

MISSION AMONG PRISONERS

EDUCATION TAKES A NEW PATH

TIPS FOR RELAXATION

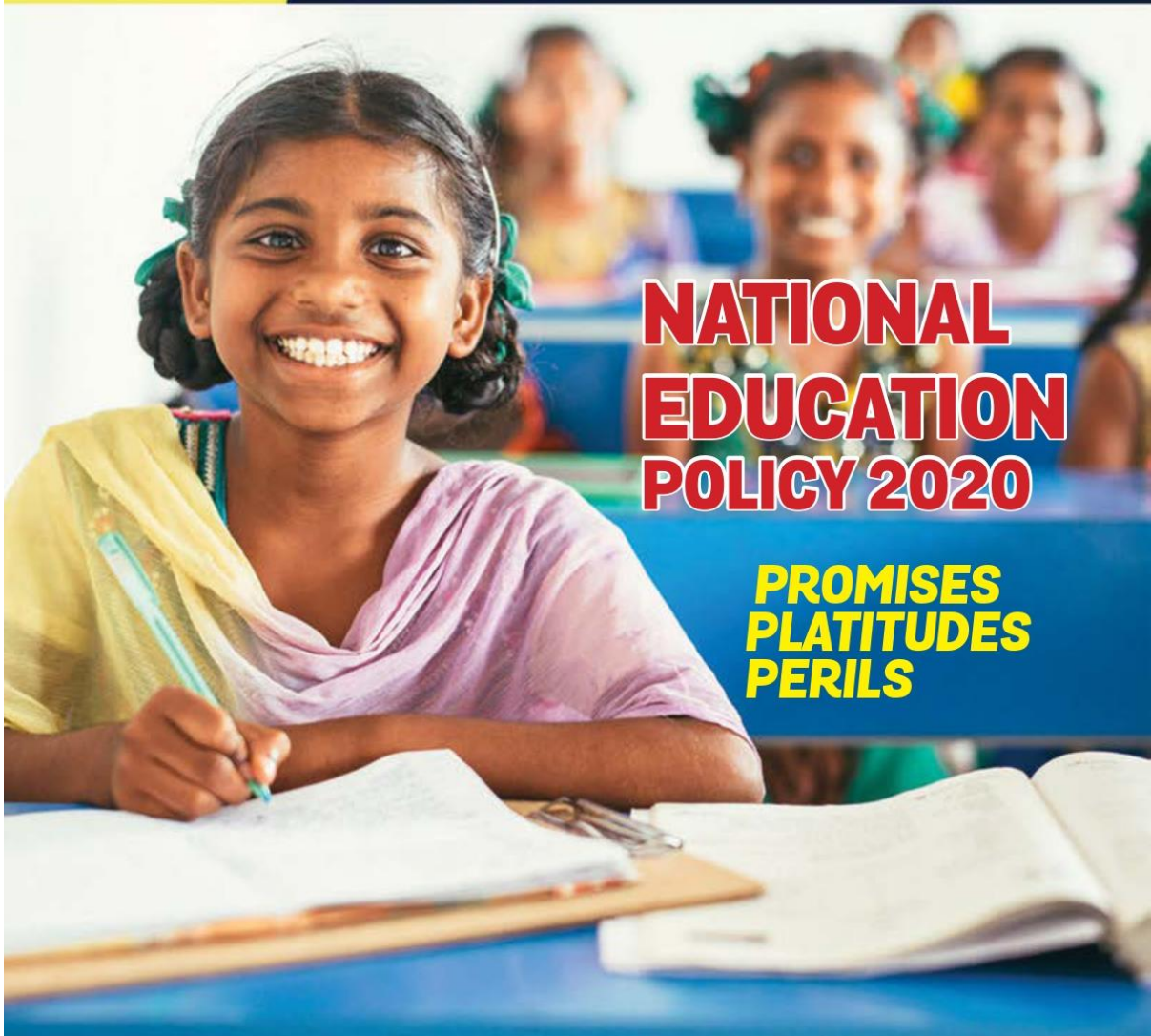
VOLUME VI | ISSUE 11

November | 2022

₹ 35

A MONTHLY  
FOR PERSONAL,  
SOCIAL AND  
SPIRITUAL  
INTEGRATION

# MAGNET

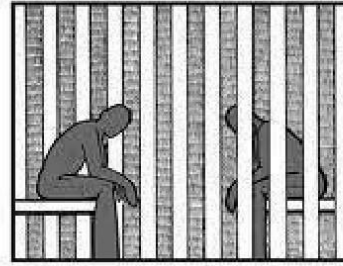


**NATIONAL  
EDUCATION  
POLICY 2020**

**PROMISES  
PLATITUDES  
PERILS**



## Do Not Condemn the Prisoners



### PRISONERS ARE PEOPLE TOO!

To deny their humanity, is to deny our own.

Sr Lini Sheeja MSC

Yeshwanth (name changed) had been living happily with his wife and 6 children in the house that he had built on inherited land. The property was a portion of the 7 acres that his father had cleared in the forest area, with due permission from the Tehsildar, and divided between Yeshwanth and his 2 brothers. His brothers too had constructed houses in their portion of the land. They cultivated the land and reared animals for a living. It was not a luxurious life, but they did manage to make ends meet, and were happy. Life was going on smoothly for the 3 brothers, until a few years down the line when tribals from the neighbouring village came with the claim that the land was rightfully theirs as it fell in the tribal belt. The tribals went to the extent of destroying their crops and forcefully taking the yield from the land.

One evening as it was getting dark, Yeshwanth saw 3 tribals ploughing his land. When he confronted them, a scuffle broke out and they started

throwing stones. Unfortunately, a stone that Yeshwanth threw back at them accidentally killed one of the 3 tribals. The next day the police, accompanied by a huge crowd, arrested Yeshwanth. He was beaten up mercilessly, despite him narrating the truth. He was thrown into jail - the sub-jail first, then the district jail, and finally the circle jail. Fearing the tribals, nobody came to his rescue. He was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment. As he was poor, he could not hire a lawyer to fight his case. His family too was on the streets with no place to live, as they had been driven out of the village.

Why was Yeshwanth imprisoned for 20 years? Every prisoner, whom we encounter behind prison walls, has a history to tell us. While Yeshwanth was behind dark cells, his family was on the street? Why is there so much injustice? Why is there so much inhumanity in our world? This true story invites humanity to understand the injustice done to the poorest of the poor in our society. *"As long as poverty, injustice and inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest"*, acclaimed Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa who was convicted along with several other ANC leaders and sentenced to life in prison in June 1964.

#### Cry of the Prisoners

Jeevan (all names in this true story have been changed) spent his childhood along with a number of homeless people living in tents. It was a time of extreme

poverty and illness. His parents worked hard for their livelihood. Sending the children to school was the least of their concerns. Along with the parents, all the children were engaged in the sale of lottery, drugs and begging. After a few years of staying there, the government provided these people with a one-room house and finally, they had land. It was a criminal activity prone area and naturally, Jeevan and his siblings joined a gang of drug users and dealers. Finally, he was arrested by the police and thrown behind the bars.

#### No One is born a Criminal

After his release, a girl named Jessy came into his life and he wanted to marry her. He wanted to be baptized and to marry in Church. He married Jessy, is blessed with two children and lives happily. He started working as a garbage collector with the Corporation. This true story invites humanity to understand the agony of poverty-stricken families and to understand the fact that no one is born a criminal. Jeevan was not born a criminal but his environment led him, together with his family, to criminal activities - for survival, for daily food. Jeevan was thrown into the dark cells of the prison and was in a hopeless situation. Whose fault is this? Why do so many people land in prisons? Do we ever take a moment to reflect on this? Does the media present the stories of these vulnerable ones? When we read/hear about murder/theft/rape stories from the media, with







our human tendency, we tend to judge immediately. How many of us can ever think of their horrific past? Or what led them to commit these crimes?

### The Cry Continues

Many poverty stricken children suffer, they leave home in search of good fortune and end up in prisons after committing a series of crimes. On account of poverty and hunger Ravi (name changed) ran away from home one day in search of a fortune. He wandered along the streets and landed among street boys. He learned soon to adjust with the life of children on the street and he picked up every type of bad action of the children there. He learned to be totally on his own and earned his living from the street and became totally a child of the street. His friends took him to their masters who were professional pickpockets.

He was apprenticed to them and eventually excelled in the nefarious art of pickpocketing. The money that was picked was usually squandered in liquor shops and such other places. He thrived in the business for about twenty-two years, spent years in prison and finally came back to his home as a renewed man and lived with his mother as he had lost his father by then.

Whose fault is this? Did Ravi's mother give birth to a pick-pocket? What dreams his mother might have had when she first held him in her arms? It was hunger that led him in search of good fortune. Thinking of getting a good job, he left home, but landed on the streets. There are so many Ravis found in our so-called developed

society.

### They never intended to do it!

The brethren behind bars are deprived of their human freedom which they long for. Prisoners within the four walls reflect on many questions. Physical custody and separation from their loved ones make them lose hope. *"We feel suffocated when we are away from our own homes and live in a place which is not ours. We try to pack off as early as possible and get back to our shelter. If we go for a trip we buy many gifts for our dear ones, our imaginations run riot."* Today, lakhs of prisoners are behind bars, many of them on life sentences who have to serve time in prison for years. I had the chance to speak to many 'life-sentenced' prisoners. They said that when the sentence

was passed their life was shattered. Some told me that they had not wanted to commit the crime; circumstances made them act in a way that branded them as criminals. Many said it was accidental! They had never intended to do wrong. God looked upon all that he had made, and indeed, it was very Good (Gen 1:31), if so how can God create a 'Criminal'. No mother gives birth to a child to make him/her a criminal. Every mother or father invests a lot of time, money and takes interest in nurturing their children to bring them up as 'good' persons.

### The Cry Continues

*"The years have gone by faster than I could ever imagine. Years ago, when I came to this prison, I was depressed"* said Manoj when I interviewed him in 2019 at Parappana Agrabara Central Prison, Bangalore. *"The way before me was closed. I'm the only child of my parents. I was loved, pampered; had more things than I needed. I was like a flower in the garden loved by parents and relatives. I'm an MBA graduate. I was brought up by my parents and they had instilled family values in me. When it was time for my marriage, my parents arranged one. I loved my wife and respected her. But I found that my wife did not love me nor my parents. She was under the influence of her mother."*





*My wife would always speak negatively about my parents and I still remember her words, 'If we have a baby, I'll never allow your parents to touch my baby'. I began to construct a house, a two-storey building with the plan of having my parents on the first floor which she opposed tooth and nail. I felt like I was caught between a hammer and an anvil. Neither could I share certain things with my mother nor could I fight with my wife because I was brought up in a serene and calm family atmosphere.*

*I kept quiet many times and my emotions started reaching a breaking point. Life was totally different after marriage and I no longer had peace of mind. We lived together only for two years and many things which were bottled up within me fizzled out when my wife died. I never intended to kill her. During our breakfast as she was nagging me so much, I took the knife from the table. I never thought of killing her... When I saw her dead body, I thought of ending my life too. I was charged with killing my wife and I was put behind bars. Life turned to be a series of thorn bushes. A person full of love became a person with scars".*

Whom shall we blame? Whose fault is this? Did Manoj ever think that he would serve a life imprisonment at the time of his marriage? There are so many Manoj's behind prison walls with similar stories.

#### Whose Fault is this?

*"My name is Jude (name changed). I was born in 1980 in a Christian family. I did my schooling and graduation in Bhopal. Since my childhood, I have had a happy life. We used to go to Church for Sunday service. I came to Bangalore in 2004 and was working. After a few years, I asked my parents to look for a girl for me. On 24 April, 2010 as my parents' choice, my marriage took place. From the day of our marriage, my wife started nagging me, saying that her parents had forced*

*her to agree to the marriage and she has no love for me. One day, while we were talking, she said that she doesn't love me and I'm not up to the mark for her. I was so upset, that I bit her violently and it resulted in choking her windpipe leading to her death. In desperation, I slashed my forearm and I was bleeding profusely. I was arrested and brought to Bangalore Central Prison" said Jude during my interview with him in 2020 at Parappanna Agrahara Central Prison, Bangalore.*

#### Prisoners: God's Image and Likeness

We often hear that prison is not a safe place as it is the living space of criminals. But dear friends, don't ever forget that it is the living space of human beings created in the image and likeness of God. The hearts of some of the many prisoners are filled with revenge and hatred. They need someone to guide them in their desperate moments. As St Therese of Child Jesus called Pranzini, a death row prisoner, Mon Premier Enfant (my first child), the broken ones behind bars are our children and that's why Pope Francis

invites us to learn to become mothers for these broken ones. As Moses was entrusted to lead and guide the Israelites, we too are called to guide these broken ones behind bars and lift their souls to God. We need to reach out to them in their wounded-ness and tirelessly work for their integrated development.

#### They too are Human

Who are we to brand them as criminals? Did they ever want to become criminals? Let us not judge our brethren behind bars, rather let us do our best to give them a bright tomorrow. Just because they are behind prison walls, let us not look down at them. They too are God's children. They too are human. Who gave us the authority to judge them as criminals? When God doesn't judge us who are we to judge them? Let us stoop through the prison gates, walk into the prison cells and walk into their lives to know them whom God has created in His image and likeness. Every prisoner has a history to narrate. Let us lift them by our service, not pull them down by our judgments.



Sr Lini Sheeja MSC, belongs to the Congregation of Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. She served as the national secretary for the Prison Ministry India. She served as the Chief-Editor for Prison Voice, a national monthly magazine and her fifth book named, Holy Warriors in Prisons portrays the sufferings of innocent brethren behind bars. Contact: [linimsc@gmail.com](mailto:linimsc@gmail.com), +91 9880022209