

For many freedom from the prison may not be very welcome

Written by Administrator
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By Sidharth Mishra



Last weekend many a newspapers carried the news that the Centre was planning to bring a policy to facilitate release of poor prisoners. Christened as 'Support for Poor Prisoners', the scheme envisages the provision of required financial support to poor persons who are in prisons and unable to afford the penalty or the bail amount.

While there is no denying the good intent of Home Minister Amit Shah, who is said to be personally mentoring the scheme, this move can cause many a social and personal ripples. The world of the jail has much more it than just the incarcerated politicians, famous gang lords and often corrupt officials. There also is a huge population for whom nobody is seeking out.

Last week a lawyer friend had called to inform that he had managed acquittal of the relative of a support staff from my old organisation. When this information was conveyed to this staff, he didn't sound very happy about the outcome of the case in the form of an acquittal.

The story went like this that the said prisoner was accused in an almost 20-year-old case of murder in his village. Since it was a case of murder and since the family did not have the wherewithal to hire best of the lawyers, he was never granted bail.

The case dragged for more than a decade before the trial court passed the order finding the accused guilty. In these 10 years the family had settled to a life without the accused, his wife rearing the children with whatever capability she had. The accused himself supported her with the meagre earnings he made by working inside the jail premises.

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The matter went to the High Court, where too it dragged for a few years before the judgment in the matter came. It upheld the trial court order and the status quo in the social and personal life of the prisoner and his family continued. In due course an appeal was filed in the Supreme Court.

Soon after filing of the appeal in the apex court, came Covid. One of the major acts of the government during the lockdown was to release the 'less hardened' inmates on parole to decongest the jails. Our prisoner too after almost 15 years had the chance to visit his home.

During the stay at home, he fairly realised that his homecoming was not of much value as the family had learnt to live without him. The children had all grown up without the guardianship of their father and when he finally came home, they did not feel the need to look up to him.

This somewhere ignited suspicion in our prisoner that 'best legal help' was never given to him, which may not be true, and he contacted a relative of his working in a newspaper office. Thus was secured for him reasonably good legal aid and acquittal was secured from the Supreme Court in a few years' time.

On hearing the news, this former colleague told me that he was going to be blamed for the mess which he foresees coming with the release of his relative. This was just one of the account in one of the jails of the country; such tales galore in almost all the jails across the country.

As rightly pointed out in the statement issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, most of these prisoners are poor and the majority of them belong to socially disadvantaged or marginalized groups with lower education and income level. Therefore, greater the need to seek guarantee of their rehabilitation in the outside world after their release from the prison? The harbingers of the scheme could make a note of this.

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