INMATES' ADJUSTMENT TO PRISON SUBCULTURE: A NEW MODEL AND A NEW PERSPECTIVE

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The adjustment of deviants in prison subculture was earlier examined and verified in terms of the Prisonisation concept or the inmate value system in prisons. Rejecting the adequacy of this perspective on the basis of an empirical study conducted in three prisons, this paper suggests a new Self-image Model for analysing Inmates' reformation. It also presents a new perspective for restructuring prisons to make them effective correctional institutions.

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I

Three perspectives have been mainly used by sociologists in the last few decades in analysing deviance: functionalist-structuralist, interactionist and Marxist. The functionalist-structuralist perspective looks for the source of deviance in the nature of society rather than in the biological or psychological nature of the individual. Functionalists argue that deviance is a normal and necessary part of all societies as it performs positive functions for social systems and contributes to the maintenance and well-being of societies. The function of punishment is not to remove crime in society but to maintain the collective sentiments so that they do not lose their force to control behaviour. However, functionalists have not explained why particular individuals appear to be more prone to deviance than others. The answer to this question has been provided by structuralists.

According to structuralist perspective, deviance results not from 'Pathological personalities' but from the culture and structure of society itself and by forces beyond the individual's control. Three sociological theories in this perspective are considered important in explaining deviance: structural, subcultural and ecological. According to the structural theory (Merton, Cloward and Ohlin), the deviant is pressurised by his position in the social structure; according to the subcultural theory (Cohen), he is pressurised by his membership of a deviant subculture; and according to the ecological theory (Shaw and McKay), he is pressurised by his presence in the area of social disorganisation.

The interactionist perspective, contrary to the functionalist-structuralist perspective, directs attention away from the deviant as such and the motivations, pressures and social forces which are supposed to direct his behaviour. Instead, it focusses upon the interaction between the deviant and those who define him as deviant. The interactionist perspective examines how and why particular individuals and groups are defined as deviants and the effects of such a definition upon their future actions. The interactionist approach (Howard Becker, Edwin Lemert) emphasises the importance of the meanings the various actors bring to and develop within the interaction situation. It (interactionist perspective) comes closer to a phenomenological view of deviant in the sense that it emphasises on the deviant's reacting to forces which are external to himself and largely beyond his control.

From a Marxian perspective, the basis of deviance is the private ownership of the forces of production and all that that entails. The radical criminologists and critical theorists have come to view deviance in terms of its meaningfulness to the deviant action and argue for the abolition of inequa-
lities in wealth and power for preventing deviance.

Like change in approach in understanding the causes of deviance, there has been change in the approach in dealing with the deviants also. But the task that we have set for this paper is not to assess the rationality of these divergent viewpoints but to accept correctionalism as irretrievably bound up with the identification of deviance with pathology (view consistent with traditional criminology but contrary to critical criminology) and examine the relationship between prison structure and resocialisation of prisoners. Specifically, our object is to examine the inmate value system in prisons, test the validity of the concept of prisonisation and suggest an alternative model for explaining the adjustment of inmates in prisons.

II

The interactionists view institutions for the treatment of deviance as a further set of links in a long chain of interactions which confirm the label of deviance for the individuals so labelled. For example, in the prison pressure is placed via a series of interactions upon the inmate to accept the institution's definition of himself. Upon entry, he begins a series of degradations, humiliations and profanities of self. His self is systematically, if often unintentionally, mortified." This 'mortification' process strips the inmate of the various supports which helped to maintain his former self-concept. Once the entry phase is over, the inmate settles down to an endless round of 'mortifying experiences'. Each day is strictly timetabled into a set of compulsory activities controlled by the staff. The inmate is allowed little freedom of movement, few opportunities to show initiative or take decisions. Throughout his stay, his actions are scrutinised and assessed by the staff in terms of the rules and standards which they have set.

Internalisation of values of the inmate system takes place in stages. Though Clemmer (1940: 299) has pointed out six stages in this process we identify only three important stages:

(i) Deidentification: This involves the use of batons, slaps, kicks and offensive and abusive language by the petty prison officials before and after shoving the new recruits in to the barracks when they (recruits) try to give either firm or inaudible answers about their offence and/or the background or make a meek protest, and thus make them (recruits) realise that jail officials are all powerful. The new recruit is herded into a barrack with 25 to 30 other inmates and is forced to face indignity in the extensive social control exercised by the custodians. Inmate's life, ranging from eating and working to sleeping, is subject to a vast number of regulations. Being stripped of his autonomy, inmate comes to consider himself as weak, helpless and a dependent individual.

(ii) Initiation: This involves learning the language of murderers, thieves, rapists, sexual deviants and toughs while living in the barracks and developing new values by hearing their (other inmates') stories of crime records. When the inmate finds the privileged few eating meat surreptitiously cooked and soaked in half a bottle of rum when he himself is eating a morsel of boiled lentil and a few half-baked chapatis, some singing bawdy songs in one corner and others being forced by the homosexuals to succumb to their prurient interests, he is deprived of the sense of security and faced with new anxieties. Realising that the deprivations and frustrations of prison life must be somehow alleviated, the inmate accepts the prevalent 'inmate code' and seeks his own gain.
(iii) Transformation: This involves inmate's talking of his rights after spending several months in the prison. Being frequently reminded of his moral unworthiness, he feels he is no longer trusted and his every act is viewed with suspicion by the officials. He, therefore, develops new values and attitudes to ward off these attacks and avoid their introjection.

Though the basic tenets of the inmate code are not always followed by all inmates, and several inmates many-a-time deviate from them without severe criticism or punishment by the subculture, they do provide a value system for most of the inmates most of the time. According to Clemmer (1940: 301), the degree to which an inmate adjusts to the inmate code, and whether or not his complete prisonisation takes place is related to his age, criminality, term of imprisonment, type of relationships he had before imprisonment, i.e. 'socialised' relationships during pre-penal life, kind and extent of relationships which he has continued with persons outside the (prison) walls, types of his cell-mates and inmates in work-gang, capacity for integration into a prison primary group or semi-primary group, and nature of recreational activities in the prison. He has, however, maintained that every man who enters the penitentiary feels the influences of universal factors of prisonisation (Clemmer, 1940: 299-300). Wheeler (1962: 158) put Clemmer's ideas to an empirical test and his analysis provided strong support for Clemmer's hypotheses.

**The Study**

This author conducted one study between 1977 and 1980 with the main objective of examining the effectiveness and the effects of imprisonment. The research also aimed at testing Clemmer's theory of prisonisation, studying different temporal aspects of the prison culture and evaluating decriminalisation process in prison. In this study, 252 prisoners were interviewed in three maximum-security prisons in one Indian State. These penal institutions receive prisoners of 16 + years of age and have a capacity of accommodating up to 800 inmates.

The prisoners in each prison were grouped into six categories on the basis of the term of imprisonment: prisoners with less than 6 months' imprisonment, 6 to 12 months' imprisonment, 1 to 2 years' imprisonment, 2 to 5 years' imprisonment, 5 to 10 years' imprisonment, and 10 + years' imprisonment. On stratified random sample basis, 15 per cent of the total convicted inmates from each category in Prison 'A', 20 per cent from each category in Prison 'B' and 10 per cent from each category in Prison 'C' were selected for the interview. The prisoners were further classified on the basis of the reason for the term of imprisonment: prisoners with less than 6 months' imprisonment, 6 to 12 months' imprisonment, 1 to 2 years' imprisonment, 2 to 5 years' imprisonment, 5 to 10 years' imprisonment, and 10 + years' imprisonment. On stratified random sample basis, 15 per cent of the total convicted inmates from each category in Prison 'A', 20 per cent from each category in Prison 'B' and 10 per cent from each category in Prison 'C' were selected for the interview. The prisoners were further classified on the basis of the type of offence, term of total sentence, term served in the jail, term yet to be spent in the jail, and earlier conviction. On the latter basis, they were classified according to age, education, marital status, occupation, monthly income, and rural-urban background. The sample was so chosen that it represented all categories of inmates with respect to the above characteristics. In addition to the prisoners, two categories of prison staff — custodial officers and treatment officers — were also interviewed.

**Acceptance and Rejection of Prison and Inmate Norms**

The acceptance and/or rejection of prison and/or inmate norms by the inmates in our study was analysed by classifying inmates into four groups on the basis of attachment to prison and inmate norms. On this basis, the following four types of inmates were identified: (i) Conformists, who
identified only with conventional prison norms and outrightly rejected inmate norms, were bound by loyalty to staff, and had great contacts with those inmates who rejected inmate norms, (2) Partial Conformists, who partially accepted prison norms and partially inmate norms, were bound by loyalty sometimes to inmates and sometimes to staff according to own advantage, and had a wide range of contacts with both prison officials and inmates, (3) Non-conformists, who identified with inmate norms, were bound by loyalty to inmates, and had great contacts with inmates who rejected prison norms, and were relatively isolated from staff contacts, (4) Isolationists, who rejected both prison and inmate norms, were bound by no loyalty either to staff or to inmates, and avoided contacts with both prison officials and inmates.

This typology was considered significant because it explained not only the personal orientations of the inmates but also their attitudes towards self and others. The four types of inmates were identified in our study (Ahuja, 1981: 41) on the basis of their responses to 8 questions included in the questionnaire, of which 3 reflected inmates' loyalty to staff or inmates, 3 reflected inmates' identification with prison or inmate norms, and 2 reflected inmates' contacts with officials or inmates.

The responses revealed that about one-third respondents (36.8 per cent) identified with prison norms, about one-third (30.7 per cent) with inmate norms and about one-third (32.5 per cent) with both prison and inmate norms. One-fifth respondents (19.6 per cent) were loyal to staff, a little less than half (46.3 per cent) to inmates, and about one-third (34.1 per cent) to both staff and inmates. One-fifth respondents (18.3 per cent) had contacts with only officials, a little less than half (45.2 per cent) only with inmates, and about one-third (36.5 per cent) with both officials and inmates. Taking the three types of responses together, one-fourth inmates (24.1 per cent) can be categorised as conformists, two-fifths (41.8 per cent) as non-conformists, one-fourth (27.3 per cent) as partial conformists, and one-fifteenth (6.8 per cent) as isolationists. It may be inferred from this that prisons decriminalise only about one-fourth of the prisoners, or that prisons do not function as correctional institutions for more than half of the inmates.

**Adaptive patterns**

To study the nature and extent of absorption or rejection of the prison and the inmate codes, or to study conformity to staff role expectations, the respondents were asked to evaluate a series of 15 questions in two different hypothetical situations. Five questions referred to one situation of life outside prison while 10 questions were related to another situation of behaviour in prison (Ahuja, 1981: 44-45). Two different types of situations were taken to compare the inmates' support for law-abiding values in the prison with their values in civilian roles outside the prison. This was based on the assumption that those who supported law-abiding values before imprisonment must support prison values after the imprisonment too. If there is difference between the two types of values, it is because of the impact of inmate system and the internalisation of the inmate values, or the result of the phenomenon referred to as 'prisonisation' by Clemmer.

The inmates were asked to indicate their reactions for each situation by tick-marking the appropriate number on a five-category justified-unjustified continuum. A 5-point scale was used and weights of +2, +1, 0, —1 and —2 were assigned to the strongly justified, justified, neutral (don't know), unjustified and strongly unjustified categories respectively. The scores were
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summed over the total items (pertaining to behaviour inside and outside the jail) with possible scores ranging from positive to negative. The positive scores indicated adjustment by conformity to the inmate norms while negative scores indicated adjustment by conformity to staff role expectations.

Forty-eight per cent respondents obtained positive scores (i.e. conformed to inmate norms), 45.0 per cent got negative scores (i.e. conformed to staff role expectations) and 7.0 per cent got zero score (i.e. remained neutral) in the ten statements pertaining to behaviour in the jail; while 40.5 per cent secured positive scores, 57.5 per cent got negative scores, and 2.0 per cent got zero score in the five statements pertaining to values related to civilian roles before coming to jail.

The above results do not give strong support to Clemmer's proposition that every man who enters the penitentiary undergoes prisonisation to some extent. Only about half of the inmates adjust themselves in the prison by adopting the inmate culture. This, however, does not mean that the inmates who do not adopt the norms and codes of the inmate world do not remain criminalistic. Such inmates may continue to be much more criminalistic than the inmates who become socialised to inmate culture.

Taking only ten statements pertaining to the behaviour of the respondents in the prison and assigning scores to their responses, our study showed that amongst 121 inmates who secured 'plus' scores (i.e. who conformed to inmate norms), the degree of conformity to inmate norms was low in 52.0 per cent cases, medium in 44.6 per cent cases and high in 3.4 per cent cases. On the negative side, amongst the 133 inmates who secured 'minus' scores (i.e. who conformed to official norms), the degree of conformity to prison norms was low in 44.2 per cent cases, medium in 40.8 per cent cases, and high in 15.0 per cent cases.

Several observations can be made on the basis of this data: First, the rate of absorption of inmate norms (48 per cent) appeared to be about the same as that of absorption of the prison norms (45.0 per cent). Secondly, almost all those inmates who accepted law-abiding values pertaining to behaviour in civilian roles before coming to prison also accepted the prison norms after coming to prison. Thirdly, since the degree of conformity to inmate norms was low in 52.0 per cent cases and high in only 3.4 per cent cases, and similarly since the degree of conformity to prison norms was low in 44.2 per cent cases and high in only 15.0 per cent cases, it could be inferred that in reality, most of the inmates remain in an ambiguous position in so far as accepting or rejecting of prison and/or inmate norms is concerned. Finally, the processes operating within prison produced a pattern of adjustment that did not appear to be much consistent with Clemmer's observations on inmate socialisation, that when new entrants in prison mix with the old inmates, slowly and gradually they come to share their folkways, mores, dogmas, sentiments and traditions more or less unconsciously, ultimately leading to their integration into the inmate scheme of life. But this also does not mean that the culture and social organisation of the prisons is necessarily conducive to the process of resocialisation of the prisoners.

Temporal Aspects of Adaptive Pattern

We also analysed the absorption of inmate/prison code or the internalisation of the prison culture in terms of certain selected factors to test the validity of Clemmer's and Wheeler's hypotheses. We concentrated on five factors, namely, length of time served, phase of prison career, age, nature of crime and involvement in informal group life. Conclusions pertaining to all these aspects of adaptive pattern were as follows:
(1) Conformity to the inmate code and to the prison norms in the first five years of prison life was about the same. However, after spending five years in the prison, conformity to the inmate code decreased. Thus, Clemmer's hypothesis that longer the duration of stay of the prisoner in the prison, higher the degree of his prisonisation (1971: 95) was not supported.

(2) The percentage of inmates who conformed to inmate norms in the last phase of six months when they were about to be released was very low (6.4 per cent), showing thereby that inmates appeared to shed the prison culture before they left the prison.

(3) Wheeler's finding (1962: 159) that a large percentage of inmates were strongly opposed to staff norms during the last stage of their confinement than during the first stage was not supported (8.2 per cent in late phase against 21.8 per cent in early phase). When conformity to prison norms in the three phases (early, middle and late) was represented graphically, we got inverted V-shaped trend. This did not support Wheeler's finding (1971: 99) that a U-shaped distribution of high conformity responses exists over the three time-periods.

(4) The number of middle-aged persons accepting inmate norms (58.1 per cent) was about the same as that of the young persons (59.1 per cent). It, therefore, cannot be hypothesised that the young are more maladjusted than the middle-aged. This rejects Wolfgang's hypothesis that a significantly higher proportion of adjusted prisoners is found in the group of young prisoners (below 35 years) than in the middle-aged group (above 35 years).

(5) Persons committing felonies do not necessarily internalise more fully a value system built upon the rejection of the prison norms.

(6) The higher the informal involvement with the inmates rejecting the prison norms, the higher will be the internalisation of inmate values and vice versa. This supports Clemmer's proposition (1940: 302) that higher degree of prisonisation is related to higher degree of involvement in the informal life of the inmate community. It also supports Wheeler's hypothesis (1971: 156) that both the speed and degree of prisonisation are a function of informal inmate involvement.

Adequacy of Prisonisation Model

Taking together the above-mentioned five temporal aspects of adjustment of inmates to the prison subculture, it could be concluded that all hypotheses of Clemmer and Wheeler pertaining to determinants of prisonisation are not fully correct, though Clemmer's prisonisation theory stands supported. For example, age and serious nature of crime do not appear to have significant relationship with prisonisation, length of time served has partial relationship, while prison-career phase and informal group life do affect the acceptance and/or rejection of the inmate norms.

As such, through prisonisation model, we are not in a position to answer important questions like what types of inmates follow the pattern of prisonisation, or what types of inmates attach themselves more to prison norms, or what conditions lead to one process rather than to the other, or can prison
authorities exert control over the processes by policy decisions? Thus, since prisonisation model is inadequate in explaining adjustment and reformation pattern in prison, we have to search for some new model which may adequately explain socialisation within prison-walls. We present below a new 'Self-Image Model' in this context.

III

Self-image Model

Borrowing Parson's view, reformation has to be understood in terms of prisoners' personality systems, social structure of prisons and the normative system of inmates. The self-image model not only leans heavily on these three sub-systems but it also takes into consideration the recent dominant theory of deviant behaviour, namely, 'Naturalistic Theory of Deviance' which views deviant acts as 'interactional productions'.

The self-image Model is based on the assumption that reformation in prisons can be studied by analysing and assessing: (i) social structure of prison (ii) inmates' personalities, and (iii) inmates' normative system. This model has four elements: (a) self-image of a prisoner (b) value conformity which deals with a prisoner's detachment from the inmate value system and attachment to prison value system and which doesn't have any overt manifestations, (c) actual conformity to norms, and (d) prisoner's social prestige among other inmates, jail officials and in the outside community. With these four elements, the model could be described as:

Reformation = Self-image + value for conformity to norms + actual conformity to norms + social prestige.

In this model, self-image, value conformity, actual conformity and social prestige are inter-related with one another and are linked to reformation in a descending order of significance. We can briefly understand each of these four components of the model separately.

(i) Self-image: Self-image is the inherent ontological conception of self which is gained by the individual through his interactions with his surroundings, specially with the relevant others around him. The self image of an inmate in a prison as a conformist or a deviant, as a good man or a bad man, as one who has harmed society or has been harmed by society is crucial in his reformation. When a person violates a law and commits a crime, he tries to explain the reason for this to himself. This reason of explaining himself to himself will have nothing to do with sociological or psychological theories of causes of crime because they are unknown to him. Besides this self image of being guilty or innocent and being responsible or not for the crime for which he has been penalised, he also develops an image of the self on the basis of treatment he receives from others in the prison and the attention he gets from his relatives and friends outside the prison. He tries to find out reasons why he was praised by his friends and relatives before committing crime and why the same people avoid him today. He tries to find out what would have happened if he had not been imprisoned, why and how is he different from other inmates, why some inmates shun him and others attract him and why jail officials regard him as a bad person or a good person. When the reasons prove to be puzzling or evasive, the ontological introspection may make him a confused person. This confusion may result in 'role strain' which may ultimately force him to deviate from the 'expected role' in the prison which in turn may prove to be barrier in his reformation.

(ii) Value Conformity: Desire to conform to the prison norms and reject the norms of the inmate world depends upon
the internalisation of non-delinquent values and conformity to the expectations of significant others. It also reflects one's religious and moral beliefs. If a person has an egocentric faith in his religious values, if he regards his deviant actions as sins, he will take no time in repenting for his wrong deeds. The simple and logical inference is that the feeling of being wronged and the desire of taking revenge have to be destroyed, erased to make way for reformation.

(iii) Actual Conformity: Actual conformity to norms may be inwardly-directed or outwardly-directed. The latter is one which is directed to groups and social institutions in society; while the former is one which is directed to the individual himself. The inwardly-directed conformity may be because the inmate is either a moralist or a traditionalist while outwardly-directed conformity may be because he is a pragmatist and is tied with reality.

(iv) Prestige; The labelling, the condemnation, the derogatory stigma, the praise, the cooperation, and the sympathetic and tolerant attitudes are also crucial factors in changing prisoners' values and in accepting or rejecting the former and informal values prevalent in the prison. The environment in which a jailor or a warden abuses or assaults an inmate, other inmates jeer at him or stand watching passively, or in which jail officials are crucial disciplinarians, would not succeed in changing the values and behaviour of a prisoner. If an inmate comes to the conclusion that his existence is neglected and treatment by the staff is devoid of reality and meaning, he may assert his existence by negative acts, such as openly criticising jail officials, demanding more facilities and instigating other inmates to revolt. "Counter role" here, which he assumes as a cover to protect himself from the penalties associated with his actual role, is an act of self-definition. Add to this the indifferent attitude of family, kinship group, caste and community members of the prisoner, the possibility of his reformation becomes more dim.

The above self-image model points out that inmates who make good institutional adjustment and conform to the prison norms create within the prison society a dissentient minority. This minority resists, at least to some extent, the dominant influence of inmate groups who reject prison norms. Therefore, an effective programme segregating the minority group from the majority group, and also breaking the majority groups, (who conform to inmate norms) by segregating them in such a way so as to minimise the social contacts between them, will minimise the influence of the inmate culture on inmates and check the kinds of anti-social influence an inmate encounters in prison life. This idea clearly challenges the present structuring of prisons and indicates the necessity and desirability of establishing prisons where a heterogeneous criminal population may be protected from the hazards of inmate culture.

IV

A New Perspective

The question is: how to restructure prisoners so that they may resocialise the offenders? Should we shift toward more liberal regimes or toward more custodial control? The author's contention is that there should be reconciliation between the goals of custody and reform. The following measures may contribute more to the adjustment of offenders in prisons and prisons functioning as correctional institutions rather than as 'factories of crime':

(1) Short-term offenders, i.e. offenders getting less than 6 months imprisonment, should not be kept in prisons. In India, at present more than three-
fourth prisoners are those who are awarded less than 6 months imprisonment. Short-term imprisonment only stigmatises the persons. Such offenders can easily be released on probation. At present, only 8 to 10 per cent of the offenders eligible to be released on probation are getting the benefit of probation services in our country, whereas in United States these services are used to the extent of 60 to 65 per cent and in U.K. to the extent of 55 to 60 per cent. Why can't in India probation system be extensively used by the courts to deal with the offenders? This will also reduce over-crowding in prisons. At present, U.S. has the highest proportion of its citizens in the custody: 189 out of every one lakh (Radzinowicz, 1977: 292). Against this, U.K. has 82 and Belgium, France and Denmark have 50 to 60 persons and India has only 40 persons in jails out of every one lakh population in the country.

The most important problem is that of classification of prisoners. The main objectives of classifying prisoners till recently were: to segregate different types of offenders, to categorise prisoners for security purposes, to prevent moral contamination, to control inmate-inmate relations, and to maintain discipline. Thus classification was done primarily for administrative purposes. But today, classification of prisoners is needed not only for custodial purposes but also for assigning work and sanctioning facilities.

(3) Channels should be provided to prisoners, independent of the prison administration, for expressing complaints and grievances. Ready access to courts and to lawyers for redress is also necessary.

(4) More facilities should be provided to inmates for continued contacts with the outside world and for release on parole.

(5) Some discretion should be permitted to jail officials in dealing with prisoners. This will reduce discontent among prisoners and make their adjustment to prison life easier.

A feeling on the part of prisoners that they are being treated fairly, that they have a say in work assignment or transfer from one to other barrack, and that their dignity is not needlessly undermined is more likely to induce them to conform to prison norms, reduce their bitterness to society and ultimately promote their rehabilitation.

Should a prisoner lose all his rights as a consequence of sentence of confinement? Is it not possible to maintain a balance between these rights and needs of prison discipline? Some rights might be incompatible with the rules of a correctional institution but some rules may be unreasonable or unnecessarily restrictive. Why should they not be changed? We, therefore, conclude that reorganisation of prisons and bringing them in tune with the modern philosophy of dealing with the criminals is the greatest need of the day. What is needed in restructuring of prisons today is not 'skin-deep cosmetics' but a 'soul-deep surgery'.
REFERENCES

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