

CRIMINOLOGICAL INSIGHTS  
BY DR. MRIDUL SRIVASTAVA

FROM COLONEL G. R. OBERAI, INSPECTOR GENERAL OF PRISONS, UNITED PROVINCES	OFFICE REVAH GENERAL OF PRISONS, UNITED PROVINCES	15/12/49
FROM COLONEL G. R. OBERAI, INSPECTOR GENERAL OF PRISONS, UNITED PROVINCES,		
No. 110452-509 of 1949 H-48 G.S.-II		Dated Lucknow, December 5, 1949.
To ALL SUPERINTENDENTS OF JAILS, UNITED PROVINCES,		

## The Architecture of Captivity: Decoding the 1949 United Provinces Jail Returns

Thirty-five pages of blank bureaucratic grids reveal how a newly independent state categorised, extracted labour from, and disciplined its prisoners.

# 1949 Annual Jail Returns: Administrative Reporting & Metrics

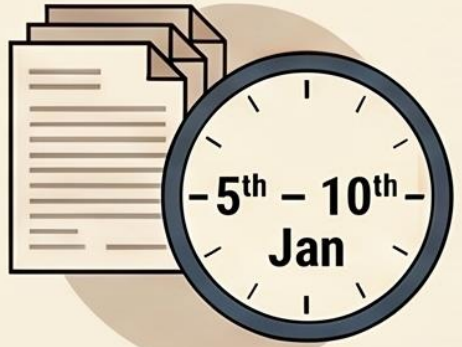
Derived from a 1949 circular by Col. G.R. Oberai (Inspector General of Prisons, United Provinces), mandating the absolutely essential, carefully compiled submission of annual, quarterly, and monthly returns documenting all facets of prison life, from finances to mortality.

## The Submission Timeline (January 1950)



**1st January Deadlines**  
Monthly returns (Dec 1949) and all quarterly returns must be despatched.

**5th - 10th January Deadlines**  
Submission of the two primary sets of annual returns and sick prisoner reports.

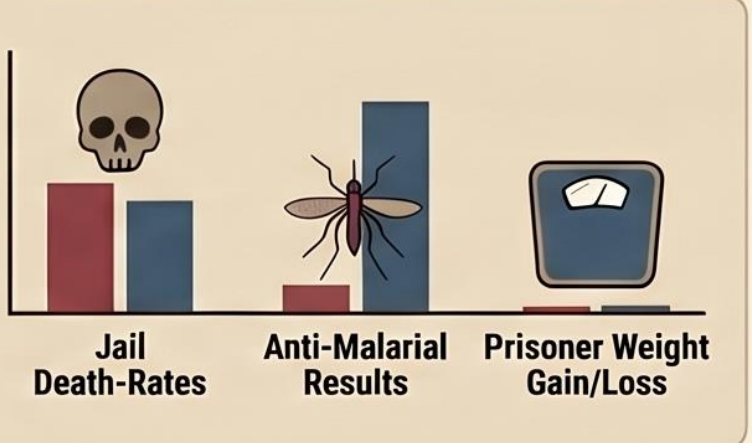


**15th January Deadline**  
Final reports on quinine and cinchona distribution for curative and prophylactic purposes.

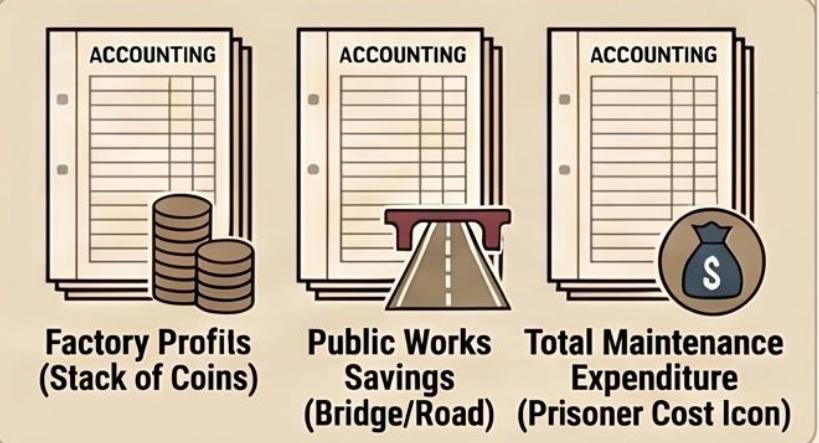
## Critical Metrics & Reporting Areas



**Health and Mortality Metrics**



**Financial and Industrial Output**



**Discipline and Punishment**



**Corporal Punishment (Whip)**



**Floggings (Whip/Rod)**



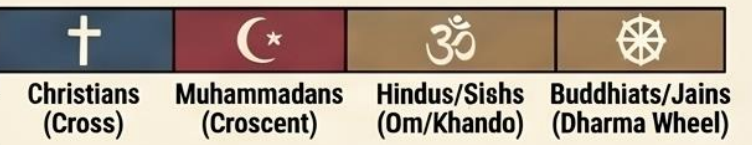
**Hunger Strikes (Empty Bowl)**



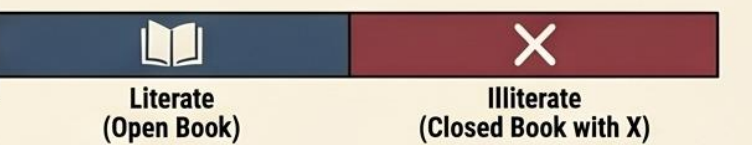
**Prison Escapes (Running Figure)**

## Prison Census Categories (1949)

**Religion**



**Education**



**Occupation**



# The Inspector General's Orders

3. The prompt ceiniation of the annual returns carefully and accurately compiled is absolutely essential. The following points should be observewire attention and strict complianes.

(a) Thein total of admissions to hospitals and of deaths appearing in annual return no. 10 ia must fally with the totals shown in the annual return of sick prioners and also so with the consolidated total of columns 8 and 9 of the monthly return no. 109 dated Lucknow, December 5, 1949.

Yours faithfully,  
**G. R. OBERAI,**  
*Inspector General.*

In the winter of 1949, Colonel G.R. Oberai dispatched strict orders to all Jail Superintendents across the United Provinces. The prompt, completely accurate compilation of annual returns was "absolutely essential."



No. 1

(Statement showinns should be filled in red ink.)

attnd into the Juil \_\_\_\_\_ during the year 1949 of  
 \_\_\_\_\_ of that year according to the nature and length of

2

(All female columns should be filled in red ink.)

A	E	F	G	H
Above sax total tiirs nd in not one, onf.	Above one year and not exconding	Above tive years not not excerding	Above five years not not excording	Expecting ten years

A singular, stark directive printed atop the very first ledger reveals the state's baseline demographic separation:  
 "(All female columns should be filled in red ink.)"

# The State's Eye View

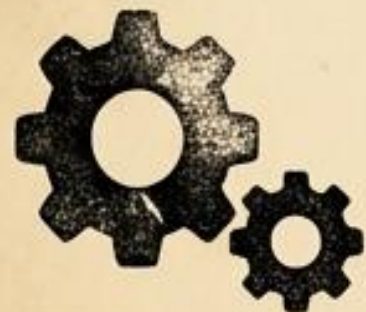
The 1949 Jail Returns are not just accounting documents; they are a mirror reflecting the anxieties and priorities of the administration. The blank forms divide the state's focus into four operational pillars:



1. The Hierarchy of Captivity: Stratifying human beings by perceived status and criminal nature.



2. The Political Threat Landscape: Tracking specific ideological enemies of the fragile new republic.



3. The Anatomy of Labour: Converting captive bodies into self-sustaining economic value.

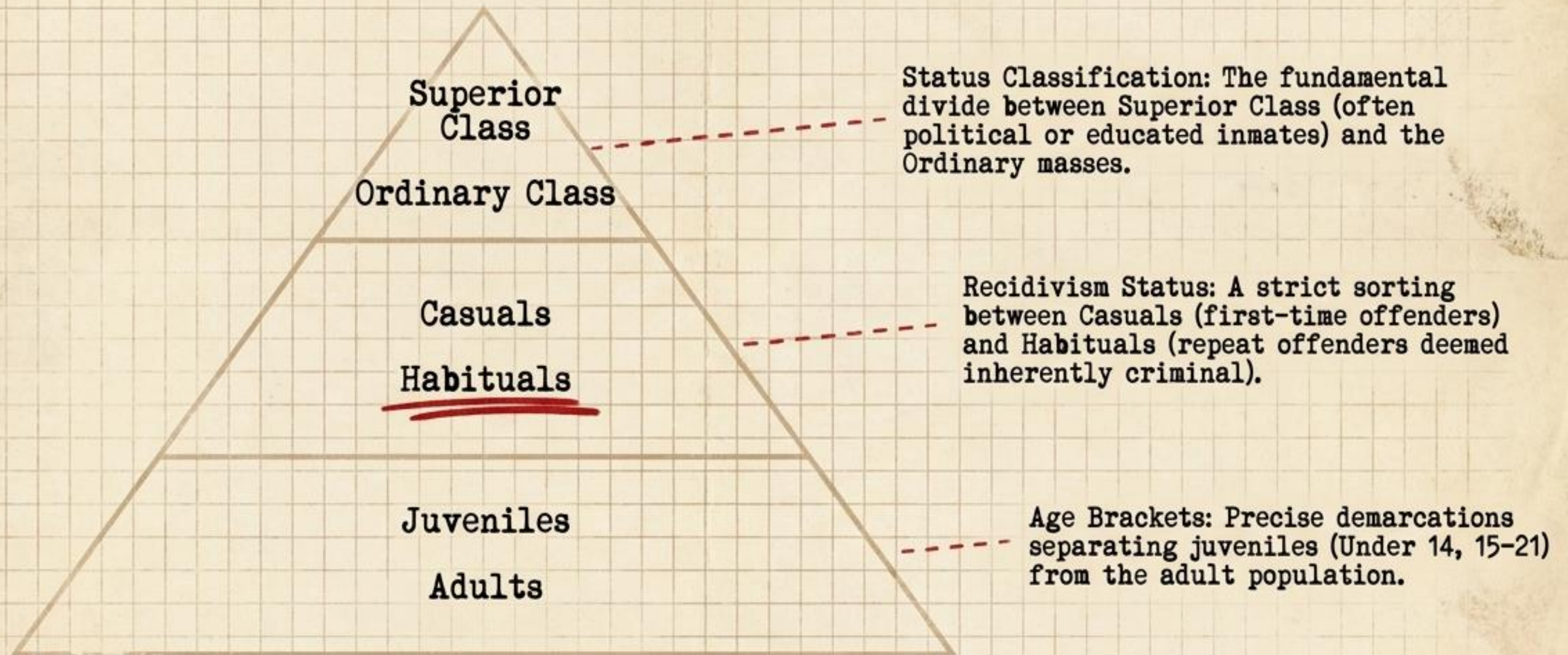


4. The Mechanics of Discipline: Measuring resistance, physical health, and corporeal punishment.

# The Hierarchy of Captivity

Institutional power requires categorisation. The 1949 administration maintained a rigid taxonomy of inmates, ensuring different classes rarely mixed.

## The Stratification of Inmates



# Demographic Sorting: Inherited Taxonomies

Form 14 dictates how superintendents must record the identity of their population. The categories ignore the new post-partition reality, strictly enforcing colonial census logic.

Religion	Europeans	
	Anglo-Indians	
	Indians	
	Muhammadans	
	Hindus and Sikhs	
	Buddhists and Jains	
Occupations	Persons employed under Government or Municipal or other local authorities	
	Professional persons	
	Persons in service or performing personal offices	
	Persons engaged in agriculture and with animals	
	Persons engaged in commerce and trade	
	Persons employed in mechanical arts, manufactures and engineering operations, etc.	
	Miscellaneous persons not classed otherwise.	
PEMALE	Married	
	Unmarried	
	Widows	
	Prostitutes	

## Racial & Religious Silos:

Prisoners are divided rigidly into Europeans, Anglo-Indians, Indians, Muhammadans, Hindus and Sikhs, and Buddhists and Jains.

## Occupational Morality:

The state's categorisation of previous employment places "Persons engaged in agriculture" on the same ledger continuum as "Prostitutes," blending economic reality with moral policing.

# The Political Threat Landscape Matrix

1949 was a year of intense internal fragility. The jail returns contain highly specific forms dedicated entirely to tracking ideological factions under the Public Safety Ordinance. The state did not just count these men; it monitored their bodies for signs of organized resistance.

Prisoner Faction	Classification Type	Weight Tracking	Hunger Strike Measurement
Ordinary Convicts	Casual/Habitual	Aggregate Ledger	
R.S.S. Prisoners (Right-Wing Nationalism)	Superior / Ordinary / Not Classified	Individual Fluctuation	✓
National Muslim Guard Prisoners (Communal Factions)	Superior / Ordinary / Not Classified	Individual Fluctuation	✓
Communist Prisoners (Left-Wing Subversion)	Superior / Ordinary / Not Classified	Individual Fluctuation	✓

The ledgers explicitly track how many of these specific ideological prisoners went on hunger strike, a metric of resistance not applied to common criminals.

# The Language of Delegitimization

*convicts in the Jails of the United Provinces duri*

8	Released during the year	On expiry of sentence	A	M	P
		On appeal	B	M	P
		By order of Government on medical grounds or on other grounds	C	M	P
9		Escaped		M	F
10		Executed			M

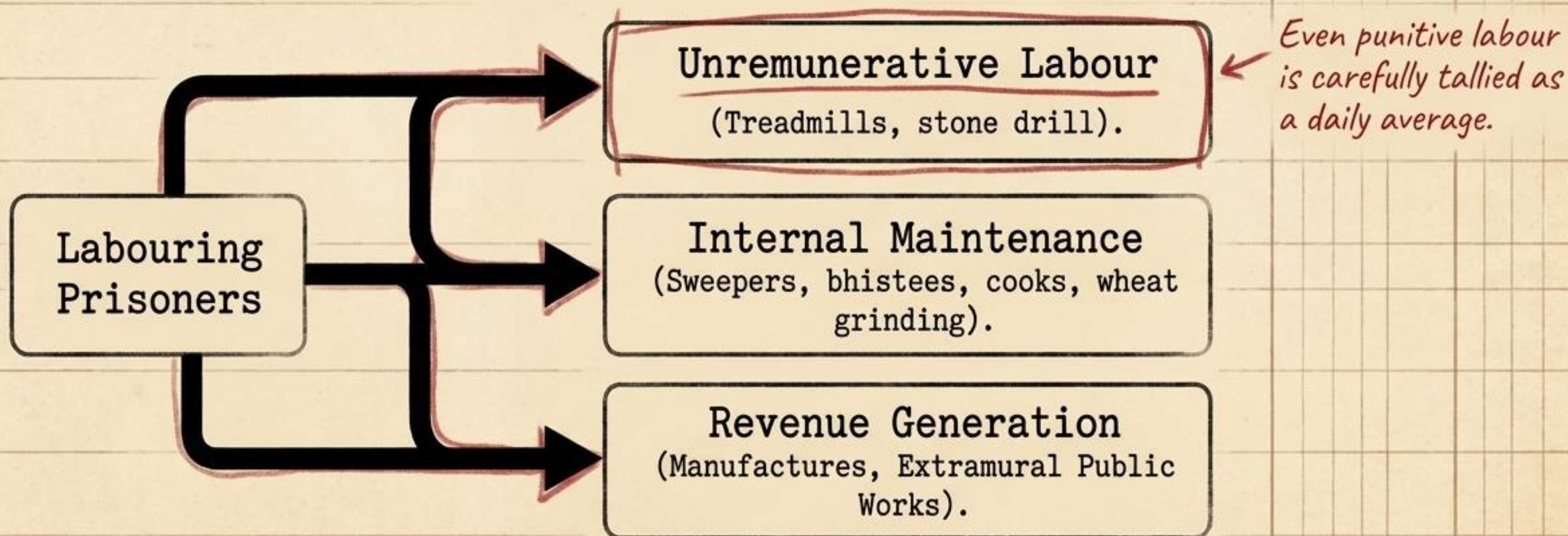
The administration refused to grant dignity to ideological resistance. Form 4 strictly categorizes these inmates as "so-called political convicts".

The ultimate victory for the state was not merely serving out a sentence, but ideological submission. The ledger includes a dedicated column for political prisoners who secured early release "By tendering apology"—a permanent, measurable record of ideological surrender.

# The Penal Economy

Form 7 maps the jail not merely as a site of captivity, but as a self-sustaining economic engine. Captive bodies offset the cost of their own confinement. Labour is strictly quantified. Superintendents must meticulously account for inmates employed in internal survival versus those hired out to external municipalities.

## The Anatomy of Institutional Labour





## The Mathematics of Time

Remission—the reduction of a sentence for good behaviour—was the ultimate currency of control. The Inspector General's office demanded absolute precision in this economy. The accounting of human freedom was reduced to exact mathematical formulas.

**“\*Figures in this column should be whole numbers. Fractional parts, half and above, should be taken as 1 and below half may be disregarded.\*”**

Jail clerks were explicitly ordered how to round a fraction of a day of freedom up or down to the nearest whole number.



# The Colonial Hangover

The profound historical tension of these documents lies in their date. In 1949, India was actively drafting a new democratic constitution, preparing to become a Republic. Yet, the administrative machinery of the ground-level state remained entirely imperial. The newly independent government tracked political dissidents using the exact same imperial methods of control.

## The Medicine

5. A statement showing the total quantity of quinine, cinchona and residual alkaloid in lb., oz., dr. and gr distributed for curative and prophylactic purposes to the prisoners...

## The Categories

### RELIGION

Europeans

Anglo-Indians

## The Whip

Total number of prisoners punished by whipping.

**1949.**

25 to 30 stripes

**UNITED PROVINCES.**

*The extreme measure.*

Note—This Circular letter should be studied very carefully and each and every detail of it should be attended to

CIRCULAR LETTER

No. 110625-009 of 1840

From  
Comdr. G. R. OBERAI

To  
ALL SUPERINTENDENT

Sir,

I have to advise the despatch of returns in duplicate. The first set containing returns should be submitted by the 5th and the second set by January 7, 1950. The second set containing (Financial,) whipping returns, security returns, the charge of the jail should be supplied with Statement 'A,' i.e. Statement showing persons punished in the Jail during the year ending January 2, 1950, positively.

2. Monthly returns for December 1949, below, should be despatched on January 2, 1950, as follows:
- (1) Jail, lock-up and public works returns.
  - (2) Quarterly returns nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100.
  - (3) Casually rolls.
  - (4) Factory monthly returns.
  - (5) Factory quarterly returns.
  - (6) Monthly return no. 109.

The total cash profits or loss for the month should be shown in the monthly return no. 22, for December 1949, and should be attached to the quarterly return no. 109. The 21% per cent deduction on account of stock used should be shown in the accounts for the month.

3. The prompt submission of returns is absolutely essential. The following

- (a) For a complete and instructions on the various forms require attention and strict compliance.
- (b) The total of admissions to hospitals and of deaths appearing in annual return nos. 10 and 11 tally with the totals shown in the annual return of sick prisoners and also with the consolidated total of columns 9 and 9 of the monthly return no. 109 from January to December.

The average number of prisoners recorded in the several columns of the annual return no. 6, should be calculated by dividing the total number of prisoners on the last days of

# The Ledger as a Weapon

Bureaucracy is never neutral. The 1949 United Provinces Jail Returns demonstrate that the blank spaces a state chooses to measure—whether it is a fraction of a day, a pound of flesh, or a specific political affiliation—reveal exactly what that state fears, and how it intends to maintain control.