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INSIDE THE WALLS: THE UNTOLD STRUGGLE OF WOMEN PRISONERS IN INDIA

The history of women's incarceration in India dates back to colonial times when British authorities used prisons as a tool for social control and punishment. However, it was not until the late 20th century that the issue of women prisoners began to gain attention in India. The lack of gender-sensitive policies and infrastructure in Indian prisons led to the marginalization and mistreatment of female inmates.

One of the key historical developments in the treatment of women prisoners in India was the passage of the Prison Rules in 1894, which were meant to regulate the conditions of confinement in Indian prisons. However, these rules were largely focused on male prisoners, and women were often overlooked in the implementation of these regulations. As a result, women prisoners continued to face harsh and degrading conditions within the prison system.

One of the major challenges faced by women prisoners is the discrimination and stigmatization they face within the prison system. From the moment they are arrested, women are subjected to gender-based violence and sexual harassment by the police. Many are also falsely charged with offenses such as adultery, dowry deaths, and prostitution. This discrimination continues within the prison walls, where women are often segregated and treated differently from their male counterparts. They are denied basic necessities such as proper clothing, hygiene products, and privacy, which further adds to their dehumanization.

Moreover, women prisoners are at a higher risk of physical and sexual abuse. Inadequate security measures and overcrowding in prisons make them vulnerable to violence from fellow inmates and even prison staff. In a recent survey conducted by the National Human Rights Commission,

it was found that 66% of the women prisoners have experienced some form of physical or sexual abuse while incarcerated. This abuse not only violates their basic human rights but also has long-lasting mental and emotional effects on these women, often leading to post-traumatic stress disorder

Another major issue faced by women prisoners is the lack of access to healthcare and rehabilitation. The majority of women in prisons come from marginalized communities, and many suffer from health issues such as malnutrition, anemia, and reproductive health problems. However, the medical facilities in prisons are grossly inadequate, and women often do not receive the necessary care and treatment. Moreover, there is a lack of rehabilitation programs specifically designed for women prisoners, which can help them reintegrate into society and prevent them from reoffending.

Despite these challenges, there are solutions that can address the struggles faced by women prisoners in India. The first step is to recognize and address the gender-specific needs of women prisoners. This includes providing separate living quarters, adequate hygiene facilities, and access to sanitary products. Prison authorities should also ensure equal treatment and rights for women prisoners, without any discrimination based on gender.

Moreover, there should be an increased focus on education and skill development programs for women prisoners. These programs should be tailored to meet the specific needs of women and help them develop new skills and knowledge. This will not only improve their chances of finding employment but also boost their self-esteem and give them a sense of purpose.

The mental health of women prisoners should also be a priority. The prison system should have trained professionals who can provide mental health support and therapy to women prisoners. Additionally, counseling and support groups can also be beneficial in helping them cope with their past traumas and prepare for a better future.

Although progress has been made in addressing the challenges faced by women prisoners in India, significant gaps remain in the criminal justice system. There is a need for gender-sensitive policies and programs that recognize the unique experiences and vulnerabilities of women

inmates. Increased funding for rehabilitation and vocational training programs can help women reintegrate into society post-release and reduce recidivism rates.

From a positive perspective, awareness about the struggles of women prisoners in India has increased in recent years, leading to a push for reforms and improvements in prison conditions. Civil society organizations, activists, and policymakers are working together to advocate for gender-specific interventions and support services for women prisoners. This collective effort has the potential to bring about lasting change in the criminal justice system and improve the lives of women inmates in India.

On the other hand, there are still challenges to be addressed, such as systemic gender biases, lack of resources, and societal stigma against women prisoners. Advocacy efforts must continue to push for policy reforms, increased funding, and community support for women inmates in Indian prisons. By working together, we can ensure that the struggles of women prisoners in India are no longer untold and that their rights and dignity are upheld in the criminal justice system.

In conclusion, the struggles of women prisoners in India cannot be overlooked or ignored. It is the responsibility of the government and society to provide them with the necessary resources and support to improve their living conditions and help them rehabilitate. The solutions mentioned above can go a long way in addressing the challenges faced by women prisoners and ensure their rights and dignity are respected. It is time to break down the walls of neglect and shine a light on the untold struggle of women prisoners in India.

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