Abstract

The aim of the present study is to analyse the literature related to prison in order to understand the state of incarceration in contemporary societies. The term literature is employed in the study in a broad sense to include theoretical writings on prison and punishment, autobiographical writings from prison, creative fiction on prison and some legal literature related to punishment and prison. In this sense the study delves into the broad idea of incarceration rather than attempting an analysis of individual writings that are part of the study. The writings which constitute parts of the study contribute to this larger scheme of action that the study aims at. The study analyses various theories of imprisonment that lead to the understanding of the origin and development of incarceration as the central punishment mechanism. Some of the important prison contexts are studied to arrive at how the carceral emerged into the central punitive mechanism in the twentieth century. A historical and theoretical analysis of select contemporary prison systems is carried out before examining a selection of prison writings from different periods and prison systems. In the conclusive elaboration of the outcomes of the study the ideas of governmental control, prison reforms, prisoners’ rights and prison alternatives are discussed.

Keywords: prison, punishment, prison reform, prison literature