

IT'S ALWAYS POSSIBLE

Transforming One of the  
Largest Prisons in the World



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Largest Prisons in the World

KIRAN BEDI

A Sterling Paperback



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To my  
Mother and Father  
whom I love the most.  
Together we believe  
“It’s Always Possible”



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THE DALAI LAMA

## *Foreword*

Serving humanity even beyond the responsibilities of one's duty calls for special human beings. Kiran Bedi is one of them. As a woman and as an officer, her compassion, concern and total commitment towards social issues, whether in the fields of drug control or prison administration at Tihar Jail, have earned her unusual distinction. I have myself believed deeply and strongly in the need to treat people who are imprisoned, as part of our own society. Unfortunately, society in general, and prison authorities in particular, treat prisoners as outcasts. I, therefore, admire and laud Kiran Bedi's noble attempts to reinstate aberrant individuals into the mainstream of society by giving them a kind and considerate exposure to a more civilised environment, meditation, education and better civic amenities.

I am confident that this book by Kiran Bedi will inspire readers and set a precedent for those who can wield authority to retain the human touch.

# *Acknowledgement*

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My family whom I have always taken for granted.

## *Preface*

Some things are destined to happen, whether we believe or we don't. But I do believe this book is a part of God's larger plan. I never chose to be Inspector General (IG Prisons). I was never even considered, leave aside being asked. Till I joined this position, I was on a compulsory wait. I waited for a posting for nine months after a full police tenure as Deputy Inspector General of Police in Mizoram, in the North-East of India. The Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, took its time to decide for me — it was a 'paid wait'. I was informed that only after the department concerned was told by the Auditor's office, that I could not be indefinitely 'paid to wait', that I was suddenly 'fixed'.

The post of IG (Prisons), Delhi, was lying vacant for many months. No one appeared to have been interested in getting posted there, and whoever was posted there, managed to stay away. In all fairness, I ought to have gone back to Delhi Police but the entrenched stalwarts were overstaying and would not make way. I was, therefore, a perfect 'forced fit', and to some the right place to be 'dumped' in. In our impressions prison postings are dead ends and also called 'punishment postings'. To many I was rightly placed to get the message across that furrowing new tracks do not necessarily get you on the road to 'privileged positions'.

Just this time, I happened to meet a concerned colleague in his office. I saw him happily perched on a high-back rocking chair, behind a large glass-topped table, in a huge conference hall-sized office. He was clinging on to the position 'visibly' by the strength of wining and dining.

He told me, "Kiran, where are you going? What will you do there? There is no work there!"

I said, "Why?"

He said, "I was IG (Prisons) many years ago, I received just two files a day. So I used to clear them from my home, or the additional charge which I had. Therefore, get yourself out of it."

I knew where he was wrong, but I did not tell him. I felt he had been promoted too high to look that 'low' — where thousands of human beings lived, perhaps the sunshine of their lives.

My family too was worried on my being posted to the prison. It was a silent concern about consequences of my expected stubbornness on certain issues and now inside a prison, which had the representative chemistry of the society. My past had caught up. My responses were an open book.

Deep down inside me, I could see destiny leading me. I knew I was going to the right place — a place where I instinctively wanted to go to, and park and steer all the years of experience of 'Corrective and Collective' policing.

The orders came on the eve of a weekend saying that I was posted as IG (Prisons) with immediate effect. The posting orders never state the duration. I reported the following morning. It was a Friday. I was now a responsible 'official-custodian' of over 7,200 inmates.

It was no different in basics, given my 21 years of policing which preceded this posting. I recall those years when every time an offender was arrested by my area police, it was mandatory for them to ask a set of questions to see if it was

- a) Why did he commit that crime?
- b) What were the circumstances which forced him to do so?
- c) What were the psycho-social-economic reasons, if any?
- d) How did his family/friends influence him?
- e) Did the police have any prior information about his delinquency? (To analyse for ourselves whether we failed to prevent it.)

- f) What was he likely to do on being released from custody?
- g) Was it possible for the police to help him, legitimately, to break the cycle of Crime-Prison-Bail-Crime-Prison-Bail-Crime?

In this process of analysis, we had collectively succeeded in many a criminal's correction, and crime prevention based on evolved concepts of policing. Each of them had worked with remarkable results. Our substance abuse treatment centres for police stations initiated in my posting as Deputy Police Commissioner, North District, New Delhi, were an outcome of this concerned and evolved policing. It was a programme of treatment of substance abusers to come in before or after they reached the stage of stealing or violent behaviour. This programme was institutionalised while I was still at that tenure. It has since then grown manifold, and today, the organisation called Navjyoti enjoys Observer Status with the United Nations. I was now Inspector General of Tihar Jail, flooded with all those concerns. I was battling from outside the prison and hoping that prison could work.

I had experimented and had seen the strength in a sustained, selfless and concerned communication. It certainly touches all, including a hardened person. We had succeeded in softening and rehabilitating many a criminal by the sheer strength of our intentions. The posting at Tihar Jail was an opportunity for me to focus on the kind of work closest to my heart — reaching out to people in dire need, understanding their needs, addressing them, providing an environment which initiates introspection, where they 'choose' to look within, without being 'told' to do so.

I had the experience of interacting and dealing with law breakers, but not lodging them and looking after their house-keeping. This had to be learnt without loss of time, and this book will unfold the multidimensional measures which were taken spontaneously and simultaneously to put the institution on a road to holistic correction. Spread over the chapters ahead, you get to see what I saw in the prison, the systems, and the prisoners. I saw what was wrong, the extent to which it was

being so wrong, what we did with it all and how we treated it, what the directions and destinations we took were, and where we finally arrived.

This work required a very authentic recall. My habit of preserving documents became the basis. Every bit of paper and every minute observation stood carefully documented. These came alive during reviews. I followed it up by carrying out focused interviews with many identified and available persons, i.e., officials, non-officials and now released prisoners. One of them, David Ming, a Hongkong-based young man in his thirties, who was a promoter of meditation programmes inside the prison, stayed in my tent-house after being released from the prison.

One day, as I drove back home, I saw a familiar figure outside the gate of my house. It was David. For me it was a great joy to see him 'free'. I asked him when he came out of the prison and what I could do for him and what indeed was he doing here?

He said, "Ma'am, I had no other place to go to."

I asked, "Why?"

He said, "Ma'am, after release, my Embassy put me up with some persons who were junkies shooting drugs. I didn't want to be infected. I have no place to stay. I want to go back home 'healthy'." I remembered how careful he was with regard to his food even in the prison. He never could take an Indian meal.

I said, "Okay, stay with my security guards in the tent, if you want to."

He said, "I would be grateful."

He stayed on for a few months, and occasionally took bland food from my house, and some cold water to drink. He looked after himself very well. He transcribed a number of tapes for me, and participated in 'Interview Meetings' with other foreigners released from the prison.

This book was destined and not planned to be written. It grew out of a 'sharing of happiness through work'. The manner in which the work grew and became a movement, giving it an immortality,

became for me a compelling duty.

I started to explore possible academic avenues. I looked at the Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, and others. My mentor and confidante, Dr Kamla Choudhury, suggested the Nehru Fellowship named after India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. As providence would have it, I was on a two-day conference in Shimla, 'Redefining a Good Society', organised by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. After the conference, travelling back by road, I shared the car with Professor Ravindran, Director, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Library and Museum. We discussed the academic possibilities of my administrative experience at Tihar. He too suggested the Nehru Fellowship. I drafted my proposal, and submitted it to Dr Karan Singh, Vice Chairman, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund. I also met Mr Natwar Singh, Secretary, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, who found the project interesting and viable for research. One of the underlying conditions of the Fellowship was that by the third year of its completion, the researched work should stand published. I was awarded the scholarship in 1995, and the book was published within the stipulated period.

The Nehru Fellowship is undoubtedly one of the most outstanding Indian scholarships for academic research. By its resource strength and my own savings, I travelled around the world twice to get familiar with some selected prisons of the West and the East. I visited prisons in London, Edinburgh, Copenhagen, Zurich, Frankfurt, Bratislava, Vienna, Washington, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Hawaii, Kwaii, Tokyo, Hongkong, Manila and Colombo. The visits enabled me to draw a comparative study and see where we stood as one of the largest prisons in the world. No one believed till I interacted for a reasonable period of time that I, a five-foot three and a half inch and a 55kg woman, was heading the largest Indian prison complex. During these visits I did not come across even a single Prison Supervisor or a Governor or a Warden, who was handling a task of my dimension in numbers. I did not get to meet any woman heading a male prison. In fact, I met in London a male Governor of a female prison (Holloway). No one really believed, till

I gave sufficient visual and written evidence that my prison complex was riot-free and that it was a 'no-smoking zone' and that we had a '*vipassana* meditation camp' of over 1,100 inmates of men and women inside the prison. Equally unbelievable during this tour to the prisons abroad was the status of the prisoners. In our prison, 90 per cent of the population comprised undertrials with periods ranging from weeks to years.

I saw an excellent infrastructure in these prisons with the best of facilities of learning and working for prisoners. I was presented well-documented programme manuals. But I could offer none in exchange. I only had an archaic prison manual based on the Prison Act of 1894.

I interacted with prisoners in their training programmes. But I did not see any prison with over 300 NGOs working with prisoners as they did in mine. Media presence was almost prohibited, unlike in ours, where it was regulated to visit and see the state of affairs for themselves and to raise issues of public concern.

At the end of these visits, I envied their infrastructure, and they envied the wilful acceptance and participation of my prisoners in all the programmes. I saw a mix of both only in one prison, and that was Grendon Prison in the UK. It was a unique establishment within the English Penal System. For 33 years now, it has concerned itself with psychotherapeutic treatment of personality disordered individuals, i.e., those who have considerable psycho-social difficulties. Grendon Prison had therapies of Music, Art, Counselling, Meditation, Home Visits and limited NGO participation.

These visits also made me feel proud of being an Indian. Whatever we did stemmed from our inherent belief in non-violence, forgiveness, compassion, sacrifice, selflessness and community participation.

I realised that while we began with trust, at least visibly, many prisons abroad began with mistrust, such as stripping a person naked to check if he was carrying drugs on his person. Or keep him back in an isolated cell for a few days till he purged himself of any drugs he may have been carrying in his body, in his stomach, or other inner



recesses. Despite this, offenders repeatedly brought in drugs by bodycarriage, and most of it in their anus.

We used to free prisoners from their barracks and cells and allow them out in open compounds and courtyards of their respective wards. I did not see so much of open air time for the prisoners in the West and the reasons were many; shortage of space (Vienna Prison), fear of violence (San Francisco), inclement weather. Copenhagen prison was an exception, where the convicted prisoners could take a bus, go to the city for education and return by evening. This trust was 'earned' over a period. I also noticed something similar in Grendon Prison (UK).

What gave me the greatest sense of satisfaction was the extent to which we had reached out to the prisoners, and that it had worked. This opening up had earned country-wide acceptance and appreciation. It was followed by international recognition with the Ramon Magsaysay Award (1994), also called the Nobel Prize of Asia, and Joseph Bueys Award from Joseph Bueys Foundation, Switzerland (1997).

On August 31, 1994, when I was in Manila receiving the prestigious Asian Award from His Excellency, Fiedol Ramos, President of the Philippines, back home over 10,000 inmates and staff celebrated the event inside the prison. Each one felt as if the award was conferred for his/her effort in accepting, practising and carrying forward correctional strategies. When I returned to Delhi with the award, the celebrations were repeated. An event like this to happen inside the largest prison of a liberal democracy anywhere in the world was indeed gratifying! I don't know when it had ever happened earlier.

This book is about how this situation came about, what went behind this and why, who all contributed, in what way and to what extent? And why did they? What were our challenges? How did we individually and collectively cope with these? And where did I leave it at...?

The sheer authenticity of this documentation comes out of this

personal habit of preserving and meticulously filing every piece of paper which had a recall value. I had maintained this practice, religiously so, in every given posting. But in the case of Tihar, the amount and variety of documents which merited preservation was voluminous — files, petitions, audio and video cassettes and photographs. This was integral to my sense of gratitude vis-à-vis what Tihar had achieved. I was least conscious of the fact that it was to become evidence for this book. As providence would have it, many released inmates came over to see me either for a personal visitor to bid goodbye. Since they knew I was working on this Fellowship, they volunteered to go on record uninhibitedly, including contributing through illustrations.

And the visual impact of this documentation can be gauged through the accompanying CD-Rom which amalgamates both the stills and moving images complementing the major highlights of the text, giving a comprehensive overview to those readers who may be keen to know and feel the prison more. Hence, we have bifurcated the two segments — a book with a CD and one without a CD. As you read along, you will be joining in the pain and pleasure of the process by which the country's largest prison was transformed and at the end believe as I do that *'It's always possible'*.

All the proceeds of this book and the CD-Rom are dedicated to the India Vision Foundation for its ongoing project on education of the children whose parents are in prison, who, even after release, do not take care of their education. The objective is to save the NEXT VICTIM, and a future potential inmate of Tihar.

In case you would like to know more, you may please visit or communicate with me through my website: [www.kiranbedi.com](http://www.kiranbedi.com) or email: [kiran@kiranbedi.com](mailto:kiran@kiranbedi.com) Thank you.

January 1, 2002

Umar Asad

# IIII

## What Existed

*All that I saw inside Tihar Jail was personally seen, heard, discussed, reviewed, recorded and felt. Tihar is living history. It is a human monument which is integral to the maintenance of peace and harmony. Being the largest prison in India, it tends to play a trendsetting role for the rest of the country.*

*Institutions such as Tihar which are inhabited by thousands of people behind huge blind gates can be seen either by the inhabitants sent in by court orders, or the few 'privileged' persons in charge. I happened to be one such eyewitness, from May 1993 to May 1995.*

*What I saw inside Tihar was captured with human concern integral to my duty. I was there to correct and not to accuse. The magnitude of the problem was enormous. It took me months. Institutions take their time to reveal, despite individual impatience.*

*Tihar Jails tested my patience to the maximum, and ultimately did cave in for the inhabitants to call the same monument 'Tihar Ashram'.*

*Here is what existed as I saw....*



# 1

## *My First Day in the Prison*

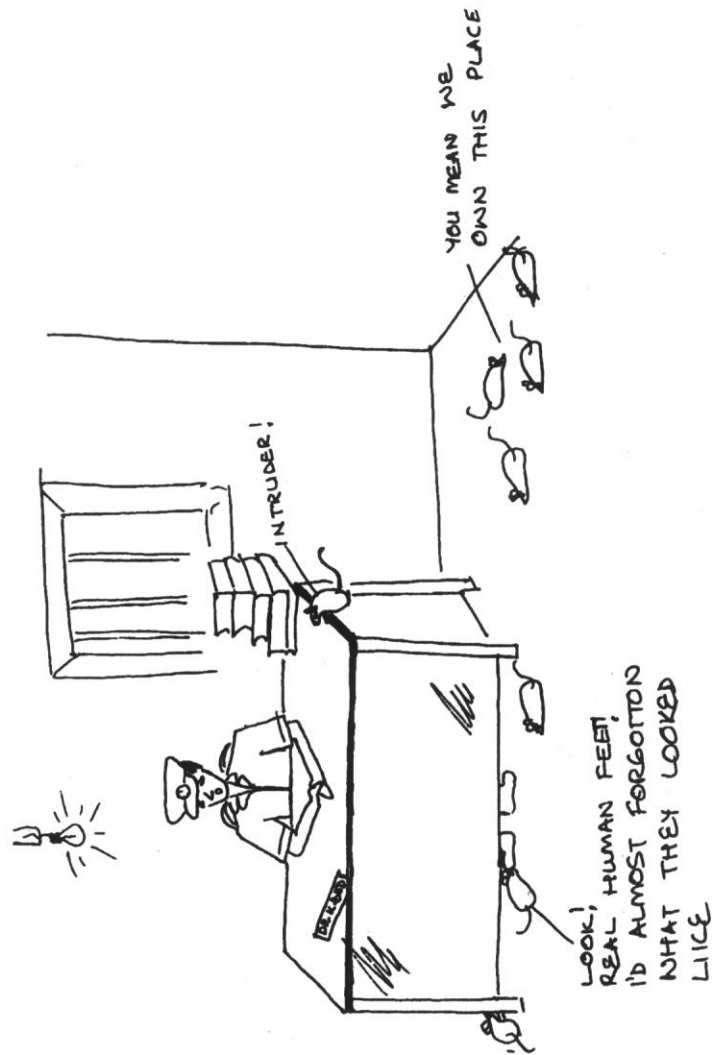
**I** came to the prison unprepared like anybody else. The difference was that I was 'in charge' while others were 'under' a charge. I did not know what exactly to expect, or what went on inside. All I knew was that there were hundreds of men and women behind rusted gates and high walls. All that was visible from outside the height of mortar topped by barbed wires were the tall lean poles with their floodlights, gleaming yellow. Sentries looked like faceless figures on the distant watchtowers.

I took charge as Inspector General (Prisons) on World Labour Day (May 1) 1993, not really being able to fathom the magnitude of labour that would be required of me to negotiate the problems waiting behind the bars. I had heard of the gory practices that continued unexposed beneath those searchlights. A whole world seemed to have been exiled behind those high walls with rusted frames. It always seemed another world, banished behind those dead walls. I had heard about the gang wars, prisoners running extortion centres from within the prison, and tales of rampant corruption, violence and heart-rending tragedies. But I was a soldier, duty-bound to take charge of this hell-hole.

I alighted from the white staff car which had come to pick me up from home, and walked towards my new office — the office of the Inspector General (IG). During those few brisk steps, I was determined not to get swallowed. I geared myself to face the situation. I was there to make it a respectable human dwelling. I am a policewoman but also religious by nature. Belief in the superpower has been an enormous source of strength and comfort to me in my hours of reckoning, throughout my career. I said a small prayer and then moved on to assume the chair that had been unoccupied for I could not wait. I called my first meeting with the Deputy Inspector General and the Superintendents of the four jails together, infamous as 'Tihar Jail'. We had to meet and get to know each other before we could begin to function as a team. As they came and sat across a large-sized prison-manufactured wooden table, I felt they were more than curious to know what I had to say. Perhaps to know how I speak and how I conduct myself as a woman IG. What was my agenda? Was I enthusiastic, or would I sulk being posted there? Was I going to accuse my seniors of dumping me and seek their sympathy? In my country, whenever postings are not manipulated by 'connections', one is always 'sent' — euphemistically termed as 'posted' — to apparently obscure places. Therefore, invariably round pegs land up in square holes and vice versa. I am sure my colleagues were trying to figure out whether I was one of those misfits. To me they did not appear enthusiastic or motivated enough for the task they were entrusted with. It seemed that they just happened to be there because of their posting. They were a young lot, all in their thirties. I found that I was the oldest in that office. For the first time, I felt a bit too responsible, not by virtue of my official position, but because of my years. I was now the head of Tihar Jails, largest in Asia-Pacific, in terms of human dimension, and right in the capital of India, New Delhi, a city-state by itself.

My office was physically repelling, the worst ever in all those years of policing. It appeared that the office was built as an afterthought, and meant to be kept vacant. Its confines were long.

First Day in Office: Illustrated by an Inmate





claustrophobic. It was a room 20 feet by 15 feet without a view. The pale yellow walls were bare. The room was a happy hunting ground for rats and insects of all age groups, who frisked around with great familiarity, despite my presence. See on page 5 how an inmate projected this through an illustration.

The meeting I had sought with my colleagues certainly served as an intrusion for the playful creatures who distracted my attention many a time. Perhaps they were equally curious to know how long my intrusion would last. At the meeting, none of the officers was in uniform. Not because it was a Saturday, but because the DIG and all the four Superintendents were drawn from the Delhi Civil Services. For them, wearing of uniform was not mandatory.

I tried to correlate to my colleagues with whom I was to administer the prison. They were reticent and on guard, and perhaps unsure about the extent to which they could share their thoughts with me. I provoked them by throwing across a few questions and when I saw them looking at each other from the corners of their eyes, I decided to take the initiative. During that short inquisition, I was able to sense who their leader was and decided to lead them through him. I told them I was primarily a team person. I did set goals, but only after I understood both the task and the energy available. I made it known that I fully respected experience, free participation, and that I cut across ranks to learn. I also shared my conviction that all hierarchies of administration have their own valuable experience to offer. I assured them that I would be learning from each of these ranks to ensure that we took the best possible directions. Once the goals were set and vision shared, we should all be in it together, through thick and thin. More importantly, I would take full responsibility for my acts of omission and commission. I would begin with an innate trust, and breach of it would not be spared. Bona fide mistakes would be examined and decisions taken on the merits of each case. Credit for good work would be made visible, just as discredit

would be made public.

As the minutes progressed, I tried to share some of  
the immediate thoughts that came to my mind about the prison.

I

recalled the days when I had persisted as a police officer to help the accused and many of those on police records to give up their habit as repeat offenders. How I had then wished that the prison would play a supportive role in reforming them. But since I had neither interaction as such with the prison nor was there a system to provide one, it had remained a mere thought. Now it was possible to translate that personal concept into conduct, and we were going to be the people to bring that about. I told them that I looked forward to working with them without knowing whether they did! I thanked them for coming and drove back home wondering what lay ahead. On May 3, Monday, I reached my office on the dot. I was firmly determined 'to do my time' optimally at Tihar. My personal assistants P. V. Rao and C. B. Virmani were already there, probably suspecting my enthusiasm, after the Saturday meeting. Without settling down in the office, I went for a round of Prison No 1. It was just a 20-yard walk from my office. The monstrous gate of the prison confronted me with a premonition of an ominous task. The peeled-off bottle-green paint could not impart much of a worldly tinge to it. Protecting a secret world of retribution, the immense structure looked timeless under a thick layer of rust. Standing dwarfed, I wondered if that giant gate would ever open for me. It did not. What opened was a faded green wicket gate, 2 feet by 4 feet. I had to bend myself and leap over a low hurdle. I entered the *deodhi* (the massive hall between two big gates) and was directed by the Warder to sign in the register kept on a wooden table for recording every entry and exit along with the time. Had the table been a few inches higher, I would have had to stand on my toes to reach for the register. It was sound and sturdy like all other furniture made inside the prison. While I was coming in through the main entry gate, I noticed another huge gate of same dimensions, which stood locked, 20 steps ahead. Unless this second gate was opened and the one I came in through locked, no one could enter the prison. Thus, I remained in the *deodhi*, a complex comprising the administrative block which houses the office of the Superintendent as well as the record room, a factory.

close-circuit television monitor for internal vigilance, and, of course, the visitors' gallery for closed visits. The prison had hardly any modern electronic gadgets or devices. The system still dated back to the colonial era, and the security measures could be traced back to a period even beyond that. A *durban* (gatekeeper), who had opened the wicket gate for me and had the keys to the locks on both the iron gates including the wicket gate, was, under orders to open only one gate at a time. Therefore, this person, a constable by rank, literally walked thousands of yards, in his eight hours of duty, between the two gates. Having entered through the first gate and recorded my entry, I was already at the second gate. I stood at the second wicket gate which opened into the prison. I was beginning to get the feel of a prison. The second gate closed behind me and I was inside. It was like entering an organised township, with a peculiar smell of its own. There were tall trees reeking of history; and there were a number of human faces which looked rather out of place. These inmates were waiting at the gate to enter the *deodhi* and exit from the prison for different reasons. They wore expressions of awe, and some looked shocked, bewildered and silent. So was I. I saw only men here. I wondered when a senior woman officer had been here last. Wearing a uniform was not mandatory. I, therefore, deliberately wore a full-sleeved pastel pathan suit topped by a waist-length Nehru jacket. This gave me full cover, with a sense of grace. I wore flat walking shoes, not to reveal even my toes. This was done to ensure a non-distracting presence, in an overwhelming male township.

The Superintendent of the jail, K. R. Kishore, soon followed me. I had no armed guard by my side. I was accompanied by a Warder in uniform, as personal staff. I held a notepad in my hand to record on-the-spot observations.

As I filed past the waiting prisoners, the Warders, perhaps from force of habit, started to physically contain the prisoners, without the slightest provocation from them. Some even waved their sticks menacingly at the onlooking prisoners, in a gesture to show concern.

for my security. The vocal sounds they made were distinctly distasteful. I signalled the Warders to stop doing this.

After about a 70-yard walk on a metalled 200 metres by 100 metres pathway, I entered one of the largest wards of the prison, which housed about 600 inmates. This prison was one of the four jails under my charge. It had 12 wards. The wards varied in size and were further subdivided into barracks or dormitories. As I entered the ward, a large expanse of an area came into view which had a sprawling mud compound and a few tall trees. It was probably a long time since an IG had visited the place. The men, who were out in the courtyard, began to walk slowly towards me, but the staff abruptly signalled them with their *lathis* (sticks) to sit down at a distance. The word had apparently gone around that there was a new visitor to the prison and it was none other than the IG herself. I was taken aback by the blank stares all around me. I stood facing them, not knowing what expression would be most suitable for the moment. The prisoners seemed to be wondering what had made me come right into their den. Not being in uniform for me represented a desire for informal communication, not authoritative distance. I had already begun to empathise with them, wondering if our criminal justice systems were at all fashioned to help change offenders and forgive those who were willing to mend.

Perhaps, in continuation of that thought I seemed to have suddenly broken the silence by asking them: "Do you pray?"

Maybe I was seeking forgiveness for them. No one answered. I repeated: "I am asking you, do you pray? Please tell me." I spoke in Hindi.

The men looked towards the Warders as if to ask them if they were permitted to speak. The Warders seemed confused, and I could sense their nervousness. I had obviously confronted them with a bewildering situation — perhaps unheard of before. For them, a similar situation in the past meant a headcount of all the inmates by loud roll calls, and being locked back into their barracks well before the IG's expected arrival to ensure that the visit went through without any hitch. The Warders would be standing outside the locks,

also to be marked present. A former IG, P. V. Sinari's finger had been bitten off by a prisoner during a round many years ago. And here I was asking them: "Do you pray?"

I moved closer to the bunch and directed the question to one inmate chosen at random.

He answered: "Yes, sometimes," nodding his head.

"Very good. Who else does? You?" I pointed towards another prisoner, again at random, getting even closer to the crouching men. And then one after another, voices joined in saying: "Yes, I also do. I recite the *Path* (the holy prayers). Most of us pray at our own timings...."

Perhaps the first human contact was made, I wondered with some relief.

I probed on: "Would it be better if 'we' say a prayer together? Would you like to?" I realised for myself that I was becoming a part of that 'we'.

They fell silent again, and I wondered if they had a collective voice. They had never prayed together.

Then one of them, with one eye on the staff and the other on me, said hesitantly: "Yes...." Others nodded their heads in agreement, wanting to be part of the prayer.

I said: "All right, which prayer should 'we' sing together? Can you suggest one?"

Silence. I volunteered one from a popular film I knew they would all know.

"Do you know '*Aye Malik tere bande hum, aise hon hamare karam, neki par chalen* (O Lord we are your creation/May our actions be worthy)?" I asked.

This time there was an enthusiastic and instant response, "Yes!" approved in a chorus.

I said: "Get up to sing together."

They began to rise to their feet but the omnipresent 'lathis' had them confined in different stages of getting up. Raising my voice, I asserted: "I told you to stand up to sing."

The staff got the message and withdrew their batons. I told the inmates: "Close your eyes and sing with me."

And we sang. When our eyes opened, theirs and mine — I don't know about the staff — I found my fingers intact. I felt that we had together succeeded in giving out the first signal of mutual trust, which would set the pace and of our work relationship from now on. The prayer we sang echoed this. The message which came through very naturally when our eyes were closed was that "I am willing to trust you, you may try trusting me, and we could work together for the benefit of all."

I moved to the women's ward as if by instinct. I knew that the women would have been waiting for me. As I entered, all the women present in the courtyard rushed towards me, uninhibited and happy, cheering my visit. Was this a homecoming? The ward was a total contrast to that of the men. The women promptly sat around me, wanting to interact and hear what I had to say. They had taken it for granted that I would visit them. Looking at their faces, I felt they were my children and I had indeed come home for them. Each one, I sensed, needed a hand on her shoulder to help her cry out her grief and relieve herself of the agony within. Yet, all of them were putting up a cheerful appearance for my sake.

I asked them: "Do you read and write here?"

They said: "No."

I said: "Would you like to?"

They said: "Yes."

"Very good, we will study here, and before you leave, you shall be literate." They applauded in excitement.

My prayer with the men gave me the joy of seeing hope and acceptance; with the women, something pulled me from within. I had been 'imprisoned' — Tihar was going to be my destiny.

## 2

*Tihar Jail: Ground Realities*

*I* scrutinised Tihar Jails over the next few weeks. The experience agonised me. This agony was soon replaced by anger. I could now see for myself who were responsible for this horrendous state of affairs. It could not have been more frustrating, for I could not take certain individuals to task, or make them see the enormous follies of their ways. The overwhelming hypocrisy which marked their functioning was revealed — and tellingly at that — by this institution. The system that I had inherited was totally derailed, and the sordid reality was conveniently hidden behind the huge iron gates.

The individuals responsible for the institution were preoccupied with numerous other pressing matters, and they rarely visited Tihar. Even those rare visits had to be preceded by a guard of honour with full ceremonial uniform and a lot of fanfare, including buglers. Such occasions were reminiscent of the Raj, when subservience was the order of the day. When these seniors arrived to pay a visit, the system spurred itself into action merely to receive them and show them only what was meant to be shown. The appalling muck and filth in the subhuman conditions inside the cells were camouflaged



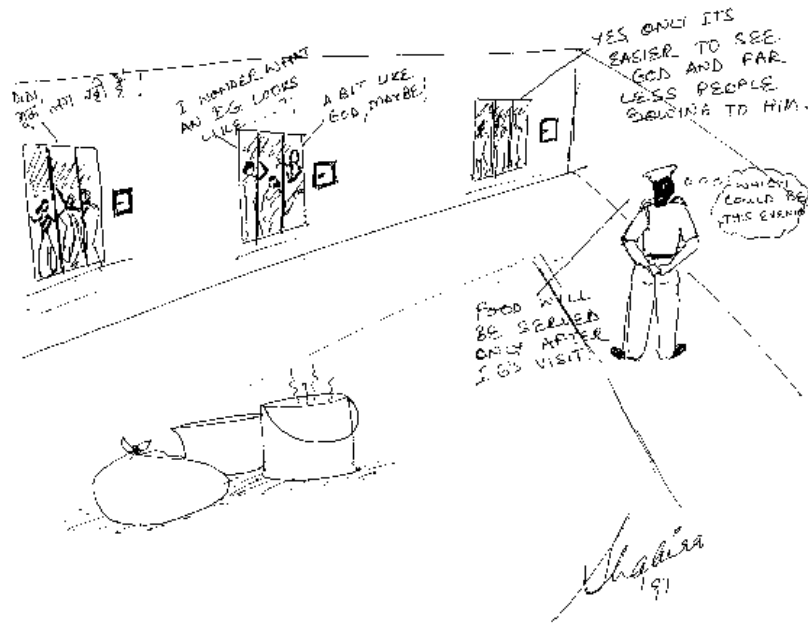
convincingly behind a make-believe facade of neatness restricted to certain areas where the VIPs were taken around. The prison barracks, stuffed beyond capacity, were kept 'out of bounds' because human beings were herded there like animals in a cage. Moreover, these depraved specimens posed a security risk, and the VIPs could suffer damage. Anyway, the VIPs were invariably accompanied by a media team which faithfully reproduced the lofty statements made by them on prison reforms and rehabilitation of prisoners. I had come across many such hyperbolic statements during my career as a police officer. But after coming face-to-face with the overpowering and nauseating reality of Tihar, I felt nothing but contempt for such inflated claims. Even an inmate chose to express these sentiments in an illustration as depicted on page 14.

In 1993, the Tihar Jail complex housed four prisons which served as 'Judicial Custodians' for over 7,200 inmates as against the sanctioned capacity of 2,273. Among this number, only around 900 had been convicted (i.e., only 10 per cent) and the remaining 90 per cent were under trials, or on remand waiting for their trials in various courts. There were around 300 women and about 50 children below the age of four years, and around 1,200 inmates in the age group of 18 to 21; 125 foreigners of 38 nationalities who were incarcerated mostly under Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act 1986. The inmates were lodged in the prisons alphabetically except for foreigners and women who were lodged in Prison No 1. Prison No 2 lodged most of the convicted prisoners. Prison No 3 housed all those who were arrested for offences under Terrorist Activities Disruption Act, TADA (now repealed). Besides other under trials, Prison No 4 housed mainly substance abusers.

Tihar was virtually 'bursting at the seams'. Prison No 1 was built as a single unit in 1958 to house 1,273 inmates. This prison was trifurcated in 1984. A decision for a new jail, i.e., the

fourth one, was taken in 1974, and its construction completed in 1980. This prison came to be known as 'Camp Jail' to house mostly prisoners requiring low security arrangements. By 1984, the four prisons housed about 2,500 prisoners. But two important enactments by the Indian

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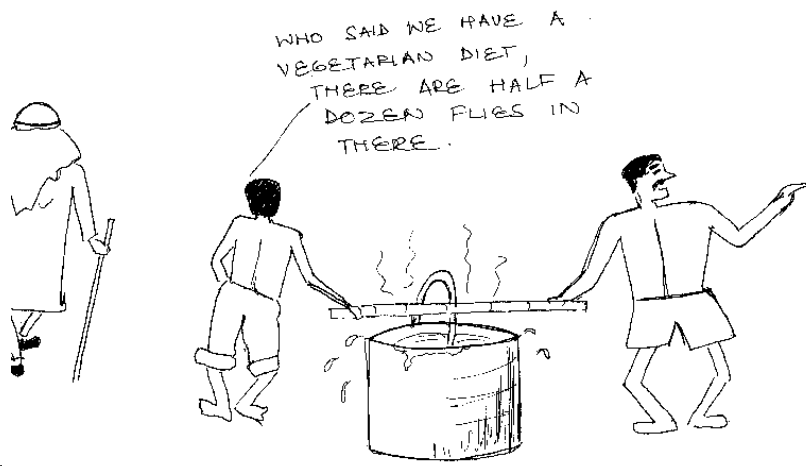
Parliament concerning crimes against women and narcotic offences, namely, Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983 and Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance Act, 1985, changed the whole scenario. Perhaps, nobody anticipated the likely increase in the number of arrests and the need to expand prison capacity. By 1985, Tihar population reached a peak of 4,000. In 1989, it touched another high of 6,000. By 1993, it was nearing 8,000. The crime rate and the corresponding number of arrests and convictions exhibited an alarming increase. Various proposals over a period to expand the prison area and to provide better facilities took off. Moreover, the prisoners did not have any effective spokesperson through whom they could convey their agonies and miseries. And even if they attempted to do so, none of their appeals could reach the decision

Occasional headlines in the media on the conditions in the jail didn't cause much flurry, only occasional embarrassment to the powerful officials. For, after all (according to them), a prison was meant to be a means of punishment and not comfort.

The prisoners' 'catalogue of woes' seemed interminable. The first item in this catalogue was 'food'. The quality of food defied description, as is projected in an illustration by an inmate on page 16. The system was devoid of any provision of breakfast for the prisoners. Lunch used to be served at 11.00 am. Those going to the courts for appearance early in the morning invariably went without a meal. Lunch consisted of five *chappatis* (handmade wheat bread) with watery cooked *dal* (lentils), or vegetables. The upper layer, sometimes containing oil, used to be served to the muscle men. The same food was served at about 5.00 pm as 'dinner'. Meals were doled out from round rusted iron containers which were 10-inch in diameter and 2 feet in height and had a handle. These containers were used for multipurpose activities, like washing of clothes, storing water and bathing. They were even used for the collection and carriage of dry garbage by the inmates. But its main use was to carry cooked *dal* or vegetables for distribution to the prisoners. All the misuse was due to administrative apathy. These containers were

makers.

ood as Depicted by an Inmaten Fison Food



carried by inmates deputed from each ward, barrack and cell to fetch the foodstuff from the *langar* (cookhouse) to each prison. Their durability could be judged from the fact that they were bought in abundance in the '70s. I asked the Assistant Superintendent (Store), who appeared to me to be as 'durable' as the containers, during a meeting with my officers:

"Why are we using such old rusted containers for carrying food? Why don't you replace these with stainless steel ones?"

"Madam, stainless steel containers break easily. They have no resale value either."

"So what?" I asked.

"Madam, stainless steel containers are also very difficult to procure."

"But we can buy these from SAIL (Steel Authority of India Ltd.)."

"We will have to place an order."

"Then who stops us?"

"Madam, they will take a very long time."

"How long?"

"Three-four months."

"Then what?"

"No, Madam, one thing more, these iron containers are very sturdy and durable. We bought them 15 or 20 years ago. Still they are serving the purpose."

I could no longer control myself, and I burst out, "Would you serve food to your own family in such durable containers? If yes, go on. If no, then let's be ashamed of what we are doing." The officer had no answer. His silence said it all.

The food was transported in the same containers by two persons who carried it slung over a bamboo. The distance to be covered was about 200 metres and invariably some of the stuff sloshed on the floor. Occasionally, some containers were covered by unclean towels, belonging to one of the inmates, which got half-soaked in the broth. By the time the food reached the individual prisoners, it invariably turned cold. Tihar did not boast of eating halls as in Western jails;

nor did a 'hot case' trolley do the rounds as in more benign prisons in Vienna and Austria. Some of the prisoners had not been provided with plates and utensils and had to share them with others. Moreover, the timings were very odd. Consequently, many of the inmates just stored the eatables and either ate them or threw them away later.

Many enterprising prisoners devised ingenious ways of heating their food. For instance, they would surreptitiously smuggle in electric heating coils. If this facility was not forthcoming, other methods, such as burning paper or plastic would serve the purpose. Sometimes, some prisoners would even burn dried *chappatis* to heat up the fresh ones. The 'delectable' aroma of such impromptu cooking along with smoke fumes added to the choking smell in the prisons. As far as jail food was concerned, quality control was an unheard-of phenomenon. The items on the menu were insipid and as unappetising as they possibly could be. Without spices, the dishes tasted like a liquid diet prescribed on medical grounds. Most of the inmates had no choice but to gobble up whatever came their way. Some prisoners, who were to receive food from home during family visits were magnanimous enough to share the goodies with their less fortunate brethren. Sometimes the dishes were so completely inedible that the prisoners were compelled to throw them into the sewer, choking it further.

Apart from being insipid, the food was unhygienic as well. Basic requirements, such as clean hands and clean nails, were non-existent. Some prisoners would borrow blades from the prison barber to cut their nails as nail-cutters were not allowed inside the prison. However, many inmates decided to do without such civic requirements altogether. Thus, a majority of prisoners had long, filthy nails along with unkempt hair. Their clothes exuded the unmistakable odour of perspiration. As the cooking utensils were copper-plated with chrome, an element of metallic bitterness seeped into the food, as and when the chrome wore off. The vegetables and other *dals* were not washed properly, due to shortage of water. On many occasions, I personally detected insects and other assorted



particles floating in the vegetable broth. Moreover, the quality of the cereals and other food items was very inferior and were not procured from reputed outlets. Government-sponsored stores were not preferred for reasons unknown.

Nobody ever thought of changing any item in the menu. In fact, monotony was the overriding factor, with the cheapest and the most easily available items being supplied. There was no mess committee to chalk out the menu for, say, a week ahead. In fact, whatever stuff arrived in the prison store went to the *langar* for cooking. The diet was strictly vegetarian. But an imaginative mind could term it non-vegetarian as it contained a sprinkling of insects in it.

Ironically, the convicts who served as unpaid cooks were the culprits who provided germs and worms due to uncut nails, unwashed hands and clothes, and tousled hair. Soap and towels as well as water were always in short supply. Moreover, the cook-convicts were never subjected to periodic cleansing processes, such as disinfection and deworming. They were never subjected to any medical checkups. Many of them suffered from tuberculosis and other respiratory ailments, which were contagious. These convicts had been awarded rigorous imprisonment, and human kindness or compassion was definitely not one of their ruling emotions. They adopted double-menu standards: one for their own cookhouse and the other for the rest of the prisoners. They used to enjoy all the spicy, well-garnished stuff, with large helpings.

Another incredible sight to be seen was how *chappatis* which had been roasted over the gas stove were strewn all over the floor. The cookhouse prisoners walked over the same floor, either barefooted, or with footwear. Since the kitchen was a part of their barrack the toilets too were inside.

Pilferage was rampant. Those in charge of the kitchen had years of experience in this art and made neat packets for themselves by siphoning out food and raw vegetables to prisoners and also to some staff members who had the means to pay for them. Sometimes, inadvertently, muscle power came into play and the tough guys would get to enjoy the dishes.

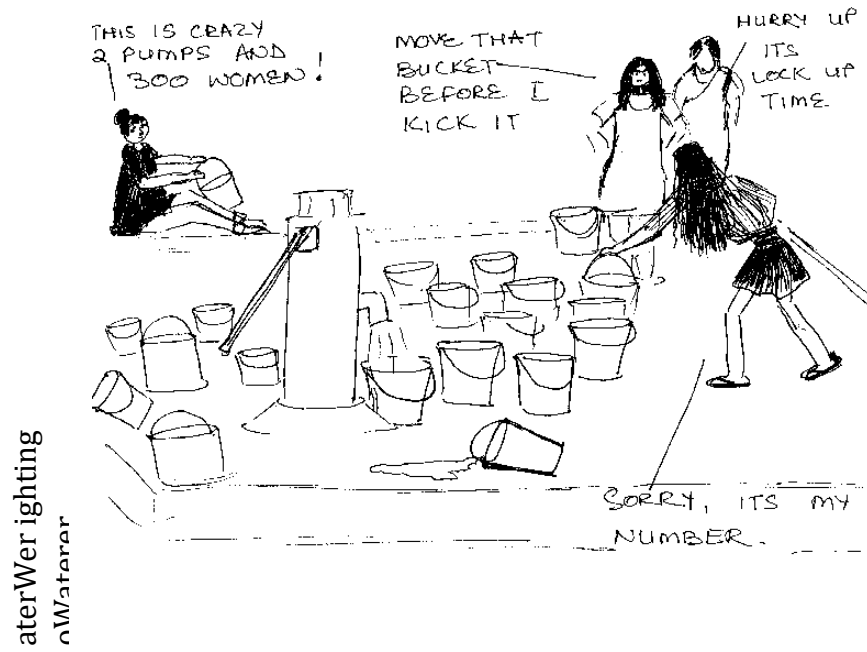
Milk was another item which did not flow. Most of the time, the milk, which had equal quantities of water in it, was not even boiled before distribution. Milk was also pilfered and sold or shared. Tea was almost black and bitter. See how the problem has been graphically illustrated by an inmate on page 21.

No exception was made of the infirm and ailing patients who suffered the reduction in the quota of milk as did the others. Each morning, getting milk was a test of patience, grit, perseverance, and, above all, luck for the inmates. So much about food.

Moving on to other conditions inside the barracks, these could only be described as 'inhuman'. The massive ovens and the gas burners emitted their own quantum of heat which augmented the solar fury during the scorching summer months. The ventilation in the barracks was very poor. The exhaust fans themselves were exhausted and hardly functioned. The vintage ceiling fans were past their prime. The inmates knew exactly what the term 'roasting' meant. Everything was hot — the walls, the ceiling and the floor. And hot was the temperament of the staff and the convict *munshi* (clerical assistant) as well. The worst hit were the newly admitted inmates who, after being sentenced to rigorous imprisonment, were deputed to the cookhouse.

Water was considered to be the most precious item inside the prison. Whatever the condition of food, it would at least arrive but there was no such guarantee for water. In summers especially, getting adequate water was the greatest anxiety of all prisoners, as illustrated on page 22. The crucial question was: would they get enough water to drink, not to talk of bathing and washing? There were no flush toilets in the jail, and so, large quantities of water were needed to drain the pot properly. Hand pumps were the only respite in wards which had them. It was another matter that water from the hand pump would come only after it was pumped at least 50 times, due to a fall in the level of water. On the hand pumps' bonnet was written in yellow paint, 'Water is not potable', yet many illiterate prisoners were seen gulping the same.





Smoke was inherent in the prison air as most of the inmates used to smoke *bidis* (hand-rolled tobacco in a leaf) in and outside the barracks. The prisoner welfare canteen made huge profits by selling 'duplicate *bidis*'. The consumption of *bidis* was 800 bundles. One bundle contained 24 smoking sticks, which added up to 19,200 *bidis* a day. In Jail Nos 2, 3 and 4, about 2,600 bundles of *bidis* were consumed in a day. Jail No 1 surpassed the sales in cigarettes. It sold 300 packets of 'Gold Flake' cigarettes a day. Brand No 502 and *Dholak Chhap* topped the list in *bidis* while 'Gold Flake' and 'Four Square' brands topped in cigarettes. The smell of smoke, perspiration, internal emissions by humans plus urinals and latrines were integral to imprisonment.

During the lock-in time (6 pm to 6 am) the prisoners had no choice but to use the toilets inside the barracks. An outsider cannot even imagine the variety of mixed odours that emanated from the barracks. When the doors opened in the morning, the inmates surged out in droves, desperately needing to relieve themselves in the toilets outside the barracks, which were devoid of running water. But now they were at least free from its awful odours and were breathing fresh air. These external toilets also remained clogged for want of water and just could not cope up with the requirements of almost four times overworked systems, which were originally constructed for only 2,273.

Sadly, even the existing infrastructure for water supply was a victim of negligence and apathy. The situation was so bad that the water pipes had become a part of the underground foliage. The roots of many trees and plants were guzzling water directly from these pipes. How could water possibly flow unhindered to the barracks and toilets? The timings fixed for water supply by the municipality were meant for the free society, not for those who had forfeited their freedom. It was truly agonising to see water running waste, within and outside the barracks, from taps which were defective and could not be closed. From behind their bars the inmates desperately wished that they had long arms so that they could fill their earthen pitchers, or mere polythene bags, in which they used to store water.

from running taps outside the barracks before the time of lock-in. The prison rule book strictly stipulated lockup time by sunset. Unfortunately, the municipal water began flowing in after this hour. The quantity of water that was supplied during the morning hours was woefully inadequate to meet the needs of the excessive number of prisoners. The ageing and corroded water pipes just could not carry the required amount of water. Sometimes in the summer, water supply would cease for three or four days. When it was resumed after the long gap, prisoners used to herald the occasion with the beating of the disfigured metal *thalis* (round plates). There were also frequent fights near the tap for water. The queue of different sizes and shapes of buckets, pitchers and even plastic bags awaiting to be filled up, presented a scene typical of a crowded slum dwelling, with acute water problems.

The prison barrack compounds, as a relief measure, were dotted with a few hand pumps, but these pumps could not function to full capacity due to dwindling water levels. There were no repairs or maintenance kits in the prison. Every time something went out of order, which was quite frequent due to misuse and overuse, the Public Works Department (PWD) had to come to the rescue. The PWD 'saviours' took their own time to rectify the defects. The prison also had tubewells, but, again, they functioned erratically and their maintenance was poor.

When things turned from bad to worse, mobile water tankers were pressed into service through the office of the city municipal corporation at an exorbitant cost. Many of these tankers did not have covers, and had leaking taps. Due to the serious water shortage and overcrowding, sewers invariably remained clogged. Consequently, the barracks were engulfed by stench. Also, gutters and manholes remained uncovered, providing a fertile breeding ground for mosquitoes. The huge accumulation of uncleared garbage at various places around the prison compounded the situation which was already intolerable. The cookhouses or barracks were neither provided with mesh doors or windows nor with insect repellents. As a result, flies could rest and roost on the food, adding to health

problems. During the monsoon, a phenomenon called 'reverse flow' occurred. In other words, the contents of the clogged sewers would flow back into the barracks, and the stench and filth became internal. The possibility of epidemics, such as cholera and dysentery breaking      Prisoners did make sporadic efforts to get rid of the garbage, which they had to carry in gunny bags because wheelbarrows were scarce. But the most astounding fact was that there was not a single departmental sweeper for this soaring population. The few sweepers who were there, were not even enough for the administration block. Consequently, the compounds, barracks and toilets had to be cleaned by the inmates themselves. Such a state of affairs bred corruption and indiscipline, leading to a great deal of acrimony. Some inmates were forced into this task as a punishment, while others had to do this job because they could not pay off the staff. Obviously, there were no 'volunteers' in this field. At times, money was collected from the prisoners to pay the 'inmate sweeper' but he or she did not receive the entire amount. Inevitably, a middleman, called *munshi* or a 'mate', pocketed a part of the collection. And there were many such *munshis* and mates flourishing amidst them.

The summer months proved to be extremely agonising — thereal 'endurance tests' for the inmates. Competing with the acute shortage of water, was the frequency of power cuts. In the overcrowded barracks, fans stopped whirring and the circulation of air came to a standstill, virtually leading to suffocation. Tihar Jail was located in the western part of Delhi, a non-VIP area. Thus, it suffered the maximum number of blackouts. The worst sufferers were the undertrials who had to undergo 'double punishment', as it were. The prison had a generator, but it was installed for the bare minimum and that too broke down frequently. Also, the diesel required would not be available, and, if available, there would be no one to pour it into the generator. Such was the power situation. The Prison Administration was in a peculiar predicament as far as public works were concerned. This administration had to entrust all work relating to planning, construction, purchase of material/ out, assumed serious dimensions.

equipment, their procurement and repair to a Government organisation, PWD, i.e., Public Works Department, or even more aptly called by the staff as the 'Public Woes Department'. The PWD enjoyed a monopoly in its field and was prone to all the flaws a monopoly could entail. This department provided a weak consumer service as exhibited by the prevailing conditions vis-à-vis water, power, sanitation and hygiene. Further proof of the PWD's 'efficiency' could be easily traced. Scores of fans, which had gone out of order, hung for weeks together. None of them was repaired; in fact, the practice was to procure new fans. What exactly happened to the old fans remained a mystery.

The PWD officials displayed a remarkable sense of apathy in letting wires dangle all around the prison. It appeared quite incredible that no one got electrocuted. These wires were meant to provide electricity for TV sets, which were permitted inside the barracks, but were deprived of the vital plug points. The provision of plug points was considered a security risk but apparently connecting the TV sets directly to the bulb holders or hanging wires was regarded safe. These conveniently available wires also provided electricity for coil heaters leading to overuse and, thus, to frequent tripping. Such unauthorised heaters were either smuggled or provided by the staff members who demanded money for this privilege. The prison headquarters, thus, had to fork out huge penalties for excessive consumption of electricity. In fact, a large portion from the prison budget went towards meeting these expenses.

All the foregoing problems stared the authorities in the face. The prison bureaucracy had earned a justifiable reputation for procrastination. 'Never put off till tomorrow what you can put off indefinitely', was the way it appeared. In fact, the PWD engineers did not have a blueprint of the underground water pipes and electrical conduits/connections. Only the Almighty knew how the machinery functioned at all in Tihar.

The PWD officials clung on to their monopoly status. A couple of incidents will highlight their attitude. In the first case, the jail



officials put forth the suggestion that the inmates could whitewash the barracks. This proposal was approved by Sahib Singh Verma, the Minister in-charge, who was keen that the prisoners performed some manual work. But the proposal never came through.

I vividly remember the afternoon when I called the senior PWD officials for a meeting on the vital question of whitewashing the subhuman barracks of the prisons. I spoke about the unutilised labour of the prisoners which could be put to the best use for this job. The opposition came from the lower ranks. I was astonished to hear what they had to say.

I asked: "What's the problem if we give the prisoners a chance to whitewash their own barracks?"

PWD Junior Engineer: "It's not possible, Madam."

"Why?"

"Because they are not trained in the trade."

"No, we have trained manpower inside," said my colleague Jaydev Sarangi. Silence; and they looked at one another.

The other PWD official spoke: "But we will have difficulty in measuring the area they have whitewashed."

"Don't you have a measuring tape with you?" asked Sarangi.

"No, no, but the problem is how we would show it."

"To whom are you supposed to show?" asked another Superintendent, D. P. Diwedi.

"In the register."

"Very simple, you can write the measurements the way you write. What's the problem if the prisoners do it?" I insisted.

"There may be some wastage."

"Then what?"

"How shall we show that?"

"Show it in the manner you show for your own workforce," I said.

"No, Madam, it will put the pressure on us."

"What type of pressure?"

"First, we will have to buy the material, then hand it over to the prison staff, take the measurement and make the recording."

"This you do even when your own labour does it," quipped Sarangi.

"But that is a separate thing."

I comprehended the meaning of 'a separate thing'. To beat it all, the officers present at the meeting were not willing to commit anything. We understood the powerful 'team-spirit'.

In the second instance, several community organisations were willing to offer any number of saplings to encourage and enable hundreds of interested inmates to plant these inside the prison, for there was enough space left for further greening of Tihar. But here again the horticulture department of the PWD got into the act and prevented any such 'free planting'. This department's one-point programme was to buy and plant saplings at exorbitant costs. So went the argument:

Horticulture official: "Madam, these donated plants will not grow."

"How can you say that?" asked my colleague, D. P. Diwedi.

"It's my experience."

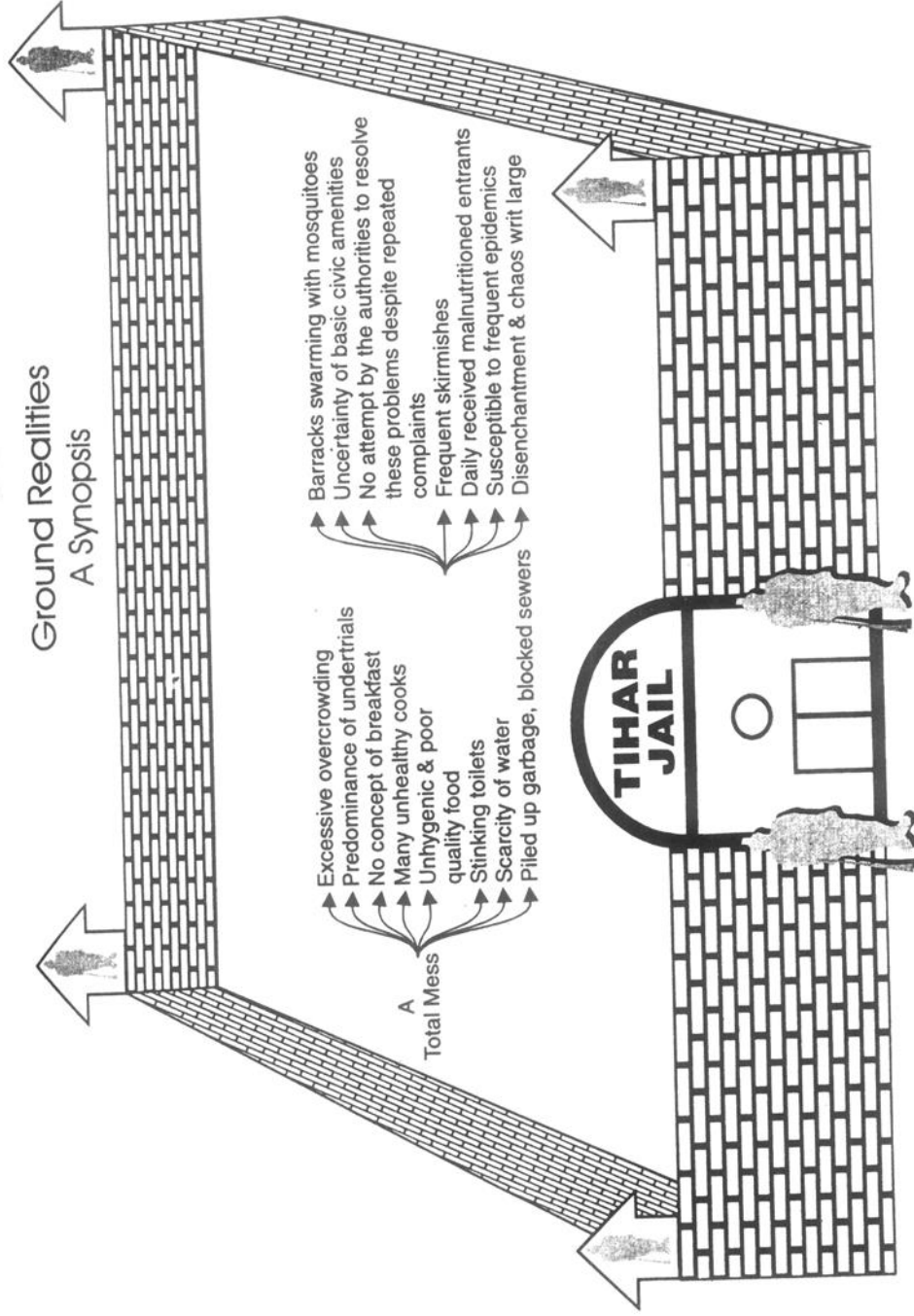
"Experience?"

"Yes, because their roots are naked." (Showing me the root.) We were getting a naked exposition of the root cause of our problems which had inbuilt solutions only if one was looking for them.

It is rightly said that when supervisors do not solve problems, they become a part of the problem themselves. In Tihar, it seems, everything and everyone was becoming one.



## Ground Realities A Synopsis



# 3

## *Medical Disservice*

**T**ihar Jail had built up for itself an unenviable notoriety for corruption, inefficiency, indifference and incompetence. The medical staff members further ensured that they did nothing to deny or undo this image. In fact, they sought new ways and means of strengthening it. The shocking health situation of the inmates made me feel, perhaps for the first time in my career, helpless. I had gained sufficient experience to effectively deal with the hardened criminals and other assorted varieties of lawbreakers. I could also effectively handle recalcitrant or obdurate staff members. But how should I have coped with this suffering township of men, women and children under my charge?

Tihar's health problems touched an incurable level. A majority of the prisoners came from underprivileged backgrounds and they brought with them a plethora of medical problems. Apart from common ailments resulting from obvious causes, such as malnutrition, unhealthy lifestyles and cramped living conditions, avoidable maladies caused by alcoholism, heavy smoking and drug abuse flourished.

The geriatric prisoners fell into a category of their own. Their problems mainly related to failing eyesight and decaying teeth. A

small part of the prison population belonging to the middle or upper income levels suffered from stress conditions triggered off by common ailments, such as diabetes, hypertension and heart problems. Adding to this list were ubiquitous fevers, coughs, colds and seasonal viruses responsible for malaria, cholera or Tihar's was a changing population. Each day, on an average, 200 to 250 prisoners left the prison and, by evening, a similar number would enter, with a fresh set of health problems. As a rule, soon after their arrival in the prison, they were expected to be checked up by the prison doctor. This process was known as *mulaiza* (inspection). The doctor was supposed to record the state of health of each new inmate, specifying the inmate's height, weight, general condition, and whether the entrant complained of any serious ailment. Also he was supposed to check if the prisoner had any injuries on his or her person. This inspection by the doctor had to be done on the same day on which the inmate entered the prison. But this did not take place as after 2 pm there was only one doctor for all the four jails (housing once 8,000 prisoners). Apart from attending to routine calls, this doctor also had to perform emergency duties. He had to manage time for patients in the prison hospital as well. Therefore, all the new inmates were huddled together in a *mulaiza* ward, meant for the newcomers. Here they remained till the doctor could spare the time to check them. Only after that, could they be sent to their lodging wards. The shift could even take three days.

There was no segregation for inmates. Healthy prisoners were bundled along with the ones suffering from infectious skin diseases, and diseases such as leprosy, tuberculosis (TB) and AIDS. According to Dr J. N. Banvalikar, a TB specialist and a visiting doctor (on our request) from a Government hospital outside the prison, Tihar Jail completely lacked the infrastructure for TB detection. After a preliminary survey, he stated that, in his opinion, of the total number of inmates, as many as 70 to 80 per cent were either TB patients, or were at risk of contracting the disease. There was no provision for hygienically disinfected spittoons to be placed inside the barracks

gastroenteritis.

and cells so as to prevent the spreading of infection. Spitting anywhere and everywhere during the lockup time was the norm. Similarly, at least a quarter of the inmates who entered the prison daily were addicted to drugs or intoxicants. Due to loss of their dose, they suffered from withdrawal symptoms. They could neither themselves sleep nor allowed fellow inmates to do so. They would reel in pain and yell for the doctor. The single doctor on duty could not possibly cope with the hundreds of calls he received each night from all the four jails. All that he did was to send one common medicine to all the patients. This medicine, supplied in tablet form, was called Parmol (a cheaper form of Paracetamol). It was, I later discovered, Tihar's panacea for all ills — from a fever to an upset stomach to something less recognisable.

The effectiveness of Parmol for all and sundry could be questioned, but at least it was innocuous. At the other extreme were doctors who would prescribe Sorbitrate, a heart medicine, for a minor disorder like a headache. Yet another doctor prescribed TB drugs at random to anyone who came to consult him. He was an eccentric old man who had spent a number of years working in the jail. When we pointed out to him how wrong his method was and that he had to stop it, he just refused to accept that there was anything amiss. The situation came to a head when the inmates discovered what they were being given. A riot was on hand had we not taken the decision to withdraw the doctor and revert him to his As far as drug abuse and addiction management were concerned, I found out that the doctors were only transferring the addiction from narcotics drugs to psychotropic substances, i.e., from illicit drugs to synthetic pills. When I took charge, literally half the prison population was addicted to tranquillisers. The doctor-staff network in collusion with the inmates ran a thriving market of its own. Inmates who ran out of stock would yell for more, and the lone doctor would never appear on the scene, but merely send across the addictives. The evening or night doctor was much more concerned to get through his duty hours than with the consequences of his parent department.



actions. There was no organised drug abuse treatment programme inside the prisons. There was one non-government centre — in Prison 4 — capable of handling not more than 20 patients at a time, when not less than a thousand needed help.

Tihar Jail was starved of doctors. There were only 12 doctors in May 1993, which worked out to one doctor each for the four prisons in the 8 am to 2 pm shift; one doctor from 2 pm to 10 pm and one doctor for the night shift, from 10 pm to 8 am. The doctor who was on night duty would get a full day off the following day even if he prescribed only tranquillisers during his duty. One doctor was allotted for hospital day duty, and there was the Resident Medical Officer (RMO), who was the overall supervisor. There was only one female doctor for the women prisoners. There was no doctor earmarked to treat those inmates who had to be taken to court. Any doctor on leave meant that there was no doctor for the day for that particular prison. This, in turn, meant no medical attendance and *nomulaiza*, only emergency calls by thousands of agonised inmates. This situation led to arrears for the next day, both in the inspection ward as well as the general prisoners' ward. No single doctor could possibly attend to such huge numbers. Medical services in the jail remained in 'arrears' all the time. Dr Bishambar Das, the then Resident Medical Officer, Tihar, spoke to a visiting press correspondent, which was reported in *Delhi Mid-Day* on June 22, 1993:

Tihar Jail is reeling under an acute shortage of medical staff. In blatant disregard of last year's enquiry report on Tihar, which recommended setting up of proper medical facilities within the jail compound, the jail authorities are functioning with just 11 doctors to look after 8,300 prisoners. In other words, one doctor for 750 prisoners. This situation has persisted for almost seven to eight years now, say serving medical officials. "We have been repeatedly appealing to the administration authorities to give us more medical staff," says Dr Bishambar Das, Resident Medical Officer, Tihar.

He said that as the strength of the inmates increased rapidly, requisitions were sent to the Delhi administration. "But that has all been

in vain because the strength of the present medical team has remained the same while the jail-inmate strength has shot up fourfold," he maintained. The hospital in Jail No 3 has but the basic facilities like X-ray machine, pathology lab, blood and urine testing, etc.

The plan to raise a full-fledged hospital within the premises, another recommendation of the enquiry report, is yet to take off.

Until medical facilities are upgraded, prisoners will continue to be taken out to other general hospitals in the Capital.

The RMO said that the operations of many prisoners too have remained long overdue.

Many of the jail doctors rarely arrived on time, but certainly left earlier than scheduled. As a result, they often ran through some 250 patients in a two-or three-hour period on an average of no more than a few minutes per patient. On occasions, when they had missed OPD for a day, the following day's attendance reached mob proportions. No wonder, incidences of diseases, such as TB, leprosy, scabies and asthma only went from bad to worse.

The attitude of the doctors was apathetic. In the first place, they were essentially inaccessible. Even if one somehow succeeded in gaining access to them, they turned out to be rude and indifferent. They never wore their white coats with name plates, and never prepared any situation report unless directed by court. Whenever a night shift doctor did not turn up, the prison went without one, till panic signals went off. If something serious happened, a judicial enquiry would be ordered by the powers that be, who were, in the first place, responsible for not providing more doctors to the prison.

The doctors themselves were a harassed lot, which probably led to their callousness. They were sometimes threatened with dire consequences by the gangsters — like bodily injury or death for not complying with the latter's demands. The gangsters 'dictated' the information they wished to be written on their medical sheets. Such 'dictats' were obviously for the benefit of securing legal facilities from the courts by exaggeration of the disorders. On the other hand, the doctors too were demanding their price for performing 'favours'. It was their 'discretion' which facilitated bail orders or court detention, based on 'doctored' and 'exaggerated' medical reports. They were

totally lacking in concern and care. Their only real interest was to find out about the family backgrounds of the patients in order to ascertain their paying capacity. They were experts at that. They were more interested in the crime case details than the medical history of their patients. They were known for sending healthy prisoners to the outside hospitals for treatment and kept chronically ill prisoners for treatment in the Central Jail Hospital. They were perfectly willing to reverse their decision, on 'feigned sickness' calls. Gradually, the game became known to the inmates, because the prisoner concerned would usually share this information, such as the price he has paid for his liberty, with his confidants before leaving the prison, for the benefit of others who could also 'buy' such a privilege.

The dishonest doctors used to select a fairly educated convict to be a *munshi*, in the OPD, who would in fact act as a conduit for the flourishing business. Further, minor deals used to be struck at the instance of the convict *munshi*. No one could dare say anything against him. His main work was to identify the 'healthy' paymasters seeking bail on grounds of ill-health, get them introduced to the right doctor and pocket the percentage earned in the bargain. Before introducing an inmate to the doctor, the *munshi* would unerringly judge the genuineness and authenticity of the paymaster. The price would depend upon the financial status and family background of the prisoner — including whether he paid income tax, how much property he had or inherited, how many cars he possessed, and such details. The paymaster would try to project himself as a poor man disclosing half the assets he possessed. The gravity of the crime he committed also determined the price factor as the certificate for a bail would correspondingly rise in value. Sometimes, factors like age, lifestyle, children and wife's affection also influenced the price. Whether he had 'settled' down in the jail or craved for an early release were other determining factors.

A few petitions from prisons will illustrate this aspect of prison

life:

I am ill. I have continuous pain in the stomach. I suffer blackouts. I am spitting blood. Doctors say I need to go to outside hospital, but now, over three months have passed, I have not been sent.

*KKKKK Kalv, prisone Jail 1: June 7, 1993*

I am imprisoned since April 1988. I am a TB patient. I am not getting regular medicines. Milk diet to me in the prison was sanctioned three months ago, but I am not getting it. I went to the court seeking the magistrate's intervention. The court directed me to ask my prison doctor to confirm that I have TB. The doctors here want money to write the certificate. If they get money, they are willing to

*AAAAA Kram Ali, prisone Jail 4: June 14, 1993*

My four molars have decayed. I want them to be extracted and replaced. I could not eat anything for one whole year. I was sent to the hospital only once. There the doctor said that there was no X-ray film, to buy it and bring it. I told him that I was a poor man and in judicial custody. How could I bring it? I went back to the jail hospital and asked the doctor to provide me with the needful. The doctor said that there was no provision. "So you stay as you are."

*PPPPPrrrrrem P akash, prisone Jail 1: June 14, 1993*

I am suffering from severe backbone pain due to which I get fever. I can't eat or sleep. I am fed up of myself. I am poor. It is money which gets referrals. It is always available for the rich, but never for the

*Jamaluddin, prisone Jail 3: June 16, 1993*

These petitions were a direct fallout of the initiatives taken for the redressal of inmates' grievances. It was evident that those who could afford lawyers filed petitions in courts to direct the prison authorities to refer them to medical services outside. It was also evident that nothing happened without the sound backup of muscle power or money, as far as medical services were concerned.

The astounding revelation which literally stunned me was that the RMO's office and the four dispensaries in the four jails kept no worthwhile records detailing items, such as a prisoner's attendance, or his or her ailments, the prescriptions made and the medicines issued. There was no internal audit system; hence, no accountability whatsoever. The entire medical system was sick to the bones. An innovative way of shirking responsibility by the doctors was to just put their initials to important documents and not sign their names in full. This left the authorities guessing as to whose

'calligraphy' it could be. However, the courts hauled up the doctors quite frequently, which engendered bitterness and resentment in them. The doctors, therefore, were a very unhappy lot. On the one hand, they were answerable to the courts and, on the other, faced the threat posed by muscle men and their cohorts inside the prison. Consequently, the doctors tended to fleece the docile and helpless. It would have been incredible if an institution as large as Tihar did not possess a hospital. It did in fact have one in Prison No 3, but had to cater to all the four jails. Evidently such a hospital was itself not in good health. It was also a 'victim' of overcrowding. A few beds with loose nuts and bolts would swing and groan with the movement of the occupants. The walls of the hospital were less black than those of the barracks, which is not saying much. Many prisoners were seen 'rolling' on the floor as the beds were insufficient in number. Beds for the genuinely ailing patient-prisoners were a luxury which too had a price. The prisoners on the beds looked healthier than those 'rolling' on the floor. Toilets of the hospital wards were usually blocked due to scarcity of water. The fluctuation of electricity voltage was quite frequent, which made the function of the X-ray machines difficult. Instead of getting the fluctuation rectified by installing a stabiliser, the doctors preferred to abandon it altogether.

Prisoners from all the four prisons used to come to Central Jail No 3 for treatment. But a majority of them manipulated 'visits' to communicate 'important extortionist' messages to their colleagues. Genuine patient-prisoners of other jails rarely found their names in the referral list to Central Jail Hospital.

Critical medicines were in short supply and poor in quality. Only those prisoners who could afford to dole out adequate amounts of money managed to get their medicines. The position of the RMO himself was a misnomer, since he was non-residential and totally distant. He was supposed to reside within the Tihar Prison complex but instead lived 10 km away from his place of duty. The RMO was never willing to share his residential telephone number with the jail staff lest he be disturbed at night or after duty hours. He exercised

prisoners.

little control over the prison medical officers. According to the prisoners, he was adding to their woes by recommending the purchase of non-effective medicines for reasons best known to himself. He was always seen looking for opportunities for purchasing medicines in bulk irrespective of their utility, even when he knew there was a dearth of funds to purchase even life-saving drugs. But interestingly, the RMO had to push his way through a bureaucratic maze of files to procure emergency drugs. The illness of the inmates, of course, did not wait for the files to move, some      There were around 30 beds in the hospital, and some amount of medical equipment, but the resemblance with a hospital ended there. There was a radiographer on the staff but the X-ray machine remained out of order. A laboratory assistant and the infrastructure for carrying out routine tests could help little in the absence of reagents. An ECG machine and a dental chair were left idle, and sophisticated eye-testing equipment gathered dust in the prison store. It was not the forlorn equipment, however, that gave me a feeling of unreality when I visited the hospital, but the complete absence of figures wearing white coats moving between the beds or sitting in any of the four dispensaries. The hospital had no nurses, I was informed, owing to vacancies which had lapsed because they had not been filled over the years. The convicts themselves doubled up as nurses in the hospital, and represented powerful vested interests. The hospital had no separate kitchen to offer a special medical diet. It had a blanket washer sanctioned by the PWD, which, true to form, had not been installed for years. There was no provision for running water and no facility for prisoners to cart water for themselves. One can only imagine what the levels of hygiene and sanitation must have been. Nevertheless, the gangsters managed to gain entry and use the hospital as a place for leading an easy life with a special diet along with multi-vitamins in order to avoid court appearances by compelling doctors to exaggerate their ailments.

The prison was bereft of any kind of specialists. One wonders

deteriorated, and some died.



what the patients did when problems relating to skin, eye, teeth, orthopaedics, psychiatry and gynaecology arose. A doctor from a Government-run mental hospital used to visit the prison twice a week. But his trips were meant more to provide legal protection to the authorities than to pay attention to the number of mentally ill patients who were left without help.

Within the prison walls, there were 46 children up to the age of five staying with their mothers who were prison inmates. Some were born in jail. There was no child specialist, no immunisation programme for the children, and no night female doctor to attend to them. At night, prisoners looked after themselves. In case of an emergency, the patient was sent out to a nearby hospital outside the prison. With so many children, there was no creche to isolate them even for some time during the day.

A female doctor was available till 2 pm. She was reportedly insensitive and mercenary. Women's special gynaecological needs were ignored unless an emergency situation arose. Any disease more serious than fever or influenza had to be referred to Government hospitals outside the prison. Such treatment entailed added cost for the inmates, but even that never came easily without muscle or money power, as eloquently testified to by the petitions and projected in the illustration on page 40. The Government hospitals outside were also overcrowded and overstrained; hence, even there, proper treatment could not be guaranteed. But some prisoners merely wanted to get out of the claustrophobic confines of the jail for a change of atmosphere. In the process, if they could manage to get admitted, they could earn fringe benefits, such as having their relations stay with them and getting home food. And if they could have their way with the police guards, they could even arrange for      The patients were transported to hospitals outside the prison by a vehicle, faintly resembling an ambulance, which anyone would be shocked to see. This ambulance, too, remained a misnomer, like the RMO. In fact, it was nothing but a rickety skeleton whose maintenance was out of question. This so-called ambulance used to

more facilities.



serve a variety of purposes. Apart from transporting the prisoners from the jail to the hospital, it also transported milk and vegetables from one jail to another. The jail staff also used this ambulance at times as their family car. The driver of the ambulance used to consider this vehicle as his personal property and parked it near his residence during the night. One such contraption did not even have seats. The plight of the infirm and ailing patients, while being transported in such an ambulance — which would shake their entire biological system — can only be imagined. Despite numerous complaints, no replacement was provided because the dignitaries who could sanction a new vehicle felt it was not really necessary. At the root of Tihar's health problems was an inadequate and inefficient infrastructure. The doctors in the jail were not completely under the administrative control of the prison authorities. Matters pertaining to posting and transfer were decided by the Delhi Health Services (DHS), whereas the prison department paid their salaries. The IG (Prisons) wrote the annual confidential report (ACR) only of the RMO, who, in turn, wrote the ACRs of the other doctors. Their reports were then rewritten by the DHS. Such dual control resulted in a total absence of accountability. There was no coordination among the doctors themselves. Besides, the doctors never interacted with the prison staff. The senior and middle-ranking officers rarely ventured into the prison to identify the prisoners who needed medical care. They obviously believed that this job had to be done by the junior staff who should pass on the information to them. In the event of any untoward occurrence, such as a death in custody, the blame could then be placed on the lower level doctors or the junior prison staff. While the junior doctors could usually offer acceptable explanations, the junior prison staff would get suspended. The senior staff, medical and prison usually escaped unscathed by claiming preoccupation with other important responsibilities.

In actual practice, the Prison Administration had effectively left the medical management of the jail to the convicts and high security prisoners. Again the gangsters, as in other aspects of prison life, ruled

the roost. They would go every morning from one ward to the next, listing the prisoners who did not want to attend court. These names were collected along with requisite 'price', and the toughies would then ensure that the doctors issued the necessary medical certificates. I learnt that the staff too used to facilitate this practice, besides making their own recommendations.

The incredible tale of the hospital and its doctors will be incomplete without a description of the less visible and smartly hidden '20 cells', which remained the most gruesome part of Central Jail Hospital located in Prison No 3. Its front gate was always locked and no guard was put on this outer gate. The '20' cells had a secret gate from inside the jail hospital building. It always had a deserted look as if no prisoner was lodged there. The lower ranks of the prison authorities used to keep these '20 cells' inaccessible to any visitor — official or non-official — as also the Superintendent. It is pertinent to mention here that the Jail Superintendents, prior to my joining the Tihar Jail as IG (Prisons), rarely used to visit the jail to see for themselves what was going on in this hell-hole. Either they were totally absent, or visited once or twice in the whole year.

A newly appointed, conscientious Superintendent of the same prison, Tarsem Kumar, conveyed this about these '20 cells':

I joined as Superintendent Jail No 3 on April 6, 1993. On April 7, 1993, I decided to have a round of the jail. My Assistant Superintendent (name withheld but who was later suspended for his vicious performance), advised me not to go inside the jail without full security. I insisted on going inside as I was curious to know how the prisoners live and what the jail looks like. My predecessor did not brief me about the jail even after repeated requests. He only introduced me to an Assistant Superintendent, labelling him as 'loyal', who eventually proved to be exactly the opposite. I went on the round with this 'loyal' Assistant Superintendent. After visiting the Central Jail Hospital, I headed, unknowingly, towards the '20 cells'. Watching me advance in that direction, he exclaimed:

"Where are you going, sir?"

I stopped at once, for his tone gave me a feeling as if I was heading towards some danger.

I asked anxiously: "What is there ahead?"

"Sir, it's better you don't go that side."

"Why?"

"There are '20 cells' ahead."

"20 cells?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's that?"

"Sir, they are the cells where violent, mentally deranged prisoners are lodged."

"Oh! but what is the harm in having a look at them too?"

"No, sir, you should not go there."

"Why?"

"Sir, they can harm you and even inflict injuries."

I was frightened a little but my curiosity mounted. With a let's-see-what-happens attitude, I decided to see the '20 cells' and their inhabitants. I told the Assistant Superintendent firmly: "I want to take a look at these cells, please get the gates opened." A security guard came running with a heavy bunch of keys and opened the door. We went inside the gate and looked around.

I saw prisoners suffering from mental disorders in solitary confinement. They were not released from the cells during daytime unlike the rest of the inmates. Some of the so-called mental prisoners wore nothing except dirty underwears.

"They do not have clothes?" I asked.

"They have, but we don't give them," replied the Assistant Superintendent.

"Why?"

"So that they cannot commit suicide."

"A mad man committing suicide!"

"Yes, sir, these mad men also have brains and recently one of them committed suicide."

These so-called mad men were not only deprived of essential clothing, but also of other necessities, such as slippers, towels or any toiletries. Their eating bowls were worn out. In one of these cells, a broken bowl had some liquid in it. I thought it was dirty water kept over sometime. A convict apprised me that it was liquid *dal*. The *chappatis* they got to eat were thrown in for them from outside. Hardly any one of them could have eaten those. The 'sane' convicts on duty used to laugh at them and also tease them. They would also call them names to derive sadistic pleasure. No wonder that many of them used to groan and cry, "*Ab to chhoddo kanjaro.*" (At least, free us now, you bastards.)

I could certainly feel one thing, that if a normal person is kept in one of these '20 cells' even for a week, he would definitely go insane, not to talk

of a prisoner who had already lost his mental equilibrium.

From what I saw I could not go beyond the '20 cells'.

Discontinuing my round, I came back to my office. For the rest of the day, this encounter was so overpowering that I could not concentrate on my job. When I returned home, I was thoroughly upset. The sight of utter human misery remained imprinted. One question which kept coming back to me was, could humans be put to these extremes? Could humans live like this? Hell might be better than this, I felt.

This Superintendent had joined the prison only three weeks before I did. And within two years of his work, he published a book, *Freedom Behind Bars*. It's a pioneering work which provides an insight into the healing effects of Vipassana meditation on the prisoners.

Only a sensitive man could have produced it. He was the sheet-anchor of our team, which was determined to radically overhaul what we saw.



Medical Disservice  
A Synopsis  
Graph

## 4

*“Life-term” Jailors*

**A**s the days rolled by, I was gradually getting to know the prisoners, but not the jailors, who somehow maintained a distance. They were the ‘dark horses’. When I compared the prisoners to their so-called keepers, I did not find much difference between the two. Many of the jailors at the ground level were unshaven, unkempt and shoddily clad. They did not wear uniforms at all and those who did, stood out as specimens of sheer lack of uniformity’. They sported shoes of diverse kinds and shades; their socks were multicoloured; their belts were not as per specification; their berets did not carry proper badges; and most importantly, they did not display their name plates on their chest pockets.

In winter, they performed their duties wrapped up in different kinds of blankets and mufflers as if they were trying to hide their identity. The overcoats which had been issued to them for official purpose were mostly reserved for social visits outside. During the monsoon, the staff members turned up for duty without raincoats, ensuring excuses for taking shelter and relaxing rather than staying on-the-rounds. Moreover, these ‘dark horses’ would continue to be in the same prison service throughout their career. I was unhappy

because they would continue to determine how the already 'chewed down' prison administration functioned and swallow up whatever little 'good' was left. They were to remain in the same service in the same complex throughout their tenure to complete the 'double life-term'. (Life-term is a punishment sentenced to a prisoner by the court for the rest of his/her life, i.e., till death.) But if his jail conduct is good and he shows reformation, a convict becomes eligible for release by a board known as the Sentence Revising Board (SRB) after completion of 14 years. But a jailor has to complete his full career in the same prison consisting of 30 to 32 years of service, hence I thought the term 'double life-term' would aptly describe their plight.

There was no system in existence which ensured uniform clothing and kit inspection. There was no pressure on the staff to be dressed appropriately as per the rules. In fact, some staff members had been in service for several years but had still not got the official uniform articles issued. I was amazed to discover the ill-maintained, erratic and whimsical system of procuring uniforms. The process of issuing the clothing was so manipulated that only a few officials could benefit. They were kept under wraps. No staff member had any kit card which would specifically indicate the items of clothing issued to each of them or when. In fact, individuals not entitled to certain items of uniform had been sanctioned the same only due to their proximity to the bosses.

The Tihar Jail Administration consisted of Warders, Head Warders, Assistant Superintendents, and Deputy Superintendents. Each of the four Superintendents was head of the respective prisons, accountable to a Deputy Inspector General (DIG) who, in turn, was accountable to the IG. The Head Warders and Warders constituted the real backbone of the security system of the prison. But a majority of them were barely literate. Many of them did not even know how to count properly. Consequently, such persons could not do their primary duty, like taking attendance of the inmates and doing the final headcount (called *ginti* in prison jargon). They had, perforce, to seek the help of literate prisoners called *munshis*.

A few of the Warders were literate and their educational level was up to class ten. Such individuals were drawing lower salaries compared to their matriculate colleagues in equivalent departments. They had sent representations to the Government, the Pay Commission, and to the courts for the removal of the distinction. They demanded equal wages, irrespective of the nature of their job. The method of recruitment of Warders, Head Warders and even Assistant Superintendents was based on 'Direct Approach'. No written test of ability or aptitude formed the basis of such selection. The only governing factor was the 'Recruitment Rules' which probably could have been drafted by a crafty clerk and given concurrence by the higher-ups. The interviewing personnel were none other than the senior officers of the Prison Administration. A less than a five-minute interview could have settled the score either way. 'Direct Approach' usually remained the guiding factor for such 'high level' selection. A few deserving cases also used to get through such 'competitive examinations' but their percentage remained very

The salaries of the staff members were grossly low keeping in view the rising cost of living. Moreover, some staff members had large families to maintain. It would not be wrong to say that their standard of living could not be much better than that of the prisoners. Such persons desperately needed more money. It was not uncommon to discover that they had sublet their government accommodation, or had diverted electricity from the overhead poles and/or had converted their compounds into cattle sheds. They lived amidst unhealthy surroundings amidst heaps of cattle dung all around. Water was scarcely available for even domestic use; and it was stored in crude containers in highly unhygienic conditions. The staff had developed a subculture of their own which bred delinquency and criminal tendencies. The staff housing complex had no security checks due to which many of them (it was reliably known) were visited by released gangsters or relatives of persons inside the jail, all with ulterior motives. Many of the offsprings of

low.

staff families turned wayward and were involved in petty crimes. The local police station had rated the area as 'crime prone'.

The staff members worked in one long single shift, literally staying on call for 24 hours. The prison had no reserves; therefore a siren-call from any of the barracks meant that all off-duty members living in the complex had to rush to duty. The Warders, Head Warders and all others daily put in 12 hours of nonstop duty. The only way they could 'snatch' leave was by providing a medical certificate that the seniors could not ignore. And they did that quite frequently. Therefore, absenteeism was high; so was alcoholism, drug abuse and even domestic violence. Instances of wife-beating were quite frequent in the Tihar residential complex.

The prison had no programme for training its staff on professional grounds. It was seriously short of manpower. At the time of my taking charge, the staff strength was 584. The personnel allotted were meant for 2,273 prisoners and not for almost four times that number. Therefore, the presence of every Warder mattered — at least there would be a human being with eyes and ears, even though. Almost all the staff, belonging to almost all ranks barring a few exceptions, had been accorded penalties both minor and major, or under matters pending (both departmental and criminal) which marked their service records. Except for a few, most of the Deputy Superintendents (jailors) were of doubtful integrity. In other words, such individuals had been declared unreliable, but were still kept posted, that too, in such a sensitive area. Some staff members had undergone long periods of suspension. They had been reinstated by court orders or by the favours of prominent persons. They performed their duties with no respect for anybody. Often they acted with a sense of vengeance on the system to inflict as much harm as they could. A majority of the Deputy Superintendents faced suspension on account of corruption charges. One Deputy Superintendent who was involved in a jail factory scam also happened to misbehave with his senior officer, i.e., the Superintendent of the prison,

and was terminated from service. He was ordered to be taken  
on duty by a  
his mind might be absent.

court order. Still arrogant, he had been declared 'beyond repair' by his seniors. He was usually shabbily dressed, would chew *paan* (betel leaf) all the time, keep the upper buttons of his shirt open, walk with the zigzag gait of a *pucca* (diehard) alcoholic, and was a regular wife-beater in the evenings. His behaviour was a daily drama in the neighbourhood.

Another Deputy Superintendent was alleged to have been instrumental in a prisoner's escape from the jail. He faced suspension for four years and was finally taken back on duty. Still another Deputy Superintendent was charged with helping prisoner-students escape from the prison. One was alleged to be involved in a prison-store scam. One could rarely find a Deputy Superintendent who had a clean service record. All the Deputy Superintendents lived in the same complex area but mutual tolerance was low. Most of them were victims of professional jealousy. Family rivalries were not uncommon in the quarters. But strangely, they would rally together as a cohesive force for any vested cause.

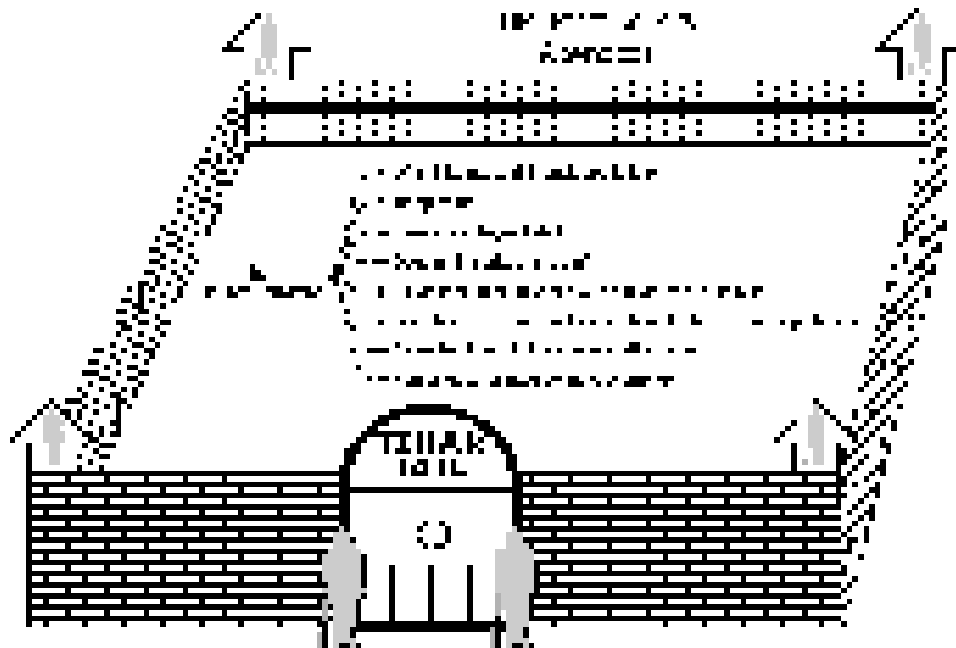
There was obviously no visible motivation to work. Rewards of any kind were alien to the lower level staff; only officers grabbed the goodies. Regular meetings with, or briefings by their seniors, were unheard of. There were no redressal forums for them where they could seek refuge. Facilities for recreation, canteen, library and sports were non-existent either at the workplace or in the residential complex. They served within a very stagnant institution where prisoners could come and go but the staff stayed on for thirty years or more. The only transfer they could get was from one prison to another within the jail complex. During the long hours of the day, they invariably saw only two sets of faces: those of the inmates and those of the cattle at home.

The staff members led a largely insecure life. Officially, they had no risk cover from the threats to their lives which came from the 'kingpins' inside the prison. To ward off the danger, most of them played it safe by making friends with different categories. No wonder their residential complex was streaming with visitors.



Within the prison, the staff members inevitably encountered immoral, rude and violent people who also had no respect for them. The staff members would insult and get insulted; they would resort to violence which begot more violence; and they would threaten their inmates and get threatened in turn. On the whole, their working conditions were tense, acrimonious and unnerving.

All ranks were victims of serious stagnation as far as upward mobility in their careers was concerned. They really had nothing to look forward to. The system had crumbled to such an extent that they themselves had to shell out money even for settling their own accounts, for getting their names on seniority lists, for obtaining their increments, for getting their loans sanctioned and for house allotments. Thus, it was a perpetuation of a subculture of "you scratch my back, I will scratch yours", and "we are all in it together." No one to hate, no one to look up to.



# 5

## *The Inescapable Grip of Corruption*

**I** have visited many countries to familiarise myself with the internal management of prisons there. I got to see high security prisons in the USA, prisons for young offenders in the UK, Japan and the Philippines, women's prisons in the UK and Denmark, juvenile homes in Japan, and many other variations. Nowhere have I seen a prison management so heavily dependent on prisoners as it is in India. In almost all countries abroad, the convicted prisoners went to work stations inside the prison. Some chose to do cleaning and cooking. But no one, repeat, no one, was deputed for security and control duties. For internal correctional programmes, staff was recruited either on contract or on a full-time basis. The quality of these programmes depended not only on the philosophy of each prison management but also on the resources available.

But India is unique. It not only stands out in the world as one of the largest liberal democracies but also runs its prison system on the basis of one of the most antiquated laws — the Prison Act of 1894. Tihar Jail with a population of over 9,700 inmates (this number was reached in 1994), had barely 40 Warders for internal security and management duties, at one particular point of time. This, however, was not even enough for mere security, let alone management.

Interestingly, the archaic Prison Act, dating back to the colonial era, had permitted the deployment of life-term convicts for night-watch duties. The incentive was that their cells would not be locked at night, and they would have the option to move freely. Naturally, they became the privileged section among the prisoners. They would be expected to stand guard, make rounds, and inform the prison sentries of any untoward incident. Gradually, these privileged convicts became a class apart who would bully the other locked-up inmates. Some reports revealed that some of the die-hard convict even chose their young 'male' partners, formally, for satisfying their carnal needs. Soon after I took charge, occurrence of one such incident exposed the system to me.

The convicts acted as conduits for all sorts of corruption taking place in the prison. Those who had been staying there for years knew the 'needs' and the problems of the relatively new undertrials very well, and also the 'readymade' solutions available for a price. Sometimes they resorted to merciless beating at the *chakkar* (Central Administrative Office right inside the prison) in front of their prospective *shikar* (target), airing the message: "If you don't pay up, await the same treatment." The security staff would usually back them up. If the matter got reported to the courts by a 'daredevil' newcomer, the authorities would easily cover it up showing that there has been nothing more than a minor scuffle amongst the prisoners over sharing of water, food or settling of old scores. Rigorous imprisonment pronounced by the court means work must be rendered inside the prison. For instance, cooking in the prison's so-called 'kitchens' with open *tandoors* (Indian earthen ovens) using firewood as fuel. The inmate 'cooks' were daily 'playing with fire' inside what could be literally termed a smoke-chamber. Each prison with a population of about 2,300 had around 70 cooks in its *langar*, a dormitory adjacent to the kitchen where they also stayed. They cooked two meals, one for distribution at noon and the other at 4 pm, and prepared tea twice: morning at 7 am and evening at 5 pm.

Toilets and toilet-cleaning bred their own variety of corruption. Such cleaning was not approved by court judgments or by any other rules or regulations. But in reality the practice was made compulsory. If the existing population of the prison was getting an almost free service of over 240 cooks, the toilets were also getting cleaned by over 200 inmates without draining the official budget. Another 100-odd inmates were roped in for the upkeep of the sprawling jail complex: all officially unpaid. All these depredations were convincingly hidden from the world outside. In reality, such a sordid state of affairs proved to be the cause of a monumental logistics problem and one of the major causes of regular corruption within the prison. Toilets needed to be cleaned frequently due to sustained overcrowding, and inmates had to be 'found' to do this dirty job. Finding suitable 'victims' posed anxieties to both the inmates and the staff. To save the skin, money changed hands both willingly and unwillingly, i.e., by extortion. Inevitably the poor and the weak swept the toilets while the rich and strong watched with satisfaction. The Warder-Supervisor persuaded the inmates to do their job either for fear or threat of violence. The inmate sweepers were 'rewarded' with soap cakes and mustard oil while the money which was collected for their 'voluntary' services was shared by the officials and the prison's 'non-officials' (i.e., the *munshis*). These convicts, usually life-termers undergoing rigorous imprisonment, were allotted their duties by a Constable Warder. This practice was unique to India. I did not come across anything even remotely similar anywhere in the world. One can understand that it is essential to keep toilets clean. But making, or rather forcing, a few to clean a large number of toilets — that too without any adequate financial payment — is a gross violation of human dignity. Landing up in prison is in itself a loss of self-esteem for any individual. Added to that, this plight of being treated as scums must have been unbearable.

The pattern of corruption devised by the staff was comprehensive, and encompassed a wide variety of activities. The 'corrupt' schemes were full of ideas and ingenuity. Being ill-trained,

democratic countries.

or illiterate did not reduce these skills. The 'pull' of money was powerful enough to keep them honed. In fact, the lure of 'filthy lucre' was the most important reason for them to report for duty. The officialdom was fully aware of the external incentives that the staff was mopping up, yet the top brass never showed any interest in increasing official allowances. The dishonest prospered, but the few honest ones suffered. Some were forced to convert their houses into cattle sheds, and to even sublet their small houses in order to meet both ends. The evidence on corruption collected from the inmates by word of mouth, written letters, interviews, public interaction, reports from the staff, and other sources, opens up a whole new world of official criminology'. Deftly hidden behind those huge gates, this corrupt world kept on flourishing.

To understand the complexities of the prevalent corruption, we have to start our journey from the moment a prisoner enters the jail. We can then move on to what happened during the incarceration period till the inmate achieved freedom again.

Every inmate who entered the jail did not get automatically 'housed'. The officials exercised a great deal of discretion as to where and with whom a newcomer should be lodged. The person's fate depended more on his social, economic and political status than his professional and educational qualifications.

Till now, in Tihar Jail in particular and in Indian jails in general, there has been no objective system of lodging prisoners. Only one rule or order could be found in the prison manual, and this pertained to classifying prisoners as class 'B' or class 'C'. In other words, dormitory lodging is known as class 'C', and small cell lodging comes under class 'B'. Legally, there was no further distinction. 'B' class prisoners were entitled to more milk and better (oiled) food. This class distinction was struck down by the Delhi High Court on April 6, 1998, following a Public Interest Litigation. However, the corrosive 'cancer' of

distinction crept in on the basis of status, money power and nuisance value. If the inmate was a 'nonentity', i.e., without money power, political, or criminal backing, he was shifted to a warehouse of a dormitory full of individuals from diverse



backgrounds. He would have to perform all kinds of menial jobs, like cleaning the public toilets. The general practice of lodging by letters of the alphabet in the four prisons of Tihar made an exception to the 'clout class' while others were sorted out like 'mail'. Once inside the 'alphabet prison', specifying the particular ward, barrack (dormitory) or cell in which a newcomer was to be lodged was the prerogative of the Warder and his personal assistant, the non-official *munshi*. Once the men and women had been allotted specific ward/barrack/cell, it depended on the particular inmate's fate who he/she was going to keep company with. However, money power could alter one's fate in deciding the placement at any stage of lodging. Within a barrack or dormitory, one was allotted space to keep one's belongings and also to sleep. There were no beds. While majority of the dormitories were like big platforms, a few of the older built had raised black cemented beds, called *phattas*, 6 feet by 3 feet, and 2 feet high from the ground and were available for a price or favour. None of these was numbered. Usually, what a new inmate got was not a *phatta* but space which fitted the body size between two *phattas*, i.e., the sunken area between two raised platforms. The most dreaded sleeping place was the one located immediately outside the barrack toilet during lock-in time. It was finally the barrack *munshi* who wielded tremendous power. But then many more trials and tribulations lay ahead. One particular threat always loomed large over the inmates. This was the sudden unannounced shifting of individuals. While security rules suggested occasional shifting of the dormitory inmates, such shifting led to intense insecurity and acrimony. When the orders were given for shifting, whoever reached the new destination first occupied the *phatta*, but in the process of running towards it, many dropped essential items of personal property, which would be picked up and 'tucked away' by others. The old and the sick always lagged behind. Often, with such orders, men were heard crying when they got separated from their close relations, who could be a father or a brother or a son. Sometimes, individuals were hand-picked to be shifted. This movement also meant loss of friends with whom

clout and decided the allocations.

relationships had developed. Here again, money changed hands for the transfer of barracks and wards. Shifting was a punishment as well as an incentive based mostly on monetary considerations, but made in the garb of security checks.

Another area where rampant corruption was prevalent was related to visitations, i.e., *mulaqaats* by relatives and friends. Such visitations were permitted to each inmate twice a week. This was an important occasion for the inmates who had visitors. Every visit usually brought not only news for the inmate but also cooked food, clothing, medicines, snacks, confectionery, fruits and even pocket money for buying essentials from the prison canteen. The money received during the visits in cash was converted immediately into coupons in order to check supply of cash money inside the prison. Money could also be directly deposited into the prisoners' property account and withdrawn by a concerned inmate as needed. These were all manual records. Such arrangements work only when the system has an inherent integrity. In practice, it was the opposite. There were few more points to establish the same. A visitor who wanted to visit an inmate had to log his intention at the entry gate located on the outer boundary wall of the prison. The visitors were reportedly encouraged to bribe the person making the entries in the visitors' book for ensuring an obstacle-free passage into the prison. Only two visitors were allowed per inmate. Invariably more than three showed up. Many of them did not have ration cards, an official identity card, without which entry could be refused. But the gatekeeper allowed many of them for obvious reasons. On many occasions, even when it was not their turn, some of the visitors were allowed in. The human factor was rarely the reason, financial incentive was the motivation. Having crossed the first hurdle, entry into the visitors' gallery for the closed visit posed another obstacle. Conversion of cash money into coupons would often mean a cut in percentage for the jail official. The food articles and other items brought along

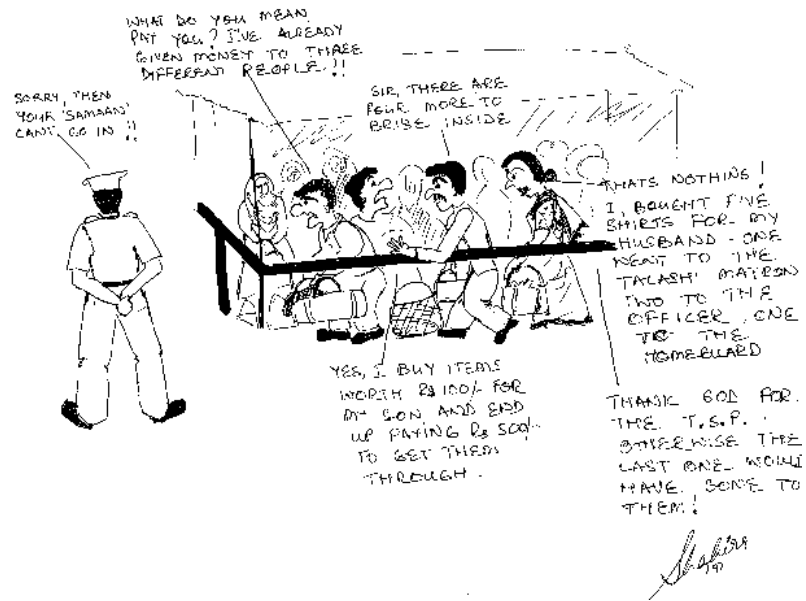
after a frisking check were inserted into a chute  
which deposited it at the other end, for the inmate to collect. As  
the visits were closed in nature, there could be no physical  
contact, therefore,

things had to be sent in impersonally. Due to the large crowd in the visitors' gallery and the presence of huge numbers of inmates on the other side, there was a two-yard gap between the iron grill mesh separating the inmates from the visitors. The chute was the only way to deliver things. Some of the jailors filched almost half the items meant for inmates during internal checking of foodstuffs. One particular incident pertained to dry fruits. It was alleged by the petitioner that the jailor had directed the inmate to leave behind the dry fruits for checking. However, when he received the bag, he felt that at least half of the dry fruits were missing. The chain of thefts did not stop here. Many times it was reported that money given to be deposited in the bank by the inmates never reached its destination. The victims kept on complaining, but nothing happened. The illustration by an inmate on page 60 says it all.

The *mulaqaat* provided a big relief for the inmates because, along with the visitor, food also came and so did certain essential items. The denial of this legitimate visit also created a lot of agony. It was learnt that, at times, names were struck off the call list. These inmates were not called out for visitors because they had failed to gratify the *munshi* or the Warder. However, unauthorised, or unannounced interviews were organised for financial gains or favours to be returned at a later date.

If the staff were using the visitations as an opportunity for making easy money, so were the gangsters. These toughies would ensure that they got extra visitations with a longer duration as compared to others. The staff were afraid to enforce the rules, as the hardened criminals could threaten them and their families with assault or kidnapping. The bullies who belonged to friendly gangs tended to flock together and also eat together. Most of them rarely consumed prison food; they managed to arrange the sequence of their visitations in such a way that the supply chain of home-cooked food was continued. Some members of the staff advised these gangsters to return 'favours' at their individual residences for this luxury.

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Survival centred on food. Although large quantities of it came from home, it required heating, and the prison barracks had no heating arrangements. The prison food was hand-carried from the kitchen to the barracks where inmates lined up to receive their portion. But it was lukewarm. Usually the food turned cold due to delayed arrivals. Therefore, heaters were needed, which were treated as prized possessions for those who could not take insipid cold food. A heater was a banned item; yet it was brought in by the staff for a price. Interestingly, the staff brought the heaters, confiscated them as per rules on orders of the seniors, only to resell them to their inmates at an opportune time. They also allowed selective use of heaters and offered protection, again at a price. For many, heating food was a must. They resorted to any possible means, like burning rolled up newspapers or plastic or even dry *chappatis*. The smoke which spewed out of the barracks or cells provided ample evidence of wrongdoing but then the staff had reasons to look the other way. And the challenge did not stop at heating; it was also necessary to have access to eatables on sale, such as bread, biscuits, salad vegetables, i.e., onions, carrots, radish, tomatoes, lemons and fruits. This was because the prison's mobile canteen meant for the welfare of the prisoners would either sell these items at exorbitant prices, or have a very irregular supply. There was no price list hung on the mobile canteen and it was up to the will of the convicts in charge of the canteen and security staff to charge as much money as they wished. Sometimes, the convict *munshi* would create an artificial scarcity of canteen items the next day just to charge a high price for the same. There was no control on canteen activities by the higher-ups. And more so, the Warder seeking duty in the mobile canteen had to pay a 'price of service' himself to the line officer. This service price used to be for a certain period of time, say, three months. The mighty prisoners purchased the bulk of the items of the mobile canteen and sold them on their own, through an internal

dormitory canteen at a still higher price. Again, the staff took a cut for allowing such canteens to function because these were unauthorised. Every inmate coming into the prison was entitled to some personal



essentials till he or she could provide the same for himself, such as a soap cake, a towel, a *neem datun* (a thin *neem* tree twig which is used for cleaning one's teeth), a postcard to inform one's family if the inmate wanted to write home or to someone else, utensils for food, and blankets. But getting all this was like a *lotto* or 'lottery' in prison jargon. The price for these items would vary from person to person and from one staff posted to another. It was the minority among the staff who did their duty sincerely; others merely granted misplaced favours.

Tihar received daily a large number of drug addicts who were involved in one crime or another. Obviously, such an influx created a pressing demand for drugs inside the prison. The addicts were willing to hawk anything for indulging in their habit. Both inmates and the staff stepped in to meet the supply, and charged heavily for this favour. They would offer either narcotics or diazepam picked up from the dispensaries inside the jail. Some staff members were suspended for drug peddling, but many managed to get away with their activities. Thus, this trade not only survived, but also flourished.

The inmates formed their own security caucuses, particularly the foreign inmates, basically in order to protect their demand and supply network, and succeeded in hoodwinking the authorities. The Warder rank which was closest to the inmates looked the other way. Under such circumstances, how could the doctors and medical staff lag behind? They charged their 'fees' for providing bed rest in the hospital to inmates who wanted to avoid appearance in court, or to create evidence of a medical ailment, or prepare false medical certificates. They also connived in not reporting the loss of medical papers, and sold hospital medicines meant for the prisoners and pocketed the cash. Over the years it was detected that the prison staff pilfered prison property, such as bulbs, soap, wood, gas cylinders, carpets, blankets, phenyl, food rations, milk — the list was inexhaustible. God alone knows who was protecting whom.

One old Head Warder of Prison No 3 was reported to be taking lady's fingers grown in the fields of the jail to his home daily. This

was revealed by a petition of an undertrial of Jail 3. The same petition was forwarded to Tarsem Kumar, the Superintendent of Prison No 3 for the verification of facts. The Superintendent called the Head Warder to his chamber:

“Do you take away lady’s fingers grown in the jail to your home?” “Yes, sir, sometimes.”

“This is not a good practice,” advised the Superintendent.

“I will not repeat it, sir,” assured the Head Warder.

“Since how long you have been carrying these?”

Silence. Looks down.

“This time you are forgiven, but don’t do so in the future.”

“I will not do so, sir.”

There was corruption in every sphere of Jail Administration. Right from the moment the prisoner came to the jail, for every little human need, he/she had to pay the cost till finally released. I had not seen corruption prevail so widely as an accepted norm anywhere else as in Tihar — that too situated in the heart of the Capital of India. It was a case of the ‘fence’ eating the ‘grass’.

The Inescapable Grip of Corruption  
A Synopsis  
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## 6

### *Intervention or Interference*

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oing by what was narrated to me by the staff members and the prisoners, the role of the official management could at best be termed indifferent. It was like that of a distant examiner, never a provider, a participant or someone who inspired an alternative way of living out one's life. During all functions inside the prison which received publicity, the senior officials would invariably be there to be photographed. But if there was an epidemic or a riot, they would only be ordering enquiries, postmortems, suspensions or dismissals.

The prison history, which I was told of, was replete with more sad memories than good ones. The gastroenteritis epidemic in 1988, was still entrenched in the memory of the staff and the prisoners. It broke out due to drinking water from a hand pump which was contaminated by subsoil. There was a serious shortage of potable water in the prisons. After a number of deaths had occurred, a team of officials, I was told, initiated action against the prison staff, without making a simultaneous provision for sufficient water for the inmates. The prisoners and staff recall that only threatening directions were given to the Superintendents to ensure that no prisoner drank water from the hand pumps, and if they did, the

responsibility would lie with the staff. This order should have gone hand in hand with the sanction of at least one water tanker as a part of the establishment which would have enabled the prison authorities to fetch water at any time of the day, from the municipal services outside. Severe paucity of water in the prisons was serious. And the prison was dependent on erratic and expensive water tankers supplied by outside contractors, arranged by the municipal corporation at an exorbitant rate.

Another incident which was still alive in prison memory was of the riot which rocked Tihar Jail in 1990. Nine inmates were killed after a four-hour battle between the prisoners and the security staff. Prisoners used LPG cylinders as bombs against the security guards. In return, the guards opened fire.

The cause of the riot as the prisoners narrated was administrative apathy towards an inmate who had fallen seriously ill during the night. Despite an uproar by the prisoners, no doctor reached the patient for treatment. The inmate died. Worse still, nobody came to remove the dead body till the next morning. The prisoners went berserk. Much later, when ten prisoners were already dead, there was a visit by a 'VIP' who subsequently announced punishment for the guilty. But there was no commitment for improvement in the medical services, which remained the way they were.

And interestingly, during my tenure, even the minimum facilities at hand were attempted to be transferred. Let me explain. The doctors were posted to Tihar Jail by the Delhi Health Service (DHS) with the approval of the Health Secretary, Government of Delhi. Once appointed, each doctor functioned in coordination with the respective Prison Superintendent, under the overall supervision and control of the Deputy Inspector General, and the Inspector General (Prisons). The budget for medical facilities was controlled by the IG (Prisons) who could monitor and appraise the doctors' performance and their commitment levels. This enabled the prison authorities to handle crisis situations. However, lapses did occur. I recollect an incident when one of the prison doctors went berserk and kept on prescribing tuberculosis tablets to all and sundry. Some

alert patients detected this and began to prepare for a riot to assault this particular doctor. We later realised that this doctor was eccentric. He appeared to be fully convinced that his prescription was absolutely right, although his colleagues did not approve of his 'panacea'. We decided to intervene. We removed the doctor from his post; the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) asked him to hand over charge instantly. We pre-empted a crisis situation even though we were one doctor less. We now had only seven doctors for about 9,000 patients, lodged in four independent prisons. Yet this drastic step had to be taken for professional reasons. The ousting of this particular doctor from Tihar was perhaps not viewed kindly. Within a few weeks after this incident, we received a letter from the Secretariat that the medical dispensaries inside Tihar would hereafter fall under the direct supervision of the Delhi Health Services (DHS). The budget would be controlled by the DHS, but the overall responsibility for the smooth functioning of the medical system would continue to rest with the IG (Prisons). The bottomline was that the IG (Prisons) was responsible for all that went wrong, but someone else would control the infrastructure.

In our reply, we stressed the point that responsibility and resources ought to necessarily go together. One could not take away the tools and direct the carpenter to make furniture. In other words, we were offered no opportunity to question but were expected to carry out the orders. Such a decision lacked a basic understanding of challenges inside the prison of Tihar and we could not submit to it. If we had faithfully implemented the written order the repercussions would have been serious. While the prison officials would have reported all cases of patients suffering from a variety of diseases, they would have been helpless in providing treatment because the resources would not have been made available to them. The prison officials would then have to send a SOS every time to the DHS and wait for its response, even in an emergency. If any

mishap occurred, the jail officials, in order to protect their own position, would spend time to produce records of the SOS to the DHS, and the latter would try its best to justify its actions, given the constraints and

limitations it faced. While judicial enquiries would be ordered, the visiting magistrate would record statements and make on-the-spot enquiries, and the staff members, instead of doing their routine work, would be busy preparing their defence, by either creating evidence or destroying it in order to save themselves. Meanwhile prisoners would yell for help with delays in services as a potential ground for riots. For the media this would be enough black news to flash. And Tihar Jail would forever painfully move on the reverse gear. This was no stretch of imagination, but a realistic anticipation. Anticipating the potential crisis, we wrote to the Government, spelling out all the implications of its decision, and asked for categorical clarifications, point by point. We also referred to the Prison Manual which confers total supervisory responsibilities on the Superintendent of the jail. We pointed out that the present executive order was also contrary to the notified rules. Had we wanted to shirk our responsibilities, we would have blindly followed the order. But we, as a team, including the RMO, decided otherwise. We strongly believed that it was our duty to point out the deficiencies and impracticality of the order. We knew that the medical resources, even if inadequate, had a crucial time value. Emergencies just could not wait. They needed immediate response. And as prison managers we could not afford to be mere onlookers; we had to tackle the problems head-on.

Consequently, we requested for a review of this decision. The Government, once confronted with legal and human compulsions, decided to restore *status quo ante*. But to bring about such a situation we had to divert a lot of energy and time which could have been utilised for other productive activities, to which we were committed. Another problem affecting Tihar was that of overcrowding, which was the result of inadequate planning in the past. Despite being reminded time and again about this problem, Tihar Prison was continually



expected to take more people. A stage finally came when we had to say that we could not pack in more, knowing fully well that Tihar was literally bursting at the seams (9,700 now against a

lodging capacity of 2,273).

In my perception, the role of the official management is that of a 'facilitator'. In other words, the official management is present to solve problems and not create new ones, or place obstacles in the way of solutions. It is my firm conviction that if we do not solve problems, we become part of the problem ourselves. In many cases, in the Government service, we become part of the problem ourselves essentially due to the manner in which we choose to function, exercise our authority and utilise our discretion. No rule shuts out options. There is always an element of judicious application. In the prison system, we were not dealing with inanimate objects but highly sensitive real-life situations. When we mechanically and arbitrarily made a decision, only on the basis of precedents, we forgot that not two situations could be fully identical, especially as far as human problems were concerned. What might be beneficial for one individual might not be for another.

During the course of my career, I saw many officers who preferred to concentrate on increasing their 'value' for being 'difficult'. Such officers possessed highly inflated egos which not only hurt the system but also led to its debilitation. Besides, such egos worked only in relation to junior officers. It crumbled before seniors, and especially before political bosses. In such situations the 'difficult' officers willingly became 'doormats'. Any senior could use these officers the way he liked.

Another area in which we received frequent calls was related to granting special favours to known prisoners. Directions were given to the prison officers and staff regarding certain prominent prisoners. They thought they had the privilege to do so. If their 'requests' were turned down, the officer concerned would become vulnerable.

Let me cite a specific example. We had succeeded, to some extent, in converting Tihar Jail into a no-smoking zone. This rule was applicable to all, including the staff. No one was permitted to smoke inside the jail. If anyone did, he was considered a violator. This acted as a deterrent. When I was away at Denmark to attend

the World Social Summit in March 1995, a popular activist farmerleader, Mahendra Singh Tikait, was lodged in Tihar for rioting and assaulting policemen. His entry into Tihar caused considerable concern to his political friends outside. Tihar being a no-smoking zone, the eminent farmers' leader was deprived of his right to smoke his *hukkah* (a long tobacco-smoking pipe), popular with the rural masses in India.

The matter turned serious and, in fact, went up to the highest office. In a meeting of top officials on this subject, the DIG (Prisons) was present. Sarangi, the DIG, was asked as to why he had not allowed Tikait to smoke his *hukkah*, and he replied that he had done so because the Tihar Prison had been declared a no-smoking zone. He was queried as to who had declared it so. Sarangi stated that this was done by the IG (i.e., Kiran Bedi) by a written order and if any inmate was given a special treatment, the written order would have to be either amended or withdrawn. It was suggested by some officers that it would be difficult to amend the order as the Government was legislating an Anti-smoking Bill to ban smoking in all public places, and Tihar fell in that category. Sarangi was accused of not obeying the orders of the Prison Minister. The Chief Minister asked Sarangi if the IG was senior to the Minister. The next day, Tikait was released from jail. His case was 'withdrawn' by the State Government. The highlights of the incident were narrated to me by Sarangi over the telephone, when I called him up from Copenhagen, and reiterated these with details when I resumed duty. I did suggest to him that he could record these developments and prepare an official note. He did not. He had his own reasons. I have all along maintained that discretion in Government service constitutes an act of trust. The supervisory authority is meant to correct a wrong and not wrong a right.

Another instance of overruling a right decision, as we thought, pertained to the reinstatement of a dismissed employee of the jail service. This person (name withheld) had been dismissed from Government service by an IG (Prisons) in the mid-1980s for gross misconduct. After dismissal this employee failed to vacate his

Government accommodation within the Tihar complex. However, he associated himself with local politics and, over a period of time, grew in stature and importance, and became a mobiliser. He openly canvassed and made all efforts to ensure that the employees of the Tihar residential colony voted for his friend. He succeeded. One afternoon, we were informed by a mail order that the person stood. The impact that such an order had on the whole prison staff, and the message it sent to the rank and file, proved to be demoralising. To me and my colleagues in the Prison Administration this 'person' was a liability as he was a full-time messenger. And because of the man's connection, his colleagues allowed him access to places he should not have had. This was despite the orders of Sarangi directing him to stay out of the jail and instead look after the welfare of the residential block only in the hope that he may be able to get some grievances redressed for Tihar. But this official had other intentions. So much for encouraging and ensuring professional management.

reinstated.

Intervention or interference  
A Synopsis  
Graph

## *Security or Insecurity*

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he Tihar Jail complex was endowed with a three-tier security system. The outermost ring comprised the boundary wall and watchtowers of all the four prisons, covering an area of over 120 acres. The second ring comprised the area between the walls of the prisoners' wards and the main wall. The third ring comprised the fixed duties at the ward gates of the barracks of the inmates. Each ward was a walled enclosure of few barracks or group of cells. The number and size of these wards varied. This was because of additional constructions which had taken place over the years since 1958.

During my tenure as IG(Prisons), the outer perimeter was guarded by police force from outside Delhi. It was one battalion on deputation from the Tamil Nadu Security Police (TSP). This force constituted the armed wing and was deployed on the outermost security ring along the high prison walls and on the watchtowers. The second and the third rings were manned by the prison staff. The members of the TSP directly reported to a Commandant deputed from Madras. This Commandant was invariably a young Indian Police Service officer. He did not have an office within the Tihar

premises and worked through remote control. He visited the prison only occasionally. He had six other officers including a Deputy Commandant and Assistant Commandants to assist, all of whom had put in 15 to 25 years in the police force. These officers were further assisted by 10 inspectors, 26 sub-inspectors, 1,100 head constables and 1,016 constables.

The entire battalion, which consisted of over 1,200 men, did not stay on the Tihar premises. They had pitched their tents about 20km away from Tihar on a piece of land, temporarily given to them by the Delhi Police Headquarters, ever since they had been posted to look after Tihar's security (in the mid-1980s). The cost of their deployment was drawn from the Delhi Police budget. The expenditure on the members of this battalion was truly exorbitant. They wasted a lot of time and fuel by travelling. Tihar premises had enough space to house them. But they wanted to retain a foothold on the Delhi Police land even if it meant compromising on the real purpose for which they were posted in Delhi.

The TSP members hailed from South India. Hardly any of them knew Hindi. Only the officers could speak English. Their diet was different from that of their North Indian counterparts and their culture, habits and peculiarities were strikingly dissimilar. Moreover, the TSP followed their own regimen regarding training, use of weapons and change of duties. All these factors contributed to their alienation. One distinct drawback stemming from this alienation was the lack of communication with the jail staff. Such communication constituted an integral part of Prison Administration. Once in three years a whole battalion, as per policy, moved out and was replaced by a new one. During this three-year posting, negative traits such as indiscipline, unwanted relationships and even psychological problems were noticed. There were confirmed reports that some TSP personnel had borrowed money from one of the most notorious Tihar inmates, Charles Sobhraj, who had been in prison as an unconvicted prisoner for over 14 years. Such a scenario definitely did not augur well as far as security was concerned.

The TSP personnel were in charge of perimeter security and for keeping watch on the activities inside the prison from their watchtowers outside the prison through a spiral staircase which the occupant could lock from within. Their shifts changed every two hours so that the person on duty could remain alert and vigilant. Yet there were occasional instances of a guard switching off the floodlights to avoid attracting mosquitoes or turning around the light near his post so that he could take a nap. One such nap resulted in an escape of an undertrial prisoner named Sagar Haldhar, who sneaked out from right under the nose of the security men at the watchtower. An inmate whose father was an alcoholic was desperate to see his minor sister when he heard that his mother had died. The TSP personnel were relaxing during the night after switching off the high-powered lights of the watchtower over Haldhar's ward.

The physical condition of these watchtowers was pathetic. The agency responsible for their maintenance was the familiar PWD. The railings around the watchtower were crumbling, and the staircase was merely a skeleton of a structure with the concrete filling having fallen off at many places. The power points on the staircase had not been earthed and, during the rainy season, the possibility of electrocution could not be discounted. The TSP men obviously had lodged complaints about these abysmal conditions but to no avail. Guarding the inner perimeter was the duty of the Delhi jail cadre. The Warders who were entrusted with the responsibility of taking care of the wards, due to severe shortage of staff, ended up being on night duty daily for weeks together from 10 pm to 6 am. However, during random night checks (conducted very rarely), most of the staff members were found asleep. Each ward ought to have been manned by at least two Warders, one inside the compound and the other outside. However, most of the time, there was only one Warden; sometimes he had to look after a few wards together due to an acute shortage of



manpower. Thus, getting relief during nightshift was simply out of the question.

All the four prisons, with over 8,000 inmates, were at times left under the supervision of one Head Warder and, at the most, one

Assistant Superintendent. There was no provision for a gazetted officer to be on duty during the night. In fact, the night duty officer was of a very low rank and the responsibility of the entire prison for the night devolved upon him. According to the rules, one Deputy Superintendent had to be on duty all the twenty-four hours. However, a single individual could not fulfil this stipulation. There should have been at least four Deputy Superintendents approximately to share the duties on a rotation basis. Instead, there was only one Deputy Superintendent who reported for duty at 6 am, mainly to order the opening of the prison. After this he would go back home and return by 9 am. He would then order an afternoon closure about 1 pm and the final closure at 6 pm. In fact, the rule was to open at sunrise and close at sunset. After completing all the paperwork, recording the entries of new inmates, ensuring the correct release of those whose orders had arrived and ordering the closure of the prison, the officer was free to leave for home around 9 pm. Therefore, how could the same Deputy Superintendent possibly come back for night duty after slogging for over 15 hours? Due to the absence of proper supervision at night, Tihar's nocturnal activities never came to light. Unauthorised interviews were given or visitations allowed; prohibited articles were smuggled in; and forced homosexuality and sexual abuse became routine affairs.

In Tihar, all book entries related to security were done manually. The records, written laboriously by hand, were mostly maintained by Warders who were not well educated. Since their number was inadequate, literate convicts did the clerical work. Life-termers who were better educated either volunteered their services or were compelled to work, depending on the compulsions of the situation. Due to the presence of convicts in the record and administrative sections, a nexus inevitably developed between those 'in the know' and those who wanted information on confidential matters. All goings-on as well as policy amendments and orders which

arrived in the Superintendent's office reached the entire prison population even before the Superintendent had access to them. The Superintendent's office was located within the administrative block

where the convicts were employed for secretarial and other duties. Infact, all the water-carriers and peons on the Superintendent's staff were 'life-termers' who meticulously observed the nature of activities in his office. These vigilant insiders knew exactly who visited the Superintendent's office, the purpose for which they came, and what transpired during the meeting. Sometimes, many of these convict-turned-clerks or peons charged money from the inmates for alerting them, or for providing them with vital information. The security was virtually compromised in the prison everyday. Replacement of this system would only be at a cost to the public exchequer which was Tihar Jail's one concession to modernisation was that of close circuit monitors which had been installed in the Superintendent's office in all the four prisons with seven cameras each to watch the activities of the prisoners and visitors alike. One of the cameras was focused on the *deodhi*, i.e., the space between the two big iron gates at the entrance, the other, just outside the *deodhi* and still another at the space where interviews of the prisoners with their relatives and friends took place. The rest of the four cameras were focused on the internal precincts of the prison. None of the cameras was focused on the wards or barracks or even at the *chakkar* where crucial activities went on. The cameras projected the images on a 21-inch television screen inside the Superintendent's office. He had the option to see the proceedings live, or else he could use the recording facility and watch the film later. The quality of the cameras, their maintenance and their end use were nothing short of dismal. They were mere showpieces. Most of the cameras were the rest houses of sparrows and pigeons with their nests visible from outside. In reply to questions in the Parliament, the respondents claimed that the video equipment in Tihar consisted of state-of-the-art gadgets and more such equipment was needed all over the jail. However, for want of resources, this need was still 'under consideration'. Later on, it was reported to me that these close circuit TVs were purchased hurriedly even when it was stated that the objectives could hardly be achieved.

never evaluated.

Another major security lapse pertained to identity cards for individual prisoners. There were thousands of inmates inside; moreover hundreds came in and went out daily. But, there was no photo identity system. Thumb impressions were taken during entry and exit. An age-old method of identifying individuals by body marks was prevalent during the entry. If these marks matched those of to-be-released inmates, the staff set them free. The prison storehouse was a dumping ground of thousands of records. The chances of retrieval of any specific document was very remote. The storehouse of records had proved beneficial for other life forms, like ants, rats and snakes, acting as deterrents to human entry.

Interestingly, due to the accumulation of huge volumes of manual records, court warrants, invariably worn out, were misplaced. On queries from the courts of whether a particular person was inside the jail or not, sometimes even if he was, the prison authorities reported 'not here'. Later, to their horror, the authorities found him there. When informed of this 'find', the courts would haul up the Superintendent and severely reprimand him. The Superintendents of Tihar Jail were regular visitors to the courts because of these frequent botch-ups. They were a harassed lot. Physical headcounts and name verifications were often resorted to avoid such blunders. But the entire process involved tremendous human effort. Computers came to most Indian institutions and offices during the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's tenure in the 1980s. But Tihar, the largest prison in the Asia-Pacific region, was not destined to get them. The jail staff did not seem to like the idea of computerisation at all, for this would have meant fresh learning and new work.

A totally rudimentary security system prevailed. Yet there was a tremendous hue and cry in the name of security. No researcher opting for research work in Tihar was allowed inside, due to reasons of security, though he or she could have been of enormous help by highlighting a particular emerging problem, which, if solved meticulously, could have avoided major mishaps.

this electronic marvel till 1994.

I vividly remember the day when I had gone to see the IG(Prisons) in 1989-90. I was working on a thesis, 'Substance Abuse and Criminality'. Since the prison had a large number of inmates who were both addicts and involved in crime at the same time, I thought if I could have his permission to interview them, it would spare me the effort to go from house to house tracing such individuals. Further, there would be a straight record of both their medical history and criminal cases right here, which would be professionally acceptable for research. But my application given to the then IG(Prisons) personally, did not get even an acknowledgement. I redesigned my research project and completed my doctorate but without Tihar.



Security or Insecurity  
A Synopsis  
Graph

## *Media Spotlight: Out of Focus, Out of Bounds*

*T*

ihar stayed in the headlines, whenever there was a riot, an escape, a death, an epidemic, or an extortion racket. As far as the media was concerned, the prison was out of bounds for its representatives, not because of any law or statute, but because the official system decreed it so. The Prison Administration obviously wanted to keep away certain goings-on from public scrutiny, and this state of affairs coerced the investigative journalists to first snoop around and then swoop down on the news to spice it up with the required *masala* usually assembled from different sources, to make it newsworthy for the public. Stories which had substantial evidence raised issues which put the administration on the defensive and cost the Government a great deal of embarrassment. Such expositions activated public interest groups and the courts.

The prison authorities did their utmost to maintain the shroud of secrecy over Tihar. Whenever they sensed a threat of revelation, they promptly pre-empted the journalists and ordered a judicial or departmental enquiry (or both) into the incident. While the media on its part felt that it had performed a service to the society with

these exposures, the outside community was fed with information which was usually distressing. Such information regularly depicted the prison system as 'evil', beyond correction and redemption despite the 'occasional efforts' made by the Government. The role the media played had some very negative consequences: (a) It made the community distance itself from the system in general, and individuals in particular; (b) It made the prisoners inside the system subconsciously mould themselves in the image of incorrigible outcasts; and (c) It relegated prison service to an ignominious position, branding it as an agency only for punishment, in which no individual with a choice would serve.

Those who were part of the jail cadre, and had no other option open to them, became immune to any sort of enquiries, for they knew that they were irreplaceable and indispensable. They also mastered the art of ensuring their protection by removing or creating evidence, depending on the demands of the situation. In reality, media reporting and the sensationalism proved to be 'flashes in the pan', as far as the prison officials were concerned. For them it was business as usual. Nevertheless, whenever any scandal rocked Tihar, the Government machinery tried its best to assert power.

While the media gurus looked askance at the Indian prison system, other 'watchdog' organisations, such as Amnesty International, PUCL (People's Union for Civil Liberties) and PUDR (People's Union for Democratic Rights) and even the MEA (Ministry of External Affairs) evinced keen interest in the goings-on at Tihar, each with its own reasons. While the 'watchdog' agencies viewed Tihar from the human rights (violation) angle, the MEA's objective was to defend the jail scenario in the foreign media as many foreign inmates were lodged there and Indian jail news travelled. Tihar had developed a tradition of discretionary and discriminatory dissemination of news. I was informed that those media persons who were not 'friends' of the prison officials were not given access to Tihar at all. To gain entry into Tihar, they had to seek court orders or permission from the Union Government, both of

abroad.

which were equally difficult to get. For the 'friendly' variety of journalists mere verbal communication was enough, and they were duly escorted into Tihar. The top brass knew that such 'reliable' types would not 'embarrass' them and they would write 'safe' stories.

To beat the system, an ace investigative journalist, Ashwini Sarin of *The Indian Express*, got himself arrested on April 18, 1979, and was duly sent to Tihar Jail. He wrote a first-hand account of all that he saw, which was more than an eye-opener. It was a rather explosive exposé running into a five-part series, titled, *Getting Into Tihar* :

I still shudder to recall the experience. "Never again," I prayed as I stepped into the waiting taxi on the night of April 20 (10.30 pm to be precise): after my release from Delhi's Tihar Jail. I had been lodged there two days earlier charged with disorderly behaviour in a public place under the influence of alcohol.

"A day more here and I would have turned mad," I told B. M. Sinha, my Chief Reporter, who came to take me home from an assignment which turned out to be something I had not bargained for.

The idea was to know at first-hand what exactly it means to be an undertrial in Tihar Jail. Our earlier efforts to penetrate the secrecy behind the high walls through official and other sources had failed.

I was to get myself arrested on a trumped up charge and then refuse bail.

My first effort to create an unruly scene, without consuming liquor, at the Delhi-Haryana border on April 17 was futile. A burly police sub-inspector gave me a long lecture on cultivating good habits. "You seem to come from a good family," he said. "Care for their honour if not your own." He hailed a taxi and put me in with instruction to the driver to 'unload' me safely at my house.

I left the taxi at Kalkaji, tipped the driver and took a bus home.

The next day, April 18, I left home after a hearty breakfast of boiled eggs and toast. "Have your fill because there will be little to eat for the next three days," Mr Sinha cautioned me. About 11.30 am we took a taxi and headed towards Badarpur. The arrangement was that Sinha would shadow me after my arrest.

This time I chose a spot very near the Badarpur Police Station. I abused a shopkeeper with an empty beer bottle in one hand and using the other to stop the traffic trying to enter the old Badarpur settlement from

the historic Agra Gate side. My torn, faded jeans and the ageing checkshirt with the upper two buttons missing suited my role nicely.

The word soon reached the police station and within minutes I was dragged into it. The old lanky sub-inspector and the baton-wielding constable were not too rough. Sinha was watching from a distance. They put me under arrest. Within half an hour the papers charging me under Sections 93 and 97 of the Delhi Police Act were ready. A police pick-up took me to the magistrate who remanded me to jail custody till Monday, April 28, if I failed to produce a bail bond. The court allowed my application that I be allowed to take Rs 20 to jail.

Outside, some touts offered to get me out on bail. "This is a very minor offence. Why are you spending five days in jail? I will get you bail for 20 rupees," one said. I thanked him as the cops took me to the lockup room of Patiala House.

Two armed cops, Ranjit Singh and Raghubir Sharma, frisked me roughly with a shower of choice abuse. One of them, after counting the two ten-rupees notes repeatedly, put the money back in my pocket with an endearing pat on my back. The other one opened the lockup door and I was in.

Outside another constable was heard arguing with Sinha about my food. After some time someone called out, "*Hai Koi Ashwini Kumar L. C. Sarin Ka* (Is there any Ashwini Kumar, son of L. C. Sarin?). I came close to the heavy iron door when the constable hurriedly handed over something wrapped in newspaper. I opened it and found four *chappatis*, stale and dry.

Sinha later told me that he had paid two rupees for the meal which I never ate.

Inside the lockup, not more than 10 feet by 15 feet and stinking like an overcrowded third class railway compartment, I found myself among 32 others.

In 1993, Tihar was no different.

The media investigators had other smart ways of combating the system. They would interview the prisoners in whom they were interested when they went to attend hearings at court. Here, it was not difficult to get around the inmates in police custody.

Such a reprehensible state of affairs created a fertile ground for certain prisoners and officials within the jail for the 'sale' of news. They also served as agents for scoops. While at times the underlying objective behind exposure was noble, nobility was not invariably the

sole objective. Other nefarious factors were involved, which indicated that the media's role was not purely constructive. At times, it was used by interested groups and persons to defame either the system or certain individuals, to settle scores, or to derive sadistic pleasure. Sometimes, the media 'exposures' threw the prison system out of gear, and undermined its working. More often than not, the media carried a 'one-time' story, with no further scope for clarifications or rejoinders.

More obviously than not, Tihar was 'officially' kept out of reach of the media for fear of exposure. The fear was induced due to the hostile relationship that existed between the two, one craving to know something by 'uncovering' while the other forcefully 'covering' it. And the 'security' was such a multi-functional and multidimensional 'phenomenon' that it was used for all 'reasons' where reasoning stopped. 'Security' and 'secret' were, perhaps, two words which kept Tihar away from social scientists, researchers and media.

On my daily jail visits, I subconsciously used to wonder as to what was so secretive about Tihar. In an institutional management, keeping security ought not to lead to gagging or throttling of the organisation. As I understood, Tihar was a correctional institute. Should it have been kept shrouded even for the wrong reasons — excessive overcrowding, inadequate medical system, languishing under trials, near absence of civic services, outdated kitchens, etc.? Should it not have provided visibility and access to certain areas for community audit? Thereafter, should it merely inform, or should it create a system backed up by an environment which permits and welcomes a visual audit?

Till I saw the prison myself, I never understood it. If this is how it was with me, what could I expect from 'others'? And who were the 'others' for the prison system? They were the inside and outside people the whole society which sends in 'offenders' and receives and absorbs the released ones. Therefore, should the organisation be left at the mercy of 'selected', 'isolated', 'erratic' and 'motivated'?

information systems? Or should the society not have a right to credible channels of communication which are professional and perceptive?

I wondered whether there was a vested interest in perpetuation of ignorance? Or was it the fear of exposure of a closed system which was the main reason for keeping information systems at bay? But the consequences were all there to be seen.

The challenge before us was, what did we want the prison as an institution to be? Isolated, shrouded and unaudited? Or participative, contributory and socially audited? We made our decisions... .



Media Spotlight: Out of Focus, Out of Bounds  
A Synopsis  
Graph

## 9

## *Women Prisoners: An Endangered Species*

**I**ndian society has been a victim of an overpowering dichotomy as far as gender is concerned. The most degrading and dehumanising aspects of such a dichotomy was manifested in Tihar Jail. Here, women prisoners were subjected to the most humiliating experiences, which robbed them of what little dignity and self-respect they reached the prison with. It must be considered some sort of a miracle that these women managed to cling on to their sanity, despite the overwhelming odds they faced.

In Tihar, women prisoners, like their male counterparts, were victims of overcrowding. Around 280 women were herded into a place with a sanctioned capacity for 60. Only 20 of this lot had been convicted; the rest were under trials. There were 40 children, including newborns and infants. The prison rules permit children up to the age of five to stay with their mothers in jail. Huddled together with their mothers, these children had become an integral part of the prison population.

A majority of women inmates landed up in the prison for committing crimes, like theft, drug trafficking, murder, atrocities

against other women, swindling and prostitution. A few of them had been arrested for indulging in terrorist activities. The foreign women were imprisoned primarily for drug trafficking offences. Although these foreign women hailed from almost all parts of the world, they managed to maintain a reasonable degree of harmony amongst themselves within the sordid confines of the prison. The foreigners were kept away from their Indian counterparts in relatively small square cells of eight feet in length and breadth; the latter were allotted spaces in the dormitories of 40 feet by 50 feet, along with their children.

Outsiders could gain some understanding of the grim and forbidding atmosphere of the prison if they heard the mind-boggling tales of Tihar Jail narrated by some of the women prisoners. Here are some verbatim reports of women whose names have been withheld. The reports may seem to be disjointed and rambling, but that's how they are. One particularly agonised woman poured her heart out on tape thus:

I came here on October 2, 1990, three days before the big riot that took place in the jail on October 5. It started from the *langar*. This was a few days before Diwali and I was new. I was arrested for a narcotics offence. The police concocted a long story and fabricated the evidence so that I could be arrested.

When the siren went off (on the day of the riot), at about 10 or 11 in the morning, they (the jailors) locked us all up. There were about 200 of us. We could hear noises like the walls crumbling and the matrons shouting, "The men have reached." The woman Assistant Superintendent (name withheld) those days always acted very mean; the men were looking for her, so she hid herself in the toilet. She was always mean and constantly demanding money from the women prisoners. So the women prisoners were also very annoyed with her. A man had died. He was serving a life-term and used to work hard in the *langar*. The men who were rioting had plans to escape and they were coming to the women's ward to take their mothers, wives or sisters with them. So the women too were yelling and screaming. That was a serious mistake the rioters made because the authorities could turn things around and claim that the prisoners had come there to assault and molest the women prisoners.

The rioters took the keys of the prison from the staff and then proceeded to open the locks of the women's barracks. They had got the keys from the Head Warder (name withheld). They abused the headmatron though they did not manhandle her. We then saw the riot police coming and the open compound where we used to have daily prayers become a battlefield, and the riot police started shooting. Dead bodies were strewn everywhere. The Deputy Superintendent (name withheld) was among those shooting at the prisoners. Since I was new, I did not know or recognise many officers but I believe the shooting was started by... (name withheld). A British prisoner, Michael, rushed to our ward to protect the foreign women. He locked us up in a separate cell and positioned himself outside. An African had also joined the mob of rioters. He and a Frenchman were beaten very badly. They broke the Frenchman's arms. He lost his senses and became crazy afterwards. His name was Christian Joseph. His arms were twisted and he always remained dirty and unkempt. I think his plaster was applied wrongly and that is how his arms got twisted. Nobody would clean or dress his wounds. He is still in the prison as a convict. (To the best of my knowledge the person is dead. He died while still in judicial custody.)

All the men were kept locked in for three days. The next thing we heard, the prison authorities had released a statement to the Press saying that the men prisoners had attacked the women's barracks because they had wanted to rape the women. They made a similar accusation about Michael who had come to protect the women. They said that he had gone to the women's ward so that he could take a woman called Helen to another room for his pleasure. This is absolute rubbish. Imagine all this happening at a time when shooting was already going on and people were dying.

When there was an enquiry, they would not allow anybody to speak and locked up everybody. If anybody dared to talk, he would be beaten up and severely punished. It was horrible. Even the medical side was so bad. Several people died because the doctors were not there. I remember one day an old Sansi woman died in the ward and another was very ill and needed to go to a hospital. This happened at midnight and no doctor appeared till afternoon the next day. They said it was the second Saturday of the month, so no doctor was available. They wanted us to go to the lockup. I refused to go to the lockup till a doctor came to attend to the sick woman. All the other women then joined me in voicing a demand for a doctor. They told me to mind my own business. But we were doing exactly that because any of us might be seriously ill and die for want of medical attention. I was put up for punishment before the Superintendent the

next day. I admitted before him that I had refused to go to the lockup because it was a matter of life and death, and if I had not done that, nobody would have listened. The punishment imposed was that I would have no visitors from outside. I was not expecting visitors anyway, so I told them to go ahead and confirm the punishment.

The Superintendent (name withheld) was very unreasonable at times. He used to lock us up by the inner door of the cell, denying access even to the little courtyard within the cell. It was hell. The lights would go off and there would be four or five women in an eight feet by eight feet cell which also included the toilet. The situation improved only when K. R. Kishore replaced the present incumbent (name withheld) as the Superintendent. He was a refreshing change for us. The earlier Superintendent used to come sneaking only once in a while in the middle of the night and would shout at the matrons if he caught them talking to any of the prisoners. Many of the Deputy Superintendents too had the same attitude. The staff was only meant to extort money from the prisoners. There were some horrible people. One of them was a man by the name of ... (name withheld). He is gone now. He used to come into the ward and paw the women. Some women who were in prostitution didn't mind, perhaps even enjoyed it. He was also in the habit of calling some of the women prisoners to his office even in the daytime.

No one reported against him. Though the then Superintendent was very strict and would not have liked such things to happen he did not know what exactly was going on. Some of the officers who are still in the prison behaved very badly. ... (name withheld) is one of them. He was a bad man. He used to talk very harshly to the prisoners. Another horrible person was ... (name withheld). He used to have a *bindi* (round dot) on his forehead and so we used to call him *Bindiwala*. He was a major extorter of money from us. One day, one of the women prisoners was lighting *achulah* (earthen stove) in her cell when he came. The lighting of *chulahs* in the barracks was not allowed those days also, but the staff allowed it as long as they got money or something to eat. They would come and order the women prisoners to make tea for them.

Maria, a Spanish prisoner, had a *chulah* in her room and one day she had it lit when *Bindiwala* came. He made a big fuss about it and shouted at her. She apologised. He looked around and seeing there was no one there, asked her to give him a kiss. She ran away screaming, and then *Bindiwala* also ran away. This happened in

1991, and shows the attitude of the prison officers towards the women prisoners. Before I came, I believe there was a prisoner called Dumdum who used to arrange prostitutes for the staff members and others. Even after her release she

continued to provide this service and that is why the officers were scared of her. She could do whatever she wanted.

The matrons were also afraid of Dumdum. She used to deal in drugs, alcohol, women and stolen property. She was a pickpocket and a thief. She would share the expensive saris and other stolen articles with the staff, so they were happy and never said anything to her even if she got drunk. If staff members tried to discipline her, she would beat them. When someone from her group came to the prison, they would have nothing (to eat) and she would give them tea and food. Then she used to make them work for her, to wash her clothes and dishes, give her a massage, etc. She also demanded and got a share of what they got from the *mulaqaat*. The male officers used to make frequent visits to the women's ward, often without reason. They would come and call anybody. Dumdum would be clad in her undergarments in their presence, and they would openly demand money from her. One of the Assistant Superintendents also used to do the same. Another Assistant Superintendent conducted herself much better during the first month of her posting but was suspended. Five of us, Glory, Chakki, two Muslim girls and I were staying in Barrack No 1. The husband of one of the Muslim girls had four wives and used them all for smuggling gold. When this man came for *mulaqaat*, he would give money to smuggle things which were forbidden. The Muslim girl would also arrange to meet her husband in hospital. She then started going out with the husband and boasting about it. (Certain unsavoury incidents took place which led to a lot of bitterness and acrimony.) We objected to these incidents and made a lot of noise. Glory said she was going to tell everybody about it, so the woman Assistant Superintendent beat her up. Even Maria and myself were not spared. It was inhuman because Glory's leg was broken. The same officer brought Dumdum's women and a male *lambardar* (errand boy with a specific responsibility) to beat her but she broke their stick in two. While this merciless assault was going on, Darshan Lal, the Deputy Superintendent, came along and asked us what had happened. We were all crying and told him what had happened. He went and reported to the Superintendent. Later on the same woman officer abused us vulgarly and suggested that I was having an affair with Darshan Lal who was like a father to us. The Superintendent then suspended the woman officer. She used to threaten me that she would get my 'B' category cancelled and I used to tell her she can't because it was given by the court. I also refused to give her any money so she hated me and

Maria. We never paid her anything while other foreign inmates used to bribe her to arrange meetings for them on Saturdays and holidays even though Saturday meetings were meant to be



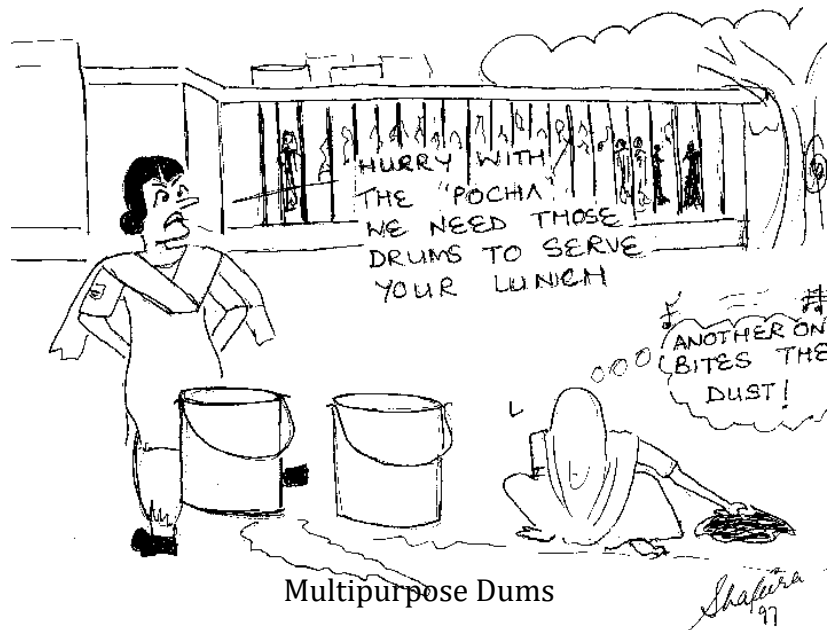
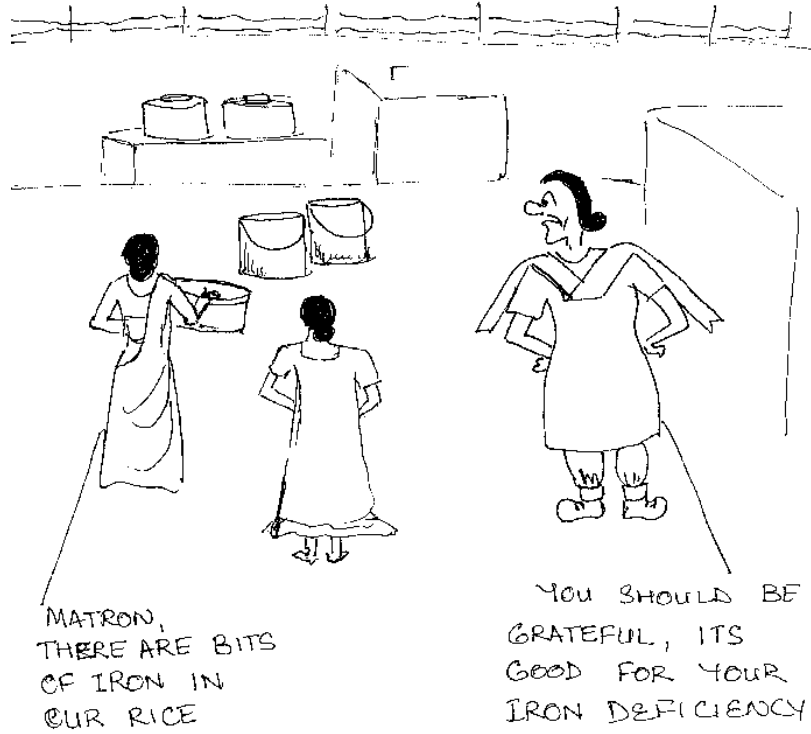
only for blood relations; money made the blood relationships and she arranged the meetings even between jail inmates.

She also acted as a go-between for prisoners who were jailed for terrorist acts. One day, the women imprisoned for similar acts tried to assault a meek woman convict and I intervened. Meanwhile, a Warden named Anand came by. He was a nice man and I asked him to take me to the Superintendent. The Superintendent, K. R. Kishore, heard me and then asked what I thought was the reason for the terrorist inmates behaving in this manner. I told him the two reasons were that they were paying the same woman officer and were keeping the other staff in check by boasting about their proximity outside to some important persons. He immediately ordered those prisoners to be separated and changed the Assistant Superintendent. In the women's ward, a sort of Mafia ruled the roost. These gangsters were extorting money from people with big cases who had big money with which they bribed the staff to manipulate visitations so that they could have *mulaqaats* every day. They could buy everything since they were able to pay for it. We never attended any prison congregation. The food in the prison was very bad. The rag which was used for mopping the floors with, and left lying out in the courtyard for hours, was used for bringing the *chappatis* in. This was a routine practice. One day the rice served to us contained pieces of rusted wire. See two illustrations on page 94. I insisted that this must not be taken away and asked a Warden to call the duty officer. She did not want to call him and wanted the rice to be thrown away but I told her if she didn't I would take the matter to court. The women once did manage to smuggle some bad *chappatis* to the court, though.

Magisterial inspection of the prison used to take place once a month. At that time all the prisoners used to be locked up. Only one or two prisoners were brought out to speak to the magistrate. Since the prison food was so bad, the prisoners had to light *chulahs* to supplement their dietary needs. They would get vegetables, etc., through the staff for which they charged triple the market price. I had no visitors, and never had any money, so I helped others to cook to earn a little money, or to be able to share their food. Poonam, another inmate, and I used to write applications for the prisoners and charged five rupees per application. This money made it possible for us to buy essential toilet items.

The lawyers were on their own moneymaking trip. The free legal aid lawyer might as well not have been there. She was such a useless lawyer. The lawyer I engaged duped me after charging an enormous amount of money. He had assured me that he would get me bailed out. When I attended court I realised to my horror that he had made an application in

### IIIIrrrrroooooon in Rice



the court to summon all my witnesses. So, instead of trying for a speedy disposal of my case, he was suggesting a fresh trial. He had also lied to me about moving the high court to grant me bail. His game plan of duping me for more money thus came to light and I dissociated myself from him. Shortly after that I was honourably acquitted by the court of S. M. Aggarwal. One of the prisoners who had been released earlier helped me with the money to pay for the legal expenses. Had it not been for her, I would still have been in jail.

And here is an account from the other side of the fence — a woman officer's recorded conversation:

I have been in service for over six years and have seen the conditions in the women's ward of Tihar Jail from the closest quarters possible. There was no work for women and they would waste the whole day quarrelling among themselves over trifles. Their idle minds were truly the devil's workshop. I spent most of my time resolving these petty disputes at my level because I did not want them to get into trouble over nothing. I also felt very sorry for their children whose age ranged from babes in arms to infants and four-years-old. There were no facilities for special food for them. After considerable effort I was able to arrange *khichri* (a kind of rice and vegetable broth) for the little ones. I felt so concerned for them that sometimes I used to bring fruits for them from my home.

There were no educational facilities for either women or children. I would sometimes overhear one of the children say, "Tomorrow is our court date, perhaps we will be convicted." I used to feel really bad to hear these tiny tots speak the language of the prison. I used to get emotional and mourn the loss of their childhood and their innocence. I often wondered what I could do for them. I discussed this matter with my Superintendent and got some money from him to buy some toys for them. I motivated an inmate called Poonam to look after them and try to teach them. Some of the women wanted to learn to read and write and those who were really keen somehow managed but I could not motivate all. I could have established a creche for the children, and provided writing materials for those who wanted to study but I did not have the resources. Many women expressed great anxiety about their children being left unattended outside while they were serving time in prison. I used to try to arrange for these women to have their children with them and also arrange to get them work in the prison so that they could earn money to look after their children. If one child got something to eat, those who saw it would ask their mothers for the same thing and a mother who didn't have money to get it, would beat the child out of sheer frustration. Some

women prisoners had no visitors at all and I used to counsel the prisoners according to the situation but the staff was inadequate. So we barely had time to attend to our daily duties and had no time to pay any attention to the welfare measures. There was a vocational school run by the Government to teach stitching and tailoring but the women had not been motivated at all. It was a situation of complete disinterest.

Yet another officer in the women's ward recounts on tape her experiences:

Some women prisoners spent all their time gambling. They were abusive and even threatened the staff. These women convicts were called *bees saali* or twenty-year-termers. In 1971, the women's ward had barely 30-35 inmates mostly imprisoned for involvement in incidents of theft or prostitution. Those convicted in murder cases were sent to Ludhiana Jail. In 1986, the composition of the women's ward underwent a radical change with women coming in for dowry and narcotics crimes and a steady increase in the number of cases of remand. At one point of time, the number of inmates had exceeded 300 including 60 children.

Regarding the position of milk in the prison, one of the inmates revealed on tape the following state of affairs and also drew an illustration as on page 97:

Each child was entitled to get 400 grams of milk to drink. It was to be given to their mothers inside the prison. Breast-feeding mothers too were entitled to milk for drinking depending on whatever the doctor prescribed. Any ailing woman could get milk as a medical diet. All very good in spirit and policy only if there was any implementation. The milk that reached the inmates and children was 'white water'. It reached the women's barracks before the daybreak. It was handed over to a woman convict (a well-educated foreign inmate). She took the milk, kept back a good amount for herself, and her boss (name withheld), a Head Warder, and some quantity to be sold to the inmates. The returns of the selling she would share with the same Head Warder.

What is further revealing is that she was not alone in selling the milk. The mothers of these children who got the milk further traded it away to earn some coupons. Many never gave it to their children. Some women who had more than one child with them, sold the share of the second child with her. Hence milk was a commodity on which all cheated, depending on the power situation one was in.



A prisoner stated this on tape about fuel as also depicted in an illustration on page 99:

Dried prison *chappatis* were hot favourites (among women inmates) as fuel for cooking, heating food and making tea for themselves, the staff and the doctors. In winters, since tea was more frequently required, dried *chappatis* were sold for 10 paise each (i.e., 1/10th of an Indian rupee). But while the staff shared the warm hospitality, they would often confiscate the *chulahs* to show a raid having been made. But all these would come back again as favours, or at a price.

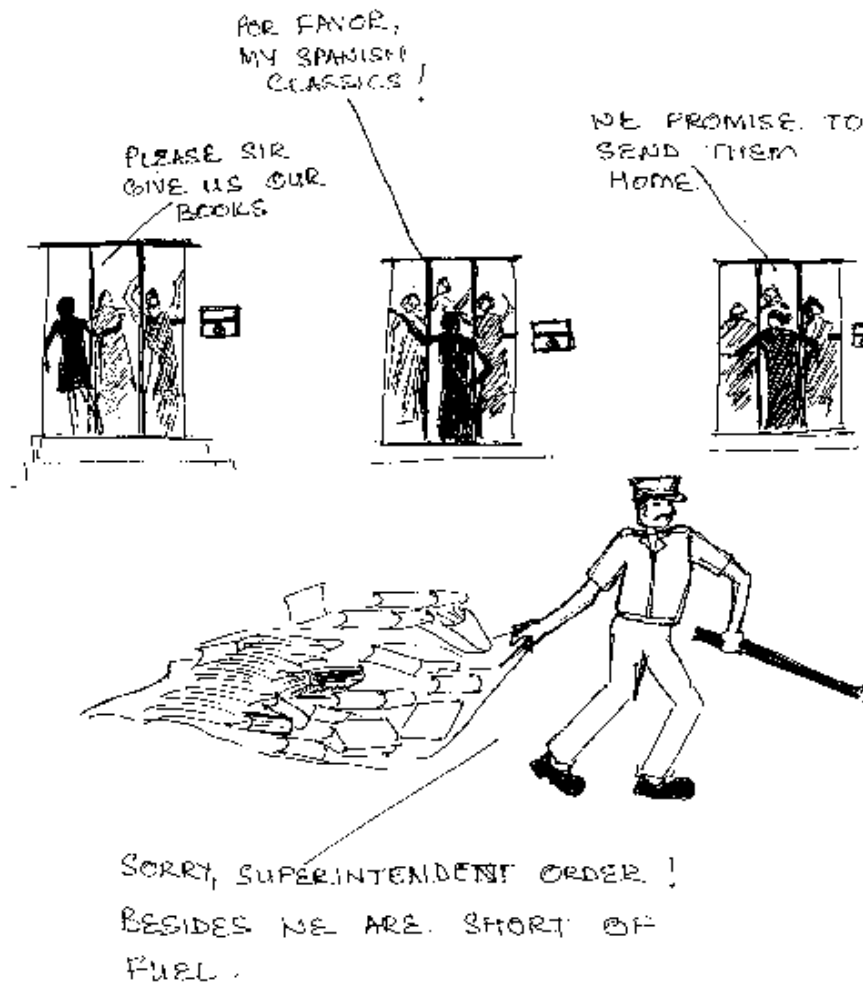
One of the officers described on tape the sordid living conditions:

The women inmates who were convicted or were being tried for non-violent crimes, and had educational backgrounds, with some financial standing, were granted 'B' class facility. This enabled them to live in cells of 8 feet by 8 feet while others lived in dormitories of the size of 50 feet by 40 feet. Most of the foreign women were in fact granted 'B' class by courts to help them stay together as a class apart due to the cultural and language proximity. The women in cells maintained themselves better than the ones in the dormitories. For, in the dormitories, there were all kinds of women from all strata of society, and at times including the ticketless travellers who had no sense of even using flush toilets. For them it was another drain to throw in all the muck (which anyway, it was).

Once a set of four foreign inmates were punished to dormitory-stay. This is what one of the women had to narrate on tape:

To add insult to injury, we were given that side of the dormitory which was right next to the open drain flowing outside the barrack. Cockroaches were aplenty and we couldn't sleep the whole night. In the morning we decided to make the best out of the worst situation. We got on to clean the whole drain ourselves; we scraped the layers and layers of grime on it, till we reached the floors and walls of the drain. We got the fellow occupants of the barrack to join us to bring water. When some of them did not want to, we asked them to pay others to bring their share of water. We formed one group "to take turns to clean every day, pour chemicals to keep cockroaches and the stench away." When it was realised that we in fact were settling down there, we were shifted yet again. But the truth was that most of the women in the dormitory lived in filthy conditions because they had no sense of personal hygiene.

SSSSStaff andalism



Regarding the upkeep of clothes and personal appearance, one of the prisoners went on record describing the harassment:

We had no laundry system. There were no irons to press our clothes. We used to fold back our washed clothes when they were still slightly damp, and put them under our heads. Of course, many of us wore crushed clothes. We could get mirrors at Rs 30 or Rs 50 from a Warder (identity not disclosed). But she could 'recover' these mirrors as her 'find' whenever it suited her, and then used to break them to show her official power. We used to tell her that she herself got it for us. She would pretend to be deaf. We all paid her again and she brought another mirror.

On medical care, a poignant disclosure was made by an 'old hand' who too went on record:

We women could get a referral to a general hospital or a medical certificate at a given price. The money was delivered to a particular woman doctor outside the prison. She would not collect it herself but tell us where it was to be delivered and what would be the signpost. It was typically in the Bollywood style. Usually, the places were bus stops, where a man would be waiting to pick it up. Once my roommate was desperate to apply for medical bail. She was suffering from heavy asthma attacks. She approached the same doctor, and was refused. Then my friend asked her (the doctor) what she wanted. She quoted a figure, and she was delivered the money. The certificate followed. My friend got her bail on that basis. When I was arrested I did not have spectacles. And I almost cannot see with one eye. I, on my appearance before the court, requested the court to direct the jail doctor to send me to the eye specialist. He issued the order. When the lady doctor saw the order, she told me, "You are very smart; anyway, the order does not matter, I will not send you." I again applied to the court. The court again issued an order. The lady doctor still did not send me and said, "You will go only when I want you to go." I gave up. After a few weeks she allowed me to go.

The Delhi policewomen outside, who escorted the prisoners to various hospitals, clearly knew the malingerers, and those who had come only to roam around, or meet friends or relatives. They knew escorting them was no strain, for it involved no doctors' visits or laboratory tests and so on. The process only involved sitting and getting a lot to eat. Many times during the allocation of guard duties,



the policewomen used to fight for these kind of hospital-escorting duties.

Certain doctors, court guards, prison guards and lawyers used to act as 'couriers', delivering letters and messages. Such persons met regularly at a particular government hospital, all through managed referrals. It was through such means that Jacqueline, a woman inmate, and Charles Sobhraj, a high-profile male inmate, exchanged love letters, and finally went public on their engagement.

While the medical facilities existed, the practitioners of this noble profession were seldom inclined to use them. In fact, doctors were absent during crucial emergencies, such as childbirth. An inmate vividly described the pathetic conditions on record:

Even in delivery cases, if the woman happened to give birth to her child while she was still in the barrack, there was no medical help available; never if it was between 1 pm and 10 am. This was because the lady doctor would come to work only at 10 am and leave at 1 pm. So it was we who assisted the woman concerned. We never had anybody with us; not even a first-aid box. In one case it so happened that a woman delivered her baby but we had nothing to cut the umbilical cord with. The child was lying outside for a long time (attached to the mother). We desperately searched for anything that could cut, but we found nothing. Then finally we got a small piece of blade from a woman in the same dormitory, that too many hours after the delivery. We could cut the cord, and save the life of both mother and child.

In another case, a woman delivered at night, during the lock-in period. No medical attendant came for her. In the morning when the barracks were opened we went inside and saw her lying with all the blood and outflow. No one had washed the child. We women bathed the child, another one of us cleaned up the woman; another one who was known for never helping anyone, made tea for the mother, for she was not lactating yet. The fellow inmates of her dormitory had left her on her own in a corner of the barrack.

A woman inmate, talking about the sensitive subject of sanitary napkins, stated on record:

Till sometime we got these, and then suddenly these were stopped. We were then given a coarse grey cloth with instructions that one could wash it to reuse. But a lot of women, not knowing how to use a flush toilet,

would choke it by dumping this there, and we had to wait forever for the gutter cleaner.

Regarding sleeping tablets, one of the 'regulars' remarked:

We could ask for as many as we needed and that is the way we could still manage some sleep. Some of us got addicted to these (tablets).

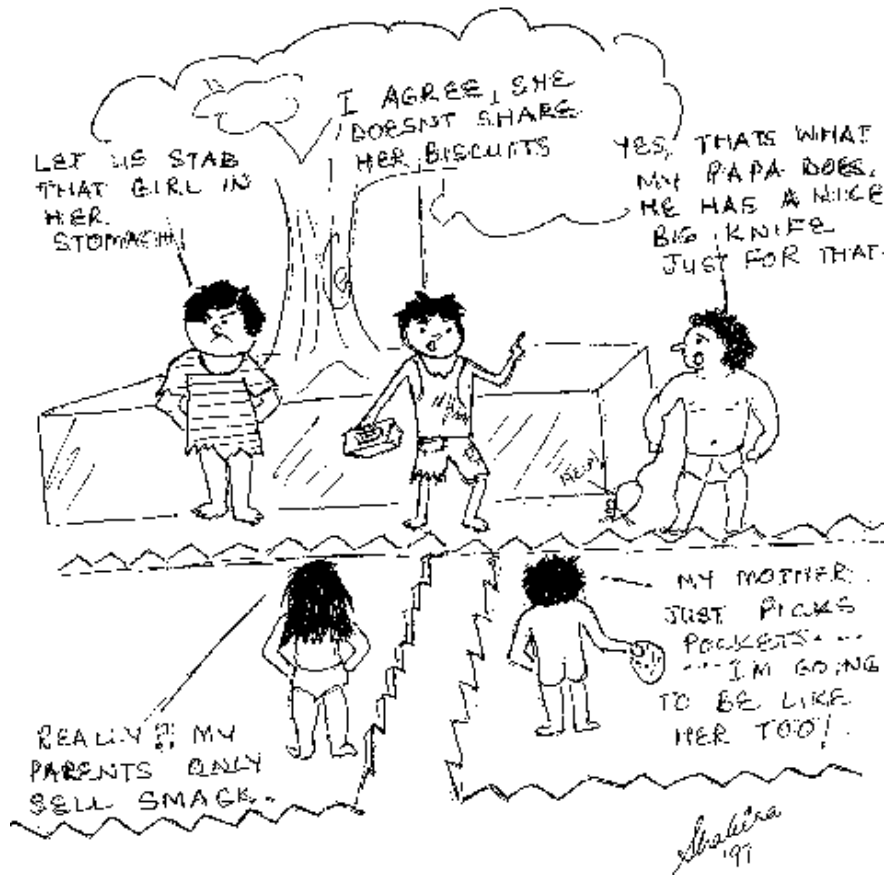
On the equally sensitive subject of lesbianism, one of the women prisoners was forthcoming in her observations. And she was least hesitant about going on record:

The prison did have a few incidents, and one such, which became very well known, involved a foreigner woman and a south Indian lady. She was the same woman who was a convict and had been entrusted with duties of milk distribution. She also had other foodstuffs and articles of use for distribution, such as oil, soap, sugar, towels and cloth. But she would always cheat. Her other fellow foreign inmates never liked her. She, therefore, had befriended the Indians, and was closer to them. She learnt Hindi, wore a sari, applied *bindi* on her forehead, and declared herself to be Hindustani. She had a boyfriend (name withheld) whom she had long declared to be her husband. Both had been convicted together for 10 years for a drug trafficking offence.

Then suddenly in jail, she stopped meeting her declared husband on permitted family visiting days and said he was nobody to her. She had by then developed a strong lesbian relationship with another Indian lady called... (name withheld). Both were staying in the same barrack and all the women knew of their relationship. When it became better known, one sensible officer, Darshan Lal, came and separated them, and lodged them in separate barracks. She created a lot of noise, but then it was done. Meanwhile, when her declared husband came to know of this, he tried to forcibly enter the women's ward, very enraged, to give his wife or girlfriend a bashing. The situation was somehow saved by all of us.

The prison atmosphere, with its undercurrents of violence, tension, bitterness and distrust, made an adverse psychological impact on the children who were staying with their mothers. The claustrophobic conditions drastically curtailed their natural instincts to frolic and romp around and indulge in playful activities. One of the officials, who had been working closely with these children, recalled, as also illustrated on page 103 by a woman inmate.

### The Little Monsters



They were not children, they were little monsters. They would abuse like adults, and speak the language of violent criminals outside, such as "I will kill you," "I will murder you," or "I will shoot you." One day we overheard two children talking with each other: "Let Chandni (name of another child) come out and I will stab her in the stomach." Even below the age of four, they were doing homosexual acts, and making sexual advances. On being scolded they would abuse and throw stones at us. They were even violent with insects and frogs crawling in abundance in the jail. They would crush them, tear them, burn them and squeeze them alive. They would pick up live frogs and throw them at us. No one could handle them.

Not only the women, even insects were endangered species inside the prison.

Women Prisoners: An Endangered Species  
A Synopsis  
Graph

## 10

*Foreign Prisoners:  
Aliens behind Bars*

W

hen I first visited the foreign inmates' ward situated in Prison No 1, I found most of them 'rusting and rotting'. They were 'rusting' because they had been languishing, without any means of sustaining their enthusiasm for life. They were rotting because of neglect and apathy. Dumped in an alien and hostile environment, they were woefully short of the basic essentials. The majority of the foreign prisoners at Tihar hailed from different countries of Asia, Africa, Europe and the USA. Prisoners hailing from Europe and America were more fortunate in that they used to get visitors once a fortnight. Their embassies also showed care and concern for their wellbeing. Others were hardly ever visited.

A large number of the foreign inmates fell into the category of 'unconvicted prisoners' in cases relating to drug trafficking, and were stuck in the judicial tangle having no choice but to take on the odds at Tihar for periods usually ranging from five to seven years. Ironically, the maximum sentence for drug-related offences, if declared guilty, was ten years plus a fine of Rs 1,00,000. Here is an

excerpt of what they told Syed Zubair Ahmed of *The Times of India*, on his visit to the prison in early June 1993:

Many undertrials of foreign nationalities are languishing in Tihar Jail for several years while their cases drag on in courts. Of the 100 foreigners, including 30-odd women, only few have been convicted.

In most trials, witnesses have not even been cross-examined. In some cases trials have yet to begin. But surprisingly, at least in one case, a German girl was sentenced to three years of imprisonment in a record four months.

These undertrials belong to various countries, including Nigeria, the US, Spain, Afghanistan and Germany.

Non-violent Crime: What makes their plight grimmer is the fact that most of these undertrials have been charged with committing non-violent crimes. A large number of them are facing charges of peddling narcotics. Some have been put behind bars for overstaying and some for travelling on forged passports.

Foreign prisoners were lodged in Ward No 9 of Jail No 1. This ward consisted of 25 cells in three compartments — five cells, 10 cells and 10 cells. There were 10 convicted prisoners all under NDPS Act and about 115 undertrials mainly under NDPS, or Passport Acts. Convicted prisoners were lodged separately from the undertrial prisoners. The 10 convicted prisoners used to occupy five cells but no cell lodged two convicts as there was no provision to keep two convicts or two undertrials in one cell. It could be either one or three inmates in a cell. The undertrial foreign prisoners were in no better condition than their Indian counterparts — so far as their lodging was concerned. The only difference was that Indian undertrial prisoners would languish in big barracks housing about 200 undertrials while the foreign inmates in eight feet by eight feet cells, five or six together. Apartheid prevailed among the whites and the blacks. Since blacks were larger in number, the whites used to get boxed very often. So, the whites were lodged separately from the blacks to avoid scuffles. There was also a convict *munshi* foreigner and an assistant *munshi*, both from Nigeria, to do the assigned duties of the ward. Most of the foreign convicts and undertrials used to speak broken Hindi with 'selective' words. It was revealed to me later

that they learnt Hindi while in jail. Drugs were available for the rich while the poor had to pay through their labour. The verbal credit system for drugs was in vogue. Interest on borrowed drug-amount varied from the nationality of the inmate to the colour of his skin. One of the major causes of scuffles among them was the insistence on prepayment and non-delivery of the assured quantity of the drugs. These fights were never reported to the higher-ups in the administration and would get sorted out by the prisoners themselves. A part of the money collected by sale of drugs would go to the lower rank security guard under whose protection this business flourished. The foreign convict *munshi*, like his Indian counterpart, would 'salute' the jail officers and speak the same language with a slightly different accent. He would wear white clothes and a belt to demonstrate his authority. He would pose more 'humble' than his Indian counterpart though he was very tough with the foreign undertrials. He extorted money and articles from the foreign prisoners after *mulaqaat* much more easily than his Indian counterparts did. Barring a few exceptions, the foreign prisoners readily appreciated the value of services and paid to 'buy' comforts. Marketing of services, price promotion and distribution process was well established. The newcomer would come to know the practice without effort and cost. The 'indoor' services were provided with full technical know-how. For a newcomer, it could have been an eye-opener and a 'blessing in hell'. Not only this, the 'friendship' among those who had no money and 'newcomers' was quietly taken care of. If a newcomer could afford a couple of dollars (later on converted into rupees), he could manage to have 2-3 bad paymasters as his servants doing all the labour for him. The financial aspects of these services and its consequential effects thereof were more emphasised among the foreigners' prisons than in the Indian ones. Retail loans, leasing and crediting were a few characteristics of the foreign prisoners' culture in



contrast to the Indian prisoners' culture. More understanding and respect for the services formed the very basis of the culture called "I will survive and let you survive" and "I want to

sleep, please don't disturb me."

Foreign prisoners were better disciplined than their Indian counterparts. The foreigners, however, questioned the validity of each decision taken by the administration, while the Indians usually accepted whatever came about. The foreigners proved 'hard nuts to crack' while the Indians were 'cracking' themselves. The Indian prisoners looked ahead to 'escape' while the foreign prisoners were finding ways and means to 'free' themselves for good by legal means. The foreign inmates could not get used to Indian food. Many of these outsiders found the diet distributed totally inedible. The food was cooked in mustard oil, which had a foreign smell of its own. A South African inmate, who had been lodged in Tihar since 1991, told his tale of woe in a recorded conversation:

The food and environment were not at all congenial for human beings. The round roasted bread which I later came to know as *chappatis* were very thin like paper which could not be consumed. The vegetables served were watery and absolutely insipid. There was no potable water to drink and greenery was not to be seen with hardly any trees, or patches of grass around. Even drinking water had to be bought. Three people died of cholera and one died because medical facilities were poor. The attitude of officers was very bad for they would beat me on trivial matters, like why I was standing somewhere. I would be humiliated at the slightest excuse. The jail officers would indulge in extortion, goondism and harassment.

J. O. (full name withheld) of Africa, an inmate since March 1991, branded Tihar to be 'a Nazi camp', where torture, beating and extortion were routinely prevalent. He further stated (as quoted) that the food was awful but even that was being sold from the *langar*. When someone did not pay or could not pay he was beaten and kicked around like an animal. The extortion was done by the organised gangs with the connivance of authorities. Living conditions were inhuman and many died due to the sheer carelessness of the authorities.

Lack of foresight on the part of the authorities in not providing even water spoke volumes about Tihar's condition. It was like a training ground for crime. The officials, on any trivial pretext, would spark off fights by provoking the members of different gangs against each other. No IG or, for that matter, no officer came to see us or speak to us about our problems. Many were tortured or humiliated because of their religion.

Another inmate, Francis Ortega, hailing from France, recounted

on tape again his experiences:

Since November 5, 1988, I have been working in the prison canteen. Very few things were available: for example, sugar, biscuits and oil. Raw vegetables were sold to the privileged few who had the money. If you had the money you could get anything, like good food, bedding or even drugs. If you did not have money you would often be beaten.

A. H. (full name not disclosed), an African inmate since 1991, discerned that there was organised extortion by goondas and gangs among the inmates known to the jail officials, for they also shared the booty. The food was simply not palatable or adequate as a meal and no one could dare to ask for more, for he could be beaten or kicked.

The prison Warders constantly reminded the foreign inmates, who tended to crib, that 'this is India'. One of the inmates named Nigel had this to say on record:

I never thought India was incapable of caring as made evident by the jailors. I could not reconcile myself to the fact that I had to suffer because I had a different colour of skin. I was shoved into the prison only with my pants on, which I was wearing then. The customs officials kept back all my clothes at the airport. They did not let me take even the T-shirt with me. When I came here (Tihar) there was no soap, no toothpaste, I had nothing.

Nigel too had been languishing in jail for the past eight years as an undertrial. He was acquitted and left for the UK. He had given this interview after his release when he visited me to bid goodbye. The foreign inmates' plight was no different from that of their Indian counterparts. But their agony was magnified due to problems of communication, food habits, cultural differences, lack of visitors, shortage of money (some of them) and shabby clothing. Moreover, a rigid system of apartheid prevailed amongst themselves. Foreign inmates were confronted with several seemingly insurmountable hurdles as far as the legal aspects of their detention were concerned. The gravity of the situation was intensified due to most of the lawyers fleecing their foreign 'victims' to the maximum extent possible. The Indian prisoners could somehow get a relative or friend to persuade, coax or follow up with their lawyers to fulfil the

contractual obligation of appearing in court on their behalf. In this context, the foreign prisoners were on record saying that some of the lawyers just pocketed the money and deserted them.

One inmate called Conway complained on tape:

I was 'legally' looted by proficient practitioners of the profession. Nine lawyers took me for a merry ride and, in the process, I lost thousands of rupees, but still could not get bail. Eventually, I got to argue my own case before Justice Arun Kumar of the Delhi High Court, despite my lawyers' efforts to prevent me from doing so. They insisted that they alone could put forward my case before the court and that if I plead, I may only be given three minutes by the court. Since I had no trust left in them, I wished to plead my case in person. I was now fed up. To my pleasant surprise, Justice Arun Kumar gave me 75 minutes of hearing.

In the course of his 'revelations', Conway opened up certain pesky 'cans of worms'. He described in fairly graphic detail how the Crime Branch of Delhi Police had extracted money from him and how the prosecution had demanded an enormous sum to remain. While Conway was in custody, his father died; he was not informed of this tragedy for two whole months. When he came to know of his father's demise, he wanted to make a telephone call, but even this basic courtesy was denied to him. (Apparently, his embassy had been instructed not to tell Conway about his father's death till his release.) Conway bitterly remonstrated: "You pay Rs 500 to the police and you can make all the calls you want to. Why wait for the court permission which will never come?"

Conway got his freedom from the court. He telephoned me at my residence wanting to meet me. This recording was a coincidence. In case the foreign prisoners were to compile a catalogue of woes they could add 'infighting' to the list. They had, over the years, succeeded in developing a peculiar subculture which bred groupism, which, in turn, engendered a malignant form of 'apartheid'. They had developed their own power structures which had spawned their own brand of prison politics. For instance, a bunch of 'tough guys' consisting of blacks (Muslims and Christians) carried out a

silent.

flourishing drug trade, and it was they who called the shots. They had developed their own network and maintained a record system. The members of this bunch offered credit to each other, as and when required.

To ensure continuity whenever the unofficial leader of this group was released or transferred elsewhere, he would hand over charge to an already groomed successor. The network continued to function with professional efficiency. Those staff members who had been enticed into the payroll of the drug pushers were instructed to protect their financiers. However, everything was not sailing smoothly. Under the influence of drugs, the inmates sometimes went berserk and committed violent acts. Other extraneous factors (related to drug deals, none the less) also generated violence. For instance, too much *moolah* was being demanded for too small a quantity of drugs; adequate credit facilities were not being provided; and the enterprising drug dealers tended to fudge their account books, forcing the addicts to pay up more for getting their 'fixes'. Obviously, the latter could not be expected to keep track of the transactions, considering that they were 'floating around' in their own oceans of fantasy.

Foreign prisoners belonging to the affluent countries possessed reasonable sums of money which was kept in their 'prison property account'. They invariably withdrew whatever amount they wanted, and whenever they wanted, under the pretext of 'paying the lawyers'. In reality, this money was siphoned off for promoting the lucrative drug-smuggling business. The drug suppliers ran a competent enterprise. They identified their buyers with precision in order to ensure that their precious products did not reach the wrong hands. The drug trade tended to thrive after sunset, when darkness provided a cover to the shady activities involved. The inmates had devised ingenious ways to bring in the drugs. The human body was used to the maximum advantage. All possible orifices were employed to conceal the drugs, however filthy they may have been. Swallowing and regurgitating was another method. The ubiquitous toothpaste

containers also came in handy for hiding drugs. The foreign inmates were far too ingenious for the Warders, who were in fact ill-equipped.

Aliens Behind Bars  
A Synopsis  
Graph



## *Adolescent Prisoners: A Class Apart*

**T**he saddest aspect of Tihar was seeing over 1,200 young boys huddled together, unsupervised. At first glance they looked innocent, with many a devil hidden inside them. None of them appeared impoverished unlike some of their seniors. This flock of youth was diverse: scared, introverted, bullied, terrorised, fun-loving, leaders, followers, couldn't-care-less and homesick. They had nothing to do the whole day, so they gambled, fought, abused, bullied, smoked and gossiped. There was not even a single recreational activity in their wards.

The 16 to 18, and 18 to 20 years old groups were to be in two separate segments. Often, boys looking way above 20 or below 16 found their way into the adolescent ward. Both created their own problems. One on bullying ability, the other on fear of being exploited. It took time for rectification but not without leaving its effects on the ward where either of them was lodged.

To compound the adverse situation, the staff from these wards had no special orientation for their special needs. These boys too, like the elders, 'administered' themselves. Hence the senior-taller-bigger-criminal among them was in charge. He and his cronies took

the roll calls, extorted money, did the allocation of sleeping space, and all other activities that went with idle-living.

Those not part of the group had no relief. The staff was not receptive. There was no outside help in the form of a counsellor or psychologist to listen to them. Many suffered from poverty of resources to be bailed out, while others stayed put since there was no information with their relatives that they were in Tihar. Help was only at a price, and for the poor there was none.

I found more than half the youngsters barely literate. Most of them were school dropouts for lack of interest in studies; very few out of family compulsions. None of them had any respect for the schools they had gone through. In fact, they had nothing but contempt for them. There was no educational material in their barracks and no concept of schooling them inside the prison. Since transistors were not allowed, they had no idea of what was happening around. It was a 'well' of illiteracy, ignorance and a curse. The adolescents found their way to jail after being nabbed for committing a fairly comprehensive range of crimes, including murder, kidnapping, stabbing, drug-peddling, burglary, street thefts, household thefts (mostly as domestic servants) and even rape. They were also in for minor offences such as ticketless travel. The ratio of those involved in gruesome crimes, like attempted murder, compared to lesser offenders was 1:10. The delinquents who had made a mark in 'middle-level' crimes, like thefts, or relatively 'higher' varieties such as inflicting grave injuries on their victims, comprised 80 per cent of the entire lot. While on statistics, it would be worth noting that 30 per cent of the lot were habitual drug users.

A majority of the adolescents tended to justify their misdeeds. Emotions, like remorse or repentance did not exist in their psyche. Some adolescents were caught and shoved into jail for vagrancy or insolent behaviour towards the police. Others were unfortunate 'indirect victims'. In other words, they

were mere accomplices while real criminals managed to get away with stolen property, or were successfully able to elude the long arm of the law. Further statistical analysis disclosed that one out of 10 adolescents appeared to be

innocent, but were hauled in along with others, paying a price for keeping bad company. One of the more sensitive Superintendents, Tarsem Kumar, conducted a survey which made some startling revelations. The study revealed that (a) 90 per cent of the young inmates had a one-point programme, of making a fortune; (b) These youngsters wanted to earn without doing any work; and (c) They wanted life to be an unalloyed entertainment without any labour or responsibility.

The magnitude of opulence and its accompanying trappings desired by these adolescents varied from one 'idealistic thinker' to another. The pinnacle of success for one particularly imaginative inmate was to own a fabulous house, luxurious furniture, electronic gadgets (TV, CD players, cellular phones and VCRs) and a chauffeur-driven limousine thrown in for good measure. Of course, they wanted all these 'goodies' to be showered from heaven. They were not particularly concerned with achieving their goals by studying or putting in any kind of hard work.

The lush fields of adolescence provided fertile breeding grounds not only for one-time crime but also for repeated offences because many pliable youngsters had been brainwashed into believing that life's only motto was to make money by any means — fair or foul. A random group of teenagers was given three options: (a) They would be given work and paid double the market rate for their products/services; (b) They would not be given any work but would be paid 10 per cent more than what they needed for a living; and (c) They would be expected to work hard and get paid according to their output.

True to form, 93 per cent of the respondents chose the second option where they would not be given any work but would be paid 10 per cent more than what they needed for a living. Only three per cent went for the third option where they would be required to work hard and be paid according to their output. The rest preferred the first option.

The same group was put to another test. The respondents were again given three different options: (a) They would be taken on a

visit to a sugar factory, where they could see for themselves the entire production process; (b) They would be provided with a car in which they could travel to hill stations of their choice; and (c) They would be provided accommodation in a five-star hotel in Delhi for a few days.

Again, as expected, the majority chose the second option where they would be provided with a car in which they could travel to a hill station of their choice. The five-star 'bait' did not attract them much as they felt that they had seen enough of such hotels. On the question of marriage, 80 per cent of the youngsters wanted to be married. However, they said they would have to raise a lot of money before thinking of marriage. For around 10 per cent, marriage was to be avoided forever because it entailed heavy responsibilities. They opted for postponing their decision.

All the adolescent prisoners were unequivocal as far as earning easy money was concerned. They were ready to do anything for a hundred thousand rupees, even commit murder. Here also, these youngsters displayed shrewdness and fast thinking. They stated they would take the money, but instead of murdering the victim, they would claim that they tried their best to kill but failed. Such tactics, they claimed, led to 'crime prevention'.

To determine their keenness for power and status the following question was posed to the youngsters: Would they like to be (a) Superintendent; (b) Deputy Superintendent; or (c) Assistant Superintendent? Each of them wanted to be an Assistant Superintendent, the lowest of the three posts in the office cadre of prison service ranks. This preference, according to them, was owing to the fact that an Assistant Superintendent was the one who wielded the maximum power which could be used or rather misused to make money for himself, or to seek favours from the gangsters. Being closest to the prisoners the Assistant Superintendent knew all the ground realities.

Finally, on being asked to choose between money or mental peace, the adolescents diplomatically replied that money and mental

peace were inseparable. They asserted that without money there They were unwilling to accept any argument — however cogent — which was contrary to their views. About 10 per cent of the adolescent prison population stated that they did not have any relatives or friends in the outside world who could provide sustenance for them. They felt that they were permanently trapped in the vicious cycle of crime-arrest-jail-release-crime. One of the adolescents was in jail for gambling. Even then, he refused to give up the habit. He simply would not acknowledge the fact that he could lose. He was obsessed with making quick money and was even prepared to cheat to achieve his goal. He felt that if he could make an enormous fortune, he could buy freedom by paying an adequate price to the police and the judiciary.

On the playing field, none of the adolescent prisoners could bear the thought of losing. They tried to win by any means. Inevitably, brawls occurred, which, in turn, created an atmosphere of tension and distrust. Nevertheless, sports was always preferred to the dull academic grind. Academics, however, provided a fillip to the 'pilferage quotient' of some students. In fact, items, like textbooks, notebooks and stationery were favourite targets. Studies repelled almost all the adolescent inmates, even the literate ones. Statistically, nearly 80 per cent were illiterate. About 10 per cent had reached class seven and very few had managed to go up to class 10.

Most of the adolescent prisoners came from rural backgrounds, and had migrated to urban centres, in this case, Delhi. The capital of India had, over the years, developed its own brand of 'culture snobbery', which rested on the underpinnings of self and power. Moved by the overpowering desire to acquire both, the adolescents were ready to go to any extent. They were dazzled by the glitter and glamour of high society flaunted ever so frequently in films and on television, and dreamed of gaining entry into its hallowed precincts. They were carried away by its superficial aspects, like fashionable clothes, the latest status symbols, like trendy cars and cellular

could be no mental peace.

phones, and romping around with a bevy of beautiful girls in tow. Whenever these adolescent deviants managed to earn a little money, they invariably squandered it on clothes. They chose gaudy colours which made them stand out like sore thumbs. For instance, they preferred red, black and blue, or garish combinations.

A large section of the adolescent criminals was willing to give up even the parents if a rich man agreed to 'adopt' them and provide them with all the luxuries of life. Such individuals did not have any affection even for their mothers. On the contrary, about 20 per cent blamed their parents for their wrongdoings and for bringing them into a world where the dominant features were poverty, hunger and deprivation. Almost 80 per cent of the adolescent prisoners were slum dwellers. Such juveniles harboured the illusion that after being released they could make a massive one-time strike and accumulate a lot of money. Even if they were caught, they would be able to afford to 'purchase' their release. If that was not possible, they could at least lead a comfortable life inside the jail just like some resourceful adults had managed to. An enterprising life-term convict, Ramesh Munshi, stood out as a case in point. He managed to amass a fairly large sum in his prison property account, which enabled him to wield enormous power. He could procure luxury items or services at will. His commands were obeyed forthwith by numerous minions.

Many adolescents were apprehensive, and quite genuinely so, about being 'branded' as jailbirds. They felt they would be convenient scapegoats for the police, who could charge them for crimes which they did not commit. Most of the adolescent inmates declared that they would definitely prefer to be rehabilitated outside Delhi, where they could begin a new life with a new identity. However, they did stress that they would like to visit Delhi at least twice every month, even if they were to be rearrested. Further probing revealed that there were some older diehard criminals in Delhi who were on the lookout



for potential talent among juveniledelinquents if they could be moulded into professionals.

On the whole, one can conclude that most adolescent prisoners were basically hedonistic in their outlook and were prepared to

indulge in illegal activities to fulfil their sole objective of making fast money. They were also not inclined to give up their addictions, be it drugs, or gambling. The gullible adolescents had obviously been influenced to a great extent by *masala* (spicy) films and television serials in which tantalising fantasies masqueraded as reality.

Since the adolescent prisoners idled away their days in gossip, planning to achieve something big in life with no prison schedule to educate or reform them, their mounting energies remained constrained within. There was no outlet for the adolescent energy to be consumed — no schedule of physical exercise or yoga, etc. Their main concern was to seek the 'knot' with the high and the mighty and indulge in crime to amass unlimited money. They firmly believed that money was everything and the sole objective of a man was to earn as much money as he could by any means — legal or illegal. The female adolescent prisoners were few in number; about 15 in a total population of over 300. They were not involved in heinous crimes. Their misdemeanours were immoral trafficking and street theft to earn money for their livelihood. Thanks to Indian culture fewer females are involved in crime as compared to men. Of a total population of 1,215 adolescents, both male and female, only 15 were female — 1.3 per cent of the total adolescent population. While the female adolescent prisoners were 'shy' of the crime they had committed, most of their male counterparts boasted of their crimes shamelessly. I must narrate an incident underlying their 'shame' content. Four female adolescents, having been caught for flesh trade, arrived in Tihar. They were lodged in a cell in the women's ward. When the cell was visited by jail officials, they covered their faces with both their hands. They did show signs of remorse. This was unlike the boys, who were on the road to become professionals. A feeling of neglect was writ large in the behaviour of these young offenders. The prison environment aggravated this. This confirmed the apprehension of a well-known reformer, Mary Carpenter, that such boys either become paupers or criminals.

illegal.

The only way for revival was providing them with a consistent environment of positivity, based on discipline, hard work and properThis required a whole new mindset in the prison regime. To bring that about was a massive challenge. usage of time.

Adolescent Prisoners: A Class Apart  
A Synopsis  
Graph

# 12

## *High Security Prisoners: Gangsters Galore*

A motley band of gangsters had virtually converted Tihar Jail into their fiefdom. The gangs flourishing behind the bars in Tihar were ritualistically named after their exalted leaders, such as the Tyagigang, the Gujjar gang, the Satpal gang and, to top it all, the Dawoodgang. The gang members hailed from different parts of India, mainly from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Irrespective of being composed of Hindus or Muslims or both, the gangs vied with one another for asserting their supremacy on the basis of their awesome reputation in their field of specialisation, be it murder, terrorism, mayhem, kidnapping, or something as mundane as extortion. The ambit of crime specialisation also covered vendetta, caste wars, gang wars, mercenary activities and the supply of an assortment of narcotics. The gangs had, over the years, developed a highly efficient information network, which was extremely useful. Since these gangsters occupied the top levels in the hierarchy of crime, their remunerations were commensurate with their lofty positions. They

had 'earned' huge amounts of money, which they had 'invested' shrewdly to acquire colour television sets, comfortable beddings, and other personal accessories. One of them had even bred a brood of over 30 white pigeons. The 'high priests' of crime had succeeded in building up a retinue of personal attendants from the inmates, who were at their beck and call.

This was again reinforced by Ashwini Sarin of *The Indian Express*, when he wrote on May 25, 1986:

Indian Jails: Where money opens doors

On April 18, 1979, I was jailed and lodged in Delhi's infamous Tihar Jail for disorderly behaviour in a public place. Two nights and three days spent in Tihar, as part of a strategy to explore the life behind Tihar's high walls, left me a complete wreck, both mentally and physically. Even seven years later, the memory of those 60 hours spent with hardened criminals in C-class makes me shudder.

In the years since my investigation into life in Tihar, nothing much has changed, except for a periodic whitewashing of the facade, an occasional strengthening of the barbed wires and the erection of the odd watchtower along the four-kilometre-long prison wall.

The new (IG) of Tihar Jail, P. V. Sinari, told me that he had taken a number of stern measures to improve Tihar. But the very next day, a Warden was found to be involved in an attempt to smuggle in morphine, hidden in a sandwich, to David Hall.

However, outside the jail and near the lockups in city courts, there are touts who promise good care inside the jail. One can still send in money, drugs and a recommendation for special care. Every service has a price tag.

The Mulla Committee submitted its report in March 1983. It made 639 recommendations for improving our prisons. The Committee visited 19 of the 76 central jails in the country and a number of other connected institutions during its tenure.

The last one heard of the Mulla Committee was in April 1983 when the Union Home Ministry announced that it would soon process and screen the recommendations of the Committee before forwarding them to the States for implementation....

...The Mulla Committee was not the first one set up to go into the working of jails. In 1979, a conference of chief secretaries, home secretaries and inspectors general of prisons, was held during the Janata regime at the instance of Viren Shah, the industrialist member of the

Rajya Sabha, who was appalled by the conditions in Tihar jail during his prison term in connection with the Baroda dynamite case. Nothing came of this conference.

Way back in 1880, when the British ruled India, a committee was appointed to evolve a prison custom which could provide erection of the odd watchtower along the four-kilometre-long prison wall.

My old contacts in Tihar jokingly maintain that officials add one more company (nearly 100 persons) after every successful jailbreak. There have been nine jailbreaks in Tihar since 1983, and many more attempted ones which have been kept away from the public.

When the Janata Government came to power, Indira Gandhi was jailed in Tihar. She, too, was perturbed by the mismanagement and the treatment of prisoners. A number of women prisoners met her during her brief stay in jail and apprised her of what was happening inside the jail where they were living, supposedly in safe custody.

When Mrs Gandhi came back to power in 1980, she appointed Justice A. N. Mulla to head the Jail Reforms Committee and also asked Zail Singh, then the Home Minister, to personally visit Tihar. The Minister was offered liquor by a tipsy inmate as he was being conducted around by officials.

Governments have changed and ministers have come and gone but the twilight world of Tihar has remained unchanged. In 1984, a friendly jail official had once invited me to his house within the jail campus. The man who removed the cups after we had drunk our tea was a convict. Two convicts were working outside on the lawn and another was cleaning the official's scooter. They call it *begar* and it continues even now although the authorities claim to have checked it completely.

In its report on Tihar, the Mulla Committee had noted: "It was alleged (by prisoners) that certain prisoners enjoyed special confidence of the authorities for which they were allowed extra privileges, including free movement all over the jail compound. In matters of basic amenities, like diet, clothing, interviews, letters, etc., prisoners were being discriminated against. The allotment of labour was also not based on any fair criteria." The officials interviewed by the Committee said: "Many of the prisoners coming to jail are habitual and hardened, having appeared in courts and police stations and visited the jail a number of times. They are not afraid of any kind of punishment. Some of these prisoners are addicted to the use of narcotics and drugs. When checked by the jail authorities, many of them react by filing frivolous cases before the courts and higher administrative authorities against the jail staff.... The habitual offender is so conscious of his rights and prison officials' responsibilities



towards him that he virtually runs the jail according to his dictates. The influence Sobhraj enjoyed in Tihar is a proof of this fact..."

Most jails in the country are housed in dilapidated old buildings with little or no maintenance for decades. The Mulla Committee has described Tihar Jail as the best architecturally planned and functional jail in the country. Tihar was planned in 1952 with the help of a United Nations consultant, Dr W. C. Reckless. Senior officers say that, over the years, Tihar Jail and its administration have lived up to its planner's name. There is no denying the fact that the Government has been concerned about the deterioration in jail conditions and the treatment being meted out to prisoners. But the concern seems to have remained confined to the setting up of committees. "In fact, the jail is a haven for hardened criminals who live a comfortable life within its safe precincts," a senior official of the Welfare Ministry's National Institute of Social Defence said. "Most notorious criminals use prison as a safe abode for some rest after a spell of crime outside. The need for prison reform cannot undermine the aspect of safe custody in jail."

Officials admit — and jail records corroborate — that all punitive action in the form of solitary confinement and extra labour for indiscipline and other acts in jail have been used only in the case of hapless inmates who were not in a position to bribe jail officials or threaten them with legal action.

Most Tihar inmates still manage to get jail hospital doctors to issue them false certificates prescribing specialised treatment in city hospitals and court officials to get them early dates for their hearings so that their routings are frequent. Tihar has been aptly described by an elderly Warder, who said (quoting a dialogue from *Sholay*, a Hindi blockbuster), "*Hum Angrezo ke zamane ke jailor hain, hum nahin sudhenge.*" (We are jailors of the British days, we cannot reform ourselves.)

These 'tough guys' ensured that a regular stream of visitors came to see them without any annoying restrictions being imposed either on their number or on the duration of their stay, the precise duration of such visits being directly proportional to the clout wielded by these gangsters. In other words, the longer the duration, the higher the individual was perched on the organisational hierarchy of crime. The jail staff members never dared to interrupt, out of fear of becoming the object of vile abuses and violent attacks from the gangsters. The long meetings held by the gangsters, both in the prison and in court, served as preparation sessions in which new

strategies were planned and new targets identified. Incidents of murder, kidnapping and extortions organised from behind the prison walls occasionally reached the media.

The outer appearance of a 'typical' gangster was not very different from that of Hindi film villains. They wore dark blue jeans, a stylish belt with a shirt of dark shade, sports shoes, dark glasses with golden frames, and a mane of flowing hair. In winter, they would put on a long, black or red-coloured handkerchief beneath the collar of their shirts — usually T-shirts without sleeves to show that the cold did not bother them. Instead they boasted of the 'inner' heat. The common prisoners or even guards staff would call them *turri* (a person who blatantly shows off). He occupied a stool or a chair whenever he happened to visit the administration block. He sometimes acted as 'Robin Hood' by pretending to be concerned about the welfare of the poor prisoners. For instance, he would request the Superintendent to allow him 100 kg of ice so that not just he, but the entire population of his ward could drink cold water. There was no concept of segregation of these gangsters from other offenders.

In the month of August 1993, an evening daily, *Sandhya Times*, reported that a particular gangster from the infamous 'Tyagi Gang' (name withheld) had threatened to extort Rs 7 lakh from someone over the telephone from the jail. The Superintendent of that prison, Tarsem Kumar, called the gangster to his office and asked him: "Is it true that you have telephoned from the jail?"

"No, sir," replied the gangster.

"Have you tried to extort Rs 7 lakh as reported in the newspaper?"

"Would you like to hear the truth?" questioned the gangster. "Yes," said the Superintendent.

"Sir, I am not someone who would ask for only Rs 7 lakh. I have never asked for that small an amount from anyone so far."

"Oh! you call Rs 7 lakh a small amount?" exclaimed the Superintendent.

“Yes, sir, I do. I never ask for less than Rs 50 lakh,” he boasted. “And what about the phone?” asked the Superintendent.

“I swear I have not telephoned from the jail. I made the call from the court,” he clarified.

Wealthy inmates at Tihar were particularly vulnerable to extortion demands made by the inveterate professionals involved in this trade. Such inmates were targeted by the extortionists and had to find huge amounts within a stipulated timeframe to avoid ‘dire consequences’, like getting maimed. Some inmates, who refused to comply, were given a sound thrashing and were forced to seek an exemption from court appearance where the truth might be revealed on medical examination. Moreover, the toughies ensured that the doctor provided the required medical certificate — either out of fear or connivance, or both.

I recall my visit to the prison hospital within the first week of my taking charge. I was alarmed to see a lone doctor surrounded by burly and ominous-looking musclemen. The sole representative of the medical profession seemed to be under tremendous duress. The Rambo-like big boys had *gheraoed* the doctor in order to extract whatever they wanted from him. The items demanded included medicines, prescriptions, medical certificates, medical files or admission forms for referral to an outside hospital. The doctor had to comply as he was in no position to refuse the demands of the hardened criminals. At the hospital, I came across very few people who looked ill — most of the patients appeared as if they were out enjoying a break. If there was any opportunity, they would definitely create a ruckus to have some noise and fun. Few prison officials meandered around looking helpless in controlling the situation. Some of the staff members were, in fact, pushed around by the bullies who also taunted them. The gangsters were virtual dictators whose realm extended from the jail barracks to the hospital, and also beyond the prison walls.

Handling the gangsters posed the most important challenge for us in Tihar Jail. One particular episode stands out in my memory.

This was within weeks of my taking charge. One evening, I was informed that a prisoner, in Jail 4 had been badly beaten. More than 10 officers of the jail staff were reportedly involved in this incident. It took place in the afternoon when the prison was officially declared closed after the midday roll-call. When 2,000 odd prisoners of Prison 4 were returning to their barracks, one particular inmate was taken out from his ward and beaten up by the officers, individually and collectively, at the *chakkar* — the centrepiece within the prison. I was informed that during visiting hours the previous day, this particular inmate, a notorious gangster and a bully to boot, had hit one of the Assistant Superintendents. The officers perceived the gangster's act as a challenge to their collective authority and felt that only a collective revenge would be commensurate. If a new IG (which was me) with her non-violent methodology was allowed to have her way, their machismo image would be shattered and their authority seriously threatened. They were convinced I had to accept the fact that the *status quo* could not be disturbed. And if it was, then consequences like this would become inevitable. It was a collective beating for displaying collective power. It was also a display of 'official unity' in the face of 'unofficial unity' of the ruthless gangsters. Through their collective action, the officers also implied that I, as an officer, would need protection from the gangsters and I had better learn my 'Tihar lessons' early. In other words, they wanted me to disturb nothing and carry on, immune to their activities. Like a heavy stone rushing downwards through slush, the news of the foregoing events spread throughout the jail. Both prisoners and staff waited, with the proverbial baited breath, to see what I would do and on whose side I was. I asked the Superintendent of Jail No 4, Prithvi Raj Meena, how the officers were able to enter the jail in the afternoon once it was officially 'closed'. And where was he when the incident occurred? I did not get a satisfactory

answer. Next, I called in the medical officer on duty and asked him to examine the inmate thoroughly and submit a detailed report specifying the nature and causes of the injuries inflicted on the beaten prisoner.

I kept up the pressure during the following days, for expediting the medical report and for an explanation from all the concerned officers. Not a single officer responded.

I spoke to my colleague and next-in-command, Jaydev Sarangi, suggesting that he should convey the message to the officers that I was waiting for the medical report. If it established violence, no one would be spared. I sent out the signal, categorically and unambiguously, that I would not tolerate the culture of violence fostered by some staff members. Eventually, the standoff ended. The medical report clearly showed the injuries to have been caused by beating the prisoner with lathis. The officers realised that they had been squarely indicted, and approached the Superintendent, P. R. Meena, to arrange a meeting with the DIG (Sarangi). One by one, they met the DIG and apologised for what had happened. Each of them asserted that he, personally, had not wanted to beat the prisoner but was compelled to do so in order to keep up the official solidarity. It was a Saturday and I was at home. Sarangi telephoned to convey the message that the officers were impatient and anxious to meet me. I did not think it proper to make them wait till the coming Monday, and I drove straight to Tihar. It was raining heavily.

All the officers were waiting outside my office, looking tense and apprehensive. I called them into my office. They initiated the conversation:

“Madam, we want to say something.”

I said: “Yes, what is it?”

They stated: “We beat up the prisoner because he was a bully and he misbehaved with one of the officers. He tore the officer’s shirt, abused and threatened him. He is a gangster and if he had not been given this treatment we would be beaten every day. We do not have any protection while on duty or at home. The gangsters regularly threaten our families, and the department has never offered us any protection.” They also put forward various other arguments to justify their stand.

After listening to their explanation, I posed some counter-questions: "The gangster became abusive and violent and beat up an officer. But what about you? You officers? Didn't you do the same? Is there no difference between custodians of law and prisoners? How did you differ in conduct? The prisoner is in prison for violation of law, and where are you? What entitles you to behave like him? Were there no other means of controlling the prisoner concerned? Was resorting to retaliatory violence the only way?" Before I could conclude, they offered a collective apology. They could not take the questions anymore. I decided to move on. "You have made me aware of the insecurities with which you have to live. There will be no And we did. The hardened, professional criminals came to know the same day that we were serious about correcting the present scenario. Most of the staff members were surprised to see the attitudes of the inmates undergoing a marked change for the better. The file of this incident remained in my personal custody — closed, but to be opened in the event of a recurrence of misbehaviour. Though they did not give me another opportunity to do so, such a mindset warranted a total overhaul to achieve this stage of prevention in future. It was a long haul... .

delays in setting them right."

Gangsters Galore  
A Synopsis  
Graph



## II

### *What Evolved*

*All that I have recorded earlier was what I saw — as it existed.*

*I have been able to state so much of what I saw because it was documented for correctional communication. Each observation is based on recorded notes and orders which were widely circulated to be reviewed and not forgotten. The reviews refined the system, and identified further areas of amendment. There was nothing confidential which went out or hung on the notice boards. Visible, verbal or written communication was used for speedy correction, since time was of essence.*

*Each day Tihar was responsible for managing the waking and sleeping hours of over 9,000 inmates, i.e., 216,000 hours each day (this was the prison population by January 1994). It was no ordinary responsibility.*

*There were no compelling demands. There were no clear commands. There were no sustained directions. There was no external audit effective enough to propel a change.*

*It was a question of individual conscience. One could consider prison work with boredom and apathy or with a sense of responsibility to be honoured in order to bring about some difference to those thousands of hapless human beings whose lives stood still.*

*I had to make a choice with which I had to live by. At the same time I was no more an individual. I stood integrated into Tihar which was to live beyond individuals. I found that the institutional and personal goals merged, to walk the road to revival, even though the road was rarely traversed.*

*It was not only the What, but the How of it. That's precisely why you'll find recurring references to various activities and individuals in this section. For, nothing was exclusive. Each and every human measure was mutually inclusive.*



*On the Rounds**T*

here were many ways of beginning the process of amendment. One was to wait for some time and ask for situational reports (or some trouble to erupt), from the respective Superintendents of the four prisons housed within the Tihar complex. On the basis of such reports, we could plan strategies for damage control. Such a wait-and-watch approach would have made me remain an understudy. I could have conveniently used these reports as a legitimate reason to delay the delineation of my further plans of action. And if anything had gone wrong during the probation period, I could have defended myself by claiming that I was still new and that it was my predecessors and juniors who had botched up. However, I did not use this approach.

The second method could have been to hold a meeting with my colleagues — the DIG, Jaydev Sarangi, and the four Superintendents, namely, K. R. Kishore, D. P. Diwedi, P. R. Meena and Tarsem Kumar — to convey the message that I would haul them up if anything went wrong, since they were the real technical experts of prison management and primarily responsible for any disorder. I could devise a system which would require them to send me daily

reports of the state of affairs and ensure that everything was going smoothly and deliver instructions with a ring of threat. I could keep calling for their explanations and not decide. I refused to adopt this harassing approach.

The third method was to ask my immediate juniors to continue with their usual activities, without reporting to me the exact nature of their activities. Incidentally, such a method was being followed, as a former IG had instructed the jail Superintendent to carry on with his work as though the office of the IG (Prisons) was "in a distant town outside Delhi". This was revealed to me by my colleagues during a relaxed session. Such a method would have enabled me to claim that I did not know what was happening and that I had sought a report, thus absolving myself of blame, to some extent, if the situation so demanded. This method, too, was not adopted.

One of the officers informed me that the main malaise affecting them was the paranoia that their names and photos would be splashed in a detrimental way in morning newspapers, as a result of 'media scoops'. In such an eventuality, they would be expected to give cogent explanations to their superiors, including the court of law which was highly stressful. Consequently, they followed the 'law of minimum intervention' and left the day-to-day management in the hands of the lower ranks, so that the Superintendents themselves could call for explanations from lower ranks in the event of an error. This method was resorted to quite frequently in the past but I found it repelling.

There was a fourth method too which involved the following factors: (a) I should take a great deal of interest in my work and call for daily written reports; and (b) I should only make occasional surprise inspections and punish or reward the persons involved according to their acts of omission and commission.

This method, too, did not seem comprehensive.

It is important to mention here that the staff members, barring a few exceptions, were immune to punishment as divulged by their confidential reports. Most of the officers and people from other ranks had earned the dubious distinction of facing court cases and

departmental enquiries. Also, several show cause notices had been slapped on them without much effect.

As I saw Tihar and the prevailing scenario, the whole system needed its own kind of answers, based on creative understanding, which would evolve as we proceeded with our work.

This on-the-rounds approach entailed walking inside the jail every day along with my Superintendent so that we could jointly see the conditions as they existed and not as they were reported. I decided to leave home daily at 8.30 am sharp, reach my office in the jail premises by 8.45 am, deposit the files, which I had taken home for clearing and by 9 am begin my rounds inside the prison. I would choose the prison to be visited by instinct or special need. I was accompanied by my personal attendant, a Warder named Lakhi Ram, from my office and the Superintendent inside. Lakhi Ram was a loyal young man who became an eyewitness to the whole process of my understanding of the prison.

My turning up at 8.45 am did cause a few problems to some staff members including the doctors. Their late schedules were disturbed. Those who had to come by public transport had to leave home much earlier and their habitual late-coming stood exposed.

The daily morning on-the-rounds gave me a unique opportunity of seeing things as they were. My innate belief in the fundamentals of the basic dictum, 'seeing is believing', proved itself with each round I took. This is what I saw and recorded for the information of all concerned, after my first formal round of the prison:

Boards in the Mulaqaat Written Window should be repainted and rewritten neatly.

*(Action, Superintendent*

*Jails)*

Clear instructions for frisking of visitors should be written on the Notice Board near the Mulaqaat Written Window.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No. 1 and TSP*

*Comdt)*

Toilets, benches and drinking water be made available to the visitors.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*1)*

Computerisation of Convict Record should be introduced.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No 1 and DIG*

*(P))*

Fireproof cupboards for maintaining records should be introduced. DIG(P) to make a proposal immediately. Also place fire extinguishers at crucial places for use in emergency.

*(Action, Superintendent Jails and DIG*

*(P))*

Issue directions to all Superintendents regarding a list of convicts who had spent more than half of the sentence. This information is to be compiled by Legal Branch.

*(Action, Legal*

*Branch)*

Repair of water cooler lying near the Legal Branch.

*(Action, Jail Superintendent No*

*1)*

A self-contained note of Social Welfare Branch giving performance report for the year 1992-93, budget allocated work assessment, staff position be put up to IG (P) within a week.

*(Action B. N. Tyagi, Incharge, Social Welfare*

*Branch)*

When was the last whitewash of Jail No 1 carried out since the premises need to be given a fresh and clean look?

*(Action, Deputy Superintendent*

*(HG))*

Timetable of Jail No 1 be put up to IG (P).

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*1)*

'Yoga Teacher' in Ladies Ward at Jail No. 1 be provided. Put up a proposal in this regard.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*1)*

To call the officers of Adult Education Centre for women prisoners.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*1)*

To prepare a list of teachers amongst the women prisoners.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*1)*

Reconsideration of time of Lockup and Lockout at Female Ward, Jail No 1 on Sundays.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*1)*

Nursery school for children should be provided.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*1)*

Film on Adult Education should be shown to the female prisoners.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*1)*

Some prisoners in Ward 4/1, Jail No. 1 had complained about medical facilities. They should be provided medical facilities immediately. Hereafter, the Superintendent of respective jails should take the doctor on duty along on the rounds, to attend to the patients and redress their grievances.

*(Action, Jail Superintendent and*

*MO)*



All Jail Superintendents would hereafter start a Rounds Observations Register of their jails. This register would include the time of their visit and observations made with instructions issued. They shall also initiate a further briefing Register for the Warders of the respective jails. Briefing Register will be written by the officers holding the briefing at the timings fixed by the Superintendent Jail. The briefing registers will mention the roll call of persons present or absent and briefing given with specific instructions if any.

*(Action, all Jail*

*Superintendents)*

Commandant, Tamil Nadu Security Police, was requested to prepare the security map of the jail and submit the same. He has been asked to prepare a Training Programme for his battalions. He has also been advised to prepare a checklist of all security aspects which his men must attend to. Detailed discussion with him will follow.

*(Action, Commandant,*

*TSP)*

As I entered the prison everyday, I would meet groups of prisoners waiting in the *deodhi* to board the jail van to go to the courts. Since this was their time to leave for the day, I got an opportunity to greet them and they greeted me. We could interact spontaneously. I could do a spot check on whether food had reached them on time in the morning, whether they got water to bathe, whether they were unlocked on time, whether the food served the previous evening was all right, whether the bread given in the morning was fresh, whether the tea served was hot and not black and bitter, whether the milk distributed was boiled, and whether the doctor was easily accessible in case of an emergency. I could assess the strength of the answers from the intensity of the response — from a feeble whimper to a boisterous collective chorus. Many times, I had to resort to a bit of goading and cross-examination to elicit the truth. On the basis of my morning rounds I could ascertain the 'evolving' or 'changing' ground realities. The group present at the *deodhi* was a perfect representative sample, because inmates from different wards came together, and, therefore, it was a random representation of the entire prison. The details of the interaction went back to all the wards on their return from the courts. A typical sample of follow-up action is being reproduced on the following page:

While entering Jail No 1, IG (Prisons) asked the prisoners who were waiting to go to courts if they had any problem. They had no complaint of water, food and behaviour.

Spiritual lectures and physical exercise started from today in the Female Ward of Jail No 1.

There were no taps in 25 cells for 'B' class prisoners, Jail No 1. Superintendent, Jail No 1, must be directed to install one tap in each cell so that water does not go waste.

*(Action, Superintendent, Jail No*

*1)*

Only one newspaper was provided in 25 chakki for 'B' class prisoners today. Superintendent, Jail No 1, to consider increasing the number of newspapers in 25 cells of 'B' class prisoners.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*1)*

Some of the prisoners in 25 chakki complained that permission to have a wrist watch, small transistor, newspaper, magazines at their own cost were not given. Superintendent, Jail No 1, is directed to give them permission to purchase newspaper, magazine, small transistor, TV and wrist watch at their own cost.

*(Action, Superintendent, Jail No*

*1)*

Some prisoners in 25 chakki requested for a separate kitchen. Superintendent, Jail No 1, to look into this.

Some of the prisoners in 25 chakki complained that the milk was totally watery and tea leaves were not of good quality.

Superintendent, Jail No 1, is directed to check the quality of the tea leaves and milk daily.

*(Action, Superintendent, Jail No*

*1)*

A reference calling the medical report of a convict, Vinoda Nath Jha, has been pending with RMO Hospital since 13.6.1993. RMO may explain why this reference is pending and fix the responsibility of the officer/official, if any.

IG (Prisons) inspected the *langar* of Jail No 3. The process of preparing of *dal* was unhealthy. It was noticed that the *dal* was never cleaned before boiling. A serious view on this was taken and Superintendent, Jail No 3, has been asked to meet *langar* staff of all the four jails to tell them what was detected so that this unhealthy cooking practice is stopped henceforth.

From the *deodhi* to the inside portion of the prison, 'on the round' meant going from barrack to barrack, and cell to cell. As I walked the prison, I was observing, interacting, questioning,

learning, solving, evolving and ensuring the implementation of earlier decisions. This

direct questioning had a straight impact on the staff present. They were compelled to improve matters and solve problems. Each one now was getting identified by face and name. Since each round was recorded, this was Round No 7:

On the night round observations of the IG (P)

In Jail No 4, a large number of drains were not covered, PWD needs to cover them.

*(Action,*

*PWD)*

Many toilets in Jail No 4 were stinking. There should be a system of cleaning. The sweepers earmarked per ward must clean the toilets before prisoners lock-in time after the evening roll-call.

*(Action, all Superintendents of*

*Jail)*

A number of fans and electricity points were not in order causing hardship to the inmates at the peak of summer. The PWD, Electricity Wing, is requested to earmark a night-checking staff to go on the round on their own to detect defects.

*(Action, PWD, Electricity*

*Wing)*

There were a lot of complaints against Ranjit Singh for misbehaviour. The concerned Superintendent of jail to call the Assistant Superintendent to find out what is the problem. Misbehaviour with inmates is not to be tolerated.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*2)*

Ward No 4 of Jail No 1 is highly over-congested and needs decongestion. DIG (Prisons) to please plan redistribution.

*(Action, DIG (P))*

Games items, such as volleyballs, tennis balls, cricket bats, carrom board, etc., be provided to the inmates of Ward No 6 and similarly to all others. The Assistant Superintendent on duty was already instructed to do the needful. Superintendent to please ensure that the instructions are complied with.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*1)*

The inmates asked for a proper letterbox where they can place the letters for posting. All Superintendents to examine the system and DIG to issue common orders in this regard which are practical and appropriate.

*(Action, DIG (P))*

A number of TV sets in Jail No 1 are reported to be out of order. Superintendent Jail No 1 to please get the faulty TVs repaired.

News travelled in Tihar like fire. This prevailing practice was later known as 'Tihar Express' — a term used by prisoners while they passed messages or exchanged notes when they happened to meet one another in judicial lockups. The prisoners from all the four prisons got intermixed due to common lodging in judicial lockup at the courts, which further facilitated inter-prison communications, for better or worse! Hence, day-to-day situations seen and corrected by us on the round made good news for the prison without any extra effort on our part. It also emboldened inmates to inform us of their requirements, such as, patients suffering from serious ailments needing immediate attention. They also told us of matters which otherwise were hidden, such as their wrist watches, wallets, belts, ballpens, etc., not being returned by the Delhi policemen frisking them at the judicial lockup. We found that the police kept no record of such items, which facilitated their misappropriation. Further, the police van which transported the undertrials carried more than the authorised number to save on vehicles. These inputs were indicative of an expectation developing from us which gave us great satisfaction.

For me every round was precious. It made each day more meaningful! My rounds revealed the realities behind the facade and made me fully aware of the challenges that I would have to face in the coming days. I could get to see and understand various problems with instant solutions to many of them. The heartening fact was that the mass of prisoners, whom we encouraged to interact, themselves started to provide the possible answers to their own problems. Running a prison proved to be a massive exercise in housekeeping. The method of taking rounds of the prison helped to identify recurring problems which were then solved. The staff members were on their toes because they would not know when the seniors would turn up for a visit! Also, their earlier camouflaging tactics had been exposed. We wanted to make the entire system transparent so that no wrongdoing could be hidden or glossed over. Here is one of the orders which documented on-the-round observations:

There have been complaints of milk pilferage, dilution and diversion from the quality of milk which comes for the prisoners' consumption. This is totally unwarranted and it must stop forthwith. Duty Officer on morning duty must supervise the quality and quantity of milk distributed in the morning. They will ensure that the milk is not pilfered and not diluted with water. Prisoners must get what Delhi Milk Scheme gives. Duty Officer will be held wholly responsible regarding the quantity of milk.

I recorded my day-to-day observations, both good and bad, meticulously on the notepad which I carried with me. After my rounds were over, these observations were typed or photocopied for circulation amongst all the officials in various prisons. One copy was displayed on the prison's noticeboard at the *deodhi*. Thus, anyone coming in or going out of the prison could read the observations of the day. The notes truthfully reflected the realities of the prison and were a kind of catalogue of events as they actually were, be it complimentary or embarrassing. Everything was on record and spoke for itself. This proved to be a powerful means of communication, making the desired difference. Here is another such example:

It has been observed that we are being erratic in locking out and locking in the prisoners, particularly on holidays. This is perhaps due to lack of staff for the staff being in a hurry to get rest. While we are taking corrective measures for deployment of the Warders, you are requested to examine proper timings for locking out and locking in so that the inmates do not have avoidable grievance in this regard.

The on-the-round approach greatly increased the degree of accessibility at all levels. The officers who rarely visited the jail were now brought face-to-face with those persons who had to bear the consequences of their policies and decisions. To some extent the red tape vanished! This state of affairs was viewed with trepidation by the officers as their hold was being greatly diminished. Moreover, their actions or lack of it were being constantly evaluated on the basis of my on-the-rounds observations, which provided an on-the-spot 'test check' for all the decisions taken at the jail headquarters.

I reproduce below a page from my notepad which was duly circulated:

Blackboards need to be provided for proper teaching.  
 Strict supervision needs to be kept at study time.  
 Bleaching powder needs to be sprinkled very regularly in all wards and the *Langar*. In case the stores are unable to meet the requirements, Jail Superintendents may purchase on their own and claim reimbursement from the Headquarters, in view of shortages.  
 Meetings between schools and respective Jail Superintendent need to be held and now each school can be offered to adopt a ward for purposes of education, and library magazines and books. In this way each ward could have its own library, and education support and move towards self-sufficiency in educational activities.  
 Class examinations be held by the end of this week. (All prisons)  
 Jail 4, Pen-making industry needs to be shifted to the Vocational Wing. All staff of the rank of Assistant Superintendent must be seen in uniform in the forenoons.  
 Jail 4 does not seem to be having a manure unit. Therefore, garbage need not be kept collected and it should be removed regularly.  
 Courts to be informed of the request for fresh dates for all the undertrials who have given consent to take *vipassana* meditation course.  
 There is a severe shortage of cooking utensils in the Prison *Langar*. Superintendent Jail 4 is requested to immediately procure six aluminium *patilas* of 250 litres each. For the other prisons, similar action be taken. *Kali* contract of the *Peetal Patilas* needs to be organised quickly by the Headquarters so that the *Peetal Patilas* have necessary *kali* to be used as cooking utensils.  
 Jail 4 is in urgent need of eradication of mosquitoes. It appears that despite the support of the Municipal Corporation, they need to have their own large pumps to flit on daily basis. They may urgently buy flit pumps from the Government stores to control the menace and take reimbursement from the Headquarters.  
*Chappatis* must be kept on raised platforms only, for purposes of hygiene. The methodology was explained to Superintendent Jail 4, for early implementation.

Anyway, the basic objective of my on-the-rounds formula was to find practical and realistic solutions to specific, tangible problems for all categories of prisoners without running into ego problems keeping in mind the ominously rigid prison hierarchy.

Appropriately, many such decisions and the implementation strategies continued to be modified on the basis of the feedback given by the prisoners or the staff during my rounds. This was Round No 15, dated 03.06.93:

Some prisoners complained that doctors were supplying only one Parmol tablet for all diseases. RMO was requested to give directions to all the doctors that the patients must be spoken to and explained at least what medicines are being given to them and for what.

*(Action, RMO)*

One prisoner, Sultan, s/o Hameed, complained about the misbehaviour of a *munshi*. DS Jail was directed to look into this. *Munshi* was warned, matter closed.

There was a complaint that the doctor on night duty did not attend the call promptly last night. Superintendent Jail to look into this and report to me in the evening along with reasons for delay.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*1)*

During the visit to the Library it was seen that the papers received from the prisoners were not signed by the Assistant Superintendent. It was decided that the Librarian would put up the papers directly to the Deputy Superintendent without any delay and the AS could sign them in DS's office itself.

*(Action, Deputy Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent Jail No 1)*

I also visited the canteen of Jail No 1. Canteen Incharge complained about the scarcity of water. Administration Officer is directed to issue a Sintex tank to the canteen for storage of water and ensure that the tanker fills it up on a regular basis.

I also visited the *Langar* of Jail No 1. It was clean and better.

Let me elaborate by providing a specific case in point. During one of the morning rounds I noticed a particular inmate with pronounced rashes on his face. I questioned him how he had developed this. He clarified that the blade used by the prison barber (who was also an inmate), was rusted and the none-too-tender ministrations of this item had resulted in these irritating rashes. We evaluated the entire process of maintenance of hygiene and personal cleanliness. We decided to introduce the twin blade cartridges and encouraged the inmates to shave by themselves. We also decided to liberalise the issue of antiseptics such as Dettol and



Savlon. We did not stop here; we went on to buy plastic mirrors for the inmates and identified suitable places where they could be fixed and also ensured that they could not be removed and used for other harmful activities. Further, to ensure personal cleanliness, we launched sustained programmes to educate the prisoners on its benefits. Innovation and improvisation were absolutely necessary, and obsolete rules could not be allowed to obstruct the cleansing process within the overall security system. Prior to this, there was resistance by the staff to accept any change in practice. This instance helped us push the change through. It did not take us long to open a hair-cutting and shaving saloon in each prison.

During another round a prisoner complained of a doctor who was asking more questions about the crimes the inmates had committed rather than their medical problems. The doctors' diagnostic skills were exposed and an order followed: "Henceforth, no doctor, while examining or treating the patient prisoners, would ask about the nature of crimes the prisoner had committed." The prison had no official psychiatrist, psychologist or counsellor anyway, so what had the physician to do with the nature of the crime committed?

Another beneficial result of the on-the-rounds phenomenon was that the number of inmates appealing to the courts got drastically reduced. They gained confidence that their pleas and entreaties would be heard within the prison, therefore, they need not necessarily rush to the court for redressal. Earlier, the prisoners frequently approached the courts, sometimes on farcical grounds, and the Superintendents and other officials were compelled to appear regularly before magistrates and judges. In fact, the jail officials were put in the dock and ended up defending themselves against various allegations made by the prisoners. Now, the officials were present in the prison and used their time for better supervision and positive intervention.

The on-the-rounds practice was not meant to be a formality. This habit had to be visibly result-oriented. All assurances, promises, acceptance of genuine suggestions and other guarantees had to be

followed up and duly implemented. It had to be constantly viewed as a problem-solving approach. This was another observation recorded on 16.12.94:

National Open School classes to be also separately organised.

*Langar* Distribution: Assistant Superintendent (*Langar*) to take action immediately.

IGNOU syllabus to be provided. Superintendent Jail to contact the IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University).

Copy-buying system to be in force at the *mulaqaat* stage.

*Satsang* for the Adolescent Ward be held daily from 11 am to 11.15 am. Shortage of drinking water in Ward No 17 to be removed.

Tape recorders along with cassettes to be provided immediately to *Vipassana* Ward.

Soap and oil to be provided for Ward No 17 immediately for poor prisoners.

In Ward No 17, the problem of mosquitoes is very acute. Flit to be sprayed immediately.

Redistribution of blankets and utensils to be done immediately.

I can recount many instances which reinforced this. For example, if we detected that some prisoners needed immediate medical attention, they were rushed to the prison hospital. If we came across ill-clad or shoddily attired prisoners, we procured better quality clothes for them from the store which came through community donations and ensured delivery the same day. In case some prisoners needed legal assistance, they were referred to the appropriate legal aid cell which consisted of lawyers who visited the prison at regular intervals. If the inmate happened to be a bibliophile, we would supply him with books from the stock available. The list could go on. But the bottom line was very clear. The prisoners had to trust the administration for their genuine needs, and the system had to respond with compassion and sensitivity.

One of the most visible benefits of on-the-rounds technique was the restoration of self-esteem and a sense of security among the inmates. They began to feel that there were people in Tihar who cared for them and they would not be victims of negligence and apathy anymore. Many convicts admitted that the prison staff was

compassionate towards them despite the fact that they had inflicted great harm on the society. Such a realisation invoked feelings of mutual respect on a human level for their protectors. This transformation was recorded after yet another observation on 09.09.93:

I visited the Women's Ward and saw the handicraft work done by the women prisoners. They were very good. The teacher required some instruments, like machines, clothes, etc. Superintendent Jail No 1 is requested to arrange these supplies.

*(Action, Superintendent*

*Jail)*

I visited Ward No 5 and inspected cells. We need to arrange regular canteen visits here as discussed with Superintendent Jail No 1.

*(Action, Superintendent Jail No*

*1)*

I visited Ward No 6/6 and found that inmates were engaged in storytelling. It was heartening to see a positive environment in the barrack.

Prisoner Rambir, s/o Baleshwar, rewarded with cash Rs 100 from IG (Prisons) on account of his leadership and participation.

*(Action, AO, to put up reward to IG*

*(P))*

Saw the adult education class in Ward No 6. The prisoners requested for more books and pencils. Also a book titled, *Teach Yourself Hindi*, could be purchased (100 copies) from the Headquarters and given to Superintendent Jail No 1 for distribution via Library. Galgotia & Brothers, Connaught Place, New Delhi were the suppliers. They could be approached.

*(Action, DIG*

*(P)/AO)*

From the visit it is evident that the staff, particularly the Assistant Superintendents, are taking a very keen interest in their work. This is a very good trend.

The prisoners, by now, knew that we were on the rounds for the content of our work and not as a result of decrees or external dictats. Realisation, appreciation and enthusiasm on the part of the prisoners gave us our first and crucial breakthrough in restructuring the internal environment of the prison. Gradually, the prisoners appeared happier and relaxed. Such *joie de vivre* proved infectious and the mood became

cheerful enough to dispel the atmosphere of depression and despondency usually hovering over the prison. In this

context, I remember one particular Japanese inmate who was a picture of infinite sadness.

One day, I walked up to him and asked him: "What can we do to make you smile for all of us?" He remained silent.

However, his companions said: "Madam, he is a very good guitarist. He can play very well."

I responded: "Very well; he shall be given a guitar."

The Jail Superintendent, K. R. Kishore, gifted him one from the Prisoners Welfare Fund the very next day. After that the Japanese inmate became a totally different person. He not only smiled but also went on to become a musician.

In the earlier setup, the prison did not have a single psychiatrist or counsellor who could have reached out to individuals on a one-to-one basis. This shortcoming was rectified in a small measure by the healing effects of on-the-rounds routine.

Taking a round of the prisons had a preventive role to play in the sense that many potential brawls or riots were nipped in the bud. We could gauge the volatility levels of the prisoners fairly accurately after the rounds, and if our barometers indicated rising levels, we could quickly intervene and defuse the situation before it went out of control. During my two-year tenure at Tihar, there was not a single case of organised violence except for a couple of minor scuffles which were instigated by a few officers opposed to the transformation taking place in Tihar. As a result of our persistent endeavours, we could isolate individuals who were hostile and tried our best to help them surmount their own malady.

The on-the-rounds pragmatism eliminated a great deal of paperwork as far as day-to-day functioning was concerned. The beneficial effects of this were visible when a large number of defects were rectified without even recording them on paper. The concerned officials were there to take spot decisions. Only my observations during the rounds were circulated, since these had policy implications. This modicum of paper work was essential. One major policy order which was the harbinger of bringing in time sensitisation is being reproduced here:

We all need to understand that if the inmates are mentally occupied with recreational activities, such as watching television, listening to the transistor, reading books, newspapers and magazines or playing games they would have less tension and stress and would remain physically and mentally healthy. We should, therefore, make special efforts to keep the inmates mentally and physically occupied in creative, recreational and spiritual activities so that our inmates have little time to think of their discomforts which come with imprisonment.

If any inmate has a television or books, or a transistor or a wrist watch, he can be permitted to keep these on the spot, nobody need harass him for want of written permission.

The spirit behind this instruction must be kindly understood and all the staff members of all ranks must kindly implement this.

During my daily tea meetings with the DIG and the Superintendents, recorded observations formed the major topics of discussion. Again, these observations dominated the proceedings during our weekly meetings with officers of the rank of Assistant Superintendents and above. Since the recorded observations provided irrefutable evidence of the goings-on within the jail, the officers were open to explanation and correction. The corrections led us to an exchange of ideas and greater understanding of each other's viewpoints. We gained mutually from the experiences which strengthened the feeling of a team spirit. This later became a powerful force to move the lower ranks towards accepting innovative and reformative measures and to generate greater momentum.

I cannot by any stretch of imagination think of any institution with such an overwhelming human dimension run by 'remote control'. Irrespective of the state-of-the-art gadgets, such as video cameras at every nook and corner to monitor the prisoners' activities, or robots to cater to the prisoners' needs, direct human participation is absolutely necessary to make an institution like a jail serve as a reservoir of hope and reassurance for its inmates. I have closely watched the functioning of the jail systems in different parts of the world, and have observed that wherever the management interaction was greater, institutions produced better results; wherever the 'remote control' devices were dominant, frequent brawls, riots, escapes or attempts to do so became the norm.

Tihar Jail was massive compared to its counterparts in other regions of the globe which I have visited — in the USA, Europe, South-east Asia and South-west Asia. Nowhere were the challenges as gigantic in terms of numbers. Nowhere was the system so feudal in its outlook and so decadent in its functioning. Nowhere were the laws so antiquated and obsolete. When entrusted with the care of such an institution, I knew it could well be turned into a graveyard, making me a part of the ruin. But I took it as a God-sent opportunity and aspired to be a part of the resurrection process. Direct human interaction during the rounds of the prison was the road to revival....

On-the-Rounds  
A Synopsis  
Graph



## *Championing a Cause: The Petition Box*

**S**ince on-the-rounds practice had built-in limitations of time and the ability to detect and rectify each and every hidden malady, we had to, therefore, constantly identify other means which would yield more information. Above all, we had to ensure that we controlled the system and that it was not the other wayround.

The prison management cadres did not have any reliable and operational system of interaction with the inmates to counteract the 'gossip network'. By habit, these cadres did not believe in accountability and responsibility. Their attitude was marked predominantly by secrecy, callousness and indifference. Therefore, chances of inmates confiding in officials for their personal insecurities was absolutely remote. The inmates did not have any means to air their grievances, or a forum where they could collectively bring their difficulties to the notice of the authorities. Although complaint boxes, modelled like postboxes, could be found hanging on the prison walls, hardly anybody ever utilised them. These boxes were painted black, reflecting sinister overtones. Most

of these complaint boxes were locked with keys lost; some others were left open, with the little doors rattling annoyingly in the breeze. Interestingly, magistrates who occasionally came for inspection visits knew that these boxes were nothing but reminders of a judgment passed in the case, *Sunil Batra vs Delhi Administration*, by Hon'ble Justice Krishna Iyer, R. S. Pathak and O. Chenappa Reddy, J J in the Supreme Court of India in the year 1980. Please see (1980) 3 SCC . . . . . With my inadequate understanding of the functioning of the ponderous jail system, within the first two days of taking charge, I initiated a procedure which entailed the introduction of a prisoners' complaint register based on my on-the-rounds observations. One such register was to be made available in each ward for recording the inmates' grievances. This meant that each Superintendent would have to go through 12 to 14 registers. This was found to be too high an expectation, and even random perusal was not done. Eventually, I realised that I would have to check about 40-odd registers everyday myself, which was physically impossible. The officials, therefore, could get away with a 'see-nothing-do-nothing' attitude.

My first solution, therefore, was a non-starter. It was like putting the cart before the horse. The staff members were just not oriented towards implementing this new methodology. Moreover, I later realised that a large percentage of the prisoners were either illiterate or poorly literate and could not put their grievances in writing. Yet, I was determined to find a way to give the prisoners a system to enable them to express their grievances. It was only a matter of time before we hit upon the correct method. And within a month, we introduced a simple and effective system of redressal, namely, the 'mobile petition box'. This eight inches by four inches box was painted green, with the number of the prison written on it. It had a cloth sling and reached the inmates right into their barracks. All they had to do was to put their petitions into a locked box, while the key was in the custody of my office. This method assured confidentiality. Each prison was given a separate box to do the ward rounds. The inmate, while putting the petition, could request for secrecy and the covering

488 for details of the judgment.

of identity. Four constables/clerks were earmarked by rotation totake the petition box to the four prisons and into the wards at knowntimings. The prisoners were advised to keep their petitions ready inadvance.



The introduction of the mobile petition box was preceded by explaining to the inmates the importance of using it to the maximum effect so that their genuine grievances and complaints could reach us for redressal. There was a regular reiteration for prisoners' information and active interest in using the system. On our part, we ensured that the petition box reached all inmates at a declared time without having to search for it.

The mobile petition box system went into operation at full steam on June 1, 1993, exactly 30 days after my taking charge of the prison. The infrastructure of the scheme was worked out by my able DIG(Prisons), Jaydev Sarangi, and four young Superintendents of the prisons, namely, K. R. Kishore, Superintendent Jail No 1, Tarsem Kumar, Superintendent Jail No 2, D. P. Dwivedi, Superintendent Jail No 3 and P. R. Meena, Superintendent Jail No 4. The DIG very aptly nominated S. P. Tyagi as the petition officer, as he did not

belong to the jail cadre, but hailed from the Delhi Administration Secretariat Services. He, therefore, was expected to be objective and fearless in pointing out matters concerning his prison colleagues, in case they were reported through the petition box. As the petition officer, he had the key to the box. He alone could open it, take the petitions out, give each of them a log number, categorise them, prioritise them and bring them to me personally. If I had the time, he and I would discuss the trends right away. We decided on priority action according to the feedback we got. This could mean an urgent personal search of a person or a barrack. It could also mean urgent help to a prisoner, be it medical or otherwise. It also meant putting a particular staffer under a watch, visiting an inmate who was under depression and needed to be heard urgently — and most of all it meant the prevention of an imminent breach of peace within a barrack, if it was found to be developing.

In case I was busy through the day, the file of petitions came home with me. I read them while driving back in my car. As soon as I reached home, I would call up the concerned Jail Superintendent to inform him, in case of any matter requiring urgent attention. Petitions were most valuable inputs for us and deserved sensitive handling.

The following day, all the petitions except those which were supposed to be confidential were sent to the Jail Superintendent. He handled them personally and asked the ward officers to remove grievances, like the irregularity of barber's visits, water scarcity, unsatisfactory cleanliness, ineffective supervision, non-availability of medicines, non-attendance of doctors, specific medicines being in short supply, visits being skipped, misbehaviour of a fellow inmate, misbehaviour by staff, etc.

To show what we got from the petition box, some complaints are being carried on pages 159-160.

Trends in petitions were discussed briefly in our tea meetings held daily. The meeting was very focused on the day's observations. Each Jail Superintendent was anxious to know what the observations of the morning rounds were, and the trends of the

Dated: 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 33

Water Sanitation

88  
28/8/33

To  
The Inspector General (Prisons)  
Jail Central Jail No. 4  
Jail Road  
New Delhi 110054.

1349  
37

106  
28/8/33

Subject: Application to improve water, sanitation & Jail conditions

Most Respected Madam,

The inmates of Ward No. 4, are facing extreme problem, due to the serious lack of potable water, due to the fact that everyday, there is tension which causes minor ward, mis-handling, because every second person, wants his queue to be filled, the people who get in their stalls need a bath too, which is extremely difficult, as there are no hot water taps, the handpumps usually are not functioning.

Secondly, the problem of sanitation arises as the manholes are open (no lids) the toilets are generally dirty, due to which unsanitary conditions prevail which can lead to any epidemic.

What but, not the least, is that, the fans of our wards, are of the old type, which are touching the high ceiling, without giving any air, due to the fact we inmates are uneasy, throughout the day.

Madam, we the inmates of Ward No. 4, would be highly obliged, if the above stated problems, are solved, as early as possible to avoid any further inconvenience to us. Thanking you  
(for the Ward No. 4)

30  
670  
226  
To  
THE I-G. (PRISONS)  
CENTRAL JAIL NO 1  
NEW DELHI - 64.  
SUB: B CLASS FACILITIES TO AUSTRALIAN CITIZEN

HON'BLE MADAM,  
MOST RESPECTFULLY, I SUBMIT AS  
UNDER,

1. THAT, I ALEX D'SOUZA S/O LATE SH. DAVID D'SOUZA  
HAS BEEN CONFINED IN THIS JAIL SINCE 5<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 82.
2. THAT, I AM AUSTRALIAN CITIZEN SINCE YEAR 1987
3. THAT, BEING FOREIGNER, I REQUEST YOU TO KINDLY  
GRANT ME THE FACILITIES WHICH I AM ENTITLED TO,  
UNDER YOUR KIND CONTROL.
4. I CAN PRODUCE YOU MY CITIZENSHIP CERTIFICATE TO  
PROVE THAT I AM TRUE, MY PASSPORT IS WITH THE  
POLICE STATION RAJOURI GARDEN, WHICH I AM UNABLE  
TO PRODUCE AT PRESENT.

Respected Madam, I am  
at present in ward no 15, Barrick no 1, and I  
am situated in a corner where there is no  
fan and the temperature is extremely hot with  
flies and mosquitoes etc it is hard to sleep at night.

I shall be highly Obligated, if I am  
granted the facilities which every foreigner Deserves

Thanking you in Advance

Yr/ 807  
286-15

Thanking you  
Yours faithfully  
D'Souza

Alex D'Souza S/O David D'Souza, Ward NO-15/1

petitions. Each meeting threw a new light on the matter at hand and each analysis led to greater understanding. Even a single petition could lead to collective application of mind for a combined policy, such as prison timings, prayer methodology, sharing of resources, interchange of prison teachers, cooking of food, etc. The other staff too awaited policy announcements after the tea meetings, and knew these were team decisions, implementation of which was mandatory. The petitions became in many ways the basis of continuous correction and innovation.

Between Tyagi, the petition officer, and myself, we used to mark out portions on petitions which needed to be highlighted and shared with all the officers during our staff meetings on every Monday. These meetings continued to reiterate the importance of the mobile petition scheme. The reports on petitions received from the Superintendents were crosschecked with the inmates.

During the course of my own checking, I discovered many realities which were concealed till then. Each situation demanded its own specific response — within the right time. The introduction of the mobile petition box had a beneficial purging effect on the endemic and ever-lurking problems of the prisoners. After the first month, in June 1993, we received as many as 231 petitions on medical problems, 68 on corruption by staff, 23 on corruption by inmates, 25 on problems concerning food, 19 on shortage of water, 13 on electricity, and 134 on miscellaneous matters, such as the need for police protection for the families of the inmates, welfare needs and transfer from one prison to another for proximity to a relative also in prison. It was these petitions which became an important source of information of ground realities of the prison, which needed basic overhauling. Here is an excerpt from a report which appeared on July 7, 1993, in *The Hindu*, with the headline, *Better Say For Tihar Prisoners*:

A prisoner in Jail No 4, Ward No 3 in Tihar wants a fellow-prisoner to be shifted elsewhere as he was “fomenting communal tensions.” The man claims to be a leader of Hindus and is always fighting. “Please, madam, do justice by transferring this person. Everybody fears him, so no one wants to report.” The



complaint which was put in the mobile petition box has now been entered in the Prisoners' Grievances Register and has been brought to the notice of the Inspector General, Prisons. An enquiry is on.

Another prisoner, a woman, requests in writing that her husband, who is also in the jail, be shifted from a particular ward because "smack was being sold there and he might become an addict." Not only is the person shifted, the Jail Administration takes steps to ensure that contraband is not sold.

A convict under NDPS Act has a suggestion on how to stop use of narcotics inside the jail. The suggestion is simple, he writes. "Just remove the silver foil from the cigarette packets that are sold in the jail. Without the foil, the addict cannot light up." The suggestion is taken and the Inspector General recommends a reward for him. A prisoner is rewarded with an extra cake of bathing soap and washing soap for his suggestions on how to save electricity and vegetables.

Nothing unusual about complaint chits and applications put in the petition box. The unusual part is that every complaint or grievance is now brought to the notice of a gazetted officer in the jail administration. In a marked departure from earlier practice, the key of the petition box is not with the Jail Superintendent. It is opened in the Administration wing by a gazetted officer.

According to Ms Kiran Bedi, IG, Prisons, such a system allows more freedom to the prisoners in airing their complaints. Earlier, when the box was kept inside the ward, there was the possibility of a jail Warder or a Superintendent removing an application from the box. Besides, the prisoner could always be stopped from putting an application in the box in the first place.

Making the petition box mobile was one of the number of changes brought about in the administration of Tihar Jail. A constable appointed with the IG takes the box to the prisoners and gets it back to the office where it is opened by an officer. The complainant is given an acknowledgement card (pink) and another card (green) after action is taken.

The petition box proved to be a searchlight which lit up the problems within the prison for all of us to see. The intensity of the light exposed all nooks and corners, enabling us to attend to the problems and provide almost instantaneous solutions. The results spoke for themselves. In July, the medical petitions came down to 128, corruption by staff to 28, misbehaviour by staff to 13, food to nine, water to 11. By December, the medical petitions further came down to 27, corruption by staff to seven, misbehaviour by staff to 12, food to five, water nil, electricity two, corruption by inmates to 10, and miscellaneous 95.

In the first six months, we attended to 2,279 petitions. The breakdown was as follows: 676 petitions on medical matters; 164 on corruption by staff; 109 on misbehaviour by staff; 125 on corruption by inmates; 114 on misbehaviour by inmates; 111 on food; 42 on water; 43 on electricity; 223 on internal discipline; and 672 miscellaneous. It was a moot question whether all these problems would have ever surfaced without the confidence which the mobile petition box system generated.

The petition system proved successful as it was the result of a collective will exercised by one and all to solve problems. Each petition had to be given due importance. Each paper that came through the petition box was expected to be carefully scrutinised and followed up according to its specific need, as deliberated through this order:

In the officer's meeting today it was clearly evident that only Jail Nos 2 and 3 are personally attending to the petitions being received from the DIG's office. Jail Nos 1 and 4 are not paying adequate attention to the reading of the petitions and redressal of the grievances. It would be expected hereafter that all Gazetted Officers including Superintendents must read the petitions being sent to them and devise their method of prompt disposal.

Maybe they could evolve the same pattern as Superintendent Jail No 3 has done by collectively sitting together, handling petitions and giving a personal hearing to many people.

The improvement in this regard would be discussed and will be evident in the next officers' meeting.

I personally acknowledged and replied to each petition before the respective Superintendent followed them up. All this needed to be done to let the petitioner and his fellow inmates believe that we valued their feedback sincerely. It was important to us to win their trust and respect for the system. It did not matter to us what kind of paper they used or what language they wrote in, and who they were. What was important was how much confidence they reposed by sharing their grievances which provided us with valuable and sensitive information.

For ensuring regular and sustained motivation, we devised a system of sending printed reply cards which were pink in colour.

“...and the ...”

## PETITION REPLY CARD

[illegible]

Each reply card was like a certified response of my having read the inmate's letter. These reply cards were usually sent to the petitioners the next day (i.e., the day after the receipt of the petitions) through the constables or clerks who went to the various prisons with the petition box. The card carried instructions or a response according to the petition received. The card carried my personal observations in response to the inmate's petition. It carried a suggestion on what was to be done by the inmates and the staff. In this manner, the petitioners knew that the system was getting personal attention. A majority of the petitions were in Hindi, to which I used to reply in Hindi; those in English were replied to in English. Some petitions even got a 'thank you' for a good suggestion made, or for giving useful information which we utilised for improving the system. For instance, if the petitioner stated that he was not getting proper medicines, I would write on the pink card: "Please go and see the doctor and show the doctor this card." On the same card, I also wrote a small note for the doctor to ensure that the inmate's problem got solved. After the daily morning literacy class, the concerned inmate would go

to see the doctor, and the Warder would not stop him from going because he had a pink card with a

written message. The doctor gave special attention to the inmate in view of the instructions. The same inmate, if still not satisfied, could write again through the petition box. This usually led to intervention at a senior level. Sometimes, I used to ask the doctor to see me to find out why the patient was complaining repeatedly. This alerted the doctors to their duties. They became accountable to work as effectively as possible by a concerned and alert system. We did not find inmates misusing the petition box. However, the doctors occasionally did come across a shammer.

Petitions received through the mobile box became an important subject of discussion in the evening congregation of the prisoners. A few of the selected petitions were read out and discussed for wider acceptance of certain practices, or brought out a general trend which was against their larger interest. An order was issued to that effect:

A very interesting information has come from the petition box and this is regarding selling of duplicate *bidis*. It says that the canteen staff took the financial benefit by means of commission for selling duplicate *bidis* which amount to about thousand rupees per month.

The situation needs to be corrected immediately and Kamla *bidi* brand be banned immediately. Any *bidi* which has an enamel coupon should also be banned. Superintendents and Deputy Superintendents will ensure the sale of only genuine material through the canteen.

This be implemented forthwith.

Habits of cleanliness, hygiene, sanitation, storing of food items, sharing of reading books, distribution of food, were some of the issues discussed. A good suggestion was considered to be a positive contribution and was openly rewarded amidst the applause of over 2,000 inmates of that particular prison from where the contribution. Confidential petitions remained in my custody or with the petition officer. We used the information provided by such petitions very carefully to ensure that the informer did not get exposed. We verified and crosschecked such information on our own while on the rounds or in some other way. While the informer would know that we were on the prowl, others would not. Through this confidential came.

method, we obtained very useful information about staff behaviour and the corruption pattern. Here's a sample of the kind of collective awareness the inmates had developed.

MOST CONFIDENTIAL

The Inspector General (Prisons)  
Central Jail, Tehan, New Delhi.

SH-3  
DH-3 9/3

Subj: PETITION BY PANCH-MEMBERS OF WARD 11-A  
ON BEHALF OF ALL INMATES TO HAVE THE HEAD  
WARDER TYAGI TRANSFERRED DUE TO HIS  
MISADVENTURES INCLUDING DEMANDING MONEY  
FROM ALL & SUNDRY AND BEATING/ABUSING  
OF INMATES (INCLUDING HARI SINGH — BEATEN  
AND ABUSED ON 01.9.93 MORNING)

Respected Madam,

This petition we, the Panchayat-Members of Ward 11-A, are submitting to your kindness for prompt action against the <sup>Head</sup> Warder Mr Tyagi who has created a reign of terror in the Ward.

- (1) First, Shri Tyagi — The Head Warder — is all the time abusing the inmates and sometimes beats/slaps them. Only yesterday, i.e. 01.9.93, in the morning, when Shri. Hari Singh (Hindi calligraphist known to you, madam) came from Ward 11-B to see one of us Panch members in relation with some urgent case.

- 2 -

matter, he was first abused and then slapped in front of some inmates. However, Hari Singh requested others not to report the matter, a thorough gentleman as he is. The inmates have got fed up with such kinds of treatment meted out to them.

(2) SECOND:- Shri Tyagi always asks money from all and sundry for every petty job even for going to other ward or the hospital. He gets regular payment from all those who use needles and gets black-mailed them for obvious reasons.

(3) THIRD:- While all cells in the Ward are locked in the noon and evening, two three cells --- mainly Nos 14, and 15 <sup>and 16</sup> are open and their men are heard talking and sitting outside with the Head Warden. This can be verified any day and any time. All previous letters in this regard by Panch members have remained ~~unattended~~ and unheard.

(4) FOURTH:- All Wardens who are on duty and under the said Head Warden, have no option, if they do not ~~to~~ agree with him, but to obey to him and succumb to his.

— 3 —

Misdeemeanours since Shri Tyagi impresses upon them claiming he is the oldest employee in the jails for 26 yrs. And that nobody can dare take any action against him. He has proved the point by remaining in the same Ward, while all other Head Warders have been transferred to other jails..!

(5) FIFTH:- None of us Panch members use heater or any illegal thing. However, there is no use and no point in the existence of this Panchayat if no prompt action is taken against the Head Warden and on this petition.

(6) SIXTH:- If no prompt action is taken against the Head Warden who has been indulging in using uncivilised and foul language with all and sundry, and knowing you do not think it necessary to visit this Ward without delay and have the first-hand knowledge about the goings-on in the Ward, they would request you to kindly dissolve the body of Panchayat.



— 4 —

(7) SEVENTH :- Since there is no point  
in complaining to the jail  
authorities, who would only unleash  
further atrocities on us directly or  
indirectly, we are sending this petition.  
Unless you visit our Ward personally,  
nobody would dare to depose the truth  
before anybody else. And so far, you have  
not bothered to visit our Ward while other  
Wards have been graced by your visits.  
And any visit to our Ward must be  
unannounced and ~~surprise~~ surprise only.  
With all the kind regards.  
We are yours faithfully :-

Hand  
Official

Such information got some staff members exposed repeatedly. A bottom line was drawn beyond which the offending staff was withdrawn from prison duties. Some of them lost their jobs by being served with retirement orders. Some others were arrested and lodged in the same jail, for they got trapped in the vicious cycle of criminality. Those who were compulsorily retired did not succeed in getting the orders reversed despite various efforts on their part. But then there were many more defaulters who ought to have gone, but could not be got rid of due to innumerable constraints. However, the few who were caught red-handed were given no escape routes. The onward march of the mobile petition box continued. In 1994, there was a sea-change compared to the situation in 1993 (June to December), as highlighted by the following table:

	June 1993 to December 31, 1993	January 1, 1994 to December 31, 1994	Fall in Percentage
Medical	676	287	75.20
Corruption	164	65	76.86
Misbehaviour by staff	109	91	51.33
Food	111	14	92.63
Water	42	28	61.11
Electricity	43	33	42.00

Another tabular comparison from available data also brings out the fall in the number of petitions:

	June 1993	November 1994
Medical	231	13
Corruption by staff	68	4
Corruption by inmates	23	7
Food	25	1
Water	19	3
Electricity	13	3
Miscellaneous	134	52

Without the petition box we would have been unable to remove apathy and negligence. We would also never have been able to get the inmates to participate in a system for which they had no respect.

In this context, the mobile petition box helped us break new ground. The box did not only bring forth the grievances of the inmates against the staff but it also brought to light the grievances of the inmates vis-à-vis themselves with regard to internal misbehaviour and threats. Besides, the onus of responsibility also fell on the inmates to seek help and redressal. If the person concerned did not cooperate, then he had to take the blame. As a matter of fact, a prisoner may not seek assistance for various reasons, but the petition box negated the accusation of the inmates that the prison authorities had neglected their duties. But this did not take away the responsibility of the prison staff to detect things for themselves. When the follow-up action on the petitions proved adequate, it enhanced hope and respect for the system, and simultaneously reduced the complaints as well, just as loss of hope and faith could also reduce the feedback, of which the previous blackboxes were a proof. If petitions showed a decline, despite the dissemination of information with due attention paid to these petitions from the entire hierarchy, one could conclude that the fall in complaints could have been genuine. Similarly, a spurt in petitions required urgent analysis to plan correctional strategies.

The prison population was like a flowing river. Every day around 200 to 250 prisoners came in and almost the same number went out. The new entrants were not aware of the system and its intricacies. They also came in with their own mindsets about the prison. Therefore, unless they were informed about the procedures and practices, they would suffer due to lack of correct information. Hence, it was vital for us to ensure a daily reinforcement of certain important practices in the prison. To achieve this it was mandatory for the petition officer to regularly visit the prisons and hold briefing sessions in different wards to explain how the petition system worked — citing examples of those who tried out the system with good results — as a confidence-building exercise.

The suggestions made by the inmates pertained mainly to procedures and systems. In the first seven months, June to December 1993, we received 118 suggestions. In 1994, we got 72. Each one was

carefully scrutinised to determine the feasibility of practical application. The persons who made the suggestions were duly informed.

The mobile petition box was like a mirror which reflected the goings-on within the jail. Any nefarious or underhand activity was brought to light. I was aware that the box could be misused by unscrupulous persons but this did not happen at Tihar. In fact, it was optimally utilised by both inmates and us to usher in changes. As the system stabilised, we received about 30 petitions every day. The box indicated to us where we stood in respect to that day's work; whether we had slipped back or moved ahead.

The petition box brought letters of thanks daily from the inmates who felt good about a particular change, or development (see page 173). Without considering these notes of thanks as flattery, we continued to objectively assess the changes we were making at the ground level.

But the scope of the petition box was not restricted to complaints and grievances. It also served as a means for expressing feelings through prose or poetry, or making suggestions, like these verses penned by an inmate, Joseph Obi:

This dreaded and deadened world you have activated into life.  
Dried fountains are now spouting waters anew  
The drowned voices are finding their voice here  
Even the orient drums could be heard too.  
This precious melic rhyme shall be thy everlasting stamp.  
Oh! thou exotic belle beti of the lions  
Have conjured-up our mollified spirits  
See thy adversaries pine and pain within, just for thy name.  
As thou live so shall thy envy be, shake not  
Within this precious melic rhyme shall thou outlive them all.

Such constructive activities instilled a sense of participation within the prison life. Through the petition box some good poetry reached us, almost daily, as the box moved close to its first birthday. A 'thankyou' note was sent daily to the poets who would wait eagerly for this. Some of the regulars were Keemti Lal, Mongia and Akram Chacha. We compiled poems by Akram Chacha, *Tanhaiyon ke Jungle* (Jungles

I.C. PRISONS  
THAR CENTRAL  
NEW DELHI

11  
28/6/83  
S-1

DEAR MAM,

LETTER OF THANKS.

WE, THE ENTIRE LODGERS OF  
THE U.T. CELLS ARE SENDING TO  
YOU THIS "LETTER OF THANKS" IN  
APPRECIATION OF GRANTING OUR  
REQUEST / SUGGESTION FOR THE  
USE OF PRIVATE TELEVISION.

WE SINCERELY HOPE TO FURTHER  
RECEIVING YOUR HUMANE UNDERSTANDING  
THANKS

YOURS OBEIENTLY  
U.T. CELL INMATES

of loneliness) and *Dukhtar-e-Hind* (Daughter of India) and published them as two titles with the help of India Vision Foundation (a Non-Governmental Organisation involved with prison reforms). This was released by Mr I. K. Gujral, who later became the Prime Minister of India.

The staff too joined the prisoners to voice their grievance through the petition box. A security guard wrote to me saying, "My neighbour has six buffaloes which he ties in the garden in front of my quarter. The garden should have been a playground for our children and a place of recreation for the residents, but no one dares to enter it. The accumulation of garbage has made it a breeding place for mosquitoes. We are all suffering because of him. Madam, we are sure that you will help us." A survey was initiated and surprisingly, a total of 42 buffaloes, 16 cows and 38 instances of unauthorised construction in Government accommodation came to light. This matter was discussed in the open staff meeting, and the security guards who kept buffaloes and cows requested for time to shift their cattle to some other place. A deadline of August 15, 1993, was given, beyond which their cattle would be confiscated by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). They removed the cattle but not the unauthorised construction. A bulldozer was arranged and all the unauthorised constructions were demolished. Astonishingly, PWD labourers working for contractors had over a period permanently settled in Tihar residential complex and were the main occupants of these unauthorised structures. The whole operation of demolition of unauthorised constructions was carried out under the supervision of Tarsem Kumar, Superintendent of Prison No 2, who was also Welfare Officer designate.

The petition box sometimes transformed itself into other 'boxes'; for instance, it became a 'pulse box' by which we could judge the mood of the prisoners. They stated how they felt and why they did so, as reflected in the letter signed collectively by the inmates on pages 175-176.

It became an 'information box', for it revealed precious nuggets such as the contraband which was entering the prison, the price at

To

The Inspector General/ (Prisons)  
Central Jail, Tihar  
New Delhi

**Sub: To fix an appointment, for a discussion, with the prisoners, who want to quit/get rid of crime.**

Respected Madam,

The undersigned prisoners, confined at part III of this prison, request and submit as under:

That, some of the prisoners, who in the past for either of the reasons, had adopted crime as a part of their life, are now interested in quitting the same and join the mainstream of the society.

But, unfortunately some obstacles often come in their way, pushing them back into the dark. Since some of them are very much interested and willing from the core of their hearts, have decided to have a word on this topic with this office, as they have now every reason to trust upon your good self in very manner.



So, if you may kindly spare some of your valuable time for necessary discussion and communication on this topic with the willing persons, they would be very grateful to you. So, kindly give an appointment to the undersigned prisoners, enabling them to cope with the situation they have been passing through. Kindly do the needful and oblige.

Date

Yours Sincerely,

5.7.93

4. *Sulthi Hussain S/o S/o B...*  
**IMAMUDDIN**
5. *Jeet Singh S/o S/o S...*
6. *Munish Kumar S/o S/o S...*
7. *Ram Meera S/o S/o S...*
8. *Surya S/o S/o S...*
10. *Rajendra S/o S/o S...*
11. *Hanuman S/o S/o S...*
12. *Chandana S/o S/o S...*
13. *Happy S/o S/o S...*

which it was being sold, the suspected players and the names of the staff members believed to be conniving in this racket. It became a 'user-friendly box', for it enabled a two-way interaction where 'care and welfare' were the objectives. It became a 'sensitive box', for it carried the hopes and aspirations of the petitioners which we attempted to fulfil. It became an 'audit box', for it exposed hypocrisy and misbehaviour and divulged the names of the offenders. It became a 'response box' as all that came in was carefully documented and the writer received an acknowledgement. Nothing was hidden anymore! It became a 'creative box', for it brought in poetry, literature, drawings and other works of art. Finally, it became a 'magic box' without which Tihar prison could not have evolved into an ashram — a place of reformation.

But to convert Tihar into an ashram, a lot more was needed to be done... .

Championing a Cause: The Petition Box  
A Synopsis  
Graph

## *Creating Security: Internal Management*

W

ithin a week of assuming charge of Tihar, I had called for a full staff meeting of all ranks except those on duty. I chose a Saturday because the next day was a holiday for many, which meant that they could attend the meeting in a relatively relaxed mood. During this meeting, I proposed to share my views with all the staff members and also explain to them the motivation and the rationale for the steps I had taken during the previous five days. Also, I wanted the staff members to express their opinions freely and frankly so that I could gain an insight into what they thought of the initiatives.

Within the first week, observations noted during the rounds had made some difference, especially after they had been prominently displayed on the jail noticeboard. As mentioned earlier, my on-the-round observations were being circulated to the various Prison Superintendents and also to the Secretariat, including the office of the Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi.

The first five days of these observations carried instructions to the staff, concerning different aspects of Prison Administration, like

guidelines for visitors, provision of essential facilities pertaining to seating arrangements, toilets and drinking water. The observations also carried instructions to urgently identify teachers to start literacy classes, specially for women and their children; to improve medical facilities; to chalk out a plan for time management of prisoners, and to arrange for clothes to be distributed among poor inmates. One of my first orders was as follows:

The Superintendent daily-work diary is being introduced. It has been seen that while some Superintendents are working as per the needs, some others are lagging behind. Some of the points listed in the Superintendent daily-work diary are not exhaustive but list out only some of the essentials which need to be carried out daily to ensure efficient management of the jails.

SSSS Superintendent's daily-work diary to include:

1. Wards visited be indicated morning, evening or both.
2. Jail parade held — Which ward, What result?
3. Petitioners heard - No \_\_\_\_.
4. If any inspection done other than the wards.
5. If any staff briefing carried out — Rank be indicated.
6. Meeting held, if any.
7. If night round carried out.
8. Any innovation, welfare information to share.

Signatures of

Superintendents Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

All Superintendents are expected to observe punctuality in submitting their daily-work diary to my office. Office will maintain Superintendent performance file.

A leaf out of superintendent's diary is being carried on page 181. Going around the prisons I had also recorded the gross inadequacy of essential amenities even for the staff members. I came across the practice of subletting of Government quarters. Given the experience of the first six days of working with me, the prison staff members perhaps came to realise that certain maladies which they thought to be incurable might have got addressed now. These pertained to prisoners, visitors, staff and the system itself. It was important for me to inspire and motivate the staff to do their best to

Serial No.

127  
128

21-2-75

पुनः प्रविष्टः

(14)

- In the interview room, drinking water made available for visitors.

For white washing and painting of the jail, it has been decided that poor persons who have some knowledge in this field, will be deputed to do this work in whole jail and some incentives will be given to them.

Parachat meeting with d-d

Sewa Dham Sabha organised

but for my  
sincerely

For exhibition at Talkatora garden plants and manure were sold for Rs = 250/- for the next exhibition. on 24 Feb. A.S. (Mufin) has directed to do the preparation like as Barans etc and packing of manure etc.

1 - In and out statement enclosed

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improve conditions in the jail against various constraints. I also laid down a definite timeframe within which various objectives would have to be achieved. Some of the staff members were cynical towards certain suggestions. Some felt that I was venturing into unknown territories and my actions including summoning an all-staff meeting were taboo. These 'conservatives' felt that *status quo* had to be maintained at all costs. They were convinced that a 'Jail' had to be a 'Jail', and could not be anything else. The staff became nervous about my daily rounds of prisons as it might expose their wrongdoings and drastically curtail their so-called control. However, all such individuals attended the *sampark sabha* (community session), perhaps more out of curiosity than for participation. The meeting turned out to be more than well attended; in fact, it was overcrowded. Some of the security staff voluntarily sat on the rug while others preferred to stand behind the chairs. Apart from all the regular staff members, the Tamil Nadu Special Police contingent, the PWD officials and an assortment of other individuals came. On the whole, the congregation consisted of around 500 members. A feeling of bonhomie charged the atmosphere. Everybody was anticipating winds of change to blow, but how powerful these winds would be remained anybody's guess. The observations and orders issued during the first few days in office had virtually questioned the timeless traditions of Tihar. Naturally, not everybody was amused. But everyone was curious about whether the new measures would continue and last. Consequently, I could sense there was both

The *sampark sabha* was held in a spacious hall located in a fairly large building (five storeys with 50 rooms) within the jail complex. This building was known as the Beggars' Home, where, once upon a time, odd beggars used to be lodged at the behest of the Delhi State Government. Over the years, this Beggars' Home had fallen victim to apathy and negligence and was begging for a change. However, the building boasted of a huge hall, with a raised concrete stage, which I chose as the venue for this session. The same hall a few excitement and anxiety.

months later served as a conference venue for an All India Inspectors General (Prisons) Meeting held to see and assess the response of the prisoners to Vipassana Meditation Programme. This building complex became the new Prison Headquarters, marking a quantum leap. The *sampark sabha* was a landmark in that it was the first occasion, I was informed, when the prison staff from all the four prisons and Prison Headquarters along with their seniors had gathered under one roof. On the stage, I was accompanied by the then DIG, Hans Raj, besides the Superintendents Kishore, Diwedi, Meena, Tarsem and the Deputy Superintendents. It was the DIG who set the ball rolling, as he specified two kinds of major problems faced by the Jail Administration. The first segment, he specified, comprised problems concerning the personnel, like less opportunity for promotion, shortage of security guards, low motivation of the staff owing to a large number of pending vigilance cases, etc. The second category of problems concerned the unhygienic and subhuman living conditions of the staff, and lack of space in the Government accommodation provided to them. After DIG Hans Raj, Superintendent D. P. Diwedi wanted to reward the staff members for meritorious work, and another Superintendent, K. R. Kishore, suggested that Tihar should work towards projecting itself as a role model. Kishore's suggestion gave me the right opportunity to expand on this theme, which I did, reinforcing my statements with facts wherever necessary. During the course of this meeting, it became obvious that the staff members were eager to participate, put across their viewpoints and be heard. The general mood reflected that many of them would welcome a change in the functioning of Tihar. I noted the various experiences, opinions, and suggestions of staff members and then put forward my own views. I was informed that for the first time in the history of Tihar, the mission, goals and objectives of the institution were stated. Also declared were the steps to achieve the organisational goals. We discussed the relevance of these strategies in the present context.

leap for Tihar as an institution.



“The use of force”, I explained, “will only increase hostility and danger. The collection of a few currency notes by illegal means will continue to demean Tihar as an institution. We need to conduct ourselves in a manner which increases honour and respect for the work we do. For, each one of us shall have to work hard collectively as a team. We will have to move on from merely keeping security to creating security. From a mere watchman to a keen educator.” Before dispersing, we resolved to meet at regular intervals to review the progress towards our goals. During my remaining tenure at Tihar, we lived up to our resolve, and many more fruitful meetings were held. Some meetings were formal and many informal. The latter included families of the staff who were staying within the jail’s residential complex. Family gatherings usually took place during religious festivals or social events. Sometimes, specific issue-related meetings were also held — for instance, the welfare of family members, or education for the children. Within a few months of combined effort, we set up a children’s library within the staff residential complex. The infrastructure and the books were provided generously by the Delhi Public Library, and the library facilities were enthusiastically used by the children. Later, we also set up a toy room for the smaller children. As far as the availability of space for productive purposes was concerned, we considered ourselves fortunate. The residential complex had a double storey built-in community centre. Like the Beggars’ Home, this building too was lying abandoned. We had requested the PWD officers to resurrect the structure. They carried out essential repairs and restored other facilities, such as lights, fans and water. We later brought in a women’s vocational training centre, a dispensary and an extension counter of the Indian Bank which was inaugurated on September 28, 1993, by the then Minister of State for Home Affairs, P. M. Sayeed. We also cleared up the jungle around it to make it into a children’s park within the residential complex and persuaded our friends in Rotary and Lions Clubs to donate sports equipment. This was just the beginning.

As time passed, Jaydev Sarangi (who replaced Hans Raj within a few weeks of my joining) and I set our sights on another building within the jail complex, which we got ready for occupation in order to start a professional training centre for adolescent boys and girls of the families of the staff.

But above all, we set about improving our communication channels among the staff and the officers. Since we had initiated a vigorous and relentless purging process, it was absolutely essential to develop an effective interaction system which could streamline all procedures and activities, whether individual or collective. We were like relay runners on a track and had to pass on the baton efficiently to the next runner, for the entire team had to win the race.

We could clearly identify who was running ahead and who was lagging behind. So we developed systems to help those whose performance was not up to the mark. We tried to initiate such persons by helping them like their work. For instance, we decided as a matter of policy that Warders including Head Warders, who were closest to the prisoners all through the day, must serve not only as security watchers and head counters but also as organisers of various activities in their respective wards, like prayer, yoga, physical training exercises, gardening, education classes, while ensuring general maintenance. We started concentrating on 'sensitising' them, and began special classes in the afternoons. We started talking to them and educating them to enhance their self-esteem, and give them tasks which were reviewed the following day. *The Statesman* carried this report on December 29, 1993:

A Christmas gift, even if belated, is more than welcome, especially if it means an assurance on payment of arrears dating back to 1986, or a reduction in the imprisonment term for convicts.

Sure enough, even Father Santa could not have given the kind of present the Chief Minister of Delhi, Mr Madan Lal Khurana, promised to the inmates and staff of Tihar jail, while opening its computer reception centre on Tuesday.

The reception centre, the first of its kind in any prison in the country, is a big improvement on the one-man reception for a jail spread over a little less than 200 acres. It will facilitate communication with the inmates

in what has emerged to be the largest jail in Asia Pacific, where the prisons alone cover an area of 62 acres. The computer has been donated by the Rotary Club of Delhi, Midwest.

Headed by Mr B. S. Bhatia, Deputy Superintendent, the centre will have three other helpers. To facilitate speedy communication with the inmates, the names of all the inmates have been fed into the computer memory. Thus, a visitor will not have to wait for hours before his message gets through to his relative or friend in the jail.

Later, addressing about 2,500 inmates and the jail staff, the Chief Minister announced speedy implementation of the recommendations of the Fourth Pay Commission. The recommendations, likely to be implemented in the coming week, will award rankwise arrears, parallel to the remuneration enjoyed by the Delhi Police.

Of the 850 convicts, 237 will derive immediate benefits from the special package, according to Mrs Bedi. Those convicted under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, National Security Act, and COFEPOSA for smuggling or serving a term in view of fine, will, however, not profit from the package.

Mr Khurana also announced a gratuity for the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled jail staff. He further empowered the Jail Administration to appoint ad hoc doctors in the presence of a skeletal medical staff. He asked the Minister for Industries, Prison and Labour, Mr Harcharan Singh Balli, to help rename the jail a '*Sudhar Kendra*' and welcomed Mrs Bedi's proposal of declaring the jail into an adult literacy and vocational training centre.

We could easily identify Warders who were exercising initiatives and those who were shirking their duties. Their relative capabilities became visible.

In order to encourage a high degree of performance, daily reports of each of the wards were displayed on the jail noticeboards. These reports revealed the performance levels of each ward along with the initiatives taken and the leadership qualities displayed. The individuals who had achieved results were duly rewarded, some felt compelled by force of pressure to change while others got motivated to experiment with the new-found role:

Debriefing of Waring rolol 1 on 26.5.93

I visited the Jail Training School today and met the Warders and Head Warders who were on training after their duties. The Warders were asked

for a feedback of instructions/orders issued by me from time to time. They stated that they were following up the instructions/orders issued by me carefully.

Some Warders requested that their seniority be decided and mentioned on the noticeboards of the jails so that they could know their seniority number, etc. Office Superintendent is hereby directed to decide the seniority of Warders, Head Warders and Assistant Superintendents and hang the list on the noticeboards of all the jails by July 1, 1993, positively.

*(Action Office*

*Superintendent)*

However, there were no penalties or demerits for those who lagged behind as it was too early to do so. We needed to give them time to accept the change in expectation of these roles. Eventually, all the Warders and Head Warders raised their performance levels despite the absence of financial incentives. This change at the grass-roots level signalled a revival. I still remember that each of these security staff used to come to the *deodhi* to see if his name was on the noticeboard. Whenever anyone's name appeared on the noticeboard, he felt proud about it, and told all his acquaintances and family members. The news spread in all the prisons through the 'Tihar Express'. However, these steps by themselves were not enough; we had to simultaneously avail of all other methods of management. Different strategies were called for, for officer ranks. We carried out regular in-house analyses of their functioning at four levels:

The first was at the level of Police Headquarters where Jaydev and I used to meet daily over a short working lunch in my office for solutions to personnel matters.

Both of us were equally impatient in clearing the huge arrears we had inherited in all respects. The second level involved tea sessions with the DIG and Superintendents. These were focused on what was happening inside the prisons. Since I was inspecting all the prisons, I was in a sound position to compare and share. This enabled discussion, participation, motivation and a challenge.

The third level was that of the Deputy Superintendents and ranks below, whom I met over a cup of tea in the afternoons in their

respective prisons, rather than summon them to my office. These sessions were utilised for identification, discussion and a review of strategies. Here is a record of the same:

Minutes of a Meeting with all Assistant Superintendents of Jail No 1

Applications from visitors for *mulaqaat* with males after 10 am and females after 11 am will not be entertained. Only applications coming from outside would be entertained till 11.30 am with proof of travel.

(Action all

To start the construction of visitors' waiting room. Executive Engineer, PWD (Civil) is requested to start the waiting room as early as possible.

(Executive Engineer

(Civil))

Strengthening of Female Ward. This point be discussed in the Weekly Coordination Meeting.

(Action

PWD)

Shortage of sweepers. Administrative Officer to make a proposal to increase the strength of sweepers and barbers for all jails as per requirements of each ward.

(Action

AO)

Sports complex for staff. Administrative Officer to make a proposal for a sports complex in Jail Training School.

(Action

AO)

The fourth level was our weekly review, in which all officers came together to assess the week's trends, as elaborated here:

Following are the decisions in the Weekly Meeting of Officers:

The night round of the officers should begin from 11 pm onwards and continue till milk distribution in the morning.

The room of Mr Garg, DS-II, Jail No 1, will be the night officer's room. When the officer is not on his job he will be available in Mr Garg's room. All Deputy Superintendents Grade-I & II will briefly declare the work done during the week in the next Monday meeting. A proforma is being circulated with this order.

In the weekly meeting with Assistant Superintendents, they will similarly declare their work done during the week.

During the course of all the foregoing interactions, discussions used to be free and frank. Many ideas, suggestions and innovations

emerged, some of which led to policy formulations and helped in solving many problems. This was one such order:

I get a large number of complaints daily concerning unjustified detention of the inmates despite the receipt of release orders. The non-release has been seen to be on very minor issues and needs only the application of mind. These detentions on unjustified technical grounds and non-application of mind are also responsible for a large number of legal cases against the Gazetted Officers.

To check this, it is hereby directed that no inmate whose release orders have been received will be detained on technical grounds without the specific approval of the Jail Superintendents. The Assistant Superintendent concerned will put up the papers of technical detention to the Deputy Superintendents and the Deputy Superintendent will examine for himself, correct the situation where he can and then place these papers before the Superintendent of Jail for orders and information. To expedite matters, any release order which the office thinks cannot be executed on technical grounds will be put up to the Jail Superintendent through the Deputy Superintendent at the earliest possible so that the decision will also be taken without delay.

It is also expected that the Jail Superintendent in every error detected will write to the concerned courts enclosing the photocopy of the defective release order encircling the error committed. This will enable the Magistrate to know the kind of errors their staff are committing which are causing undue hardship to the inmates waiting for release.

The above orders may be kindly and strictly complied with.  
Be read out to all and understood by all.

We enjoyed these sessions because they eliminated lurking suspicions, nagging doubts and latent bitterness. All decisions which were worthy of further review and implementation were recorded:

All the Superintendents of Jail are directed to paste a list of daily releases and withheld releases (with reasons) on the main gate of jails so that the visitors of the prisoners know the reasons. They ought to be made aware of the situation and not kept waiting.

Such processes of interaction ensured a guaranteed implementation of decisions because they emerged after a thorough discussion with all of us in total agreement.

Within a few months, we managed to perfect a coordinated communication network which was comprehensive and workable. Here are some policy decisions which were executed:

SSSS Subject: Instructions for daily institutionalised coordination by Deputy Superintendent (Internal)

I do see an urgent need for daily Institutionalised Coordination by Deputy Superintendent (Internal Management) on a regular basis for activities which go on in the prison on a day-to-day basis. This is to ensure that all activities and all needs are coordinated on a daily basis.

Suggesting a forum of all officers dealing with internal management, *panchayat* members (prisoners) who are managing and coordinating various activities with the Prison Administration such as:

Education

Yoga

Prayer management

Roll-calls

PWD maintenance

Library

*Goshti* management

Horticulture

Games

Health and hygiene

Essential services

Clerical support

Vocational training

Mess management

Job work management

Canteen procurement and distribution

*Satsang*, etc., and various others which emerge from time to time

A fixed time and place be declared by the Deputy Superintendent (Internal Management) when all staff and coordinating prisoners meet to assess the work of the day. From this will emerge the priorities for the following day.

I do believe that with this forum many needs of prisoners will be met on a day-to-day basis including the identification of other prisoners to replace those who will be released. Thereafter, it will be known which activities have been left without a replacement.

Also many corrections will be possible in management, security or otherwise without loss of time.

Efforts be made to get better representatives and encourage them to collect feedback and state the positive fallout.

We agreed to do this in our meeting today. May now like to systemise as suggested.

For general information of all officers.

Within a short span of time, we were able to provide a progressive and professional management. The 'corrective' approach was made 'collective' with the help of my team of young DIG and Superintendents and the staff working under them, who inevitably formed the nucleus. I preferred to maintain an open and informal organisational culture and create a climate which encouraged innovation, enterprise and superior performance of our staff through conditioning, and a perfect policy of rewards. The policy of punishment was very selective at this stage. We succeeded in creating to some extent an environment where work was both challenging and fulfilling at the same time. Lunch and tea meetings with my officers in an informal and interactive environment helped to create a willing and relaxed environment for vital reforms.

A feeling of mutual trust travelled down from the top, making each employee understand that he was a crucial part of the whole system and had to be integrated within. Each member of the organisation was of equal importance to us.

We did all that was possible within the given setup to develop our human resource by helping to upgrade the skills and broaden the capabilities of the staff through systematic training programmes and varied work experience. In-house training programmes were conducted for the ranks up to the level of Assistant Superintendents. Teachers were none other than the Superintendents and Deputy Superintendents. This training was arranged and provided during the lean period of 1 pm to 3 pm when the prison was officially locked. Sometimes I used to go to the class and sit on the last chair to see for myself how the training was progressing. Since the trainers were very experienced, these turned out to be extremely valuable. I was thrilled to see such free discussion on subjects of daily



application. For some officers, these were the first of such classes. This was the only way we could train, as we had no reserves to be able to send staff away for training in view of scarce manpower resources.

The other set of training consisted of sending the staff to other places. Few Assistant Superintendents were sent to Regional Centres outside Delhi to get trained in modern penology and criminology. Assistant Superintendents, Deputy Superintendents and the Superintendents were sent to Jaipur and Igatpuri, the headquarters of Vipassana Meditation Centre. Such officers, after returning from courses in Vipassana, used to narrate their experiences in our weekly interactions for the benefit of all. Witnessing the question-answer session was a source of great joy for me because I saw considerable self-confidence and self-esteem among my staff members. The officer proudly shared what he was asked about his work by his course mates. He narrated it all with great enthusiasm and a sense of achievement.

The sensitivity level of our workforce also increased by putting them through self-evaluation tests on the basis of the information received through the 'magic box'. They were informed of the petitions referring to them, and I used to await their responses without giving them any deadline. It was very important for me to check the level of sensitivity of my officers and to develop strategies and techniques to enhance it. Within the first few months, a questionnaire was evolved which was answered by the prisoners selected at random by the petition officer, who was well trained in sampling data. Each

1. When did you last see your Superintendent doing a round of the prison?
  - i) A month ago
  - ii) 15 days back
  - iii) A week ago
  - iv) Yesterday

- v) This morning
- 2. When did your Superintendent invite you to a group discussion or seminar on any chosen topic ?
  - i) 15 days back
  - ii) Last week
  - iii) Not yet
  - iv) What is this group discussion or seminar?
- 3. When did your Deputy Superintendent visit your ward ?
  - i) 7 days back
  - ii) 3 days back
  - iii) Only yesterday
  - iv) This morning
- 4. When did your Assistant Superintendent come to you to check your morning educational classes ?
  - i) He does not come at all
  - ii) He comes once a week
  - iii) He comes 2-3 times a week
  - iv) He comes daily to see us
- 5. How does your Warder/Head Warder treat you when you go with a problem ?
  - i) I don't go as he uses abusive language
  - ii) He is totally indifferent, does not listen to our problems
  - iii) He listens to the problems but provides no solution
  - iv) He not only listens to the problems, but provides reasonable solutions acceptable to all, and his behaviour is also good

This technique was deliberately used to ensure an open social audit from the Superintendents and their staff. We strengthened this by team inspections of each prison and by circulating the results to all. The fallout? Each Superintendent, head of the prison, was doing his best along with his team to be the best. This power of positive competition made them responsible, built teams and brought in compassion in dealing with problems of the prisoners. Within a short span of time, the Superintendents became 'leaders' of their teams.

Apart from developing sensitivity among their team-mates, the Superintendents' attention was diverted to the personnel problems and needs of their workforce for providing effective avenues for the      I was also aware of financial costs of forced honesty. We brought in a commercial opportunity for staff families to supplement their incomes. A filter-manufacturing unit got opened, thanks to a counselling volunteer, S. K. Sikka, who responded to our television programme on Tihar. Again an abandoned but safe building was chosen for the purpose, which was on the periphery of our complex. Over 60 women and wives or daughters worked in the unit and supplemented their household income.

The prison operated on the principle of 'responsibilities prevailing over rights'. It was a beautiful feeling. The Superintendents were advised to maintain a cooperative attitude at the workplace and treat other individuals and groups as members of the same organisation who also had similar needs and expectations. Though a healthy competition between prisons was boosted, it was made clear to everyone that the spirit behind this endeavour was a collective effort with total cooperation.

The staff started coming up with innovative ideas based on human warmth. One such instance which stands out in my memory is that of an Assistant Superintendent, I. P. Dhawan of Jail No 2, who introduced the concept of *prabhat pheri* (morning round). This meant a team of 10-12 prisoners would go round the entire inner periphery of the jail in the wee hours of the morning — with soft musical instruments, like *dholki*, harmonium — singing devotional songs at the crack of dawn to wake up the sleeping prisoners. This was in sharp contrast to the previous practice of waking up the prisoners by striking a heavy bunch of keys against the iron grills.      The Warders who were in direct and constant contact with the prisoners through *panchayats* or prison councils reported to the Assistant Superintendents who, in turn, reported to the Deputy Superintendents after verification. The Deputy Superintendents,

redressal of their

while obtaining such feedback, also made their own on-the-rounds observations, which enabled them to accurately assess the reports they received.

Innumerable activities kept all of us busy and instilled a profound sense of achievement. The constant flurry of activities, such as coordinating, organising, arranging and innovating, motivated us to strive harder for the future. Our goal was to send back individuals who were willing to realise their responsibilities and obligations towards the community at large.

Along with the prisoners, staff ranks were turning the corner. A large number of non-matriculate Warders enrolled in the National Open School, a branch opened inside the prison. Many officers opted for postgraduation courses, including computer science, in the newly opened centre of IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University) within the prison. The educational facilities were extended to the families of the staff members and children as well. Here was another directive:

To

The Additional Director,  
Indira Gandhi National Open University,  
Chanakyapuri, New Delhi.

SSSS Subject: Opening of IGNOU Centre at Central Jail, Tihar  
Sir,

It is to inform that IGNOU has desired to open a Centre at Central Jail, Tihar, for the inmates. However, the staff and their family members have also shown interest to do various courses offered by the IGNOU. It is learnt that this Centre is only meant for the prisoners of Central Jail, Tihar, since the staff of Central Jail is engaged in shift duties and no time is left to pursue this course at outside Centres which are located quite far from Central Jail, Tihar. It will really help the staff and their family members who have not pursued their studies for one reason or another to continue their studies at the IGNOU Centre, Central Jail, Tihar, itself. In view of the same it is requested that the staff of Central Jail, Tihar, and their family members also be allowed to continue at the IGNOU Centre.

Superintendent  
Tihar (No 1)  
Delhi

Central Jail:  
New

There was a revival of the desire to learn. This influenced inmates too who were inspired by the staff striving to educate themselves. We coined an appropriate slogan for our staff: *rakshak seshikshak* (from protector to educator).

We cleared huge cobwebs at the Police Headquarters. My colleague, Jaydev Sarangi, from the Delhi Civil Services, was adept at secretariat management. We had a perfect understanding. He was to manage the office, and I, the field. We shared ideas and analysed what we observed every day without fail over our brief lunch break, and subsequently followed up a meeting over tea with our Superintendent of jails. We teamed up most effectively. Whenever either of us was in doubt, we preferred to discuss. Sarangi's excellent office management helped clear hundreds of departmental enquiry files pending for decades! He was ably assisted by a Deputy Superintendent, A. K. Purohit. The three of us used to meet once a week to review and decide all these vigilance matters. Sarangi and I cleared arrears in payments, house allotments, seniority lists, issue of uniforms, personal files, recruitment and rules, etc. We revived management matters relating to jail cadre, and took them up with the secretariat with reasonable success. The credit for this cleansing act lies more with Sarangi than me, because he took it upon himself to pursue these matters till he got a favourable order. It was his perseverance which brought computers and cable network to the prison. Tihar became the first prison in India to have both.

Sarangi, however, will always be remembered by the entire staff for two schemes he introduced. The first scheme involved a risk insurance cover for the staff. It was due to Sarangi's unique initiatives that each one of us, on a small contribution of Rs 7 per month, was provided an injury or fatality cover of Rs 1,00,000. The then Home Secretary in the Delhi State Government, Pratibha Karan, a warm-hearted person who appreciated this scheme, launched it. I decided to name it 'Sarangi Scheme' despite his protests. This scheme went along way in redressing the financial grievances of the staff and their family members in times of crisis as reported in *The Times of India* on

10.7.93.

Insurance cover for Tihar staff  
Insurance cover for Tihar staff

The Tihar Jail staff dealing with over 8,000 prisoners have been covered by a group insurance scheme "Sarangi Scheme" that was launched today. The scheme named after the prison's Deputy Inspector General, Mr Jaydev Sarangi, would provide financial cover to all forms of casualties so that the families of the staff are not left uncared.

Announcing the scheme, the Inspector General (Prisons), Mrs Kiran Bedi, said that it was a group insurance scheme for all ranks of the members of the jail staff including doctors, PWD and others, who are dealing with the prisoners in one form or another.

Voluntary scheme: This scheme has been offered by Oriental Insurance Co Ltd, Karampura Branch. It is said to be a voluntary scheme with a monthly contribution of Rs 6.93. And will be effective till the staffer is 65.

If the staffer dies, his/her family would immediately get Rs one lakh and Rs 10,000 as educational assistance for two children of the deceased. All cases of injury would be dealt with according to the merit of the case. The insurance cover of Rs one lakh would increase at the rate of five per cent per annum in case there is no

Sarangi's second scheme pertained to the formation of the Tihar Employees' Welfare Association (TEWA). Through TEWA, Sarangi procured a gas agency for the staff which supplied cooking gas to the prison. The Tihar Employees' Welfare Association also ensured regular inputs to the various welfare funds.

Despite all this, we still had members of the staff who continued to offend. For instance, we arrested a Warder for the possession of drugs and for attempts to peddle them inside the jail. He spent a whole year in the company of the people he was earlier guarding! The information about this particular Warder came from certain inmates who were rewarded for detecting this 'black sheep'. Few more such cases came to light over the next few months. Several Warders eventually volunteered to undergo treatment for detoxification.

Yet others carried on their illegal activities despite our preventive efforts. In the process, they made hefty packets for themselves at the cost of others. Some continued to be rude and obnoxious in their

behaviour. The petition box revealed the names and the *modus operandi* of such offenders. We tried our best to reform them and even sent them for a ten-day meditation programme outside Delhi. However, our endeavours seemed to have very little effect. The real remedy was to post these deviants out of Tihar and give them a different kind of work. I did not have the power to do so. We could only make proposals, which took their own time even for getting turned down. Eventually, we had to deal with the delinquent staff as firmly as possible, which included warnings, suspensions and directions, directing them to stay at home and not report to prison for duty. They received their pay for keeping away.

On the whole, the staff changed with the reforms, either willingly or under pressure. I saw a great deal of enthusiasm, zeal and diligence. The change was slow but satisfactory. See this report of a Jail Superintendent, K. R. Kishore, directing his prison:

- i) Arrangement of drinking water for the visitors outside the *mulaqaat jungla* and for court prisoners inside the jail.
- ii) Erection of tent for protection from sunstroke to the visitors.
- iii) Temporary Public Address System introduced at the time of release outside the gate of Jail No 1.
- iv) System of prayer in each and every ward introduced and the instruments of yoga provided to poor prisoners free of cost.
- v) Distribution of clothes amongst children of Female Ward and distribution of saris to the needy women.
- vi) Two times *khichri* distribution for the children of Female Ward.
- vii) Free distribution of *pudina lassi* and grams to smack-addict prisoners in Ward No 2 from the Prisoners Welfare Fund.
- viii) Ward No 1 started and drug peddlers isolated therein — most of them Nigerians.
- ix) Material/instruments arranged from the Prisoners Welfare Fund for Adult Education for males as well as females.
- x) Number of items increased in the Welfare Canteen according to the demands of the prisoners and instruction of IG (P).
- xi) Hawker system for grams and *daal-moth* introduced.
- xii) Musical instruments purchased for the recreation of the prisoners.
- xiii) Number of heaters and *angithis* removed by way of surprise searches.
- xiv) System of distribution of milk, washing of raw vegetables and *daal* prior to the preparation improved.



- xv) *Munshis, Mashaktis* and *Nambardars* rewarded in terms of cash.
  - xvi) Acid cleaning of toilets.
  - xvii) U/T period problem solved by circulating a judgment of Delhi High Court to all the Officers of Jail No 1.
  - xviii) Objection on release minimised and technical procedure dropped.
  - xix) Court litigations on behalf of inmates minimised.
- In future, it shall be our endeavour to introduce all the reformatory systems possible within our means and there shall be a concerted effort towards beautification of the jail, i.e., running of fountain, placing of Gandhiji's statue, gardening, flowering, painting and removal of garbage. We shall prove that this infamous Jail is the best model Jail of India. Yoga activities will be at large in future early in the morning in the lawn near the *Chakkar* where up to 1,000 inmates can be accommodated at a time.

It improved visibly each day. I knew within me that the staff was appreciating the change, for it was restoring dignity to their institution and enhancing their self-esteem, internally and in the community outside. But the kind of environment we were creating left few choices for anyone, including myself.

It was a question of grit. I knew it was still not time for me to expect a full transformation. Therefore, I had to carry on with motivation and persistence, with selective and deterrent punishment. Here is one of my orders which reveals the challenge of change:

I have asked each prison to submit its In and Out statement daily. This is arriving regularly from some jails while not from the others. Regularity should be kindly ensured.

The Out statement should be signed by the Superintendent so that he is aware of the time which is being spent inside the jail by his subordinates.

An analysis of the statement indicates that some officers are not even spending the mandatory eight hours on actual prison work.

That many officers are taking long breaks in the afternoon, i.e., leave prison at about noon and return by 4.30 pm. This is not at all acceptable. Officers taking afternoon breaks should not exceed by two hours. They must return to their office tables to do office work wherever required or field work otherwise. Presence in the prison is important and mandatory. This is all the more necessary in view of the winter season when the

day is anyway short and the prison closes by 6 pm-7 pm.

These observations should be carefully read, carefully understood and implemented.

The statement should have a remarks column in which long gaps can be explained as to whether the officer was in the court or meeting or any official work or personal work.

Serious note will be taken of officers being absent from their prison work without prior permission.

I still had to keep alerting them. We had come a long way in systemising and ensuring that all these became habits to volunteer change, from keeping security to creating security.

Graph  
Creating Security: Internal Management  
A Synopsis

## 16

*Enters the Community*

*E*ventually, on-the-round observations and prisoners' letters through the petition box, supplemented with our daily feedback system through staff and prison councils termed *Panchayats*, were taking us towards the identification of special needs which were possibly within reach and were also raising expectations of performance. Our challenge was clear. Do we admit we have no resources? Or do we declare, 'WE SHALL OVERCOME'? We officers were under watch. Timing everything right was important. The community was a resource which had been a great source of strength for me right through my police work. Once taken into confidence and given an opportunity to participate, goodwill is guaranteed. I believed that we could fall back upon the same reservoir. I was only waiting for an opportunity.

It did not take me long to hear the knock at my office door. In fact with the knock, it made a straight entry. It began with a small slip of paper from my office attendant, one afternoon, within four weeks of my taking charge. I knew who they were and promptly asked them in. I stood up to welcome them. Truly speaking, I had been waiting for them. To my surprise they said they too were

anxious to meet me and had been considering this for quite sometime. They were the Brahma Kumaris, a countrywide organisation of women and men who spread the message of practising ethical values. The following day we walked through the prison together. The prisoners absorbed each word they said. There was complete silence in reverence for these sisters in white sarees. For the society at large, the Brahma Kumaris stand as symbols of simplicity with purity in thought and deed, peace and non-violence. They lay emphasis on vegetarianism with proper eating habits and took the inmates towards moments of total 'inward silence'. We experimented this with the convicts and the undertrials. Soon the petition box was full of requests for the Brahma Kumaris to visit them too. The number of the sisters increased and each prison got its schedule of visits on the noticeboards for all to know. Tihar got used to their visits. They used to reach out to the inmates with such regularity and punctuality that neither could do without the other.

This report in *The Pioneer* which appeared on May 25, 1993, with the headline, *Godly Approach to Jail Inmates*, described the interaction of the Ramakrishna Mission with the prisoners:

After yoga, meditation, puppet shows and outdoor sports, it is now time for sermons in the Central Tihar Jail here.

The maximum security prison was virtually turned into an ashram on Monday with two sanyasis delivering religious discourses to inmates in an attempt to inculcate spirituality and human values among the undertrials and convicts.

"There is God inside me and you. By prayers and recitation of the name of God, you can lessen your sufferings and sorrows," Swami Jita Atmanand of the Ramakrishna Mission said amidst applause.

"My guru taught me, hate the sin and not the sinner," the Swami said, exhorting his congregation to serve fellow beings as God resided in each one. The Swami told the prisoners they were in jail because of their 'Karmas'.

Nearly 1,500 inmates of the jail, 200 of them women, converged for the sermons.

"The topic was the universal religion of humanism. No particular religion was discussed," said Ms Bedi.

It was the first time when sermons were organised in Tihar Jail. Male and female prisoners jointly congregated in the jail for the first time. Press reporters were allowed for the first time deep inside Jail Number 1 to enable them to cover the function....

From this most auspicious beginning of community-entry we went on to invite a well-known yoga teacher in Delhi, Sardari Lal Sehgal. He promptly responded with his team of youngsters headed by another woman, Tripta Bhanot. They ushered in the attention to mental and physical wellbeing. They taught the inmates the value of personal hygiene, deep breathing and some essential exercises which could help them maintain good health within the prison conditions. They too had to increase their presence to cover all prisons. Such was the demand for yoga that Sehgal started a training course to make the wards self-sufficient by having inmate teachers to provide regular instructions. Inmates learnt yoga with great enthusiasm. Over a period of time they too became indispensable for the inmates. Here was another report in *Delhi Mid-Day* on July 5, 1993:

TTTTT Tihar emerging with a new face  
Brahma Kumaris, homeopaths, storytellers and more. They all frequent the place. The air is no more awe-inspiring, no more 'shady'. Tihar is in for a face-lift, gradually replacing the brutal image with something that is more humane.

The jail covering several acres, housing the bad, the worse and the worst of the jailbirds, now has a spate of activities explaining the reason why its corridors remain crowded these days.

The quick change in the atmosphere of the jail and removing the aura of secrecy and silence from the jail came soon after the new Inspector General (IG), Kiran Bedi, took over.

Every day in the evening, inmates collect in the courtyard in the ward and wait for yoga sessions to begin. The yoga sessions are very popular with the inmates, especially the foreigners. There are many foreigners arrested mostly under the NDPS Act. "They specially come and ask us if the yoga instructor gets late for her session," said the Ward Incharge. Yoga classes are conducted at various times of the day in all the four jails. Positive activities in Tihar have definitely gone up. The most eye-catching of them all, however, is the daily visit of Brahma Kumaris to the jail. Every evening at five come these women in white, who speak to

gatherings of the prisoners. Surprisingly, there is absolute silence during the session. "Some of them were so overwhelmed that they even cried. Others wanted to confess," said a jail official.

Equally interesting is the scheme slated for children — storytelling. The idea emanated when the jail authorities received a letter requesting permission to come and recite poems and stories for the jail's young ones, said the IG. The scheme is all set for a takeoff.

The problem with Tihar even before Kiran Bedi took over was the tradition that a jail didn't require to be homely.

The prisoners led a suffocated life and outsiders just did not know what went on behind the massive iron gates. Bedi's efforts to throw the gates open to let people know that a jail could be more than just barred windows and cells has been a step towards development.

One evening Sheetal Sehgal of Mahila Pratiraksha Mandal (Women Protection Group), and a great community supporter in my earlier postings, dropped by. She casually asked if she could be of any assistance. For me she was an asset, as she was running counselling and legal aid centres and schools for deprived children. I asked her whether she could help us on similar lines. She is a woman who never says 'no' to deserving causes. She came the following day with her dedicated team of women volunteers to work with women and children in the Women's Ward. She was ably supported by Surinder Saini, Sonia Sharma and Santosh Muthoo of the Delhi Social Welfare Board. The centres and the school she set up inside. Within days of my assuming responsibility, the introduction of yoga, spiritual discourses, vocational training and counselling for women, with the first ever creche for prisoners' children, made headlines in several newspapers. Consequently, I got a telephone call from Mark Templer of the Hope Foundation, an international organisation dealing with health matters of the needy. I invited him to see me the following day. He and his team member, Ian Correa, offered to take up health care in respect to leprosy and tuberculosis inside the prison. We had no provision ourselves. For me this help was God-sent. I took them for a round of the prison personally the same day. Within days, they started their programmes. They are still

Tihar are still functioning.



there, not only for prisoners but even for the staff, through their dental clinic established inside the prison. Besides them there were many other Christian groups who came to take counselling sessions and distribute copies of the *Bible*. One of them was Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. A woman inmate Shakira even received a letter from Mother Teresa as reproduced below:

**MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY**  
54A, A. J. C. BOSE ROAD,  
CALCUTTA — 700016

5th March

1995 Dear Shakira,

Thank you for your letter of 27.2.95. I am happy to know that Sr. Mamta and Sr. Coreen often visit the prisoners at Tihar Jail and that they were able to take care of that young girl who is mental. Here in Bengal, we have more than 200 young and old women who have been sent to us from the jail. I am sure slowly we will be able to do this in many parts of India. In the meantime, pray for this intention.

I will surely pray that your case will be over and that you begin a new life. It is very consoling to know that your Authorities, specially Mrs Kiran Bedi, is doing so much for the betterment of the prisoners. I'm glad that she arranged for the Ash Wednesday service for you all. My prayers and greetings to all those who are in charge there. God loves you — love others as God loves you.

God bless you.

*Mother Teresa me*

An Anglo-Indian woman called Mary Ann of *The Family*, another worldwide organisation known for promoting human values, put in a request to come in for value-based musical programmes for women and children. They were a Christian group of good men, women and children. Their visit enlivened the prison environment with resounding music. Never had the wards savoured this kind of value-based entertainment. They imparted joy to one and all, and were welcomed. We had to request them if they could come often and take a different prison each day, since that was the

demand. They were generous to the inmates with their time. They moved on from music to skits, workshops, forestry, and festivals. They reached out to all, and over a period of time they developed workbooks on management of human relations. They continue to be associated with Tihar, carrying on with the good work. Without them, the laughter inside the prison would not have been audible. Here is a report which appeared in *The National Herald* on September 12, 1994:

Tender saplings on Tihar's barren land  
Tender saplings on Tihar's barren  
land

Two rugged men join hands to plant a tender sapling on a stretch of barren land — one of them is a policeman, another a convict.

The unlikely cooperation is yet another step towards positive changes that have swept the Capital's Tihar Jail. Thousands of tiny saplings, standing around overcrowded prisons, not only promise salubrious surroundings, but also reflect the growing hope among prisoners for their future.

During this monsoon, hundreds of zealous jail inmates participated in covering about 6,000 sq ft of land with 3,000 plants from an assortment of fruit, shade and flowering trees and a variety of shrubs and creepers. "It was just a matter of rekindling their old instincts as most of the inmates have rural agrarian background," says Ms Sonia of *The Family*, a voluntary body organising the social forestry project in Tihar Jail.

"They are so caring that there is no need to put tree-guards around the plants, which have shown a remarkable survival rate of 95 per cent," enthuses Tarsem Kumar, Superintendent of Jail No 2.

The complex is to have 2,000 more trees by the year end. In a matter of two to three years, the jail will be lush with mango, guava, pomegranate, jamun and lemon trees, and the prisoners will reap the fruits of their labour.

"It is accompanied by programmes that sensitise jail inmates about the importance of preserving a clean environment and conveys the message that a young sapling planted by them could symbolise the new growth that their future can attain. If they so choose," elaborates Ms Sonia.

The positive influence of the programme is reflected in comments made by some old convicts who participated in one such tree planting function in Jail No 2.

The oldest inmate, 78-year-old Pati Lal, a freedom fighter

murder, went on the stage to declare that he was glad to kick off his old habit of smoking *bidis* and pledged to keep the surroundings clean.

One morning, as I was leaving for my regular walk, I got a telephone call from a lady, Saroj Vashisht. She introduced herself as a retired official of All India Radio, and a fond storyteller. She asked me if she could in any way be allowed to be with the prisoners for storytelling.

My immediate response was, "Why not!"

"And when could I come?" she asked.

"Today," I said.

And she came as per her appointed time. I took her to the adolescents wards, and over the weeks she became a fond motherly presence and a storyteller for 1,200 boys. They respected her and missed her when she was not in town. She came with books, interesting magazines, clothes, stationery and even a television for the adolescent ward. Today, Saroj works for other prisons too, and has been rewarded for her efforts. She has authored a book, *Aisa Jaise Kuch Hua Hi Nahin* (It's Like Nothing Has Happened) narrating her story of the work she has done inside Tihar. Without her, the prison would have been poorer.

Tihar acquired a changed atmosphere within two months of the entry of individuals and organisations from outside. By July, the then Lieutenant-Governor, P. K. Dave, came to Tihar to inaugurate two new wards for adolescents. We launched a literacy programme for these young people. The Government of India officials came with the Lieutenant-Governor, and so did many eminent citizens and non-governmental agencies in the field of education and vocational training. The Director of Shramik Vidya Peeth, R. K. Chhabra, and Jamia Millia University from the Directorate, Adult Education, came with hundreds of literacy kits for distribution by the Lieutenant-Governor. The literacy movement in Tihar picked up to such an extent that it became an urgent task for Tihar officials to ensure that anyone leaving Tihar must at least know how to write his own name and read the numerals. The literacy programme started

to spread and finally engulfed the entire prison. This would not have been possible without massive community support.

Alongside illiteracy, drug abuse was a major challenge inside the prison. To meet this, similar help arrived through dedicated individuals and recognised organisations. Dr Harinder Sethi of Aasra and Sunil Vatsayan of Navjyoti, volunteered and took up different prisons. They brought with them appropriate models of substance abuse management and handled what we could not have done on our own. These individuals and organisations are still there in Tihar with broader reach. Without them, we would not have achieved the kind of peace and harmony which was essential to build the environment we were aiming at.

Determination to find answers gets you the solutions. This has been my frequent experience. Vipassana, a meditation programme, was one such example which came to us as a major therapy with intensive reach. The programme was offered to us by M. L. Mehta, former Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, and we pursued it diligently. As a result of this endeavour, Tihar housed a ten-day meditation camp with 1,100 prisoners assembled at one common place, unheard of in any prison anywhere in the world. Tihar got a permanent gift through the opening of a formal branch of the Vipassana Research Institute, to carry on with the courses at regular intervals. Tihar was already attracting international attention. Among the groups which made great impact on the inmates was 'Osho'. *The Hindustan Times* reported on December 30, 1993:

RRRRRajneesh wave in Tihar

A wave of *Rajneeshism* has hit the Central Tihar Jail here over the past two days.

It was a dynamic meditation Osho style in the country's largest jail. A cathartic explosion. An inner cyclone. These expressions would sum up the new experiment launched in Tihar Jail.

An ear-shattering explosion of pent-up anger and frustration broke out from 600 prisoners in this overcrowded jail during Monday and Tuesday afternoons.

After the first stage of deep and fast breathing, the prisoners were

encouraged to purge their repressed emotions and traumas in the second stage. In this stage, termed catharsis by the Rajneeshees, bedlam broke out as all the 600 prisoners screamed and shrieked while wildly gesticulating and punching the air.

"...It erupted like a volcano of violence showing the tremendous anger and frustration of these prisoners," commented Swami Swabhav, Osho's 'ambassador' who had come from Pune to conduct the special meditation camp.

"If not released in this harmless manner, this violence lies dormant, ready to strike when these people are freed," said the Swami in a statement there.

"It is significant that the catharsis stage, which takes longer in normal persons, came in less than five minutes with these people and it surprised many Warders and other staffers present," he added.

Later, after the third stage of shouting "hoo... hoo... hoo" there was total silence as everyone became still and calm.

"Some even cried, shedding tears of release from this inner cyclone," Swami Swabhav said.

The message of our accessibility did reach out to the student community as well. A number of scholars interested in research came from all over the country to do social research work. They were students of social sciences, law and architecture.

Even before these researchers came, school children had already come into Tihar in a big way. The Oxford Public School with over 150 children enacted a powerful docudrama on the Quit India Movement which moved the convicts to tears. Some of them could not resist promising to the children that they shall never return to a life of crime. The children came with moral messages through music, dance, books and plays to soften hardened souls. Interestingly, hundreds of these children who came to the prisons got themselves baptised in community service, having Tihar etched in their memories for ever.

But one visit for which the prison system shall remain indebted forever was a visit by a gentleman from Mumbai, K. C. Shroff. He was brought by our family friend, Dr R. C. Vatts. Shroff, a grand old man with the enthusiasm and zeal of a motivated teenager, came straight to the point.

He said, "You have garbage removal problem?"

I said, "Yes."

"Would you like some solutions for this?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Come, show me your garbage dump."

I took him inside the prison and showed him the stinking dumps.

He said, "What if we treat this right here and turn it into manure?"

I asked, "What about the stink?"

He replied, "You see for yourself."

We lost no time in taking help as he was equally impatient. He deputed his team of experts led by T. K. Chatterjee to oversee our programme, train us and finally make us self-sufficient. We organised training programmes and revelled at the visible success. One of the enterprising jail Superintendents, D. P. Diwedi, fabricated sacks called 'Green Tihar' and sold manure to earn funds for the prisoner's welfare. We were thrilled at this transformation. Infact, it became a role model for others in garbage management. This UNI agency report was carried on June 19, 1994 in *The Indian Express*:

TTTTTurning garbage into manur

Another novel experiment has started in Tihar Jail here — manure from garbage, reports UNI.

The largest jail in Asia Pacific, which houses more than 8,700 inmates, produces 3,000 kg of garbage daily, making disposal quite a costly task.

But no more. The inmates of the jail are not only turning the garbage into rich manure, they are also marketing it, thus saving a massive amount of money, Rs 10.8 lakh annually, which was earlier used for its removal. The money generated from the sale of the manure of jail garbage is deposited in the Prisoners' Welfare Fund. Besides, the prisoners who manage garbage, earn their wages as well.

About 40 prisoners have volunteered to take part in the exercise initiated by K. C. Shroff, Managing Director, Excel Industries, Mumbai. These prisoners are getting vocational training in garbage management and financial incentives for their work. They get reduction in sentence for good conduct.

Inspector General of Prisons, Kiran Bedi, said that the marketing of manure from garbage had started weeks ago and encouraged by the response, she would soon order a technical feasibility study of producing electricity from garbage.

Bedi also plans to get in touch with voluntary organisations, like Sulabh International, to extract biogas from garbage before turning it into manure.

She would like to meet all the energy needs of the massive jail through non-conventional energy sources.

The 'bio-organic soil enricher', converted mainly from horticulture and kitchen waste in the prison, is being bought by many nurseries in the capital, with the active help from the Kitchen Garden Association of India.

"We are trying to expand our market, and once the project goes full steam, it is expected to generate a return of over Rs 10 lakh per annum into the Prisoners' Welfare Fund," Bedi said. The PWF money will be used for correctional measures, she added.

In a novel experiment, the five-kg polybags in which the manure is being marketed are printed in bright red by juvenile delinquents who are undergoing vocational training inside the jail.

"It gives their morale a boost to see their work being put to use and actually being sold," said Bedi.

In the field of legal aid a group called Sakshi, headed by Jasjit Purewal, and scores of others came in to provide free legal aid for the women prisoners and needy men. This expedited trials and provided the much-needed sensitivity in an area which was neglected.

The health care improved dramatically due to community support for children, women and men. There was an increase in awareness about health due to care exhibitions. We could meet inmates' special needs through the support of specialists. We observed Health Care Days as part of our celebrations. Doctors from all fields came to offer voluntary support for a cause they had started to admire. On January 26, 1994, hundreds of doctors from different streams volunteered medical help. The entire prison population had access to specialist care. We later added alternative medicines to increase the range. We also had plans to open outlets for the sale of ayurvedic medicines to meet some basic ailments, such as fever, coughs, colds, weakness, etc., to enable us to further reduce pressure

on Government doctors. This was yet to be accomplished. But then I am informed that Tihar has sufficient doctors now, and it is no more dependent on outside help — yet it continues with its community participation, to carry on the spirit which was kindled.

India is a land of festivals, and at Tihar we celebrated all of them, be it Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or Christian. All insiders celebrated equally. The community from outside generously contributed in kind to strengthen the festivity. For Diwali, a festival of lights, individuals came from outside to organise Ram Leela. For Gurupurva the Sikh Community gave articles of food to be cooked inside the prison for sharing. For Id, the Muslim groups offered dates and puddings to all. On Christmas Day cake pieces were sent to all. These were contributed by the Christian groups, ably led by Brother Williams and his wife, teachers of Mount St Mary's School. We were true to our Indian sense of plurality and hospitality even in Tihar.

During my visits to the prisons in the West, South and the East, I did not see such an abundance of community participation. Perhaps it was not required there since the basic needs were met. But I am of the view that there is no substitute to community participation to forge reformation in a substantial way. 'Reformation' and 'Correction' are based on environmental acceptance, both within the prison and outside. A community created the best environment necessary for the transformation — from a prison to an ashram. The entry of the community was the basis of prisoners' reintegration into the community that had been hurt, and was now preparing to accept them back. While hundreds of inmates had already started feeling regretful, they were not hesitating to express their feelings. They were now coming out of their sense of guilt to feel at peace with themselves. Many of them were keen to confess before the courts, but were not sure how the courts would take them, understand them, or call it an act of yet another escape. The inmates had reached a crossroads...



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## *The Community Within*

W

hen the prison staff members had geared themselves up to face new challenges and shoulder increasing responsibilities, and the outside community as well was eagerly contributing to the reform revolution in Tihar, how could the prisoners hold back their innate potential? In fact, the jail itself housed the greatest strength — human resource. The human beings confined within the four walls had all the time, energy and the professional skills, which constitute the foundation of any vibrant society. What was required was an identification and a recognition of their talent with direction and guidance as and when required. Here was a mass of human potential waiting to be entrusted with responsibility.

Very early in the process for reformation, we realised the fundamental fact: that the prisoners were keen on changes — and drastic ones at that — in the system. However, we had no ready-made magic formula for instant reforms. Given the remote possibility of our discovering an instant blueprint for action, even if we did find one, the actual process would require the willing acceptance of the entire population of prisoners. Their participation

would have to be voluntary and not coercive, in order to not defeat the very purpose of the reforms.

The daily on-the-round observations, reinforced by the parallel avalanche of petitions (from the mobile petition box), along with the entry of the community, led to a pronounced directional change in the prisoners' thought processes. The impact was nothing short of spectacular. Within a short span of time, we had initiated a purposeful array of reforms, including adult education programmes, yoga activities, daily morning prayers, sports and festivities. The remarkable feature was that we accomplished these with the same old staff, who were also waiting to be properly motivated and organised for the purpose. As a consequence, we developed a model known as the Prisoners' Panchayat (Cooperative) System. This system was put into practice on June 26, 1993. It was the result of one of our brainstorming sessions:

Decisions taken at the lunch meeting on 16.6.1993  
*Panchayat* system to be considered for introduction in all wards. Head Warders will head the Ward *Panchayats*. *Panchayat* will regulate discipline and organise educational, sports and cultural activities. The Ward *Lambardar* and *Munshi* will be members of the *panchayat*.

The Jail Superintendents suggested we take time to consider its details and evolve a working system in consultation with the ward inmates during the rounds of the Superintendents. The scheme will be finalised by next week.

Each Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent, Jail 1, to fix a day and time of week to brief and interact with Warders and Head Warders. A suitable place to be identified in each jail.

Proper signboards to all jails need to be fixed on the main road for the convenience of all visitors.

(Action

PWD)

Prisoners lodging in jail will be in alphabetical order. The system will be discussed and finalised on Monday at Gazetted Officers Meeting. All to come prepared with their ideas on this suggestion.

Power of procurement of essential non-dietary items will be delegated to each Jail Superintendent. He will buy goods from authorised stores and get *ex post facto* sanction for all purchases made up to Rs 20,000. All these should be made through Purchase Committee. An order to this effect will be issued by the Administration Officer.

We decided to appoint a Superintendent or a Deputy Superintendent to ensure that the various *panchayats* were formed in each ward. The main objective was to encourage the prisoners to voluntarily take part in organising educational, cultural and sports activities as also in maintaining discipline. The formation of the various *panchayats* was preceded by an orientation programme conducted by jail officials who explained to the inmates the objectives and benefits of the new system, thereby instilling in the latter the ability to develop self-management skills.

The response from the majority of the prisoners was enthusiastic and positive. Many volunteers came forward to join the reformation programme, and were encouraged by their companions to take up organisational responsibilities. All of a sudden, a perceptible transformation took place. The ward inmates began to evolve into self-organised groups. The individual Warder of each ward was deputed to be the head of each group and was called the *sarpanch*. Once the individual ward *panchayats* were formed, the Superintendents summoned a *mahapanchayat* — a collective assembly of all *panchayats*. The basic objectives of this *mahapanchayat* were (a) To coordinate the relevant activities; (b) To streamline the reform process; (c) To reach a consensus on acceptable methods of functioning; (d) To point out existing problems and suggest measures to combat them; (e) Offer further suggestions for the improvement of reformatory activities; and (f) New suggestions, if any, to move ahead towards the clearly defined goals.

The setting up of the various *panchayats* led to several beneficial developments. First and foremost, the prisoners' feeling of isolation and worthlessness was eliminated. They could now participate in their own correctional programmes. Secondly, the Head Warder and his band of deputies could mobilise assistance for organising educational, cultural and sports activities. Thirdly, the *panchayat* system formula created a new positive equation between the staff and the inmates and also among the inmates. It sought to focus on solving problems and not merely complaining about them.

(headman).

When on the rounds, we observed that certain problems, which according to us ought to have been resolved by the *panchayat's* initiatives, persisted, we summoned the *panchayat* to explain. This brought in accountability in community management. The underlying message was clear: personal and collective reformation had to be personal and collective responsibility.

The need for specific activity-oriented *panchayats* grew as we went in for programme expansion. Let me now highlight the purpose and functions of such specific *panchayats*:

The Teachers' Panchayat was formed to achieve the goal of total literacy in the jail. The teachers were chosen from the literate section of the prisoners themselves. In other words, those individuals who were fairly well qualified were now entrusted with the job of teaching their fellow residents to create within the prison walls an environment conducive to studying and learning. The chosen teachers truly rose to the occasion in a comprehensive and diligent manner so much so that an Assistant Superintendent was exclusively placed as head of the Teachers' Panchayat. He ensured that the *panchayat* functioned effectively, and its benefits reached the entire population of the prison. The Assistant Superintendent also collated the feedback from various sources and used this information to improve the system from time to time. A coordinator from among the inmates was also appointed who would calculate the material needs — chalks, notebooks, etc. — of each class, and let the concerned Assistant Superintendent know about it for a quick supply so that classwork did not suffer.

After the Literacy Panchayat, we gradually motivated the prisoners into forming a Medical Panchayat. The members of this *panchayat* were made collectively responsible for the identification of inmates who needed urgent medical help, seeking the assistance of the staff and the doctors without delay. They would be responsible for reporting if they noticed



that any patient in urgent need was being neglected or ignored. They could inform the officers who were on the rounds, or send letters through the petition box. Apart from the aforementioned functions, the Medical Panchayat members

conveyed to their ward inmates the policy decisions conveyed to them by the staff with respect to medical matters. They were also being trained to undertake preventive measures on a regular basis to help maintain a healthy environment in their wards.

All the foregoing developments called for regular interaction between the staff and the *panchayats*. Just as the daily briefing of the staff was mandatory, now it became necessary to hold a daily forum in which all the Ward Panchayats would meet at a fixed time. Such a forum came into existence and was being chaired by an officer, preferably the Deputy Superintendent himself.

I summoned a *mahapanchayat* on September 25, 1993, and members from all the Ward Panchayats assembled at the appointed hour. This meeting was the very first occasion when about 400 inmate representatives from the four prisons assembled, representing all activities, such as internal discipline, mess management, literacy, yoga, sports, medical and cultural activities. This *mahapanchayat* marked a turning point in the internal administration of Tihar Jail. This congregation of individuals from prisons sent out a clear and sincere message — signalling the advent of a meaningful, viable, reliable, collective-corrective-community (3C) system. It did not matter that these men and women were in jail; they displayed the enthusiasm, the energy and the willingness to participate in self-governance and self-improvement programme in a township which housed over 8,000 of them.

Self-governance led to a sense of responsibility underpinned by increased vigilance by the inmates themselves. They, in consultation with their Deputy Superintendents, formed search parties. These search parties, of course, under the watchful eyes of the present staff, focused mainly on the food and clothing the inmates got from their visitors. The main objective was to ferret out drugs if present. The inmates returning from court appearances were bodily frisked

at various points by different teams, official or mixed, in order to detect any contraband items on them. Such multi-tier searches further cleansed the system. It was as if searchlights were being beamed on one and all, and nobody could hide from the intensity of the glare.

With the passage of time, *panchayat* meetings had become a constructive way of life. Over a period of time, we came across men and women who were not only developing self-esteem but also displaying leadership qualities. Such individuals were accorded due recognition and provided with identification badges and special seating places to occupy in all gatherings. We were constantly on the lookout for new ideas, new viewpoints and new programmes. And there was no dearth of these inputs.

We decided on the Gandhian concept of *shram daan* (voluntary labour or service). We allotted Wednesday afternoons for *shram daan*, following the morning literacy classes. During this course all inmates would dust and clean their own barracks/cells and also tidy up their personal belongings. They would also brighten up the areas within the ward compound. Later, inspection teams would visit each barrack/cell and grade their respective performances.

It would be appropriate at this stage to reproduce a report that I received from one of the most enthusiastic Superintendents of Prison 2, Tarsem Kumar, which reveals how each one of us was profoundly involved in developing, nurturing and sustaining the *panchayat* system:

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT, CENTRAL JAIL NO 2,  
TIHAR, NEW DELHI  
No. SCJ/CJ-2/93/4216-4217 Dated: December 9, 1993  
To  
THE DIG (P),  
Central Jail, Tihar,  
New Delhi.

SSSSS Subject: *panchayats* in the prison — achievements during the last three months.

Sir,

Please refer to your letter U O No 10 (Misc)/CJ/Legal/93/764 dated: November 19, 1993, on the above-mentioned subject. In this connection I wish to point out the following achievements made during the last three months:

### 1. WARD PANCHAYAT

In every ward, a main *panchayat* and a shadow *panchayat* have been formed. The task of the prime *panchayat* is to mainly look out for the welfare of the prisoners of the ward regarding discipline and cleanliness. The *panchayat* members of the wards are authorised to settle all the petty issues among the prisoners. Serious matters concerning indiscipline and violence are brought to the notice of the officers. These Ward Panchayats were formed on the pattern of Village Panchayats. The task of the shadow *panchayat* is also the same and it helps the main *panchayat* in its working, and members from the shadow *panchayat* are opted to the main *panchayat* when its members are released or transferred.

### 2. MESS PANCHAYAT

Its main duty is to see the quality of raw food materials to be used and cooked in the *langar*, and also to see the quality of cooked food. If they find the quality is not up to the mark, the members of the *panchayat* report the matter to the officers and the same is not allowed to be used or cooked.

### 3. EDUCATION PANCHAYAT

This *panchayat* was formed to look after the educational activities of the prisoners. Their main task is to see that no prisoner remains illiterate, and to make arrangements for the teachers to educate the uneducated prisoners. At present there are five teachers for this purpose. It may be submitted that before October 2, 1993, a literacy campaign was launched and the same was achieved with 100 per

### 4. SPORTS PANCHAYAT

The main task of the Sports Panchayat is to look after the sports activity in the jail. Its task is to see that sports/games are conducted in each ward. They also arrange inter-ward and inter-jail matches. IG (P) trophy in the inter-jail volleyball tournament was won by this jail this year.

### 5. MEDICAL PANCHAYAT

This *panchayat* is formed for giving medical facilities to the prisoners. In case of any emergency, its main duty is to inform the duty officer and take the patient/prisoner to the doctor immediately for medical help.

### 6. CULTURAL PANCHAYAT

Its main task is to sing *bhajans* (devotional songs) daily at the *Panchayat Ghar* or in wards as also to make arrangements for any cultural programme to be performed in jail.

### 7.7. NAI PUNJA (barber team)

Its task is to see that the *nai* (barber) goes to each ward and does his job efficiently. In case of any default it reports the matter to the officer.

#### 8. O CTIVI

Yoga activities are going on in the jail and a good number of prisoners have learnt yoga. A yoga coordinator has been nominated to see that the yoga activities are conducted correctly.

#### 9. MAHAPANCHA

The *mahapanchayats* are held from time to time at the *Panchayat Ghar*. They are briefed about the instructions/directions/orders from the Superintendents and from the Prison Headquarters, and are directed to pass on the same to the prisoners of their wards for follow-up action. This helps the prisoners to learn about the activities already started and those which are going to be started.

#### 10. HEAD WARDER/WARDER BRIEFING

Instructions/directions/orders given by the Jail Superintendent and by the Headquarters are briefed to the Head Warder/Warder for compliance. They are also directed to inform their ward prisoners about them, and in this way instructions/guidelines are passed on to the prisoners in order to maintain peace and discipline in the jail.

#### 11. PANCHAYAT GHAR

Previously, the name of the *Panchayat Ghar* was *chakkar*, which is a central place to control the movements of incoming and outgoing prisoners. The name *chakkar* has been changed and now it is called *Panchayat Ghar*, a name which is both very symbolic and meaningful with regard to the activities it undertakes.

-sd-

(TARSEM KUMAR)

Superintendent, Central Jail No 2,  
Tihar, New Delhi.

The underlying spirit behind the *panchayat* system was to usher in an era of self-governance for the inmates and ensure a natural acceptance of opportunities available to them to participate in various reformation programmes with sustained motivation. Such a situation engendered healthy interaction not only between the inmates but also between the inmates and the staff.

The most significant *panchayat* set up in Tihar was the Legal Panchayat. This *panchayat*, on the basis of its remarkable accomplishments, went on to create legal history. The basic function of this *panchayat* was to first make the inmates aware of their legal

rights, and then provide ways and means of exercising these rights. Many of the inmates were absolutely ignorant about the law. They perceived it as a legal maze from which all escape routes were blocked.

Gradually, however, as the inmates' participation in the Legal Panchayat began to increase, they gained confidence and shared their views and opinions with others during daily meetings or during the *mahapanchayats*. Newer and better ideas came to the fore, and practical solutions to various complex legal problems were evolved. The core of the Legal Panchayat was voluntarily formed by those inmates who had a legal background and who possessed analytical skills as well as the ability to draft petitions and type out affidavits. We provided them with the requisite typewriters and stationery.

In order to provide the Legal Panchayat with a comprehensive data bank, Superintendent K. R. Kishore and his colleagues procured five complete sets of law books and other related literature (one set for each of the four prisons and one for the Prison Headquarters). Also, the costs of photocopying and the paper required were defrayed from the Prisoners' Welfare Fund. Each Superintendent earmarked a separate room for the prisoners' legal experts which their fellow residents could also use for consultation purposes. This impromptu legal aid cell proved to be an immense source of relief for all of us. It was incredible to witness this phenomenon of legal assistance being offered absolutely free without any expectation of material gain or favours. This was a great achievement given the fact that many of the inmates openly complained of the fleecing skills of the legal profession. The entire approach was constructive and positive.

The Legal Panchayat deputed a team of 'inside' lawyers to tackle the endemic problem of inordinately delayed trials and to produce substantial evidence of such lapses before the courts. This team was led by Mufti Mirazuddin Farooqi, a former senior law officer from Jammu and Kashmir. Farooqi devised a simple but ingenious and effective court diary for under trials. By judiciously using this diary,

each inmate could keep a methodical record of the trial. It could be used to place before the court in the event the trial was being delayed due to factors beyond the inmates' control, and seek relief thereby. This diary alerted one and all, for it was easily accessible.

This format was distributed free of cost to the indigent inmates; those who could afford to pay were charged a nominal sum of one rupee. And *The Asian Age* reported thus on May 10, 1994, with this headline, *Undertrials at Tihar hold the law to be guilty:*

The over-7,000 undertrials in Tihar Jail are taking the law into their own hands. Fed up with the endless rounds of courts that can stretch their cases to 10 years and beyond, the undertrials have decided to keep a written record of what happens in each of the interminable rounds they make to a court for a hearing.

The Legal Panchayats that have been set up among the prisoners in the last two months have hit upon a way to prod awake the judicial system, reported to be among the tardiest in the world. Last Saturday they began to keep a 'case diary' of the proceedings of each undertrial's hearings, which are written down by the jail *panchayat* when an undertrial returns from the court, Ms Kiran Bedi, Inspector General of Prisons said on Sunday.

The hearings are classified as either effective or non-effective hearings. A list of all the non-effective hearings, and the reasons why the hearings were ineffective, will be submitted once a month to the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, the Minister for Law, the Police Commissioner, the Home Secretary, the Human Rights Commission and the Delhi Legal Aid Bureau.

An overwhelming 7,114 of the 8,500 inmates in Tihar are undertrials, many of whom wait anywhere between five and 10 years to get a verdict from the overcrowded courts of Delhi.

According to Mr S. Sen, Inspector General of Police in the Central Bureau of Investigation, there were 5.7 million criminal cases waiting for trial in Indian courts till the end of 1991. But according to one judge who spoke at a seminar on criminal justice that concluded in the capital on Sunday, over 20 million cases were pending in the lower courts while another 2.2 million cases were pending in the 18 High Courts in the country.

The judges say this is because of an explosion of litigation in the country in recent years, with the passing of new legislation and the population growth. But the infrastructure of the judiciary has not



expanded to keep pace with this “huge clamouring at the doors of the judiciary,” one judge said.

But in Tihar Jail, the largest in the Asia Pacific region, prisoners are not as despairing as they used to be a year or so ago of getting a speedy trial. In the women’s jail, a *lok adalat* is in session under the banyan tree in the open square around the washing-strewn barracks.

When the prisoners came to know of the easy availability of free legal aid, they swamped the ‘inside lawyers’ with a plethora of cases. The workload of the Legal Panchayat was nothing short of stupendous. To streamline the activities of this *panchayat*, ward-wise sub-*panchayats* had to be formed, which helped the main *panchayat* acquire a larger base.

The members of the Legal Panchayat put in a tremendous effort to alleviate the sufferings of their more unfortunate companions. They proved extremely effective in trying to fulfil their objectives. Depending upon the gravity of the individual cases, they petitioned the Supreme Court, the High Courts or the District Courts. And in many deserving cases, relief came their way.

The indomitable Mufti Mirazuddin Farooqi was personally responsible for obtaining bail orders for several prisoners through petitions drafted by him and produced in court by the respective prisoners, some of whom were under murder charges. In one particularly crucial case, in which a convict had been sentenced to death for homicide, Farooqi made an appeal to the Supreme Court through the post to commute the sentence to life imprisonment. His appeal was heard and his plea upheld. Mufti, as Farooqi was affectionately known, literally pegged away day and night at his job, and his efforts were rewarded with due success. Mufti had landed up in the prison under TADA (Terrorists and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act). He is now back in Jammu and Kashmir — a freeman whose profession is freeing others who have been confined. In 1994, on the performance declaration day, all *panchayats* presented their individual reports. This was the sum total of the performance of Legal Panchayat and the benefits accrued thereof:

AAAAAppeals to High Courts for bail (interim/parole)

1) 192 petitions filed — 60 persons received relief.

2) 177 petitions filed — 69 persons released in Sessions Court.

3) 272 appeals filed — 225 benefited.

The aforementioned figures did not include the petitions sent to the Government departments for obtaining pensions, or subsistence allowance by the 69 Government employees lodged in Tihar.

The Legal Panchayat was actively supported by an outside lawyers' forum, known as the Delhi Legal Aid Bureau, whose president was Manju Goel. This bureau disseminated legal education in all the wards and made the inmates, especially the newcomers, aware of their rights and duties. I had been informed that the legal aid *panchayats* were being mentioned in reputed legal journals and bulletins.

The legal aid *panchayat* had even chalked out a plan for the year ahead. The priorities in this plan were: (a) To devise a system of monitoring the progress of appeals in various courts; (b) To make provisions for a panel of advocates to represent the prisoners; and (c) to draw up a programme for the rehabilitation of convicts so that they could be socially integrated after their release.

The foregoing momentous happenings imbued Tihar with an all-pervading spirit of conscientiousness and concern for unattended matters. Out of this emerged yet another *panchayat* called the Mulhaiza Panchayat (an Orientation Council), which would provide information and guidelines for all new entrants into the prison regarding procedures, rules and regulations. Such entrants had also to be acquainted with the available infrastructural support systems and on how to use them optimally. The creation of such a *panchayat* was very necessary because, till then, we had no printed self-help booklets.

This *panchayat* could also identify, on a daily basis, the newcomers who possessed professional skills, and the expected tenure of incarceration. Such individuals could be motivated to utilise their skills to improve the living conditions of their companions.

Other *panchayats* came into existence according to the needs of the situation, for instance, the PWD Panchayat. Such a *panchayat* was created because the actual 'super efficient' PWD stalwarts were invariably conspicuous by their absence, and we had to perforce reduce our dependence on them drastically.

This *panchayat* consisted of inmates who possessed engineering and mechanical skills. By the end of 1994, the dedicated members of this group had saved the Government from incurring huge expenditures by carrying out innumerable repairs and minor construction jobs on their own.

They performed the jobs willingly and joyously. All we had to provide them with were the required tools/instruments and raw materials. Not a single person misused these items. On the contrary, they put them to maximum use for prison service. The specialists of the PWD Panchayat repaired broken doors and hand pumps, plugged water leakages, and remedied defective power points. They fixed fans, TVs and VCRs which had gone out of order. They even managed to set up audio installations, mainly for conducting stage shows within the jail. The material was bought at cost price from the Prisoners' Welfare Fund, and labour was provided by the prison. These professionals went on to design and build two open air auditoriums with a seating capacity of 2,500 each. Had these activities been left to the mercies of Government-run PWD, they would have never been constructed, mainly because of paucity of funds. Both the open air auditoriums were formally inaugurated. The one in Prison No 3 was opened by Mukul Wasnik, then Minister of State for Sports. The inaugural stone carries the names of the hard-working inmates who put in outstanding work. The stadium is called Jariyal Stadium, in the name of serving Deputy Superintendent due to whose intervention the stadium came up. The stadium of Prison No 4, was formally inaugurated by the existing Prison Minister, H. S. Balli, and Finance Minister, Jagdish Mukhi of the Delhi Government. But for me it was the Sunil Gupta Stadium, for it was his leadership which galvanised the synergy. At that time he was the serving Deputy Superintendent of Prison No 4.

inmates.

Since each prison possessed its own PWD Panchayat, the two *stadia* differed in structure. They met the pressing needs of the inmates of Prisons No 3 and 4 for a place to congregate for their daily *sarva dharma sabhas* (all religion assemblies).

Prison No 1 already had a stadium, so its inmates erected a greenhouse and dug a pond decorated with lotus flowers. They were planning to grow diverse varieties of plants throughout the year to encourage agro-economic activities and to impart training in horticulture to their fellow residents. This project was the brainchild of V. P. Garg, a zealous Deputy Superintendent, who was ably supported by Jagdish Chandra Pant, Agriculture Secretary, Government of India. The material needed for the structure was provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, but the actual construction job was carried out by the inmates themselves. One particular inmate, Surinder Kumar, was the driving force behind this venture who galvanised his companions to new heights. He held a master's degree in agronomics and was serving a life sentence. The greenhouse project brought in excellent financial returns to the Panchayat supervised one of the most unique projects which literally turned garbage into gold. Every day the four prisons generated almost two tonnes of organic garbage which had to be carried out of the jail premises. Such a process entailed hiring of trucks at Rs 300 per trip. Keeping in view the mountains of waste material to be cleared, each truck made several trips per day. The truck driver would invariably dupe the prison authorities by not filling the truck to its full capacity and thereby increasing the number of trips. The Delhi State Government, in its supreme wisdom, refused to permit the jail officials to buy a tripper truck even when we had the money in our budget, for the all-important function of garbage removal. We were instructed to continue with the traditional system of hiring trucks, which would drain about Rs 23 lakh per annum from the prison budget. Such a huge pile-up of garbage not only permeated the jail premises with its unique stink

Prisoners' Welfare

—

but also posed a potential threat as far as the outbreak of contagious diseases, such as cholera and dysentery, were concerned.

At this stage, destiny came to our rescue. A good Samaritan, K. C. Shroff, came from Mumbai to convert the garbage into a money-spinning venture as discussed earlier in the preceding chapter. The benefits derived by Tihar were twofold: we acquired a new technology as well as the skills to use it effectively, many inmates learned a vocational trade skill; and in the process, revenue flowed in. Undeniably, this team venture was one of the most innovative, creative and productive projects ever undertaken at Tihar Jail. Tihar just cannot do without it now.

Thanks to the exuberant participation, and that too in abundance in the *panchayat* system, within a year of its inception, a full-fledged bazaar was flourishing within the jail premises. This was run by the canteen *panchayat* members, and it could genuinely boast of containing grocery and other provision shops, cold drinks outlets and Pepsi fountains, fruit juice and coffee counters and a mini restaurant which served hot fried snacks and tea as well as *lassi* (cold drink made from beaten curd). Moreover, mobile canteens were also in operation. From the shops, the prisoners could buy items such as vegetables (for salads), clothing, buckets, stationery and utensils. All the aforesaid activities and their concomitant benefits were the result of sincere, heartfelt and invigorating enthusiasm and diligence on the part of the inmates. Moreover, there was a great degree of coordination between the staff and the inmates which proved productive. The earlier environment of mutual suspicion and even hostility was dispelled and replaced by a trusting attitude to Festivals, such as Dussehra and Diwali, were celebrated within the confines of Tihar with a marked emphasis on mass participation and spontaneous outbursts of joy and gaiety. The inmates set up various stalls during these festivals, which served a wide variety of food stuffs apart from providing entertainment through 'try-your-luck' games. All the activities during the festivals resulted from the

organise community service.

combined efforts of (and coordination among) the various *panchayats*.

The jail had been transformed into an ashram, and the atmosphere fostered ever-increasing transparency and openness. Such a development, however, called for greater vigil and more caution. To ensure that no individual misused the facilities provided by the reform process a "Patrolling Panchayat" was set up. Its duty was to make daily rounds of all wards to ensure that there were no loiterers, and that nobody fell victim to depression and confined oneself to the cell when all others were occupied in performing various tasks. Such depressed individuals were identified and given special attention and treatment, if needed. It is hardly surprising that suicide attempts became non-existent after such efforts.

Four more *panchayats* were formed to meet specific needs: (a) The Insaaf (justice) Panchayat, consisting of elderly persons, to resolve disputes among barrackmates; (b) A Cable Panchayat to chalk out the programmes to be viewed on a recently acquired Tihar Cable Network (c) A Vipassana Panchayat to oversee the organisation of the meditation programme; and (d) A *panchayat* against corruption and violence. The last one was set up to forcefully drive home the point that corruption and violence were anathema to the new system that we had so painstakingly developed, and had to be stamped out once and for all.

The community outside began to take note of the spectacular changes taking place in Tihar. In September 1994, one particular individual, Hari Singh, from Manav Sewa Sansthan was so inspired that he wrote to us stating that his association wanted to award me a medal of honour for the work done in the field of prison reforms. I agreed to accept the medal on the condition that such medals be also awarded to all those inmates who were collectively responsible for this 'revolution'. He accepted my stipulation. He and his associates along with the prison staff held four separate functions in the open air auditoriums to award the medals; each function was jam-packed and was marked by jubilation and *joie de vivre*. Along with the

medals, certificates were also given to those inmates whose services were outstanding.

We had invoked the voluntary spirit among the inmates with remarkable results. Moreover, we had managed to sustain the tempo for almost two years at a stretch. The time was ripe to inject additional tangible incentives besides recognition and appreciation. We decided to provide financial benefits as well. For this purpose, we launched a *panchayat* fund. However, just as this was coming into existence, my posting at Tihar came to an end.

During my visit to prisons outside India, I had seen a 'casual' concept of Prison Councils existing in different prisons. They would interact once a fortnight in a formal forum, or on a regular basis with their floor supervisor. The issues were rather peripheral, for all their basic requirements were being met institutionally. Also the number everywhere I went were small. In these prisons they were talking of 10 or 15 prisoners on a floor and not 400 of a ward as in Tihar. Very rarely in these prisons did all the floor councils get together, for reasons of security and discipline. And this is what I consistently saw in my visits to prisons abroad.

The structure of Tihar was not comparable — either in culture, dimension or infrastructure. I came back convinced that given our ground realities we were on the right path, breaking new grounds and creating new systems.



Graph  
The Community Within  
A Synopsis

## *The Education Process: An Eternal Journey*

*E*

ach one of us, irrespective of who we are or what we are, is a product of our own time management. The manner in which an individual spends each moment of his or her waking hours determines the value he attaches to himself, which goes on to shape the present as well as the future. This was a lesson I learnt early in life from my parents, teachers, books and the environment around. The basic realisation that time had value was drilled into me during my childhood. Every moment was precious, and once lost, could not be retrieved. This philosophy has been the basic motivating factor behind all my actions, personal and professional.

Consequently, when I took charge at Tihar, I felt personally responsible for being a timekeeper of all the inmates. When I could not afford to waste even a minute of my own time, how could I possibly preside over the squandering of the time of thousands of men, women and children confined within the prison walls? I felt that most of these individuals (except the truly innocent ones) had wound up in prison precisely because they could not manage their

time properly. Had they realised how precious every fleeting moment was, they would have invested their energy in useful and constructive work which would have paid them beneficial dividends, instead of leading them into prison.

How could this awareness be kindled now — right inside the jail? How could the inmates be taught the value of time? How could the prisoners be provided with an environment in which they would willingly exercise a choice of learning something new, irrespective of their literacy level? Could we not initiate them into respecting or sustaining the urge to seek knowledge before they left the prison? We could still try, despite the odds. And we did.

This was reported in *The Patriot* on June 15, 1994:

In the mornings, the Capital's Central Tihar Jail turns into a school.

This atmosphere would get a tinge of formality on the coming Wednesday when a branch of the National Open School would be opened in this overcrowded jail, housing more than 8,000 inmates. The entire jail population is split into more than 300 classrooms with educated prison inmates as teachers.

Moral education, social studies, basic functional literacy, and languages, like Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Sanskrit, French, Persian and Swahili are taught in these classes.

Education programmes in Tihar Jail are being supported by more than 80 local schools, institutions and individuals. Delhi's Education Minister, Sahib Singh Verma, will be the chief guest at the function....

The environment was such that the prison could be declared a literacy centre. We decided to daily allocate two hours of the morning — 9 am to 11 am from Monday to Saturday — to this end. We spoke to the prisoners. We explained to them how they could utilise their time better here, instead of sulking away. We assured them that we would do our best to create a congenial environment for learning. They had started to believe in us. We helped them form ward-wise small groups, according to their literacy levels. For instance, groups were formed for the totally illiterate, partially literate, fairly literate, graders and

graduates and so on. The inmates who were graders and graduates were motivated to take up the responsibility of teaching their less literate companions.

Industrious inmates with carpentry skills made the blackboards in the prison factory. From the Prisoners' Welfare Fund we bought slates, chalks, notebooks and pencils. We appealed to heads of various schools for help and called them for a meeting which was attended by many school principals. The purpose behind this was to share our literacy plan for Tihar, and motivate the principals and teachers to help in converting the largest prison in the country into an institution of learning. We requested them to donate spare educational material and old school textbooks, which children would not need after being promoted to the next class. We received tremendous response. There was one such communication from Mrs S. Dutt, Coordinator of Literacy Programme, J. D. Tytler School:

...Sometime back our school students donated 250 old bags and 250 exercise books which I deposited with Mr D. P. Diwedi, Superintendent of Jail No 3. As soon as the school opened after the summer vacation, our students collected 'Education Material' for the inmates of *Tihar Sudhar Grah*. Assuring you of our best support for this noble cause in future too. I am directed by our Principal to send the following to Jail No 3 where the school is allocated. Kindly acknowledge the receipt of the letter and the articles sent by our students, who are continuously motivated by our literacy in charges to donate generously....

We invoked among school children the spirit of community service, and suggested that each of them donate a notebook, a pencil or an eraser which they could buy from their pocket money specially for the purpose. In the meeting, schools were linked with different prisons. It was now for the Superintendent of Jails to enable micro-coordination for confirming initiatives and support. The response to our requests was phenomenal. A virtual deluge resulted. Scores of schools volunteered and thousands of school children sent in their contributions in kind. We set up outlets for books and stationery at suitable points within the prison. Depending on

their individual needs, the inmates could receive books from these places. Whenever we ran short of books, we sent out appeals or purchased them from the market with the earnings from canteen sales.

We also insisted that prisoners who received pocket money from their visitors bought at least two notebooks and a pencil.

This was to encourage them to share a copy and a pencil with inmate friends who had no visitors. Writing material was also sold through the mobile canteens and the grocery stores within the jail premises. The prisoners' Literacy (education) Panchayat members had an important role to play in ensuring that adequate stocks of writing material were available.

Consequently, these members coordinated with the prison officials daily in order to procure their requirements. We had also drawn up contingency plans for replacements. For instance, if a teacher inmate was released, another inmate took over, till a suitable substitute could be found from among the newcomers. Our motto was: "The school must go on." The learning process never suffered due to lack of teachers. We managed to identify volunteers willing to teach regularly. The Tihar literacy centres were endowed with all the hallmarks of any standard educational institution. We toned up the administration; took daily attendance; conducted weekly tests; declared the results; upgraded the students; and, regularly rewarded the deserving ones with open appreciation. This was duly reported in *The Asian Age* on February 10, 1995:

Life convicts can now read and write

Dhani Ram and several other illiterate life convicts at Delhi's infamous Tihar Jail can now read, thanks to a simple innovative method.

The much wizened face of Dhani Ram lights up when he sees that with two consonants and a *matra* (vowel) he could make and read words on the very first day of school. "An old parrot" like him can also learn, being as intelligent as anybody else.

The innovative method has only one primer while the process recommended by the National Literacy Mission has three.

The much used Hindi vowel for elongated 'a' looks like a stick and registers itself on the learner immediately. "It may appear unbelievable, but it is true," says G. P. Jain, convenor of Gyan Samaj, a voluntary body spreading literacy. He claims that an illiterate can be turned literate in 60 hours only. He says that the consonants as well as the vowels of the Hindi alphabet are equated with familiar

The teachers from a large number of schools outside started to visit the literacy centres within Tihar. Such visits gave a new fillip to

2=9:11  
one a B c d e f g h i  
 j k l m n o p q  
 r s T u v w x y  
 z ✓ (5)

This is a book —

What is this —

That is a boy —

What your name  
 My name is a vijaykumar  
 (3)



DATE  
2-9-94

CLASS - V

### Test Paper List

S.No.	NAME	Son of	RANK
1.	TEJPAL	- BABU RAM	I <sup>st</sup> 50/50
2.	UMAR ALAM	- NJTAMUDIN	I <sup>st</sup> 50/50
3.	TARIK MOHAMED	- FIJIT KHAN	II <sup>nd</sup> 50/40
4.	TEK BHADHUR	- HARAK BHADHUR	II <sup>nd</sup> 50/40
5.	PARVEEN	- KHEM CHAND	II <sup>nd</sup> 50/40
6.	DHARAMVIR	- BALRAM	II <sup>nd</sup> 50/40
7.	PANKAJ	- JAGDISH	III <sup>rd</sup> 50/30
8.	NEES	- RAHIM BAKS	III <sup>rd</sup> 50/30
9.	THAKUR DASS	- SANTOLI	III <sup>rd</sup> 50/30
10.	Om PARKASH	- RAM SINGH	III <sup>rd</sup> 50/30
11.	TRILOK	- FURTI	III <sup>rd</sup> 50/30
12.	PARKASH	- PATI RAM	IV <sup>th</sup> 50/20
13.	HARISH	- KISHAN LAL	IV <sup>th</sup> 50/20
14.	PAVITRO	- LALIT MOHAN	V <sup>th</sup> 50/10
15.	MANOJ	- VIRENDER	V <sup>th</sup> 50/10

*Nasim Khan*  
2/9/94

TEACHER  
NASIM KHAN

the education drive launched within the prison walls. Their very presence added more value to the endeavour and spurred us on to make greater efforts. These teachers from outside voluntarily offered their services. They managed to find time despite their tight schedules and domestic compulsions to enlighten the inmates with their knowledge and expertise. The adolescent inmates gained most, since their educational needs were accorded top priority. A majority of them diligently lapped up all that was taught to them. The three 'Rs' were bestowed upon them by a dedicated group of Catholic nuns who were, in turn, happy to come across so many eager and enthusiastic seekers of knowledge. During my rounds, I could detect the distinct glow of knowledge on their faces which was inspiring. Here, the adolescents were studying and learning voluntarily and were imbued with joy and fervour. In the world outside, they might have behaved differently. They might not have listened to anyone, least of all to their parents. However, within Tihar, through subtle persuasion, persistent cajoling and by using new innovative methods, we managed to sustain and even appreciably boost their interest in the learning process.

With the passage of time, we expanded the gambit of our literacy programme. Those matriculates and undergraduates who wanted to learn other languages were given the option of doing so. They could attend classes conducted by inmate teachers where, apart from English, various Indian languages, such as Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Sanskrit, Tamil and Bengali were taught. Those with a penchant for learning foreign languages could choose from French, Spanish, Swahili, Arabic and Persian. At times, audio aids were brought in for teaching foreign languages, thanks to some philanthropic donations. Some inmates even sat for an examination in French, conducted upon our request by a French Embassy official. Some 'eager beavers' learnt more than one language within the span of a few months by studying even during lockup time! Time had started to assume value.

One of the most satisfying experiences for the inmates was their ability to sign their name while departing from the prison as

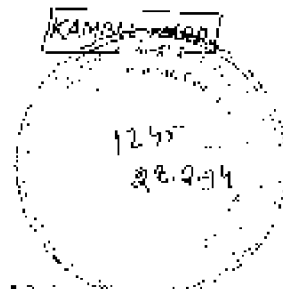
TO, \* WEEKLY PROGRESS REPORT \*

THE INSPECTOR GENERAL (PRISON)  
TIRUK ASIRAM  
NEW DELHI-60

Through, The Superintendent,  
Tiruk Asiram, No 3  
Prison Office - 4

Madam/Sir,

Most humbly and respectfully I am submitting  
the progress-report (weekly) of Kamali ward [Ethas-27403]



21-2-94 8:30 AM - Prayer and Yoga.  
(MONDAY) 9:00 AM - Classes commence & Chakka Manchi came in the  
11:00 AM - AS. Gupta Sahib visited the ward.  
3:30 PM - Volley ball played by inmates.  
5:00 PM - Meeting held at Chakka in presence of DS-I,  
DS-II, DS-III of Jail Nat. Raksha Shamaji, one Dr.  
AS. Gupta Sahib, Maheshwar Sahib, Bote Sahib &  
Manna Sahib. Asked about Chakka problems and  
promised by him to fulfill all type of requirements.

22-2-94 8:50 AM - Prayer & Yoga.  
(TUESDAY) 9:00 AM - Classes began and attended by Chakka Manchi  
& Chakka. Akh. Panditji.  
10:25 AM - Mr. Lal (welfare) came in the ward.  
Evening - Volley ball played and a meeting held at Chakka.

23-2-94 8:30 AM - Prayer & Yoga.  
(WEDNESDAY) 9:00 AM - Chakka Akh. Panditji & Chakka Manchi visited  
the class & ward.  
10:05 AM - Tanwar Sahib came.  
11:35 AM - DS-I & DS-II came in the ward with some  
students who came from outside. They visited  
the ward and watched the classes of Agriculture  
& check works.

- 11:30 AM - Some papers (Yellow & red) distributed among inmates to find out homosexual data.  
 4:50 PM - SET - visited the ward.  
 5:15 PM - One person came from DESU.  
 A meeting held at Chakkar in presence of DS-II.

24-2-94  
 (THURSDAY)

- 8:30 AM - Prayer & Yoga.  
 9:00 AM - Chakkar Munshi came in the ward.  
 9:05 AM - DS-II, Jariya Sahab visited the ward.  
 9:15 AM - Teacher Satvir came.  
 10:10 AM - Chakkar-Chief Panditji & Munshi Anandji visited the ward.  
 Evening - A Meeting held at Chakkar. Some important books distributed by SET from Deorhi.

25-2-94  
 (FRIDAY)

- 8:30 AM - Prayer & Yoga. Chakkar Chief Panditji attended the Yoga class and told them build their character & live brotherly.  
 9:00 AM - Chakkar Munshi came.  
 10:15 AM - Mr Lal (welfare) came. DS-II & As-Gupta Sahab also visited the ward.  
 Evening - A meeting held at Chakkar.

26-2-94  
 (SATURDAY)

- 8:30 AM - Prayer & Yoga. Chakkar-Chief Panditji commence yoga class and arranged one Satsang class for some while. Inmates were very glad.  
 9:00 AM - Chakkar Munshi attended SATSANG.

RESPONSE - Panditji's Satsang-class is effective.  
 Hw - Jawahar Maughi is better.

REQUIREMENT: CAROM-BOARDS, CHESS-BOARD, LUDOS

Thanking for this

Your Sincere

Ajmer Singh.

Forward for  
 your kind interest  
 2/2/94

opposed to merely, affixing their thumb impression on entry. Such inmates also wanted to carry home their notebooks and other study material on release to prove to their family members that they had actually learnt how to read and write. For them, such study material proved to be invaluable as certificates of time well invested.

I felt within me that Devi Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning, had started to reside inside Tihar. To reinforce my conviction, Professor Devendra Chaudhry, Regional Director, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), decided to reinstate his offer of a broad range of correspondence courses for the inmates by setting up a study centre within Tihar. IGNOU's entry represented a landmark in our education crusade. Apart from excellent books and other study materials, audiovisual teaching aids also made an appearance on Tihar's premises, free of cost. It was inaugurated by the then Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Arjun Singh. *The Hindu* reported on July 29, 1994, about the IGNOU Study Centre set up in Tihar:

With the inauguration of Indira Gandhi National Open University Study Centre in the Capital's Central Jail this evening, the nine-year-old University has earned for itself the adage of a 'University with a Difference':

The Study Centre — inaugurated by the Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Mr Arjun Singh — aims at bringing higher education to the 'prison-step', thereby giving the inmates an opportunity to pursue higher education and be a part of the national mainstream as far as is possible from behind the bars. Bringing more joy to the prisoners was the Minister, who in his inaugural address, announced his Ministry's decision to grant Rs 3 lakh to Tihar Jail for educational and correctional activities.

To be set up with the help of the Directorate of Training and Technical Education of the Delhi Government, the school is yet another attempt to ensure that an inmate who leaves the confines of the jail does not return.

Earlier, the prisoners of different wards of Jail No 3 — which houses the Study Centre — welcomed their guests with '*Aye malik tere bande hum*', following which one of the prisoners — Hari Singh, facing trial for hijacking a flight from Lucknow to Pakistan — made a fervent plea to the

powers that be to hasten the judicial process. Quoting the oft-repeated phrase 'justice delayed is justice denied', Hari Singh said, of late the process was being further delayed by frequent strikes by lawyers.

Taking the cue from IGNOU, we requested Dr R. L. Phutela of the National Open School to offer its courses to anyone wanting to complete school education, take examination, and merit a certificate.

An impressive array of other educational, social and cultural organisations, evidently inspired by the 'reform revolution' at Tihar, decided to contribute their efforts. For instance, Bharat Vikas Parishad (BVP) adopted adolescent wards of Prison No 4. BVP was committed to look after the educational requirements of all 2,300 inmates in that prison. Further, they organised inter-barrack and inter-prison tournaments to encourage sports. Deepalya (a Non-Governmental Organisation) was requested to bring in its group of small children who made very touching presentations. Most of the inmates were moved to tears. Vidya Jyoti College of Theology sent in a team of counsellors, who proved to be sympathetic and understanding and with whom the inmates could interact easily. Later on, the Urdu Akademi and the Punjabi Akademi joined in and decided to offer an honorarium to those inmates who taught these two languages inside the jail. The entry of these two reputed academies represented a major breakthrough, as now Tihar could claim to house a respected academic institution 'Academe'. The Punjabi Akademi faculty motivated inmates with histrionic talents to form a theatre group inside Tihar with great enthusiasm. They staged a powerful play, *Soba Tek Singh*, with only the inmates as actors.

The *pieces de resistance* were the libraries which increased in number from three to twenty-five in a span of six months. Many academic institutions, organisations and individuals willingly donated books to these libraries, which teemed with activity during the literacy periods. This was in response to one full meeting with some leading publishers stationed in Delhi.

I must make a special mention of one dedicated, outstanding individual, Saroj Vashisht, whose untiring and versatile endeavours were a constant source of inspiration to all of us. Saroj turned sixty in 1993, but she seemed remarkably young. Her zest for life was incredible. She proved to be extremely dynamic in all spheres of community work, especially in those aspects related to adolescents and juveniles. She started off by volunteering to tell stories to the youngsters. She instantly won the hearts of her young audience who began calling her 'mother'. All of them insisted that she visit the jail daily to narrate new stories. Due to some unforeseen circumstances, it so happened that Saroj could not come to Tihar for a few days. Many young inmates got terribly upset. They wanted her address so that they could write to her or send her a telegram to find out what exactly had happened to her. Such was the degree of concern for Saroj. Overwhelmed by such touching sentiments, Saroj replied to all the letters and telegrams.

When Saroj returned to Tihar, she was accorded a warm welcome. Each time she came to Tihar, she brought books on diverse subjects, which helped supplement the library collection. The young inmates saw in Saroj an image of love, compassion and understanding. The orphaned inmates, who had missed out on motherly love, struck up a very strong and binding rapport with her. And Saroj responded on my request for a recall. This is what she had to say:

I came to Tihar for community service in June 1993. I started as a storyteller and during my interaction with the adolescents, I found they were desperate for dictionaries and 'teach-yourself' kits in Hindi and English. I have many interesting accounts to relate, one of which concerns Manoj (a Tihar inmate) who was 20 years old when I met him and was studying in BA second year. His father was an inspector at Rajpur Road Police Station. Manoj and his brother had murdered eight people in that Police Station. He said his father had taught him that even the *Gita* says that if you kill your enemy, you are not doing any wrong. When he and his brother were old enough, they were called to the police station where their father told them that some people who had been their enemies were coming to lodge an FIR (First Information Report). So he and his

brother went to the police station with their father's service revolver and killed eight of them. When Manoj tried to tell his father the futility of this kind of killing, he was unmoved.

Within two weeks, Manoj begged me to help him get admission to a correspondence course so that he could complete his graduation. Later he also joined the meditation (Vipassana) programme. He improved internally as well. He was part of the large 1,200 plus adolescent inmates camped inside the jail. When I saw him for the first time, I asked him, "You are only 20 now and if convicted, you will come out when you are 34. What will you do then?" He replied: "I'll kill the rest of the family." That had worried me but gradually he became a peaceful human being. He said that he had realised his father's mistake. Manoj's was a classic case of the result of education with understanding and sensitivity. There were times when the boys would ask me if I could leave the books behind after the day's reading, so that they may read them later. They would ask for books on physics, chemistry and other subjects.

I was desperate to get them books. I phoned my friend Madhvi Malhotra, the young publisher of Hind Pocket Books, and told her, "Look, you can mint money inside the jail." To this, her answer was that she had been sending books to prisons all over India and she never even charged them the postage. That was how the library idea sprouted. Madhvi gave a large donation of books as did the Ishan Charitable Trust.

For Saroj, the literacy movement within Tihar was nothing short of a crusade. She suggested that we request various publishers to donate books generously to the prison libraries. She was confident of getting a positive response. In fact, the response was overwhelming. Stacks of books arrived, which covered a vast range of subjects, such as science, computers, basic medicine, literature, history, religion and management. General books and children's books were also a part of the package. In addition to the publishers, as mentioned earlier, other bodies supportive of the cause of education came forward. They supplied other education-related material such as slates, blackboards, chalk pieces, notebooks, pencils and school bags. Such institutions were genuinely interested in boosting the cause of literacy and knowledge and were ever-ready to provide all kinds of support.

As the literacy and education drive within Tihar gained momentum, we expanded the circulation of newspapers and



magazines within the wards, and also introduced some new ones. We also set in motion mobile libraries with the assistance of Delhi Public Library. The duty wards of many prisons now stored literary material along with essential furniture such as tables and chairs. These wards also served as counselling rooms for doctors as well as duty Warders' visitors' rooms. Thousands of books were distributed among prison residents as per their requirements in a systematic manner. Moreover, every time we held a *panchayat* or *amahapanchayat*, books, notebooks and diaries were given to the teacher inmates and other *panchayat* members, who would pass them on to the other inmates. We constantly endeavoured to ensure adequate supplies of reading material, especially for the teachers, so that they could update their teaching material before conducting. Another area in which we attempted to make headway, but were not entirely successful, pertained to vocational training. There we managed to make a beginning. My unshakeable conviction was that if making the inmates literate was important, teaching them vocational trades was crucial. But here we ran into seemingly insurmountable obstacles which seriously impeded our progress. Such obstacles were thrown up by limitations in the infrastructure and policy orientation as well as by a lack of trained professional teachers. Nevertheless, we did not lose hope, and our optimism paid off. Eventually, help did come our way but only in a small measure. The Government of India provided some help and two of its bodies, Shramik Vidya Peeth (headed by R. K. Chhabra) and the State Resource Centre, Jamia Millia University (headed by Nishat Farooq) extended their support. Professionals from these two bodies provided training to the adolescents in vocations such as bookbinding, file cover-making, *agarbatti* (incense) stick-rolling, tailoring, chalk-making and repairing radio and TV sets. The training programme was formally launched on July 16, 1993, by the then Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi, P. K. Dave. Further, the Department of Technical Education of the Delhi State Government conducted a certificate course (for 30 inmates in a batch) in classes.

commercial art and embroidery. Many talented inmates availed of this opportunity.

However, these efforts were not sufficient to cater to the needs of over 8,000 inmates. A majority of the jail residents were eager, in fact, desperate, to learn a trade or a craft so that they could eke out a living while in prison to support not only themselves but also their family members outside who were dependent on them. Here, as already mentioned, we could achieve very little and felt helpless due to lack of comprehensive Government assistance to give a stimulus to our efforts. This was one area which required serious attention, and here long-term policies as well as practical implementation procedures needed to be drawn up urgently. It was for the Delhi State Government to fill in the breach.

Industries from outside were keen to impart training to the manpower available within Tihar. During a meeting with leading entrepreneurs, they inserted the clause that such an enterprise had to be on a long-term basis. This additional clause led to a setback because the turnover of inmates was high and we could not guarantee compliance with the business magnates' stipulation. Moreover, these entrepreneurs wanted the commitment of the Secretariat before they could even think of training or recruiting Tihar inmates. The attitude of the Secretariat was officious and not in the same gear as ours. They rarely visited Tihar to witness first-hand the tremendous changes which were taking place. Vocational training trailed far behind the literacy and moral education movement. *The Indian Express* reported:

New wards bring cheer to Tihar's young inmates. They sat, braving the sun for more than two hours on Friday morning. All of them were teenagers, and had assembled in the courtyard for a special function. Lt Governor P. K. Dave was coming, and so were other top officials of Delhi Administration.

But the enthusiasm and eagerness in the 350 young undertrials in Tihar Jail was not just because of the function. It was because the prisoners assembled there were being shifted to new wards, named after two young cricket superstars, *Sachin* and *Kambli*. In fact, all the 8,000 prisoners of the jail have a reason to celebrate.

For, very soon, they will be getting three meals every day as against the present two. Those who want to learn the three 'Rs' can do so now, thanks to the literacy kits provided by the National Literacy Mission. Those who want to pursue their graduation and higher studies can do so without going out of the jail, as the Indira Gandhi National Open University will soon open a centre there.

Vocational Courses: For those who prefer vocational courses, classes in candle-making, chalk-making, jostick-making, tailoring, stitching and bookbinding have been introduced from Friday. As one of the speakers at the function put it, windows to the world are being made in the high walls of Tihar Jail.

Anyway, we remained undaunted by such setbacks, and concentrated our efforts on those areas which were under our control. The internal management structure of Tihar consisted of the staff officials as well as some prison *panchayat* members. They were regularly on the lookout for new initiatives and new problem-solving methods which lay within their capabilities. As a result, a series of productive activities took place. The internal management team organised seminars and workshops on those subjects which would hold the interest of the inmates. For instance, causes of crime, reformation of criminals, woman vs woman (in the context of crimes against women), rehabilitation of released prisoners, benefits of yoga in combating crime, and many others. *Aaj ka vichar*, the thought of the day, was read out by the 'head teacher' before the classes actually began. This ennobling thought was also written out on the blackboard for all to read and discuss and debate the idea in a healthy and creative manner. And I circulated this order:

Aaj Ka Vichar - A P actice

There is a daily thought for today on page 12 of *Nav Bharat Times* which is relevant for the staff to read and understand. This should become *Aaj ka Vichar* for all jail inmates and staff.

This be read out on the PA system at a fixed time and also discussed out in a class *satsang* form with Prison inmates. The discussion could be initiated by Panchayat Members and encourage full participation. Officers, i.e., Jail Superintendents, Deputy Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents should read and participate in the *Aaj Ka Vichar*. Deputy Superintendent, Training School, must read out the *Aaj Ka Vichar* to the

trainees. The clipping of *Nav Bharat Times* should also be put up on noticeboards daily - inside the wards and *deodhi*.

It would be excellent if the Gazetted Officers take interest in the scheme and follow it up to such an extent that it becomes a habit.

Yoga teachers to be also asked to make it an integral part of their training.

Let us see which jail and which ward does the best training. I would like to declare a reward to the jail as a whole and a reward for a particular ward who makes this habit the earliest.

During my rounds, I observed classes being conducted in full swing, with the teachers and pupils totally absorbed in their respective activities. Such an inspiring and heartening sight was a source of delight and joy to me. They were so engrossed in their studies that the inmates often did not notice me as I stood quietly at the back of the classroom to observe what was going on.

The mornings were as a rule allotted for literary activities followed by vocational training (whatever was possible) and the evenings were meant for sports and also for *sarva dharma sabhas*, i.e. meant to be ethical therapy congregations. These *sabhas* were held in the open air auditorium of the jail for an hour from 5 pm onwards. The timings varied with the seasons. The officer-in-charge, preferably the Deputy Superintendent and often the Superintendent, presided over the programmes. I personally attended many such congregations.

Those inmates who were well-versed with compering conducted the proceedings. On several occasions, eminent visitors who either volunteered or consented to address the inmates on a variety of topics, such as morality, peace, harmony and good conduct came to Tihar. Eminent persons who came in were: Naseeruddin Shah, Khushwant Singh, Rajmohan Gandhi, Salman Khursheed, Manoj Prabhakar, Sidanshu Maharaj, Sushil Munji, V. N. Narayanan, Dr Charles Colson (a Templeton awardee, heading Prison Fellowship) and wives of diplomats, like Christine Wisner and Dr Susan Weld among many others. Occasionally, well-known dancers like Shovana Narayan performed, and singers like Anup Jalota sang devotional songs.

After the address or singing came to an end, the renowned personalities held a question-and-answer session in which the inmates were encouraged to ask questions which were preying on their minds. We felt that by providing the right answers we could reorient their thinking processes and help clear their clogged minds. The reputed individuals whose presence elevated the status of Tihar included pious and religious persons and missionaries who were greatly respected and even revered by most inmates. Christian and Muslim priests, Sikh *granthis* (preachers), Hindu pandits and others from the OSHO Mission, the Chinmaya Mission, Brahma Kumaris, Ramakrishna Mission, International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and innumerable others addressed the inmates at evening congregations.

They listened with rapt attention to the discourses and tried to absorb as much as possible. Within the jail they got one-to-one attention from such teachers who otherwise would have been difficult to reach in such a manner. Inmates started showing a sense of gratitude to the community at large, and the administration in particular, for having made this possible for them. Perhaps never before in their life did they receive such sustained value-based education. These discourses led them to question who they were, why they were what they were and what in fact they could be. This was evident from the queries they were raising and the help they were seeking. This made the presence of the teachers and the effort involved extremely worthwhile for us.

Even in this field Tihar was moving towards self-reliance. Many times in the evenings, when we did not have a teacher from outside, we used to encourage one of the inmates who wanted to be the teacher of the day to share how he learnt religious teaching and cultivated it, why he subdued it, and what lesson he had learnt to revive it, and what he was doing on a regular basis to retrieve it. Such personal accounts became extremely captivating. The person concerned enhanced his self-

esteem and tried to live up to his newlyacquired image. This enabled the prison to move towards self-sufficiency, even in value-based congregations.

We did not miss out on any opportunity in coming together for a cause. National days (Republic Day, Independence Day and Gandhi Jayanti) and major festivals of all religions provided the occasions for the expression of joy, patriotism, harmony, compassion and sacrifice. A poignantly moving experience relates to a visually impaired music teacher, S. K. Bhalla, who volunteered to teach the inmates, as he held a firm conviction that soul-stirring music could achieve near-miraculous results.

He recounts his experience:

I knew the power of music. It softens hard hearts. I wanted to test this for myself in my first meeting with the convicts. I started my singing with a prayer of Saraswati *vandana* (Saraswati is the goddess of learning and *vandana* means invocation): *Hey Sharda Maa, agyanta se hame tar de Maa* (Mother of learning, deliver us from ignorance). I felt some inmates were crying. They told me that they were missing their mothers. Their suppressed feelings had surfaced with singing of this prayer. I felt I needed to pursue my music classes with them and, if possible, teach them to become teachers of music one day.

*The Family*, as we know by now, worked wonders for the Tihar inmates and left profound impressions on their minds. The organisation possessed multifarious talents. For instance, they enacted value-based plays, which included a good deal of music, they organised seminars on human relations, they held workshops on hygiene, they conducted self-improvement courses, they devised children's development programmes, and they offered rehabilitation therapy for drug users. They also made the prisoners environment-conscious and underlined the urgent need for pollution control measures and afforestation programmes. One of *The Family* members recalls the Tihar experience:

Our first contact with the inmates of Tihar Jail was almost intimidating. Coming face to face with hundreds of human beings in captivity all at once was an unsettling experience initially, to say the least, till we realised that beneath these seemingly hard and cold exteriors were some very bitter, discouraged and depressed human

souls desperately in need of understanding and acceptance. We decided not to get minutely involved with details of every inmate's individual case, but to look beyond their criminal record and treat them as human beings worthy of respect in the



firm belief that if we treat people as if they were what they ought to be, we will help them to become what they are capable of becoming — good human beings.

We also treated them as equals instead of as inmates and talked to them as we would talk to friends instead of talking down at them. Some of them would initially make sarcastic remarks during our programmes and try to disrupt them in an attempt to provoke us, but we found it best to totally ignore all this and continue being friendly towards them, no matter what. Gradually we started to win their trust, and before long, the barrier was broken and we were accepted as friends. As a result of this, our workshops and programmes started having a deeper impact on their lives and a number of them started acknowledging the fact that they were learning moral principles which they were totally unaware of previously. We have found music and theatre to be ideal methods of communicating concepts to them - methods which entertain and educate at the same time and we have witnessed lives slowly changing for the better with our very eyes.

And lives were changing and so was the entire institutional culture. One telling example reveals the extent of change. I was informed by the inmates that when a released inmate was rearrested and brought back to Tihar Jail, he was given a warm welcome, and his old friends organised a cheerful reception for him in the ward where he was to be lodged. But after the reform revolution made its impact, a former inmate returning to Tihar triggered off shouts of Shame! Shame! The former prisoner was castigated by his fellow residents for returning to the world of crime. The latter felt that all the collective efforts put in by themselves, the staff and the community had been wasted. The jail inmates no more welcomed a repeat offender with open arms. For them, the jail was moving towards an ashram — a place for reform and correction. In fact, Tihar Jail was now being addressed as Tihar Ashram. It had embarked into a new direction which would last till posterity. On my visits to prisons abroad I saw very impressive educational programmes for the convicts but nothing for the undertrials. For the convicts the educational classes were not compulsory. The teachers were from outside, mostly on contract. They conducted classes on various subjects — in social sciences, psychology, management,

computers, etc. I personally attended a few in the prisons in San Francisco, in the UK, and in Copenhagen. They were as good as anywhere else. The student inmates were keen learners. Some of them were taking up regular certificate courses. And even one student comprised a class.

During my visit to a German prison, I gathered that the prisoners were getting an incentive of a few dollars to attend classes. However, nowhere did I see a programme for the undertrials. Perhaps no one languishes this long as in Tihar and in other prisons in India. But analytically speaking, the spectrum of reach and totality of the programme, with a completely integrating participation, did not take place anywhere as it did in Tihar, covering every resident inmate, from child to adolescent, women, young and old, convicts and undertrials, Indians and foreigners. An educational institution has to have all its children in classes, without exception. Tihar gave no choice to any of its 9,700 inmates (prison population by 1995), either during the morning classes or evening congregations — they had to participate in every activity. It was mandatory.

The concluding slogans of evening *sabhas* were: *Yahan se jayenge, wapis nahin ayenge* (once we leave Tihar, we shall never come back). Another one was: *Khush rahenge, khushian bantenge* (we will stay happy and spread happiness).

The incentive for the inmates to educate themselves was not financial but internal revival.

Graph  
The Education Process: An Eternal Journey  
A Synopsis

Graph  
The Education Process: An Eternal Journey  
A Synopsis

## 19

*The De-addiction Drive  
On a Steady Track*

**T**ihar Jail had a 'floating population', of around 250 new entrants arriving in daily and an almost equal number leaving the prison. Among these freshers, at least 60 of them were habitual substance abusers. Their 'substances of choice' covered a wide range from narcotics to psychotropic substances. This dependent group used to reach the prison in the evenings after court hearings. After the completion of the formalities inside the prison, they were sent off to various prisons allotted to each of them according to the alphabetic order of their names. Inside each prison, they would be lodged for the night in a ward meant for new entrants called the *muaina* (inspection) ward. The purpose behind herding these newcomers together was that the jail doctor could inspect them the following morning. However, due to the skeletal medical services existing within Tihar, even the routine formality of inspection sometimes took more than 48 long hours. For the dependent drug victims, this protracted period was nothing short of a horrendous nightmare, for they were deprived of their regular 'fix'. They exhibited acute withdrawal symptoms, writhed in pain and

yelled for help. Generally the other seasoned inmates had inured themselves to such pathetic expressions of agony and anguish. They knew and took for granted that such intense and excruciating pain was caused due to drug starvation. The Warders, who had to somehow put their charges to sleep, invariably doped them with Diazepam and Parmol (Paracetamol), the two standard pills freely available with the prison doctor. The doctor himself would save his precious time for the more serious cases as he used to be the only doctor on duty who had to cater to the demands of over 8,000 individuals. What was happening was that the drug addicts were merely transferring their dependence from the renowned varieties such as, opium, heroin or marijuana to the so-called sleep-inducing drugs, like Diazepam.

The *muaina* wards never slept. Moreover, those drug addict inmates who were allotted different wards ensured that their fellow residents also remained awake. The sounds emitted by the drug users were eerie and sometimes macabre. I just could not shut my ears to these sounds during my initial night rounds of the jail. To me, these sounds were similar to those heard in a zoo; the only difference was that this was a human zoo. The prime objective of all this cacophony was to summon the prison doctors. More often than not this objective was defeated.

Barring a single 20-bed detoxification centre located in Prison No 4 run by a non-governmental organisation known as Ashiana (Indian Council Education), Tihar had no other facility for de-addiction. The drug suppliers and the consumers were all mixed up haphazardly. Consequently, a systematic and organised pattern of diagnosis and treatment was hardly possible.

Within the prisons, the chaotic mix-up of drug peddlers and drug users was evident. Both categories tended to huddle together as if they sustained each other. The drug mafia's intricate web had drawn some staff members to this network due to filthy lucre or under duress or due to threats to them or their family members. The prison environment, which was supposed to reduce drug addiction and the resultant crimes, was, in fact, stimulating it. All the

characteristics of a successful enterprise were present: the indefatigable producer, the persevering pushers and suppliers, the retail outlets, pliable inmates, as well as staff members, and above all, the omnipresent consumers sometimes vulnerable to forces beyond. Such was the situation when we launched our crusade against drugs. Our prime objective was to initially curtail and then eliminate the influx of drugs into the jail. For this crusade, I had to personally bring to bear all the knowledge, skills and experience that I gained over the years while running Navjyoti centres. These were institutions I had set up in the community as non-profit organisations for the holistic treatment of substance abusers. In this field, I was confident of achieving reasonable success on the basis of the strategies and tactics I planned to devise in a steady, methodical and comprehensive manner. Evidently, I needed dedicated and motivated support not only from my colleagues but also from the inmates themselves, who would be the ultimate beneficiaries. Such support did manifest itself, grudgingly at first, but later on, enthusiastically and wholeheartedly.

The first measure we adopted was to segregate the substance abusers, those who were known as well as those who were suspected, from the rest of the inmates within each prison. These abusers were clustered together in a ward within each prison. Next, we brought in a homoeopathic doctor, on a daily visit basis, to provide exclusive attention to the substance-afflicted inmates in each prison. These doctors performed their duties exemplarily, much to the satisfaction of their patients. The medicinal doses dispensed by them seemed to work wonders for those under their care. These medicines proved effective in controlling, to a large extent, the painful symptoms caused by withdrawal, such as running noses, trembling or quivering of the body, watering of the eyes, sleeplessness, and other related manifestations. The treatment pattern was basically holistic in keeping with the traditions of homoeopathy.

On their part, the doctors had to ensure that the patients

actually took the medicines in their presence. In this holistic system of his/her control.



medicine, Diazepam, its variations of pain killers and sleep inducives had no role to play.

The doctor made his rounds both during forenoons and evenings, before lockup time. The second round was essentially to make sure that the substance abusers had been administered their doses of medicines so that they could pass the night with minimum discomfort. This round also ensured that other inmates could sleep peacefully.

The homoeopathic therapy provided considerable respite to the habitual drug users. Such therapy brought along other advantages as well. For instance, the homoeopathic medicines were non-addictive. Their usage reduced the pressure on other already overburdened allopathic prison doctors to a great extent.

Apart from the inmates, some of the prison staff members were also entrapped in the quagmire of drug addiction. I, along with my colleagues, drew up a plan to identify and isolate such individuals. Once we managed to do that, they were summoned to my office and asked to proceed on medical leave and get themselves treated. They could seek treatment in the Navjyoti treatment centres or at any other medical centre in which they had confidence. We were very clear in our minds that all staff members had to come clean before they could be entrusted with any responsibility.

Along with medical attention, we suitably augmented the medical diet of the substance abuse patients so that faster recovery could be attained. We sanctioned more milk for them. We added some variety to their otherwise monotonous menu by providing curd, jaggery and dry black grams. All these measures generated a sense of optimism among the addict patients, who now felt properly cared for.

By this time, we had started to monitor the inmates carefully right from the time they entered the prison. We ensured that each inmate was subjected to a proper medical checkup the evening of their entry into the jail. The dependents were duly identified and sent to the 'drug wards' forthwith. Such an early segregation enabled us to identify those individuals who served as the sources in the

drug-supplying nexus involving the inmates and their outside connections.

While we were doing our utmost for the drug users both at the physical and psychological levels, we were simultaneously intensifying the searches in all wards to cut off all the sources of drug supply. During one such search, we found that in the kitchen of Prison No 2, the inmate in charge there was himself a drug peddler and running a brisk supply operation with nine other inmates. Searching his belongings, we actually detected small amounts of drugs concealed in strategic places. We called in the police who instituted a case against him for the possession of drugs.

In another instance, we got a timely tip-off that a Warder, Shiv Raj Singh, was peddling drugs inside the jail. He was caught red-handed by the officers and handed over to the local police. After the legal formalities were completed, Shiv Raj Singh found himself back in Tihar's custody, but this time behind the bars. He was compulsorily retired from service. He drew some consolation from the fact that three other of his colleagues followed his footsteps and met the same fate.

Gradually, as the overall health of the prisoners started to improve, they began to support the prison authorities in their crusade against drugs. The petition box proved to be an invaluable source of information as well as of suggestions and opinions in our efforts to check drug supply and consumption. One particularly useful suggestion was implemented immediately. This keenly observant inmate had suggested that we remove the silver foils from the cigarette packets being sold in the prison canteens. It was the silver foil which helped chase the drug fumes, 'chasing the dragon' as it was called, when the drug was placed atop the foil and lit from below. The addicts inhaled these fumes fervently and got a tremendous 'kick'! In the absence of the silver foil, the drug-inhaling experience would literally 'go up in smoke' because if ordinary paper was used for the purpose it would start burning. Since, intravenous drug intake was not a preferred practice in the jail, smoking or snorting were only methods available to them.

While the efficacy of the petition box was undeniable, the other methods of drug detection such as on-the-round observations and the *panchayat* system proved equally effective. They provided precious nuggets of information which we may have otherwise overlooked.

Meanwhile, another disturbing aspect came to light. The only NGO de-addiction centre, Ashiana, was itself in need of immediate aid. First of all, we had to ensure its functional integrity by instituting round-the-clock medical vigil. Next, we had to rectify various infrastructural defects before the centre could effectively provide specialised medicare required for the patients.

During a surprise inspection, we detected that many of the staff members whose names were recorded in the attendance register were conspicuous by their absence. Out-of-order equipment, such as X-ray machines, were shown to be in use. The more serious and alarming factor was that the medicines for use in Ashiana not only were coming surreptitiously from another clinic but were being stealthily diverted to yet another centre. We seized these medicines and the attendance records. We reported all these shortcomings to the Secretariat authorities. I was informed that some sort of enquiry was ordered, which did have the desired effect. However, no formal communication came from the Secretariat in this regard. But this centre came under our vigilance, and it had to perform, if it wanted to continue in Tihar.

As the reform process began to make progress in the prisons, the de-addiction centres too began to display signs of vigour. The persons in charge realised that all their activities were being subjected to the glare of searchlights and camouflage tactics would not work anymore. They realised that they would have to upgrade their performance; the sooner the better. Though a bit grudgingly, the staff began to put their centres in order. Consequently, Tihar could now proudly claim to possess de-addiction centres with doctors and social workers available round the clock.

The difficult or problematic drug addict entrants were referred to Ashiana because medical aid was available even at night which

was not the case in the drug addict wards of other prisons. The patients who were admitted to Ashiana, and who were on the way to recovery, assisted us in our seemingly endless war against drug smuggling into the jail by identifying the supply points. The feedback provided by these patients was authentic and highly reliable. We could thus plug the supply points, thereby further reducing the ingress of drugs, and we achieved many a breakthrough, virtually bringing the drug menace in Tihar under control. Within a few months of this collective endeavour, the inmates could sleep peacefully at night. The eerie and bizarre yells were now forgotten sounds. During my night rounds, as I walked through the various prisons, I felt like a relieved mother, whose children were blissfully asleep after a hard day's work. And the staff was vigilant. Exactly opposite of what I had seen a few months earlier.

In the field of de-addiction, the community outside began to make meaningful contributions. The Bharat Vikas Parishad offered to send yoga teachers to Tihar in order to educate the recovering addicts about the beneficial and therapeutic effects of various *asanas* (postures). Navjyoti made its presence felt by bringing in a pragmatic package for achieving de-addiction, which included counselling services, audiovisual programmes on prevention of drug abuse, street plays with powerful messages against drug abuse, and group sessions in which individuals could discuss and debate any topic. At the conceptual level, Navjyoti introduced the phenomenon of user-accountability and self-management for the addicts within the jail. A day-care counsellor guided the addicts so that they could utilise their time fruitfully and purposefully.

My colleague, Jaydev Sarangi, brought in the Central Health Education Bureau authorities to launch a comprehensive campaign for the addicted inmates which primarily focused on the health hazards caused by smoking, chewing tobacco, and consuming drugs. This was the first-ever campaign of its kind in the annals of Tihar. To make a profound impact, such a major exposition required film shows, group discussions and the distribution of relevant control.

literature. All these aspects presented a novel dimension to the Tihar inmates, who were earlier accustomed to a life of intense monotony. Also many experts in the field of de-addiction — doctors, psychiatrists and other specialists — volunteered their services. The inmates could interact with these experts and gain information that might not have been easily accessible to many of them outside the prison.

All India Radio (AIR), was greatly enthused by the response to our drug de-addiction drive. A team from AIR came into Tihar and produced a programme on this subject. Many addicted inmates were interviewed, and they recounted their positive experiences relating how they could transform their lives from being abjectly dependent on drugs to looking forward to a healthy future. The inmates used this opportunity to make an appeal for greater help from the community outside. This appeal made a fairly impressive impact. The Indian Cancer Society volunteered to conduct a campaign to highlight how the indiscriminate and uncontrolled use of drugs could lead to cancer. Another pioneering organisation in the field of drug abuse and prevention, Sahara, offered to supervise an entire ward, in the same manner as its sister organisation Navjyoti did. The Brahma Kumaris and other social workers and missionaries regularly visited Tihar for conducting evening discourses on topics, such as moral conduct, the benefits of vegetarianism, tobacco and drug-free life. Doctors from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, on their part, recommended fruit-based beverages in order to reduce the toxins present in the addicts' system.

All these developments substantially reinforced the concept of good health — both of the mind and the body — among the prisoners. The voluntary organisations not only provided a healing touch to the addicted inmates, but also propelled them towards adopting a new, salubrious lifestyle.

On my visits to certain prisons abroad, I saw some excellent medical structures for substance abuse treatment. They were like full-fledged nursing wards for addiction treatment, an integral part

of their health care system. Tihar had nothing of this, yet made considerable breakthrough in controlling the problem, through collective community support, with emphasis on community-based model. Another reason was the declaration of Tihar prison as a no-smoking zone which directly made substance abuse difficult. I saw that infrastructure-wise and management-wise we were getting better results in dealing with deviant human behaviour through holistic strategies. The prison, in fact, was moving towards a holistic healthy lifestyle, which meant treatment of the inmates in totality — environmentally, physically and medically.

All this became possible and achievable due to the substantial work done by Dr Harinder Sethi, a reputed psychiatrist and director of AASRA (An Association for Scientific Research on Addictions), which in Hindi means 'support'. In fact, the contributions of Dr Sethi and his colleagues proved to be so very lasting that his name became an institution by itself. The details on how Dr Sethi's remarkable therapeutic programme began, how it developed and reached its apogee are best narrated in his own words:

#### AASRA Par The First twenty Months

I had been waiting for 45 minutes on August 24, 1993, for a group to assemble to listen to what one had to say. Ward 12 of Jail 4, the addicts' ward, was a place no one in the jail felt happy to be in. A few weeks earlier, in a containment exercise, the prison authorities had rounded up all the drug addicts from all over Jail 4 and lodged them in this ward. The prisoners wore a stubble and looked vacuous with the proverbial 'tombstones in their eyes'. Their clothes (most of them in their underclothes), needed a wash a month earlier. One's thoughts were frequently interrupted by shouts and abuses hurled by the Head Warden for order, as requests for an assembly fell on deaf ears. The sound of the wooden rod on the backs of a few prisoners is still fresh in my mind. Slowly, about twenty of the 200-odd prisoners sat down to listen to what I was to say.

The cacophony was far too loud to be able to even hear oneself. After ten minutes of futile attempt, the venue had to be changed. A brief introduction by the Assistant Superintendent was not enough. I tried to tell the reluctant group that I was a doctor who worked with drug addicts, and that I would like to know what their needs were, and whether I could

be of any help. This was new for them. They had been busy catering to the needs of others. The prisoners felt grateful that someone considered them worthwhile enough to talk to. They were happy to have me come again after a fortnight.

On my return my thoughts were that one Kiran Bedi per ward was needed. We just did not have sixty such persons for all the wards of the prison. It dawned on me that I had been given a big responsibility without being given any authority. It was a challenge nevertheless.

This prison was unlike others. An overcrowded detoxification facility, Ashiana, run by a NGO under the auspices of the Ministry of Welfare was already running, catering to the overwhelming detoxification needs of all four prisons. Some counselling and post-discharge follow-up was also apart of their programme.

I discovered that 85 per cent of the prisoners were under judicial custody (under trial) and no one in the prison had any control on the admissions and discharges. The population presented to me were all under trials. Literature on prison programmes contained references to designs for convict-prisoners. Rehabilitation programmes for under trials was an unheard of concept. Even the law prescribed rehabilitation programmes only for convicts. Safe custody of under trials was the prison's only concern. Of those presented to me, there was a significant number who had been convicted earlier as well. There were others who would stay for a long time in prison owing to the protracted judicial proceedings, then be convicted and leave the jail immediately — their stay as under trials would be counted as a prison sentence which they had already undergone. A new design was needed to cater to this reality. This is how I went about it.

#### PPPPPrrrrrelaunch Stage

My second visit to this ward was less traumatic. After a 45-minute wait a larger group had collected to listen to me, this time without the use of the rod. By word of mouth, the previous group of listeners had aroused curiosity. On seeing some prisoners showing signs of withdrawal. I asked if they needed medical aid. Some said, 'yes'. The majority did not. Some had already suffered for over two or three days without their drug. Some had chosen to withdraw from drugs without the aid of medication (cold turkey withdrawal). Most of them, in any case, had gone in and out of detoxification facilities several times. It gradually dawned on them that getting off drugs was not an issue, staying off drugs was the central problem.

I started visiting the ward twice a week. Indoor and outdoor game equipment, clothes, toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, anti-scabies and anti-

lice medication, books and magazines were brought on the following visits as more and more requests for 'goodies' kept on coming. I would spend time playing cricket or volleyball with the prisoners much to the surprise of the rest. Not fully understanding this phase of the programme, my work was initially described in a prison magazine as *"Dr Sethi treats drug addicts with sports and games."*

My visits to the ward were anxiously awaited by the prisoners after six weeks of my initial visits. Less time was necessary to gather around to hear 'Doctor Sahib', as I was called. More and more prisoners would join in the gathering. Concept seminar topics ranged from Responsible Concern, Sharing and Caring for Self and Others, to Leadership, Family and Bonding. Requests for 'goodies' continued and were met.

One day, there were objections by the group that had gathered, to some individuals fooling the 'good doctor'. It was not acceptable that those who were well-off were lining up for goodies. The group decided that from then onwards only those who did not get a *mulaqaat* (visit from a relative) would get their needs met by such requests. This marked the formation of group norms being set by the majority. Grabbing the opportunity, my talk focused on 'No free lunch'. One stipulated that the 'goodies' were not doles. A payment was expected. The price was a commitment that all would be vigilant and would not allow drugs or peddlers of drugs to enter the ward.

The culture of helping the less fortunate in the ward was slowly catching up. Serfdom, which was widespread, was slowly coming down as needs were being met without menial labour. Concept seminars continued on my visits. The topics now were 'mutual self-help' and 'I am my brother's keeper' as an extension of Responsible Concern. Money was not the only asset, education and caring were highlighted as valuable assets. The more educated would teach the less educated. Teams were formed in each barrack to give massages to those undergoing withdrawal pains. Oil was provided for this as well as incentives to the volunteers. However, the frequent admissions and discharges into this ward was disturbing to an extent that this environment of mutual assistance could not be sustained, that this culture kept on being shaken.

Several meetings of 'leaders' of subgroups were held. They would disseminate the messages given to members of their subgroup. The concept of a community which looks after its own needs was mooted, and how it would help recovery from drugs was discussed. The ward would now be known as the Therapeutic Community (TC) for recovery from drug dependence. Requests for 'goodies' were now to be channelled through these chosen leaders. A rudimentary feedback system was thus started.



They named the programme, Aasra Parivar, a joint system of families. Family meetings were held three times a week wherein members would share their life story, and talk of their family of origin. They would also share what happened at their court hearing, and some read out letters they had received from friends and relatives.

In mid-November, 1993, on the occasion of presenting the first television set, we were pleasantly surprised by Dr Kiran Bedi's visit. She thanked me for coming to help her. I expressed gratitude for her visit and invited her to join us. Thereafter, the eight family heads spoke presenting different aspects of the programme. The education programme, the monitoring system, the peer support along with massages (modified cold turkey withdrawal), family meetings and need-fulfilment were highlighted. The community was proud that they took care of the needy. They explained how they identified with their family, how the big brother looked after the new entrants, and how the culture was undisturbed by distributing new entrants amongst the families.

Within the Therapeutic Community, the style of living, and living with demonstrable values was stressed upon. The family groups presented the setting for 'repair work'. Conflicts arose when a member wanted the fulfilment of his desire to the detriment of another family member. Strong emotions, generated amongst family members whenever such an event happened, were dealt with in 'Encounter Groups'. These involved the identification of the defective attitude of the erring member, sharing of similar defects and how they were overcome by group members, followed by acceptance on the part of the erring member to adopt a healthy attitude. External pressure from family members would force a new way of behaving for the erring member to feel comfortable again in his family. In December 1993, an Aasra volunteer, Pradeep, who had been off heroin for four years, joined me on my visits. While I held meetings with family heads, he would hold meetings with the rest of the community and share his story of recovery from drugs. He motivated others to share their experience with drugs, their gradual downfall, and their recovery after joining Aasra Parivar. He joined the project as its first staff member after Aasra got a modest grant from Ishan Charitable Trust. His full-time involvement was a boon to the project. A roster of activities was now implementable and one-to-one sharing started.

Dr Kiran Bedi was positively encouraging by her visits to

this programme while on her rounds to Jail 4. Her numerous suggestions were readily incorporated into the programme. This helped in getting respectability for the residents of this community from other prisoners. For suddenly they were no more untouchables. The prisoner-teachers

started coming in once again and holding classes. The local music group was encouraged to come regularly each morning for a mood-making session. The Superintendent, P. R. Meena, and the Deputy Superintendent, Sunil Gupta, took active interest in our community. Meena's passion for helping the needy was being amply fulfilled in this community, while Sunil Gupta's leaning towards spiritual upliftment met expression in this programme. Frequent shifting of staff members posted by the jail was a constant source of contradictory messages. Finally, a permanent Head Warder was posted to the programme, Shivanand Khemani, a rare human being who rose with the programme to later become an Assistant Superintendent. Each contributed immensely to the blossoming of Aasra Parivar.

January 1994 saw the recognition of this programme by Delhi Police Foundation. The Navjyoti Award was presented to Aasra for this new contribution towards Correction/De-addiction/Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts. I received the prize on behalf of residents of the Programme. Later, at a small ceremony, inside the ward, I presented the shawl from Navjyoti to the man who really deserved it, i.e., Shivanand Khemani. Cash coupon awards were also presented to the convict officer of the ward and other family heads. To everyone's surprise, the cash was deposited by them in the Ward's Welfare Fund. Giving ownership of this programme to those involved was the goal.

#### LLLLLaunch Stage

The project launch ceremony was held in end April 1994. The Chief Guest, Pawan Chopra, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, was moved to tears hearing the sharing of recovery by our residents. *Hum honge kamyab*, the Hindi version of 'We shall overcome', moved many in the audience. The much-felt need of the community to have an Activity Hall was met as one barrack was inaugurated by Aasra Chairman, Dr Devinder Mohan, Chief of Psychiatry, All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

The Aasra Parivar was the first to celebrate its first anniversary in May 1994. With more staff trainees, the focus was on training, curriculum, and shaping behaviour. The behaviour monitoring system was refined and a five-colour behaviour rating code was introduced. An elaborate 'Shaping Pro-Social Behaviour' programme was launched in the community after a detailed study of the Indian Prisons Act and the Delhi Jail Manual. A protocol to this effect was presented to the Inspector General of Prisons and Senior Jail Officials of Jail 4. Rewards for pro-social behaviour and consequences and learning experiences for antisocial

behaviour were refined with the suggestions of the residents. Confrontation and the Encounter Group Process was taught, practised and refined. An 'Incidents Register' was introduced which not only had incident reports of negative events in the community but also prescribed learning experiences. The records of incidents in this register provided a longitudinal history of negative behaviour of any individual. Once, a convict officer was falsely accused by a resident in a petition in court. The longitudinal negative behaviour of the complainant recorded in this register helped clarify matters for the accused.

The Education Programme was refined with the coming of our new convict officer, Rajinder Jathedar. This remarkable man took charge of the indiscipline in the community and made the 'Shaping Behaviour' programme work. On my encouragement, he even gave up his afternoon siesta in his cell. He would then get locked up with the prisoners in one of the barracks and conduct education classes in the afternoons. Simultaneously, he and his team, which included Pradeep Mongia, helped drive out a major negative habit inculcated in prisons — sleeping in the afternoons. This habit is promoted by a lame excuse of the prison that the jail has to be closed in the afternoons to give some rest to the overworked Head Warders. A solution for a hundred tired Head Warders inculcated negative habits in 9,000 prisoners. There was scant regard for the NGO personnel who hung around for four unproductive hours while the prisoners slept.

Under Rajinder's able guidance, the massive landscape garden project gathered speed. A pond with a bridge on top, a waterfall, an aviary, a fountain and landscaped garden grew and became a reality. All families contributed equally. Some equipment was provided by Aasra, and some by the Prison.

The Aasra staff members served as 'rational authority'. While giving a consequence and learning experience to a resident for a transgression, the staff gave a reason that was consistent with the therapeutic community's 'view of right living', highlighted the effect the errant behaviour had on the community and the resident, and suggested the expected behaviour option to be adopted in future. They also encouraged the expression of feelings and emotions that this exercise had aroused in the errant resident. These staff members had to articulate the rationale for their decision to the resident, to the community, and to the prison staff. Through this process, residents were guided towards greater autonomy and dignity.

### TTTTTrrrrraining and Changing Natural Role Models

I accept that events of the Reforms Programme of the Prison Administration were happening side by side for the inmates to be able to appreciate the atmosphere in which this Therapeutic Community arose. Without these reforms, the project would have been a non-starter. Some negative forces would have extinguished the small flame that this project was at that stage. However, some reforms were ad hoc solutions to problems which were contradictions to the global view of reforms. The Prison was obsessed with breaking the nexus, sometimes real, sometimes imagined, between the jail staff and the prisoners. The Prison resorted to an irrational transfer policy. Warders would be transferred every day from one ward to another. Head Warders would be transferred every week. The attitude of these personnel was negative, their calibre low. Accountability which was already low became lower as no one stayed long enough to know the problems of prisoners or solve them. The result was repeated chaos in the Therapeutic Community created by the jail staff members not getting adequate theoretical inputs to understand the totality of the programme and the relevance of TC methods. This lack of understanding led to a lot of wastage of time and effort in repeated education of each new jail staff member. I was continually undoing the damage to the programme and the residents' morale when older repressive methods or irrational authority were used.

A major exercise was carried out over four months, December 1994 to March 1995, to inculcate value education in all prisons. A series of lecture demonstrations was initiated by Aasra on personality growth.

Indicators of Change in the First twenty Months in Aasra War  
About 1,100 heroin-dependent adult male prisoners had been admitted to the programme by May 1995. One-third of these were under trials for narcotics possession and sale, one-third for thefts, and about one-third for violence under the Arms Act. About 40 per cent had been admitted after a medically supervised detoxification and the rest had undergone peer-supervised, modified cold-turkey withdrawal in the community.

Since the Therapeutic Community started functioning, the culture of the 'addicts ward' underwent a radical transformation. The ward was once the darkest area in the prison. The Deputy Superintendent would peep in on his evening rounds seeing very little as inmates used to break all light bulbs at dusk to avoid detection of drug use. Heroin use was a daily occurrence. The inmates were looked down upon as hopeless. The teachers of the prison education wing had refused to go in to teach them. The night duty officer would be called time and again as frequent quarrels

were reported and the barracks would have to be opened. False blaming was prevalent.

By the end of the first twenty months, the Aasra Parivar was being recognised as a significant treatment programme for drug de-addiction by the jail, and a stream of visitors and dignitaries began to visit the ward. The residents showed a sense of pride (enhanced self-esteem) amongst the jail community. They also valued the position of the big-brother and family head. Where once inmates needed 45 minutes to sit for a meeting, they assembled in less than five minutes (increased discipline, a higher sense of responsibility and respect for authority). Silence was observed when requested and excuses to leave meetings were less. Quarrels had decreased (better coping with feelings of anger), heroin smuggling had decreased (better detection and control of supply as well as longer abstinence), false blaming had decreased (more respect for others). Less number of inmates were tempted to take heroin when it did reach the ward (better impulse control). There were longer periods of no drug use verified by regular urinalysis (increased abstinence). Consequences were taken with less resistance (increased power of the community as well as sense of accountability in residents). Transgressions were owned more easily (greater honesty). Increased and voluntary participation in the workshops and projects undertaken by the community reflected incorporation of the work ethic (increased sense of community). The quality of sharing had improved showing better communication skills and experiential learning.

Drug Abuse Management was integral to the health of Tihar. We needed to rise to the challenge, and we somehow did.

In November 1994, Mr Lee P. Brown, Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy, USA, had visited our Drug Rehabilitation Centre, and he sent across a letter which is being reproduced here:



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY  
Washington, D.C. 20500

November 18, 1994

Dr. Aftab Bedi  
Inspector General of Prisons  
Feroz Hall  
New Delhi

Dear Dr. Bedi:

As I leave New Delhi, I want to thank you and your staff for a most informative meeting at your drug rehabilitation center on Thursday morning. It was one of the highlights of my visit.

There can be only one point of view about narcotics in our societies. We must take all possible steps to eliminate them and their effects from our midst. Places such as yours demonstrate what innovation and dedication can accomplish.

Thank you again for a memorable visit. I wish you well and look forward to hearing of success upon success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Lee A. Brown".

Lee A. Brown  
Director

One can only conclude that grief and hostility are two sides  
of the same coin. You establish a human bond and even  
hardened  
criminals introspect their actions.

Graph  
Deaddiction Drive on a Steady Track  
A Synopsis



## 20

*The Medical Service:  
Treating the Maladies*

We had few doctors in a township of unhealthy residents, also called inmates. Those few doctors hardly had any communication with the prisoners and prison supervisors. Officials were convinced that their jobs were mutually exclusive. We needed to correct this basic philosophy. To begin with, we had to restore communication. So we introduced mobile dispensaries. If prisoners could not reach the doctors and officials in their hours of need, the latter had to be brought perforce to the patients. This move initially sparked off a good deal of resentment and unease among the doctors whose proclivity for immobility was renowned. They preferred to remain ensconced in the safety of their clinics rather than venture into 'hostile territory'. Moreover, their working patterns and habits would now be under scrutiny from other curious onlookers. The medical personnel were clearly troubled by challenging factors, such as visibility and transparency, which seemed to seriously hamper their professional accountability. However, the inmates were delighted, especially those individuals who laboured hard in the prison factory and could not afford to take

time off to consult the doctors because time lost meant a reduction in their earnings. The staff accompanying the doctors were glad to see the doctors and pharmacists on the round, as recorded in one of the many feedbacks:

I visited the Jail Training Centre on May 19, 1993, and met the Warders who were on training after their duties. They were asked for a feedback of their duties and they stated the following:

a) That the new shift system introduced for their duties was very satisfactory. However, the shifts could be started from 8 am to 4 pm, 4 pm to 12 night and 12 night to 8 am. Superintendents could please consider and give their views on the matter.

b) The Warders were very satisfied, for the doctors were visiting the wards directly for medical care. They reported that the satisfaction of prisoners with the medical services has greatly increased due to the doctors' rounds in the wards. However, due to a large number of inmates wanting to meet the doctors in every ward, it is possible that some wards may not get visited till 2 pm when the doctor's shift is over. It was explained and clarified that in case of any emergency in any ward, the doctor of the respective jail can always be called to attend to the emergency promptly. The Warders stated that this kind of direct medical attendance in the wards has helped reach medical care to all deserving patients. In the earlier system, inmates who could elbow their way got comparatively more medical attendance while the others were ignored.

c) There was another suggestion from the Warders that the doctor on his round could visit the bigger ward on regular basis and smaller wards once or twice a week only. Concerned Superintendents of the jail may kindly consider this and liaison with their respective doctor. The Assistant Superintendents accompanying the doctor should have their movement planned according to the need.

d) Ward staff stated that the number of Warders working in administrative jobs, such as writing of records, etc., is larger than the actual requirement. They felt that the Warders posted in these offices could be reduced.

e) We also need to ensure that Assistant Superintendents deputed to maintain and make entries in the registers should do their work themselves to the extent possible. They should take help of the literate Warders only as per the minimum requirements. These two points need to be examined by DIG (Prisons).

f) Warders stated that the sleeping cots had not been supplied to them. This also to be done after introduction of the uniform items, Kit Card System.

As in other areas, so also with the medical service, the on-the-round observations and the petition box revelations proved to be eye-openers. The reports which came in through these two sources identified those prisoners who were suffering from an assortment of diseases. They also brought in specific grievances or complaints with regard to the medical situation, which were duly considered. All these developments resulted in Tihar witnessing an unprecedented scene — the normally elusive and inaccessible doctors actually doing the rounds of the wards and examining the inmates. The jail doctors were not particularly amused with this kind of mobility. They vehemently opposed this move. They forcefully argued against it, constantly cribbed about it, and tried to devise ingenious means of sabotaging the move. At one stage, they even threatened to collectively boycott the jail by staying away from duty. They knew that they held a monopoly, and tried to exploit the situation to the maximum extent. They felt secure in their seemingly invulnerable medical fortress. The doctors entertained notions that the prison authorities would bend backwards to retain them.

Unfortunately for them, the doctors had misdiagnosed the new command. We were determined to proceed with the process of change, irrespective of the obstacles. We were also determined to break or at least loosen the doctors' stranglehold. In this context, Jaydev Sarangi came up with the suggestion that we call in private doctors from outside. This suggestion was undeniably useful, but did the prison rules and regulations permit the appointment of private doctors?

Yes, instead of engaging doctors on an honorarium basis which had its limitations, we invited doctors on our own by providing them transportation cost. Fortunately, we could ourselves defray the costs incurred in hiring taxis or other modes of travel, without waiting for the State Government's approval. We decided not to restrict ourselves to the allopathic system. We sought out doctors

specialising in alternative systems of medicine. Initially, we brought in homoeopaths who were recommended by Dr V. K. Gupta, the Principal of the Nehru Homoeopathic Medical College and Hospital, New Delhi, an eminent name in his profession. Dr Gupta also assisted in steering our proposed programmes along the right course. Dr Nagra, also a Homoeopath, who was on our rolls but without work, became the coordinator for the alternative medical services. However, the first major hurdle we had to cross was the resource crunch. We had to procure the basic medicines and the equipment needed for running even a rudimentary medical system. We somehow managed to buy the required medicines by diverting money from the Prisoners' Welfare Fund and dispensed these through the new team of doctors who possessed all the hallmarks of sincere and dedicated professionals.

We provided 'advance warning' to the external team of doctors so that they could make themselves available during the rush hours. They would visit the wards which the regular prison doctors felt were not worth their attention. The newcomers in their professional coats and stethoscopes, both young men and women, instilled a much-needed sense of confidence among the inmates that there really was someone to listen to their tales of woe, some of which were heart-rending. The very fact that a doctor had examined the inmates was extremely reassuring for them. This fundamental change in the inmates' viewpoint provided the first successful breakthrough in our attempts to end or at least curtail the prison doctors' monopoly, and gradually they seemed to realise that strike threats were proving to be ineffective. But they were still reluctant to join the efforts of their colleagues from outside. Nevertheless, they agreed to don white coats stitched by the jail tailors and carry stethoscopes which at least bestowed on them the unmistakable identity of the medical profession. I issued this order to all doctors through the Resident Medical Officer for strict compliance:

services.

In many cases it has been seen that doctors are only initialling important papers by which it is not possible to read the identity of the doctor. In earlier cases some doctors have denied their own initials. It is hereby directed that all doctors signing any paper will sign in full signature and not put initials.

All our efforts at augmentation of the medical services proved very fruitful during daytime and also during the evenings. But at night it was a different matter altogether. For the nights, the entire prison population (8,000 plus) was dependent on only one Government-appointed doctor. The pressure on this individual was evidently overwhelming and to cope with it he adopted the 'path of least resistance'. As already stated, this doctor prescribed Diazepam or Parmol as the ultimate panacea, for one and all, obviously for its placebo effect. And I issued this on-the-spot observation:

I visited Jail No 3 Ward No. 11/B and the following were my observations:

It has been reported that the doctors are still issuing Diazepam tablets to the prisoners. RMO to please issue instructions to all doctors not to issue Diazepam tablet or tablets which have dependence concerning narcotics or substance to the prisoners henceforth.

*(Action RMO and all*

*doctors)*

Petition Officer to meet the following two prisoners in their wards to apprise them of the latest:

Harish Chander s/o Munna Lal

Date of petition sent to Petition Officer — July 23, 1993

Hari Singh s/o Ganeshi Lal

Date of Petition sent to Petition Officer — June-July, 1993

It has been reported that the X-ray machine of the DDU hospital is out of order. RMO to please take the help of X-ray machine installed in Jail No 4 for a particular case of prisoner Harish, s/o Chandan Singh of Ward No 11B, Jail No 3.

*(Action RMO)*

Far too many medical complaints were brought to my notice in Ward No 11B of Jail No 3. RMO to please visit this ward tomorrow positively for remedial measures.

All our endeavours for the appointment of additional doctors for night duty failed to yield any positive result. The Directorate of

Health Services and the Health Secretary of the Delhi State Government expressed willing helplessness for reinforcement since they themselves were short of doctors. We had to raise more resources ourselves to meet the requisite challenges or suffer the consequences. We decided to engage the services of a private doctor who was willing to be on-call in prison at night. This meant Tihar now would have two doctors at night instead of one.

While the non-official doctors went about their duties methodically and effectively, the 'in-house' men, instead of being inspired, continued to fret and fume. Despite all our attempts at making them change their ways, they stuck to their traditional rigid patterns. As mentioned earlier, we were compelled to transfer an eccentric doctor who prescribed TB drugs to all and sundry. This doctor was replaced by Dr Bhagotia who brought initiative and concern to the medical service in Tihar. He lost no time in streamlining the system and clearing up the formidable backlog that had accumulated over the years. The Resident Medical Officer was instructed to send his work journal to the Prison Headquarters on a daily basis. This step enabled us to assess and evaluate the daily work. Since all doctors were supposed to submit their reports daily, as per the new guidelines issued by the RMO, which were then logged into the daily work journal, we could keep track of each doctor's individual level of performance. When the doctors came to realise that they themselves were under appraisal, they decided to exchange views and opinions and coordinate their activities so that some semblance of unity could be achieved. The doctors began interacting with one another. This was a restoration of communication at the macro level, perhaps for the first time, I was informed.

We had realised early in our reform programme that the restoration of the medical services had to be underpinned by a concomitant overhauling of the entire Prison Administration. In this effort, the on-the-round observations, the petition box, the prisoners' *panchayats*, the phenomenon of the community entering the premises of Tihar and the literacy education campaign served as

health bulletin of the prison.

the five senses. These senses helped us in identifying maladies afflicting the system and then prioritising them on a daily basis. As in charge of the Prison, my senior colleagues and I decided to give full support to the in-house doctors, though many of them might not have welcomed it. We motivated these doctors to do the rounds of the prisons. We shared the challenges they faced when encountered by a particularly difficult or baffling case. We provided them whatever amenities we could — transportation, better administrative facilities whenever needed, risk allowance and reimbursement of telephone expenses. These amenities may appear trivial to an outsider, but for the doctors they held a lot of significance.

For emergency cases, we sanctioned the expenses for hiring a taxi for transporting the patients to a Government hospital if an ambulance was not readily available. To introduce more logistical support and to ensure increased doctor-prisoner rapport, we decided to divert from the existing strength and appoint an Assistant Superintendent (Medical) and an Assistant Superintendent (Hospital). Both these individuals were to liaise daily with the prison doctors in order to ensure prompt clearance of all important medical documents and other allied matters. Both would attend the afternoon coordination group meetings of the doctors and take cognisance of suggestions, opinions and views put forth. Essentially, they acted as a bridge between the doctors, the prisoners and us on a daily basis.

Meanwhile, we persuaded the Government-appointed doctors to provide normal medical services during those weeks which had a string of consecutive gazetted holidays in order to avoid dislocation in the normal functioning. Such dislocations in the past had been responsible for massive backlogs, resulting in riots and violence. We went in simultaneously for a neat appearance. We presented whitecoats to the doctors so that they could be easily identified by the prisoners. We got the hospital cleaned up. Equipment which were out of order, specially some essential instruments, were ordered to be repaired immediately. The essential instruments which were revived



were the X-ray machine, the sphygmomanometer (a device for measuring blood pressure) and the dentist's chair. Although the number of such instruments was grossly inadequate, we intended to make optimum use of what we had.

We also decided to go in for certain other measures. The Superintendents were asked to collect the medical reports from their respective night duty officers, and to maintain a constant vigil on the situation. Moreover, they had to ensure that the ambulances meant for transporting seriously ill patients were readily available and not diverted for extracurricular activities.

In the *muaina* (inspection) wards themselves, we decided to identify and segregate those entrants who needed intensive and immediate medicare. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, we brought in outside doctors to meet medical emergencies, especially during the night. These doctors were readily available. Further, the Superintendents devised a comprehensive medical register which provided all the vital information about a patient (the treatment plan and the progress made) at a glance. Unfortunately, a death register also had to be maintained, but fortunately it was used very rarely.

Most of our other ambitious programmes and projects for revitalising and reorienting the jail's medical service failed because of the obstacles placed by the State Government. But we persisted. One of the major projects envisaged by us pertained to the setting up of an ultramodern detoxification centre with state-of-the-art equipment within Tihar, to combat the pernicious impact of drug addiction and also to rehabilitate the victims. Till the day I was moved out from Tihar, many important matters were still under consideration at higher levels. This was primarily due to sudden replacements of officers we were dealing with and their successors had to be 'educated' all over again. Eventually, we ran out of patience and resolved that we would become self-reliant and self-sufficient. In theory, although this objective was a noble one, in practice, it

was very difficult to achieve. For instance, even a relatively trivial matter, say, asking a referral hospital to earmark a separate custody ward for visiting inmates to ensure collective security, was not within our control.

While we were concentrating on ensuring readily available medicine for all inmates, we received an order directing the transfer of the management and control of the Tihar medical services to the Directorate of Health Services (DHS).

The order effectively took away the control of whatever medical resources (i.e., resources belonging to the doctors and budget for medicines) was with us, but it directed that the overall responsibility for maintaining the medical services be placed squarely upon us. This order also meant that in the event of any mishap, we were the only ones who would be accountable. The direction was not marked confidential, hence it is reproduced verbatim:

To  
The Director of Health Services  
Govt. of NCT of Delhi  
Saraswati Bhawan  
Connaught Circus  
New Delhi.  
Sir,

1. I am directed to inform you that the Lt. Governor has approved transfer of all dispensaries and the hospital in Tihar Jail to the Directorate of Health Services with immediate effect on 'as is where is basis'.
2. Consequently all the resources, human as well as material, will stand transferred to the Directorate of Health Services with immediate effect.
3. For day-to-day supervision and control, the Jail dispensaries/hospital will be under the administrative control of IG (Prisons).
4. The additional staff as are necessary will be provided immediately.
5. All the medical and paramedical posts of the dispensaries and the hospital shall henceforth be borne on the strength of Directorate of Health Services.
6. The Directorate of Health Services shall take necessary action to get the posts of GDMO-II and CMO encadred in the CHS.

7. All matters relating to transfer, posting, creation of posts, filling up of the posts, purchase of medical equipments, stores, medicines and other matters relating to the running of the dispensaries and the hospital shall henceforth be dealt with by the Directorate of Health Services.

Yours

faithfully,  
(sd/-)  
Kutty)  
(Home)  
Delhi

(Dr M. M.  
Joint Secretary  
Govt of NCT of

An order which directly affected the entire prison system was issued that abruptly. Thankfully, the Prison Administration was endorsed a copy of it.

Our replies highlighted the contradictions thrown up by the State Government's order, which could impinge adversely on the entire medical system inside the prison. This was our final response:

Office of the Inspector General (Prisons), Delhi  
Central Jail: Tihar: New Delhi  
No F 21 (149)/AO/IGP/94/804-810 Dated: 13 May, 1994  
To  
The Home Secretary  
Delhi Administration  
5, Sham Nath Marg  
Delhi.

SSSSSubject: Transfer of dispensaries and hospitals of Tihar Jail to the Directorate of Health Services

Reference: No F 9 (200)/92-Home(G)/6847 dated December 29, 1993

Sir,

You may recall my letter on the subject dated December 31, 1993, that the present order would dislocate the whole system of medical care in the prison and will prove detrimental in a sensitive system like the Tihar Prison (population 9,000 +, requiring intensive day-to-day management, spot decisions, direct personal supervision, and immediate availability of resources).

It needs to be further clarified that the supervision and control cannot be separated from capacity for making resources available. The present order takes this away from the Prison Administration and gives it to Delhi Health Services which is located far away from the prisons. Delhi Health

Services does not have any office or officers here to provide the resources which are required on a minute to minute, urgent and round-the-clock basis. We all know that all matters concerning prisoners call for legal accountability. Therefore, supervision without resources cannot provide for legal accountability, while this would also be against the spirit of the Jail Manual and Prisons Act.

Further, delay in medical care of any kind leads to law and order and security implications inside the overcrowded prisons. In the past, it has been a primary reason for riots and strikes. By the present order, Superintendent Prisons will be expected to control these without any resources to hasten medical care.

It is, therefore, requested that before this decision is carried further, we call for a meeting to discuss its day-to-day working implications so as to arrive at a decision which does not jeopardise the medical care for prisoners and the security of the prison thereby.

We look forward to an early date for a meeting in this regard. The matter may kindly be treated as URGENT.

Yours

faithfully  
(-sd)  
(Kiran Bedi)  
General (Prisons)  
Delhi

Inspector

In response to this, I got a reply in the form of an endorsement:

No F 9/200/92-Home(G)/  
Govt of National Capital Territory of Delhi  
Home (General) Department  
5, Sham Nath Marg, Delhi-54  
Dated: September 26, 1994

To

The Director of Health Services  
Govt of NCT of Delhi  
Saraswati Bhawan  
Connaught Circus  
New Delhi

SSSSSubject: Transfer of dispensaries and hospitals of Jharkhand Jail to the Directorate of Health Services

Sir,

The Hon'ble Lt. Governor, Delhi, is pleased to modify the earlier decision of this Government regarding transfer of all dispensaries and

hospitals in Central Jail to Directorate of Health Services on 'as is wherebasis' communicated vide this Govt letter of even number, dated December 29, 1993, with the following conditions:

That the management, material resources including handling of budget, purchase of stores, equipment, medicines, will continue to remain with the Prison Administration. However, to draw benefit of better cadre management and share of trained manpower, it would be desirable to encadre the medical, and technical staff of jail dispensaries/hospitals is[sic] encadred in Directorate of Health Services.

faithfully,  
Singh)  
Home (General)  
Delhi

Yours  
(S. P.  
Deputy Secretary,  
Govt of NCT of

Irrespective of the outcome of such tedious and tardy communication, we, including the then RMO, Dr Vijay Kumar, and his team of doctors, were determined to restore and maintain the medical services at their optimum levels. Simultaneously, we decided to open up another front in our war against the diseases and disorders prevalent in Tihar. We planned to introduce education on disease prevention in a holistic way. Our objectives were to effectively reduce the inmates' dependence on doctors and reorient their thought processes towards a disease- and addiction-free environment. Consequently, we adopted certain pragmatic tactics, which yielded positive results within a span of few months. These tactics included (a) Segregation of drug addicts (mentioned earlier); (b) Banning the use of addictive medicines (in whatever form they may be — tablet or capsule or syrup) and drugs; and (c) Launching of a forceful no-smoking campaign followed up by a Ban Order:

We are spending an enormous amount of money on medicines which are related to bronchial problems. We also get a number of drug addicts and TB patients. For all these categories, smoking is a health hazard. We need to remedy the situation and hereafter, therefore, it is decided to discourage and totally ban smoking in the prisons.

This means that there will be no sale of tobacco, *bidi*, cigarettes, *gutka*, etc., in the canteens.

These will also be banned items being brought in by the relatives of the prisoners who hand these over to them after court attendance. Prisoners be fully searched for these items as well.

Saleable items of this category already with the canteens of jail should be returned to the retailers if possible, but hereinafter at no cost will these items be sold to the prisoners.

Proper announcement to this effect be kindly made and implementation be seen thereafter.

This also implies that the jail staff will also resist from smoking, to set the right example.

DAP (Delhi Armed Police) is also requested to ensure that prisoners do not bring these items from the court premises after their court appearance. Any prisoner bringing these items to the prison after court appearance will be reported to the DAP Headquarters to fix responsibility of the guard concerned.

These orders come into effect immediately.

Further, as a matter of policy, the Superintendents were empowered to permit terminally ill or bedridden patients to be visited by their relatives outside the visiting hours as special cases. Sometimes, especially in the case of hardened criminals, judicial permission was needed before the relatives could visit the patients. To secure such permission, we ourselves prepared and presented before the judges/magistrates the relevant reports, duly substantiated by photographic evidence, showing that the individual was indeed bedridden or in a critical state. These patients themselves were not in a position to apply for such permission. We wished to make sure that the final phase of such lives improved qualitatively in the company of their near and dear ones. Many cancer patients were granted visiting facilities by the courts, which proved to be a source of both solace and consolation. To our dismay, we could not provide such patients any professional psychiatric aid for the simple reason that Tihar did not have a single government-appointed psychiatrist. We laid great emphasis on both hygiene and nutrition in our efforts to reduce the inmates' dependence on doctors. We ensured that clean and safe water was available. We also ensured that adequate quantities of soap — both for toilet use and washing of clothes — was available. We saw to it that all the inmates bathed regularly, wore clean clothes and shaved daily. The inmates began to clean and clip their nails and to keep their hair clean and beards

trim — in contrast to their earlier outgrowth which provided fertile breeding grounds for lice and other forms of vermin. During winters, clean and regularly washed sheets and blankets were provided for the inmates. Jute mats were also supplied so that the inmates did not have to sit on the floor.

As far as better nutrition was concerned, we went in for some rapid action diet-upgrading measures. We increased the supply of good quality milk, provided better cooked and more palatable food — not the repulsive stuff of the earlier days — with added variety in the form of pulses and grams to enhance the nutritive value. One could not term the fare as a delight, but we did our best under the circumstances to provide some variety to the inmates in the menu. We also set mobile canteens rolling, mainly to provide tea, cold drinks and light snacks. In winter, there was a special round of hot tea and hot water. In summer we set up *piaos*, places where drinking water was freely served to quench the thirst of hundreds of inmates, once they returned to the prison from the court.

Apart from the hygienic and nutritional aspects, the spiritual dimension had already been taken into account. As mentioned earlier, we had initiated and sustained several useful activities, such as yoga, sports, literacy drive, discourses and lectures by pious persons or eminent personalities, *sarva dharma sabhas* (all-religion congregations), devotional music, cultural programmes and meditation classes. All these measures not only helped in considerably reducing dependence of the inmates on doctors but also improved their overall wellbeing.

But despite all the positive developments, when it came to the crunch, i.e., medical emergencies, we just could not meet the challenge because the infrastructure and resources in the jail hospital were woefully inadequate. We could not grapple with those complicated situations which required specialists' skills as these professionals were not to be found in Tihar. Again, we had to seek help from the community outside; such help did eventually come our way and when it did, we were overwhelmed by the sheer intensity.



The process of community entry in the medical field started as a trickle, in the form of a wheelchair and prosthetic equipment (artificial limbs) donated by the philanthropic Bharat Vikas Parishad. The wheelchair enabled the invalids and the disabled to be transported with a sense of dignity, instead of their wobbling or shuffling along pathetically and making a spectacle of themselves, evoking more derision than sympathy among the other inmates. A few of the handicapped inmates were fitted with artificial limbs. Some of them could now walk around without support from others. B. R. Sharma, yet another volunteer, totally committed to reforms in prisons, offered to conduct a first-aid course for both the staff and the inmates and also to award formal certificates on successful completion of the course. Many aspirants flocked together to pursue this course which became very popular.

A renowned eye specialist, Dr R. K. Bhutani, personally visited Tihar with his modern gadgets and examined inmates with eye problems. He also arranged to provide spectacles to the needy. The entry of Dr Bhutani opened the floodgates and a stream of specialists from other disciplines began to pour in voluntarily. This positive development evoked a feeling of great elation amongst us because now we had attained a position wherein we need not be abjectly dependent on the prison doctors. We had managed to effectively tackle one of the most contentious issues confronting us without resorting to any negative or pernicious tactics.

Among the various reputed experts, I would like to mention the name of Dr Kusum Sehgal of NACO (National Aids Control Organisation). She initiated an AIDS awareness campaign in Tihar and also sought to assess how a practical programme to prevent the spread of this scourge could be carried out. She made extensive rounds of the various prisons, interacted with the *panchayat* members and put forward valuable suggestions. And the Hope Foundation provided full support to TB and leprosy patients and went on to open a full-fledged dental clinic inside Tihar.

or without the help of crutches.

Besides treatment, we also projected the crucial importance of the prevention of diseases through exhibitions and mobile film shows. We used any occasion to mobilise support for medical care. The high point of this programme was attained on Republic Day (26 January) 1994. On this occasion, more than 500 medicos and paramedicos came into Tihar along with their sophisticated medical paraphernalia, which included eminent specialists in various fields belonging to diverse branches of medicine. Virtually all the 9,000 plus inmates, including the children, were thoroughly examined. Depending on the degree of seriousness of the individual's disease, he or she was given a different coloured card. Such a card would indicate clearly whether or not a particular patient required a specialist's attention. Such an identification enabled the medical staff to monitor the progress of the individual patients.

As the degree of community interest in Tihar increased, doctors belonging to other branches of medicine like ayurveda and unani or specialising in diverse therapies — magnetotherapy, acupuncture or naturopathy — rolled in. The inmates were grateful beneficiaries of these doctors' proficiency and skills in their respective fields. We announced an 'Alternative Medicine Day', on which the inmates could avail of the possible opportunities engendered by the diverse systems of medicine. They could now choose that particular system with which they were familiar or with which they felt comfortable. Over 200 doctors from the alternative medicine streams participated. Some doctors had also arranged for film shows, exhibitions and practical demonstrations, which proved to be an education not only for the inmates but also for the staff members at all levels. Also, some leading pharmaceutical companies generously donated their products to the inmates' benefit.

We were consciously and deliberately encouraging a 'performance shift' — a shift from overdependence on

allopathic drugs to seeking treatment through alternative systems of medicine which could be culturally and environmentally closer to the Indian psyche besides leading to a reduction in costs and also in the adverse side-effects triggered off by some allopathic medicines. In this

context, the visiting experts offered to strengthen the infrastructure of the alternative systems within Tihar Jail. Such an offer was more than welcome. Gradually, we managed to provide outlets inside the jail, from which the inmates could procure ayurvedic and herbal medicines for minor disorders, such as coughs, colds, stomach upsets and skin rashes. Such a provision instilled a great deal of confidence in the inmates, who could now go in for harmless self-medication instead of waiting agonisingly for doctors.

By the first quarter of 1995, the medicare reform programme had produced some remarkable results. Each prison could now boast of containing three separate dispensaries, one each for allopathic, homoeopathic and ayurvedic medicines. A fourth dispensary (to supply unani medicine) was in the process of being set up by the Hamdard Group when I left the charge. But among the most significant medical measures was the Policy Statement Document and Project Outline for HIV/AIDS Awareness and Surveillance in Central Jail, Tihar, which we prepared to commit ourselves to:

#### Objectiv

To give an AIDS sensitisation session, so as to lead to behavioural change. All prisoners should be made available all the preventive measures equivalent to those available in the community.

To cover the entire jail, all prisoners should receive HIV/AIDS education on entry, during their prison term and in pre-release programmes. Jail library should be stocked with enough literature, such as pamphlets, books and journals on HIV/AIDS. Wall charts mentioning the mode of spread of infection of HIV (and preventive measures to be taken) should be displayed in all the wards.

To have an ongoing programme.

Involve other (4-6) NGOs:

would be trained to give standardised information. This would ensure that there is no confusion in the minds of the largest population regarding various aspects of HIV and AIDS.

TTTT To divide the jail into workable sections:

be prepared so that groups of 150-200 inmates are formed for sensitisation sessions. The roster would also depend upon the manpower of trained NGO's available.

TTTTTo illustrate the sensitisation sessions with use of audiovisuals: Extensive use of audiovisual aids can be made for sensitisation sessions with inmates. Infrastructure for these facilities should be created in all the jails.

TTTTTo go on to behavioural change workshops: sensitisation sessions we may go to the stage of behavioural change workshops.

TTTTTo select and train peer educators to carry on the programme: create infrastructure for research so that constant evaluation and upgradation of services is possible from time to time. This would be a unique research opportunity in a closed community of prisons.

TTTTTimeframe

To begin identifying/training NGOs.

To sensitise the entire jail population once by September 30, 1995. To begin simultaneously workshops with the aim of behavioural change by December 31, 1995.

To keep sensitisation programmes and workshops ongoing.

To continue with the training of peer education so that the Development of Infrastructure for HIV testing in Jharkhand Jail

Compulsory testing of prisoners is not recommended but the facilities for voluntary testing for HIV infection should be available to the prisoners with adequate pre- and post-test counselling.

'Sentinel Surveillance' methodology should be followed. HIV screening (after pre- and post-test counselling) of persons indulging in high-risk behaviour: drug addicts, juvenile prisoners, commercial sexworkers and prisoners suffering from tuberculosis should be included in this surveillance in the first stage and the total population in the next stage. to prevent any panic reaction.

FFFFFunding:

NACO for consideration. A detailed blueprint and the amount of financial assistance required can be evolved later on in consultation with the higher authorities in NACO.

This policy statement would be reviewed from time to time based upon the feedback from the target population, experts in the field and jail doctors and officers who are working with these

The mammoth collective effort put in by the inmates and the staff including the medicos and paramedicos and by the medical

community outside no doubt benefited a large number of people and also received its justified share of accolades and encomiums. However, the entire experiment in achieving medical coordination and subsequent prognosis and treatment on such a stupendous scale, being at a nascent stage, was still fragile. It required careful nurturing and sustenance before it could be consolidated. One could not afford to rest on one's laurels.

Tihar on the whole moved towards good physical and mental wellbeing. What we did in Tihar bore no comparison whatsoever with the prisons I visited in the West. They had adequate medical infrastructure, with either in-house facilities or closely linked full-fledged infrastructures. None of them compromised on this count at all. What was heartening to see was their constant audit of what they were doing to improve in whatever way they could. They regularly conducted surveys on health-related behaviour in order to inform the planners of health care, and worked on shared provision of health care to provide better coordinated approach to the prisoners' health matters. They regularly evaluated the situations to raise health standards — not under court directions through Public Interest Litigation (PIL) but out of professional habit and practising public policies. We had to invest a lot in the area of prison medical care, for we had just begun.

Graph  
Treating the Maladies  
A Synopsis

Graph  
Treating the Maladies  
A Synopsis



## *Vipassana and the Magical Metamorphosis*

While I was on the rounds one day, Rajinder Kumar, a thin, lean, young Assistant Superintendent was accompanying me. He overheard me saying that I wished I possessed the magical therapy to get the inmates rid themselves of corrosive emotions. He promptly came to me and said that he knew of such a therapy, and that was known as Vipassana. I was obviously curious to know more about it. He added that if I wanted additional information about the magic of Vipassana and be convinced about its beneficial effects, I should talk to his family members. I did. His wife revealed that Rajinder once used to be an ill-tempered man who got provoked very easily. But after he went through the Vipassana meditation course, he emerged a much better human being with greater control over his once-volatile emotions. I verified the authenticity of Rajinder's wife's claim from other sources as well. I asked for more details. Rajinder told me that if we wanted Vipassana to come to Tihar, he would need to go to Jaipur where the Vipassana Meditation Centre was located and needed to meet Ram Singh who was the person in charge. Rajinder informed me that Ram Singh was

the former Home Secretary of the Rajasthan State Government, and a very good human being. He had been solely responsible for taking Vipassana meditation programmes into Jaipur and Baroda prisons. He would more than welcome our invitation.

As coincidence would have it, M. L. Mehta, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, and a former colleague of Ram Singh, visited Tihar at our request. It was for another purpose, but while walking down, he suggested the introduction of Vipassana meditation inside Tihar and volunteered to speak to Ram Singh to come over. I was amazed and thrilled at this telepathy. To me it appeared to be an instance of prayers being answered even before they were said.

I got a prompt response to my letter from Ram Singh. He clarified succinctly that Vipassana was a very ancient meditation technique of India. Purification of the mind was its basic objective. It was secular in all respects and non-sectarian, and very effective for an attitudinal change and could transform the human mind. He also went on to state that this technique entailed a ten-day residential course, which followed a strict regime. The participants had to take a vow to maintain silence, known as noble silence, during the ten-day period. They would not be permitted to communicate among themselves or with outsiders. Their day would begin in the very early hours of the morning (4 am), with eight hours of intense meditation. For the first three days of the course, the meditation would be focused upon trying to make the participants aware of their breathing patterns, as they inhaled and exhaled. Any physical discomfort had to be ignored by exercising rigid self-control. The remaining seven days were devoted to becoming conscious of various body sensations and emotions and how to achieve and retain control over them. Such body-controlling acts would automatically initiate a process of purification, which would ultimately lead to total emancipation from anxiety, tension and suffering. This beneficial development, in turn, would completely transform an individual's personality and outlook. The number of participants could vary from at specified periods of the day.

60 to 90, all of whom had to be volunteers, preferably long-term convicts who would stand to gain the most. He felt that some staff members should also be included in the initial lot. Ram Singh wanted us to go in for advance logistical planning so that everything could be conducted smoothly, barring some unforeseen situation. He assured us that he would “beacon to herald a new hope to people who have lost hope, who see no chance of redemption, who see no future.”

This is exactly what we needed here. I telephoned Ram Singh at his Jaipur residence and we finalised the date of our meeting in Delhi, and he came over to Tihar. After surveying the scene, he put forward certain requirements for conducting the Vipassana course successfully. First and foremost, he proposed that we had to earmark two or three barracks for residential purposes for individuals undergoing the course. He wanted a separate room or hall to be allotted for the actual conducting of the course. The teacher was to have a separate room with an attached bath. A separate kitchen was mandatory for the participants, who had to observe a strict diet pattern as they were permitted to eat only wholesome vegetarian items. Breakfast was to be served at 6.30 am. Only one meal a day was allowed, at precisely 11 am. Evening tea at 5 pm would include milk and some seasonal fruits. Every evening, a discourse on video would be shown to the participants and also to others interested in the Vipassana technique (e.g., other inmates, staff members, medical staff and paramedical staff). The security contingent could also attend, circumstances permitting.

We decided to conduct the first course on November 22, 1993, in Prison No 2 which housed the long-term convicted inmates. Ram Singh and Professor P. L. Dhar of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, who was well-versed in the Vipassana technique, were entrusted with the privilege of conducting the first lessons. As teachers, both of them were expected to stay inside the prison, along with the life-termers, so that they could reach out to the convicts and make them understand the sincerity of their intentions.

Their professed intentions, however, were initially viewed with suspicion by the hardened convicts, for whom affection, sensitivity and care were totally alien feelings. The two teachers were subjected to some nightmarish experiences during the first few days of their tenure in jail. They were exposed to a barrage of intimidatory threats by the professional criminals who felt that they would lose their grip over their companions and some staff members. The tough guys deliberately flouted the rules they were supposed to follow during the Vipassana course: they began to smoke and broke the vow of silence and proceeded to mouth some of the choicest of abuses at all those around them. They hoped Ram Singh and Professor Dhar would succumb to their verbal onslaught and physical threats and quit. But they were proved wrong. Both the teachers consciously and purposefully decided to counter such an onslaught by themselves, without bothering the prison authorities. They continued to perform their activities for conducting the course as usual, ignoring the jibes and taunts flung at them. Their determination and perseverance, imbued with compassion, eventually prevailed, and after five days, the small gang of convicts realised their folly and begged forgiveness from their two teachers. A miracle by itself ! As already stated, the Vipassana course was for a period of ten days, during which total silence had to be maintained. When the first batch of *vipassvis* broke their noble silence after the ten-day course, several amazing revelations were made, which evoked triumph, joy and contentment in all our hearts. The hardcore gangsters had shed their former identities and emerged as totally new human beings. On the auspicious occasion of breaking their noble silence, M. L. Mehta was also present to listen to the glowing reports presented by the *vipassvis*.

The first to stand up and speak was one Bichittar Singh who was serving a life-term. He said, "I have been in the jail for the last nine years due to fabricated and misconceived evidence of

my parents and brothers. I had been harbouring a feeling of revenge and ill-will against my own parents and brothers. Right now, after undergoing this meditation course, I am feeling so light, so tension-free, so

happy and so satisfied that I am thankful to my parents and brothers who sent me to jail where I have been given a chance to attend this unique meditation course which has changed my attitude, behaviour and way of thinking. I am also thankful to the jail authorities for giving me an opportunity to attend this course.” And he went on to request Mehta to organise such courses for the police, judiciary and other Government officers so that the future of millions of people may be guided in the right direction for the benefit of all. The biased and blind acts of this class sends innocents to jails for no fault of Santokh Singh, also serving a life-term (for murder), expressed that Vipassana meditation had brought him peace of mind and contentment. After his release he would once again attend the course at Jaipur along with his wife and children, while during his stay in Tihar Ashram, he would continue to practise Vipassana meditation.

The third in the series was Satbir Singh, an ex-constable who was undergoing a sentence for 10 years u/s 109 (abetment to rape). He narrated the fact that he was undergoing this punishment for no fault of his own but acknowledged with a free and balanced mind that he had committed many offences during the 1984 riots in Delhi. It was, perhaps, the result of these offences which he had committed in 1984, that he had been imprisoned in Tihar. “Prior to coming to Tihar, I was under the impression that the stick was all powerful, but after undergoing this meditation course, the helpful and cooperative attitude of the senior officers who were instrumental in reforming and rehabilitating the prisoners, my view has been transformed by love and affection. Now I think love and affection has greater powers for curbing the negativities. I have developed a firm faith in nemesis, that man has to pay for his misdeeds sooner or later. I promise before all that I will not repeat any misdeed that can be harmful to anybody,” said Satbir Singh.

Niranjan Nath, who was undergoing sentence under various dacoities and robberies and Arms Act, narrated that his mind was very *chanchal* (unstable), and dwelt in the misdeeds of the past. The Vipassana meditation course had imparted a feeling in him to be

theirs.

non-violent and attentive to the present and not worry anymore about the past. By living in the present and concentrating on one's breath at the base of one's nostrils, one can bring true happiness and purification of mind.

The most startling statement and disclosure was made by OmPrakash Bairwa, who was undergoing two-and-a-half years of rigorous imprisonment for kidnapping a girl. He asserted that he had been falsely implicated in the case of kidnapping by his rivals in connivance with the police since he was the president of his community and wanted to contest the elections. "Before undergoing this Vipassana meditation course, I was polluting my mind with the feelings of taking revenge by way of either killing the judge who delivered the wrong judgment, or by kidnapping his children, or by way of stage-managing an accident of the vehicle of the judge by a truck. My mind used to be flooded with negative feelings. Consequently, I spent many restless nights. But now, after undergoing the meditation course, all my negative feelings have disappeared. Now I have become a firm believer in God. I shall not take revenge on anyone. My mind is now full of *karuna* (compassion) and *maitri* (benevolence)."

The hardcore coterie members, who had benefited the most, were impatient to share the Vipassana experience with all the prisoners, irrespective of their category, so that they could benefit and transform themselves into better, well-adjusted individuals who could face the challenges of the outside world once they were released. The *vipassvis* were insistent that their 'demand' be fulfilled and we were happy to fulfil them. Consequently, we decided to celebrate New Year's day in 1994, as a Vipassana course day in all the four prisons. The objective was to enable all the inmates to begin the year in right earnest, inspired by noble ideas and thoughts. Before the actual commencement of the course, Guru Satyanarayan Goenka who had brought back Vipassana to its land of birth from Myanmar, and who readily agreed to come to Tihar addressed the huge assembly of inmates and staff. I am reproducing an extract of



his speech here:

Friends, you have all assembled here to liberate yourselves, liberate yourselves from all bondages, all miseries. To be imprisoned in a prison like this is great agony. And to be liberated from prison is very fortunate. But besides the confinement within these four walls, there is a greater prison in which all of us suffer so much. This is the prison of our negativities, our own mental derailments, which keep overpowering us. We have become the slaves of our own anger, hatred, ill-will, animosity, slaves of our defilement of craving, clinging, greed, passion, attachment and ego. Any defilement that arises in our minds overpowers us — makes us its prisoner so quickly. We start suffering immediately. This suffering is not limited to the area inside these prison walls. People inside this jail or outside this jail are all prisoners of their own habit patterns. They keep generating one negativity or the other, and they keep on suffering. If we are relieved of these negativities, we start enjoying the true happiness of liberation. We start enjoying real peace, real harmony. When our minds are freed from impurities, the entire habit pattern of our lives changes. A pure mind is naturally full of love and compassion, infinite love and compassion; full of joy, sympathetic joy and full of equanimity, perfect equilibrium of mind. This is real happiness, real peace, real harmony. The bondage of mental defilements is a universal bondage. And the happiness of liberation from these negativities is also universal. Whether one is a Hindu or a Muslim, Jain, Buddhist, Christian or Jew, Sikh or Parsi — it makes no difference. Anyone who is imprisoned in the bondage of defilement is bound to suffer. And anyone who comes out of this bondage starts to enjoy peace and harmony.

The first day of the new year has brought you this wonderful technique of ancient India, the technique discovered by the enlightened ones. The technique is so scientific, so result-oriented, so non-sectarian that it brings you the message of liberation, the message of peace and harmony. May all of you participating in this camp work diligently, patiently and persistently to come out of your bondages, all your miseries. May a new era start in your lives. May *dharma* bring you full liberation. May you all enjoy real peace, real harmony.

After having observed the tremendous goodwill generated by the Vipassana programme, none other than the distinguished M. L. Mehta and a propelling force behind the meditation, decided to spread the method of introspection. Mehta along with Ram Singh suggested that we hold a meeting of Inspectors-General

(Prisons) at the national level so that all of them could understand and appreciate the benefits of the Vipassana programme. Accordingly, such a meeting was held on January 24, 1994, at the Tihar Jail conference hall. The participants were the IG (Prisons) of Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. These high-level police officials were given an audiovisual presentation to enable them to understand Vipassana. The accompanying commentary traced the origins of Vipassana and described it in detail as well as its beneficial results. After that, the IG (Prisons) were taken around the jail. They got an opportunity to interact with those inmates who had undergone the Vipassana course during an open house session. This was in the presence of others. All these exercises increased keenness among other inmates to learn Vipassana. This became increasingly evident with each passing day. We, on our part, also wanted the maximum number of inmates to benefit, the sooner the better. We were aware that the captivity period provided the best time when we could help them focus on 'reconstruction'. Hesitatingly, I queried Ram Singh whether it would be possible to conduct the Vipassana course for a large number of inmates, say, around 1,000, in one go? He said, "Why not?" In this context, Ram Singh recalled a prediction made by Goenkaji's Burmese guru, Sayagyi U Ba Khin (some time in 1969-70) that "one day Goenka will collectively teach this course to over 1,000 people" (an astonishingly high number), never conducted so far. This prediction soon became a reality within the Tihar Jail in The logistical and security aspects of conducting the Vipassana course on such a massive scale necessitated a careful organisation and a precise coordination of a series of diverse activities. Goenkaji and his wife along with a large team of dedicated teachers (to assist them) as well as P. R. Meena, Superintendent and Sunil Gupta, Deputy Superintendent set about performing the formidable task paying meticulous attention to every minute detail.

First of all, we had to select a suitable site which could  
April 1994.

accommodate 1,000 individuals without being packed in and without posing security threats. I had observed that in Prison No 4, two new buildings were nearing completion which consisted of several wards to house prisoners within a compact area. We chose this area as the venue for the proposed course. The PWD engineer in charge, I. C. Kalra, contrary to the norms set by his predecessors, aimed at speeding up the work of the construction of these two buildings. In his endeavour, he was ably and willingly assisted by those inmates who possessed the requisite expertise in this field. In view of the cooperative spirit permeating the entire prison environment, other less skilled inmates did not lag behind. They dug ditches for drainage purposes, laid out a network of pipes for carrying water, cleared out the large space earmarked for the Vipassana course, i.e., they got rid of the bushes, debris and other extraneous matter and levelled the area. They erected a very huge multicolour *shamiana*, an open air tent. Seating arrangements had to be made and other facilities provided for 1,000 individuals within the *shamiana*, without causing any discomfort. Rugs were spread out efficiently, cushions were set out neatly, and fans and lights were                      Eventually, on April 4, 1994, when we felt that all was ready, we summoned 1,003 male inmates who had volunteered to assemble within the *shamiana* to receive the initial instruction from Goenkaji. After that, 13 male assistant teachers, assigned 75-80 students each, helped in conducting the course. Their efforts were supplemented by a handful of trained workers from outside and about 60 'old student prisoners'. The first Vipassana course for female prisoners was initiated simultaneously in Prison No 1, which was conducted by two female (assistant) teachers and attended by 49 inmates.

A little background information about the inmates would not be out of place here. Most of the 1,000 plus inmates who undertook this Vipassana course were under trials (in fact around 90 per cent of Tihar's inmates are under trials) whose range of crimes spanned robbery, murder, rape, terrorist acts to drug trafficking. They belonged to diverse religions — Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism,

fixed competently.

Buddhism and Christianity, and possessed diverse antecedents, which were not particularly edifying. And more than one-third of them were illiterate. Twenty foreign male inmates and eight female inmates also participated in the Vipassana programme. These individuals hailed from different countries including Afghanistan, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and United Kingdom.

In the early hours of the day during one of the courses, a sudden storm, unusual for that time of the year, marked by a powerful gale and a heavy downpour, resulted in the top and sides of the *shamiana* collapsing, as the supporting poles had been dislodged. All the rugs and the cushions were drenched. The stupendous efforts that went into 'setting the stage' were washed out. An emergency meeting of all the teachers and some of the senior staff members was held at 3.30am with the express purpose of devising ways and means to save the Vipassana course from a total disaster. Meanwhile, the storm continued to unleash its fury, causing more damage.

Goenkaji and his wife surveyed the scene, which looked as if a rampaging mob had ransacked the place. Both of them, however, maintained their equanimity and they advised to continue the programme saying that everything would soon be all right. Their calm handling of the situation inspired a new sense of optimism in everyone. The Jail Superintendent, P. R. Meena, instructed that an emergency public address system be set up, which could reach the barracks where all the teachers and inmates were assembled in order to carry on the course, under proper cover. The public address system transmitted the guru's instructions to these barracks, together with the soothing strains of music succeeded in restoring a modicum of order and normalcy. The inmates, under the guidance of their teachers, began to concentrate on their meditation. After breakfast, the weather began to clear, and a massive salvage operation was launched. A large phalanx of inmates, including

those not attending the Vipassana course, began the daunting task of restoring the devastated site. They carried more than 1,000 cushions outside the tent into the sun and put them to dry; sewed together numerous

sections of torn material; reinstalled electric wires as well as the lights and the fans; mopped up areas with standing water; and cleared out the broken glass pieces (from the light bulbs). All these activities were performed at a record speed and in record time. By 7 pm the *shamiana* was again ready. Goenkaji's discourse was the first item on the agenda, and it was delivered as scheduled.

As each day of the ten-day course passed by, the vibrations of the transformation process were all-pervading. Within these high walls there was a sense of liberation. There was discipline without fear; there was devotion without coercion. On the last day, it became evident to one and all that something unbelievable had been accomplished. Over 1,000 inmates had successfully completed a Vipassana course. Goenkaji declared that this was the largest course he had ever conducted in almost 25 years of teaching Vipassana. Every evening, Goenkaji delivered discourses in Hindi and also answered questions raised by the students. The session usually lasted for 30 to 45 minutes. During the course, he was questioned by a journalist as to why Vipassana was good for prisoners. His response was all-encompassing:

Vipassana is good for everyone! We are all prisoners of the negative habit patterns of our own minds. The practice of Vipassana liberates us from this bondage... Vipassana is a tool which can help all suffering people: those who are behind bars, separated from their families, and those who are not. What you see in Tihar is a message of hope which will benefit the whole world.

Goenkaji's discourses were not confined to Tihar, they were videotaped and telecast for wide dissemination by Zee TV, a pan-Asian television channel and other TV channels. A documentary, *Doing Time Doing Vipassana*, produced by Karuna Films, came as a by-product. Recently this film won the Golden Spire Award at San Francisco International Film Festival 1998 and the Finalist Award at the New York Festival. It has also been screened on PBS channel in the United States and Channel Eight of Israel.

The successful completion of the Vipassana course on such a

mammoth scale paved the way for the establishment of the first permanent centre within Tihar for the practice of this technique. After the final session of meditation on April 15, the congregation comprising around 1,100 persons including the inmates, the jail staff and some guests witnessed the momentous inauguration of the new centre in Prison No 4, which Goenkaji named Dhamma Tihar. On this occasion, the erudite Gururji chanted this *shloka* (hymn):

*Is ashram ke jitane prani  
Sabake dukhade dur ho.  
Shuddha dharma sabake mana jage  
Antara nirmala hoye re  
Antara sheetal hoye re.  
( All the beings of this ashram  
May their misery be eradicated.  
May pure Dharma arise in the minds of all  
Making them pure from deep within  
Making them serene from deep within.)*

A marble plaque commemorating the successful completion of the ten-day course and also the inauguration of the new centre was unveiled by Guru Goenkaji on April 15, 1994.

Within a span of three weeks, the new centre began to conduct two ten-day courses per month for students from all the four prisons. The Tihar population constituted a mix of those inmates who had gone through the Vipassana course, those who had only heard the discourses and those newcomers who had no idea about the existence of the programme. Consequently, we relocated inmates who had gone through the course to enable continuance of joint sittings in meditation. Each Prison Superintendent began earmarking separate barracks for Vipassana inmates and allotting adequate open space near those barracks as *tapasthalis* (places for meditation or concentration). All these measures proved to be crucial in enhancing the benefits of the Vipassana course.

We regularly held full-house assemblies, which consisted of all those inmates who had undergone the course. These assemblies were held on the same lines as those of the *mahapanchayats*. We now



established a Vipassana Panchayat to regularly coordinate between the prisoners and teachers and to also act as a 'think tank' on all matters related to this system of meditation.

The collective assemblies were inspired and also invigorated by one-day courses devised by the Vipassana Research Institute (VRI). Collective meditation was carried out under the guidance of teachers from VRI. Videotapes of Goenkaji's discourses were shown as well. The teachers answered the questions raised by the inmates and dispelled doubts or suspicions which some sceptics may have. The Dhamma Tihar gradually developed into an organised residential centre for Vipassana inside the jail. Benefits that accrued from this centre were substantial and long-lasting. However, its activities needed to be vigilantly monitored and properly supervised. Meanwhile, the spectacular impact of Vipassana spread beyond Tihar and New Delhi, thanks to extensive and positive media coverage. This impact was so powerful that it inspired the Home Ministry officials to send out a circular to the concerned authorities in all the States and Union Territories of India to adopt Vipassana as a reform measure in all the prisons under their jurisdiction. Thus, these seeds of Vipassana were spread far and wide.

To keep up the momentum of the Vipassana drive, the VRI formulated and distributed concise but informative pamphlets highlighting the rules and codes of conduct to be observed while on the programme. Such rules and codes took into account the practical difficulties faced by the inmates while performing Vipassana (usually under space restrictions) as revealed by the huge fund of experience of the teachers, accumulated not only from Tihar but also from other places, such as Jaipur and Baroda Jails.

Nearer home, a Jail Superintendent, Tarsem Kumar, wanted to record such unheard of events for posterity. He opted for the literary course and became an author. He wrote a book detailing his experiences during the metamorphosis stage in Tihar, with due emphasis on the remarkable catalytic effect of Vipassana. He himself attended a full-time course on the meditation programme at Jaipur,

nurtured.

and attained a high degree of proficiency. Consequently, he became an ideal representative of Tihar at various seminars and conferences related to prison reforms. His book, *Freedom Behind Bars*, was released within the jail premises by T. N. Seshan, the then Chief Election Commissioner of India, before a huge congregation of the inmates. I presented a copy of this book at the National Prayer Breakfast Meeting at White House, Washington, in February 1995, when I was invited by the Congressional Executive Committee. I firmly believe that the West could benefit from the Vipassana meditation programme for devising procedures in criminal correction and reform, as a letter from an inmate (carried on pages 311-314) is so revealing.

A team of eminent professionals and researchers like, Dr Kishore Chandramani, Dr N. N. Wig and Dr Uday Parekh, was constituted by VRI to empirically study the effects of Vipassana on the mental health of those who had undergone the course. The study brought into focus several significant facts; an important excerpt from this study is worth citing:

While on the one hand, the emotional climate of a prison can prove to be destructive to most goals of rehabilitation, it can also provide a safe structure that contains self-constructive feelings and impulses, and can offer opportunities for individual growth and development. Certain aspects of the prison milieu can be utilised creatively by the correctional system. In this regard, Vipassana promises to offer an experience very different from that experienced by most inmates who have suffered from actual or imagined neglect and abandonment, and lack of consistent caring from responsive people in their environment. The emphasis, in Vipassana system of meditation, on empathic understanding, a caring, non-retaliatory but firm approach; and unconditioned positive regard for each individual can reduce anxieties and foster psychological growth and self-actualisation. Vipassana can help in shifting the focus of inmates from desire for a discharge, transfer or parole to increasing self-awareness and improved functioning within the prison walls. The existential position of Vipassana, i.e., the inevitability of loss and coming to terms with it and viewing others as suffering individuals struggling to reach their goals —helps inculcate feelings of compassion, sympathetic joy, friendliness, etc. The recent studies assessing the psychological effects of Vipassana

To,

Dr. Kiran BEB

P.A. (P)

N. Delhi.

① ✓

June 17 1994

(46)

Respected: "M"

Among many good things which  
has happened with Tihar, since you  
have stepped in, the best so far is  
"Vipassana". I have passed my 10  
days in Ashram No. 4 recently and  
came out with a very positive  
feeling. My idea to take my  
jail sentence as Tapasya was  
fulfilled to a great extent and  
was very pleased to know that  
even you have a idea to give  
a Tapobhumi ~~new~~ character to  
Tihar and not only "Ashrami trust".  
If all goes well, that's a real  
transformation, real revolution  
which would ever happened. I  
have one more thing for which I  
am ~~going~~ grateful to you but this  
I can do only when I am out.



(2)

Coming to mundane problems  
mama, I have a proposal. You  
please examine me ~~the~~ being  
police officer, lawyer, judge all  
in one. If you find that I  
am culprit, I am wrong, do  
as you wish. But if you  
find that I have not done  
wrong, then please help me  
by all means all the way. I  
have only two strong points  
One, that I am convinced I  
have not done wrong. Morally,  
spiritually or substantially I  
am innocent. Legally and  
technically evidences may be  
against me. It is simply like -  
~~this~~ - if I have been working  
for you and doing many  
thing ~~for~~ at your instance, with  
your approval. Tomorrow you  
turn against me and use  
those very things which I have  
done in good faith for you, selectively.



against some <sup>3.</sup> attributing motive.  
As there was never <sup>any</sup> intention to  
do anything wrong to get undue  
advantage, I consider myself victim  
and not culprit. Second strong  
point, I consider, is your support.  
My fault, conceding too much in trust.  
I am very thankful for the  
kind considerations you have  
extended to me, but I want  
little more involved support.  
My father is very humble simple  
person and untouched by all  
cunningness/cleverness which may  
be necessary to deal with this  
world. I have advised him to  
see you so you can see yourself.  
He was being misled by some  
lawyer that Dr. Wadsworth was  
feeling slightly uncomfortable. I  
reaffirmed my faith in Dr. Wadsworth  
and no one else, to avoid that  
misgiving.

Moana, had I not been the  
eldest son, I would have cared  
not for anything and could have  
fought everything. My weakness is  
this fact. I am involved in  
first-generation effect is give upward





mobility to family, and facing  
the worst crisis, family background,  
financial position of family, all  
such ~~etc~~ ground are poor for me.

Somehow things have not yet  
come to a better turning point.  
~~My~~ I consider you as my mother  
not verbally only, nor as an extra  
vagant emotion to get some  
help, but a genuine feeling -  
a genuine necessity arising out  
of genuine conditions.

Mama, please step step  
in my life, as you have  
stepped in Tihar and put  
things right with similar  
involvement and enthusiasm.  
I suffer from communication  
gap, particularly of time, please  
monitor <sup>my case</sup> yourself by any means  
and all means, please do a  
Karam Bedi to me and my life,

Yours S

Nityendra Kumar Jh  
Ashram No 2, Ward-8/1

meditation carried out in Tihar Jail in November 1993, and January 1994, have revealed statistically, a significant reduction in anxiety, depression, hostility and feelings of helplessness coupled with enhanced wellbeing and hope for future.

This study reinforced earlier studies conducted after Vipassana courses in the prisons of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Their findings were in tandem with the narration of experiences of individual inmates (both Indian and foreign) after the courses. Here are a few verbatim quotes:

I am very thankful to the jail administration for starting this unique course. After the meditation, I have experienced truth.

(((((TTTTT Timothy

Asemoti)

It was quite an aura. I took part along with other inmates in the ten-day course. The sensitivity flowing from Guruji was marvellous. I regret it was so short, i.e., merely 10 days of the course. In other words, the course period should be increased to at least 15 or 20 days. Anyhow, the Vipassana course is a great experience for me.

(((((TTTTT Oooooo

yyyyy M. Anslem)

It is really a marvellous experience and the way the course was conducted was really impressive.

(N. Allinson)

Before starting the course, some kind of prior knowledge of Vipassana should be given to the participants so that they can prepare for this in advance.

(((((Jowhar

Babe

Every participant should strictly obey the advice of Guruji. I feel that tensions and sorrows are completely eradicated through this course. Now I feel very peaceful.

(Ladoo

Dibey)y)

Vipassana is an art as to how to control anger and proceed towards a peaceful life.

(Sunil Rat

I find no words to express my feelings. I feel so light as if I am flying in the sky. Specially, I am thankful to the organisers of the Vipassana

(P ince hra)

Previously, I was a bad person as I have given a lot of pain to others. But, this time (after undergoing Vipassana), I feel that everybody should help others and not hurt others' feelings.

(Salman

Hussain)

I feel great sensations through this course and now I can control my anger in a better way and I feel very peaceful.

*(Ram Babu)*

I have gained experience through this course and now am sure that by doing this, at a later stage everybody will know himself better.

*(Sudharkar*

*Singh)*

Before this course, I was so disturbed in life. Now I feel I can control myself.

*(Pira Swami)*

Before joining this course, I was disturbed with my family problems and spent sleepless nights. Now I feel so light and happy.

*(Sukhdev*

*Singh)*

I have committed many mistakes before coming to jail. Now I am realising those mistakes and I swear that I will not do any wrong thing in life.

*(Santosh*

*Kumar)*

This type of course is very essential for everybody and all should do this course. Through this we can feel the sensations passing through the

*(Preen Chhabra)*

I will never do any wrong. This was a great opportunity.

*(Lakhan Lal)*

Before this, I had so much of anger and everything I used to think was to harm others [sic]. But now, I am feeling very peaceful and can lead a good life.

*(Suresh Singh)*

I am not satisfied with the first session of meditation. I want to join another meditation course.

*(Sudhir*

*Sharma)*

I would like to thank the worthy IG (P) for this kind act. I have gained a lot from this course and I am doing it regularly.

*(Hussain Khalaq)*

The meditation course has taught me how to live life in a peaceful manner and it has increased my love for others.

*(Ntje Djakar idja)*

This course leads to a disciplined life. However, it is very difficult to sit in the course for a long stretch.

*(Stefano Mancini)*

...through which I came to know as to how to be more nice to others, without expecting anything in return from them.

*(Jackson*

*Danlogun)*

This course is really a technique how to rehabilitate ourselves. And when I go back to my country, I will encourage my countrymen to go for this course.

*(Olatunji Dadeowd)*

This wisdom and knowledge of Vipassana has no comparison. It is a way to intensify the instant observation of natural truth in ourselves.

*(((Jacob Lauson))*

The Vipassana effect was phenomenal. Everyone benefited. The course cleansed souls as it were and imparted nobility and magnanimity. Within a span of a few months, Vipassana had become an integral part of Tihar Ashram. When I had joined in May 1993, we had set for ourselves the goal of transforming the jail into an ashram — an institution which enables 'introspection' by all its inhabitants, including the managers. It reinforced my personal conviction that certain duties are not mere jobs, but a whole mission by themselves, for they construct the future.



## *Women at the Forefront*

*Underneath the Peepal  
We shared it all in rhyme  
Our sorrows, hurt and laughter  
Bitterness and... time...*

*A woman*

*inmate* **D**

Despite all the sordid, and sometimes hair-raising details, given in chapter nine on the plight of women inmates in Tihar, the situation was not hopeless; it could be rectified. The most important requirement was a firm commitment on the part of the authorities that they would change the conditions. The process of reform began with a focus on identifying latent talent in diverse areas among the women inmates.

The women housed in Tihar Jail were not entirely bereft of creative expression. However, a tranquil and congenial ambience had to be created before such an expression could manifest itself. In fact, the women inmates surged ahead of their male counterparts in all areas in reaping the benefits of the reform process. The main reason for this could be that the number of women in jail, about 250-300, was much smaller compared to the number of the male inmates.

Also, the women constituted an almost homogeneous lot and were allotted different dormitories and cells within the same ward. However, when they were not confined in lockup, all of them flocked together. Such a situation facilitated communication with them as a group, conveying information about our forthcoming plans and programmes for their welfare and empowerment.

Once we had set in motion the process of correction and reform (for both men and women inmates), we could not afford to slacken our efforts or let the momentum be slowed down. We had to evolve specific strategies to tackle those problems which were peculiar to women prisoners. Here again, we called upon the outside community for help, which came in abundant measure. Consequently, we initiated a wide spectrum of corrective reforms including yoga therapy, collective prayer and meditation (Vipassana), a crash cleanliness and hygiene drive, a literacy programme, a forum for the expression of creative talent, e.g., in literature, poetry, music, theatre and the visual arts, such as painting, as well as weaving, knitting and textile printing.

If we wanted the women inmates to take part in one of the above programmes with total dedication and commitment, we had to first ensure that the children who were housed along with their mothers in the jail were properly taken care of and did not weigh heavily on women's minds leading to distraction and loss of concentration. In this regard, a woman's organisation, Mahila Pratiraksha Mandal (MPM), a forum for the protection of women, came to our rescue. It volunteered to start a creche for the children of women inmates apart from setting up a vocational training and counselling centre for them. A philanthropist, Lalla, who loved children, donated a large collection of soft toys and educative games for the creche, which were regarded as a boon by the inmates. Life for the little angels improved qualitatively and their faces beamed with joy and excitement! The MPM took under its protective wing the



60-odd small children and opened a nursery school within the women's ward. Superintendent K. R. Kishore motivated the skilled masons and labourers among the male inmates to construct a shed for

carrying out various programmes aimed at the upliftment of women and their children. For all these programmes, financial help was provided by Tani Bhargava (Ishan Charitable Trust) and Surinder Saini, Chairperson, Delhi Social Welfare Board. *The Indian Express* carried this report on October 24, 1994, titled *Better Days Ahead for Convicts' Kids Born inside Tihar*:

Four-year-old cherubic Chandni is not an offender, she still lives the life of a 'convict'. Reason: she was born in the women's cell of Tihar Jail. There are eight such little ones who share her fate, and are thus 'convicted' by birth.

Besides them, there are 52 more small children who have been incarcerated along with their mothers as many are too small to be deprived of motherly love and, some of them have nobody back home to look after them.

But for the radically changed jail management ever since Magsaysay award-winner, Kiran Bedi, has taken over, a few voluntary organisations have chipped in to take care of these children and their mothers. Sushum Lata, a counsellor of Mahila Pratiraksha Mandal, which runs a creche there, said that the only animal these children had seen in the jail was a cat. And when they were taken to the zoo, she pointed out, they ran after a caged bear shouting "Oh, such a big cat!"

In the last one year these children have been exposed to the 'outside' world several times. They have now learnt to sing songs, poems and recognise animals and vegetables. When a visitor steps into their creche they immediately greet her — '*Namaste aunty*' (male visitors are usually not allowed inside).

Says Chandni's mother, Shabnam, who has been given life imprisonment in a murder case, "I am very happy for Chandni who is fortunate enough to get so good an upbringing."

But these children are not kept in Tihar for more than five years. As soon as they become eligible for formal education they are sent to Delhi Government-run 'Homes'. Assistant Superintendent Meena Lucker said that they have so far sent 16 children to the Kirti Nagar-based 'Home'. What about those who were not fortunate enough to join their mothers in the jail and have nobody to look after them? Tears rolling down her cheeks, Mithilesh Devi who has been an undertrial in a murder case for four years, said, "*Mere do bachche hain, unko dekhane wala koi nahin hai, baap to kabhi ka mar gaya*" (I have two children who have nobody to look after them, their father died long back).

Ms Lucker said that Mithilesh Devi's children — Ashok Kumar and Manoj Kumar — were living in deep misery. Often they spend their nights without food. On top of it, when they went to their neighbours for help they were taunted as 'murderer's children'.

In contrast to Indian women prisoners, foreign nationals caught in drug cases have a different sort of problem. Says Margo from Holland who has been in Tihar for the last six years, "I have five children; two of them are married and the rest being taken care of by the elders." Her only problem is the delay in trials.

The nursery school soon began to teem with delightful activity. We could identify the pitter-patter of small feet; we could hear innocent lisping voices singing songs, jingles and rhymes; and we could envision the joyous atmosphere within the school, which really warmed the cockles of our hearts. A separate kitchen was set up for the kids, who were provided a special diet which was nutritious, very vital during their growing years. For the first time probably in the history of Tihar, children were being looked after as children. With the passage of time, they were given uniforms and supplied with the necessary stationery, such as slates, chalk pieces, crayons, copybooks, pencils and erasers.

In order to expand the children's horizons and to simultaneously reduce their overwhelming sense of claustrophobia, the little ones were taken out on excursions. Private buses were hired to carry them to different destinations. They visited gardens, museums, temples, mosques, the zoo and also outside schools so that they could befriend the children studying there and learn from the latter's regimen and experience. The rewards of such outings proved invaluable and greatly helped in transforming the life patterns of these children. From the depths of despair and gloom, they now went to seek the heights of hope and light. They gave up fighting among themselves and stopped tormenting the harassed prison staff because their energies and concentration were now focused elsewhere — on creative, constructive and beneficial activities. We also paid due attention to the medicare of the children of women inmates. Two eminent paediatricians, Dr Suri and Dr Arora, volunteered their services. They offered to bring along their medical

kit when they visited Tihar. They handed out health cards for all children which were to be updated regularly. They also provided the requisite medicines anti-polio vaccines, DPT and other preventive vaccines to the children. The paediatricians also instructed the mothers on fundamental health matters emphasising the vital need for maintaining hygiene at all times. They underlined the importance of bathing the children regularly and keeping their hair oiled and well groomed and their nails clean. Also, they stressed the fact that the children needed to wear clean clothes and display an overall tidy appearance. These prerequisites were mandatory in case the children had to be sent to outside schools. The doctors also explained to the mothers how to administer basic first aid and what to do in case of emergencies. Here is a first-hand account by Dr S. K. Arora:

When I received the offer of an honorary Senior Paediatric Consultant, I accepted it.

After my first visit I immediately realised that it was a great challenge, unlike everything else I had done in life. Here was a group of emotionally disturbed group of mothers and children, accused of serious crimes, away from members of family and normal environment. My plan of action would not have succeeded had it not been for Mrs Bedi.

Priority  
environment, which we did to the best of our capacity and stamina. The guilt, sorrow, anger, depression, aggressiveness, despondency, Infrastructure  
toffees and sweets were purchased. For monitoring growth special paediatric cards were printed.

Immunisation  
Academy of Paediatrics was followed.

Drugs  
purchased for better compliance, taste and palatability.

Creche and Play Activities  
*khichri, halwa, porridge, fruits, eggs, milk, kheer* were regularly given to meet adequate calorie requirements. It was seen that food was soft, tasty and attractively served. Balanced proteins, fat, carbohydrate levels were provided to promote positive growth. A fridge was also purchased for food. *Jhoolas* (swings) were installed for playing activity.

Hygiene and clothing  
hand-washing and it was seen that the children remained very clean  
and  
SSSSSurvey of disease prevalence  
malnutrition, anaemia, boils, conjunctivitis, worm infestation,  
diarrhoea,

Referrals  
managed, immediate referrals were made to Deen Dayal Hospital.  
NNon-compliance  
prescribed drugs to the children, so special supervisory staff was  
given the

Child battering  
would violently beat the children, hit and injure them. In such  
casescounselling was done to control the damage as far as humanly  
possible. Clean water supply  
water.

Meeting  
possible was done for emotional satisfaction of everybody

Education  
depending upon their age. The curriculum was so designed that  
studybecame play and play became study.

It was sad when I stopped going there.

DDr S. K. Aror  
MD (Paediatrics)  
Senior Consultant Paediatrics

With the children properly and regularly cared for, the  
motherscould now be encouraged and motivated to go in for  
other activities.The most important objective was to make all  
the women literate.With this objective in mind, we inducted  
the totally illiterate into non-formal literacy classes. Those  
women who had acquired someamount of education were  
classified according to their levels of literacy and were sent to  
appropriate classes. Two inmates, namely, Poonam and  
Shakira, worked as teachers and two more were called in from  
outside to reinforce their efforts.

The women's literacy mission was the cynosure of almost  
alleyes. The prison authorities ensured a regular and adequate  
supply of study and work material. They also made sure that  
the environment was kept clean and hygienic and encouraged  
the inmates to study

seriously without being distracted. The MPM teachers conducted tutorial classes to enable their students to pursue abridged courses. Such courses would make the students eligible for appearing in examinations at various levels, class five or matriculation. The courses covered a fairly wide range of subjects including basic mathematics, science, literature, grammar and social studies. The medium of instruction was Hindi.

Alongside the teaching activities, we also initiated a host of other practical and productive activities, like typing, tailoring and embroidery, in which many women developed a high degree of proficiency. Such proficiency instilled the much-needed self-confidence in them. As time rolled by, the MPM members managed to procure job work for the skilled women inmates, which further boosted their self-confidence. They were now learning and earning simultaneously. *The Indian Express* carried a news item on November 30, 1994, carrying a picture with a caption, *Tihar women begin life anew:*

The children of the women convicts of Tihar can now go for outings and picnics while their mothers are given vocational training to lead a more useful and productive life — courtesy Nai Disha (New Direction), a project sponsored by the Delhi Social Welfare Advisory Board and run with the help of a non-governmental organisation, the Mahila Pratiraksha Mandal. A function was held in Tihar Jail on Tuesday to mark the first anniversary of the project.

Another activity which helped the women inmates to concentrate and take their minds off anxieties, tensions and sorrows, but also enabled them to eke out a livelihood emerged in the form of spinning. The Jail Superintendent provided five *charkhas*, i.e., spinning wheels. A lady by the name of Indu who taught this skill to the inmates contributed one *charkha* herself. The *charkha* had been popularised by Mahatma Gandhi, who made it the focal point of his daily concentration and meditation all through his life. The women were provided with rolls of raw cotton which they spun into cloth, which was then sold outside the jail. They also sang devotional songs

to the rhythm of the *charkha*. This, in brief, was the essence of the The MPM did not confine its 'healing touch' to thoseunfortunate beings lodged within the prison walls. These volunteersalso visited the relatives of the women inmates. During such visits,they acted as a link between the inmates and the relatives and helpedin restoring broken ties, by persuading these relatives to stand surety.MPM could then attempt to secure their release as soon as possible,keeping in view the languorous pace at which the wheels of justicemoved in India. They did not stop there. This organisation broughtin women lawyers to deal with certain difficult and complex casesbecause mere counselling was not enough. The women lawyershandled their briefs, so to say, with commendable zeal andenthusiasm and were held in great respect.

The soothing effect of soft music was another significant factorwhich led to a transformation in the mindset of the once-criminallyinclined women inmates. The women could hear music in one formor the other on an almost daily basis which helped calm frayednerves. A well known musician, Vasanti Chaudhary, who wasteaching in a Government school, volunteered to sing *bhajans*(devotional songs) for the Tihar inmates and educate the musicallyinclined ones on the finer points of classical music. She organisedchorus singing which helped release repressed emotions.

K. R. Kishore, Jail Superintendent, arranged for a few musicalinstruments to be brought in. He also called upon the 'electrician'inmates to set up an audio system inside their ward. Very soon, theentire women's ward began to reverberate with the melodious andtranquil strains of therapeutic music. And *Sun* carried this report,*Tihar Jail: The Inside Story*, on July 3, 1993:

'spinning wheel

In the 1950s, V. Shantaram created history when he made a film, *DoAankhen Baarah Haath*. The film fetched many awards in national and international film festivals. Based on jail reforms, the film revolved around a jailor (Shantaram) who reformed hardcore criminals and engaged them in constructive works.



Twenty years later, Kiran Bedi, the formidable, high-profile lady cop, is doing exactly the same thing. But now it's for real.

Since she became the Inspector General, Prisons, Delhi, two months ago, Tihar Jail, the biggest prison in the whole of Asia housing more than 8,000 prisoners, is turned into a virtual ashram.

The efforts of Vasanti Chaudhury were supplemented by the renowned social organisation, The Family, whose noble contributions in diverse spheres have been mentioned in various other contexts as well. The philanthropic members of The Family volunteered to teach music on a regular basis to all those inmates who were interested. They also conducted theatre programmes within the women's ward with the prime objective of providing value-based entertainment as well as education. Besides, The Family brought in some novel features which, apart from engineering a cheerful atmosphere marked by gaiety, created an ambience conducive to gradual reform and subtle changes in an inmate's thought processes and subsequent actions. It conducted workshops whose basic themes were 'positive communication', 'child care', 'personal hygiene' and 'creative activities'. The novel aspect was that the persons conducting these workshops employed puppets, picture postcards and action songs for achieving the maximum impact.

The remarkably dynamic, Saroj Vashisht, the active 'young' storyteller of 65 plus, was here too! She donated a set of about 90 religious books, which we stocked in the reading room for women inmates, who referred to them quite frequently. An interesting sidelight was that this reading room was set up in the cell which got vacated after the release of the famous Bandit Queen, Phoolan Devi, who later became a member of the Indian Parliament. She learnt to write her name in Tihar. In fact, had she not done so, she would have had to append her thumb impression on the register as a newly elected parliamentarian.

The reading room soon attained the stature of a full-fledged library, as a large cluster of writers and publishers decided to supply books on a regular basis. A woman inmate who was a bibliophile and also possessed basic cataloguing skills was put in charge of the library.

The women's section of Tihar formed happy hunting ground for an assortment of researchers, mainly sociologists, filmmakers, lawyers, and other visitors. Each had his or her own reason for coming there. The very fact that these individuals came to Tihar and later projected their views and impressions through articles, books or films, generated greater support for the women inmates and brought in more contributions from the community outside apart from making them understand the prisoners' trials and tribulations. Let me now cite a few specific examples.

Hon'ble Ms Fatima Biwi, a member of the National Human Rights Commission and a former Judge of the Supreme Court of India, visited Tihar. Her indicting report of languishing trials galvanised the courts into releasing those women. A well-known author on the subject of 'commercial sex', Promila Kapur, conducted case studies of women inmates accused of prostitution. Her findings and pragmatic proposals for rehabilitation of her target group brought about positive results.

A women's forum of advocates known as Sakshi (female companion), offered its services in identifying and assisting women inmates who needed to be extricated from the legal maze. These women lawyers analysed each and every case that came their way and provided the requisite follow-up action. The Delhi School of Social Work sent an eager group of students to Tihar to conduct research through a process of interaction with the women inmates. These students also lent their support to the welfare and upliftment of women inmates as they worked along with them in various projects.

Another organisation, Marg, held a workshop for women inmates which can be best described as a 'legal literacy workshop'. The Marg legal specialists made the members of their audience aware of their legal rights. They also spoke on other related subjects, such as legal petitioning, visiting rights for relatives and friends and trial procedures. Further, they enlightened the women on the laws pertaining to highly relevant subjects, such as marriage, divorce, adoption, dowry and child marriage. The information and data

provided by Marg were truly substantial and went a long way in redressing the grievances of women inmates and resolving their problems.

With the introduction of the women's *panchayat* system, the female inmates became self-governing as well. The Legal Panchayat for Women worked in coordination with the visiting lawyers and counsellors. The requisite legal petitions for those inmates who did not possess the education or skills to write them were prepared by their more accomplished companions or by the foreign inmates. One day in November 1993, a 63-year-old black American Buddhist nun, a saintly woman called Sister Max Mathews, came to visit the women inmates of Tihar, and became an initiator and propeller of economic empowerment of women inmates. A former teacher, fashion designer and art collector who has lived in Europe, Nepal and India, she has devoted a part of her life to helping Tibetan refugees earn a living by marketing their handicraft and soliciting advice on designing.

At Tihar, Sister Max used her creative energy, marketing acumen and unwavering determination to launch self-financing programmes that enabled many women inmates — most of whom were under trials — to become economically independent for the very first time. Since her arrival, almost half of the jail's 300-odd women prisoners were trained in knitting, painting, embroidery and other artistic projects which were marketed outside Tihar. At least 90 of these women were able to hold bank accounts.

Through Sister Max, we attracted the Danish Embassy support for a creche for about 60 young children who lived with their mothers inside the jail, creating a stimulating and happy environment compared to their miserable conditions in the past. Her innovative work, literacy, education and other rehabilitation programmes gave them additional tools to readjust to society when released, and hold their own ground, to some extent.

Here are first-hand accounts of two admirable women who made the difference; American Buddhist nun, Sister Max Mathews and Danish Social worker, Margrete Bentholt. On my personal

request, they spoke to a freelance journalist, Lisa Vanhan. Here they describe the reforms in full detail and capture the excitement that went with it:

SSSSSister Maxs Narratio

I first saw Tihar in November 1993. I was working with Tibetans for the export of handicraft at the time. A Mumbai based artisan-exporter friend, Kirit Dave, mentioned that he and his father had an exciting prospect for me. Kirit's mother is an artisan and works with a people's cooperative in the desert. His father was Mr K. C. Shroff of Excel, Mumbai, whom I didn't really know. Mr Shroff picked me up one morning at 9 am and asked me to bring some of my Tibetan pieces along. I had no idea what I was in for.

When I first saw the prison that day, I thought, "What is this place?" It looked more like an Indian village than a jail. It was beautiful, with lots of bushes and trees. Its buildings were all neatly painted white, and there were barracks arranged in U-shape around a big open courtyard. There were bars on the windows, but I didn't see any locks — nothing that would indicate at a glance that it was a prison. There was no feeling of threat or fear. The atmosphere was not charged. I was surprised.

Once inside the prison gates we walked through a large, grassy open quadrangle. As we entered a second courtyard, which I learned later was the women's prison area, I heard women laughing. There was a woman standing on a raised platform entertaining a group of women and children who were all sitting on the ground in rows. She was wearing a salwar-kameez with a vest, and sneakers. It was Kiran Bedi. She was talking to them as a mother, as she always did. No one wore uniforms, not even the Warders. The women wore ordinary sarees and salwar-kameez.

The lecture was in Hindi, which I don't speak, but suddenly I heard my name. She asked me to hold up my Tibetan things and show them to the group. Then she came over to us, and explained that she had asked all the women who were interested in working to stay back. About 50 or 60 women were curious, including a number of non-Indian faces, and they were being interviewed by someone about their work and skills.

Kiran Bedi's plan of reforms was based on learning and earning through income-generating activities. That was what I'd been brought in for, though I didn't know it at the time. She had asked the Shroffs to setup a training course at the prison to teach the women handicraft skills, but Kirit didn't feel they could manage it from Mumbai and asked me to assist. Since the prison could contribute nothing except the resources of the inmates, Mr Shroff was to finance the project initially.

Though Mr Shroff and Mrs Bedi didn't really spell it out to me untillater, it dawned on me after she finished speaking to the inmates whatthey wanted me to do. I found out that she had told the women I hadcome to offer work and training, so the women could earn and learn. Kiritcalled me later and gave me the details.

When I first spoke to Kiran Bedi she was very open to my ideas. Shedidn't give me any specific charge. Her desire was to rehabilitate thewomen economically, socially, emotionally and in every other way to showthem that they have a resource in themselves and they must use it. That first day, some of the women were apprehensive about theprogrammes I was to start. The foreign women positively descended onme and some even embraced me. They almost never had visitors and forsomeone to express an interest in them was very exciting. They were soeager. Some had tried projects before, giving money to Warders to getthem supplies, but nothing had come of them.

It was fortunate that the ones that came forward had certain skillsand talents. I found a tremendous amount of energy and enthusiasamong them and immediately felt the possibility of achieving somethingthere with their help. I might have hesitated if it wasn't for the response ofthe foreign women, because I wasn't initially sure how I could make asuccess of the project.

But after you meet Kiran Bedi, you can't say 'No.' I immediatelycommitted myself to the project and was ready to begin. Several womenwhom I had helped to get started at Tihar joined me and we workedunder the auspices of Kiran Bedi's Non-Governmental Organisation,Navjyoti — Delhi Police Foundation for Correction, De-addiction andRehabilitation. It works in Delhi slums to detoxify and rehabilitate drugaddicts from Delhi and its neighbouring States, and runs programmes tohelp street, slum and working children.

I hired four foreign inmates as supervisors of production units andpaid them Rs 1,000 a month each. Maria, a Spanish woman organisedwomen to handpaint cloth, stationery, greeting cards and print giftwrapping paper. A large-hearted Nigerian, Gloria, headed the knittingsection, and got work out of women like no one I've ever seen do before.The hand-stitching unit was run by Margo, a Dutch national fromSurinam, and women here hand-rolled and finished silk scarves fromTibet, and crafted on table-runners and linens.

Shakira, an Anglo-Indian woman in Tihar, was my majorcoordinator and one of the most successful women to emerge from theprogrammes. She helped the supervisors and made sure they had thesupplies they needed. She worked with them and I worked with her to

train women, produce the goods and fill our orders. She excelled, and once she was released she went to work at Navjyoti helping others. She has made a new life for herself.

Training was and is very important for us. The majority of women inmates needed training to upgrade useful skills to make the handicraft we set out to produce. Because the prison population is always shifting, trained inmates left suddenly bringing in a regular stream of newcomers needing training; so training services had to be offered continuously. To manage this, I hired Perminder Kaur, a woman from outside Tihar, who was skilled at all crafts and worked directly with the women for two years. I sat down with my supervisors and made a brief outline about how we would proceed with the projects, and gave it to Kiran Bedi. We started right away with her approval.

In the beginning, I couldn't relate to the Indian women inmates, with my limited Hindi. I was at Tihar three to four days a week. I had to spend some time on my own projects to make a living. So the supervisors and Perminder were my links.

This structure became an incredible system of group interaction. We saw a huge change in the women. When I arrived, the women always sat with others of the same caste. Once the work started, they began working together harmoniously, and the fighting and bickering nearly stopped. We started the women knitting squares. Due to Gloria's magnetism we soon had 100 knitters. By Christmas, I started marketing the products to the foreign and diplomatic community in New Delhi at *melas* (fairs) and special sales. The proceeds were used to pay the women for each piece, pay salaries and finance our supplies.

I initiated a system for payday in which all the supervisors and women workers had to keep payment records in their notebooks. We took thumbprints as signatures at first, but to encourage people in the literacy classes, we decided no one was going to get paid if she couldn't sign her own name.

Since our seed money for the projects came from Mr Shroff and later from foreign embassies, we were able to give all the earnings from the things we sold to the women who made them. For most of them it was the first time that they held the money they had earned. It was the first time that most of them had any money of their own at all. It certainly gave them a lot of confidence to make something someone liked enough to pay for. Once I brought two foreign buyers who had placed orders with us to see their work, and it encouraged the women enormously to see that people were actually interested in something they had produced.

We fought to get bank accounts for the earning women. We had to put up quite a fight. We were told by the Indian banks that convicts have no rights and could not have bank accounts. Finally, we got the banks to cooperate, on the plea that 90 per cent of the women were under trials, not convicts.

In the end more than 90 women opened bank accounts. Most of them had never seen a bank book or cheque book before, nor had savings. I never really wanted to know why the women inmates were there. After I had been there for a while and we got to know each other, some of them talked to me about their cases. With the money they earned and saved, a number of them were able to hire lawyers, pay school fees or send money home. There were some stories of women who were released that way.

A few months after I arrived, the women prisoners put up a fashion show for Kiran Bedi on a day she designated as the Women's Day at Tihar. Jessica Lefkowitz, a raven-haired American actress who directed and acted in community theatre in Delhi, provided the music and showed the women how to walk like models on the runway. The stuff they made — modelling vests, sweaters, knitted mufflers — was nothing special. It was raw. But you cannot imagine the joy of the women. In the photograph taken that day, you could see the pride on their faces.

My only training has been in teaching and my experience has been gained from running my own garment business. I ran this project like I taught, using my intuition and instinct about what might work or sell. I am a visionary. I can see things and dream them though I can't do them myself. I'm a catalyst. At Tihar, I got people involved, brought people from outside who had special talents. Somehow I knew what could be done. My role was to get people excited and enthused about the project and market it.

Kiran Bedi made it very clear that the prison had nothing to give but the resources of the inmates. She had trouble getting what she needed to implement her reforms. But she gave all she could in terms of support and enabled us to do our work. I had no transport when I arrived, but she allowed me to have rickshaws to bring supplies in. We had to have tools to do the handwork and she allowed knives, scissors and needles to be brought in. The Supervisors had special lockers and keys and kept track of them all. There was never an incident in my three years when these things had been misused.

There was no hostility in the women inmates' reaction to me. There was genuine openness, based on the fact that I was bringing them money. We developed a relationship over time. There was an exchange of

appreciation and gratitude because I spent so much time there, and brought cakes, birthday cards and all sorts of things. Many of the women in Tihar were deprived of attention, stimulation or gifts for a long time. They wanted to succeed and were excited; Kiran Bedi's enthusiasm added to it. There was no hostility when I was late with payday, and often I couldn't pay on the dot exactly. As long as I came to the prison and brought orders and the work continued, they didn't mind.

The women crocheted sweaters, glass covers and plate covers. They embroidered cushion covers and table-runners, dresses, nightgowns, skirts and quilts. Using sewing machines they produced bathrobes, kimonos, aprons, nightgowns, children's clothes, vests and salwar suits. We also had printing projects, and used potato-printing techniques. The inmates made hand-painted greeting cards, stationery sets and paper bags used to wrap gifts. They also hand-painted cloth for dresses, vests and skirts. From jute they knitted bath mitts, belts, mats and bags. Of all the projects, our knitting project became our biggest earner. I got an order from J. Peterman, a trendy US mail order catalogue, for 5,000 pairs of long socks. These were hand-knitted with four needles using up to 17 colours of Tibetan wool in each pair. We made them in three sizes and four styles, and sewed the J. Peterman label inside. We also knitted Christmas stockings and jute mitts for them. The women received Rs 70 per pair.

Madame Carine du Marche Savas, who was married to the then Dutch Ambassador to India, was instrumental in all we achieved, especially this project. She was a dynamo, a real ball of energy. Her talent was helping NGO's network and she was a great inspiration. She worked with me day and night on the Tihar project and wrote the grant proposal to the Dutch Embassy. The Embassy approved the funding of Rs 1.5 lakh for this project, the first training programme ever in Tihar. It involved training in knitting with four needles to fill the sock orders, tailoring and typing, and it began in April 1994.

For the tailoring section, Carine herself volunteered as an instructor, training the women to make patterns and tailor Western style clothing. She contributed her design expertise from study at the French School for Fashion Design in Paris. She also arranged *melas* among the foreign diplomatic community where goods produced in Tihar were sold. She told foreign women about our work and got them involved.

For the typing segment, we hired a typing instructor and we organised typing classes, which were especially in demand by foreign inmates. Though the classes ended when the teacher left, the women continued to use the typewriter brought in by Carine on their own initiative.



The inmates grew assertive with their economic independence. At one point they refused to make large jute bath mats, which were hard to handle and rough on their fingers, because they wanted more money for making them than we could afford.

I worked to get Carine and others with special skills inside the prison to help the rehabilitation of women. I made a speech to the American Women's Association of New Delhi and took some women from its volunteer committee to the prison to meet Kiran Bedi.

I haven't been able to get any Indian woman to go to Tihar. They were scared to death, given the stigma. Indians are afraid of being associated with the prison and believe if a person goes near it they will be assumed to be guilty by association. They don't want the police to have their names because they think they will be checked out and implicated. Kiran Bedi designated December 1 as a special day at the prison to set up something new. Nanete Hulshoff Pol, another Dutch volunteer, organised craftsmen to come from Delhi's Craft Museum and set up their craft stalls on the prison grounds for the prisoners to see how the handicraft were made. We brought in potters, bangle painters, kite makers, candle and soap makers, and a handful of others to demonstrate. Kiran Bedi told us to use the whole lawn and bussed all the prisoners from the other sections in to see it. She wanted us to set up training courses in all the handicraft.

In December 1995, we introduced the making of quilt and started the production of advent calendars with the help and inspiration of two Americans, Marilyn Edwards and Teresa Olthoff. Some of the men prisoners worked on these projects.

I gave as much work as possible to the men's carpentry workshop. They made the frames and looms for the weaving project and made stools for the kitchen. They wanted to earn and learn too, the desire was there, but the prison had no resources.

One of my two great concerns for the women inmates of Tihar was their children. Only children up to age five were allowed to live in the prison with their mothers.

The solution came from a Danish social worker, Margrete Bentholt. I met her through another Dane who visited the prison just to thank the women for making some Christmas cards that she had bought from one of our early sales. Each card was such a unique work of art that she sent them as gifts to friends around the world, who framed them and hung them on their walls. Margrete had worked in Africa and Scandinavia, and we asked her if she could come in and see if she could put her social work background to use in the women's prison.

It was magic when Margrete and I met. We worked well together and learned from each other. I was interested in the income-generating aspects of our work and she was interested in the social, emotional and legal aspects. Both our interests were one, to help Kiran Bedi implement the reforms.

Margrete wrote a proposal for the children's creche in 1994, and it began in March 1995. Our dream was to set up a halfway house for women to go to after Tihar, a cooperative, where women could find support and get socialised back to the world outside. But it has never become a reality because we couldn't get the money.

Margrete was also instrumental in forming Concerned Women, a group of foreign women who visited the foreign women prisoners and, if possible, speak to them in their own language. This programme to reach out still exists today.

### The Creche

Margrete Bentholt describes her experience (while) setting up the creche at Tihar:

I met Sister Max at Tihar in January 1994, when I first visited the women's prison with a Danish friend. I met several inmates that day, and quickly gained a strong impression of what Sister Max had already accomplished with her programmes there.

A woman came up to me and said: "It's so terrible. I'm going to be released next week. Here I have work and friends. But outside I have nothing. You have to help me." I've been a professional social worker and activist for 20 years. Among other things I worked on a women's extension training programme in Zambia, for the Red Cross in Malawi, and in Denmark I set up crisis centres for women and children.

I've seen so many income-generating projects fail in Africa, that at the beginning I didn't believe in what Sister Max planned to do. But she brought the whole point of human rights into the income-generating projects.

I had no intention of working at Tihar. But after some discussions with a social worker connected to Navjyoti about the needs of women and children, I saw that I could contribute positively.

The 60 children there had no special arrangements except a small half-day creche five days a week run by a social welfare organisation, Mahila Pratiraksha Mandal. It was something, but it was limited.

The social workers discovered after interviewing the women and observing the children that the children had no experience of the outside

world. Many were born in jail. They didn't know or recognise any animals — only cockroaches and stray cats. When they were asked to draw a picture of anything they wanted, they didn't know what to do. Only one child drew a banana. It was clear that they had no dreams, because they were starved for social stimulation and development. Many of the mothers were in a crisis. They didn't have the extra reserves to do what was needed with their children or to give them attention. Some simply gave up. The social workers wanted us to give hope to the mothers so the children would grow and develop.

With the idea of starting a creche and training creche workers in mind, Sister Max and I approached some NGOs. We were attracted by the experienced people of the Mobile Creche who had set up high-quality care creches and non-formal education for children of construction workers. They also conducted training courses and extension programmes. They were just right for the women and children of Tihar. We had to wait some time for foreign money to be approved when we could finally start in March 1995. The Mobile Creche workers concentrated on language and physical development. They made the children practise singing, drama, art and yoga. They helped the children to decorate the room we were given using their paintings or the simplest of things, such as old magazines, and we changed the wall decorations regularly.

We found Rajasthani cradles for the smallest children, carpets from the Danish Embassy, and helped the children to make their own toys out of waste materials we collected. It became an oasis with a completely different atmosphere from the rest of the jail.

The creche workers also started an intensive training programme for the prison mothers, to train them to be professional creche workers. We paid the trainee-inmates a small, symbolic stipend, to give value to their skills. Twenty-five women participated and 14 became certified after nine months — the rest left the prison so they couldn't complete the course. The course focused on health, nutrition and using creativity with the children. It developed self-confidence: suddenly the women realised they could learn, and it gave them life. The certification was the same as what the Mobile Creche gave to those eligible outside the prison and they couldn't believe that they had finished a proper education programme with an examination. It made such a difference to them. Now they would have a recognised skill when they get out.

The creche changed the way the women talked with each other and their children. They paid each other and their children more respect. Gradually the atmosphere in the project changed. You could feel it, even though they spoke Hindi and I didn't.

We've seen a remarkable change in the children. It has given them a good start in life. They looked healthier and put on weight, because the creche was giving them nutritious and fresh food, something they had not had before. They were washed more regularly and their hair was oiled. The mothers started to make an effort to make their children look nice every day. We helped by bringing in donated clothes.

There was a different look in the eyes of the children. They started to behave just like any child outside the prison. Previously, they were like small wild things, afraid and full of apathy. After a while in the creche, they started coming up to adults and recited poems alone. Finally, some people were focusing only on them and giving them love and care. It was a safe haven for them.

The Mobile Creche workers helped us to select kind women from outside the jail to run the creche and they were assisted by the inmates. Shakira, who was known to all the women and whom the children loved, added to the warm atmosphere.

Since I spoke no Hindi, my role was to see the need, find the money for the project, make a proposal that would fit the needs of the women and children and work towards making things happen with professional advice from the Mobile Creche. We were supported in all this by Kiran Bedi.

I will never forget the first time I met Kiran Bedi. A big man welcomed me into the prison. There were flowerpots in the halls. There was no door to her office in Tihar. She wore salwar-kameez and vest, and her hair was chopped short. Her eyes were so radiant, I felt her intense focus when it was my turn to see her, as if I was in the spotlight, and immediately wanted to give my best. She gave this to everyone she spoke to all day long, and had this effect on people. Her reaction to our proposals was: "Go and do it." She helped in whatever way she could and gave us a building, and later doubled the space for the women inmates. Sister Max saw the possibilities which a technically-minded person like myself might say are unrealistic or impossible. She has a trained eye for something that could sell. Tihar was her life, she was dedicated and that was inspiring.

My other abiding concern was the food served in the prison. In March 1994, I proposed that an African prisoner trained as a chef, should teach the women how to make weaning food for children and to make healthy, nutritious food for themselves. With Rs 25,000 donated by the American Women's Association and Rs 10,000 from my own pocket, we created a new kitchen with two sinks, a water pump, marble slab counters, dishes, a fridge, coolers and ice. It was beautiful and clean.

Six inmate-trainees worked in rotation. They made everything imaginable and sold the food to the women, who were earning and could buy something of their own choice with their own money. The women were so happy. They made cakes and bread and fruit yogurt. The new kitchen was a great success and the women bought everything.

Our chef expanded her product lines to include cold drinks, tasty snacks, ice-cream, birthday cakes and delicious milk shakes. With the money we made we brought in fresh food from outside to make more. We bought much better quality rice and ate two or three different vegetables a day.

So that the male prisoners could benefit too, the women started a food service on Saturdays when prisoners were allowed family visits. The prison even let us have a rickshaw for transporting the food from the women's kitchen to the visiting area. Saturday was our big day, and we sold a lot of food that day.

That spring I initiated a poetry workshop, to give some of the more literate women another avenue of expression as an outlet for the stress in their lives.

I've been completely and totally enriched from the experience of working at Tihar. I get a lot of love and fulfillment from it. I don't know exactly what I'm doing for the women, but I hope it's doing some good. It's an opportunity to give something back, and it's a challenge. I pay the women at Tihar before I pay my rent sometimes. Tihar has become a part of my life. It's one of the most worthwhile things I've ever done, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve.

My two literary-minded American friends, Bernard Rafer and India Hixon, acted as coordinators. Rafer and Hixon sat amidst women inmates who had a fairly good command over the English language and took them through a series of exercises. Such exercises resulted in these inmates reciting off verses, like a flowing river; here are some precious drops taken from the poems, compiled by *Concerned Women* group.

#### LESSONS FROM TIHAR

*If life is out to teach us  
The things we need to know  
Then coming here has a purpose  
As this story will show.*

AAAAA

ndrea

*CHILDREN OF TIHAR*

*Shift elsewhere  
 Imagine if you're Rinku  
 Or Chandni or Deepu  
 And you were growing up here  
 In Tihar's women wing  
 Your vision of the world  
 Limited by the walls  
 Your experience of living  
 A suffering untold  
 You'll only have your mother  
 And never see a man  
 Your daddy might be out there  
 But meet him you can't  
 He might even be nonexistent  
 Or dead or far away  
 But it really doesn't matter  
 Coz all there is today  
 For here you spend your childhood  
 Up to the age of five  
 With no knowledge of outside  
 A very sheltered life  
 You'll have no idea of what you're  
 missing Or what you lack in here  
 Coz there just is no comparing  
 With all they have out there  
 At least you've got your mummy  
 And aunties lots of them  
 Hot food in your tummy  
 So you'll just stay for them  
 Now you don't feel unhappy  
 Or limited or sad  
 Coz every day you live here  
 You're doing exactly that.*

AAAAAn

drea

*WOMEN OF IHAR*

*We, women of Tihar, have been thrown together  
by fate Or because our luck failed to protect us that  
date  
The walls that surround us  
Are the chains that bind us  
Trying to keep hands and minds busy  
Lord knows it's not easy  
Wondering day in day out  
What being in jail is all about  
Sharing sadness, frustration and pain  
At not seeing our loved ones again  
To be separated from our family  
And be confronted by our destiny  
With nothing to look forward to at all  
No ray of hope, no matter how small  
All we do is think of outside  
Hoping that some day we might  
Enjoy a normal life once more  
Coz that is what we are living for.*

AAAAAndrea

*MY VEG ABLE GARDEN*

*Even in jail, you'll be surprised to know  
That such a cute garden could grow  
And I don't give a damn what anyone supposes  
But I'll break your head if you dare pluck my roses  
And talking about roses, they are now full in bloom  
I only wish we'll have plenty more soon  
I've got spinach, radish and carrots too  
Lettuce, cabbage and coriander, all I can give to you.*

SSSSShakir

GREATER HAN HE GREATER

*Indira Gandhi went to jail  
And so did Gandhiji  
The stigma did not bother them,  
Why should it bother me?  
Some of the greatest of the great  
Were lodged inside this jail  
If they survived to challenge fate  
Why should I then fail?  
What do they have, that I don't  
What made them so great?  
If I can make the most of jail  
I'll be greater than the great.*

SSSSShakir

TTTTTIHAR ASHRAM?

*Do you believe your coming to jail  
Has a purpose?  
I know it.  
Do you believe that you are never too  
Old to learn?  
I know it for sure.  
So keep on trying and go for it.  
Work hard on yourself and save your  
Experiences some day  
Just one day  
I will write  
Down in my book  
What makes indeed a new woman of me  
Secret moments  
Filling my lifeline  
Enough heartaches and pains  
Single happiness  
Relief sometimes  
Never gone*



*The moon is only changing  
Red sky appearing often  
Paths undefining  
Between heaven and earth  
There's eternal light*

Marg nita

And *Business Standard* carried this report, *Poetry from Behind Bars*, on December 2, 1995:

There is a starkness about the title on the red cover of the slim paperback. It says, *The Tihar Collection: Poems by Women from Tihar Jail, Delhi*. Packed into fifty-odd pages are the sorrows, longings and frustrations of the women under trials of Tihar.

The poems offer fleeting glimpses into the poets' past. Memories — some sweet, some bitter — come alive. A home tucked away somewhere and the warmth of a family; a relationship gone awry; nostalgia for friends far away.

A lot of the poems are attempts to grapple with the bitterness churning inside. But there is a strong element of hope in some poems: *Hoping that someday we might enjoy a normal life once more/Coz that is what we are living for...* Andrea.

The poems were written at various times in the course of the under trials' confinement in jail. But they were put together and given a definite form in the course of a workshop held in the jail earlier this year. Of course, a lot of the participants were foreigners or Indian women who had received an English education.

After the recent prison reforms, several voluntary groups have initiated activities with the women of Ward 1 of Tihar Jail. Most of these women are under trials charged under the Narcotics, Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985.

A lot of these activities are aimed at developing skills for income generation. Their hidden agenda aims at tapping the creative potential in these women.

Concerned Women is one such group. This group of eight women, all foreign nationals, have helped bring out this collection of poems. Released in September, the slim poetry anthology has already been reprinted twice and the proceeds from the sale have gone towards the welfare of the women of Tihar. The efforts of two other ladies have also yielded results. Dolly Narang, who runs the Village Gallery, Hauz Khas

and well-known writer and painter, Bulbul Sharma, recently exhibited monoprints done by the women prisoners at Tihar.

The exhibition was held at the Capital's India International Centre and was attended by Delhi's glitterati which included the likes of M. F. Husain and supercop Kiran Bedi. A lot of the works were sold and there were cheques in the mail for some of the artists on the eve of Diwali.

At Navjyoti, Sister Max Mathews put together a unique project called *Weaving Behind Bars*. She was appointed by Navjyoti as Programme Officer for this project as she got funds generated through the Dutch Embassy and extended a remarkable service in coordinating and implementing this project.

The expanded project was to be a training course for the trainees to make them self-sufficient in many ways. A three-month intensive training course was planned for instructors in artistic weaving. The immediate objectives of this course were: (a) To train 10 selected female inmates in the techniques of creative weaving, composition, colour matching and textures as a base for future income-generation inside the jail or when released; (b) To produce a wide variety of woven articles and artefacts of first quality in order to attract upmarket customers in India and abroad; (c) To hold a sales exhibition of the items in Delhi in order to develop and explore market possibilities; and (d) To ensure the continuity of weaving and training programme and the ensuing products becoming a new source of income-generation for inmates.

The training of skills and income-generating activities in the jail had so far concentrated mostly on traditional female skills. The choice of a new activity focusing on production of artistic weaving was a step away from this tendency by upgrading it into an art form. Weaving of Indian textiles is an age-old tradition, but this specific project was a renewal — of introducing artistic products for selected upmarket consumer groups.

A successful result of the initial training, such as the production of high-quality products and demand for such items, would have been ensured only by the employment of a highly qualified trainer

and weaver, who had mastered the necessary techniques and who was familiar with the market conditions for these items. The person was identified and engaged for three months for this intensive training and later on as a part-time consultant and supervisor. The 10 women so selected were among the female inmates who were interested and had shown artistic skills in the field. It was hoped that they would later pass on the skills and knowledge to others.

Their training would consist of (a) A knowledge of different weaving techniques: simple weaving, weaving with macrame, crochet, screen-weaving, and weaving on wooden frames with jute strings; (b) A knowledge of various raw material combinations; (c) Composition, a variety of surface textures, design and colour-matching techniques; (d) Quality control and presentation; (e) Finishing and framing; (f) Marketing skills, basic presentation and exhibition of marketing skills.

The *Weaving Behind Bars* project gave an opportunity to women to work for several hours everyday. They learnt the skills of tapestry-weaving and develop them over a period of time. It gave them a way of expressing themselves in the piece of art that they created on these small looms. These ran into exhibitions and stood sold out. The trained women trained others, sharpened the techniques innovated and produced pieces of art. Not only was it an economic activity, it also became another form of meditation.

Here are some statements from the women inmates in the training programme:

It keeps me occupied and I like it — otherwise I used to spend my time doing nothing, just wandering around. With the persuasion of another student I joined this programme and I earn money now. It's a home product which I can use later on, once I am released.

(Paramjeet)

)

Paramjeet taught me. She brought me to this class. Earlier I used to spend my time just sitting idle and gossiping as I didn't have any skill. Now there is no one to support me, I will have to live on my own, arrange for my food and earn for my living.

(Murti)

I am learning since last two months and I like it. I also earn money byweaving. I have been able to weave five pieces in two months.

*(Kuldeep*

*)*

I am always eager to learn something new so I joined this programme. I can spend my life easily now. I like to match the colours and I like the weaving process too. Sometimes I have some designs in mind, but it changes automatically when I am working. So the final product becomes different from what I had in mind.

*(Kiran)*

Besides the art of weaving the highly acclaimed painter-cum-author, Bulbul Sharma along with Dolly Narang of the Village Gallery, Hauz Khas, New Delhi, came to Tihar to stimulate the women to take up another creative activity, i.e., painting. Bulbul Sharma narrates her experiences during the course of a painting workshop she held in Tihar. Her account reveals how the emotions of the women inmates swung from apprehension to suspicion to curiosity to eagerness, and finally, to trust:

With hesitant hands they (women inmates) picked up the rollers and tried the plates. The first day of the monoprinting workshop, the Village Gallery had organised at the Tihar Jail was a day of discovery. I was unsure about the working conditions at the Tihar jail and also worried about the reaction of the women inmates of the jail whom Dolly Narang and I were going to meet. The gates were unlocked and we stepped into a huge open courtyard full of tall trees. The women inmates, equally apprehensive and suspicious about us, watched us carefully as we unloaded our bag full of colours, plates, rollers and print-making tools. "I cannot draw," said one woman. "The last time I held a crayon was in school many years ago," said another. But as I began to demonstrate the method of monoprinting, the women gradually came forward, one by one, to test out the rollers (and) to touch the paints with their fingers. Soon we had a crowd of 20 or more women around us, each one eager to make her own monoprint.

The simple method of monoprinting which requires no skills or any expensive materials is an easy way to initiate people into this art. The women learnt quickly and soon lost their initial hesitation once they knew how to use the roller. They laid out flat layers of colour on a plastic sheet with the roller. We used ordinary oil colour tubes instead of printing ink since they are easier to spread. Once the colour was spread on the sheet, we asked the women to draw a pattern with any pointed instrument like a

hairpin, a twig, or the back end of a paint brush. The women began with tiny hesitant lines and dots but after a while they covered the entire sheet with intricate drawings. The next session was much easier for both the women and for us since each knew what to expect. The women now handled the roller with ease, used more interesting combinations of colours and searched on their own for new kinds of marking tools. They collected stings, old leaves and bits of cloth to make new designs. They experimented with various techniques, like combining crayons with monoprinting or finger painting with collage, dabbing paint on the plastic sheet with their fingers. The women made monoprints on different kinds of paper provided by the Village Gallery which included handmade, recycled paper.

After a few sessions we found that the women were working entirely on their own with very little input from us except for an occasional encouraging remark or word of praise. We sat under a huge neem tree and the wind often blew away the monoprints left out in the sun to dry. There was great enthusiasm now all over the women's ward in the jail about the 'drawing classes' and many women who had not worked with us earlier now came to watch and then sat down to work with us. Gradually, as they worked on new patterns and designs, some of them began to talk to us about their past lives and their hopes for the future.

Shakira (the inmate with diverse talents) spoke about how she would like to be a professional cartoonist and made a series of portraits using the monoprinting technique. Baljeet worked quietly to create powerful portraits and a subtle abstract monoprint. Savita, Santosh and Nirpriti were curious to learn more about monoprinting and kept coming out with new ideas on paper. Sumitra Devi took to the art of monoprinting like a professional and tried out various innovative ways to print. She used thick impasto layers of oil paint with torn strips of paper, she rolled light colours on dark and used strings to make unusual abstract patterns. Karpai, a shy elderly woman from a village, spoke no Hindi and communicated with us only through gestures but she had a skilled eye for colour.

The women often recalled images they had seen in their childhood and tried to recreate them in a monoprint. In the beginning they had worked spontaneously, picking up any colour which was lying nearby but after six or seven workshops, they began to think and plan ahead. Some of them, of course, still rolled out colours swiftly, drew quick patterns and lifted the paper at once — eager and impatient to see the results. The immediate, swift flowing quality of the monoprint, which is one of its charms, can be seen in their works. Flowers and trees, strange birds from faded childhood images, portraits of unknown faces and intricate patterns

from tribal art, and abstract landscapes from dreams are some of the many striking images seen in the monoprints made with enthusiasm and spirit by the women of Tihar Jail. The women were very surprised when we asked them to sign their names on their monoprints. "Who would ever come to see our work? The outside world forgets you very soon once you are here," said one woman as she created an imaginary world with a roller and a tube of paint. But it was only a few months later when their monoprinting exhibition was held at the India International Centre which had an amazing and admiring audience. The exhibition travelled outside India.

Reported *The Asian Age* on September 15, 1995, *Women inmates say it with monoprints:*

What happens when a dynamic, efficiency-driven police officer called Kiran Bedi takes over the running of Tihar Jail? Reforms begin, along with the change in functioning comes a milestone in providing an anaesthetic odyssey to some women inmates of the prison. This was precisely why Dolly Narang and Bulbul Sharma were allowed to enter the gates of Tihar and teach the art of monoprints to some of the women there. With Kiran Bedi's green signal, some basic paints, rollers and recycled paper, Bulbul and Dolly set upon a sojourn that became an experience to savour.

Gone were the backgrounds and past criminal records of the women they faced, during 10 workshops of coming together and working, Bulbul and Dolly too discovered another self within themselves. The women prisoners had another chance, perhaps, the first in their life to discover a whole new world which they never knew before. The difficult task, however, was breaking of the ice. "With us being there, that by itself becomes the icebreaker," mused Bulbul, who loved seeing the creative and intellectual growth of the inmates, some of whom were literate.

The reformation process for women, when viewed from a holistic perspective, brought in its wake many favourable and advantageous developments. These developments went a long way in instilling qualities of self-confidence, a determination to succeed, organising skills, and, above all, dignity in the women inmates. They began to look towards the future with new hope and new aspirations, as very emphatically brought out by the following statements:

I want to be a lawyer or a public prosecutor and help innocent  
(*Poonam asudev*)

I want to run a tea stall or work in a household (as a domestic  
(*Jo a Alam*)

I want to work at home and make some small, but attractive items,  
such as *srakhis*.  
(*Najma Sattar*)

I want to start a service centre for washing, repairing and  
repainting vehicles.  
(*Lakshmi Nattu*)

I want to, first of all, serve my father and later give discourses for  
the uplift of women inmates at Tihar.  
(*H a Moti Mishra*)

The vision of these women inmates was wide and new, written  
large in all respects. The Tihar prison was no more a prison for  
most of them. It was now a centre of empowerment, preparing  
them for their release.

Graph  
Women at the Forefront  
A Synopsis



## *Media: Making the Difference*

*T*

he media walked through the prisons except the high security prison area, accompanied by the local prison officials and interacted with the normal activities underway at that time. They got an opportunity to see naturally for themselves the living conditions inside the prison. Nothing was structured for them. They were like the normal community walking in to perform the assigned role — the role of a social audit for wide dissemination. Their writings were to link the larger society with an institution which had an integral role in contributing to the safety and security of the community as a whole. The linkage was to be multidimensional. It could be for information, participation, appreciation, cooperation or mobilisation. It could also be for raising concerns for effecting systemic changes by highlighting issues. It is here that the media played the vital role of a 'concerned watchdog', providing the loudest voice to the chords of the dumb. It was unbelievable that the drowned voice of the prisoners — men, women, adolescents or children could be aired or read on languishing trials, subhuman living conditions, fleeing lawyers, insensitive and corrupt law enforcement and the indifference of the community as a whole.

These are some selected writings which made the 'Difference'. Bisheshwar Mishra of *The Times of India*, reported in December 1993, saying, *Speedy trial urged for aliens in Tihar*:

A petition has urged the Delhi High Court to direct the Government to prepare a scheme for expeditious trial of foreigners who have been languishing in Tihar jail for over five years and some even seven, without any trial.

There are about 130 foreigners languishing in Tihar Central Jail. Almost 90 per cent of them are facing charges under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act 1985...

Mrs Nitya Ramakrishna, counsel for the petitioner, has raised several questions of law relating to constitutional and fundamental rights of the foreign prisoners, of human rights, of drawbacks in procedure, of Supreme Court judgment, in the context of inordinate delay in conducting trial of foreigners languishing in jail for years.

Ground Rules:

administration to prepare a scheme for expeditious trials of foreigners facing NDPS charges, kept in jails. She has also asked for laying down of ground rules for their release on bail when trial of their case — filing of charge sheets, recording of evidence — are not completed on time. She has also sought the court's direction for repatriation, deportation of foreigners, when their period of detention without trial exceeds a certain limit.

The petition points out, most of the undertrial foreigners facing NDPS charges have been in detention for years without trial and in some cases charges have not been framed even after three years of detention, despite the fact that the high court has ordered for timebound trial in some cases...

The trend continued. Here was another report in *The Pioneer* in May 1994, saying *Foreign inmates of Tihar for quick disposal of cases*:

Eleven foreigner undertrials lodged in the Tihar Jail have entreated the Delhi High Court Chief Justice, M Jagannatha Rao, to immediately look into what they called their "extra judicial detention and inordinate delay in trial."

The inmates have also threatened to go on fast-unto-death on the jail premises from August 15 if no action was taken by the competent authorities by then.

The signatories to the two-page petition have been lodged in jail for the last two to seven years.

They pointed out that a presidential order in December 1993 had made it mandatory to dispose of all foreign undertrial cases by December 12, this year.

According to jail sources, there are more than 130 foreign undertrials in Tihar Jail, a majority of whom are undergoing trial under Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) and Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Prevention Act (NDPS).

The petitioners pointed out they had made several representations to President S. D. Sharma and the Chief Justice of India and had also filed a joint petition to the Delhi High Court earlier. They alleged that their petition in High Court had “run aground into the sea of delayed justice.” “Having been listed as urgent matter since the second half of the last year, the writ petition is now being tossed from one bench to another with utter disregard of its contents,” they say.

There was yet another headline in *The Indian Express*, saying, *Languishing undertrials congest Tihar Jail*, in September 1994, by Sayantan Chakravarty, which led the then Lt Governor, P. K. Dave, to admit that the delay in the process of law was highly regrettable:

...The matter now rests with the administration and the Delhi High Court. A move is on to set up more trial courts for expediting things. I agree such delays are unfortunate and the system needs to be set right on a priority.

This news item gave a voice to many inmates eliciting a serious comment from the then Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, Ranganath Mishra:

It is very unfortunate. Society has no justification in keeping undertrials in prison for so long. I fully agree that the process of law must be expedited. We must work out ways in which to speed up the judicial process for those who are lodged for several years.

All this build-up with an uninterrupted inflow of information to the community led the High Court to intervene, which was reported in the columns of *The Hindustan Times*, in November 1994, saying, *High Court tells Tihar to give prisoners' list*:

The Delhi High Court has asked the Tihar Jail authorities to furnish a comprehensive list of prisoners who have not been released despite bail orders in their favour. The Inspector General of Prisons has also been

asked by Justice Dalveer Bhandari to submit a list of undertrials who have undergone custody for a period longer than the maximum sentence which can be awarded to them... The judge has appointed counsel, R. K. Saini, *as amicus curie* to assist the court in this matter.

...Justice Bhandari directed the IG (Prisons) to furnish a complete list of all prisoners who have not been released despite bail orders by this court or other courts because they could not fulfil the conditions attached to the bail orders. A comprehensive list be submitted to this court within two weeks... The judge wants the prison officials to submit another list of undertrials who are in custody for a period longer than the maximum sentence which can be awarded to them for various offences with which they are charged... Justice Bhandari also wants yet another list of those prisoners who have already served more than half the sentence which can be awarded to them by the statute for the offences with which they are charged....

The news got reiterated in *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, in December 1994, *To the rescue of Tihar inmates*:

The Delhi High Court has directed Inspector General (prisons), Kiran Bedi, to furnish a list of all the prisoners in Tihar Jail who had been ordered to be released on bail but could not come out as they could not afford the bail money. Usually, when an undertrial is released on bail, he or she has to give a personal bond of Rs 5,000 with a surety of the same amount, or as the case may be. Apparently, a significant number of undertrials are languishing in Tihar Jail even after getting bail because they are not in a position to fulfil the conditions.

The Delhi High Court went on relentlessly. It moved to its logical conclusion, appointing a Commission comprising seven members of the Bar to investigate and shed light on the plight of the undertrials. This was further reported by Bisheshwar Mishra in *The Times of India*, March 1995, saying, *Panel to probe plight of undertrials*:

A Commission comprising seven senior members of the bar has been appointed by the Delhi High Court to investigate and shed light on why hundreds of undertrials continue to languish in Tihar jail for years, despite orders from various courts to release them on bail.

Most of these undertrials have not been able to secure release because they were too poor to fulfil the conditions attached with the bail orders...

Several such undertrials had moved the HC from inside the jail and the matter had come up before Mr Justice Dalveer Bhandari who on October 26, 1994, had ordered the IG (Prisons) to give a list of all such prisoners who had not been released despite bail orders. He had also sought information about all those prisoners who had served more than half their sentence.

When this matter came up before Mr Justice Vijender Jain, he appointed seven advocates as court commissioners, to investigate and report within a fortnight with a comprehensive list of all such undertrials. "...These court commissioners will individually scrutinise the cases of all such persons (undertrials) whose list had been filed by the IG (Prisons) in this court as well as of those persons (undertrials) who also fall in this category," Mr Justice Jain has ordered.

The court has specifically directed the commissioners to look for two basic points — the nature of offences committed by the undertrials and their background. This is presumably to ascertain whether the undertrial is a habitual criminal or not and whether he would tamper with evidence or flee from justice.

The process gained momentum and now prisoners under TADA too raised a voice and threatened to go on a hunger strike inside the prison. And *The Times of India* gave a lead headline, *Over 450 TADA undertrials languish in Tihar Jail without bail*, on February 21, 1995, reported by Prabhat Shunglu.

Yet another news release which had a great impact making the concerned officials perform with a sense of urgency was, *Prisoners release terms reviewed*, reported by Kumkum Chadha in *The Hindustan Times* in March 1995:

"...There were attempts during the course of the meeting to further postpone the meeting to a future date to settle the criteria issue. This was not agreed upon by the Minister of Jail, Government of Delhi, who is also the Chairman of the Sentence Revising Board. Sources reveal that he confessed fear of adverse media reports to be the reason behind disposing off the cases in this meeting.

The following news clip from *Mid-Day* of May 4, 1995, reveals that the system had come a full circle. The prisoners and the staff, all had a voice — loud and clear. It did not matter to what end or what result:

### SSSSStrtrtrtrtrtrike Threat in ihar

The inmates of the Tihar Jail have threatened to go on strike unless the transfer orders of former IG (Prisons) Kiran Bedi were declared void and she was reinstated immediately.

With the strike threat looming large, the jail staff is finding it hard to control the rising tempers of over 9,000 Tihar inmates, who want to know why their favourite IG (Prisons) was transferred out of Tihar.

According to Tihar sources, the news of Bedi's transfer spread like wildfire in the Central Jail yesterday and the inmates have been crowding the offices of the Jail Superintendents for confirmation of the news. One of the Jail Superintendents said this morning that they were finding it hard to face the inmates as the ire against the transfer of Kiran Bedi has been building up over the past 24 hours after she was handed over her transfer orders yesterday.

Most of the jail inmates got the news of Kiran Bedi's transfer from the morning newspapers. If the prisoners are visibly agitated at the transfer of Bedi, the jail officials themselves are not particularly pleased about the issue. While most of the officials refrained from going on record on the issue, they privately admitted that the transfer was "uncalled for and motivated".

Talking about the feelings of the inmates, one of the Superintendents said that with the transfer of Kiran Bedi the inmates were feeling "isolated and motherless".

One of the jail officials said that Kiran Bedi had successfully restored human dignity in thousands of prisoners at Tihar and to a great extent achieved the basic objective of rehabilitating a man isolated from the society.

While condemning the Government's decision as one which was inspired by vested interests, one of the Superintendents said, "We are the custodians of the jail. Even if Kiran Bedi has been transferred, we will continue to carry on with the reforms she initiated."

"We simply fail to understand the basis of her transfer," said another jail official. According to jail officials, Kiran Bedi implemented the recommendations which were forwarded by the Mulla Committee, which was formed by the Government itself and had submitted its report in 1980. Jail officials said that none of Bedi's predecessors had ever bothered to implement the recommendations of the committee.

In fact this is an issue which Kiran Bedi had herself been trying to insist on, pleading that she was doing nothing which went against

develop suicidal tendencies. What is wrong in an honest attempt to help the prisoners become law-abiding citizens.”

“At present Tihar could be termed as a model jail with all sorts of reforms going on but it is unfortunate that the process of reforms has received a serious jolt with the transfer of Madam,” said an official of the jail, summing up the sentiments of a number of his colleagues and the 9,000-odd prisoners.

But the then Lt Governor, P. K. Dave, was quoted by the media saying “Reforms will continue”. And they did. Perhaps it was late in the day to undo what was done with so much of concerted vim and vigour. And therein lay the inherent paradox in the use of State power and the Fourth Estate.

Graph  
Media Making the Difference  
A Synopsis



## *Media Manifests: Eyewitness Accounts*

W

e had resolved to move on from retributive to reconstructive justice. I was personally convinced that retribution may assuage the hurt feelings of a victim, but it does not necessarily check the offender from getting at the next victim. In reconstructive justice we were to help move the offender from 'breaking' to 'mending'. It was a process of self-amendment of his own thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions. To enable the offender to get on the road to 'amendment', required a supportive environment — an internal environment which was conducive to such introspection, and an external environment willing to give him another chance.

While the internal environment was well under our control, the external was not. To establish a communication link between the two was, therefore, necessary to enable us to extend the benefits of internal change to reach the society. It was imperative for us to build a bridge for the external agencies to enable them reach our internal platform, from where they could themselves see the process of reconstruction'. Prison is 'seeing and believing'. Nothing can be

more authentic than first-hand information. Being an eyewitness to changes is also a powerful experience. We required the media to share this first-hand, direct observations with the society. We wanted them to report what they saw; and not what they were told. It also needed a balanced sharing of the space on the bridge which needed a fair-minded regulation, with monitoring to ensure that the objective of the viewing was used only for the purpose it had been made accessible, with not a single case of exception.

One knows that in order to be newsworthy, media wants news, 'bad' or 'new'. Bad because it is of great concern and new because it is new news. In Tihar 'new' news started happening within days of our work commencing inside the prison. The winds of change were reaching out to the community, including the individuals in the media. Naturally, this added to the curiosity and queries. Since our policy was based on accessibility, we were there to explain the change. But even without rendering explanations, Tihar made news in the media as the happenings were 'new'.

However, media was taboo for Tihar by history. Many of the staffers had been departmentally punished for surreptitiously aiding the media persons. Media had been used in the past by prison authorities only when it was convenient for them. On June 29, 1993, I issued a Standing Order for Media Management to leave no room for any ambiguity:

#### Objectiv

- 1 Tihar Jail needs to work towards Reformation and Correction for all prison inmates so that they can be provided with opportunities for a better future.
- . Tihar Jail Complex has areas of 'Security' and 'High Security' zones. It also has certain areas which have to be kept out of bounds from certain category of visitors, while others can be visited by authorised persons.
- 2 Similarly, the nature of work also falls into two kinds of activities:
  - i) Confidential, which concerns certain personal information concerning the inmates.
  - . ii) Activities related to their welfare, development, education, economic, cultural, etc.
- 3

4. Therefore, exposure to 'media' can be provided in the larger interest of the prison and prisoners to the areas which relate to welfare, development, economic, educational and cultural, etc.
5. Exposure will help seek community support in developmental activities to the benefit of prisoners, and help achieve the objective of humanising the system.
6. Exposure will also enable an analytical 'audit' of the performance of the jail management.

Manner of exposure

*a) Written Material*

Media reporting would not be permitted in the 'High Security' zone.

Also

no names of prisoners shall be mentioned even if the prisoners so desire. Gazetted Officers will accompany the 'media' persons on the round.

Anything reported and not found factually correct shall be promptly rebutted by the concerned SCJ/DIG(P)/IG(P). A record to this effect shall be maintained. There can be a provision for monthly newsletter of all the Jails combined for exchange of

*b) Still Photography*

As a policy it has been decided that the Directorate of Public Relations (DPR) will be requested to make an album of all the welfare, educational, cultural and developmental activities so that the reporters could have an option to select from the pool.

Any special occasion will be covered preferably by the DPR. In case of urgency a photographer could be engaged from the nearby market. Negatives will be kept by the Superintendent in his personal custody. Journalists and photographers will be permitted only if he/she gives an undertaking that he/she will abide by the guidelines already issued in this regard.

Attention: An in-house camera could also be kept available for capturing moments of human interest. The focus will be on activity

*c) Audiovisual*

Movie cameras will be permitted by the IG's (Prisons) Office to let humanism be seen and shared. But it shall be projected in such a way that it does not compromise or hurt the prisoners' security. The films taken will be under the copyright of IG (Prisons) who will be the custodian of the same.

Nothing will be shown till all the tapes are certified to have been previewed by a team of Gazetted Officers. Any funds earned through contracts/donations will be deposited in Prisoners' Welfare Fund. The focus of the film will be developmental activities only.

Movie teams would be accompanied by the Superintendent and the DIG (Prisons).

There can be a provision for a monthly in-house *Audio Magazine* which is prepared by Jail Administration for viewing by jail inmates. This can carry messages of Superintendents for prisoners' discipline and recreation.

All visiting journalists will be permitted preferably in the evening time, i.e., from 4 pm till 5.30 pm on all working days except Sundays. Exceptions could be made due to special reasons or exigencies.

All visiting journalists would collect a circular/instructions from the IG (Prisons) office/DIG(P) office and sign the undertaking and carry a visitor's pass to visit the jails and deposit the said pass on completion of the round.

Intimation of the journalists visiting the respective jail will be given to the concerned Superintendent. If the concerned Superintendent is not present, the Deputy Superintendent could then accompany them. Any other point coming through work experience will be added in the standing order policy.

By a strange coincidence, a programme for the expansion of an existing drug de-addiction centre inside Tihar had been planned within days of my assuming charge. A new chapter was added when a 30-bed drug de-addiction centre, Ashiana, sponsored by the Indian Council of Education was inaugurated by the then Union Minister for Welfare, Mr Sitaram Kesri. He was accompanied by the Chief Secretary, Mr Thakkar, the Home Secretary, Mrs Pratibha Karan, and many other dignitaries for the inauguration function which was conducted in the lawns outside Prison No 4. The Minister made his speech. After this he was to be conducted inside the premises of the prison. Going round Tihar Jail No 4, where the Ashiana centre is located, was a revealing experience. The Minister stopped in front of a patient and asked him what crime he had committed. He replied that he had been caught with smack. While we took around the VIPs and officials, the battery of waiting media men who had been invited by the Delhi Government Public Relations Department had already been screened and given a specially printed entry pass by the jail officials. They were surprised at this new accessibility, and accompanied the Minister straight to

the Treatment Centre. It really made 'news' for all, when pictures of the Minister speaking to addict inmates inside a prison appeared. This was 'new' for Tihar. Here is an excerpt of that day's coverage in *The Hindustan Times* on May 13, 1993:

Drug de-addiction centre opened in Tihar Jail  
Going round Tihar Jail No 4, where the Ashiana centre is located, was a revealing experience. The Minister stopped in front of a patient and asked him what crime he had committed. He replied he had been caught with smack. The Minister asked him whether he realised that drug abuse was an offence or not. The patient thought for a while and slowly said: "No." As the accompanying guests told the Minister that these people did not even realise that drug peddling was an offence, the Minister said: "That is why we have to do this work."

The whole intention behind the formulation of the media policy was to provide consistency to our response to media requests. This open policy broke the earlier nexus of buying and selling news, and placed the prison as it was, before the Government, the courts and the community, outside and inside the prison. If it was to be reported, let it be seen and reported, and not briefed or tutored. This is how the 'seeing and reporting' developed for Tihar through the eyes of the visiting media professionals. Here are some excerpts from the reportage. Priya Sahgal of the weekly magazine, *Sunday*, rendered a personal account in August 1993:

#### Crime and Amendment

G.V. Rao, personal assistant to Inspector-General (Prisons), is a puzzled man. He was used to quite a different response from the prisoners of Tihar Jail when they sighted the IG anywhere on the premises. There used to be boos and catcalls, muttered threats and insults. But the scene had altered dramatically. Over the past two months, the convicts were actually cheering whenever they saw the IG. "I have never seen this before," says Rao, who has been working at Tihar since 1989...

Yoga classes were introduced in the mornings and evenings as one such disciplinary measure. The classes are held by TV personality Sardari Lalji. "There is a television set in each barrack," claims Sunil Kumar Gupta, Deputy Warder, Jail No 4, "so the prisoners have also seen him on TV. Hence this is an added incentive for them to join the classes."

"Earlier," he adds, "before Kiran Bedi joined, the undertrials were free to do what they liked, which was to basically lounge around. A few played volleyball, but that was it. They had no organised schedule for the day." Now, they start the day in prayer. Every morning, at 6.30 am, there is a curious sight to be seen at Tihar Jail. People accused of some of the most heinous crimes form docile lines to join a pious chorus of devotional songs.

Are they truly penitent? It's difficult to believe, watching one smirking his way through the lyrics of *Tvamev Mata* and another nudging his neighbour, irritated at his loud and tuneless singing.

Again in 1993, Harinder Baweja a correspondent of the news magazine, *India Today*, reported thus:

TTTTTihar Jail womens cell A new dignit

We enter Tihar jail, Delhi's top-security prison, with a great deal of trepidation. My meagre knowledge of jails comes from their portrayal in films, but the focus there is always on male prisoners. Granted permission to spend time in the women's ward of Tihar jail, my mind kept conjuring up horrific images of women chained to their cells and crying out hysterically.

One of the three men escorting us bangs on the sturdy iron gate and a frail, middle-aged policewoman peeps out of the door. She opens it immediately on noticing the Jail Superintendent, K. R. Kishore. He has just been filling us in on the assorted crimes the women there have been jailed for. Accompanied by the photographer, I enter, expecting to see women holed up in cells and wearing blue-striped prisoners' uniforms. What we come upon is a picture in complete contrast. Inmates sprawled out in the courtyard in colourful clothes, some combing their hair, others enjoying a ride on a swing strung from a tree branch. Helen, a tall, gracious British woman, is sweeping the rain water out, while Sarah is busy making a cucumber and tomato salad.

Helen, I was shocked to learn later, is an Oxford graduate and a computer analyst who even after six years in jail is an undertrial. Not surprisingly, she is completely broken in spirit, just like Maria, a Spaniard, who has also been languishing in the jail as an undertrial for the past five years.

Surprises don't cease at finding scores of foreigners in the women's ward. There are also daughters and wives of the elite. And wives of terrorists as well as 40 children, all under the age of four. Not to speak of two felines, named Sheru and Chein Chein, favourites of all the prisoners.

The atmosphere in the dreaded top-security prison is not too different from the one in women's hostel with their own nightly curfews. But it soon metamorphoses into what could well be an ashram. Or even a temple.

Suddenly the premises resound with the *dhak-dhak* of a *dholki* (drum). Startled, we rush out from a cell into the courtyard. Others troop out too. Soon, the entire ward echoes with strains of a *bhajan* as almost all the 270-odd inmates sit cross-legged, heads covered, lost in prayer.

This, Kiran Bedi, who recently took over as IG (Prisons), told us later, is a daily feature. Bedi, in fact, has been instrumental in initiating many reforms, which have made the prison a "liveable place" in the inmates' opinion.

...Tied by mutual empathy and a common yearning for freedom, the inmates usually make allowances for each other's moods. Each has been through the same gamut of emotions herself. Frustration. Dejection. Paranoia. Claustrophobia. Acute depression. Occasionally, fights breakout over trifling matters. "Why did you step on my blanket?" They are resolved soon enough, for it's time for Maxi to appear on the scene. Chosen as leader of the recently formed *panchayat*, Maxi's job has been made easier, for her view counts each time a prisoner's parole application comes up.

Oddly enough, confinement has had a salutary effect on a few prisoners who prefer jail to the outside world. Like Anita, who has been in Tihar for the past 12 years. Convicted for killing her husband's first wife's three-year-old son, Anita would rather stay on at Tihar than "go back to the man who showed me what police stations and jails look like."

Sarah, a Canadian booked under the Drugs Act, is also content. Not because she has been jailed but because she hopes to get out on bail. She has been in Tihar for only a month unlike Maria, Shakira or Poonam who are shattered by the legal wrangles that have kept them from freedom. Poonam is considered lucky by others, for at least 60 of them have been able to get out on bail on applications drafted by her.

Each time the pain increases and hopelessness takes over, the inmates think of one of Shakira's poems which reads: "Indira Gandhi went to jail, and so did Gandhiji. The stigma didn't deter them, why should it bother me? If they survived to challenge fate, why should I fail then..."

Walking out of Tihar, we can't help wondering how the miniature world within the jail comes so close to being a deceptive replica of what life would have been, were they free. But only just.

And Aarti Dhar of *The Hindu*, after visiting Tihar in October 1993, penned this article, *Spreading a lot of warmth and love*:

There is a lot of hustle and bustle inside Jail No 2 at Tihar. Inmates are busy putting up banners and fixing the music system. A makeshift stage is being set up as part of arrangements to put a special musical programme for more than 900 inmates within the premises.

A good half an hour behind schedule, the artistes step on stage to perform. The audience is much less than expected, even less than 100. Announcements are made asking the prisoners to assemble at the ground where "an outside party" will stage a performance. "You will not get such an opportunity again," the announcer appeals. No response. Prisoners trickle in, indifference writ large on their faces.

This certainly does not dampen the spirits of the artistes. They begin with a song, calling up the people to work together and share their sorrows and happiness. Within minutes, inmates start pouring in. This time in larger groups. "We were being served tea and dinner. Why didn't you wait for us?" says one as he runs to make himself comfortable on the durrie.

The show is stopped for a while to enable the viewers to take their seats. By the time the show resumes, the number has swelled to nearly 900, filling the space to capacity.

Introductions over, the singers begin in Hindi aiming to inspire the inmates to face the situation bravely. More songs follow in Hindi and English. In between is a short skit enjoyed thoroughly by the prisoners. And at the end of the show, a few prisoners dance in joy while others clap heartily.

However, it is the artistes who are more happy at the end of the show. "Our objective has been achieved," says Ruth Kumar, a singer, who has been associated with The Family for the past 11 years. "The show brought cheer to the prisoners - which is what we wanted," she says.

Ruth was at St. Xavier's College, Bombay, when she learnt about The Family through a friend and decided to join it full-time. "We are all from well-to-do families who have dedicated ourselves to the cause of happiness in the lives of others," she explains.

The Family is a voluntary organisation active in the major cities of the world for the past, 20 years. The wellbeing of humanity is one of its main goals and it works through a wide spectrum of activities to make the world a better place to live in. The Family is functioning in 50 countries all over the world, and the Indian Chapter has a membership of 300 besides those working part-time.



The organisation is composed of individuals and families from varied cultural backgrounds and they believe that faith in God is the answer to the problems of a modern fear-filled world.

The activists came to Tihar Jail about two months ago to bring cheer and happiness to the lives of the prisoners through musical programmes and weekly seminars, in addition to individual counselling, if required, says Ruth.

Since the beginning of their programmes at Tihar they have performed four music shows for women and adolescent inmates and five weekly follow-up visits. Besides, they have donated educational music videos for entertaining the inmates. "We have been continuously evaluating our programmes so as to make it relevant to the lives of the inmates in their present environment as well as enriching their personal values and relationships," explains Paul.

The children indeed are an indispensable part of their endeavour. The young ones who performed at Tihar are Shanti and Vidhur. Vidhur is the son of a businessman involved with The Family activities. The Family claims to have worked with the underworld in Europe and the US in order to rehabilitate them and show them an alternative way to survive. "After all, you find love only if you love others," says Marianne.

And when two reporters of *The Hindustan Times*, Gopal Jain and Kavita Tankha revisited Tihar and reported on December 17, 1993, their personal account was moving in every aspect:

TTTTTihar revisited

Delhi's by now infamous Tihar Jail has for long been viewed as a dehumanising Bastille administered by an iron regime, essentially ad hoc. Prisoners are believed to live in exacerbated conditions of bare solitude, where prison autonomy demonised human dignity. In the mid-Eighties, the subhuman and spirit-crushing conditions prevailing in Tihar led Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer, former Supreme Court Judge, to remark: "Were there a modicum of truth in the disclosures made of vice and violence, overt and covert in the going on in Tihar, such institutional outrage would make our constitutional punishment a guilty procedure."

Yet on a recent visit to Tihar, it seemed as if a sea of change had swept through it. Its notoriety seemed anachronistic and its excesses trimmed and tamed by the rule of law. The reforms being brought about by the new Inspector General of Prisons, the irrepressible Mrs Kiran Bedi, seem at last in consonance with the prescribed Supreme court guidelines in Sunil Batra (IV) which were hitherto obeyed more in their breach.

No longer did part III of the Constitution part company with the prisoner at the prison gate. The inmates, it seems, are at long last beginning to get what are their legitimate dues of 'Just Desserts'. Cameras and scribes are being allowed into what was once the 'sanctum sanctorum', cut off from the outside world.

The very purpose behind prison-keeping is rehabilitation and whenever the time comes, final reintegration into the society. To this end, remedies punitive and/or therapeutic are being applied in appropriate dosage. The idea being to protect society against crime.

The introduction of yoga and meditation classes in Tihar seem to be a moral and spiritual form of assistance. The results are for all to see. A calm, almost complacent air pervades within the inner walls of the jailhouse. The inmates themselves talk of feeling lighter and perceptibly less tense. Criminality in such surroundings seems to be a curable deviance. An almost harmonious relationship exists between the inmates and the prison staff. One would otherwise be hard pressed to explain just how two Jail Warders oversee 750 inmates charged under various provisions of the IPC (Indian Penal Code).

Tihar jailors today are only invigilators and enforcers of the law and are not allowed to touch the inmates. The new administration, it seems, believes in the idiom that "if wars are too important to be left to the generals, surely the prisoners' rights are too precious to be left to jailors." Prison brutality and torture are things of the past. Although no system is so watertight and no rule so stringent as to totally eliminate such excesses, yet a definite and visible change has slowly but steadily crept in. One of the novel ideas suggested by the Supreme Court in the *Sunil Batra (II)* as far back as 1980, was the introduction of a petition/grievance box to empower the inmates to counteract any form of unreviewed administrative discretion enabling them to anonymously place their petitions into one of the boxes which makes its way directly to the IG (Prisons), bypassing the jail hierarchy.

But it is only now that the petition box has actually been placed in various parts of the jail. The idea behind the petition box was to introduce a sort of vigilance over the jail staff and the stronger and more powerful inmates. It provided the means to adventure into areas of agony and brutal savage beatings of the detenus, which was one of the ills plaguing the criminal justice system.

Besides this, other harsh features of the prison regime seem to have been attended to, shackles have been shunned as being violative of human rights, reckless handcuffing and chaining has been limited to TADA and other dangerous detenus as it is considered violative of Articles 14 and 21

of the Constitution, and de-addiction camps are being run within the prison with the help of trained psychologists to wean away the impressionable youngsters who may take to drugs or are forced into it. The impact of the reforms has also been felt in other crucial areas of jail life. The kitchen at Jail No 3 which caters to around 2,500-3,000 inmates is a round-the-clock unit where work begins at 1.00 am for serving the next day's meal consisting of may be thousand *chappatis* and hundreds of kilos of vegetable and *dal*. Apart from being spick and span, a sampling of the food, the provisions for which are now procured from the Super Bazar, showed that there were many a cook hidden among the inmates.

The *panchayat* system too has invaded Tihar. A system of *panchayats* is functional within each barrack which is responsible for looking after the needs of its inmates. At the same time, it facilitates greater scrutiny and accountability as functions pertaining to discipline are being undertaken by fellow inmates who are much tougher on one another.

Journalists from the foreign media were equally interested in the transformation of Tihar. While Mark Tully, South Asia Bureau Chief of BBC, reported live from the premises of Tihar, Ashish Ray of CNN too shot a film which was telecast on the American channel. The very first time that the electronic media captured the activities of Tihar. This was preceded by video news magazines, *Newstrack* of *Living Media* and *Eyewitness of The Hindustan Times*. Christopher Thomas of *The Times*, London, visited Tihar during Christmas in 1994, he reported in the paper on January 12, 1994:

Delhi Jails inmates learn the message of Christmas: The 9,300 prisoners at Delhi Central Jail, India's largest, are celebrating Christmas and the new year with Father Christmas, who is a Hindu with the vaguest knowledge of what it is all about.

Ranjan Kumar Sinha, formerly a circus clown, received a crash course from foreign prisoners about the meaning of the Christmas message. He said he found it simple to understand and had no problem teaching it to fellow Hindus. "It is not much different from Hinduism really. It seems to say the same sort of things."

Nigel Beardsley, 31, from Maidenhead, Berkshire, who has been remanded in custody on drugs charges for the past 20 months, wrote a play, *The Beginning of Life*, half in Hindi and half in English, with Father Christmas in the starring role. Most performers were drawn from the 140 foreign inmates, but several Hindus are involved.

Mr Beardsley's Hindi, learnt while waiting for a trial date to be set, is insufficient for the endeavour. "We wanted to send the Christmas message of goodwill to Hindu, Sikh and Muslim prisoners," he said. "It seems to have gone down well. There used to be a misunderstanding between Indians and foreigners, but that has all gone."

The play is being taken 'on tour' during the holiday period to the four prisons that make up the huge complex on the outskirts of Delhi. The pantomime particularly enthralled the prison's 40-odd children, who are allowed to stay with their mothers in jail until the age of five.

Thomas filed yet another report on January 12, 1994:

...This is no ordinary prison boss. In seven months as Director General of Delhi Prisons she has made a hellish institution humane.

She has revolutionised prison management: a simple concession, like allowing inmates to wear watches, brought a wave of gratitude from people unable to mark out long, empty days. Drug use by prisoners and staff corruption, both once rampant, are now negligible. This is mainly due to the daily distribution of a 'petition box' through which inmates can air grievances, anonymously if they wish. The name of a guard extorting bribes will turn up in the box; prisoners with access to drugs will be exposed; Warders who inflict beatings will be named.

She is known these days as '*sudhar*' (reform) Bedi. The institution she heads is four jails in one, desperately overcrowded but with large dirty courtyards that are its lungs. This is where prisoners spend their days, mostly shuffling about with nothing to do. There is little vocational training. Some educated prisoners teach inmates to read; there are yoga and mediation classes, but mostly the days are idle.

There are 9,300 inmates in a prison designed for 2,500, and the congestion will continue until a new institution is completed in a year or so. Most of the prisoners are 'undertrials' - victims of a judicial system that has all but collapsed under the weight of numbers. Almost a quarter are accused of drugs offences; they can wait up to seven years for trial because the court system has been overburdened as a result of a tougher anti-drugs legislation introduced in 1980.

Mrs Bedi walks around the jail at least once a day hearing grievances, giving encouragement, calling prisoners by name. She wears khaki kurtapyjamas; her hair is boyishly short. "I don't wear saris," she declares. "It is not a fast-moving form of dress." A prisoner approaches and says he is diabetic but has not been allowed insulin. She barks at a senior prison officer. "You'll have your insulin," she tells the inmate.

“Prisoners should be treated with dignity,” Mrs Bedi says, in between singing songs with women inmates celebrating the birthday of a child in the creche. “When I was a police officer I felt the prison service failed to support my efforts. Now I have an opportunity to change it, and change it I will.”

Bernard Imhasly, New Delhi correspondent of a Swiss daily, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, accompanied by his wife Rachana, had walked the prison on January 26, 1994, the day when the Health Care Day was being observed. This is what he reported in the paper:

When Mrs Kiran Bedi first entered the Tihar Jail in May 1993, the prison — the biggest in Asia — once resembled a concentration camp: corrupt personnel, a prisoner mafia that terrorised fellow inmates and ran a flourishing drugs business, 300 children born in the prison who were given neither health care nor education, the food was the same stew and dirty water year in and year out. And what was a particular disgrace in the main prison in India’s capital: of the 8,880 prisoners, 90 per cent were persons remanded in custody, and many of them had been on remand for a longer period of time than the toughest sentence would have imposed on them for their crime — if indeed, they had committed a crime at all. Envious colleagues must have been pleased that for the country’s first female police officer, the Tihar posting would at last turn out to be too hard a nut to crack. They had tried before to tame the woman who had made them sing small. Yet Kiran Bedi turned it into triumph. Hardly had she started the new job when she had the word ‘Jail’ overwritten by ‘Ashram’ throughout the prison, and within two years proved that this was no mere window-dressing. She transformed the prison, which had been built for 2,500 inmates into a monastic place of self-examination, learning and work... meditation courses meant to show that being imprisoned is not only a physical state but also a psychological attitude. While the authorities were able to offer material relief, meditation proved that it was up to the individual to perceive the state of incarceration as an opportunity for self-examination.

This report of Imhasly led the Jury of Joseph Bueys Foundation of Germany to identify and award me the Joseph Bueys Prize for Holistic and Creative Management. I received the award from Dr Rita Süsmann, Speaker of German Bundestag, in Frankfurt on October 21, 1997.

As a sequel to Bernard's writing, the Associated Press (AP) reported on March 2, 1994, after a visit to the Prison:

A year ago, Tihar Central Jail was India's toughest prison, a cesspool of drugs and gang wars, of corruption and extortion by both guards and powerful inmates.

Then the no-nonsense Kiran Bedi came along. These days, thousands of inmates gather in clean, three-shaded courtyards every morning for prayer and meditation. After that, they go to school.

By last July, when she became warden of Tihar Central, the only prison in New Delhi, newspapers were calling Mrs Bedi the 'lady supercop.'

Soon, she was the 'jail goddess' to many of her charges.

"I really feel like a mother to them", she said with a laugh that softened her raspy voice. "Sometimes I scold them, sometimes I pat them, sometimes I push them." Ashish Nandy, a social psychologist, praised the warden's work in reforming Tihar and said the whole grim Indian prison system needs cleaning up, "but I doubt we can find so many Kiran Bedis." Most inmates volunteer for Mrs Bedi's programmes. "Probably I cannot solve all problems of the inmates, but at least we can do something to make their lives better," she said.

With its dozens of sparkling clean barracks, the neat courtyards, shining kitchens and now-disciplined inmates, Tihar resembles an orderly commune.

"I have lived in jails that were like pig stys, but this is first class," said Jagmohan Tandon, sitting on his bed in a dormitory reminiscent of a student hostel. Photos of movie stars and art works cover the walls.

"Tihar is unrecognisable from a year ago," said S. N. Talwar, a political science teacher who helped start an in-house magazine edited by an inmate. "I see no difference now in the atmosphere between my college and the jail."

About overcrowding, a chronic condition in all Indian jails, Mrs Bedi can do little. When it was built in 1956, Tihar was intended for 2,500 inmates. Today, over 8,000 are crammed into it, including 300 women. Only about 1,000 are convicts. The rest await trial, and some have spent years in the jail as their cases move sluggishly through the overburdened courts.

At the old Tihar, inmates say, the strong extorted money and possessions from the weak with threats of violent death.

Knife fights were common, gambling was rampant and drugs were smuggled in with the connivance of guards.

Prisoners awaiting trial, who are not required to work, had nothing to do but cause trouble.

On her first day at the jail, Mrs Bedi said, she felt as if “the Himalayas had fallen on my head. My legs were buckling under me.”

Then, she recalled, “I thought, am I going to be a part of this rotten system or am I going to change it?”

As a first step toward reform, she rounded up 400 men from one of the barracks, sang them a prayer and told them to repeat it after her. The prayer has become the jail’s anthem and inmates chant it daily.

Next came classes in meditation and yoga, isolation of gang leaders, suspension of corrupt prison officers. Inmates as well as officials say that drug use has declined dramatically.

Voluntary groups were allowed into Tihar for the first time in 35 years to provide counselling, meditation classes, vocational training, legal aid, even entertainment.

Educated prisoners volunteer to teach classes. Music programmes, spiritual and religious lectures and sports contests are regular events. “We have stopped being lazy,” Mrs Bedi said.

John F. Burns of *The New York Times* had requested to see the prison programmes. He did and this is what he wrote in *The New York Times International*, on December 5, 1994:

When Kiran Bedi was named warden of India’s largest and most notorious prison, a job considered a professional graveyard, many of her critics shed crocodile tears.

Now, 18 months after taking the prison job, Ms Bedi — who was once women’s tennis champion of Asia — has staged a scrambling comeback. Instead of getting bogged down in the corruption and violence associated with the New Delhi Prison, Tihar, she has pushed through reforms that have begun to change its reputation. Ms Bedi’s popularity has been fostered by the educational and recreational activities she has brought to the prison, as well as the pressure she has put on the judges to adopt more liberal bail policies.

... But many of the politicians and police superiors Ms Bedi has crossed in her career are more likely to have reacted with a gnashing of teeth. ... At Tihar, where she is the first woman to serve as Warden, her philosophy of rehabilitation is at odds with the prison’s repressive reputation. ... While going round the prison, in the prison yard, Gerald Victor interrupted the literacy class he was teaching to step forward. The 38-year-old one-time businessman was awaiting trial on a charge of

disposing of a pistol used to kill a prominent lawyer. The maximum penalty for that offence is three years in jail, and he had been there for 40 months awaiting trial. "Let's go to legal aid," she said. "This man does not belong here."

Even when the media was all along an eyewitness and had given such a voluble voice to the issues of great social concern, at the end of it all, I still had to defend myself that I did not violate the jail manual, and the rules. These were the same rules and regulations under which the media was permitted to accompany the visiting VVIPs earlier. The only difference was now it was no more the exclusive privilege of eminent visitors but also for all other areas of human and social concern.

Interestingly enough, one particular journalist did not relent in repeatedly publishing a factually incorrect view, despite his own newspaper correspondents including the editor himself having personally visited Tihar, witnessed and wrote about the changes he had personally felt and observed. I had to take up the matter with the Press Council of India.

The Press Council's relief order came precisely a year after I had moved out of Tihar. The Chairman, Justice P. B. Sawant, stated thus in his verdict: "It was pleaded that the said news item withheld vital and relevant provisions of the Jail Manual so as to create the impression amongst the readers that their client had acted in contravention of the Prison Rules to favour Charles Sobhraj.... Authors of the news items withheld the relevant provisions of the Jail Manual ... thus created a wrong impression on the reader. ... The said provisions vest sufficient authority in the Prison Authorities to permit the use of items, such as typewriter, etc. It is clear that had the regulations been quoted correctly and not withheld from the readers, it would not have been possible to create such a lingering misimpression on the subject." The concerned correspondent and the newspaper had to publish the corrigendum.

However, Sudhir Tailang perceived my transfer in his cartoon on May 5, 1995, in *The Hindustan Times*, two days after the issue of the official order:





Though I had moved on, the work remained integral to me and had totally engulfed me because of the Nehru Fellowship based on Tihar as a reform model. I was also by now receiving invitations both from within and outside India to share my experiences about Tihar. In March 1996, I attended the Liverpool Conference on Healthy Prisons: A Vision for the Future, the first international conference of its kind on the subject. In London, I was invited for an interview for the BBC programme, *Asia File*. This is how it went:

YYY You are over here talking about the issue of criminality to humanity. But here we have seen some of your work in India. You paid quite a high political price for that. Haven't you?

Well I have achieved a lot after that. Because I think whatever we did is now coming into a Bill form in India. The National Human Rights Commission is including all the reformatory measures into a new Bill to

But you were moved out by the Governor. He moved you back into the Police force from Tihar Jail and you became a planning officer.

Yes, I was forced to become Additional Commissioner, Planning. Now I've moved to something better, which is now writing a book on the work we did.

While talking of criminality-humanity in a country (Britain) where the Home Secretary the Interior Minister believes in the idea of the Boot Camp more firm retribution against the prisoners than actually kind of encourage them; what's your feeling about the kind of mood developing in the Western world?

I think there is a move that the prisons should be more restorative rather than retributive. Because in the final working only punishment doesn't work, what finally works is the healing process which must go on within a prison and if a prison continues to punish, then the prisoners will come back and be punished more. I think the consensus which emerged at the first international conference at Liverpool on a concept called 'healthy prisons', which is a brilliant initiative by Dr John Ashton, the Regional Director of Public Health, Northwest Regional Health Authority (UK) — the consensus was that we need to go for a restorative process

That certainly is the mood of the Conservative Party here but the Republican Party is not moving in that direction, is it? It's moving towards, if you like the Boot Camp syndrome.

But perhaps I think if they would hear their own governors and the experts a little more, maybe a balance would emerge — a balance between the hard and soft options, and that's exactly what we have done in Tihar.

VVVVViririririrtually at one stage when you were about to leave happy prisoners threatened to go on strike for what you had done in Tihar Jail.

They did it for the love of it. They loved me and I loved them. It was an issue of concern, compassion and respect and I think that's how it

What happens to those prisoners who have been treated more humanely? Do they leave and they don't come back or do they leave and come back because it is actually quite comfortable in jail?

No, it's never comfortable in prison because you lose and surrender your freedom but the recidivism and the return to prison certainly shows a great fall when compassion and healing process takes place in a prison. And prisoners must be allowed to work as a community of healing process within and community from outside to start the whole process of social reintegration before it's too late.

That much for media perceptions — both nationally and internationally. But by all means these reports played such a tremendous and significant role that Tihar emerged to become a model for reconstructive and restorative justice.

Graph

# *III*

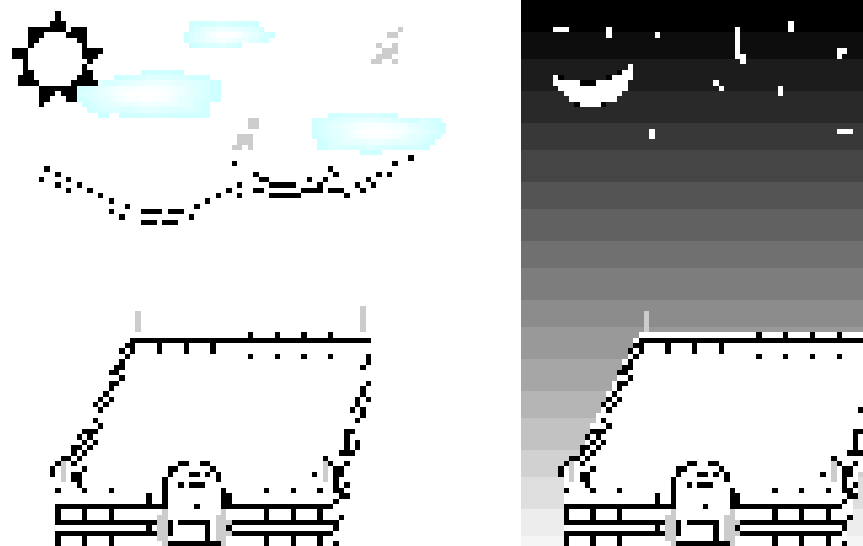
## *What Emerged*

A Visual Presentation — Internal Cohesion and  
External Coordination.



*This is how it was*

*I*



We had started with a system of 'head counts' and 'lock ups'.

A place where occupants did not sleep at night for various reasons. The night sounds resembled those of a zoo. A place inhabited by humans to whom it hardly mattered whether it was day or night!

This is how I felt when I first saw Tihar....

The drawings show that there was no difference in the prisoners' activities, between day and night.

They could sleep through the day, or keep awake through the night... It was exactly the same!

RY  
A  
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*This is how it was*

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POLICE

ENT



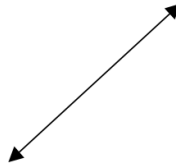
Prisoner

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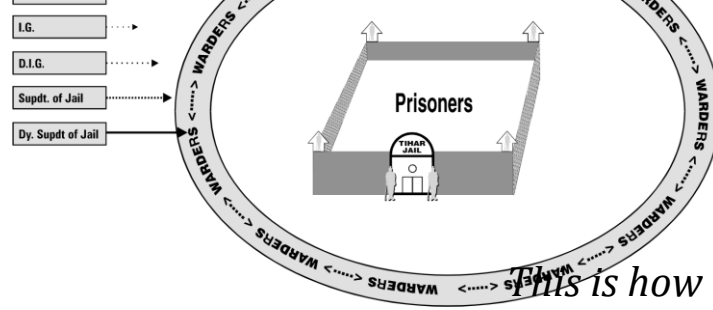
POLICE

M  
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G

Tihar as an institution was completely isolated. Contrary to the requirements of a correctional centre, each wing of the criminal justice system dealt with prisoners in its own way, without any cohesion. This is how it appeared to me in its functioning... .

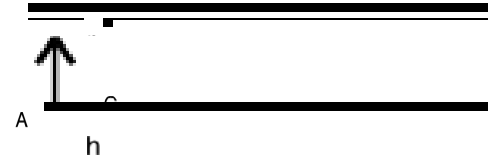
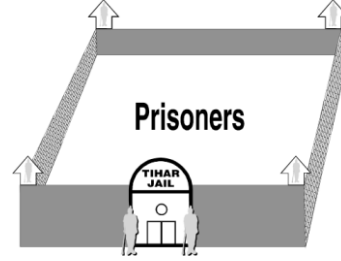




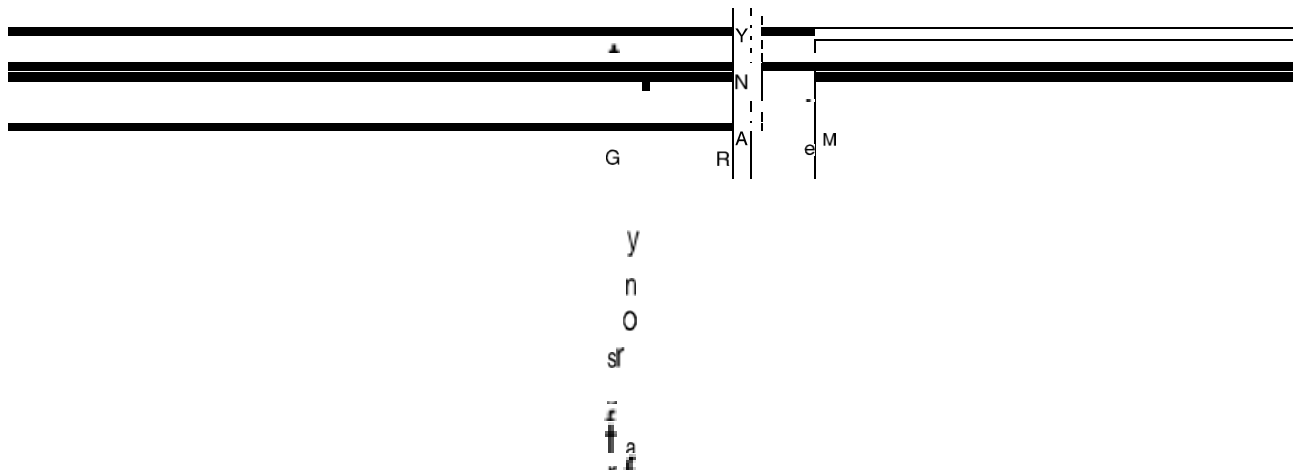


*This is how it was  
III*

Its internal management appeared to be that of a guard — preventing escapes and internal riots. Hence it was in a sense more under the charge of Warders and Head Warders, despite the presence of officers, who performed only distant supervisory roles. This is how it appeared to me... .



*This is how it was*



The supervisory ranks were distant. The official hierarchy closed in with its punitive capacity.<sup>ee</sup>  
The vulture seemed to symbolise it the best. This is how it was... .<sup>o</sup>

ed

DJ



Mission statement  
Practise what preached  
No compromise  
on principle  
Transparent  
functioning

HEAD WARDERS

Participation in  
decision-making

Effective &  
prompt decisions

Walk & learn  
Spot decisions

Reevaluating decisions

More field work, less

paperworkSpot-appreciation

Personal participation

*This is how it  
changedInternal  
ManagementI*

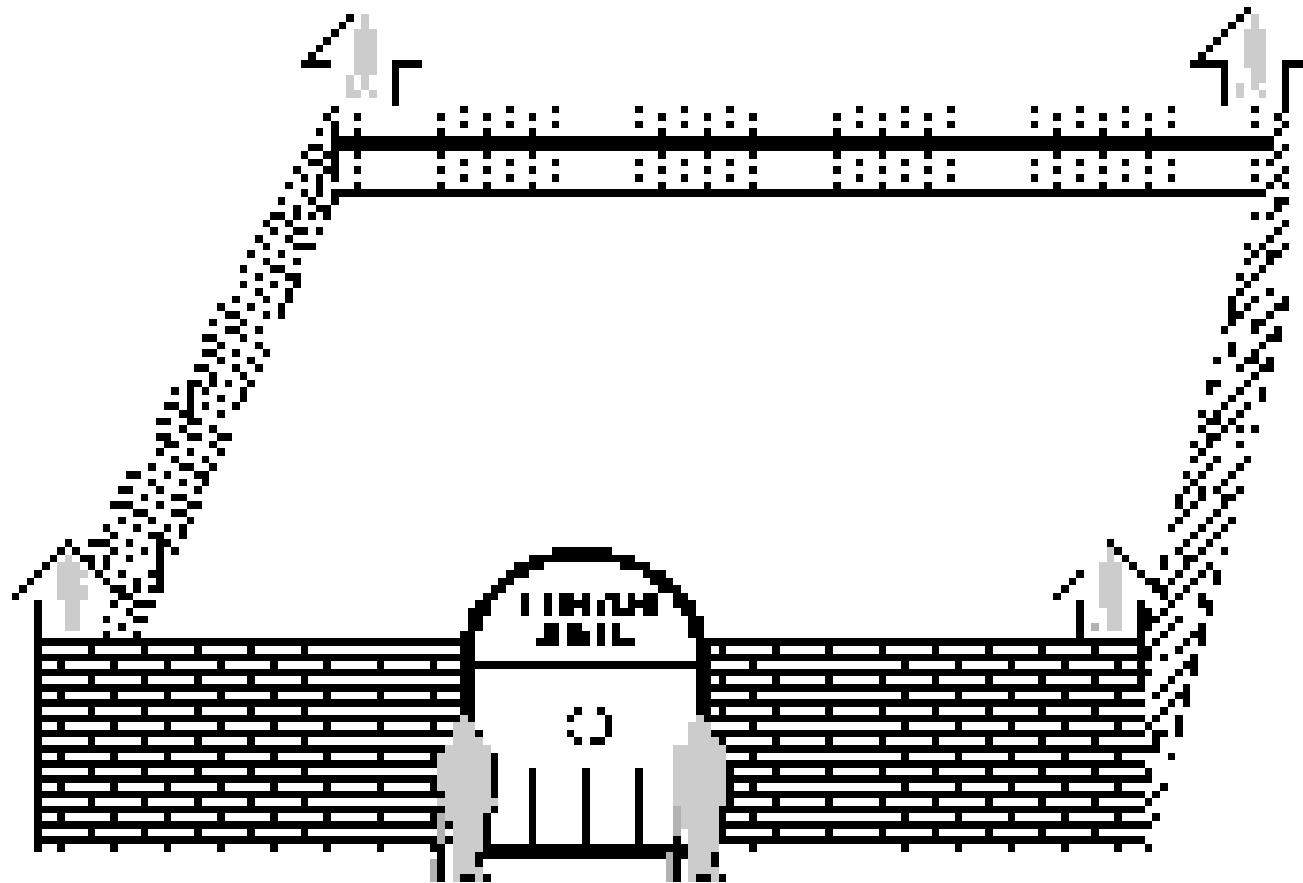
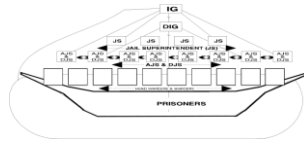
## Periodical review of panchayat

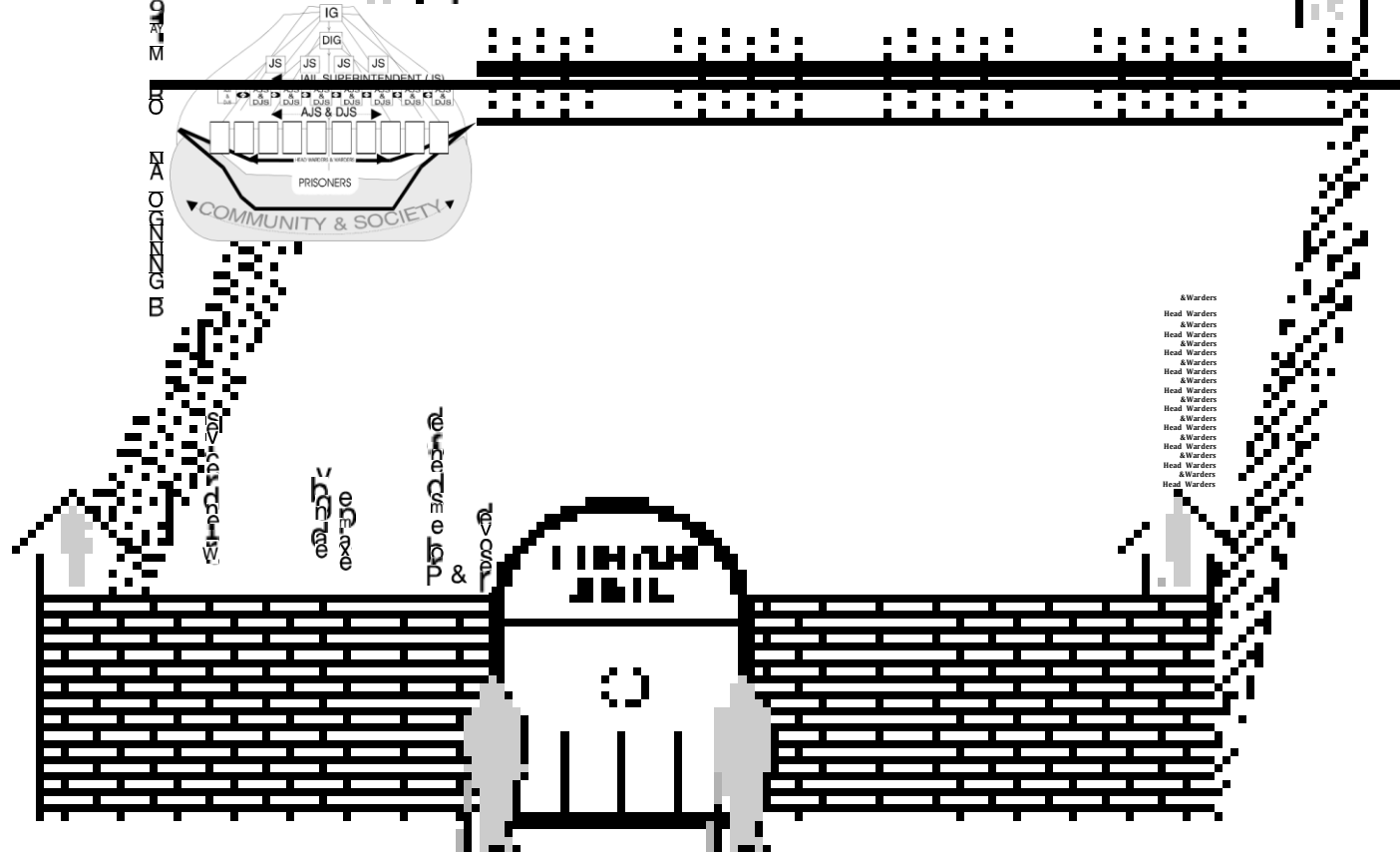
## Informal interaction

## Reporting daily

## Protection of bona fides

Facilitation of informal

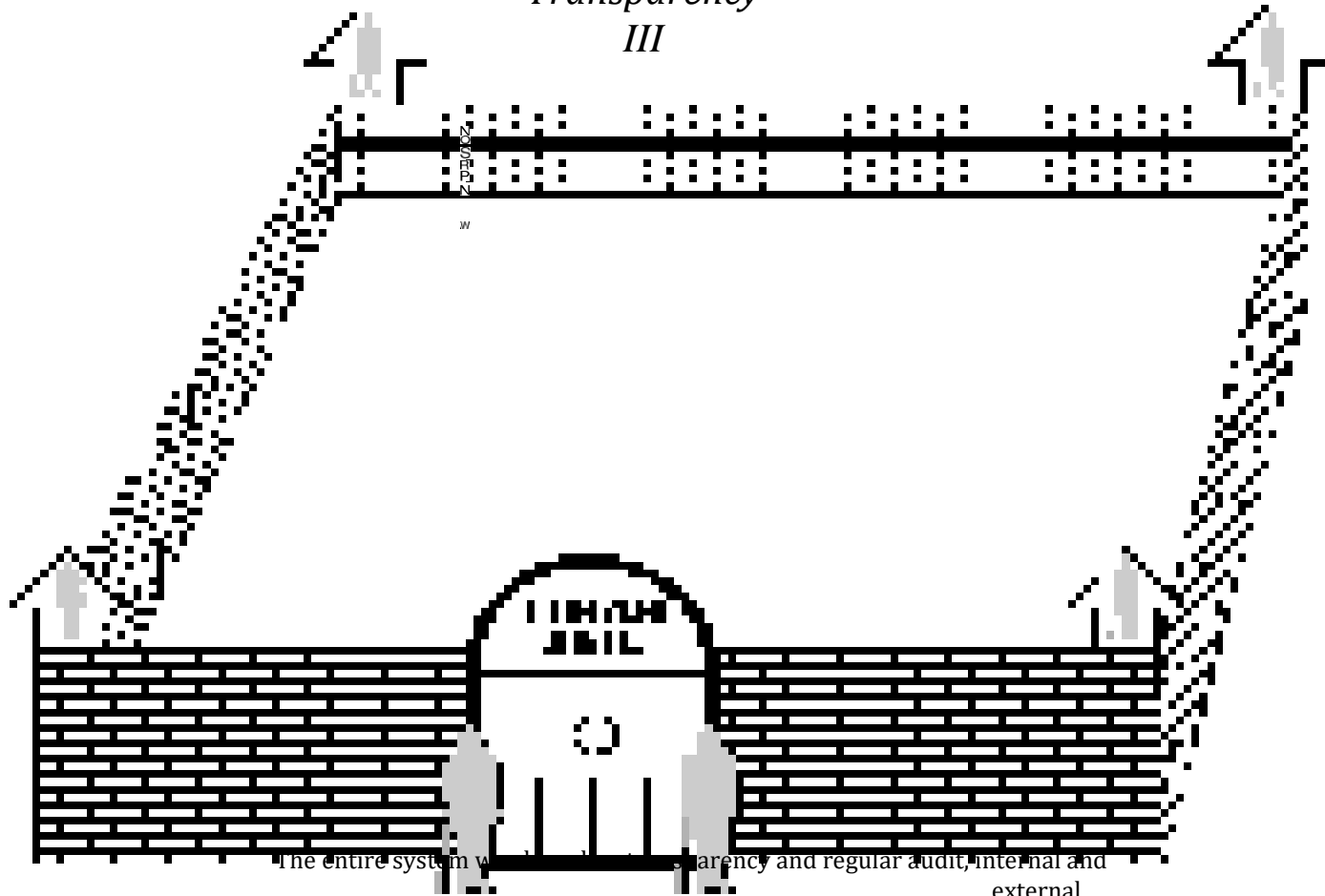




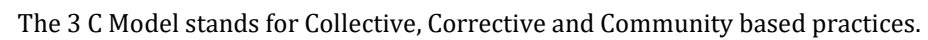
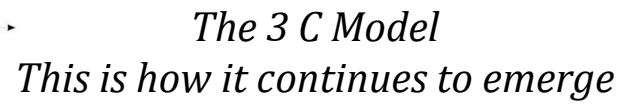




# *This is how it changed Transparency III*



The entire system was transparent and regular audit, internal and external....



*The Emergence: Through the Eyes of an Inmate*



Drawn by a woman inmate, Shakira, this is a visual projection of the emergence of Tihar in all its dimensions.





The courts were getting sensitised and on occasions expressed their impatience to redeem the abysmal situation. They started to direct appointment of a panel of lawyers for preparing lists of languishing under trials, to be released.

The officialdom still remained indifferent, distant and punitive. They were yet to participate actively in the emergence! According to the Prison Manual, the Home Secretary is duty bound to personally inspect the prison once in three months. No one ever did! The Delhi Police was still to consider whether it had any role in such an institution. Though the rules made it mandatory for the Police Commissioner to visit the prison once in a quarter. It was observed more in breach than practice. No one ever came! The Parliament, raised questions, but did not go beyond.

Within the given scenario and without waiting for any legal amendments, Tihar stood transformed. As an institute, Tihar emerged from a collective expression of all that is noble in humankind. It became a visible reservoir of human energy. Each individual was a contributor and not a consumer, an asset and not a liability.

The experience of Tihar can be universal, wherever collective determination is based on innate goodness.

Anything is possible...

## *IV*

### *What Continues To Emerge*

The 3 C model of prison management, which incorporates Collective, Corrective and Community based approach (initiated in 1993), emerged as a major *raison d'être* of a proposed New Prison Act. Awaiting the consent of the President of India, it shall replace the 107-year-old Prison Act of 1894.

No small continuity in emergence...

## The most happening place in town? Tihar jail, of



\*Courtesy: *The Times of India*, April 9, 1998. Caricature by Neelabh. Continuity in emergence...



*And It Became Possible...  
107 Years After*

A

nything did become possible. A new Prison Act...

1999 is on the anvil to replace Prison Act 1894, which governed us till now. When we began thereform process, we used the discretionary clauses from the archaicPrison Law of 1894 and the judgements of the Apex Courts,delivered time to time. Now, the proposed new law will make all theexisting management practices and reforms mandatory.(Documented in Part II of the book.) For the first time in the historyof the Indian Prison Management, in the Delhi Prison Bill 1999(awaiting the consent of the President of India to become a law),there is a mission statement in its Preamble. It says:

“A Bill to provide for the detention of prisoners committed toprison custody and for their reformation and rehabilitation, with aview to ensuring safe detention and minimum standards oftreatment of prisoners, consistent with the principles of dignity.” It took the Indian prison system 107 years of ‘imprisonment’ toliberate itself from the colonial hangover. For instance, it categoricallyabolishes the practice of whipping as a punishment for the prisoners

and the staff. The new act outlaws these barbaric measures, and in their place, provides for an institutional system of grievance redressal. (Remember the mobile petition box system, Chapter 14.) Under the new dispensation, prisoners would have a right to legal aid; a) Regulation of community/visitor entry (read Non-Profit-Organisations/Individuals); b) Under trials too can work and earn, if they so desired; c) Aftercare and rehabilitation of prisoners; d) Review of cases of prisoners pending for more than one year and release of under trials whose detention exceeds period of punishment proved for the offences; e) Abolition of convict officers as security guards, etc.; f) Medical examination of a prisoner on the same day of admission; g) Liberation in facilities of communication through interviews and letters; h) Abolition of solitary confinement; i) Provision for a Law Officer and Welfare Officers for jails; j) Training of prison officials on the responsibilities and rights of prisoners; and k) Regular audit, etc.

It took 107 years to see this change, with seven years of determined reform process, and through a very sustained 'Collective, Corrective and Community' (the 3 C Model) based effort of prison officials, prisoners – as a community within – and the community of individuals, i.e. NGOs, from outside.

And there is overwhelming evidence of it.

aid. Other highlights being:

## *A Global Model*

“New Delhi’s Tihar Jail has gone from being an unruly hell-hole to a global model for prison reform,” wrote Meenakshi Ganguly, for *Time* magazine (December 11, 2000). This is no small statement. Let us see what enabled it to reach this far. Meenakshi’s article gives the necessary insights. Below is a reproduction of the same:

### A Place to Call Home

In the crowded western part of New Delhi sits a vast, but packed, prison, surrounded by high, yellow walls. Built in 1958, for a few thousand thieves, murderers and other malefactors, Tihar Jail is now home to more than 11,500 prisoners, most of them trapped by a cumbersome judicial process that keeps suspects imprisoned as ‘undertrials’, often for terms much longer than if they had simply been found guilty. While the grounds are quiet and green, the living conditions are hard, with about a hundred people sharing quarters intended for twenty-five.

Prison authorities, however, love to show off their teeming institution. That’s because reforms set in motion several years ago, by crusading policewoman, Kiran Bedi, have transformed

the medieval hell-hole into a place that, Tihar administrators say wryly, even criminals have ceased to fear. When Bedi took charge of the prison, it was a breedingground for corruption and savagery, where new criminals were trained, killers recruited and dope addicts created. Less than a decade later, Tihar,

the largest prison in Asia, is being showcased to penal experts around the world, as a place where human rights – no joke – is a prime concern. There is better food, satisfactory hygiene, proper medical attention and effective rehabilitation programs. “We know that the truly criminal-minded will never change,” says Ajay Agrawal, the current Police Chief of Tihar. “But now there is hope for the others in the majority.”

In the days before ‘Madam’ Bedi arrived in 1993, an understanding between the prison staff and criminals provided fertile ground for running gangster operations outside the walls. There were appalling incidents of bullying, both by wardens and prisoners. Jitender Dev Srivastava, jailed since 1987 for trafficking narcotics, says violent quarrels were common. Guards, vastly outnumbered, stayed clear of the fighting. “Believe me. It was a terrible, terrible place,” Srivastava says. “Now everyone is busy and has less time to think about crime.” He points to his barrack mates practising for an athletic competition, and continues, “Earlier, they would have all been abusing each other.” The games, an annual contest involving Tihar’s six prisons, are among the innovations that won Bedi the Ramon Magsaysay award for Government Service, in 1994.

Bedi, who was transferred out in 1995, turned Tihar around, partly by bringing in volunteers willing to organise prisoners’ time. More than fifty groups work in Tihar today, providing legal aid, running literacy and health programs and encouraging inmates to enrol for private degree through study centers and courses by mail. Meditation courses help cool their hot tempers. Celebrity appearances at cultural shows provide positive role models. Convicts even make their own line of potato chips and other munchies, marketed under the brand name TJ’s (for Tihar Jail’s) Special. Overall amenities are vastly improved. “The prisoners are getting better food and medical attention than the staff,” says jailor Shivanand Khemani, with a laugh. “And we work twelve-hour days. Tell me, now, who are the real prisoners?”

Indeed, some believe conditions have become too good. While the bulk of the prison’s menial jobs – cooking, cleaning, managing wards – are delegated to convicts, most are not required to pitch in. Only those prisoners who have faced trial have to work, while eighty-five per cent are still under trials and tend to hang around doing nothing. Some people deliberately enter prison by committing small, but culpable crimes to avoid gangster enemies or because they can get better food and lodging here. The number of inmates rises by about ten per cent each winter, as some opt for the four blankets handed out in jail over shivering on the pavements. Once upon a time, Tihar tended to take in mild criminals and

send them back hardened. Heroin could be found more easily in the cell than on the streets. Satish, a forty-one-year-old addict, has been in and out of prison for the past twenty-five years. "We used to break the lightbulbs earlier, so the jailers could not see us smoke," he says. Now, the bulbs are all intact. Addicts take part in counselling sessions and receive vocational training. Prisoners and visitors who once smuggled dope into Tihar are now frisked thoroughly.

At Jail No.1, the Association for Scientific Research on the Addictions runs a novel program to wean inmates off heroin. About two hundred new prisoners enter the jail every day, a few dozen of whom, on average, are addicts. Program leader, Dr H.S. Sethi, divides them into a 'family tree'. Groups of four newcomers, known as 'younger brothers', are placed in the care of a 'big brother,' who is meant to ensure that they are not bullied and help them handle withdrawal. Groups of four big brothers, in turn, are looked after by a 'family head'. Ultimately, every one of the seven hundred enrolled in the program is assessed and monitored by the 'family'. It seems to work, too. In the past seven years, more than 15,000 addicts have joined the program; it recently won praise from the United Nations Drug Control Program also, which is using the model to create a global network of youth against drug abuse.

Among Tihar's model prisoners is Leo Sande Gasnier, a Norwegian who was caught smuggling marijuana from India, three years ago. Gasnier, now 22, says he spent his adolescence stoned and angry. He was forced to go clean in prison and then discovered meditation. With new-found introspectiveness, Gasnier confessed and accepted his ten-year sentence at Tihar, even though the prosecution lacked evidence. "I was guilty and deserved to be punished," he says.

Of course, many more of Tihar's inmates contend that they don't deserve to be locked up. "Everyone from a peon to the PM, is committing some crime," says Srivastava. "Crime has not ended because we are in jail." But the improved conditions, he believes, help prevent the relatively innocent from adopting lives of crime. "Earlier," he says, "any man who came in here, went out a criminal." Jail may not put an end to crime, but Tihar is at least helping prisoners live a life free of misdemeanor.

There is still more evidence of continuity in emergence...

## 28

### *Nirvana Behind Bars*

C

Crime and delinquency is a thought-action product. It is intertwined. In order to correct action, we cannot ignore treating the thought process. Hence, crime correction has to take the thought-mind-intellect route to reach its goalpost of crime-free living. This basic understanding ought not to be uncommon. But, unfortunately, it is. Still, once it is understood, it knows no bounds. It has the capacity to break free in any physical or mental state.

When we, as Prison Administrators, initiated the spiritual journey, based on non-denominational spirituality in the Tihar Jails in 1993, the route map was clear. We knew that the journey was to be continuous. Also known was the role of prison administration, to be enabling drivers and co-travellers. Without being anxious for the far future ahead, we got on to the starting line and took off. The results were immediately visible. Recall the over 1,000 prisoners who joined in the Vipassana Meditation programme (Chapter 21). It created history and still remains a mystery, for the Western World in particular. I have addressed innumerable conferences and international forums across the seas, to explain the why and what of

it all. The documentary film on it by Karuna Films, called *Doing Time Doing Vipassana*, is being screened in many overseas prisons where Vipassana courses are going on and in hundreds of Vipassana Centres, all over the world. The film went on to win the Golden Spire Award in San Francisco. It has already become a subject for intense research and interest. The film motivates individuals all over the world to learn and practise Vipassana, for it changes lifestyles. I received one such letter from Leo Sande Gasneir the Norwegian convict prisoner. It says it all. I am encouraged to reproduce the letter in his own handwriting:

and way of thinking.

### THE EXPERIENCE OF VIPASSANA IN Tihar

As I went through my first Vipassana ten-day course I realized that as long there is going to be pleasures in life there will also have to be pain. Learning how to handle my pain just through sitting for ten days was my most difficult experience ever. Vipassana taught me how to smile when I'm sad and how to be happy without becoming hysterical.

Vipassana is creating perspective, seeing things as they really are. That all phenomena are ephemeral, and there is of no use clinging or craving towards them. Better just to accept the external world as it is learning how to see with eyes of wisdom from a



internal viewpoint. Just observing one's physical sensations and mind realizing how it's all connected. How every action has a direct effect, Karma, and learning to act instead of merely reacting.

That it is possible to be sitting for these courses while serving time in jail is very beneficial. Not only for the individual meditators but also for society as a whole. Time for reflection and meditation should be obligatory in every jail as it gives the word reform a new meaning. To me Vipassana is a tool of reforming myself, improving my ways of life. It's the real thing as it doesn't mix religion or sectarian rituals with the art of meditation. It is simply a scientific instruction on how to live in the present, more aware, and more awake to see reality, as it is.

It is my deep wish and I hope from my heart that as many as possible will benefit from the precious teachings of the Buddha, the enlightened one, the dhamma and the Sangha the community which now even

aroses inside jail. May the flower of dharma  
grow bigger and higher in order to benefit  
all beings. May all be happy!

Yours faithfully



Leo Sande Gasnier  
Convict

Till date, 15,000 prisoners and over 800 members of the staff have undergone various types of meditation programmes, namely Art of Living and few others. Here is an excerpt of what Sunil Gupta, Law Officer, says after doing the Art of Living Course: "After the basic course, I felt great changes and was amazed by them. All my life I wanted these changes to happen. The changes were so effortless that I still wonder how it happened. After the advance course, I was flying. I am so contented now that I feel any amount of work cannot wear me out and I can tackle situations with ease, which seemed very difficult previously. I am planning to go for the Teacher Training Course of Art of Living, as early as possible." The most outstanding contribution of Tihar Jail reforms is the community entry (Chapter 16), i.e. the contribution of innumerable mission-driven individuals and organisations providing a variety of services to the prisoners. They are dedicating their services to the Prison Department in the field of counselling, health, education, vocational training, crèche activities, rehabilitation, yoga and meditation, drug de-addiction, legal aid, moral upliftment, etc. The NGO's unparalleled contribution towards the prisoner's cause is encouraging the jail administration to leap forward and claim

unhesitatingly that Tihar Jails are the torchbearer and trendsetter of reforms throughout the world. This claim is fortified by the fact that Tihar Jails are being visited by foreign dignitaries, including ministers, to witness the reformatory activities. On a recent visit to the Tihar Jail, the present Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, Mr Justice Arijit Pasayat, said:

“...We are here to see/to witness jail reforms and special courts. Jail reform is, as a matter of fact, a reformatory system for the prisoners. When the jail reform system started, people thought that we were following the British and American system, but I was happy to learn that now the British are trying to learn from us, as to how we have reformed our jails, so that they can take corrective measures. It is not a small thing; old ways of reforms have receded to the background in view of what has been done by the Tihar Jail authorities.”

I have had the opportunity of visiting prisons in many countries, such as the USA, Australia, UK, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Mauritius, Slovakia, Japan, Philippines and Sri Lanka. I can confidently say that nowhere in the world did I see the community entry into the prisons so generous and so overwhelming. And nowhere also has the non-denominational spirituality achieved such great heights of nirvana behind bars.

Tihar Jail continues to emerge truly as a global model.

The 3 C Model

This is how it continues to emerge

The 3 C Model stands for  
Collective, Corrective and Community based practices.

The Emergence: Through the Eyes of an Inmate



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