

# Tihar Jail

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The jail warden led me through a dark winding passage. I was almost suffocated by the humid stench of the open gutters that lined the walls. Soon we came to an opening where hundreds of people, all dressed in striped rags, stood looking at me in wonder. The warden suddenly broke the silence by yelling some commands at the crowd. Where there was space for 2,500 prisoners, more than 10,000 were herded together within the walls of Tihar jail. I thought to myself, if there was a hell on earth, this was it.

That very moment I realised why I had been posted as the Inspector General, or IG, of the infamous Tihar jail in Delhi. I had to do something to improve the condition of the prisoners. I knew that it would be the toughest challenge so far in my career.

I began to visit the prisoners every day. I was told that the IGs posted there before me would never set foot inside the jail premises.

In the beginning, the prisoners would crowd around me and not speak much as they feared wardens. I would sit among large groups and discuss their problems. I knew that apart from improving the hygiene and general condition of the prison, I had to also keep the prisoners busy so that they would not have any free time to get into mischief. I started by introducing some simple but effective routines for them such as walks around the prison, sporting events and cultural events like singing and acting.



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I soon formed a group of trusted officials who helped me. A major problem that my team and I faced was that of religious groupings and enmity between them. To put an end to this danger we began to celebrate festivals from all religions, like Rakhi, Holi, Ramzaan and Christmas. This helped the inmates to accept each other's religious practices better and even feel good about participating in them. I also made sure plenty of books were available.

Soon, many universities began to offer courses for the prisoners. We introduced meditation and helped them think positively and plan their life outside prison.

I was posted in Tihar Jail between 1993 and 1995. Those two years were the most fruitful years of my life.

On my last day, as I went on my usual round of the prison, I saw what could only be described as an ashram of Indian rishis. Hundreds of hardened criminals, who had committed the worst of crimes, were sitting peacefully in meditation. The grounds were green and filled with sunlight. Inmates were either preparing for exams or learning a craft that they were passionate about.

THE END



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# Vocabulary

(All meanings given in context to the story)

Ashram	-	A calm and peaceful place usually for saints
Fruitful	-	Producing positive results
Herd	-	To gather people in a group
Humid	-	Warm and wet
Inmate	-	A person who lives with others usually in a prison
Premises	-	A building or land owned by someone
Rishi	-	An Indian saint
Routine	-	A regular activity
Stench	-	A strong unpleasant smell
Suffocation	-	Unable to breath

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