

ABSTRACT

The study seeks to examine how prison power operates upon the women prisoners. Further, the study investigates how women prisoners are able to construct their everyday within the four walls of the prison. The study also examines the power dynamics that arise within the setting of family and society, which subsequently impact women upon their release. The present study is conducted in two Central Jails of Assam.

The Study has been conducted with the following objectives:

- To examine how control and discipline operate upon the women in the prisons
- To understand the ways and means of how the women prisoners create every day for themselves
- To explore the nature and process of re-entry of the women in the post-imprisonment period

Conceptual Framework

In order to comprehend how the jail works for the women prisoners and how they live inside it, I have employed Foucault's idea of power in this research. Foucault argues that individuals are both subject to power and are also its conveyors (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). He argues that people are unique in their ability to question power dynamics because they are a part of them and in this capacity they can resist power. To continue, the study looks at how prison operates power by functioning as a Total Institution (Goffman, 1961) for women. The key to the concept of Total Institution is the 'inmates' detachment from the outside world. 'Detachment' is a fundamental characteristic of the prison. In Prison once admitted, a person is detached from the outside world and undergoes a series of experiences. Prisons operating as total institutions exhibit power with the help of a complex system of surveillance. Jeremy Bentham's sketch of prison architecture is the most well-known illustration of such surveillance systems. Though in architecture the present prisons do not resemble Bentham's sketch, the study takes into account the ideological basis of the panopticon to see the influence of power in the everyday life of women within the prison. Regarding the created every day of women prisoners, the study refers to Lefebvre's (1991) work on production of space within daily life. De Certeau's (1984) resistance theory is necessary to comprehend the complex relationship

between resistance and power operating within the walls of the Prison. To comprehend the resistance tactics used by the women prisoners in their everyday, the notion of "tactic" has been the primary focus. The study expands upon the concept of prison power that influences the lives of women even after their release, in order to examine the functioning of the re-entry process for these women. Within this framework, the study incorporates Goffman's (1963) notion of Stigma and Coser's (1974) concept of the greedy institution.

Literature Review

Seminal works on prison such as Clemmer (1940), Sykes (1958), Foucault (1977), and Garland (1990) helped to understand the nexus of power and punishment operating within the Prison which in a way helped me to locate the women prisoners in the punishment system. Though the present prison system functioning in India is a legacy of colonial rule, there are vast differences between the prisons of the West and India. So in the Indian context, Datir (1978), Singh(1998), Shankardass (2000), and Bandyopadhyay (2015) work helped to understand the Indian Prison system, its mode of operation through the ages, and how life functions within it. To understand women's imprisonment in particular in the global context Carlen (1983), Eaton (1986), Allen (1987), Bosworth (1999), Kemshall's (2004) work and in the Indian context works of Ahuja (1969), Patnaik and Mishra (2001), Milli and Cherian (2015), Raimedhi (2017), Bandopadhyay and Mehta's (2022) helped to contextualize women's imprisonment. Similarly, Irwin (1970), Tracy- Leonard (1996), Visser and Travis (2002), and Tong's (2022) work helped to understand post- imprisonment life.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative approach and adheres to a feminist methodological framework. The feminist research assumptions of notable feminists served as the basis for the methodological choices that were made during the study. The power dynamics between the researcher and the subjects being studied is somewhat eliminated under the feminist methodology. When doing feminist research it is essential to take into account the stance of researchers who aim to empower study participants and give them more influence and authority. Throughout the entire research process, I made a deliberate effort to clearly define and address the power dynamics while also avoiding the exertion

of power in the research process between myself and the participants which is reflected in the study. In addition to being participants, my research subjects i.e., the women prisoners also function as "co-creators of new knowledge" in the research process as they share their narratives on how they built and reconstructed their lives both inside and outside of prison.

Interview and observation were used as methods of research. To collect narratives, the interview was used as a research tool throughout the entire research process. The fieldwork was carried out during 2021 and 2022. I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with the women prisoners in the two central jails of Assam as well as with the women who were released from prison. In the two central jails, in total, I interviewed 53 women prisoners along with some prison staff and interviewed 19 former women prisoners.

The philosophies of ethics serve as a framework for moral conduct, helping people distinguish between what is good and wrong in various situations (Israel & Hay, 2006,15). In this study, interviews were conducted with participants who only volunteered to participate and I tried my best to make the respondents understand the purpose of my work. Confidentiality is highly maintained throughout the study. All the names of the participants including the names of the jails are pseudonyms. I took utmost care during the entire research process not to cause psychological and emotional harm to the respondents.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter one introduces the research topic followed by the statement of the problem. The Chapter then discusses the conceptual and theoretical framework within which the study is located. This is followed by the relevant literature related to the research problem and finally followed by the research objectives, research questions, and methodology. The second chapter introduces the field which is the Prison. The chapter briefly describes the trajectory of the Prison in India and Assam, describing the prison reforms, the prison structure, and prison management. The chapter then describes the field: the two prisons under study. The chapter further offers a thick description of the field experiences, the question of reflexivity, the subjective positioning of the researcher, and the challenges of conducting research in a field such as the Prison.

The third chapter locates how power operates over women through the control and discipline mechanisms within the prison. The chapter also problematizes how space and time work within the regime of punishment for women. Chapter four deals with the created every day of the women. The fifth chapter deals with the process of re-entry of the women. The sixth chapter is the concluding chapter and brings a summary of all the chapters and highlights the major findings of the study.

Significant Findings

The study demonstrates the manner in which prison authority operates power in a very coercive manner against women. However, these women exhibit a kind of resistance by strategically navigating prison space and time to their advantage, therefore establishing their own daily routines thus creating their own everyday. The study also highlights the symbolic presence of prison power in the lives of the women after their release, and how it impacts their re-entry process in myriad ways.