

Debacle of Democracy: Naveen's *Dark Days*

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Abstract

Naveen's novel *Dark Days* (2004) an English translation of his Telugu novel *Cheekati Rojulu* (1978) is the first of its kind in any Indian language to depict the atrocities committed on the common citizen during the Emergency of 1975-77 imposed by Indira Gandhi. Naveen wrote the Telugu original *Cheekati Rojulu* in 1977 immediately after Emergency was lifted. This article aims to provide an insight into how the youth and intellectuals in the country were sacrificed on the altar of the Emergency. The paper explores the excesses committed during the Emergency in the Telangana region of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh.

Keywords: 1975 Emergency, Indian Politics, Indian Literature in English Translation, Telugu Novel, Telugu Literature

In his author's note Naveen writes that this novel is based on the experience of his close friend M. Thirupathaiiah during the infamous Emergency of 1975. Thirupathaiiah was a lecturer in a private aided college. He was also a reluctant writer and used to write poetry and short stories occasionally. One of his short stories Nyayam (justice) created a stir in Telugu literary circles in the early seventies. This story realistically portrays the injustice meted out to a small peasant by a big landlord. This story attracted the attention of a left extremist literary association called the Revolutionary Writer's Association. The Association highlighted this story in their literary journals and also made it into a play and enacted it at many places. The publicity received by this story was noticed by the Police Department of Andhra Pradesh. They suspected that the writer of this story might be a revolutionary having links with the underground naxalites. When the Emergency was clamped in 1975 Thirupathaiiah was arrested and kept in police custody for nineteen days. When the police realized that he had nothing to do with naxalism he was released. Though the novel is based on his friend's experience Naveen has put into his novel many atrocious incidents that had taken place all over India. Victims of police violence like P. Rajan of Kerala and Snehalata Reddy of Karnataka are closely akin to the characters of Raghu Ram and Taruni in the novel. "Why this much animosity against one armed with nothing more than a pen? I think it was something more than intolerance of dissent. It was the hurt felt by the utterance of truth" - K.R. Malkani, Editor *Motherland*. These lines articulate a writer's anguish during the 1975 Emergency imposed by Prime minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, when writers, be it

authors, poets, newspaper editors, reporters, intellectuals etc., were termed as more dangerous than terrorists and arrested overnight under MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act).

The three years old Naxalbari movement from Bengal had spread to Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh in 1967. It faced severe suppression from the government. To crush the Srikakulam Armed Struggle many tribals were killed in the name of fake encounters. At the same time significant changes took place in Telugu art and literature. The formation of RWA (Revolutionary Writers Association) in the 1970s is a revolutionary breakthrough in Telugu literature. A number of young writers openly expressed their support for the fighting masses. The revolution shook the foundations of traditional and romantic schools of literature. The proclamation of Emergency led to a ban on mass organizations like the RSS and the RSU and had given the police forces an authority to unleash political repression and terror on the general public and to kill the supporters, activists and leaders of the movement.

The novel *Dark Days* depicts the protagonist Srinivasa Rao's arrest, imprisonment and release from the Raghavapuram police camp, Warangal, during the Emergency. He is suspected of being associated with the RWA. The novel in the form of Srinivasa Rao's diary is an eyewitness account of the inhuman acts of violence inflicted on the political prisoners during the Emergency by the police. The RWA along with the RSU and RSS comes under severe attack during the dark period. The RWA is banned for promoting literature that instigates the people against the government. In Andhra several RSU and RSS volunteers are charged as being *naxalites* and shot down. They are arrested stealthily at midnight without a warrant or any kind of information to their families. Prisoners under charge of the police or jail authorities disappear mysteriously. Silent killings termed as encounters are the order of the day. It is ironical that the police whose main role is to protect the fundamental rights of a citizen and ensure his safe existence in society become his deadliest enemy.

If they put us under MISA, we will go for a year. What can we do sir? Power is in their hands.....It is like a gun in the hands of a madman. They can do anything and get away with it. They may shoot me, shoot you...Who is there to question them? (154).

These words of a political detainee Ram Reddy briefly state the official violence and violation by the State on the innocent public during the Emergency of twenty sixth June 1975 – twenty first March 1977, a twenty-one month period, when President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, upon the advice of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency under Article 352 of the Constitution of India, effectively bestowing on her the power to rule by decree, suspending elections and civil liberties. The police system seems to be much geared to tackle the

internal anarchy and chaos for which the emergency is supposed to have been imposed. With the total collapse of the fundamental rights and liberties it is police *Raj* (rule) all the way.

As Srinivasa Rao laments:

Millions are detained and tortured all over the country. Why do they do all this? All this to let a single person stay in power! So many should be made slaves to keep the one person in power! Why do the police adopt this canine servility? They go about arresting the innocent and put them behind bars. Are they mere machines?... They are soulless machines, maybe we are all cogs in the machine called the State. The state was brought into existence to protect the individual. It is devouring the individual now. It is devouring me (19).

Srinivasa Rao is a lecturer in a government aided private college. He is a writer not by profession but by passion. Only real life incidents inspire him to write poetry or short stories. To him ‘politics and literature are two different things unrelated to each other’ (1) unlike his friends who look for ‘the political persuasion of the writer and his commitment to Revolution’ (2) in literature. For Srinivasa Rao reading is for pleasure. It is as simple as ‘if you like a book, read it: if you don’t, drop it’ (2). But for his friends literature in all its forms must be committed to social good.

Writing a short story ‘Justice’ based on a real-life event four years ago was like asking for trouble. In the story Mysaiah works for Sambaiah a big landlord ever since he was a boy. When Mysaiah comes of age he marries a girl who brings him a dowry of thousand rupees. Sambaiah cheats him by making him buy his own dusty dry land of four acres for the amount and that too on an oral agreement. Years later Mysaiah and his sons toil hard to make it a fertile piece of land. With the Pochampad canal flowing into the village, the land price increases twenty fold. The landlord conspires with the village sahuakar (merchant) and tells Mysaiah that the land has been mortgaged to the sahuakar many years ago for twenty thousand rupees and that he either has to pay the amount to get hold of the land or leave it to the sahuakar. His sons take Sambaiah to court but with no valid documents in their hands they lose. Embittered the sons leave the village. Rumours go around the village that they have become naxalites and would come back from the jungle to settle the scores. In Srinivasa Rao’s story the two young men walk into the forest to get justice denied to them in the village - there is a veiled suggestion to this effect at the end of the story.

Sometime later, his friend Venu a revolutionary poet publishes the story in his journal *Kranthi*. The response that follows is unbelievable. The story is widely appreciated. It is also

made into a play and enacted at several places by a revolutionary cultural organization. But his friends warn him of the infamous story - "Such stories mean trouble" (3) and that the police might dub him as a naxalite. To make matters worse Venu asks him to join the RWA pleading that 'writers had to support and lead revolution' (3) a theory Srinivasa Rao always refutes:

One may write, others may or may not read. That is all there is to it.

How can a writer bring about revolution (3).

Srinivasa Rao is unwilling to accede to Venu's request as he has a family and old parents to take care of. Moreover the truth is that he is 'too cowardly to think of such dangerous forays into politics' (4). Venu on the other hand is deeply involved with the movement. 'He read Marx, Lenin, Mao, Charu Mazumdar and quoted them verbatim with felicity" (4). Venu is persuasive. "Write stories similar to 'Justice' and help Revolution" (4) he would say. So he carefully writes a letter to Venu giving the weakest of excuses that his 'poverty of imagination' is the reason for his not joining the RWA.

A few days later Venu seeks Srinivasa Rao's permission and publishes 'Justice' in an anthology of revolution literature. In response he receives many letters of appreciation of the story. Srinivasa Rao feels happy but the fear of being dubbed a RWA continues to haunt him.

The Emergency is imposed on the midnight of twenty fifth June 1975. The very next day i.e. in the early hours of twenty sixth June Venu and many other revolutionary poets are arrested. Newspapers are censored. There is fear and panic everywhere. Srinivasa Rao's friends warn him of an enquiry. "Why an enquiry? What have I done" he asks them. "What have they done - those arrested?" (7) they ask him. It is true that people are being whisked away in the dead of the night, arrested without warrant and taken away to undisclosed locations without any information to their families. His friends' apprehension proves right. The special branch police start an enquiry on Srinivasa Rao. As days pass they frequent their visits and quiz him for hours.

On twentieth July 1976 two o'clock in the night Srinivasa Rao tosses on his bed as the recurrent dream of a police jeep screeching to a halt before his house, the police knocking on the door, he is being arrested by the police and Susheela collapsing and the children crying haunts him. But that day he does hear a familiar voice calling him- "Srinivasa Rao garu"; it is Sub-Inspector Chandraiah asking him to go with him to the police station at that unearthly hour. The Superintendent of Police would like to interrogate him. Srinivasa Rao's request to meet the S.P. in the morning or at least to inform his Principal or his friends is turned down by Chandraiah. Chandraiah comes with a warrant and so Srinivasa Rao has to comply with his bidding. As soon as Srinivasa Rao gets into the van the armed constables take positions in the front and the back as if he is a 'hardened criminal'. Chandraiah informs him that he is being taken to Karimnagar for interrogation.

The journey to Karimnagar is slow, long and painful. After some time the van stops at a roadside hotel. The S.I.s get off the van for a cup of tea. The hotel boy who goes to serve tea to the rest of the people in the van is puzzled to see Srinivasa Rao sitting amidst armed guards. On many occasions he has seen Srinivasa Rao with his friends at the hotel over a cup of tea. Next, the van stops at a wayside village. An S.I. and a constable join them. They inform Chandraiah that those arrested by them have been sent in a van. Once again Srinivasa Rao suspects Chandraiah for hiding the truth but sadly realizes that though he knew Srinivasa Rao is blameless there is nothing he could do:

Chandraiah knows pretty well that I am innocent. But he cannot help me. The hierarchy all the way has to work for keeping that one person in power at Delhi. All of them in the hierarchy would work day in and day out... so many innocent people have to be thrown into prisons. Only then the throne of that person will be safe (13).

Next the van comes to a halt at the office of the Circle Inspector before daybreak. The place is crowded with vans, motorcycles, the S.I.s in uniform and the Reserve Police. Many people arrested and brought like him are seated in the verandah. The Emergency laws give special powers to the police to define who the enemies of the state are with the hope of restoring law and order in the state. Three of them are his old students and greet him instantly. The others are youngsters of junior college level. Sathaiah had left college without completing his B.A. Srinivasa Rao comes to know he is the District President of RSU. Mutyala Srinivasa Rao studied B.Sc. He is now with the RSS. Madhusudhan passed with good credits in his BA. A diligent boy he kept himself away from politics but by the twist of fate he is arrested along with Sataiah who had been hiding in his room since a week.

At daybreak, the Circle Inspector walks into the station. He is none other than Chandrasekhar, leader of the rival group while at college. But now Chandrasekhar shows no signs of the old enmity. He courteously greets Srinivasa Rao and shakes hands with him. Srinivasa Rao overhears Chandrasekhar informing the S.P. over the wireless in the next room about the number of detainees and their identities in detail. He is instructed to get them to Karimnagar. As his destination appears fixed Srinivasa Rao plans to send a message to Susheela about his whereabouts. He spots Rajaiah, a merchant of fertilizers, standing among the crowd outside the station. He has come for his brother-in-law also detained by the police. Srinivasa Rao calls out to him and gets an accusing glance in return. As Srinivasa Rao approaches him he alleges that teachers like Srinivasa Rao are responsible for the youth straying into politics and mess up their life and career:

Why Sir, you get about a thousand rupees a month for nothing. You inject the Naxalite ideology into the brains of young fellows and ruin them. You ruined the young fellows. My brother-in-law has become like this because of you (18).

The police too have the same erroneous impression on teachers. It is Dy. S.P. Venkateswar Rao's considered opinion that the teaching community is not to be taken lightly.

The so-called intellectuals are worse than thieves, rowdies and murderers. They are the most dangerous fellows. They mislead and ruin the youngsters. They create the problem of law and order for us. We should be careful about them. All of you should understand this (25).

Once again the detainees are huddled into a van. Lead by Chandrasekhar they reach Karimnagar police station – the office of the S.P. by nine o'clock in the morning. This again turns out to be a long wait. Srinivasa Rao feels acute anxiety over his arrest. "The 39th Amendment to the Constitution of India placed MISA in the 9th Schedule to the Constitution, thereby making it totally immune from any judicial review; even on the grounds that it contravened the Fundamental Rights which are guaranteed by the Constitution or violated the Basic Structure" (Sail 8).

Maybe, they have brought me here for a long incarceration. They would detain me under MISA. I cannot ask the reason for my detention. There is no room for such questions. The courts could not intervene. Nobody would even know even if I were killed in detention. No reason whatever. The press was curbed; no newspaper would dare publish the news of such killings in detention. My god! Independent India is changed into a police state in no time. Is it for this that the people fought for and won freedom from the British? (19).

Next the van stops at a police station in the town. The police fingerprint every one of the detainees and ask them to sign on a dotted line with the words "prisoner's signature" below it. Without arrest warrants or interrogation or court trials the detainees are turned into prisoners and their final destination is the Raghavapuram police camp.

It is the sixth day of Srinivasa Rao's arrest and one year of completion of the Emergency. The visit by his brother in the morning builds Srinivasa Rao's confidence. He has met the Home Minister to talk to the S.P. on the phone. The S.P. assured the minister that Srinivasa Rao would

be released on the first of next month. His brother also tells him of his plans to take the local M.L.A. to Hyderabad to seek the Chief Minister's help. There is a sudden increase in the security at the station as 'they say there is a great threat to the internal security and the integrity of the nation'(97). The station is abuzz with police officers in jeeps, vans and motor cycles making many rounds, inspecting the place and leaving.

The government gears up to celebrate the first anniversary of Emergency. The government's propaganda machine tries to restore the prime minister's image by harping on the pet schemes of the Prime Minister, especially the twenty point programme and the family planning. The Family Planning programme was imperative to curb India's growing population except that it was a forced one - "The saddest and the cruelest part of the emergency regime were the operations of Nasbandi, sterilization... The whole programme was characterized by fear and terror. Thus sterilizations were not always carried on in hospitals; even bus stands and public places were used as operation theatres. Many people died due to the hasty performance of operations and the absence of aftercare. Government servants had to fulfill certain quotas or face the consequences of stoppage of their promotions or sometimes even of dismissal... Electricity and water supply in rural and urban areas were cut off if there was lack of response from the people. Even in the cold winter months of November and December many villagers were passing their nights in open fields to escape being caught unawares by the officials engaged in this work. Without their consent and even knowledge, people were loaded into trucks and taken away for mass sterilization..." (Kripalani 24-25). In a public meeting at Warangal the minister 'eulogized the discipline that swept across the length and breadth of the country... and the rapid development of the poor people because of Twenty Point Programme initiated by the supreme leader. Even a great Gandhian like Vinoba Bhave said that the Emergency brought 'discipline' into the country. The minister quoted Vinoba Bhave amidst great fanfare' (155). The only thing the veteran leader does not know Srinivasa Rao quips is that 'they achieved this 'discipline' by putting everybody behind bars' (155).

On the other side the opposition decides to observe it as the anti-fascist day, their primary demand being end of the Indira Gandhi regime and the end of the Emergency. The RSS launches an agitational programme, a part of which is writing anti-government slogans on the walls. The government prepares to quash such democratic protests that criticize it with brutal force and corrupt tactics. Under the state of Emergency, the government can censor anything, if it considers it a threat to public safety and national security. The wireless radio in the station blares out instructions to make some more arrests in this connection. As Srinivasa Rao observes:

The government which is afraid of writing on the walls...how long
it will survive?

That people should not know its activities is the evil intention of the government...except that...what is their aim in preventing people from writing on the walls? They can write untruths all over the buses, in the bus stations and also in all the railway stations and give full page advertisements in newspapers about the achievements of the Emergency. But facts cannot be written on the walls (100).

Late in the evening instructions are received through the wireless to make arrangements for another four detainees arriving at the camp accompanied by Dy.S.P. Venkateswar Rao and the special branch police. Sub-Inspector Venkaiah hurdles all the detenus into a room behind the SI's room. The writer's room adjacent to the S.I.'s room in which Srinivasa Rao is accommodated is bolted from outside. Srinivasa Rao senses the seriousness of the situation. Whatever is likely to happen, the scene of action would be the S.I.'s room. Srinivasa Rao closes one of the two window doors and bolts it. He closes the second door too, keeping half an inch of it open. From the darkness of his room he views the developments taking place in the SI's room. Around midnight a boy and a girl Taruni and Anil kumar, leaders of the RSU are brought to the station. Taruni is around twenty years old. She is a student of Warangal Medical College. Anil is a student of Warangal Engineering College. Two RSS volunteers studying Intermediate are brought and thrown into a separate lockup. They could be around fifteen or sixteen years old. 'Shades of childhood marks have not gone out of their faces' (105). They were found writing anti-government slogans on the walls in Godavarikhani. The base and barbaric acts of the police are bestial completely unworthy of a legal and moral authority who is supposed to protect them. Though the police are aware of the boundaries of law, unlawful methods like arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and killings become common and widespread throughout the state. Beatings and torture of detainees is used to extract information or force confessions.

The first boy to face the wrath of the police is Suresh. For Srinivasa Rao watching through the window gap, it is a horror movie come true. Suresh answers to the initial questions that his father Ramachandriah owned a provision store in Godavarikhani. After a first round of severe beatings he tells them about the slogans he has written on the walls- "Down with dictatorship", "J.P. Zindabad", "Long live Hindurashtra", "Emergency should be thrown in Bay of Bengal!", "Ban of R.S.S should be lifted" and "R.S.S. Zindabad". However, he fails to answer who asked him to write them. He denies that he is a member of the RSS. His feeble answer that he had written the slogans upon directions from his friend Ramesh has unfortunate consequences. The Dy.S.P. orders Sub-Inspector Prabhakar 'to use his methods and see that he reveals everything'. Prabhakar lights his cigarette, inhales it heavily and drops its ashes. Venkaiah holds both his hands so as not to allow him to move and protect himself. Prabhakar presses the red hot cigarette on Suresh's tender cheeks. Pieces of cloth are stuffed into his mouth as Suresh shouts with excruciating pain. Next his shirt is removed and the burning cigarette is

pressed on his stomach, chest, shoulders, back and hands. Srinivasa Rao looks at him aghast as Suresh ‘helplessly beats his hands and legs in the void’ (105). Later Prabhakar removes his trousers and even his underwear. He lights another cigarette and this time he presses it on his waist, thighs and his penis. Suresh rolls on the ground ‘like a goat whose throat was cut’ (105). The Dy.S.P. orders the clothes to be removed from his mouth and the same question is repeated but there is no reply from Suresh. The boy had fainted. The two constables drag him by his legs out of the room.

The next to be interrogated is Ramesh. Ramesh appears a little older than Suresh. He has a rather ‘devil-may-care’ attitude. He accepts his being member of the RSS but refuses to give out the name of his leader. To make him speak Prabhakar kicks Ramesh in his stomach with his booted leg. As Ramesh crying in a heartrending manner holds his stomach and bends down, Venkaiah kicks Ramesh in his back making him fall flat on his stomach. His hands are spread wide open and two constables stand on them with their boots which have iron spikes. A wooden ruler is placed on the thighs and Prabhakar and Venkaiah stand on either side pressing their feet with all their strength. Though Ramesh ‘trembles like a leaf in a storm’ (107) the torture fails to break his spirit. He refuses to let out the secret: You beat me or kill me... I can only say no body told me to write those slogans. I myself wrote them (107).

An irate Dy.S.P. also puts a hand in extracting the truth. He starts hitting Ramesh on his cheeks making the blood ooze out of his mouth profusely:

Hasn’t Hanumantha Rao asked you to write slogans? Tell...the truth. Where is Hanumantha Rao, come on, tell me. I’ll release you and your friend, if you tell me the whereabouts of Hanumantha Rao (108).

But Ramesh is adamant that he had not met Hanumantha Rao since a year. The Dy.S.P. orders to use third degree methods on Ramesh. They stick needles into his nails and chilly powder is sprinkled on them. They light candles and burn his fingers. They even threaten to shoot him. Whatever the torture, Ramesh goes on repeating that he “did not know the whereabouts of Hanumantha Srinivasa Rao...and I myself wrote the slogan” (108). At last the three S.I.s together lift him up very high and keep dropping him on the floor. The third time his head directly falls on the floor and Ramesh lies unconscious in a pool of blood. The Dy.S.P. storms out of the room in exasperation – ‘the moral strength of that boy defeated him, depressed him and demoralized him’ (108).

The Dy.S.P and the S.I.s leave the place and the night becomes peaceful again though ‘it is the peace that prevails in a burial ground’ (109). A totally shattered Srinivasa Rao tries to sleep

in a confused state of mind. How tragic that the interrogations remind Srinivasa Rao of Hitler, the German dictator, whose name is synonymous with violence of the cruelest kind. The atrocities committed by the police are no less savage and barbarous than those inflicted on the Jews by the Nazis-

Was it true? Or was it a nightmare? No...No... It was true... bitterest truth. I was told by my friend Ravi that during the regime of Hitler, there were many concentration camps everywhere in Germany, in which millions of Jews were subjected to inhuman torture and put to death. I have seen today with my own eyes that type of brutal violence. That such nightmarish experiences will fall to my lot... did I ever imagine? (109).

The late-night episode strikes fear and panic into the detainees as the condition of Suresh and Ramesh grows critical. At about eleven in the morning a van arrives to take them away to the headquarters.

Taruni, an asthmatic patient, turns breathless in the suffocating cell and is refused medicines in her handbag. Her suffering reminds one of Mrs. Snehlata Reddy an ardent socialist and an artist of great repute. “Her only crime was that she was a friend of George Fernandes. It began with a midnight knock and a shout of ‘Telegram’. Her young son opened the door and was seized by the policemen and dragged to the police station. Then came a series of troubles and harassment of all the family members leading to her arrest. Her long ordeal began with that arrest. ..Her asthmatic attacks began to be more or less continuous. But her plea, on the recommendations of the jail doctors, that she should be hospitalized was not granted. The pain and sufferings through which she passed are well reflected in the prison diary she kept. She wrote: “Sometimes I wish I had really done something to deserve my imprisonment”. Judging from her diary, she probably suffered two heart attacks though none had told her family about this. Her condition grew worse; at last she was released on parole for a month. But at the end of the month came a serious heart attack and she— “One of the finest we would ever know” (C.G.K. Reddy) – was dead. (Kripalani 30).

The sight of the detenus suffering and perishing without a trace arouses a deep sense of injustice in Srinivasa Rao. On fifth July around ten o’clock in the night Srinivasa Rao sees a handsome young man being brought and put into a lockup. Raghu Ram is an engineering college student. He is caught and arrested by Prabhakar in a nearby village of Karimnagar on the suspicion of his involvement in the Hyderabad Bombing case on twenty sixth June. The interrogation as usual does not take place in the S.I.’s room. Within minutes Srinivasa Rao hears Raghu Ram crying and wailing in a heart-rending manner from the lockup. The sounds of

beating Raghu Ram with a rifle are clearly audible. This continues for an hour. At around ten o'clock no sound emanates from the lockup. Srinivasa Rao thinks that Raghu Ram has fallen unconscious due to third degree police measures. But it is with shock and disbelief that he overhears Prabhakar, Venkaiah and a special branch police man whispering conspiratorially:

Did you check up again? You mean to say that he is really dead?

Died ...no doubt...

Dose was on a higher side...

What shall we do know..?

What is there to do? That we have arrested him...brought him here

Where is the record...? Who knows...? Everything is off the record.

No paper will publish this news. This news can never leak out...if

anybody at anytime enquires about the boy, we can flatly refuse

that we have arrested any person of that name....

Then shall we consign his dead body to flames or bury him quietly...?

(161).

Raghu Ram's death is the result of fatal injury, but murders committed inside a police station remain undisclosed. Under the cover of darkness they carry him away in a van and dispose of the body in secret. Life turns into an unendurable suspense for Srinivasa Rao. This latest violence destroys all remaining hope for survival in the hands of his blood thirsty perpetrators and heightens his fears of being subject to interrogation and a violent death.

The next morning Chandrasekhar and Chandriah arrive with some good news. Chandrasekhar sees the surrendering of the RWA leader Rama Raju the previous day as a positive development. Rama Raju's confession might finally help Srinivasa Rao to be cleared of the suspected link with the RWA. Rama Raju is a junior lecturer in a village and a very good literary friend of Srinivasa Rao. Chandriah's information that he has just submitted a favourable report on Srinivasa Rao based on public opinion to the S.P. also gives Srinivasa Rao renewed hope of freedom.

At five in the evening he sees Rama Raju walking casually into the police station with a big suit case escorted by Senior Reserve Constable Simhadri and another constable. He laughs at the foolishness of the police in arresting a 'lamb like gentleman' like Srinivasa Rao. He consoles everybody and asks them not to worry as only he would be booked under MISA. He plans to meet Venu and the other writers in the central prison at Warangal, write one or two novels and to study Law for taking law exams as a private candidate.

Rama Raju is a bold and outspoken critic of the emergency. All through the interrogation he speaks of Srinivasa Rao's innocence. He proudly claims his own membership of the RWA.

He makes audacious remarks at the police officers. His piercing criticism about the emergency stuns the higher-ups.

Yes...If not innocent, what crime have I committed? Please Did I murder any one? Did I commit any docoity? Through my writings I asked the people to destroy this unjust society... Man exploiting another man... Man subjecting another man to violence. This sort of goonda raj should come to an end, I said....

Before the proclamation of Emergency, they said we have a constitution. In that Constitution they said certain fundamental rights are enshrined. We have freedom of speech, freedom of association. If any injustice is meted out to you , you have the right to approach the courts....Since all these rights were given to us we expressed our opinions freely....Now you have proclaimed Emergency – they said we have now lost all those fundamental rights...The constitution has been thrown to the winds. After you have declared Emergency, did I write anything fresh? Did I ever speak out anywhere from any platform. No... then why did you arrest me? How can you take into account my activities before Emergency was declared and arrest me? During those days, within the purview of those rights I have done what all I did... Have you cancelled all the fundamental rights after June 26, 1975 or earlier to that date? ... (173).

His surrender to the police is an outburst of righteous anger. He bombards them for unjustly detaining individuals for activities they have done prior to the emergency. Imposing emergency for safeguarding the country is only a feeble excuse. Innocent lives are cruelly and pointlessly wiped out. The constitution of India promises solemnly among other things, Justice – social, economic and political, Liberty of thought and expression and Fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual. The sudden shift to ‘police state’ (the government using the police to severely limit people’s freedom) leaves the individual helpless and unprotected. Deprived of fundamental rights the individual is trampled under the heavy boots of lawlessness and injustice. Even the courts remain silent. The media turns a blind eye to the horrific scenes of torture and murder. This emergency is to brutally crush all agitating and rebellious groups. Once a person is arrested, release is a distant mirage. The corridors of power are long and endless.

After being questioned to the nth degree by the special branch police at Hyderabad, Srinivas is released while Rama Raju is booked under MISA and sent to jail. His muted reaction upon his release is understandable. The incidents seem to have totally destroyed his confidence. His nineteen days in the camp leaves a deep psychological scar crippling him as a writer.

Above all, there is another thing that dealt a crushing blow to me, which is much more damaging. The creative writer in me is dead forever! (186).

Srinivasa Rao cannot be called the protagonist of the novel in the real sense. Though the novel unfolds from the pages of his prison diary he remains a mere narrator till the end of the novel. Srinivasa Rao is guilty of a cowardice which neither condemns the horror nor rebels against the happenings. Only once or twice he silently criticizes the government and the prime minister. His only worry is about his family and of his release. He accepts his timidity and despises himself for being such a coward. Only in the final interrogation he musters courage to speak against his detention. After his release he decides to keep away from writing for fear of reprisal from the police. Srinivasa Rao manages to win the readers sympathy but fails to earn their respect.

Rama Raju and Srinivasa Rao stand in contrast to each other in every way. Rama Raju is bold and fearless. Nothing can dissociate the man from his Marxist perspective. He remains undaunted despite his father's plea to give in writing, his willingness to change his ways, his wife's tears or his little daughter asking innocently –“You also come along with us, Daddy!” (183) on their visit to the police camp.

The Raghavapuram police station camp where the detainees are housed is located near a big old Gadi (fortress) far from the village. Built during the Nizam's rule, the fortress 'looks like a dilapidated palace where ghosts live' (33). The outer ambience of the place and the inside activities of the camp match well. That such a place of crime and torture could exist in a democracy is a question that bothers every reader. Dy.S.P. Venkateshwar Rao, Sub-Inspectors Prabhakar and Vekataiah and senior reserve constable Simhadri represent the dark side of the law enforcement agencies. There are also principled men like Chandriah, Chandrasekhar Rao and Suryanaryana among them.

The presence of a large number of youth among the detainees is alarming and is a sign of retrogression. Peaceful rallies, protests and demonstrations by the public express their grievances and when such peaceful marches are met with police violence and brutality, the people particularly the youth are led to think that peaceful methods of articulating their demands are futile. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth becomes their ideology. As Taruni justifies educated youth taking to violence “Because.... It is a matter of great pride for the younger generation of this country” (128). This sensitive and complex problem a major cause of violence in the country needs deft handling.

The figure of Sub-Inspector Prabhakar withholding young boys as *naxalities* (26) speaks of police men who operate outside the law and lack sufficient professional and ethical standards.

When it comes to the poor or socially marginalized people the police do not seem to need a reason for punishment. Ordered to arrest one Govardhan a radical student at Ramaram, Prabhakar locates the house - a small hut with nothing there except a few pots in it. The old father is sleeping on a cot. As Prabhakar narrates the incident to his colleague his words and deeds churn Srinivasa Rao's stomach:

I thrashed the old son of a whore to reveal his son's whereabouts. He was so weak that with another blow, he would have kicked the bucket. "Arre Badmash, you sent your son to college to become a Naxalite. Where is he?" His wife came running and crying. I told her "If you cry and create a scene, I will shoot you" I aimed my revolver at her. She fell at my feet. She said all the while crying "my son left ten days ago...Search the hut if you want. "Shut up, dirty whore", I gave her a kick and asked the police to search. They threw everything out of the hut- pots, pans and rags. We caught him finally; he was hiding in the well in the backyard. A rope tied to the wooden bar of the well gave him out (26).

The police are guilty of extortion, unlawful detention and custodial violence. The vodderas (workers in a mine) episode speaks of the corruption in the police system in the form of extortion. Two vodderas in a drunken state come in the path of the police van which irks S.I. Prabhakar, who beats them and brings them to the station. The arbitrariness and senselessness of violence unleashed on them is shocking. Venkaiah threatens to put up false cases of robbery and theft against them. They are let off after they part with their silver waist chains and twenty rupees.

Narayana belongs to muthrasi (fisherman) community. During the day he is forced to do all sorts of mean jobs in the station and at night is sent to the lockup. He is a victim of his village sahukar's oppression and unjustifiable behaviour. Narayana borrows fifteen rupees from the sahukar for buying medicines for his ailing father with a request to repay the amount by working as a *coolie* in his house. He calls Narayana's wife for domestic work and tries to molest her. Narayana beats him black and blue for which he is implicated in a false case of theft by the sahukar. As he tells Srinivasa Rao

Sahukar has money... S.I wants money... Sahukar gave a complaint against me (133).

Narayana is dispirited. The S.I beats him whenever he asks him about his case.
... Is it a small case..? It is of 'attempted murder', S.I says (133).

Finally, the S.I demands two hundred rupees from his father-in-law as a bribe to release him, which means an insupportable financial burden on his family.

Two and a half decades after the revolution (Telangana Armed Struggle) to free the Telangana villages from the clutches of landlords, patels (village police officer) and patwaris (village accounts officer), the oppression of the poor still continues. In the novel the villagers provide food, accommodation and other facilities to the police officers who come visiting the police camp. The demands for 'a country lass' (village girl) by lecherous men like Prabhakar are also to be met.

Naveen's *Dark Days* invites comparison with Kuldip Nayar's *In Jail* and KR Malkani's *The Midnight Knock*. Kuldip Nayar's *In Jail* is based on the diary he kept "to record what I felt, saw and heard during my detention of two months, from 24th July 1975; for I knew I would be writing this book." A journalist by profession, he was detained under MISA. K.R. Malkani, Editor of the newspaper *Motherland* is supposed to be the first person to be arrested on the midnight of twenty fifth June 1975. His book *The Midnight Knock* as the name suggests, speaks of the midnight arrests - a totally new phenomenon in India, detention and life in jail which runs parallel to Srinivasa Rao's arrest and detention in the novel *Dark Days*. The two experiences are comparable, in fact, as Malkani writes in the preface to his book - "It is an account of what a detainee saw, heard, thought and felt in jail. To that extent it might be the autobiography of any detainee—or the quintessential autobiography of all detenus—for the period of detention."

Naveen's *Dark Days* gives an unflinching account of the unconstitutional, illegal and dictatorial regime of Indira Gandhi during the 1975-77 Emergency. With an uncompromising sense of responsibility the writer rises to the occasion and reveals the tortuous, inhuman and ugly face of the Emergency and its adverse effects on the common citizen of India. Speaking through the character of Srinivasa Rao, Naveen takes a dig at the population of India -

... People ... people... there is no shortage of people in this country?
Wherever you see, there are people. As some poet has put it in
America dollars are born and in India people are born (53).

submissive and defenseless unbecoming to 'the largest democracy' in the world mutely accepting the iniquities of Emergency as-

'KARMA...destiny... the result of the sins they have committed
in the previous birth' (53).

The writer wonders at such a docile population, religiously fanatical and quite unruffled.

... As long as their gods and temples are safe... Two times... no... at least once in a day if they can get a meal that's enough for them... Whoever plunders them to what extent, they care a pin (53).

He pities the likes of Venu who wish to bring about radical changes 'to establish a people's government'.

As a prolific writer Naveen explores the dynamics of the human mind and social relations in the context of contemporary issues facing man and society. The novel *Dark Days* gives a faithful account of the 1975 Emergency. It is clearly motivated by the desire for social justice, democracy and curbing of police brutality.

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