemed as if the vapour (*ghubar*) of the self (*khatir*) would condense and start flowing (in tears), but that did not happen. The cause was the sound of Mendelssohn’s ‘Song Without an End’ being played on the violin (a jail officer was listening to the BBC).” The words he uses to describe his feelings are, ‘As if a carbuncle was about to burst.’ The choice of words to describe his feelings is unusual and has not been used in any of his other writings.” (2014, 35).

During the first two years of his jail term (1942-1945) at the Ahmednagar Fort, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad addressed a series of letters to Habibur Rahman Khan Shirwani, one of his closest friends and a man of letters. However, he did not post any of these letters as the administration did not allow the jailed any communication with the outside world. He would wake up very early in the morning, as was his habit throughout his life, and write a letter to his friend, then leave it in a file. The letters were published only when he was finally released from jail. They are letters because he wrote them in the form of letters and addressed them to his ‘*sadiq e maukkaram*’. Otherwise, it would be equally correct to state that they are reflective and personal essays written in highly chaste, flowery, and engaging Urdu. Nevertheless, they are published as letters as they were originally intended to be by the Maulana. This decision was more logical because it might have saved the publishers from the concern of looking for a single unifying subject matter in the book. The letters deal with a host of issues: Maulana’s love for tea; his flowery description of tea, tea-making, and its taste along with cigarette smoking and the manners thereof; the question of sin; the questions of morality, ethics, and the concept of God; Maulana’s wayfaring and struggle for seeking answers to the most basic questions of life; descriptions of what solitary confinement would feel like and how the confinement was converted into the blessings of solitude, and a host of other themes and issues.

There are twenty-four letters in *Ghubar e Khatir* : letter number 1 is dated June 27, 1945; letter number 2 is dated August 24, 1945; letter number 3 is dated September 3, 1945; letter number 4 is dated August 3, 1942; letter number 5 is dated August 10, 1942; letter number 6 is dated August 11, 1942; letter number 7 is dated August 15, 1942; letter number 8 is dated August 19, 1942; letter number 9 is dated August 27, 1942; letter number 10 is dated August 29, 1942; letter number 11 is dated October 12, 1942; letter number 12 is dated October 17, 1942; letter number 13 is dated October 18, 1942; letter number 14 is dated December 5, 1942; letter number 15 is dated December 17, 1942; letter number 16 is dated January 7, 1943; letter number 17 is dated January 7, 1943; letter number 18 is dated March 2, 1943; letter number 19 is dated March 17, 1943; letter number 20 is dated March 18, 1943; letter number 21 is dated April 11, 1943; letter number 22 is dated June 14, 1943; letter number 23 is dated June 15, 1943, and letter number 24 is dated September 16, 1943 (1967, 27-8).

All the letters are addressed to an unnamed ‘*sadiq e mukkaram*’ (respected friend). The ‘*sadiq e mukkaram*’ is none other than Maulana Habib ur Rehman Khan Shirwani. Of the twenty-four letters in the collection, the letter dated June 27, 1945, was written by Maulana from Shimla. The letter dated August 24, 1945, was written from a houseboat in Srinagar, and the letter dated September 3, 1945, was written from Nasim Bagh Srinagar, and the letter dated August 3, 1942, was written by Maulana in Bombay Mail while he was on his way to Nagpur and could not be posted because of his subsequent imprisonment. Technically speaking, these four letters should not have been included in this collection, as three of these four letters were written by Maulana after his release from the Ahmednagar Jail, and one before his imprisonment. However, due to the fact that all four letters are addressed to Habib ur Rehman Khan Shirwani, these four letters have been included in the collection.

There are three titled letters in the collection : letter number 5 is titled “*Dastan e Be Sutun wa Kohkan*,” letter number 18 is titled “*Hikayat e Zag wa Bulbul*” ;and letter number 19 is titled “*Chidya*

Chaday ki Kahani." Throughout the collection, Maulana has quoted around seven hundred couplets from Persian, Urdu, and Arabic languages to augment and strengthen his arguments regarding the issues discussed in these letters. The Sahitya Akademi of India published these letters in 1967. Malik Ram, the compiler of the edition published by the Sahitya Akademi, writes in his foreword: "It is quite possible that Maulana thought of writing such letters(essays) as an emulation of *Persian Letters* (1721) by the famous French writer and philosopher, Charles Louis Montesco"(p.8).

Prison Literature in perspective

Prison literature is not something new in human history. It is as old as human history itself. Since the dawn of human civilization, powerful people, clans, families, tribes, and more recently, states and empires have subjected their opponents to incarceration, control, and systematic restraint. The history of Homo sapiens has been a history of conflict, and conflicts of various natures have always given rise to circumstances where a state, empire, powerful tribe, or clan has crushed its enemy, real or imaginary, through imprisonment and incarceration. Prison, of course, is a place where a human being or an animal loses freedom and dignity, which they are entitled to as normal citizens of the world. It is also a place where a human being is 'marked' as someone who is a danger to the outside world; therefore, supposed to be isolated from society, to its peace and stability he is a threat. Prison is a site of denial and instability. A class of human beings is, with legal justification, subjected to the denial of all those rights which a human being outside the prison enjoys; in fact, the prisoner is subjected to the negation of their normal identity. Psychologically speaking, prison is a place of total torment designed by Homo sapiens for the reform of fellow human beings who are believed to threaten peace, stability, law and order, or are non-conformists to a dominant belief system or political structure. As prisons could be both formal and informal, since the dawn of human civilization prisons have been there. Amidst restrictions, control, chains, torture, and denial of normal life, is it possible for human beings to find peace, creativity, and upliftment in the spiritual domain? One of the most illuminating answers to this question is offered by prison literature.

What is prison literature?

It is the body of fictional and non-fictional work that incarcerated writers and thinkers have produced behind bars. Poetry, novels, plays, letters, and much non-fictional material written behind bars are now referred to as prison literature or studied as prison literature. Such literary or non-literary work could be aimed at resistance, expression of one's feelings and thoughts about different things, love and anguish, memory and loss, intense reflection, or imaginary flight from physical chains or prison walls. It could also be an act of self-assertion aimed at the defiance of charges leveled against the prisoner. It is worth noting that a prison writer has always been a sensitive soul who uses the power of writing to express their anguish or give new meaning to their ongoing crisis. It won't be out of place to state that human beings have always been a meaning-making species. Whatever conditions they live in, prisoners use language to create new meanings out of their physically and mentally depressing circumstances, thereby defying the powers that be by creating a new world out of the system of control and power of denial and annihilation. Prison literature, throughout the world, is an expression of all these themes. Language, thus, is not merely a tool of expression for a prisoner; in fact, it becomes a consolation for them. Noted scholar of prison literature, Rivkah Zim, defines prison literature in her book *The Consolation of Writing: Literary Strategies of Resistance from Boethius to Primo Levi* (2014) in these words:

"Resistance may sometimes enhance chances of survival, but this is seldom sufficient. For personal or political reasons, the persecuted captive may decide that one must survive morally or be spiritually intact, which is why some prisoners regard suicide as a paradoxical means of self-preservation, similar to martyrdom." Such prisoners have always used various means to preserve and defend themselves against the corrosion of fear, uncertainty, and disinformation. Writing is one of the most

important and durable methods. In captivity, writing is often a continuation of the author's ordinary vocation, but confinement and repression also prompt dissidents to speak out, either in self-defense or for their cause. Many prisoners wrote personal accounts that interpreted their past, recorded present interrogations or suffering, and preserved memorial images of themselves and others as historic testimony." (2014, 1)

A similar definition is found in Wringer, who, in his paper "I'jaam, An Iraqi Rhapsody: Defying Violence with Words" writes that "Prison Literature" is a genre in which authors usually express their individual or collective struggle against an oppressive regime. In this way, prison literature could be regarded as a literary testimony of oppression and resistance that can clarify the specific facets of violence within a particular socio-political context"(2019,1). Kelley and Claire Westall, in her edited book on prison writing titled *Prison Writing and the Literary World: Imprisonment, Institutionalization, and Questions of Literary Practice*, note that "Prison writing in its varying modes can also provide opportunities for the incarcerated to express themselves, critique the system of detention, and document their struggle for survival and sanity." (2021, 1). Harlow Barbara, in her seminal work titled *Resistance Literature*, offers a similar definition, stating that prison writing mainly seeks a "re-definition of the self and the individual in terms of collective enterprise and struggle...they are not written for the sake of a book of one's own, but rather they are collective documents, testimonies written by individuals to their common struggle"(1987, 120).

Thus, self-preservation, survival, meaning-making, self-assertion, freedom, consolation, defiance, and other such issues are some of the most common features of Prison Writing. However, the most illuminating feature of prison writing could be the educational value that it offers not only for the incarcerated but the incarcerating agency of power as well; thus, prison writing could be seen as a silent dialogue between the powerful and the powerless, wherein the incarcerated powerful attempt to educate the powerful and seek enlightenment through a written dialogue that, in a way, subverts the understanding of the powerful by showing them the alternative truth of things and the transitoriness of all ephemeral realities. If seen in this way, not only does the writer's individual self become important, but the self of the other as well is also given recognition, and its modification is sought, either latently or manifestly.

Reading selected letters from Ghubar-ee-Khatir as reflections on prison life

Maulana and his fellow congressmen were released from Bankura jail on June 15th, 1945, as they had been transferred to Bankura from the Ahmednagar fort sometime before. Immediately after his release, he handed over the file of letters to Ajmal Khan for making copies prior to mailing them to different people. The file contained the nineteen letters he had written in jail and also the one he had not been able to post before his imprisonment. While the publication process of publication started, Ajmal Khan added some more letters to the collection. These letters were written from Srinagar and Shimla after his release, following the simple logic that the addressee of these letters was also the same '*sadiq e mukkaram*'. (2014,3)

The moment one thinks of how the Maulana might have been able to write such scholarly and highly imaginative pieces of work in the form of letters, many things come to mind. Perhaps there might have been a library in the jail that the Maulana could have accessed for reading, verifying facts, or collecting data; that the Maulana may have relied on his memory to retrieve the data he deals with in these letters; that the Maulana might have only used information he collected from conversations that he might have had with his fellow prisoners. Of all these assumptions that one can have about *Ghubar-ee-Khatir*, only the second assumption is true. The jail administration did not allow the inmates to have any kind of communication with the outside world, nor were they allowed to access any library in the fort. Maulana did not rely on conversations for the collection of information and data for these letters. Ajmal Khan talks about it in his *Introduction* to these letters, which Syeda Hameed has commented upon in these words:

“ Two other pointers from Ajmal Khan's Introduction are important: first, Azad's endless capacity to store information in his mind, and second, what he calls the writer's *dimaghi pas manzar* (mental perspective). The obvious proof of memory is Azad's lavish use of poetry to illustrate or substantiate his thoughts, even when he was miles away from the use of any library. He uses poetry sparingly in religious and other intellectual discourses, but in giving free play to his feelings, in other words, in ventilating his own *ghubar e khatir* (pent-up feelings), couplets appear almost unbidden and slip in naturally, becoming intrinsic to the present discourse. Similarly, the attention to detail with which he records history, not leaving out dates, names, or places, makes it appear as if he were sitting in the reference section of a library." Ajmal Khan refers to what he calls the "*dimaghi pas manzar*" of an individual (Azad), who is woken up one morning to discover that he is under arrest and being taken to an unknown destination. Twenty-four hours later, he wakes up inside the prison walls, picks up his pen, and begins to write. The pattern repeats itself every few days. The question is : what 'mental perspective' enabled him to recreate another reality and turn prison life as if it was his normal life of reading and writing"(ibid).

Like Boethius, Maulana also seems to have made the best use of his time at the Ahmadnagar Fort Prison. Writing, like hundreds of prison writers, seems to have offered consolation to the Maulana, as through writing he might have converted all the losses into gains.

As the writer of these letters is cut off from the outside world and thrown into solitary confinement by the British administration, with no access initially to newspapers and books, he summons his own internal world and converts the solitary confinement into a solitude that becomes blissful through writing these letters and reflecting on a number of issues and questions that he holds dear as a scholar of high repute and as a wayfarer on the highway of knowledge and wisdom. Like all other quality prison writings, these letters mark his defiance against unfreedom, his longing for his dearest ideals and aspirations, his exploration of his own inner world, and his pursuit of happiness despite the fact that all of its avenues were apparently snatched from him by the administration, and his will to survive the trials and tests of life. Maulana comes very close to Boethius in this regard; in fact, at times he even surpasses him as he goes deeper and deeper into some of the most basic questions of human life.

The first letter that Azad writes from the Ahmednagar Fort Prison is titled "*Dastan e be Sutoon o Kohkan*" (The Story of Be Sutun and Kohkan). In fact, this letter is one of only three of the total nineteen stories in the collection that bear titles. In old Persian tradition, *Be Sutun* is the place of gods, and Iranian storytellers connect it with Farhad, the lover of Shirin. He was ordained by the emperor of Iran to carve a canal of milk by cutting a mountain, a Herculean task that he had to do to win his beloved. Farhad is, therefore, the symbol of strength and resilience for the powerless against the mighty and powerful state. Azad seems to have appropriated the story in tune with his own background and condition. His pursuit of freedom for his country is echoed by the love of Farhad for Shirin, and the struggle on this path is symbolized by Farhad's struggle to win Shirin's love. In fact, the first letter from Ahmednagar Fort categorically suggests that Azad considered himself in the category of those lovers who are physically and mentally prepared to undertake an arduous journey on the path of freedom struggle for their nation; and, through the appropriation of such a story, Azad makes it clear that the road to freedom is full of struggle and thorns, and anybody who is going to undertake this journey has to be mentally prepared to welcome the struggle of Farhad and maybe his fate too. The letter gives an account of how he and his fellow congressmen were arrested in Bombay and then transported to Ahmednagar Fort and other prisons. Azad, unlike any other prisoner, welcomes the timelessness that the prison in Ahmednagar Fort offered to him. Remember, it is only the tribe of lovers in the league of Farhad who welcome and readily accept the prison and the gallows in the pursuit of their love. Azad writes:

“ Yesterday, in the vast city of Bombay, the poverty of my limited leisure was such that I could not even hand my 3 August letter to Ajmal Khan for mailing. Today, within the narrow walls of

Ahmednagar Fort, just look at the luxury of timelessness!" "I feel like writing volumes upon volumes."(in 2014,7)

The experience of timelessness in the most trying and testing circumstances is not the cup of tea of an ordinary mind; it is, of course, the music of extraordinary minds and geniuses like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. There are no complaints on his lips; instead, upon his entry into the Ahmednagar Fort Prison, he starts looking forward to bringing light to the darkness of the prison and finding hope and meaning in life despite the absence of life that has been denied to him. Most of this letter provides a detailed account of the circumstances of his imprisonment, with powerful imagery in his descriptions of various things. When he describes the last whistle of the train that carried them to the Ahmednagar Fort, he quotes Hafiz: " I do not know where my desired destination is// I do know that the caravan bells are calling me"(in 2014, 7-8).

In the second letter written from the Ahmednagar Fort, dated August 11th, Azad first counts the number of days he has spent in jail during the struggle for India's freedom - one out of every seven days in fifty-three years and eight months of his life, thereby giving an idea of how he, like Farhad, has been consistent and steadfast in the journey he undertook for India's independence from British slavery. In other words, as he would put it in his articles for his newspapers like the *Al-Hilal* and the *Al-Balagh*, there are only two alternatives for the people of India: one, to live a senseless life, and two, to live a life of awareness. He would then say that in the case of the first option, such a life could be lived anywhere and under any circumstances; and, as for the second option, people with awakened and aware minds and spirits do not find any place to live except in prison cells. In other words, he wants to reiterate that the Farhad in Azad has no option but to dig the canal through the mountain to attain the object of his love, the independence of India - an act and conviction that is bound to land him in the valley of sorrow and suffering. Therefore, he has no complaints or regrets about finding himself in different jails again and again. After expressing his conviction about the fate of every Farhad, he then with every comfort and feeling of ease starts a philosophical discourse on a host of theological issues.

The liveliness of Azad's spirit during his testing jail days could be understood through his descriptions of tea and tea-making at the earliest hour of every day and his habit of wakefulness when the whole world slept. With a *finjan* of tea in his hand, he describes his solitude and early wakefulness in the third letter of the series:

" When I think of it, in this matter, too, I walked in the opposite direction from the rest of the world. What constitutes the most precious moments for everyone else to enjoy the sweetness of sleep are my most treasured moments of wakefulness. My advantage is that nobody can interfere with my solitude. I have not allowed the world to take liberties with me. I sleep when it wakes, and I wake when it sleeps"(in 2014,11).

Syeda Saydein Hameed explains the importance of wakefulness and solitude for Azad in these words:

" These letters reveal how, in his private thoughts, Azad was conscious of acting differently from the rest of the world. Seeking the solitude of the early hours of the morning when the world sleeps is understandable, as any introspective individual may just want to be all by himself, undisturbed, perhaps to think, to plan, or to meditate. But what were the opposite directions he took in defiance of the rest of the world, he leaves unspoken. Although his entire life's struggle was to move along the path of his personal convictions, in the opposite direction to the popular tide." (2014, 11)

Like Farhad, he is determined to pursue the path of his love, and any compromise on this account would be considered a sin by Azad. The jail administration would offer him access to newspapers, books, and communication with family through post; however, they also inform him that murderers lodged in the same jail are denied such a privilege. Therefore, Azad decides not to entertain the offer of the jail administration, thereby expressing his sympathy with the other prisoners. His

fellow political prisoners follow the suit. A couplet quoted by Azad in this regard explains the unsaid: "My tongue is burned, my hands amputated till the wrists// This is the rearrangement my oppressor has made for saying my prayers" (*ibid*).

As jail is a place of control and containment, to prisoners like Boethius, Azad, Nehru, Ngugi and others of their tribe, a peacock does not require a garden as wherever he would open his wings the garden is created there. Self-realization and self-sufficiency are something that people of this tribe depend upon; more than the world of external phenomenon, it is the world within that people like Azad would summon, invoke and live, thereby surviving the toughest of times and seeking consolations in the worst of situations. Azad internalizes this fact time and again and thus preserves his lonely self from all desolations. The following passage is phenomenal in this regard:

" Every day, the sun shines inside the four walls of the prison. Moonbeams make no distinction between a prisoner and a free person. During dark nights, star-torches in the sky not only brighten the world outside the prison walls, but they also create bright pools of light around the prisoners. When the day spreads sunshine, its light is not exclusive to those who live in pleasure houses. This visual feast is equally displayed for the benefit of those whose eyes are glued to the holes in the walls of the prison houses. Unlike humans, nature never shows favoritism in bestowing her favors. When she lifts her veil from her face, she invites one and all to savor her beauty. It is we who are to blame for never breath-taking vision presented by nature, always immersed in our narrow world." (in 2014,13)

One may consider this passage also in this context quoted by Mushirul Hasan in his paper " Calcutta's Maulana: Colonialism on Trial:

" The prison house where the morning smiles every day, where evening draws the veil every night, whose nights are lit up now by the torches of stars and then with the beauty of moonlight; where noon shines daily and so does the twilight. Why consider it bereft of the means of pleasure just because it is a prison house? There is no dearth here of the means; the only problem is that our heart and mind get lost. We look for everything outside and never look for our lost heart, though if we find it, all means of epicurean delights would be available in it." (in 2016, 8)

In the trying and taxing conditions of prison life, the secret of happiness is to keep one's heart alive. Azad's letters bear ample testimony on this account, how he would keep it alive. This wouldn't have been possible if Azad and people like him did not have the awareness of the purpose of life for which they sacrifice the transitory pleasures of the world. In fact, Azad's letters show that he, and his real life as well, were so preoccupied with the pursuit of the purpose of his life that he wrote: " Life cannot be lived without any purpose. There must be some restriction, some attachment, and some binding for which the days of life are spent; this purpose comes to different people in different forms and shapes" (*Ghubar e Khatir*, 43). Azad glorifies the dust on the path of purpose in these words:

" The dust which lies along the path of the *masqsad* (purpose)is a very proud commodity. It snatches from the forehead of the wayfarer all the concealed *sajday* (prostrations), so that there is nothing left in it to be offered at any other doorstep" (in 2014, 10).

The metaphor of *sajda* and the mark on a believer's forehead, caused by prostrations, is used by Azad to suggest that as a result of " the arduous journey towards the destination of India's freedom, the layer of dust kicked up from the path has covered his forehead and concealed the mark formed by the years of his prayers"(2014,10). In other words, Azad declares that the freedom of India from British rule is the holiest of all causes for him. Hence, the pain on this account does not matter, just as it wouldn't matter for Farhad in the pursuit of his love; something that is suggestive of total surrender to the cause of freedom.

Azad, apart from describing his love for tea, solitude, early morning wakefulness, and philosophical and scholarly engagement with history and other such topics, narrates the tale of some birds who happen to be his companions in and around the prison. *Chidya Chaday ki Kahani*, narrated in two letters in this collection, presents Azad as an ornithologist. He describes in detail all the birds he happens to see living around him. He appears to have befriended the birds and has come very close to understanding them. One of the birds he names Qalandar becomes an objective correlative for Azad for his philosophical discourse on the importance of taking initiative in life. He writes:

“ If one were to borrow the English idiom, “ the ice broke” (vis-à-vis birds). In this world, all the steps seem to be listening for the sound of that one single step. Until such time that its sound is heard, all the potential little steps are stuck in the ground. When that one step is taken, it seems that the entire world of steps wakes up... The cup of victory, in this world of profit and loss, is not won by hesitant hands. It has always been won by the hand that has the courage to reach out for it by virtue of its own strength (in 2014, 31).

In the Ahmednagar Fort, Azad wills to survive the darkness of the prison by turning reflective about everything small or big; here is how he is pondering some of the biggest questions of humankind:

“ The entire commerce of existence, its every mode and form, is gathered into one single question: ‘What is all this?’ ‘Why all this?’ ‘What for all this?’ We take the support of reason, and in the light of what we have named learning, we keep moving along whichever path becomes visible. But we do not find any solution which can slake the thirst for discovering the ends of the tangle... As we turn towards the old solution...that ‘an embodiment of knowledge and strength is Presence behind the veil’...we suddenly emerge into the light. Now radiance floods in. Every question finds its answer, every demand finds its fulfillment, every thirst is slaked- as if this perplexity was a vice-like grip which opened at the gentle touch of a key.” (in 2016, 2).

Summing up, *Ghubar e Khatir* is an extraordinary act of communication by an incarcerated intellectual and political leader. While keeping to himself in his jail cell, the leader and intellectual in question relieves the burden of his mind by attempting a conversation not only with himself but also with his friend through the medium of imagination, thereby attempting a healing therapy for himself through these letters. It would not be an exaggeration to state that such acts of writing help prison writers across the world help the writers to survive the absence of life and liveliness in the dark chambers of prison, enabling also enables them create meaning in the absence of all the manifest avenues of meaning-making. As he crosses the barriers of the jail with the help of his imagination and enjoys his dialogue and conversations with his friend, *Ghubar e Khatir*, actually relieves the author of all the vapors of his self and the burden caused by them. The spontaneity and freshness with which these letters are written bears testimony to the fact that Maulana was a writer whose mind was capable of best work of art in Urdu literature. In fact, the spontaneity with which he expresses his feelings or discusses different historical and philosophical issues shows his capacity for meaning-making in the absence of a library and reference books. *Ghubar e Khatir* could also be a conclusive argument on behalf of a prisoner against his oppressors, the British colonial administration, through his celebration of solitude and stillness, thereby attempting a silent defiance against their methods of manipulation and machinations. The reflective nature and tone of the letters in *Ghubar e Khatir* prove beyond any doubt that Azad’s mind knew the art of creating a world of his own when bereft of all free expression and avenues of social engagement. In other words, it speaks volumes about Azad’s will to defy oppression by engaging himself with himself. Therefore, in *Ghubar e Khatir*, though the letters are apparently addressed to a friend, Azad actually meets himself through these conversations.

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