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Prison Education: A Ray Hope for Jail Inmates to be a Better Individual in Life

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Abstract: Prisoners' Education in India is an institutionalised insufficiency. It is imperative to prioritise prison education in policy, evaluate existing programmes for efficiency, as well as scale them up to be availed by each and every inmate in the country.

Keywords: Prison Education, Jail Inmates, Adult Learning, Distance Education, Upskilling.

I. INTRODUCTION

Prison education is any educational activity that occurs inside prison. Courses can include basic literacy programs, secondary school equivalency programs, vocational education and tertiary education. Other activities such as rehabilitation programs, physical education and arts and crafts programs may also be considered a form of prison education. Programs are typically provided, managed and funded by the prison system, though inmates may be required to pay for distance education programs. The history of and current practices in prison education vary greatly among countries.

II. BACKGROUND

The need for prison reforms in modern India was first highlighted by Lord Thomas Macaulay, who addressed in the Legislative Council of India in 1835 about the deplorable conditions in Indian prisons. He called the practices taking place inside the prisons to be "shocking to humanity". On the basis of his recommendations, the Prison Discipline Committee was established in 1836. It was soon followed by the Jail Manual and Discipline (1864) and the Calcutta Conference (1877), which suggested the abolition of the backbreaking outdoor labour that prisoners were made to do while incarcerated. Although the conversation had not yet focused on the need to educate and rehabilitate prisoners, some of the groundwork for this was established.

When the discourse on punishment shifted from a punitive to a more reformative approach in the early 20th century, the Indian Jail Committee Report 1919-20 proposed vocational training and work programmes as a possible and more rehabilitative alternative to the hard labour that prisoners were forced to do.

III. REVIEW BY RESEARCHERS

Accordin to Criminologists Vijay Raghavan and Vineetha S , vocational training and work programmes remained conceptually interchangeable, and prisoners continued to work during their term, a practice often defended as "on the job training".

In subsequent decades, scholars and activists began to advocate for educational facilities to be made available within the confines of the prison, in the form of libraries, educational courses, and so on. Many such programmes were started, reportedly, in prisons around independent India, with a focus on skill building and overall personality development of convicts, so that they can successfully reintegrate into society post release. However, in 1983, Qaiser Hayat extensively studied the general and vocational education available at the time and came to the conclusion that prison education in India remains largely neglected. There were no modern programmes of vocational training, inadequate library facilities, and a noted lack of trained instructors and separate classrooms. Other barriers to improving educational programmes in prison existed in the form of negative attitudes of fellow prisoners towards those involved in these programmes. Almost 40 years later, the little that is known about the state of prison education in India suggests that it continues to be a neglected issue.

Numerous reports dating from the end of the 19th century have pointed to the need for educational programs in prisons. However, the basic penal philosophy is one of deterrence and retribution. Prisoner education remains largely neglected. The prison education program includes both general education and vocational education. However, the number of trained teachers is insufficient, and no supervisory staff is provided. No modern program of vocational training exists. Prison libraries are inadequate.

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Barriers to improvement of educational programs include the negative attitudes of fellow inmates toward prisoners involved in educational programs and the lack of separate rooms for classes. Inadequate textbooks and fundings, poor pay for teachers, and administrators' attitudes are further problems. Recommended changes are revision of courses, instilling positive attitudes toward inmate education, separate school buildings and classrooms, adequate pay for staff, and control of inmate education by the State Board of Education. Further needs are proper supplying and staffing of libraries, improved vocational education, provision of television and radio facilities to inmates, and adequate funding.

Furthermore, the vocational training offered to inmates is rarely beneficial to them after release, with limited job prospects and earning potential in those respective fields. While the 2003 Model Prison Manual suggested that vocational courses be upgraded on a regular basis, studies have shown that this has very rarely been the case. Teachers are often untrained and low-paid, tools and equipment are unavailable, raw materials are short, and the resulting goods produced are therefore substandard, further resulting in lack of interest or motivation among inmates. Moreover, inmates are often assigned to particular courses based on availability of seats with no regard to their aptitude or interests. Payment for their labour, which aims to bring dignity and value to work as well as equip prisoners with some monetary support post release, is often below minimum wage.

Vocational training programmes in Indian prisons, therefore, present as rather punitive than reformative upon close analysis. The lack of individual agency to pick a program, the denial of choice on whether to work at all, and the meagre wages, suggest that the current programmes are tokenistic, existing only to meet certain government guidelines rather than for the interest of prisoners.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is evident that prison education in India is an institutionalised insufficiency – it is hardly mandated and regulated in policy, and finds even less importance in practice. Prisoners face systemic barriers in reintegrating back to society, thus continuing the cycle of incarceration. Very few studies exist to assess the nature of existing programmes and their outcomes. The same taboos and stereotypes that prejudice the general population against convicts and ex-convicts also prevent prisoners from finding opportunities for rehabilitation, as the government as well as civil society rarely invest in their education and upskilling. The programmes that do exist are scattered and small in scale.

It is imperative, therefore, to prioritise prison education in policy, evaluate existing programmes for efficiency, as well as scale them up to be availed by each and every inmate in the country. A programme similar to the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan or the National Adult Education Programme, or a statutory body like the UGC can bring education in prisons under their umbrella so that the curriculum that is followed has real world advantage for inmates. Similarly, vocational training should be effective and provide skills that are beneficial in the world outside prisons. Both educational and vocational training programmes should be designed keeping in mind the different levels and kinds of education, cultural backgrounds, interests, ages, genders, and abilities of inmates. Inmates should be able to choose which programmes to be a part of, and paid adequate wages for their labour. It is only when prisoners are given the tools necessary to reintegrate into society after their incarceration is over, can a prison system be truly reformative in practice.

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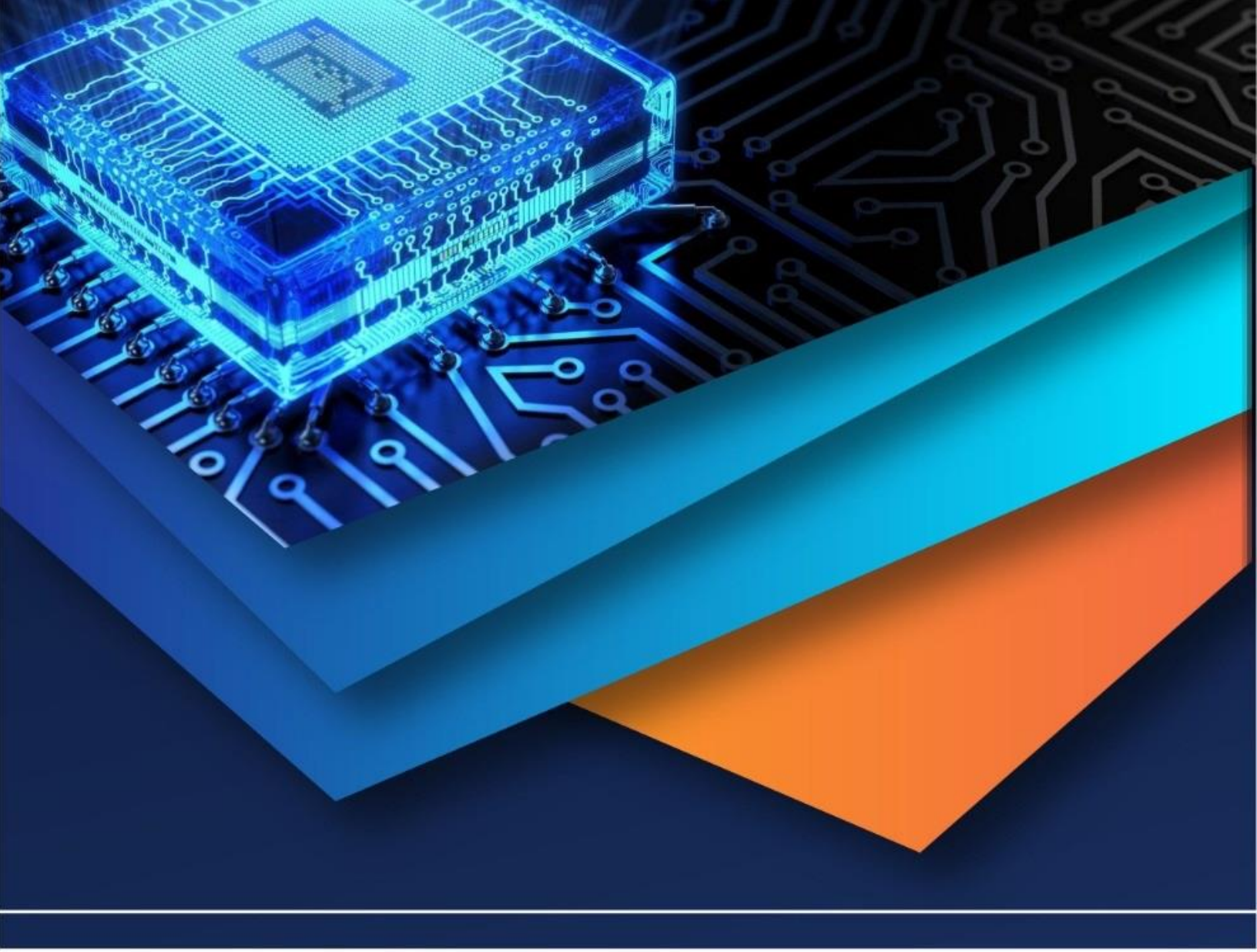

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