

CLES

Update Report

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Summary

Telangana (20 cases):

Cases are overwhelmingly male, with most accused individuals concentrated in the 21–40 age group. The dataset is dominated by minor violent offences, public order violations, gambling-related matters, and theft cases, while serious offences such as murder and sexual offences appear only in limited numbers. Most matters are at routine procedural stages such as appearance, examination, notice, or disposal, with limited evidence of prolonged custodial detention. Overall, the Telangana dataset reflects a procedure-driven and trial-oriented criminal justice pattern centred on lower-severity offences.

Assam (20 cases):

The dataset is overwhelmingly male, with accused persons primarily falling within the 21–40 age bracket. Compared to Telangana, Assam reflects a significantly more serious offence profile, including sexual offences, NDPS and Arms Act offences, economic offences, violent crimes, and a UAPA-related case. Anticipatory bail proceedings are frequent, while judicial custody is more common in grave offences such as narcotics, homicide, and terror-related matters. The dataset therefore reflects a custody-intensive pre-trial system with stronger reliance on special criminal statutes and stringent legal frameworks.

Comparative Insight:

While both datasets are male dominated and concentrated among younger, economically active adults, the nature of offences and procedural approaches differ sharply between the two states. Telangana is characterised by routine public order and assault-related litigation with greater emphasis on procedural progression and limited detention. Assam, by contrast, demonstrates higher reliance on custodial detention and anticipatory bail litigation, particularly in cases involving serious offences and special statutes such as NDPS, POCSO,

and UAPA. The divergence appears driven primarily by offence composition and enforcement patterns rather than demographic factors.

Law & Society Podcast Feature:

The report also highlights the upcoming podcast featuring Dr. Sanu Rani Paul of Damodaram Sanjivayya National Law University. The discussion examines the criminalisation of tribal and vulnerable communities under environmental laws and explores how the Indian legal system can balance conservation objectives with the rights, dignity, and livelihoods of affected communities. Drawing from environmental jurisprudence, ecocentrism, and social justice perspectives, the episode seeks to connect doctrinal law with contemporary policy and ground realities.

Prison Statistics India 2024 (released in May 2026):

The Prison Statistics India 2024 report highlights persistent structural inequalities within India's prison system despite a slight decline in overcrowding. Indian prisons housed over 5.1 lakh inmates in 2024, with undertrials constituting 72.6% of prisoners, reflecting systemic delays in investigation, trial, and bail procedures. The report reveals significant social disparities, with Muslims and marginalised caste groups, including SCs, STs, and OBCs, disproportionately represented among undertrials. Overcrowding remains severe in several states, affecting living conditions and access to justice. The findings demonstrate how poverty, social exclusion, inadequate legal aid, and unequal access to bail continue to shape incarceration patterns in India.

Section 1: Analysis of 20 Criminal Cases from Telangana with Cross-Analysis

This report presents a factual analysis of 20 anonymised criminal cases from Telangana, Telangana, India, derived from the provided dataset. Each case is referenced only by serial number (1-20). The analysis examines five primary dimensions and gender, age, religion, crime types, and status and uses cross-analysis to identify patterns within the dataset (n = 20).

1.1 Gender Distribution

Gender	Count
Male	18
Female	2

Summary:

The dataset is overwhelmingly male (90%), with only two female accused represented. This pattern reflects broader trends commonly observed in criminal litigation, particularly in cases involving violent offences, theft-related offences, and public-order violations.

1.2 Age Group Distribution

Age Group	Count
21-30	7
31-40	6
41-50	4
51-60	2
Above 60	1

Summary:

The largest proportion of accused individuals falls within the 21-30 age bracket, followed closely by the 31-40 group. This indicates a concentration of criminal proceedings involving younger and economically active adults. Representation declines steadily among older age groups.

1.3 Religion Distribution

Religion	Count
Hindu	15
Muslim	4
Christian	1

Summary:

The majority of accused individuals belong to the Hindu community, followed by smaller representations from Muslim and Christian communities. The distribution appears broadly reflective of the demographic composition of the region and does not indicate offence-specific clustering.

1.4 Crime Type Distribution

Crime Type	Count
Voluntarily causing hurt	5
Public order / gambling	5
Theft / robbery	4
Other IPC/BNS offences	2
Sexual offences	2
Fraud / cheating	1
Murder / homicide	1

Summary:

The dataset is primarily composed of minor violent offences and public-order related matters, including quarrelling, assault, nuisance, drunk driving, and affray-related offences. Theft and robbery-related offences also form a significant portion of the dataset. Serious offences such as murder and rape appear in limited numbers but remain legally significant.

1.5 Crime Type vs. Age Group (Cross-Analysis)

Crime Type	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Above 60
Fraud / cheating	0	0	1	0	0
Murder / homicide	0	1	0	0	0
Other IPC/BNS offences	1	0	1	0	0
Public order / gambling	1	2	0	2	0
Sexual offences	1	0	0	1	0
Theft / robbery	3	0	0	0	1
Voluntarily causing hurt	1	3	2	0	0

Summary:

Younger accused individuals between 21–30 years are more heavily represented in theft and robbery-related offences, while voluntarily causing hurt offences are concentrated within the 31–40 and 41–50 age groups. Public-order offences appear across multiple age brackets, including older accused persons. Serious offences such as murder and sexual offences are limited in number and dispersed across select age groups.

1.6 Crime Type vs. Religion (Cross-Analysis)

Crime Type	Hindu	Muslim	Christian
Fraud / cheating	1	0	0
Murder / homicide	1	0	0
Other IPC/BNS offences	1	0	1
Public order / gambling	4	1	0
Sexual offences	1	1	0
Theft / robbery	2	2	0
Voluntarily causing hurt	5	0	0

Summary:

Most offence categories involve Hindu accused persons, reflecting the broader religious composition of the dataset. Theft-related offences show representation from both Hindu and Muslim accused persons, while other categories remain comparatively dispersed. No offence category demonstrates significant clustering among minority communities.

1.7 Custody Duration vs. Offence Type

An examination of procedural stages across the 20 anonymised Telangana cases indicates that most matters involve relatively early or intermediate stages of criminal proceedings, including appearance, examination, notice, and disposal stages. Minor offences relating to public order, assault, nuisance, and theft frequently appear in routine procedural stages with limited indications of prolonged custodial detention.

Serious offences such as murder and rape appear in comparatively fewer numbers but are associated with more active procedural scrutiny. However, even within these categories, the dataset does not indicate extensive prolonged incarceration across the majority of accused individuals. Most cases appear to be progressing through ordinary criminal procedures rather than involving exceptional detention periods.

Overall, the Telangana dataset reflects a criminal process dominated by routine public-order, assault, and theft-related litigation, with custody and procedural progression appearing proportionate to offence severity.

Concluding Observations

Across these 20 anonymised Telangana cases:

- The dataset is overwhelmingly male, with only two females accused represented.
- Individuals aged between 21–40 constitute most accused persons, indicating strong concentration among younger and economically active adults.
- Public-order offences, voluntarily causing hurt, and theft-related offences form the largest share of cases.
- Serious offences such as murder and sexual offences are comparatively limited in number.
- Most matters remain within ordinary procedural stages such as appearance, examination, notice, or disposal, suggesting limited prolonged custodial detention.
- Religion-based distributions broadly reflect regional demographic patterns and do not demonstrate offence-specific concentration.

Section 2: Analysis of 20 Criminal Cases from Assam with Cross-Analysis

This report presents a factual analysis of 20 anonymised criminal cases from Assam, India, derived from the provided dataset. Each case is referenced only by serial number (1–20). The analysis examines five primary dimensions—gender, age, religion, crime types, and procedural status—and uses cross-analysis to identify patterns within the dataset (n = 20).

2.1 Gender Distribution

Gender	Count
Male	19
Female	1

Summary:

The dataset is overwhelmingly male (95%), with only one female accused represented. This trend aligns with general patterns in criminal litigation, particularly in offences involving violence, narcotics, and property disputes.

2.2 Age Group Distribution

Age Group	Count
21–30	9
31–40	7
41–50	4
51–60	0
Above 60	0

Summary:

The largest proportion of accused individuals falls within the 21–30 age bracket, followed by 31–40. This indicates a strong concentration of cases involving younger and economically active adults. There is no representation from individuals above 50 years.

2.3 Religion Distribution

Religion	Count
Muslim	13
Hindu	4
ST / Tribal (Bodo, Garo)	2
Not Mentioned	1

Summary:

The dataset shows a majority of accused individuals identified as Muslim, followed by Hindu

and Scheduled Tribe (Bodo/Garo) individuals. This distribution reflects case-specific sampling rather than indicating any inherent offence pattern linked to religion.

2.4 Crime Type Distribution

Crime Type	Count
Sexual offences (incl. POCSO, promise of marriage)	5
Violent offences (assault, rioting, hurt)	4
Theft / robbery / dacoity	3
Fraud / cheating / forgery / economic offences	3
NDPS / Arms offences	3
Terror-related (UAPA)	1
Murder / homicide	1
Extortion / intimidation	1
Dowry death	1

Summary:

The dataset has a relatively high representation of serious offences. Sexual offences form the largest category, followed by violent offences and economic crimes. NDPS and arms-related offences also appear prominently. Unlike the Telangana dataset, Assam cases show greater involvement of serious and special law offences (POCSO, NDPS, UAPA).

2.5 Crime Type vs. Age Group (Cross-Analysis)

Crime Type	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Above 60
Sexual offences	3	2	0	0	0
Violent offences	2	1	1	0	0
Theft / robbery	2	1	0	0	0
Fraud / cheating	0	3	0	0	0
NDPS / Arms	2	1	0	0	0
Terror (UAPA)	0	1	0	0	0
Murder / homicide	0	0	1	0	0
Extortion	0	1	0	0	0
Dowry death	0	0	1	0	0

Summary:

Younger accused individuals (21-30) are more represented in sexual offences, theft, and NDPS-related crimes. Economic offences such as fraud and forgery cluster in the 31-40 age group, indicating involvement of more economically established individuals. Serious offences like murder and dowry death appear in older age brackets (41-50).

2.6 Crime Type vs. Religion (Cross-Analysis)

Crime Type	Muslim	Hindu	ST/Tribal	Not Mentioned
Sexual offences	4	1	0	0
Violent offences	3	1	0	0
Theft / robbery	2	0	1	0
Fraud / cheating	2	1	0	0
NDPS / Arms	3	0	0	0
Terror (UAPA)	0	0	1	0
Murder / homicide	0	1	0	0
Extortion	1	0	0	0
Dowry death	0	1	0	0

Summary:

Most offence categories involve Muslim accused persons, reflecting their numerical majority in the dataset. NDPS and sexual offences are more frequent within this group in the sample. However, serious offences such as murder and dowry death appear among Hindu accused. Tribal representation is limited but includes a significant UAPA-related case. No category shows exclusive or disproportionate clustering beyond dataset composition.

2.7 Custody Duration vs. Offence Type

An examination of procedural status indicates that a large number of cases involve **anticipatory bail or bail proceedings before the Gauhati High Court**.

- **Judicial custody** is more commonly observed in serious offences, including:
 - NDPS cases (commercial quantity drugs)
 - Arms offences
 - UAPA (terror-related case)
 - Murder and abetment of suicide
- **Anticipatory bail (pre-arrest stage)** is frequently sought in:
 - Sexual offences (including POCSO and promise-to-marry cases)
 - Fraud/forgery and economic offences
 - Violent disputes arising from land or family conflicts
- **Charge-sheet filed / cognizance taken** appears in several serious cases, particularly POCSO and abetment of suicide, suggesting progression to trial stages.

Overall, compared to the Telangana dataset, Assam cases show:

- Greater involvement of **stringent special laws (NDPS, UAPA, POCSO)**
- Higher incidence of **custodial detention in serious offences**
- Widespread reliance on **anticipatory bail due to apprehension of arrest**

Concluding Observations

Across these 20 anonymised Assam cases:

- The dataset is **overwhelmingly male (95%)**, with only one female accused.
- Individuals aged **21–40 dominate the dataset**, reflecting concentration among younger and economically active adults.
- **Sexual offences, violent crimes, and economic offences** form the largest share of cases.
- Unlike Telangana, **serious offences and special statutes (NDPS, UAPA, POCSO)** are more prominent.
- **Judicial custody is common in grave offences**, particularly narcotics, terrorism, and homicide-related cases.
- A large number of accused individuals are in **anticipatory bail stages**, indicating early procedural phases.
- Religion-based distribution reflects dataset composition and does not independently indicate offence patterns.

Overall, the Assam dataset reflects a **more serious crime profile**, with a stronger presence of organised crime, narcotics offences, and sexual offences under special laws, alongside routine interpersonal and property disputes.

Section 3: Comparative Analysis of Criminal Cases in Assam and Telangana

Datasets Compared

- **Assam:** 20 anonymised cases
- **Telangana:** 20 anonymised cases

Both datasets were compiled using a uniform structure and analysed across identical dimensions—gender, age, religion, offence type, and custody stage. All comparisons are strictly limited to the provided datasets.

3.1 Gender Distribution Comparison

State	Male	Female
Assam	19	1
Telangana	18	2

Observation:

Both states demonstrate a strong predominance of male accused individuals. Telangana shows slightly higher female representation (2 cases) compared to Assam (1 case). Overall, gender distribution patterns remain largely consistent across both datasets, confirming male dominance in criminal litigation.

3.2 Age Group Distribution Comparison

Age Group	Assam	Telangana
21–30	9	7
31–40	7	6
41–50	4	4
51–60	0	2
Above 60	0	1

Observation:

Both states show concentration in the **21–40 age group**, indicating that criminal cases primarily involve economically active adults. However, Telangana displays **greater age diversity**, including older accused individuals (above 50), whereas Assam cases are entirely concentrated below 50 years.

3.3 Religion Distribution Comparison

Religion	Assam	Telangana
Hindu	4	15
Muslim	13	4
Christian	0	1
ST / Tribal	2	0
Not Mentioned	1	0

Observation:

The religious composition differs significantly between the two datasets. Assam shows a **Muslim majority**, while Telangana shows a **Hindu majority**, broadly reflecting regional demographics. No offence category in either dataset demonstrates independent religious clustering beyond representation patterns.

3.4 Crime Type Distribution Comparison

Crime Type	Assam	Telangana
Sexual offences	5	2
Violent offences (hurt/assault)	4	5
Theft / robbery	3	4
Fraud / cheating	3	1
Public order / gambling	0	5
NDPS / Arms	3	0
Terror-related (UAPA)	1	0
Murder / homicide	1	1
Other IPC/BNS offences	0	2

Observation:

The offence profiles show clear divergence:

- **Assam** is characterised by **serious and statute-driven offences**, including sexual offences, NDPS cases, and even one terrorism-related case.
- **Telangana** is dominated by **public-order offences, minor assaults, and theft-related matters**, indicating comparatively lower severity.
- Economic offences appear in both, but are slightly more prominent in Assam.

3.5 Custody Stage Comparison

Dimension	Assam	Telangana
Judicial custody	Common in serious offences (NDPS, murder, UAPA)	Limited
Pre-arrest / anticipatory bail	Very frequent	Moderate
Procedural stage (trial/examination)	Moderate progression	High progression
Severity-linked detention	Strong correlation	Limited correlation

Observation:

Assam reflects a **custody-intensive pre-trial model**, particularly in cases involving NDPS, sexual offences, and serious crimes. A large number of cases involve anticipatory bail due to apprehension of arrest. In contrast, Telangana demonstrates a **procedurally advancing system**, where cases progress through trial stages with relatively limited prolonged custody.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis highlights two distinct criminal justice patterns:

- **Assam:**
 - Greater concentration of **serious offences** (sexual offences, NDPS, UAPA, homicide)
 - Higher reliance on **custodial detention and pre-arrest litigation**
 - Strong linkage between **offence severity and custody**
- **Telangana:**
 - Dominance of **minor offences** (public order, petty assault, theft)
 - Greater emphasis on **trial progression rather than detention**
 - Broader procedural movement within the justice system

Overall, the differences between the states appear to stem from **variation in offence composition and enforcement patterns**, rather than demographic characteristics.

Section 4: Podcast Feature – Dr. Sanu Rani Paul

Dr. Sanu Rani Paul is a faculty member at Damodaram Sanjivayya National Law University (DSNLU), Sabbavaram, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India. She previously served as an Assistant Professor at Symbiosis Law School, Hyderabad, bringing with her over 13 years of academic experience in environmental law and jurisprudence. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Mysore and was a rank holder in her LL.M. from Mangalore University.

Her research engages deeply with environmental jurisprudence, with a particular focus on rights of nature, ecocentrism, and the legal personality of natural entities within comparative legal frameworks. Drawing on interdisciplinary approaches, her scholarship integrates Western philosophical traditions, including Spinozist thought, with Indian non-dual philosophies such as Advaita Vedanta, to develop alternative eco-centric legal paradigms.

Dr. Paul has published widely in Scopus and Web of Science indexed journals and has received multiple international best paper awards. As a doctoral supervisor and an active participant in global academic discourse, her work seeks to reimagine the relationship between law, ecology, and evolving environmental crises.



Her upcoming podcast, scheduled for release this month, will examine the criminalisation of tribal and other vulnerable communities under environmental laws, while critically analysing how the Indian legal system can balance conservation imperatives with the rights, dignity, and livelihoods of these communities. The discussion is expected to bridge doctrinal law, ground realities, and policy concerns, offering a nuanced perspective on the intersection of environmental protection and social justice.

Section 5: Prison Statistics India 2024: Undertrial Realities, Religion, and Caste in Indian Prisons

5.1 Introduction

The *Prison Statistics India 2024* (PSI 2024), published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in May 2026, offers an important overview of the condition of Indian prisons and the structural realities of incarceration across the country. The report shows modest improvements in prison occupancy levels compared to previous years, yet it simultaneously confirms that overcrowding, prolonged undertrial detention, and socio-economic disparities continue to define India's criminal justice landscape.

Indian prisons are not merely correctional institutions. They function as mirrors of broader inequalities embedded within policing systems, judicial delays, economic deprivation, and unequal access to legal representation. PSI 2024 demonstrates that incarceration in India remains deeply tied to structural vulnerabilities rather than solely to criminal conviction.

One of the most significant aspects of PSI 2024 is its religion-wise and caste-wise disaggregation of undertrial prisoners. These categories provide an important lens through which patterns of representation, regional disparities, and structural inequalities may be examined. While the data alone cannot establish causation, they raise serious questions regarding the relationship between social identity, economic vulnerability, and access to justice.

As of 31 December 2024, India housed more than half a million prisoners across 1,333 prisons. Despite a slight decline in overall overcrowding compared to the previous year, the prison system remains heavily burdened by an extraordinarily high proportion of undertrial prisoners. The continued dominance of undertrials illustrates the persistent inability of the criminal justice system to ensure speedy investigation, timely trial, and equitable bail practices.

5.2 Prison Infrastructure and Occupancy

India's prison system comprises central jails, district jails, sub-jails, open prisons, women's jails, and special jails. Collectively, these institutions continue to operate beyond their sanctioned capacity.

Table 5.1: Overall Prison Capacity and Occupancy (2024)

Indicator	Figure
Total number of prisons	1,333
Authorised prison capacity	4,53,769
Actual prison population	5,11,542
National occupancy rate	112.7%

Although the occupancy rate declined from 120.8% in 2023 to 112.7% in 2024, the prison system continues to remain structurally overcrowded. The reduction reflects marginal decongestion rather than a transformation in prison administration or criminal justice practices.

District jails remain the most overcrowded category of prisons, operating at approximately 120.3% occupancy, followed by central jails at 118.3%. These institutions primarily house undertrial prisoners, which indicates that overcrowding is directly connected to the large number of individuals awaiting trial rather than convicted inmates alone.

Table 5.2: States and Union Territories with Highest Occupancy Rates

State/UT	Occupancy Rate
Delhi	194.6%
Meghalaya	163.5%
Jammu & Kashmir	148.3%

The extremely high occupancy levels in these regions demonstrate the uneven burden placed on prison infrastructure across India. Such overcrowding has implications not only for living conditions but also for health, sanitation, access to legal services, and rehabilitation opportunities.

5.3 Composition of Prison Inmates

The defining feature of Indian incarceration continues to be the overwhelming dominance of undertrial prisoners.

Table 5.3: Composition of Prison Population in India (2024)

Type of Prisoner	Number	Percentage
Undertrials	3,71,440	72.6%
Convicts	1,36,138	26.6%
Detenues	3,048	0.6%
Others	916	0.2%
Total	5,11,542	100%

Nearly three out of every four prisoners in India are undertrials. This means that the majority of incarcerated individuals have not been convicted of any offence and remain legally presumed innocent. High-population states account for a substantial proportion of undertrial prisoners.

Table 5.4: States with Largest Undertrial Populations

State	Number of Undertrials
Uttar Pradesh	59,194
Bihar	45,339
Maharashtra	31,523

The persistence of such high undertrial numbers illustrates that incarceration in India is frequently a consequence of delayed justice rather than adjudicated guilt.

5.4 Religion-wise Distribution of Undertrial Prisoners

The religion-wise disaggregation of undertrial prisoners provides important insight into the social composition of incarceration in India.

Table 5.5: Religion-wise Distribution of Undertrial Prisoners (2024) Compared with Census 2011 Population Share

Religion	Number of Undertrials	Share of Undertrial Population	Census 2011 Population Share
Hindu	2,40,190	64.7%	79.8%
Muslim	69,864	18.8%	14.2%
Sikh	17,916	4.8%	1.7%
Christian	8,885	2.4%	2.3%
Others	3,062	0.8%	2.0%
Total	3,71,440	100%	100%

The comparative data reveal important disparities between the religious composition of India’s population and the composition of undertrial prisoners. Hindus, while constituting the majority of undertrial prisoners, are represented at a lower proportion than their share in the national population. In contrast, Muslims constitute 18.8% of undertrial prisoners despite comprising approximately 14.2% of the population according to Census 2011 data, indicating a pattern of overrepresentation.

The data also show significant overrepresentation of Sikhs within the undertrial population, largely influenced by Punjab’s prison demographics. Christians appear broadly proportionate to their population share nationally, while the category classified as “Others” appears comparatively underrepresented.

Regional variations further shape religious representation within prisons. Punjab records a large concentration of Sikh undertrials, Assam reports a higher number of Muslim than Hindu undertrials, while Jammu and Kashmir and Lakshadweep display Muslim-majority prison populations. These variations demonstrate that incarceration patterns are shaped not only by national trends but also by local demographic and political contexts.

Table 5.6: Religion-wise Undertrial Population in Assam

Religion	Undertrial Population in Assam
Muslim	4,095
Hindu	3,374

The data do not establish direct causation, but they raise important structural questions regarding policing patterns, socio-economic disadvantage, and differential access to legal safeguards.

5.5 Caste and Structural Inequality in Undertrial Detention

Alongside religion, caste remains one of the clearest indicators of structural inequality within India’s prison system. Table 2.11D of PSI 2024 reveals that Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) together constitute a substantial proportion of undertrial prisoners across the country.

Table 5.7: Caste-wise Distribution of Undertrial Prisoners (2024)

Category	Number	Percentage	Approximate National Population Share
Scheduled Castes (SC)	61,755	16.6%	16.6%
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	34,154	9.2%	8.6%
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	1,10,194	29.7%	41.0%*
Others	1,00,288	27.0%	Remaining population

****OBC population estimates are based on Mandal Commission and subsequent government estimates, as the Census of India does not publish official caste census data for OBC communities.***

Even with incomplete reporting from some states, the data clearly demonstrate that historically marginalised caste groups form a disproportionately large share of India’s undertrial population.

OBC prisoners constitute the single largest caste category among undertrials, followed by SC and ST prisoners. Collectively, these communities account for a majority of undertrial prisoners for whom caste data are available. This reinforces the broader reality that incarceration in India is deeply linked to economic vulnerability, educational disadvantage, unequal access to legal representation, and social exclusion.

State-wise trends further highlight these structural inequalities:

- Uttar Pradesh and Bihar report extremely high numbers of OBC and SC undertrial prisoners.

- Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand show significant ST representation among undertrials, reflecting the vulnerability of Adivasi communities in regions marked by land conflict, forest governance disputes, and economic marginalisation.
- Tamil Nadu records a particularly large OBC undertrial population.
- Punjab shows a high concentration of prisoners categorised under “Others”, alongside a substantial SC population.

The caste profile of undertrial prisoners indicates that prisons in India frequently function as spaces where broader social hierarchies are reproduced. Marginalised communities often face cumulative disadvantages, including poverty, low levels of formal education, weaker legal awareness, and reduced ability to secure bail.

These realities suggest that incarceration is not only a criminal justice issue but also a reflection of entrenched social and economic inequality.

5.6 Intersection of Religion, Caste, and Poverty

Religion and caste do not operate independently within the prison system. PSI 2024 reinforces the reality that incarceration in India is deeply connected to broader socio-economic deprivation.

The report indicates that a substantial proportion of prisoners possess low levels of formal education and belong to economically marginalised backgrounds. This suggests that imprisonment disproportionately affects individuals with limited social and financial capital.

The intersection between religion, caste, class, and education is therefore critical. Minority overrepresentation and caste concentration among undertrial prisoners must be understood within the broader framework of structural disadvantage rather than through identity alone.

Many undertrial prisoners remain trapped within the justice system because they lack:

- Financial resources for bail
- Awareness of legal rights
- Access to competent legal representation
- Social support networks
- Stable employment or residence documentation

Consequently, imprisonment often reflects systemic exclusion as much as criminal adjudication.

5.7 Duration of Undertrial Detention

The PSI 2024 data reveal that prolonged detention remains a serious concern.

Table 5.8: Duration of Undertrial Detention

Duration	Percentage
Up to 1 year	69.9%
1–2 years	13.9%
More than 5 years	2.4%

Although most undertrials are detained for less than one year, the existence of prisoners incarcerated for more than five years without conviction raises serious constitutional and human rights concerns.

Marginalised communities are especially vulnerable to prolonged incarceration because they often lack the institutional resources required to navigate the legal system effectively.

5.8 Policy Implications

The PSI 2024 findings underscore the need for structural criminal justice reform rather than merely infrastructural expansion.

5.8.1 Strengthening Legal Aid

Legal aid systems must be expanded and made more accessible, particularly for economically vulnerable and underrepresented communities.

5.8.2 Reforming Bail Practices

Indian prisons remain overcrowded largely because pre-trial detention is overused. Bail procedures should prioritise liberty and reduce dependence on financial sureties that disproportionately disadvantage poorer individuals.

5.8.3 Expanding Non-custodial Measures

Greater use of non-custodial alternatives, including probation, community supervision, and conditional release, could significantly reduce prison overcrowding.

5.8.4 Improving Data Transparency

Comprehensive and standardised religion-wise and caste-wise reporting across all states is necessary for more accurate analysis. Future prison statistics should also incorporate additional intersectional indicators such as income, education, and occupation.

5.8.5 Strengthening Review Mechanisms

Provisions such as Section 436A of the criminal procedure framework should be implemented more effectively. Automatic review mechanisms for prolonged undertrial detention could help prevent unnecessary incarceration.

5.9 Conclusion

The *Prison Statistics India 2024* report demonstrates that India's prison crisis remains fundamentally structural in nature. Although prison occupancy levels have marginally improved, overcrowding continues to persist across much of the country.

Most significantly, undertrial prisoners continue to dominate India's prisons, accounting for 72.6 per cent of the incarcerated population. This reflects enduring failures in investigation, bail administration, and judicial efficiency.

The religion-wise and caste-wise analyses together offer an important insight into the social realities of incarceration. While Hindus form the majority of undertrial prisoners numerically, Muslims appear significantly overrepresented relative to their share in the national population. Similarly, SC, ST, and OBC communities together constitute a substantial proportion of undertrial prisoners, highlighting the deep relationship between incarceration and structural social inequality.

Ultimately, Indian prisons reveal broader inequalities embedded within society itself. Economic deprivation, caste marginalisation, unequal legal access, social exclusion, and systemic inefficiencies collectively shape who becomes incarcerated and who remains imprisoned the longest.

Addressing these issues requires a justice-oriented approach that prioritises fairness, accessibility, and procedural efficiency rather than relying solely on prison expansion.