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# Understanding the Impact of Open Prison System in India as a Part of Jail Reform

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ROOBA V.<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*The word prison itself portrays a negative image and prisoners are often seen offensive by people though some of them happen to commit crime because of some provoked sudden actions without having a strong motive but 'open prison' can change that opinion. According to Reformatory theory, a criminal has to be provided a chance to change himself and start a fresh life where he can live his life as a new person. This guarantees fundamental constitutional rights, fundamental human dignity and a most importantly constitutional and human right. And, Open prison is built on the concept of trust and self-discipline. The Research Paper emphasizes the significance of open prison in India and its superiority over the conventional form of incarceration. This paper also provides a brief outlook on the history and origin of open prison. Following it, the paper explains the objectives of implementing an open prison system in India along with its advantages of adopting. This paper also explores the function of the current open prison system in India. On the other hand, it provides a detailed understanding of criticisms that are put forward and also challenges on implementing them. Analyzing every perception, this research paper gives suggestions on implementation of the open prison system in India.*

**Keywords:** *Open prison, India, Reform, fundamental, crime.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to the reformatory theory of justice, a criminal's damaging degeneracy should be eliminated and they should be given the chance to start over and live a moral life. This ensures basic human dignity, which is a vital constitutional and human right. The current penal system's major focus on punitive and retributive punishments is unsuitable for protecting human dignity. In light of this, several sociologists, lawyers, legislators and intellectuals, have argued for different changes to the criminal justice system all around the world. It is now well understood that merely punishing a wrongdoer will not result in his or her reform. It must be supplemented by some strategies to encourage and mould bad behaviour into good, and wrong behaviour into right behaviour. It must cultivate humanitarian sensibilities and make them aware of the need of living and letting live. The current prison system in India is opaque, antiquated and plagued

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<sup>1</sup> Author is a student at CMR University School of Legal Studies, India.

with systemic abuses. There is an urgent imperative for various prison reforms.<sup>2</sup> A new era in the history of the prison system has begun with the idea of open prisons. Inmates who are housed in open prisons have the opportunity to change their attitudes and behaviour patterns for the better. Instead of remaining idle in cells, inmates are allowed more freedom of interaction, nicer amenities, and jobs. Some criminologists prefer the term 'Open-Prisons' or 'Open-Jails' to describe it.

### **(A) Research questions**

1. Does the central government enforce uniform standards?
2. Does the “trust” between society and inmates be a challenge to implement open prisons?
3. Are eligibility criteria for open prisons the same in every state prison manual?
4. Does the open prison system reformed the prisoners?

### **(B) Hypothesis**

Implementing an open prison system serves to eliminate criminals from society and reform the offenders. This increases the welfare of prisoners which in one hand acts as a way to rehabilitate and is an alternate method of reforming offenders in the penal system.

### **(C) Literature review**

Resocialisation of Prisoners - A Concept of Open Prison,<sup>3</sup> the article explains the origin of open prison, its evolution. It provided the reasons and objectives to implement the open prison system and also on what criteria an offender will be eligible to be admitted in open prison. The article is so precise and is a clear reflection on the information it serves.

Concept of Open Prisons, their main characteristics, and Indian Scenario: Review,<sup>4</sup> the author of the article directly focus on the content of the topic. The article provides exactly the knowledge about content that is titled. The article explains the characteristics and the functioning of open prison system. The article emphasis mainly on explaining the characteristics of the open prison.

Understanding open prisons in India<sup>5</sup>- the authors of the article insist to look forward on

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<sup>2</sup> Suryansh Tiwari, Concept of Open Prison System as a Correctional System: A Study in Light of Present Context, *International Journal of Legal Science and Innovation* (Oct. 15, 2022, 4:00PM),

<sup>3</sup> Nrupathunga Patel & Dr.G.S.Venumadhava, Resocialisation of Prisoners - A Concept of Open Prison, *Indian Journal of Applied Science* (Oct. 15, 2022, 5:30PM), [https://www.worldwidejournals.com/indian-journal-of-applied-research-\(IJAR\)/recent\\_issues\\_pdf/2016/April/April\\_2016\\_1461303321\\_\\_174.pdf](https://www.worldwidejournals.com/indian-journal-of-applied-research-(IJAR)/recent_issues_pdf/2016/April/April_2016_1461303321__174.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Bindu Bansal, Concept of Open Prisons, their main characteristics and Indian Scenario: A Review, *Universal Research Report* (Oct. 16, 2022, 6:00PM), <https://www.uresearchr.com/uploads/2018/v5i1/28.v5i1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Parikshit Goyal & Kamesh Vedula, Understanding Open Prisons in India, *Economic & Political Weekly* (Oct. 15, 2022, 10:20 PM), <https://www.epw.in/node/157897/pdf>

reformatory theory of justice and shows light on human dignity. The article contains all most every information needed for a reader to know about open prison and its enforcement in India. It explains how open prisons work in practical appliance.

## **II. HISTORY OF OPEN PRISONS**

First the Open Prison was established in Switzerland in 1891 and then in 1916 in the United States. The Hague Conference, held in 1952, proposed the establishment of open-air camps. The subject of "how prisons could be organised to lessen the possibility that the offender would repeat their illegal activities" dominated post-revolutionary America's penal policy. This approach reflected a firm belief that human beings are capable of reformation if given the right circumstances. Two jail reformers, John Howard and Jeremy Bentham, expressed disgust with the philosophy of deterrence in the 18th century.<sup>6</sup> They agreed that facilities built to rehabilitate convicts would aid in crime prevention. Many institutions put this reformation idea to the test in the late 18th century. During practise trials, however, this attempt at reformation failed.

### **(A) Objectives for implementing**

- To reduce overcrowding in prisons
- To provide self-reliance training and to reward good behaviour,
- To supply dependable, long-term labour for public works projects,
- To alleviate long-term residents' frustrations and instil optimism,
- To give agricultural and industrial training,
- To see if releasing convicts from prison is a good idea, and
- To allow detainees to live with their families (in some states).<sup>7</sup>

### **(B) Significance of open prison**

The following are some of the characteristics of an open prison:

1. Informal and institutionalised small-group life with the bare minimum of supervision.
2. Efforts to increase inmates' awareness of their social responsibilities.
3. Appropriate training facilities for inmates in agricultural and similar occupations.

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<sup>6</sup> Suryanshi Tiwari, Concept of Open Prison System as a Correctional System: A Study of Present Context, *International Journal of Legal Science and Innovation* (Oct. 18, 2022, 2:00PM), <https://www.ijlsi.com/wp-content/uploads/Concept-of-Open-Prison-System-as-a-Correctional-System.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Nrupathunga Patel & Dr. G. S. Venumadhava, Resocialisation of Prisoners- A concept of Open prison, *Indian Journal of Applied Research* (Oct. 18, 2022, 3:00PM), [https://www.worldwidejournals.com/indian-journal-of-applied-research-\(IJAR\)/recent\\_issues\\_pdf/2016/April/April\\_2016\\_1461303321\\_\\_174.pdf](https://www.worldwidejournals.com/indian-journal-of-applied-research-(IJAR)/recent_issues_pdf/2016/April/April_2016_1461303321__174.pdf)

4. More opportunities for inmates to meet their relatives and friends so that they can talk about their troubles at home.
5. Flexible remissions of up to fifteen days per month.<sup>8</sup>
6. Adequate attention paid to inmates' health and leisure needs.
7. Open Jail Institutions are managed by professionally skilled and well-trained people.<sup>9</sup>
8. Improved diet, with provisions for a specific diet for convicts who are weak or unwell.

### **III. CHALLENGES IN ADOPTING OPEN PRISON SYSTEM**

Since independence, India's states have formed a number of investigation and reform committees, but they have lacked the political will to push the changes through to completion. This could be as a result of the general public's disregard for the situation of inmates, who are frequently viewed as criminals unable to undergo moral and social change. In the establishment and maintenance of open prisons, a fundamental difficulty is the lack of consistency across jurisdictions. A lack of legislative effort is sometimes blamed for the incapacity of the central government to impose universal standards and improvements in state-by-state jail administration. Under List II of the Constitution of India's Seventh Schedule, the topic of prisons and related subjects falls under the legislative jurisdiction of the states. The efficacy of the open prison idea is dependent on the availability of huge areas of land around closed prisons to serve as natural perimeters within which offenders must engage in a range of subsistence activities. Due to increasing land shortage in India, this is becoming increasingly problematic. The trust between the state apparatus and the inmates is exemplified through open prisons. But the main question is if this trust can be developed between society and convicts/ex-convicts. Chakraburttty talks about the issues with elderly inmates at Buxar's open prison.<sup>10</sup> They are encouraged to stay with their families, as is customary, but they find it difficult to adjust because most of them have lost touch with their relatives due to protracted imprisonment. In the open prison system, it is difficult for elderly inmates to make a living. As a result, due to their inability to be self-sufficient, these individuals cannot be sent back to closed prisons.

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<sup>8</sup> Bindu Bansal, Concept of Open Prisons, their main characteristics, and Indian Scenario: A Review, Universal Research Reports (Oct. 18, 2022, 6:30PM), <http://www.uresearchr.com/uploads/2018/v5i1/28.v5i1.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Shreya Chatterjee, Open prison system in India and its significance, The Amikus Qriae, (Oct. 18, 2020, 10:30 AM) <https://theamikusqriae.com/open-prison-system-in-india-and-its-significance/>

<sup>10</sup> Parikshit Goyal & Kamesh Vedula, Understanding Open Prisons in India, Economic and Political weekly, (Oct. 19, 2020, 6:30 PM) <https://www.epw.in/node/157897/pdf>

#### **IV. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR TRANSFER OF CONVICTS FROM CLOSED TO OPEN PRISONS**

Distinct states have different Prison Manuals that outline the qualifying conditions for inmates to be transferred from closed to open prisons. In Andhra Pradesh, the age limit for admission to an open jail should be between 21 and 55 years old. A criminal is eligible for transfer only after completing 1/3 of their sentence in a closed cell and having served more than 5 years. Inmates are transferred to open jail in Anantpur, Andhra Pradesh,<sup>11</sup> based on their good behaviour and fulfilment of two-thirds of their term. Inmates can acquire new agricultural skills while growing cucumbers, brinjal mangoes, and other fruits and vegetables. In Andhra Pradesh, prisoners who are frequent and dangerous criminals, political agitators, or have a history of fleeing from open prisons, or who have any other charges ongoing against them, or who have any sickness that may progress under open conditions, are all disqualified. Women are not transferred to open prisons in the State based on arbitrary criteria. Open Prison Rules in Maharashtra are governed by Maharashtra Open Prison Rules, 1971. A Selection Committee will be constituted, consisting of the Superintendent of Prison, the Inspector General, the Deputy Inspector General, and a Superintendent of Open Prison. The key selection factors are the duration of the term, the amount of time already spent, the convict's physical and mental health, and his or her good behaviour. In this state as well, there are ineligibility conditions, and convicts who have a history of mental illness, are convicted of narcotics, are hardened murderers, or have been convicted of sedition or arms collecting are disqualified for transfer. Woman inmates are not allowed to be transferred to open prisons, which is another arbitrary criterion. In Rajasthan the open prisons are governed by the Rajasthan Prisoners open-air camp rules, 1972.<sup>12</sup> The goal of open jails, according to the rules, is to encourage good behaviour among inmates and provide them a chance to socialise and better their economic situation. According to the Rajasthan Open Prison Rules, 1972, Sampurnanand Open Prison can house convicts

- a. with good behaviour
- b. who have served one-third of their sentence
- c. whose names have been proposed by the Committee formed for this purpose

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<sup>11</sup> Suryanshi Tiwari, Concept of Open Prison System as a Correctional System: A Study in light of Present Context, *International Journal of Legal Science and Innovation*, (OCT. 19, 2020, 7:45 PM) <https://www.ijlsi.com/wp-content/uploads/Concept-of-Open-Prison-System-as-a-Correctional-System.p>

<sup>12</sup> Suryanshi Tiwari, Concept of Open Prison System as a Correctional System: A Study in light of Present Context, *International Journal of Legal Science and Innovation*, (Oct. 19, 2020, 9:30 PM) <https://www.ijlsi.com/wp-content/uploads/Concept-of-Open-Prison-System-as-a-Correctional-System.p>

The Jail Superintendent compiles a list of qualified criminals for transfer and sends it to the Open-air Camp Advisory Committee, which makes the final decision. Ineligible convicts include those who are:

- a. under the age of 25 or over the age of 60
- b. have a mental disease history.
- c. Those convicted of serious crimes such as arms trafficking or political offences, among others.

## **V. OPEN PRISON IN INDIA**

The most important international instrument dealing to the protection of prisoners' rights is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). India ratified the Covenant in 1979 and is now required to adopt the Covenant's provisions into domestic legislation and administrative practise. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights specifies that "no one should be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment." Section 24 of the Implementation of the All-India Committee on Jail Reforms agreed that convicts who had completed a specific amount of their sentence satisfactorily should be moved to open-air camps and permitted to live in a close-community setting. The first All India Jail Committee was founded in 1836, and the concept of an open prison system was established in India[12]. The results, however, were disappointing, forcing the development of a number of committees, the most notable of which was the All-India Committee on Jail Reforms, which was established in 1956. The Mulla Group was the most influential body in India's open prison system's establishment. The Committee states on open institutions in Chapter XIX of the committee report. In 1905, the first open prison was established in India's Bombay Presidency. The inmates were chosen from a specific class of inmates at Thane Central Jail. However, in 1910, this open prison was closed. In 1953, the state of Uttar Pradesh established the first open prison camp with Benaras to help in the construction of a dam over the Chandraprabha River.

### **(A) Implementation of open prison in India**

If the current Prison Statistics of India Report, 2021, is any indication, the successful implementation of the idea of open correctional institutions across the states has been moderated. According to the report, among all states and union territories only 88 had open jails as of December 31, 2021. Rajasthan has 39 open prisons out of a total of 88 in India. The state with the highest occupancy rate (89.3percent) is Punjab, while the state with the lowest percentage is Himachal Pradesh (7.5 percent). Only three states, Maharashtra, Kerala and

Rajasthan have built capacity in open jails for female detainees. Maharashtra has the maximum capacity for convicts in its open jails, despite having fewer open prisons compared to Rajasthan.<sup>13</sup>

### **(B) Open prisons in India: success or failure?**

The good and bad aspects of the system must be assessed in order to determine whether open jails in India are a success or failure. The NCRB data released in 2015 highlights some of the reasons why the open prison system can be criticised. The data revealed that there were 77 in-custody suicides and 11 deaths as a result of in-custody murders. The following are some of the reasons why the system is criticised:

- i. **Open Prisons Are Underutilized:** As previously said, each state has its own set of laws for convicts' eligibility for open prisons. The eligibility requirements are quite subjective and are often based on good behaviour, the kind of offence, the length of the term, and the security risk. Dangerous offenders are rarely moved, and some jurisdictions have unilaterally excluded women from participating. These rules have resulted in low occupancy rates and underutilization of open prisons, weakening the essential foundations of open prison, namely, convict socialisation and reform. The Justice Mulla Committee for open prisons in India concluded that the most important consideration in deciding whether or not to send a prisoner to an open prison should be the "suitability of his admission,"<sup>14</sup> rather than the nature of the crime or the length of the sentence
- ii. Those who are awaiting trial are not eligible for open prisons.
- iii. The regulations that regulate the operation of open prisons are outdated date, and they should be changed to fit the needs of existing and future offenders.
- iv. In India, no Union Territories have ever attempted open jails, while the States have only a handful.
- v. Our country has long been plagued by corruption. Wealthy offenders, even those charged with serious crimes and hardened criminals, are sometimes relocated to open-air prisons due to bribes. Furthermore, followers in the retributive or deterrent theory criticise open air jails, believing that punishment should be harsh in order to punish the offender for his wrongdoing and deter others from doing the same.

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<sup>13</sup> NCRB, <https://ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/PSI-2019-27-08-2020.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Suryanshi Tiwari, Concept of Open Prison System as a Correctional System: A Study in light of Present Context, *International Journal of Legal Science and Innovation*, (Oct. 25, 2022, 4:40 PM) <https://www.ijlsi.com/wp-content/uploads/Concept-of-Open-Prison-System-as-a-Correctional-System.p>

It is also said that because of the free housing, economic independence, and the ability to stay with family, inmates refuse to leave. Despite the aforementioned criticisms, the advantages of open prisons outweigh the disadvantages. Open prisons offer them the opportunity to change and reintegrate into civilised society as law-abiding citizens, as well as providing them with jobs. As a result, it instals self-confidence and self-discipline in them, and given its benefits, the open jail system is unquestionably a success as a correctional institution.

## **VI. SUGGESTIONS**

The following suggestions are offered respectfully in order to increase the utility of open prisons:

- i. In the Union Territories, open prisons should be built as well. Furthermore, States that do not currently have open jail facilities should work to build them. States that already have open prisons should expand their capacity.
- ii. To raise the occupancy rates in open prisons and make full use of them, the Mulla Committee's suggestions (as outlined in the project) should be followed.
- iii. More open prisons for women should be established in India. The first effort was undertaken in Maharashtra in 2010, when the first open prison in Yerawada was opened.
- iv. A standard set of guidelines is needed to determine the qualifying criteria for offenders to be transferred to open prisons. Allowing individual governments to make their own laws has resulted in the arbitrary exclusion of specific groups of convicts. For example, some nations have barred women from being transferred to open prisons. This may also aid in the reduction of prison administration corruption when it comes to the transfer of detainees to open prisons.
- v. In open prison institutions, special qualifications for prison employees should be mandated. "Only trained and well-adjusted personnel who accept the importance of personal knowledge and understanding of prisoners in their charge and have the qualities of leadership, integrity, and humanity should be posted to open prisons," the Central Bureau of Correctional Services recommends in its report.
- vi. The judiciary should have the authority to send certain types of offenders to open prisons, particularly in the case of minor offences and juvenile offenders, so that they are kept isolated from hardened criminals and the vices prevalent in Indian jails.

- vii. To instil self-reliance in the inmates,<sup>15</sup> they should be paid 'equitable compensation' for their job, and paucity of resources should not be an excuse. Varying states pay different rates, necessitating the creation of a federal law to distribute uniform wages throughout all open institutions.
- viii. A suitable amendment to Section 433-A CrPC, which requires life prisoners to serve a minimum of 14 years in jail and thereby reduces the motivation to earn remittance by working in open prisons.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Despite faults, the core principle of open prisons has made them a viable solution to the problem of overcrowding in closed prisons. Open prisons promote a sense of self-discipline and societal responsibility in inmates through freedom of movement, work, family visits, and recreational facilities. The open prison circumstances have made it possible for offenders to avoid re-offending following their release, and wage labour has enabled them to become economically self-sufficient. In India, open prisons still have a long way to go due to various governments' exclusion of particular kinds of criminals, resulting in underutilization of open jails. However, if the recommended changes are implemented, Open Prisons will play an important role as a criminal system in the Welfare State in terms of prisoner reform and rehabilitation in the near future.

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<sup>15</sup> Parikshit Goyal & Kamesh Vedula, Understanding Open Prisons in India, Economic and Political weekly, (Oct. 30, 2020, 6:25 PM) <https://www.epw.in/node/157897/pdf>

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