CHAPTER VI
Conclusion

Invading the closed jail system was a challenging task, but venturing the same I began to see the majesty and dread it contains. The majestic part was the way women gave meaning to their lives within the confined. But the dreadful part was that I was plagued by the surroundings and sometimes some unsettling narratives of the women, which at times questioned my willpower. It required tenacity and unrelenting self-criticism to go through my own emotions to make sure that the women's voices were interpreted objectively. I've gained the ability to be more understanding, patient, perceptive, understanding, and less judgemental.

The present study investigates the phenomenon of imprisonment and the trajectory of women prisoners in Assam. This research has explored the experiences of women prisoners and shown how the power dynamics inside the jail affect them, as well as the difficulties they encounter. The research has also investigated how women strategically navigate the influence of the prison system on their lives. This study delves further into the post-release experiences of women prisoners, specifically examining the re-entry process. It sheds light on the challenging road these women face upon re-entering society, characterized by stigma and struggles. In the process of my study attempt has been made to make the women prisoners visible through their own narratives who are very much invisible in the Criminal Justice System and in society as a whole. I portrayed the lives of the women prisoners under my study as narrated because it provided a means of understanding the nuances of living a life within confinement.

The study has been conducted with three objectives and has been carried out in two central jails of Assam. The first objective examines how control and discipline operate upon the women in the prisons and reflects that control and discipline in the prison act in an extra total way, making the women's imprisonment harsher than that of the males. Control and discipline are used to develop subjects who are dominated. The bodies of women prisoners are marked and disfigured by the jail, where the combination of material deprivation and control exerted on their bodies serves as a means of socializing and regulating bodies within the larger society. The second objective is to understand the ways and means of how the women prisoners create every day for themselves. The women created their everyday by adapting and resisting the prison routine through tricks

and tactics which consisted of both tangible and intangible means. The every day of women reflected power dynamics and the informal economies that emerged within the prison system. The third objective is to explore the nature and process of re-entry of women and reflect how the re-entry process is full of challenges for women, as it makes the women encounter stigma and challenges.

In this research, I have used Foucault's (1978) concept of power and Goffman's (1961) concept of Total Institution to understand how imprisonment works for women. Foucault claims that people both receive and transmit power (Foucault, 1978). Prison operating as total institution, possesses authority through comprehensive surveillance. Bentham's jail architecture drawing is the best-known monitoring system illustration. Even if the prisons of the field site in architecture differs from Bentham's, the research examines the panopticon's ideology to determine how power affects women in jail. He claims that as part of power dynamics, people might reject power and challenge them. To understand the complicated link between resistance and power in prison, De Certeau's (1984) resistance theory is engaged. To understand the women prisoners' everyday resistance methods, "tactic" has been the main emphasis. The research further engages Lefebvre (1991) work on everyday space production to understand the created everyday of the women prisoners. The research explores prison power's impact on women's lives even after release to assess their re-entry process. Goffman's Stigma (1963) and Coser's Greedy Institution (1974) are used to analyze the process of re-entry of women.

6.1 Chapter summary

The thesis has been developed into six chapters. Chapter one presents the research problem, research objectives, methodology, conceptual framework, literature review, and research ethics. Chapter two of thesis delves into the historical development and current state of the prison system in India and Assam, emphasizing the colonial influences and subsequent reforms. The chapter explores the researcher's fieldwork experiences, reflecting on the challenges and dynamics of conducting research within prison settings. It addresses the complexities of navigating the prison environment as a research site, discussing methodological approaches, the researcher's subjectivity, and the power dynamics encountered during fieldwork. Chapter three through Focauldian (1978) and Goffmanion (1961) lens examines the prison as a total institution and reflects that power operate in an extra total way for the women. The chapter begins with the accounts of the

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admission procedure and the initial days of the women in prison and brings to light how the transformation occurs in the self and identity the women to adjust their lives in the prison. The chapter then discusses how time in prison is maintained through the system of *gunti*, and the nuances associated with it. The chapter then highlights how prison acts in an extra total way for the women as time in prison is used as an additional form of punishment for women in conjunction with space resulting in a scarcity of space and an abundance of time. In the process, the chapter describes the accounts of the women prisoners which shows how the prison not only controls the movements of the women but power is exercised over the body of the women directly, as body boundaries are not respected. The prison in a way also acts partially in respect of men and women prisoners, as women are denied access to prison labour, in matter of legal aid also the male prisoners gain superiority. The chapter also shows how the *mulakat* which is a right of the women prisoners is treated as a privilege and women's emotions are held at stake.

Chapter four deals with the created everyday of the women. A primary emphasis of this chapter is on the ways in which women manipulate prison time and space in their own advantage in order to build a daily routine for themselves. The chapter begins with how the women speaks of boredom in their life due to the monotonous prison routine, and how to overcome boredom they discovered strategies and tactics to create an everyday for themselves. Through Lefebvre's (1971, 1976) prism on everyday and boredom, the chapter locates how women in a way discovers adaption and resistance mechanisms to do with boredom. Following that, the chapter provides a comprehensive account of the strategies and techniques employed by women prisoners to create their everyday. These encompass both concrete methods, such as utilizing prohibited products to enhance their quality of life and occupy their ample leisure time, as well as abstract approaches like engaging in gossips, cultivating friendships, pursuing romantic relationships, and fulfilling their maternal responsibilities. De Certeau (1976) idea of tactics is used to understand the way women overcome the monotony of prison life and make their ward a livable place.

Chapter Five details the re-entry process of the women and the associated challenges that the women face mainly stigma and shame. The chapter begins with a discussion of the challenges faced by women prisoners in readjusting to life outside of prison. It highlights the negative effects of prison time and habits on their ability to adapt and the

development of self-stigma. These factors pose a significant struggle for individual women prisoners in their transition back into society.

  The chapter then locates the process of re-entry in the sphere of home and within the family Symbolically, the power of prison continues to work for women in the guise of a greedy institution (Coser, 1974), and this power was exercised through the institutions of family and society. The informal power processes that were exerting their influence on women through their families were reflected in the situation of women in the spaces of the home. The women fought for their right to be respected inside the family and to maintain their individuality. For the women, their families and society serves as the walls of the jail, which allows authority to be imposed upon them.   Imprisonment affects the mother-child relationship, and their absence is a barrier to rebuilding the relationship with children after prison. Similarly, women faces difficulties in their conjugal relations. They faces issues of trust. Many of the respondents expresses how they became homeless in their homes after release. These women trace the roots of their homelessness to the experience of home they are passing through after release. Neglect and humiliation by the family members makes the women feel dejected.   The chapter also critiques the role of the State, emphasizing its passive stance in the reintegration process of the women, and called for more effective rehabilitation and support systems.

6.2 Key Findings

In the post-independence era, the principal objective of the prison was reform. To substantiate documentary evidence in this regard, in the Preamble of the Assam Prison Act, 2013 an excerpt about prison reform is mentioned as

To provide correctional treatment and guidance to the offenders committed to prison so as to facilitate their rehabilitation as law-abiding, responsible and useful members of society. To provide statutory support and guidelines for pursuing the humanitarian, correctional and rehabilitative objectives of the prison organization in the State of Assam (The Prison Act 2013,p.1358)

        However, the study brought to light that this phenomenon exists only in papers. Punishment in our culture remains embedded within the political economics of the human body. Even in the absence of employing aggressive forms of discipline, even when employing 'lenient' techniques that involve confinement, the focus is always on the physical body and its capabilities, its usefulness and obedience, its arrangement, and

subordination. The authority inside the prison system employed power as a strategic tool for women prisoners, to produce a subjected and practiced, inferiorised body which can be understood as an aspect of a larger discipline, an oppressive and inegalitarian system of gender subordination (Bordo,1988). Its ability to dominate is not derived from seizing control, but rather from the many dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, methods, and functions it employs (Haney,2008). It is possible to conclude that the Panopticon ideology can be interpreted as a cruel cage and a laboratory of power when applied to the situation of the women prisoners. Women's everyday lives showed how authority might be opposed in an institution. In false consciousness and free will perspectives, power is incompletely conceptualized (Foucault, 1979). Power may be uneven, but it cannot be separated into haves and have-nots. Resistance is a prerequisite for any power relationship. The created everyday of the women was a kind of strategic resistance, which contributed in making their living situations tolerable. Certeau (1984, p.14) defines "tactics" as the deliberate act of undermining the system in order to accomplish a particular goal. The implementation of everyday tactics of the women inside the confines of the female wards undermined the existing system of control. It represented the concept of exercising one's freedom despite being confined or restricted. When it comes to the process of re-entry for the women, it was an experience that was intrinsically full of physicality. The women's identities were compromised due to the social disapproval they faced as a consequence of their imprisonment. This resulted in the obscuring of their existence inside the societal and geographical confines of their residence, family, and domestic life. The women's identities were diminished due to the convergence of these two causes. The process of reintegrating into society presents a potential danger to the established moral framework, similar to the risk associated with a person engaging in criminal behavior. Conversely, re-entry lacks the structured and familiar procedures seen in jail, unlike the punitive process, which is defined by such rituals. The State's involvement in the re-entry process for women is minimal, leading to the current situation. For the women prisoners stigma and shame operated in a diverse range of circumstances where due to their former prisoner identity, they were believed to possess traits that bring about discredit. A stigma in a way operated as a negative characteristic that is associated with the public perception of the idea of "women prisoner". Women in a sense are doubly imprisoned, first with the formal punishment of the jail and then with the informal punishment inflicted by family and society.

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