

## **Education as a Source of Change and Discipline: A Case Study of Education System in the Prisons of Colonial Punjab**

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the education system in the prisons of colonial Punjab from 1849 to 1947. The main aim is to understand the basic prison system in the context of colonialism and the role of education in transforming prisoners into civilized citizens. Education was one of the key elements of reforming the prisoners, which was not practiced in any prison in colonial Punjab with a proper system like the other subjects and elements of prisons. The prison education system in the prisons of colonial Punjab was divided into two phases: the first phase from 1849 to 1900 AD, which was relatively better in the context of prison education, as the colonial authorities tried to maintain an education system for the adult prisoners, and the second phase from 1900 to 1947. During this period, education was ignored in the prisons of colonial Punjab because it was considered not useful for the inmates. On the other hand, labour, skill, and industrial development were more focused in the prisons of colonial Punjab, but this, in fact, never proved to be a source of reformation and transformation. The labour work was, in most cases, extramural, and the inmates faded up from hard labor.

**Key Words:** Colonial Prisons, Punjab, Discipline, Education

### **Introduction**

From the emergence of modern prisons until present, a number of modes of education and reformation have been adopted to reform the prisoners from criminals to useful citizens. In present time, the prison reforms in some of the countries have attained and achieved much to reform the criminals (Radzinowicz, 1939). In developed countries, the mechanisms and educational measures were followed by the prison administration, which became a source for the change of the criminals and their overall behavior. Like the Danish prison system, which adopted a philosophy based on normalization, openness, and responsibility—teach the prisoners all these mechanisms with the help of education—the nature of colonial prisons was totally different and managed in a different way (Reese, 2019). Although the British government of India has always claimed that the main purpose of the prisons in India is only to reform the criminals to make them better citizens, Education is the basic source for reforming an individual or a society as a whole, which was ignored in the prisons of colonial India (Waits, 2018). Basically, it was not the main agenda of the colonial prisons to reform inmates but to utilize the Labour of the prisoners. Education, as a whole, for the general public during colonial rule was considered a tool for the change of societies and the behavior of nations (Yang, 1987). The birth of the modern education system in modern prisons can be traced back to Robert Peel's Parliamentary Goal Act of 1823, which is considered to be the first significant provision for education in English. The jail authorities were asked to appoint schoolmasters to teach the inmates (Gash, 2011). Although a number of steps were taken to form an education system in the prisons of the United States after 1776, it could not develop permanently as a mechanism for prison education. Similarly, before the British advent of India, no initiative was taken to impart education to the inmates, or the prisoners who were waiting for the trial were kept in any space declared a prison. The first step in educating the prisoners and inmates was taken by the British authorities at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was not permanent, as the process of educating the prisoners was terminated several times in India because the main motive

of the prisons was not only to reform the inmates. Labour and the imposition of colonial control on the people were the main agendas of the prisons in colonial India (Arnold, 2007).

Writing on the prisons of colonial India, a number of contrary approaches were adopted to explain the purpose of the colonial prisons in India. As Mushirul Hasan wrote in "*Roads to Freedom: Prisoners in Colonial India*," the prison in British India was an instrument of the colonial state for instilling fear and dealing with resistance (Hasan, 2016). Similarly, F.A. Barker has mentioned that reforms in the modern prisons of colonial India were carried out with five main heads: physical, educational, moral, industrial, and Labour ; punishment; and rewards. For him, the literacy rate in colonial India was not more than 5 percent in the general public, and the aim of the prison could only be to impart simple primary education to as many as possible (Muzaffar, et. al. 2017& Barker, 1941).

Similarly, education in the prisons of colonial India was imparted to a small level and it was not cared much for the adult prisoners in the beginning, but later on, after 1838, this approach was changed a little, but it was also recommended by the jail committee of 1838 to not spend or allocate a budget for educating the adult prisoners (Fischer-Tiné, 2008). In the Punjab province, educating the inmates from the beginning was taken seriously, and each central and district jail teacher was appointed from 1854 to 1900, which was later changed, and it was decided by the government of the Punjab and Punjab jail administration to reduce the funding for the education of the adult inmates (Anderson, 2018). The mechanism for understanding the education and colonial prisons in the Punjab province is explored in this research article, which is the main aim of this research article.

## Literature Review

Colonialism's main problem and motive was greed and lucre to maintain it for a long time, both in Africa and Asia (Samuel-Mbaekwe, 2018). Most of the sources on colonialism have presented this approach with respect to different approaches and mechanisms of colonialism. A similar approach to the concept and motives of colonialism is presented by both indigenous and foreign experts on colonialism and the British Empire. According to Cooper (2005), colonialism got the attention of academia and historiographic writings when it lost its political legitimacy. This approach presents a bigger question about the theory, knowledge, and history of colonialism itself. It was because of the presentation and mobilization of modernity and new patterns of thinking among the scholars that concepts of colonialism were less focused. As the colonial past is invoked to teach a lesson about the present, it serves to expose the hypocrisy of Europe's claims to provide models of democratic politics, effective economic systems, and a rational approach to understanding and changing the world by connecting the very ideas of imperialism. Cooper's big question likely lies in the form of criticism and a historiographical approach towards understanding the motive and reason presented by the colonial masters. These are all the points mentioned as part of the hypocrisy of the colonial power to just tell the colonized that these ideas were incorporated in their society, without which it is not possible to live in this world in a civilized manner (Cooper, 2005). Eric Stokes, in his book "*The English Utilitarian and India*," has maintained that the colonial rule in India was a change in the administration and that it carried forward a legacy of utilitarian imperialism. The administration included the jail administration as an imperial power to promote British imperialism in India (Stokes, 1959).

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing amount of research on the history of criminal laws, law and order, and prison systems in colonial settings in relation to various countries and continents. The prison system of colonial India has been studied collectively as well as on a provincial level. Most of the authors writing on the prison system of India have adopted the idea that colonial prisons played a great part in maintaining the colonial system of control and management of the masses in India (Lanzillo, 2024). The Andaman Islands' prison colony, juvenile delinquency, and female crime have all been specifically addressed in Satradu Sen's research (Sen, 2005). In her book *Legible Bodies*, Clare Anderson describes the various ways that convict attire, tattoos, and other physical modifications are used to identify and label the bodies of criminals. Additionally, Anderson's research highlights gender-specific criminal practices and conventions (Anderson, 2004). Understanding jail life requires

reading Anand Yang and David Arnold's work, which focuses on the agency of the colonial prisoner through insurrection and resistance. For example, Yang describes how inmates resisted colonial attempts to control food and caste relations by setting up a "messing system" in the jail (Yang, 1985). All these approaches were well taken care of in the colonial prisons of India, but education was not imparted properly to the inmates.

## **Material and Methods**

The methodological approach of this research study is based on qualitative research techniques along with the historical analysis method. For this research study, both primary and secondary sources were utilized to acquire the results of this article (Jovanović, 2011). The primary sources are the archival materials, like the proceedings of the government of the Punjab, administrative reports of the Punjab and the dependencies, and the jail administrative reports of the Punjab province from 1900 to 1947. Similarly, secondary sources are the peer-reviewed articles, books, magazines, newspapers, and gazetteers of the Punjab province from 1900 to 1947. The primary data or documents are collected from the Punjab Archives Civil Secretariat, Lahore, the Main Library, University of the Punjab, Lahore, and online sources at the British Library in London. In the same way, the secondary sources are collected both online and offline from different libraries and sites. All the sources are analyzed with the help of the historical analysis method in the form of documents, archival materials, and chronicles (Wyche, Sengers, & Grinter, 2006).

## **Prison Education in the Punjab Province**

While Britain was at least determined to offer religious instruction, if not secular education, for detainees, the 1838 PDC in India concluded that education would be too costly and spent on criminals (Arnold, 2015). However, because of the potential for employment for formerly incarcerated individuals, efforts to provide Indian prisoners with a higher education were beginning to gain traction with jail officials in the 1860s. (Reports on the Administration of the Punjab and its Dependencies, 1859–1860, 1860). This was primarily in line with the broader stance on education that the Indian government had at the time. In 1870, the British began educating India's lower classes in an effort to inculcate self-discipline and a work ethic. Similar to this, the British government was eager to get impoverished urban people off the streets and into "productive" employment. (Reports on the Administration of the Punjab and its Dependencies, 1869–1870). There were some proposals for the use of education in the 1864 IC report, despite the fact that it was not covered in great detail. The report's initial mention of education implied that it may be used as a "reward" for the cleverer inmates or, conversely, as a kind of punishment for the less intelligent ones. Additionally, inmates were to be kept busy during periods of "idleness" when they weren't working by providing them with knowledge (Roberts, 1864).

A similar approach was adopted while educating the inmates in the prisons of the Punjab province. The education system in the prisons of colonial Punjab was made part of jail activities in 1854 with the formal establishment of the prisons in colonial Punjab. The British took the education of the inmates seriously during the first fifty years of the prisons in colonial Punjab. (Reports on the Administration of the Punjab and its Dependencies, 1853–1854, 1854). With the passage of time, jail authorities thought adult education was not fruitful as it was affecting the overall Labour of the prisoners. Ninety percent of the prisoners in the Punjab province's prisons were assigned to Labour, and while education was stated in the prisoners' routine, it was not well followed. No specific time was set out for this purpose. The majority of experts on colonial jails believe that this is the primary cause of the colonial authorities' lack of interest (Arnold, 2007). Only in 1859, in the prisons of colonial Punjab, the number of inmates under instruction was above 5000 from the total of 12000 (Reports on the Administration of the Punjab and its Dependencies 1859–1860, 1860). At that time, one-third of the prisoners had to get instruction from the prison education system. On the other hand, the prison inspector general opposed squandering a significant amount of convicts' time on education in favor of assisting them in developing their abilities. But from 1860 to 1961, more inmates received instruction

in reading and writing in prison; that figure had increased to 2700. In 1862, 5570 inmates, or 55% of the jail population, were enrolled in the jail education program, according to the system (Reports on the Administration of the Punjab and its Dependencies 1861–1862, 1862).

The medium of instruction in the prisons of colonial Punjab, like other provinces, was vernacular, and it was decided according to the religion and caste of the inmate. For the adult prisoners, the curriculum was based on local languages, religious texts, and other vernacular courses (Proceedings of the Government of the Punjab, 1900). The books in the libraries and the newspapers were also based on local sources, rather than the new system of western education introduced for the common masses after the annexation of the Punjab province in 1849. During this period, literature and the illiterate were categorized as being taught separately; most of the inmates were taught to read and write separately. No grading or specific class system was developed in the prisons of colonial Punjab, which further shows the nonseriousness of British authorities and the jail administration of Punjab province. This also shows that teaching the inmates to be civilized or reformed was just a claim that was not practiced in true spirit. This shows the confused nature of the administrative approach to dealing with the prisoners, either to make them civilized or to utilize the jail Labour for the manufacturing of the state infrastructure mega projects, which were costly and the state could not afford to construct them at her own cost. (Bohier, 2022).

The data presented in the “*Annual Jail Reports and Administrative Reports of Punjab and the Dependencies*” shows that the main problem was not taking education and educating the inmates as the primary or key agenda in the prisons of colonial Punjab; education was considered an extra activity in the prisons. On numerous occasions, it was mentioned that progress in the education system was not possible until the pay and prospects of the jail teachers were placed on a better footing than at that time. With this view, the Inspector General of Punjab requested several times to the Lieutenant Governor to manage the affairs of the teaching staff by providing them with a handsome salary to teach the prisoners in a proper way, but all the time it was declined due to the non-availability of funds. This became the main reason that the education system and its management could not sustain themselves for as long as desired by the jail department. Most of the jail’s government did not sanction the salaries of the jail teachers, which made it difficult for the jail department to continue the process and routine education system in the prisons of colonial Punjab (Havik et al., 2021). The vernacular schools of the jails in Punjab had developed a system for learning till 1866–1867 where inmates were taught three language courses, which included Hindi, Urdu, and Persian.

**Table1**  
**Languages Teaching in the Prisons of Colonial Punjab.**

S. No	Number of Students Learning	Language Courses
1.	4496 Adult Inmates	Urdu
2.	280 Adult Inmates	Hindi
3.	130 Adult Inmates	Persian

Source: Report of the Punjab Administration and Dependencies, 1866-1867.

In the prisons of Colonial Punjab, the number of inmates under instruction was changed every year due to a number of issues, like the epidemic, the increase in Labour work, and the need the need to reduce the expanse of the jails. All these factors were discussed in the “*Jail Conference of 1877*,” in which the Inspector General of the Punjab Province, Dr. Dallas, mentioned that the subject of education can be assumed to be a useful thing for every man, woman, and child who enter the jails, whatever their caste, religion, or age. The agriculturalist is as much benefitted by education as the dwellers in the towns, poor men as rich. Dallas further stated that “I do not attach weight to the views of those who think that it would be better to teach most of our convicts an art or handicraft than to read and write because, first, I see no reason why we should not do both things, and secondly, because we are so little able to teach handicraft that, owing to social restraints, prisoners can use when they leave jail. Dr. Dallas suggested that imparting education to the inmates should be increased in the jails, which is a great source for the reformation of the inmates in the jails. On the other hand, the other committee members

did not agree with the opinions presented by Dr. Dallas and repeated the same suggestions that were part of the Jail Committee of 1838, which were not in favor of imparting education to the adult inmates due to the high expenses of education without any gain to the government. Similarly, other committee members also stated that the discipline and the education of the inmates should not be mixed, and for discipline, the rules should be strict (Report of the Indian Jail Conference Assembled in Calcutta in January–March 1877, Under the orders of His Excellency the Governor General in Council, 1877).

The Jail Conference Committee also suggested that the education be imparted to the inmates according to their age; that all prisoners under the age of 16 years should be compelled to attend the jail school; that prisoners between the ages of 16 and 24 should be compelled to attend the jail school if their sentence is more than months; and that prisoners between the ages of 24 and 35 should be compelled to attend the jail school if their sentence is more than 2 years. Above the age of 35, the inmates' attendance at the jail schools is voluntary. Again, in the same committee report, it was mentioned that the hours for educating the prisoners should not affect the Labour routine in the jails, which shows that the British authorities were not much interested in educating the prisoners in the jails of Punjab. To reduce jail expenditure, in Punjab province, educated prisoners were appointed as teachers in the prisons. It was not possible to maintain an education system in the jails, as they were not professional teachers and were not paid anything, which affected the seriousness of the education in jails (Report of the Indian Jail Conference Assembled in Calcutta in January–March 1877, Under the orders of His Excellency the Governor General in Council, 1877).

It was seen that for the jail discipline, the inmates who learn to read and write were given special marks. This was a good initiative, but the problem with the implications of these rules, which were directly under the superintendents of the jail, was that all the jails in Punjab had different environments and conditions where the subject of education was not followed equally. Miss Carpenter, who visited the jails in India, suggested that books should be kept in prisons, which can promote a culture of voluntary reading and learning in prisons. This was, in one way, the mechanism for the development of libraries in the prisons of colonial Punjab (Carpenter, 1868).

### **Status of Education System in the Punjab from 1900-1947**

The prison administration of the Punjab province tried to maintain a system of education in the prisons from 1854 to 1900 but failed to maintain it throughout the history of the colonial prisons of the Punjab province. The idea of educating the prisoners changed after 1900 AD. As it is mentioned in the Report of the Indian Jails Committee, 1919–1920, the place that education should occupy in the scheme of reformation of adult criminals has not been clearly defined by the authorities in a satisfactory manner. Educating the inmates became more blurred as it was decided that education should only be imparted to prisoners less than 25 and those above 25 should not be sent to be involved in any type of education in the prisons of colonial India and colonial Punjab (Muzaffar, 2016; Muzaffar, et. al 2020). The education that was imparted in the central and district jails of colonial Punjab was elementary education for all; the main agenda was to impart only the basic education. According to the Jail Report of the Punjab, 1901–1902, the literacy rate in the prison of the Punjab became less after 1900, as out of the 20000 inmates, only 364 were in literature. After this period, the element of education was not discussed in the Proceeding of the Government of the Punjab, Punjab Jail Reports and Administration Reports of the Jails of the Punjab (India Jail Committee, 1920).

This also shows that during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education was not the focus of the British authorities in the prisons of colonial Punjab. Only in some of the committee reports is the subject of jail education discussed for all colonial India, but the condition and status of the education system in the colonial jails in India were not maintained, and the education system was terminated in the last two decades of colonial rule in the Punjab province. Only in the Central and District Jails were libraries and books provided to the political prisoners on demand, and adult illiterate prisoners were put to Labour during the day, and no spare time was given to them for reading and writing (Bhattacharya, 2022).

Jail education never became a permanent part of prison life in colonial Punjab; it was just used for disciplining the prisoners at the time. As According to Mary Carpenter, when she visited the Indian Jail, she couldn't find any special space for the instruction of the inmates. The prison administration did not make any provision for these or fix any time when instructions could be given to the prisoners. Carpenter gives this opinion for the prisons of India as a whole, but the condition of the prison system in the jails of the Punjab province was also the same (Carpenter, 1968).

## **Conclusion**

Colonial authorities, after annexing the Punjab Province in 1849, developed a similar pattern of administration that had already been working in other parts of colonial India for more than five decades. Prison remained a key colonial institution to discipline and control the colonial subjects in Punjab Province. As it was claimed by British authorities, prisons are a mode for reforming and civilizing colonial subjects. For this, different mechanisms were established to make the criminals useful citizens. The main agendas that were used in the prisons of Punjab were to take care of the necessity of the inmates and discipline them with jail punishment, but in a civilized manner, a system of Labour was initiated to engage the prisoners with good work, to take care of their health, diet, and clothing, to separate juveniles, and to educate them to reform. Education is considered to be the main tool for transformation and change, but it was not given a proper and satisfactory place in the prisons of Punjab. The education system was not developed to reform the prisoners in colonial prisons in Punjab; education was considered a useful tool to reform the adult inmates, and it was also believed that education was very expensive for the jail authorities to manage. It was also difficult for the jail authorities to impart education to the adult prisoners, which would not benefit them, but the skills and industrial work will help them after they are released from prison and they can earn a living easily. This was not more than an excuse for increasing the labour production in the prison, which could cover the expanses of the British Empire and the prisons in the Punjab province.

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