



REFORMATORY ACTIVITIES IN PRINCELY MYSORE PRISONS

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INTRODUCTION:

Prisons are as old as human civilization. Jails were existed from the time immemorial. We have plenty of references pertaining to jails across the globe. Even in ancient India jails were existed. The prisons in those days were not used for reforming the culprit by imposing imprisonment, but served only as places of confinement till further action was taken, i.e., execution, mutilation, deportation and so on. With the development of civilization the old methods of punishments were done away and imprisonment was replaced as a means of punishment. The concept of reforming the prisoners also evolved over the time. This is an humble attempt to bring out the facts of Prison reformatory efforts in the Princely Mysore State during the period of 1831-1947.



In the past jail administration was punitive rather than reformatory. No attempt was made for the reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners. But it was understood that criminals do make a social problem. In the western countries, efforts have been made for the prevention of crime by reforming the convicts. In India also, at present efforts were made to reform the prisoners. Prisoners cannot be reformed, unless the prison staff trained in that end.

The first Prison Reform Committee was appointed in 1836, with the efforts of T. B. Macaulay, the then Governor General of India, The committee in it's report in 1838, considered the question of prison reform, but nothing on record for the reformation of the prisoners.¹ The only positive result of this report was that it recommended for the construction of large Central Prisons, resulted in the first Central Prison came up in 1846. In 1864, the Government of India appointed the Prison Enquiry Committee which came to the conclusion that prisoners were without guidance ; that the condition of prisoner's life was miserable in all respects, that prison officials were corrupt and they had no sympathy for prisoners. In many jails women were separated from men merely by iron railing.

In Princely Mysore the Prison reform commenced during the Commissioners reign, Sir Mark Cubbon in his General Memorandum on Mysore gives us a clear picture of the contemporary

situation. In the jails under the Maharaja's administration, "little regard was had to accommodation, or management, and there was no classification of prisoners: whether convicted, accused or only suspected, they were all confined in the same place" ² The commissioner government abolished the working of convicts before trial in 1835.

The Bangalore Town Jail was removed in the beginning of 1858 from its former locality in a low and crowded part of Pettah of Bangalore, to a better location near the Northern Gate of Pettah, after clearing the hedge. This jail was consisted of three compartments, i.e., The Felons' Jail, the Debtors Jail and the Insane Ward, each had a separate entrance. The building was constructed of granite pillars, supporting slabs of same material for the roof. There was no timber was employed. It was capable of containing 400 prisoners, but the number of inmates in 1858 were 246. The cost of the whole building was Rupees 5,458-8-6, exclusive of the value of the assistance rendered by the convicts themselves.³ The fort Jail was also constructed on the same principle as the Town Jail at a cost of Rs.1,515/- It was situated near the Mysore Gate of the fort. It could house 296 prisoners. In 1855 September the number of prisoners were 138.

In the Cantonment Jail there were in August 1834, 130 prisoners huddled together in a building suitable for only 65, and the arrangements were, "very defective, insecure and unhealthy, debtors, criminals, men, women and children being promiscuously huddled together without classification or the possibility of observing and description of prison discipline..... and... in many cases... punishment for a first offence... becomes the means of exposing the offender to the contamination of association, evil example, and counsel of the most dreaded criminals."⁴

In order to provide better facilities for the prisoners, the construction of Central Jail in Bangalore was commenced in 1863 and made available in 1867. In this institution which not only seems to have been model to the other prisons in the state, but is widely known as second to none in India, the accommodation was intended for 1,000 prisoners.⁵ On visiting the jail, L. B. Bowring saw all the jail mates were chained together in the night. If one man wanted to get up, he could not do so, without awakening all the inmates in the ward. There was no separate lock-up for women, there being only a separate room to approach to which was the same as that as the rest of the wards.⁶

The Mysore Government introduced the Government of India Prisons Act of 1870, in Mysore state in 1879. This gave a new lease of life to the prison reforms in Mysore State.

In 1879 The Mark System was introduced in Mysore Prisons. According to this system prisoners sentenced to long periods of imprisonments earned a remission of their sentence and small money gratuities for good conduct in jail. Many of the convicts were even appointed as convict Watchmen, Convict Overseers and Convict Warders.

In 1882, the practice of sending the convicts sentenced to transportation by the Courts in Mysore, to the Andaman Islands was stopped due to heavy cost of their up-keep in the penal settlement. Such prisoners were kept in the Central Jail at Bangalore.⁷

The Indian Jails Committee Report, 1919-20, recommended that prisoners should be under the superintendence and control of persons who were well versed in penology; that they must be taught to work hard and make out an honest living after release and that they should be taught some vocation. The Committee was against the use of fetters, while the prisoners were engaged in public works. It also recommended that moral and religious lessons should be imparted to prisoners. Most of these recommendations were introduced in Mysore prisons.

The question of prison reform on the lines of the recommendation of the Indian Jails Committees engaged attention during the year 1926. A tabulated list of suggestions were drawn up indicating the directions in which improvement may be effected with due regard to financial and other local conditions or in respect of which action has already been taken and the suggestions are under consideration of the Government. Proposals for starting a Borstal Institute and an After Care Association for Juvenile offenders were also considered by the Government.⁸

In 1941, the Mysore Government appointed Prison Reform Committee. The committee was constituted, to make an enquiry into the whole matter of prison administration in the Mysore state, the efficiency of the existing system, and any defects therein, and to suggest remedies and improvements on practicable lines. The committee in its recommendations stressed on the reformatory side, with the following suggestions:

ON EDUCATION

- Education in Prison must be made compulsory and should take the form of elementary instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic.
- Those who desire education beyond the elementary level should be provided books and other assistance.
- Education must be given in the vernacular, English being taught in addition.
- The educational work in the prison should receive full co-operation from the Department of Public Instruction.
- Library should be provided with an ample supply of books and periodicals in the vernaculars and in English.
- Prisoners should be permitted to have books of an unobjectionable character, of their own.
- The natural longing for news of the outside world should not be suppressed.

On Moral and Religious Instruction

- Instruction should be non-sectarian in character.
- Private organizations efforts in religious instruction may be continued.
- Charts related to moral precepts and rules of conduct may be hung up in all cells.
- Increase in the pay of non-sectarian instructors.

On Recreation

- An open air recreation should come before the evening meal.
- After evening meal time may be set for general lectures, discourses and debates.
- Another hour may be devoted to Bhajans, music and listening to news summaries.
- Prisoners may be allowed to organize a band or orchestra among themselves.

On Vocational training :

- Training must, ordinarily provided in connection with the industries carried on in the jail.
- Vocational training must train a man to work with modern machinery
- Crafts may be taught, so that they can take up after release.

On Interviews and Letters

- The humanizing influence of a close touch between prisoner and his family and friends should be encouraged.
- Well behaved prisoners should be permitted to have interview once in a month and to write and receive letters.
- Interview procedure should be simplified.
- Writing materials should be supplied free of cost.

The recommendations of the Prison Reform Committee were given a concrete shape by passing out Mysore Prisons Act 1943. The Committee insisted on doing away with the Indian Prisons Act of 1870, as it had many defects.

Education

It has been noted that large number of prisoners in Mysore were illiterates. This implies that illiteracy and ignorance were also partly responsible for crime. Most of the criminals were no doubt aware of the fact that crime was committed but unaware of the consequences. Education is one of the means by which the criminals may be released from the chains of ignorance and thereby reformed.⁹

In December 1866, a school master was engaged for the instruction of the boys at Rs. 20 per mensem. At the Beginning of 1867, Doctor Henderson commenced the instruction of the adult prisoners. He first formed a class of those prisoners, who already knew how to read Canarese. His intention was to distribute these convicts as monitors to different barracks, and the education of one barrack began. Later on the other convicts who could read were distributed to different barracks, forming the pupils into classes of 15 each under a separate instruction. The hour of instruction is from 5 PM (after the men had their dinner) till lock-up time 6 o'clock. Prisoners thoroughly appreciated the effort, even the old men took to letters and their progress was more rapid than that of adult Europeans would have been under similar circumstances.¹⁰ A Paid teacher appointed in 1868 in the Bangalore Central Jail to teach the inmates. Inmates were taught Kanarese, Hindustani and English. There was no paid teacher in Mysore and Shimogga Jails. In Shimogga a convict competent to teach was employed to instruct.

Much was done in the Central Jail at Bangalore and to a small extent in the Mysore Jail towards educating the convicts, especially those of youthful age. A Hindustani class was opened in the Mysore Jail in 1881. Since June 1893, no instructions were given to the adult convicts. Juveniles were taught Kannada and English on a moderate scale by a literate convict

With the sanction of the government in 1912, during the year 1913-14, books were allowed into the barracks and some selected prisoners read them to the rest for an hour or two before the bedtime. Since then the prisoners were allowed to use books during leisure hours. The Jails at Bangalore and Mysore were given libraries. In 1922, these libraries were improved to encourage convicts reading suitable books on religion and morals. In 1923 a whole time teacher for teaching adult convicts was sanctioned by the government.

By 1926 there were two schools attached to Bangalore Central Jail, one for teaching Kannada and other for teaching Urdu. In Kannada school 30 convicts finished their course and there were 49 pupils at the end of 1928. With regard to the establishment of Reformatory School for the Juvenile prisoners was planned.

Moral and Religious Instruction:

Provision was made for the imparting moral and religious lessons to prisoners. In the month of October 1867, all the native Catholic Christians were placed in a separate barrack, and Reverend A. de Kerezout gave them religious instruction. Their number was 18.¹¹ At the close of the year 1910-11, the local theosophical society, the Ramakrishna mission and the Central Mohammadan Association of Bangalore came forward to deliver discourses on religious and moral subjects. Similar arrangements were made in the Mysore Jails with the sanction of the government in 1912. To instruct Ligayat and Brahmin prisoners in the central Jail, Bangalore. Every Sunday afternoon was devoted to Bhajanas or Harikathas.¹²

Vocational Training

The Indian Jail Committee, 1919-20, laid stress on the training of prisoners in selected trades. This was desired for several reasons. First, it is economic on the part of the jail administration as many jail requirements can be supplied by prison labour at a cheaper price. Second, it has a great educative value, because, if prisoners go out of jail learning some vocations they may be able to earn their livelihood. Third, prisoners are engaged and they cannot idle away their time. Finally, some kind of work is absolutely necessary to maintain oneself in good health.

Many cottage industries were established at the Central Jail at Bangalore, over a period of time. They were. A large number of prisoners learnt the trade and made use of their skills in the in jail and later when they were released.

1. Carpet and cumbly making
2. Cloth weaving
3. Tent repairing
4. Gunny and coir work
5. Carpentry
6. Smithy
7. Pottery
8. Rattan work and basket making
9. Book binding
10. Lithography
11. Brick and tile making
12. Printing

In the district Jail at Mysore were:-

1. Carpentry
2. Smithy
3. Cloth weaving
4. Carpet and cumbly making.¹³

Remission System

The Mark system was introduced in 1879 by which convicts of good conduct could earn appointments as warders and work supervisors, with some remission of sentence and small gratuities.¹⁴ The new Mark rules which were in force in Madras Province were introduced into the Mysore Jails in June 1895, and they were appreciated by all convicts except those sentenced to less than one year's imprisonment.

Interviews and Letters

Convict prisoners were graded into three categories. Based on their good conduct and marks earned in the remission system they were permitted to write and receive letters and also to have interviews. Convicts of first class were entitled for writing and receiving one letter every three months and one interview. Second class convicts were entitled for writing and receiving one letter every four months and one interview. Third class convicts were entitled for writing and receiving one letter every six months and one interview.

Thus the Mysore jail administration gradually began to introduce reforms not only in tangible aspects but also in reforming the prisoners more initiatives were gathered. In the

beginning of 19th century there existed no proper system of prison as such, in modern perception, made humble beginning during the commissioners regime and was developed in the modern methods under the Rajah's of Mysore. At present the jail system in Karnataka has made great leaps in reforming the prisoners.

CONCLUSION

The Princely Mysore was truly called a model state due to great leap taken in various aspects. Department of Prisons has no exception in this regard. During the Commissioners rule efforts were made to systematize the jail department. Later the reforms were aimed at providing humane atmosphere in the state prisons.

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