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# THE CORRECTIONAL RENAISSANCE OF 2023: THE REBIRTH OF INDIA'S PRISON PHILOSOPHY THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND INMATE WELFARE AT MUMBAI CENTRAL PRISON

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## ABSTRACT

Prison reform reflects broader transformations in societal values, governance, and conceptions of justice. This study examines India's contemporary correctional shift through the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023 and its state-level implementation under the Maharashtra Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2024, using Mumbai Central Prison (Arthur Road Jail) as an empirical case study. Conceptualising prisons as cultural institutions, the paper analyses how legal reform, digital governance, and administrative practice intersect to reconfigure incarceration from a punitive framework toward a rehabilitative and rights-based model. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining doctrinal legal analysis with empirical fieldwork including semi-structured interviews with prison officials and institutional observations. Findings indicate that while the legislative framework emphasises dignity, rehabilitation, and reintegration, effective implementation remains constrained by chronic overcrowding, infrastructural limitations, staff shortages, and prolonged undertrial detention within a dense urban context. The study further demonstrates how technological interventions such as biometric kiosks, CCTV surveillance, e-prison management systems, and virtual communication platforms reshape prison governance, power relations, and inmate experiences, functioning simultaneously as mechanisms of surveillance and humanisation. Viewed through a cultural lens, the paper argues that contemporary prison reform in India signifies a broader social transformation in understandings of punishment, citizenship, and state responsibility. The study contributes to cultural and socio-legal scholarship by foregrounding prisons as critical sites of institutional, technological, and moral change in the Global South.

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**KEYWORDS:** *Prison Reform, Cultural Institutions, Digital Governance, Undertrial Prisoners, India.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“Dignified prisons are also essential for effective rehabilitation, as they create an environment conducive to self-reflection, personal growth, and eventual reintegration into society.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Supreme Court of India, Report on Prisons in India, 2024*

The Indian prison system has undergone a gradual but significant evolution from its colonial legacy of punitive confinement to a contemporary rights-based and correctional approach. The enactment of the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023 marks a paradigmatic shift in the nation's penal philosophy, one that emphasizes rehabilitation, reintegration, and humane treatment of inmates over mere incarceration. Within this national framework, the Maharashtra Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2024 represents a progressive state-level endeavor to translate the objectives of correctional jurisprudence into operational reality.

While the word “*correctional*” emanates from the legacy of the London Bridewell, the establishment of the Bridewell in 1553 marked a turning point in correctional history, blending punishment with moral and social reform. Conceived as both a *house of correction* and a *charitable refuge*, it introduced the notion that confinement could serve a rehabilitative purpose. Over time, “Bridewell” became synonymous with reform-oriented detention across England. In philosophical continuity, India's MPCSA represents the modern culmination of that evolution transforming the idea of correction from coercive moral discipline into a rights-based, humane, and rehabilitative framework rooted in constitutional and humanistic values.<sup>2</sup>

Among Maharashtra's correctional institutions, Mumbai Central Prison commonly known as Arthur Road Jail emerges as an apt case study to decipher the practical implementation of the new correctional framework. Being one of the oldest and most densely populated prisons in the state, it encapsulates the multifaceted challenges that the reform seeks to address ranging from overcrowding and infrastructural fatigue to inmate violence, health deficiencies, and administrative limitations. Its urban setting, high turnover of undertrial prisoners, and exposure to complex socio-legal dynamics make it a microcosm of the larger Indian prison system. Thus, studying Arthur Road Prison provides a fertile ground to evaluate how legislative ideals of

correction, digital modernization, and inmate welfare are being operationalized within a high-pressure institutional environment.

Prisons are not merely legal or administrative institutions but they are cultural spaces in which social values, power relations, and moral conceptions of punishment and reform are produced and contested. The manner in which a society structures its prisons reflects its broader cultural orientation toward crime, citizenship, and human dignity. In postcolonial India, prison reform represents a significant cultural shift away from colonial logics of retribution and discipline toward a rights-based and rehabilitative framework grounded in constitutional morality. The enactment of the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023, therefore signals not only legislative reform but a deeper transformation in the cultural understanding of incarceration, rehabilitation, and social responsibility.<sup>3</sup>

This study therefore examines the correctional renaissance of 2023-2024 by empirically exploring conditions at Mumbai Central Prison. It critically analyses how digital and forensic interventions such as biometric monitoring, CCTV surveillance, e-prison management systems, and cellular jamming are being integrated to enhance transparency, security, and inmate welfare. Furthermore, the paper evaluates policy dimensions such as classification of prisons, establishment of high-security and gender-sensitive facilities, and the expanding scope of parole, furlough, and rehabilitation schemes. Anchored in both doctrinal and empirical inquiry, it juxtaposes the lived realities of incarceration with the normative promises of the new legal framework. By situating Arthur Road Jail within the broader continuum of Indian prison reform from the Prison Discipline Committee (1836-1838) to the Model Act of 2023 the research also contextualizes the historical persistence of overcrowding, health neglect, and reformation deficits in correctional governance.

Ultimately, this paper aims to test the effectiveness of the MPSCA, 2023 and its Maharashtra adaptation by focusing on evidence-based assessment, stakeholder perspectives and the operational integration of technology in correctional management. Through this, it proposes a restorative justice framework for undertrial prisoners, particularly those accused of petty offences, envisioning prisons not as sites of retribution but as laboratories for reform, human dignity, and social reintegration.

<sup>1</sup> Supreme Court of India (2024) *Report on prisons: Mapping prison manuals and measures for reformation and decongestion*. Available at: <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3ec0490f1f4972d133619a60c30f3559e/uploads/2024/11/2024110677.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Cryar, J. (2023) *The London Bridewell: Defining deviance in early modern London*.

<sup>3</sup> Government of India (2023) *Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act*. New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs.

This study contributes to cultural and socio-legal scholarship by demonstrating how prison reform in India functions as a site of institutional, technological, and moral transformation.

### 1.1. Research Objectives

- a) To examine the current conditions and operational challenges at Mumbai Central Prison, particularly concerning overcrowding, infrastructure, and access to rehabilitation programs.
- b) To critically analyse the key provisions of the Model Correctional Services Act, 2023, with focus on its rehabilitative and rights-based framework.
- c) To assess the extent and effectiveness of technological and forensic interventions implemented in line with the Act within Mumbai Central Prison.
- d) To provide evidence-based recommendations to improve prison management practices and align them with the goals of rehabilitation, reintegration, and reduced recidivism.
- e) To integrate legislative analysis, empirical findings, and technological interventions in order to assess whether prison reforms at Mumbai Central Prison reflect a broader cultural shift toward rights-based correctional governance and social reintegration.

### 1.2. Research Questions

- a) What are the core rehabilitative and rights-based provisions of the Model Correctional Services Act, 2023?
- b) What are the major operational challenges faced by Mumbai Central Prison in complying with the Act?
- c) How has Mumbai Central Prison implemented the Act, particularly regarding technological and forensic measures?
- d) What are the perspectives of prison authorities, inmates, and NGOs on the implementation and effectiveness of the Act

### 1.3. Methodology

The empirical fieldwork was conducted and involved semi-structured interviews with approximately ten prison officials, including senior administrative personnel, medical staff, and rehabilitation officers. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to through informed consent,

confidentiality assurances, and the anonymization of respondents. The study does not disclose any personal identifiers, ensuring compliance with ethical standards for institutional research. Thus, the study undertakes a mixed-methods research design, using doctrinal (qualitative legal analysis) and empirical (quantitative and qualitative fieldwork) methods. The design enables interpretation of the legislative framework and its practical implementation within Mumbai Central Prison. As part of the empirical component of this research, in-depth interviews were conducted with prison authorities at Mumbai Central Prison (Arthur Road Jail). These included senior officials such as the jail superintendent, senior jailer at Mumbai Central Prison, administrative staff, medical personnel and rehabilitation officers. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, allowing for open-ended responses while maintaining focus on key themes such as the implementation of the Model Correctional Services Act, 2023, the challenges faced in aligning with its provisions, and the perceived impact of technological and forensic interventions in prison management. These interactions provided valuable insider perspectives on operational realities, institutional constraints, and the prison administration's efforts toward ensuring humane treatment and effective rehabilitation of inmates. The data gathered through these interviews significantly informed the analysis of the gap between legislative intent and practical execution within the prison system.

### 1.4. Limitations

The data is restricted to interviews from prison authorities although the insights from prison inmates are significant. The paper is restricted to implementation of the law therefore an enlarged view by interviewing inmates can be the scope for future research.

## 2. HISTORY OF PRISON SYSTEM IN INDIA

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* provided detailed accounts of prison administration, describing the *Bhandaigaradhyaksha* (superintendent), *Karka* (assistant), and *Sannidhata* (officer in charge). It also prescribed occasions for prisoner release and detailed the duties of jail officers.<sup>4</sup> In 1835, Lord Macaulay drew attention to the deplorable state of Indian jails, forming the Prison Discipline Committee (1836-38), that recommended rigorous discipline, hard labour, solitude, and silence to make the jail "a place of dread."<sup>5</sup>

The modern prison system in India however emerged during the British colonial period, designed

<sup>4</sup> Modelska, G. (1964) 'Kautilya: Foreign policy and international system in the ancient Hindu world', *American Political Science Review*, 58, p. 549.

<sup>5</sup> Manaworker, M.B. (2006) *Prison management: Problems and solutions*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.

primarily to serve imperial interests and instill fear among offenders. The Prisons Act of 1870 formally defined prisons and structured their administration, replacing indigenous punitive systems with organized incarceration intended to make "imprisonment a terror to wrongdoers".

From a criminological perspective, Sutherland and Cressey emphasized that modern correctional systems are expected to fulfill multiple functions within society. One of the foremost objectives, especially emphasized in recent discourse, is the rehabilitation and reform of individuals who have committed crimes. The prison system is thus seen not merely as a place of confinement, but as a setting for behavioural change and reintegration into society. At the same time, prisons serve a protective function by isolating offenders from the general public, thereby temporarily preventing further criminal activity. Additionally, society often views imprisonment as a form of retributive justice, wherein individuals who have caused harm are themselves subjected to punitive conditions. Finally, there is the broader expectation that prisons will contribute to the reduction of crime rates, both through deterrence and through efforts aimed at addressing the

underlying causes of criminal behaviour. These overlapping expectations highlight the complex and often conflicting roles that prisons are expected to play in the modern justice system.<sup>6</sup>

The cultural analysis of prisons is deeply informed by Michel Foucault's seminal work *"Discipline and Punish"*, in which he conceptualises prisons as instruments of disciplinary power embedded within broader systems of surveillance and social control.<sup>7</sup> According to Foucault, modern punishment shifts away from overt physical coercion toward continuous observation, normalisation, and self-regulation, a process epitomised by the metaphor of the Panopticon. This framework is particularly relevant in understanding contemporary prison reforms, where technologies such as CCTV surveillance, biometric monitoring, and digital record-keeping extend the logic of visibility and discipline. While such mechanisms may enhance accountability and security, they also reshape the lived experience of incarceration by intensifying institutional oversight. Foucault's insights thus provide a critical lens through which the evolving relationship between punishment, surveillance, and governance in modern correctional systems can be examined.

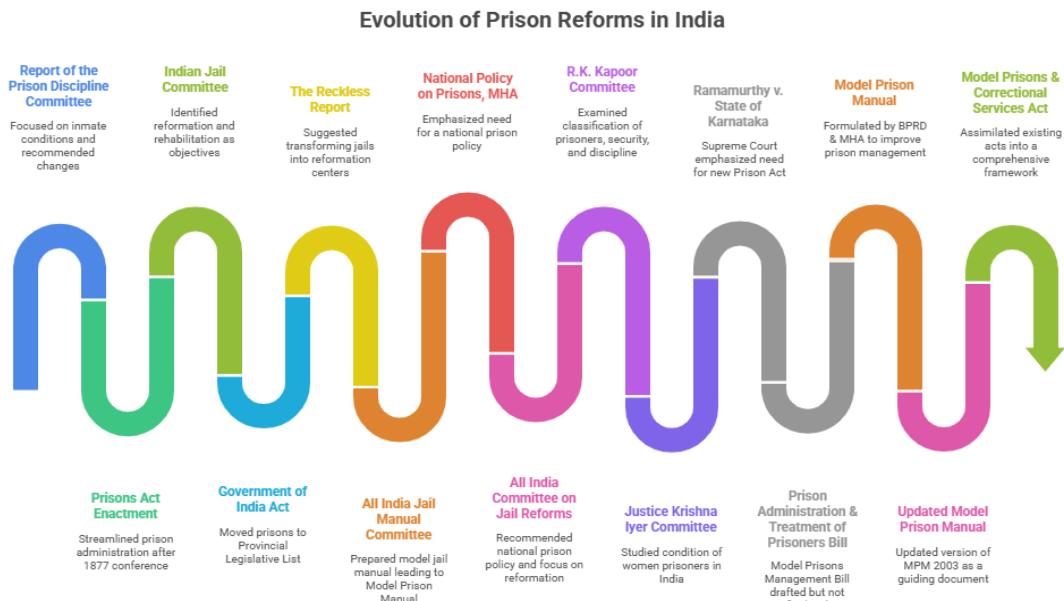


Figure 1: Source: Image Re-envisioned by the Authors.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.1. Prisons as Cultural Institutions and Sites of Social Change

Prisons function as powerful cultural institutions

that embody a society's attitudes toward authority, discipline, deviance, and reform. Beyond their legal mandate, prisons produce social meanings through

<sup>6</sup> Nagla, B.K. (1989) 'Prison administration in India', *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 35, p. 1011.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Pantheon Books.

<sup>8</sup> Supreme Court of India (2024) *Report on prisons in India: Mapping prison manuals and measures for reformation and decongestion*. Available at: <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3ec0490f1f4972d133619a60c30f3559e/uploads/2024/11/2024110677.pdf>

daily routines, surveillance practices, spatial organization, and interactions between inmates and authorities. In colonial contexts, prisons were designed to instill fear, obedience, and moral conformity, reinforcing imperial power structures and social hierarchies. In contemporary democracies, however, correctional institutions are increasingly reimagined as spaces of rehabilitation, dignity, and social reintegration. This shift reflects broader cultural transformations in which punishment is no longer viewed solely as retribution but as a mechanism for restoring social order and individual agency. In the Global South, and particularly in India, prison reform occupies a critical position at the intersection of postcolonial governance, human rights discourse, and social inequality.

Digital technologies, including biometric identification, surveillance systems, and e-governance platforms, further reshape prison culture by redefining power, visibility, and accountability. While such technologies promise efficiency and transparency, they also raise questions concerning privacy, control, and the lived experience of incarceration. Analyzing prison reform through a cultural lens thus allows for a deeper understanding of how institutional change reflects and produces wider processes of social transformation.

In the context of this study, 'cultural shift' refers to a transformation in the dominant meaning attached to incarceration. This shift involves a movement from viewing prisons primarily as sites of punishment and deterrence toward understanding them as institutions of rehabilitation, dignity, and social responsibility. It is reflected in changes in legal frameworks, administrative practices, technological governance, and public discourse, where accountability, transparency, and inmate welfare increasingly replace secrecy, coercion, and retribution.

### 3. MUMBAI CENTRAL PRISON

The Mumbai Central Prison, famed by its old name Arthur Road Jail, has stood as one of the city's most enduring institutions since its construction, a century ago. It was originally built to accommodate Mumbai's growing inmate population. Located in the bustling area, it is situated amidst two slums. Nestled in a two-storey old building, it is isolated from the rest of the jail by a high wall. In 1994, it was officially upgraded to the status of a Central Prison and renamed the *Mumbai Central Prison*, yet in public

memory and common parlance, it continues to be affectionately and widely known as Arthur Road Jail. Over the decades, the facility has witnessed the changing face of Mumbai's criminal justice system housing a diverse range of prisoners, from high profile cases like the 26/11 attacker Ajmal Kasab, to petty offenders.

The urban location of Mumbai Central Prison significantly shapes its operational realities. Situated within one of India's most densely populated metropolitan regions, the prison operates under severe spatial, infrastructural, and administrative constraints. High population density, intensive policing in urban informal settlements, and limited availability of land for expansion contribute to persistent overcrowding. The prison's proximity to economically marginalised neighborhoods also reflect broader patterns of urban inequality, wherein underprivileged populations are disproportionately represented within the criminal justice system. As an urban correctional institution, Arthur Road Jail exemplifies how city-level governance, policing practices, and socio-economic stratification directly influence incarceration patterns and institutional stress.

Within its premises, Arthur Road Jail houses several distinctive structures. Among the most notable is the *Anda Cell*, a high-security, circular cell block designed to detain notorious or high-profile inmates. At present there are five major compartments in the Anda cell with capacity of 32 rooms for individual high-risk prisoners. Another prominent feature is *Barrack No. 12*, often referred to as the "most high-profile cell in India." This specially prepared barrack includes amenities such as multiple ceiling fans, enhanced lighting, and a private exercise area. It has been used to accommodate extradited fugitives and high-profile accused individuals. At the entrance stands a black-and-grey *administrative building*, serving as the jail's operations hub.<sup>9</sup> Arthur Road Jail emblematic of the urgent need for prison reform in Mumbai. Despite being a key holding center for undertrials in Mumbai, the jail struggles with limited space, strained resources, and the constant challenge of managing a volatile inmate population within outdated infrastructure that require immediate attention.

#### 3.1 Persistent Challenges in Mumbai Central Prison

As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Road Jail to get 4 watchtowers, multipurpose hall (2025) *Hindustan Times*, 14 May. Available at: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news/arthur-road-jail-to-get-4-watchtowers-multipurpose-hall-101747165200108.html>

<sup>10</sup> National Crime Records Bureau (2023) *Prison statistics India* 2022. New Delhi: NCRB. Available at: <https://www.ncrb.gov.in/uploads/nationalcrimerecordsbureau/custom/psiyearwise2022/1701613297PSI2022ason01122023.pdf>

Report on Prison Statistics, 2022, Maharashtra recorded an alarming prison occupancy rate of 161.4%, ranking it as the sixth highest in India.<sup>10</sup>

This means that the state's prisons are housing over one and a half times their sanctioned capacity, reflecting severe congestion across central and district jails. The data underscores a critical need for systemic expansion, infrastructure modernization, and reformative correctional measures, all of which are directly addressed by the Maharashtra Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2024, through provisions for new high-security prisons, open and semi-open institutions, and digitalized inmate management systems.

According to the (NCRB) Report on Prison, 2022, there are 1,330 prisons, comprising central, district, sub, open, special, and women's jails. Among them, Maharashtra accounts for 64 prisons, representing about 4.8% of the nation's total correctional infrastructure. The combined sanctioned capacity of all prisons in India is 4,36,266 inmates, out of which Maharashtra contributes 25,443, approximately 5.8% of the national capacity, a figure that, while seemingly adequate on paper, fails to reflect the grim reality within the state's walls.

Despite this capacity, Maharashtra's prisons are bursting far beyond their limits. The overall occupancy rate stands at 161.4%, while Central Jails alone are operating at 175.9%, the second-highest in the country after Delhi (190.7%). In practical terms, this means that for every 100 sanctioned prison spaces, nearly 176 individuals are forced to live in conditions never meant to hold them, signalling severe infrastructural stress. The situation is particularly dire in Mumbai Central Prison (Arthur Road) and Yerawada Central Jail, where corridors, verandas, and even infirmaries have been turned into sleeping areas for undertrials who await justice for years.

Overcrowding is not merely a statistical concern, it is a humanitarian crisis unfolding in slow motion. Cramped cells breed disease, violence, and despair; rehabilitation programs lose meaning when survival becomes the first concern. The human dignity of both inmates and prison staff stands eroded under the weight of a system stretched beyond endurance.

Over the past decade, the escalation of overcrowding in Mumbai Central Prison cannot be attributed solely to fluctuations in crime rates. Rather, it reflects broader shifts in urban policing practices, intensified enforcement under special

legislations such as narcotics and preventive detention laws, and prolonged pre-trial incarceration. These factors have disproportionately expanded the undertrial population, indicating that patterns of incarceration are shaped as much by governance and enforcement strategies as by crime incidence itself.

It is against this stark backdrop that the Maharashtra Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2024 emerges not as a routine legislative reform, but as a moral and administrative imperative. Its provisions for new high-security prisons, open and semi-open institutions, detention centres, and digitalized correctional management are designed to breathe life into a system on the brink. The Act seeks not only to decongest prisons but to restore humanity, structure, and purpose to correctional spaces ensuring that prisons in Maharashtra become places of transformation rather than mere confinement.

*Inmate violence* at Arthur Road Jail has long been a serious concern, driven by gang rivalries, overcrowding, and the presence of high-profile criminals. For example, in December 2006, a violent clash between members of the Dawood Ibrahim and Chhota Rajan gangs once erupted inside the jail, resulting in several injuries. Following this incident, prison authorities began housing rival gang members in separate sections of the complex to prevent further conflict. In 2010, there was another violent clash between gangster Abu Salem and Mustafa Dossa, an accused in the 1993 Bombay Bomb Blasts case. Dossa slashed Salem's face with a sharp object injuring him severely. In May 2016, another major incident saw inmates using sharpened aluminium plates and metal sheets as weapons in a gang war inside the prison, resulting in multiple hospitalisations.<sup>11</sup>

These episodes reflect how the overlapping factors of overcrowded conditions, poorly segregated inmates from rival gangs, and inadequate supervision combine to make the jail a hotspot for violence. The jail has seen numerous instances of violence amongst its inmates.<sup>12</sup>

*Healthcare, Hygiene and Sanitation* remain critical concerns that stem from chronic overcrowding, insufficient sanitation and inadequately equipped medical facilities. The prison's capacity has been vastly exceeded for years, leading to cramped sleeping quarters, limited access to clean toilets and showers,

<sup>11</sup>'Mumbai prison gang war? Inmates attack each other with metal plates in Arthur Road' (2016) *Mid-Day*, 31 May. Available at: <https://www.mid-day.com/mumbai/mumbai-news/article/mumbai-prison-gang-war--inmates-attack-each-other-with-metal-plates-in-arthur-road-17288163>

<sup>12</sup> Deshpande, H. (2024) 'Anatomy of a prison: Inside Mumbai's overcrowded, high-profile Arthur Road Jail', *Outlook*, 18 January. Available at: <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/overcrowded-inhuman-corrupt-inside-mumbai-s-arthur-road-jail-news-217940>

and rampant spread of skin-infections, tuberculosis and other communicable diseases.<sup>13</sup> As per the latest information received through the officers, the segregation of prison inmates on the basis of categorisation is strictly followed in the prison. In case of excessive overcrowding, the prisoners are shifted to Taloja jail.

The number of psychiatrists and psychologists is, however, bare minimum.

### 3.2. Trends of Institutional Strain Over Past Decade

**Table 1**

Occupancy and Excessive Burden Ratios at Arthur Road Jail (2013–2025): A Summary of Institutional Strain	2013*	2017**	2025
Sanctioned Strength	804	804	999
Present Occupancy	2703	2801	3570
Excessive burden Ratio in %	336%	348%	357%

\*Report of Report Of Thiru S. Ramani, Ips (Retd), Special Rapporteur, Central West Zone-I, National Human Rights Commission, Headquarter At Chennai, On Visit To Central Prison, Arthur Road, Mumbai On 26.07.2013 & 27.07.2013.

\*\*Report On Inspection Visit Of Sh. S.C. Sinha, Hon'ble Member, NHRC, To Mumbai Central Prison, Arthur Road, Mumbai, Maharashtra on 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> May, 2017

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Between 2013 and 2025, Mumbai Central Prison's occupancy surged from 336% to 357%, reflecting an alarming inmate rise from 2,703 to 3,570 against a marginal capacity increase from 804 to 999—an imbalance that has turned chronic overcrowding into the nucleus of institutional dysfunction. Such extreme congestion erodes spatial order, fuels psychological stress, and provokes frequent episodes of inmate violence arising from territorial conflicts, frustration, and gang dominance. Hygiene and health conditions have deteriorated correspondingly, with inadequate sanitation, limited water access, and overburdened medical facilities heightening the spread of communicable diseases and violating the dignity and health rights guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution and the UN Nelson Mandela Rules. The negligible infrastructural expansion reflects policy stagnation, transforming the prison into a pressure chamber rather than a rehabilitative space. The Maharashtra Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2024 seeks to correct this imbalance through digital monitoring, open and semi-open prisons, and enhanced medical and welfare facilities; yet its success will depend on the State's ability to translate legislative intent into structural relief, ensuring that correction regains its reformative and humane character.

In a metropolitan context such as Mumbai, institutional strain within prisons must also be understood as a product of urban governance. High population density, migration, informal housing clusters, and intensive surveillance in urban spaces contribute to higher rates of arrest and prolonged detention, particularly among economically marginalized groups. These urban pressures reinforce cycles of incarceration and overcrowding, transforming prisons into sites where broader social inequalities and governance practices are reproduced. As an urban correctional institution, Mumbai Central Prison thus reflects how city-level dynamics intersect with penal policy to shape incarceration patterns and institutional culture.

## 4. OVERVIEW OF THE MPCSA, 2023

The MPCSA, 2023 constitutes a seminal development in the evolution of India's penal jurisprudence, effecting the repeal of three colonial-era statutes.<sup>14</sup> Enacted as part of a comprehensive criminal law reform initiative alongside the new criminal laws, the Act seeks to modernize the correctional framework in consonance with constitutional mandates and internationally recognised human rights standards. It articulates a marked departure from the traditionally retributive model of incarceration, embracing instead a reformative, rehabilitative, and rights-based approach to prison administration. Central to its philosophical foundation is the affirmation of the dignity of the individual, as guaranteed under the Constitution of India.

In alignment with global best practices, the Act draws normative guidance from instruments<sup>15</sup> Among its salient features are provisions for the development of individualised rehabilitation and reintegration plans, access to educational and vocational training, legal assistance, psychological counselling, and healthcare services. The legislation accords special attention to the needs of vulnerable groups, including women, transgender persons, persons with disabilities, and elderly inmates. Furthermore, it mandates the adoption of technological interventions such as biometric identification, e-prison management systems, and digitised record-keeping to enhance administrative efficiency, transparency, and accountability. Mechanisms for institutional oversight, including the constitution of Prison Visiting Committees and grievance redressal systems, are also embedded within the statutory framework.

<sup>13</sup> 'Visit Arthur Road Jail to see hell on earth' (2016) *Asian Age*, 1 August. Available at: <https://www.asianage.com/mumbai/visit-arthur-road-jail-see-hell-earth-870>

<sup>14</sup> The Prisons Act, 1894; The Prisoners Act, 1900; The Transfer of Prisoners Act, 1950.

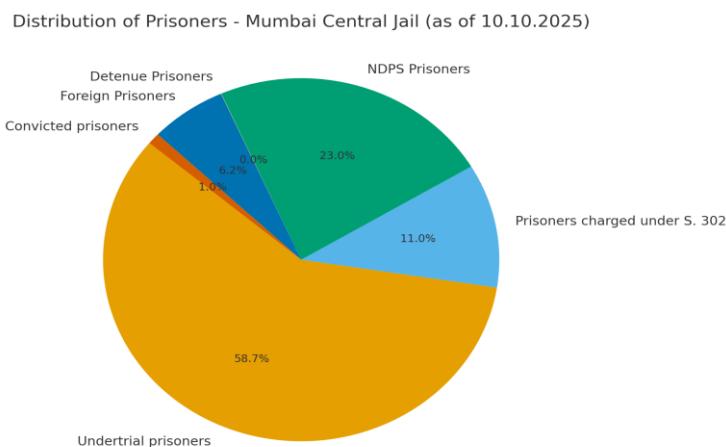
<sup>15</sup> United Nations General Assembly (2015). United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules). New York: United Nations.

Nevertheless, the realisation of the Act's transformative vision remains contingent upon its effective implementation at the institutional level. Structural impediments such as chronic overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, shortage of trained personnel, and entrenched custodial attitudes continue to impede progress, particularly in overburdened facilities such as Mumbai Central Prison (Arthur Road Jail). While the *Correctional Services Act, 2023* provides a robust and forward-looking legislative framework, its success will ultimately depend upon sustained political will, interdepartmental coordination, capacity-building

of prison staff, and the allocation of adequate financial and infrastructural resources.

**Table 2: Data of Prison inmates as on 10th of October 2025: (Mumbai Central Prison, Arthur Road).**

Category	No. of prisoners
Undertrial prisoners	2094
Prisoners charged under S. 302	394
NDPS Prisoners	822
Detenu Prisons	01
Foreign Prisoners	223
Convicted prisoners	36
Total Prisoners	3570



**Figure 2: Distribution of Prisoners in Mumbai Central Prison.**

Figure 2, depicting the prisoner distribution at Mumbai Central Jail as of October 10, 2025, reveals a significant imbalance in inmate categories. A majority of prisoners, approximately 58.6% are undertrials, indicating prolonged judicial delays and a need for faster case disposal mechanism.

NDPS prisoners constitute 23%, reflecting the growing impact of drug-related offences in the state. Prisoners charged under Section 302 (murder) account for 11%, while foreign and detenu prisoners

collectively form a small fraction of the population. Convicted prisoners represent only about 1%, suggesting that conviction rates are disproportionately low compared to the number of individuals awaiting trial. Overall, the data underscores the pressing issue of overcrowding driven largely by undertrials, highlighting the urgent need for judicial and procedural reforms to decongest prisons and ensure timely justice.

#### **4.1. Overview of implementation of the Model Prison and Correctional Services Act, 2023, in Maharashtra and the existing situation in Mumbai Central Prison**

**Table 3: Current Scenario at Mumbai Prison in consonance with Maharashtra**

Salient Features	Description	Implementation/ Developments at Mumbai Central Prison (as per the data provided by Prison Officials)
Repeal and Consolidation	Repeals outdated prison laws (1894, 1900, 1950) and consolidates prison regulations under one Act.	The Maharashtra Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2024, was passed by the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly on December 20, 2024. It is currently in the process of implementation, yet to be executed in Maharashtra, thereby replacing the colonial-era Prisons Act of 1894.
High-Security Prison in Mumbai	Plans for a modern, multi-storey high-security jail with advanced surveillance and security systems.	A high security cell (Anda Cell) having the capacity of keeping 32 cells divided into 5 major compartments to keep high risk prisoners under strict and severe surveillance.

Technological assistance	Use of biometric identification, CCTV, scanning/detection devices, RFID (Radio Frequency Identification), video-conference facilities	Currently there are 12 biometric touchscreen kiosks installed in the prison at different locations, which enable inmates to know their case status and mark attendance. There are 16 computers in the video conferencing room for appearing online in cases of bail applications. The facilities can also be used for video calling the families (e- Mulakat) who cannot visit the prison due to logistical/ financial constraints.
Categorization of Prisons	Establishes high-security, open, semi-open, temporary prisons, and open colonies for inmate segregation and rehabilitation. Features include fortified walls, electronic tracking, power fencing, watchtowers, and 24x7 CCTV coverage. Land parcels for the new Mumbai jail have already been identified.	Categorization followed strictly with proper segregation of prisoners. Currently 423 CCTVs are installed across the prisons to keep a track of activities within the premises. The state government has sanctioned ₹1.21 crore for construction of watchtowers.
Gender-Sensitive Facilities	Provides separate wards for women, ante/post-natal care, child-care centers (Balwadis), and facilities for transgender inmates.	It is a prison with male inmates, and the transgender inmates are segregated from the regular inmates to protect them from sexual exploitation.
Rehabilitation & Welfare Measures	Mandates education, vocational training, libraries, sports, yoga, remunerative work, and Borstal institutions for youth offenders.	Inmates are provided with books, reading material and vocational training. They are given remunerative work for prison-manufactured goods. Works like bike repairing, gadget repairs and paintings etc are taught. They are provided with certificates to utilise the education outside prisons once acquitted.
Parole, Furlough & Monitoring	Updates rules for parole and furlough with electronic monitoring; supports bail assistance committees for indigent undertrials.	Currently there is no provision for keeping a track of prisoners out on bail at Mumbai Central Prison.
Cellular jamming	Use of cellular jamming / detection of unauthorised mobile phones / electronic devices	The computers in video conferencing rooms are connected through LAN and there is no WiFi used. There are no jammers however, it is not required as the surveillance is very high for the use of gadgets/devices. There are disciplinary actions in case of breach of rules.
Detention Centre in Mumbai	Establishes a detention centre for foreign nationals; land identification and civic coordination underway.	The Balegaon, Navi Mumbai (near Taloja MIDC) site has been approved for a permanent detention centre for foreign nationals who overstay visas or commit visa/immigration-related offences.
Addressing Overcrowding	Aims to alleviate severe congestion in Mumbai prisons by expanding and modernizing facilities.	It was proposed to elevate the prisons vertically in 2016, but the construction has still not commenced. Release of prisoners on bail is another option but it poses other risks.

## 5. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 5.1. *Observations from Field Visit*

#### i) Kitchen and Food Facilities

The prison maintains a clean and hygienic kitchen equipped with modern amenities. A detailed food manual is displayed, clearly mentioning the nutritional value of each item served. A roti-making machine has been installed to ensure efficiency and hygiene in food preparation. The menu for breakfast, lunch, and dinner is displayed for transparency. Inmates are also encouraged to participate in cooking according to their skills, which helps them develop a sense of responsibility and gain valuable experience.

#### ii) Canteen Facility

The prison has an in-house canteen that provides a variety of grocery and food items. Inmates can purchase items through cash payments, giving them limited financial independence and access to essential products. The availability of a canteen ensures convenience and improves the overall

quality of life inside the prison.

#### iii) *Video Conferencing and Communication*

There are designated video conferencing rooms with proper surveillance and LAN connectivity to ensure secure communication during virtual court hearings and official interactions. Kiosk machines have been installed outside every division to facilitate communication and access to basic services. Inmates are permitted to make ten-minute phone calls three times a week through an automated system, which automatically disconnects after the allotted time, ensuring equal opportunity and maintaining order.

#### iv) *Healthcare and Mental Health Support*

Emergency healthcare services are available within the prison to handle any medical situation promptly. In addition to physical health facilities, mental health support is provided through regular counselling sessions. This initiative helps inmates cope with stress, isolation, and other mental health challenges, promoting their emotional stability and rehabilitation.

### **v) Surveillance and Security**

Each division and barrack in the prison is under constant surveillance to ensure discipline and prevent any security breaches. High-risk inmates, marked with red strips, are segregated to avoid potential escape attempts or disturbances. Similarly, prisoners associated with extremist activities, such as Naxalites, are housed separately to maintain security and control within the facility.

### **vi) Hygiene and Cleanliness**

Maintaining cleanliness is a key focus of the prison administration. Washing machines have been installed to help inmates maintain hygiene and sanitation. Regular cleaning schedules and modern equipment ensure a healthy living environment, reducing the risk of infections and improving the overall quality of life inside the prison.

### **vii) Behaviour and Discipline**

The inmates are generally well-behaved and disciplined, which reflects effective supervision and structured management. The prison environment encourages positive behaviour, respect for rules, and cooperation among inmates and staff.

### **viii) Recreational and Rehabilitation Facilities**

A radio system is installed in the prison to broadcast motivational talks, educational lectures, and songs. These sessions aim to inspire inmates, promote moral values, and support their emotional well-being. Such recreational initiatives play a vital role in reformation and help inmates stay mentally engaged during their incarceration.

#### **a) Perspectives of prison staff (administration, security, healthcare).**

#### **i) Dearth of staff- Prison functions on 50% staff**

The prison currently functions with only 50% of the required staff strength. This shortage severely affects day-to-day management, security, rehabilitation programs, and timely response to inmate needs. Immediate recruitment and better resource allocation are necessary to ensure smooth operation

#### **ii) Overcrowding**

Although the official capacity of the prison is 999 inmates, it presently houses 3,570 prisoners. This extreme overcrowding leads to poor living conditions, health risks, and increased stress among inmates and staff. Urgent steps toward decongestion, such as speedy trials and use of open jails, are

essential. Inmates with serious illnesses have to be kept in a different cell for curbing spread of infections and skin diseases.

### **iii) Mental Health Support**

The prison needs more psychiatrists and trained counselors to address the growing mental health challenges among inmates. Regular counselling sessions, including online therapy options, should be introduced to ensure consistent psychological support.

### **iv) Enhanced legal aid for undertrials**

With a large proportion of prisoners being undertrials, there is an urgent need for pro bono legal aid and government-supported legal services. This will help poor inmates secure bail and reduce unnecessary incarceration due to financial or procedural barriers.

### **v) Easy financial transactions**

The existing money order system for prisoners is inefficient and outdated. Secure digital payment solutions, such as restricted-use apps like Google Pay for prison transactions, should be developed to ensure transparency and convenience. Such an app is being developed in Haryana for sending quick money to the inmates.

### **vi) Cremation and Burial Concerns**

In some cases, deceased inmates are cremated or buried by the authorities due to the unavailability of relatives. A standardized protocol ensuring dignity and coordination with social organizations should be established for such instances.

### **vii) Behavioural and Antecedent Records**

Upon release, each inmate should receive a detailed internal behaviour report documenting their conduct and progress. This process must involve NGOs, social welfare workers, and prison officials to ensure a holistic evaluation and smoother reintegration into society.

### **viii) Prevention of Criminal Associations formed within prisons**

Steps should be taken to prevent inmates from forming criminal networks inside the prison. Segregation measures and behaviour-based monitoring can help reduce conspiracies and limit recidivism, promoting genuine rehabilitation instead.

### **ix) Speedy Disposal of Bail Applications**

The courts must take proactive measures to

ensure the swift disposal of bail applications. Delays in hearing and deciding bail matters contribute significantly to overcrowding in prisons, especially among undertrials. Setting up dedicated bail benches, using virtual hearings, and simplifying procedural requirements can help expedite the process and uphold the principle that bail is the rule, not the exception.

The empirical findings suggest that daily practices, disciplinary routines, and rehabilitative initiatives collectively shape the cultural life of the prison. Structured supervision, access to education, and regulated communication foster a climate of managed discipline rather than coercive control. Despite severe overcrowding and staffing constraints, these practices reflect an emerging institutional culture oriented toward order, accountability, and conditional rehabilitation, highlighting the gradual transformation of prison governance from punitive containment to corrective management.

## 6. TECHNOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS AND FORENSIC APPLICATIONS IN PRISON MANAGEMENT AT MUMBAI CENTRAL PRISON

Mumbai Central Prison has embraced a series of digital reforms to enhance transparency, security, and inmate welfare through smart technology. At present, twelve biometric touchscreen kiosks have been installed across various sections of the prison, enabling inmates to check their case status and mark attendance independently. This system has streamlined administrative operations and empowered inmates with greater access to legal and procedural information, reducing dependency on manual record-keeping and minimizing human error.

To facilitate legal access and maintain emotional ties with families, the prison has established a video conferencing room equipped with sixteen computers, primarily used for online court appearances such as bail hearings. In addition to the *e-Mulakat* facility that allows inmates to connect with family members virtually, *smart calling systems* have been introduced to provide secure, monitored phone access. These systems enable inmates to make approved calls to their relatives or legal representatives under supervision, ensuring communication remains transparent, traceable, and within security protocols.



Source: Nadeem Inamdar, Prison reforms: Smart calling cards for inmates of Maharashtra jails<sup>16</sup>

Plans are also underway to introduce electronic tagging for individuals released on bail, allowing digital tracking and identification to ensure compliance and prevent misuse.

Security infrastructure has simultaneously been strengthened through the installation of 423 CCTV cameras that continuously monitor activities across the premises, along with strict segregation and categorization of prisoners to maintain order. Further, the Maharashtra government has sanctioned ₹1.21 crore for constructing four new watchtowers at Arthur Road Jail, reinforcing surveillance and preventing escape attempts. Together, these technological upgrades including biometric kiosks, smart calling systems, and electronic tagging represent a shift toward a more accountable, human-centric, and digitally governed correctional framework.

These technological interventions extend beyond administrative efficiency and security enhancement, they actively reshape the cultural environment of incarceration. Continuous surveillance and digital monitoring reconfigure power relations within the prison, producing new forms of discipline, visibility, and self-regulation among inmates. At the same time, technologies such as video conferencing and *e-Mulakat* platforms humanize incarceration by sustaining social bonds and mitigating the isolating effects of confinement. Technology thus operates as a cultural mediator, simultaneously reinforcing institutional control and enabling more humane forms of governance.

However, implementing such technological reforms faces multiple constraints. High costs of procurement, installation, and maintenance often limit the scale of deployment. Many prisons suffer from outdated infrastructure, insufficient technical staff, and unreliable power or network connectivity, all of which impede smooth functioning of digital systems. Additionally, data privacy concerns, lack of training among prison personnel, and resistance to change

<sup>16</sup> 'Prison reforms: Smart calling cards for inmates of Maharashtra jails' (2023) *National Herald*, 23 June. Available at: <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/national/prison-reforms-smart-calling-cards-for-inmates-of-maharashtras-largest-jail>

within traditional administrative structures further delay technological integration. These challenges underscore the need for sustained funding, capacity-building programs, and policy-level commitment to fully realize the vision of a digitized, transparent, and humane correctional system.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY REFORMS

*“Crime is but a sign of a diseased mind and that imprisonment, should aim primarily at treating a prisoner’s diseased mind and making him fit to go into society after release to lead an honest life”*<sup>17</sup>

*Mahatma Gandhi.*

In the advent of restorative justice, one can find true resonance in the Maharashtra Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2024, which redefines prisons as centres of reformation rather than retribution. The Act emphasizes rehabilitation, counselling, education, and skill development, treating offenders as individuals capable of change. In doing so, it transforms the prison from a place of punishment to a space of healing and reintegration. Thus, Gandhi's humanistic vision stands realised in the Act's spirit of reform, dignity, and societal restoration. Under the Indian justice system, it is evident that the pendency of cases is enormous. In order to reduce this, the undertrial prisoners shall be released on bail after proper enquiry. A restorative justice model is suggested to resolve this issue for the offenders with petty offences.

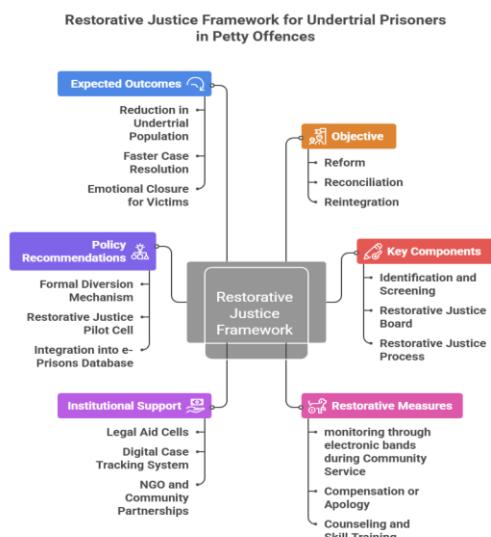


Figure 3: Proposed Research Model on Restorative Framework.

<sup>17</sup> Government of Maharashtra (2025) *History of prisons in India*. Maharashtra Prisons & Correctional Services. Available at: <https://mahaprisons.gov.in/en/prison-history/> (Accessed: 9 October 2025).

In terms of technological interventions, following advancements are proposed:

i) **AI-Based Surveillance Systems** by upgrading existing 423 CCTVs with AI-enabled analytics for anomaly detection identifying fights, unauthorized gatherings, or self-harm in real-time.

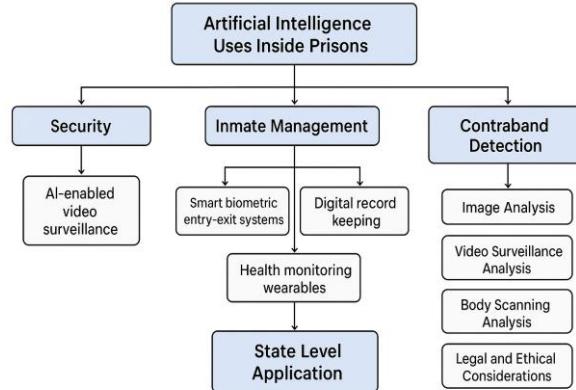


Figure 4: Use of AI in Prison Management.

### ii) Electronic Tagging & Tracking

Introduce electronic bracelets for undertrial prisoners granted bail or parole to ensure compliance and reduce overcrowding.

### iii) Smart Biometric Entry-Exit Monitoring

Biometric scanners at all prison access points for staff, visitors, and contractors to ensure accountability and prevent impersonation.

### iv) Digital Evidence Chain Management System

Blockchain-based record-keeping for evidence and inmate property to ensure tamper-proof storage and transparent auditing.

### v) Integrated Prison Management Software

Link case records, health data, and behavioral reports with judicial and police databases for real-time updates and expedited bail hearings.]

### vi) Drones for Perimeter Surveillance

Use drones to monitor prison boundaries and detect unauthorized entry or contraband drops, especially in congested urban prisons like Arthur Road.

### vii) Health Monitoring Wearables

Equip inmates with basic wearable devices to track vitals and alert medical staff in case of emergencies helpful for elderly or vulnerable inmates.

In conclusion, the correctional renaissance symbolized by India's Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023, and its state-level adaptation in Maharashtra reflects a decisive

transformation in the nation's penal philosophy from confinement to correction, and from custody to care. Through its emphasis on rehabilitation, digital governance, gender sensitivity, and reintegration, the Act redefines prisons as institutional spaces oriented toward human dignity rather than retribution. The case study of Mumbai Central Prison illustrates both the promise and the limitations of this transformative framework, particularly within the constraints of overcrowding, infrastructural strain, and administrative capacity in a densely populated urban setting.

Viewed through a cultural lens, these reforms signify a broader social reorientation in India's

understanding of punishment, citizenship, and state responsibility. The gradual shift from colonial punitive legacies to a rights-based correctional culture reflects changing societal values that prioritize reform, accountability, and social reintegration. While structural and operational challenges continue to impede full realization of these ideals, the evolving prison culture signals an important departure toward a more humane and socially responsive model of justice. Prison reform, therefore, emerges not merely as a legal or administrative exercise, but as a critical site of cultural transformation and social reimagination in contemporary India.

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