Jailer Behind Bars

When the Custodian Becomes the Exploiter

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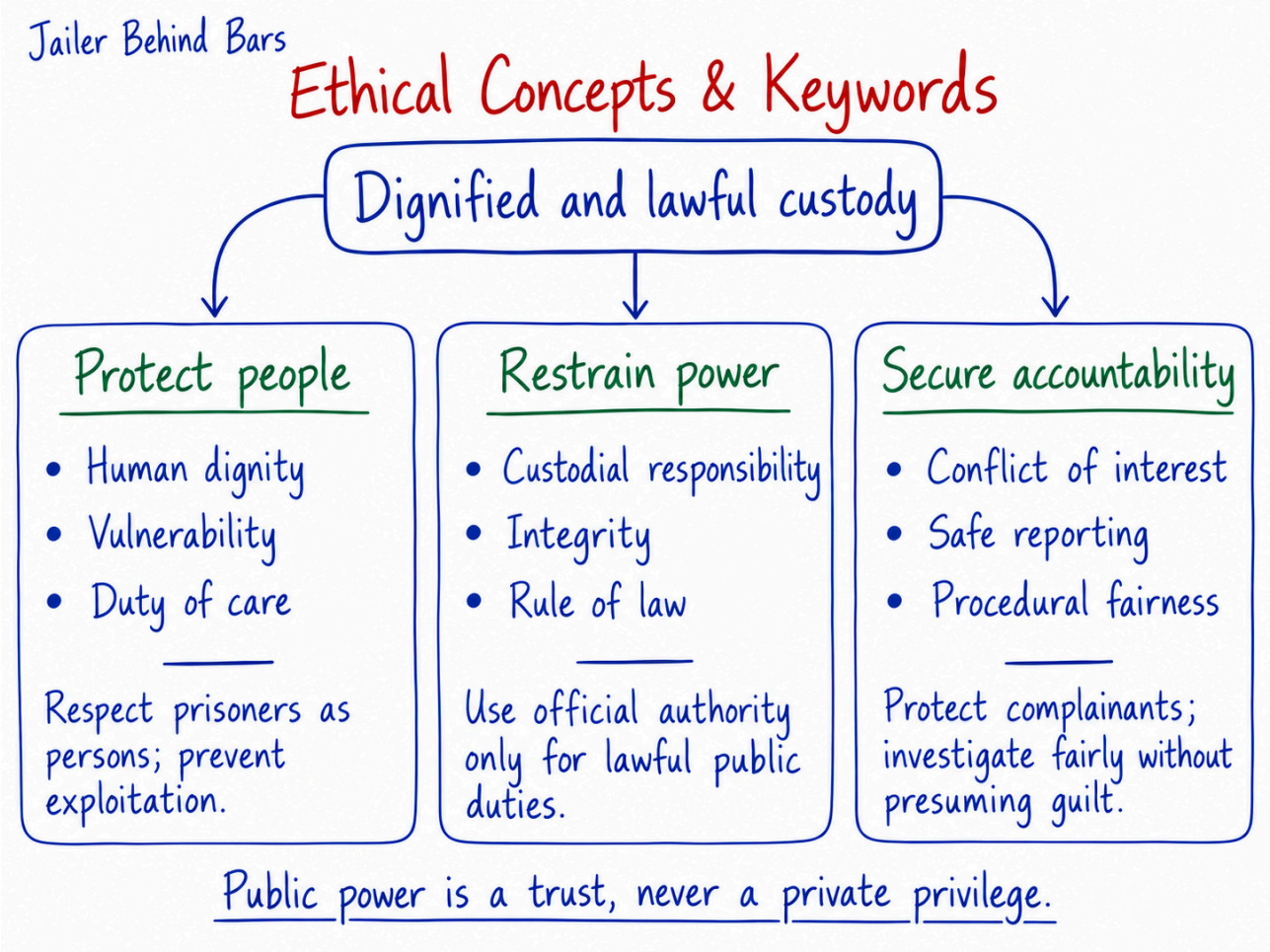
Symbolic illustration with fictional adults; not a reconstruction of a reported event.

01 Gist of the Issue

Divya Chaudhary, then jailer at the Women's Reformatory within Ajmer Central Jail, was arrested in Kota on 6 October 2026 over allegations that she took two female inmates to her private residence for domestic work on 12 July. Contemporary reporting describes objections by gate staff, an internal inquiry and an FIR registered on 5 August on a prison guard's report. These steps show that staff resistance and institutional accountability did operate, although the alleged removal raises serious questions about preventive safeguards. The ethical issue is the diversion of custodial power for private benefit. The criminal allegations remain subject to adjudication; an internal disciplinary finding is not a criminal conviction.

The ethical question: How should public servants protect the dignity of people in custody, resist misuse of authority and secure accountability without prejudging criminal guilt?

02 Ethical Concepts & Keywords



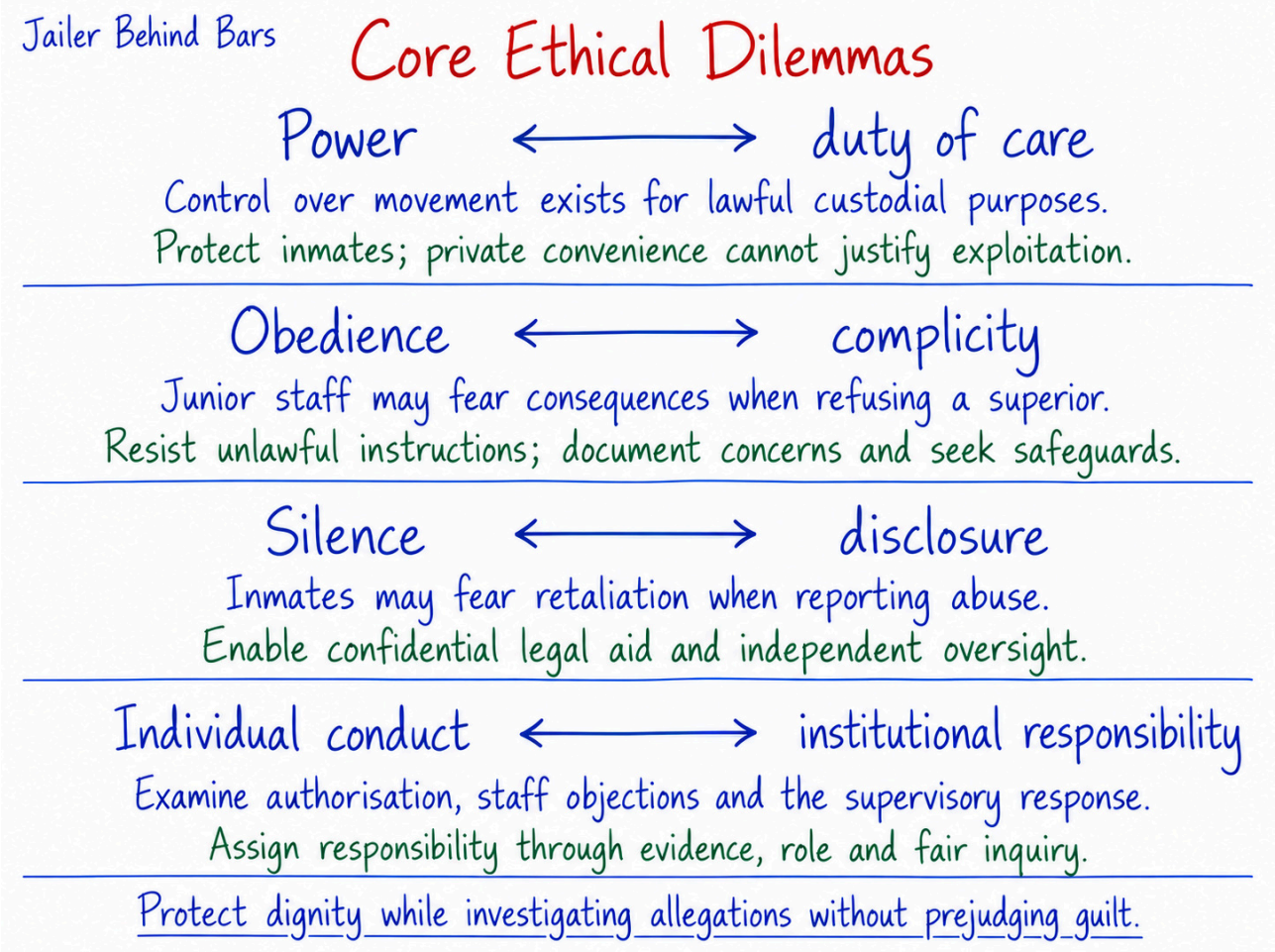
Ethical Concepts & Keywords • Handwritten revision aid

Value / Keyword	Relevance to This Case
Custodial responsibility	A jailer holds state-delegated authority over persons who cannot resist; that authority must be exercised only for lawful custodial purposes
Abuse of authority	Using official position - access to inmates, control of their movement - for personal domestic benefit is a textbook abuse of power
Human dignity	Inmates retain dignity. Apparent consent must be examined for coercion arising from custodial dependency
Conflict of interest	The official's personal convenience conflicts with the duty to maintain lawful custody and protect inmates
Rule of law	Prison regulations on custody and movement exist to protect both inmates and society; breaching them undermines the entire legal order

Value / Keyword	Relevance to This Case
Integrity	Public office must not yield private gain; using custodial authority for domestic benefit would violate integrity in public service
Accountability	The alleged removal despite staff objections raises questions about preventive controls; the reported inquiry and guard's complaint also demonstrate accountability in action
Vulnerability and protection	Prisoners are among the most voiceless; the state's duty of care is heightened, not diminished, precisely because of that vulnerability

Anchor concepts for this sheet: custodial responsibility, human dignity, and abuse of authority. These three will be threaded through the analysis and model answer that follow.

03 Core Ethical Dilemmas



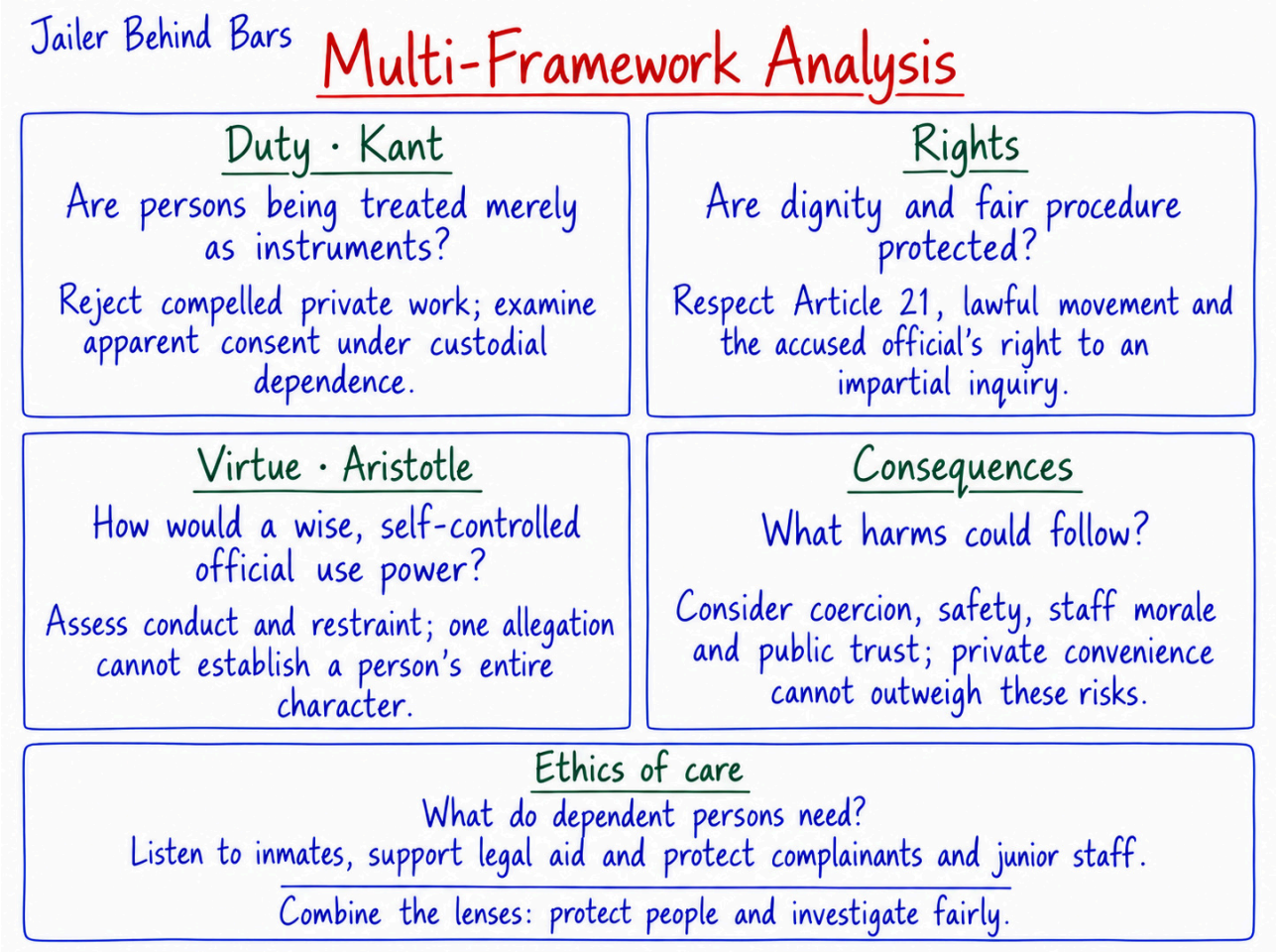
Core Ethical Dilemmas • Handwritten revision aid

- Power versus duty of care: Operational control over inmate movement exists for lawful custodial purposes. Private convenience cannot justify exploiting persons under that

control. The administrative challenge is to prevent misuse and respond proportionately when an allegation arises.

- **Compliance vs. complicity for subordinates:** Junior prison staff who witnessed or facilitated the removal faced a classic dilemma - obey a superior's order and become complicit, or refuse and risk consequences.
- Silence versus disclosure for inmates: A prisoner who experiences or witnesses abuse may fear retaliation. Confidential access to legal aid and independent oversight can reduce this risk. The actual reporting routes available in this incident must not be assumed absent without evidence.
- Individual wrongdoing versus institutional responsibility: An inquiry should examine who authorised or facilitated the movement, what objections were raised and how supervision responded. Responsibility should follow evidence, role and due process.

04 Multi-Framework Analysis



Multi-Framework Analysis • Handwritten revision aid

Deontology (Kant)

Kant's formula of humanity requires treating persons as ends in themselves, never merely as instruments. If inmates are compelled to perform an official's private domestic work, their vulnerability is being used for another's convenience. Custodial responsibility therefore creates an affirmative duty to protect dignity as well as a duty to refrain from exploitation. An inmate's apparent agreement must be assessed against the unequal power relationship.

Rights-Based Ethics

Prisoners retain fundamental rights compatible with lawful detention, including dignity under Article 21. A custodial official must protect these rights and follow lawful movement procedures. The same commitment to fair treatment also requires an impartial inquiry and due process for an accused official. The allegation should be examined through evidence rather than treated as a completed criminal finding.

Virtue Ethics (Aristotle)

Virtue ethics asks how a just, self-controlled and practically wise public servant uses power when oversight is limited. If established, using inmates for private benefit would be inconsistent with these qualities. The analysis should evaluate the conduct without claiming to know the accused person's entire character from one reported episode.

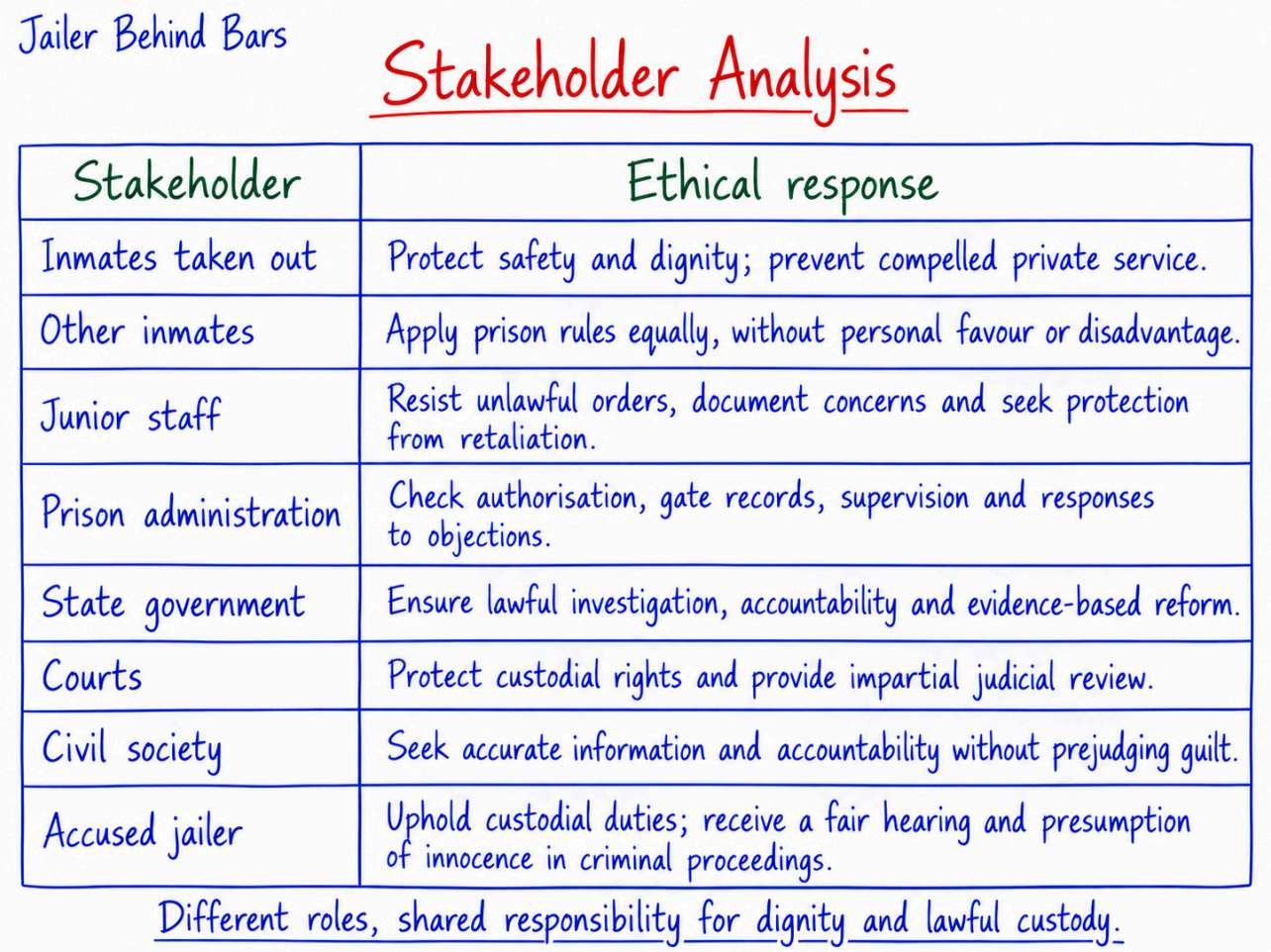
Consequences and public trust

Assess harm to inmates, escape and safety risks, coercion, staff morale and public confidence. Household convenience cannot outweigh these harms. Prevention should combine enforceable controls with humane management and accountability.

Ethics of care

Custody creates dependency. A caring institution listens to inmates, protects complainants, provides legal-aid access and recognises the risks borne by junior staff. Support for an official's genuine personal difficulties must come through lawful arrangements, never through compelled inmate labour.

05 Stakeholder Analysis

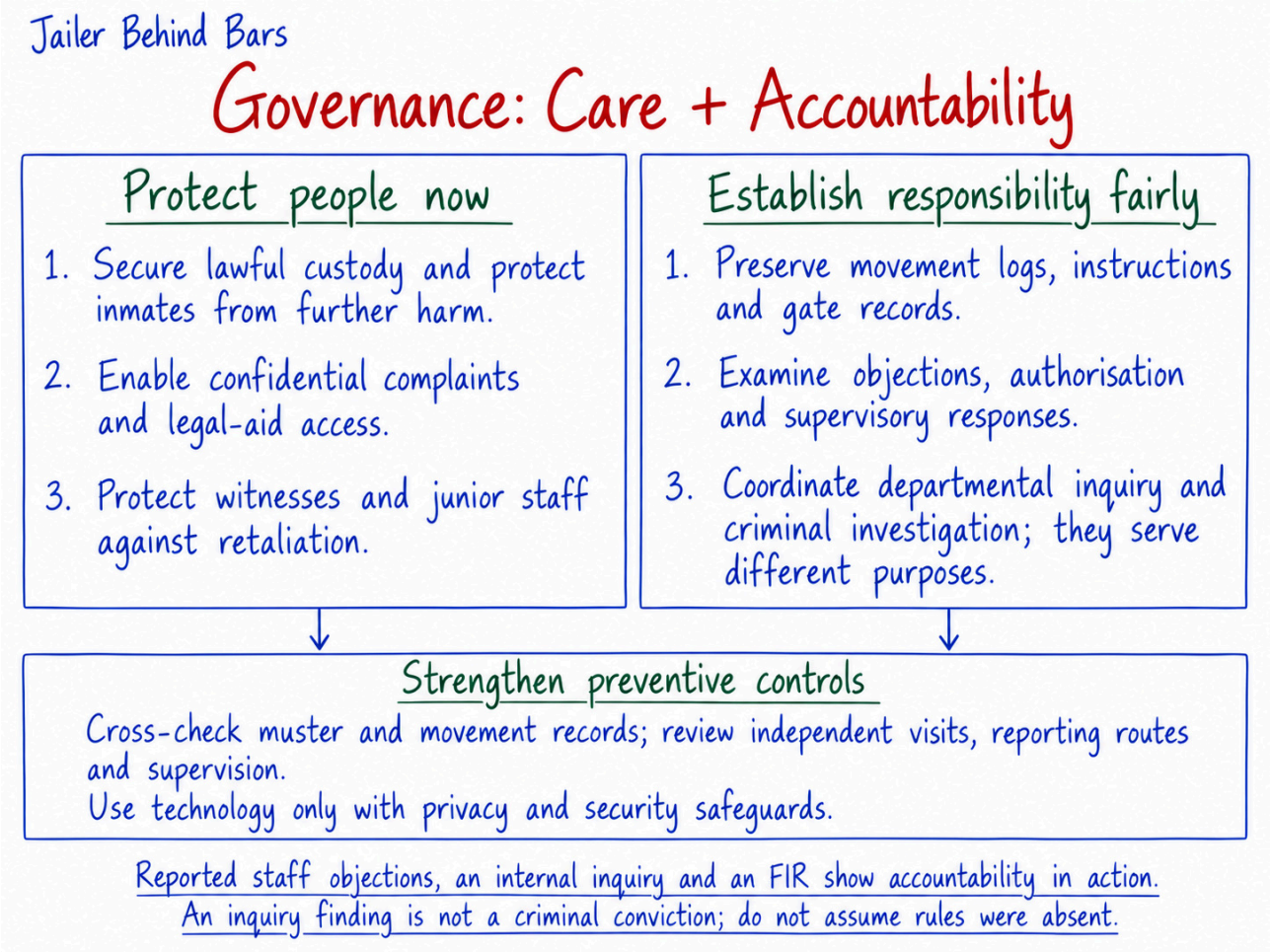


Stakeholder Analysis • Handwritten revision aid

Stakeholder	Interest / Concern	Ethical Obligation
Inmates taken out	Physical safety outside jail, protection from exploitation, maintenance of their custodial rights	Owed dignified treatment and lawful custody; cannot be compelled to serve private persons
Other inmates remaining	Fair treatment; not to be disadvantaged or discriminated against based on an official's personal needs	Owed equal and impartial application of prison rules
Junior prison staff	Caught between a superior's order and legal/ethical duty	Must resist unlawful instructions, document concerns and seek available safeguards against retaliation

Stakeholder	Interest / Concern	Ethical Obligation
Prison administration / Superintendent	Institutional reputation, rule compliance, duty of supervision	Responsible for detecting and preventing such violations through oversight
State government / Home Department	Public trust, lawful governance, accountability of custodial institutions	Must investigate, prosecute, and reform oversight mechanisms
Judiciary / Courts	Upholding Article 21 rights of persons in state custody	Empowered to take suo motu cognisance; may issue directions on prison administration
Civil society / public	Confidence that custodial institutions operate lawfully	Can demand accountability through RTI, litigation, and public scrutiny
The accused jailer	Fair investigation, due process and professional obligations	Must uphold lawful custody; is also entitled to a fair hearing and the presumption of innocence in criminal proceedings

06 Administrative / Governance Angle



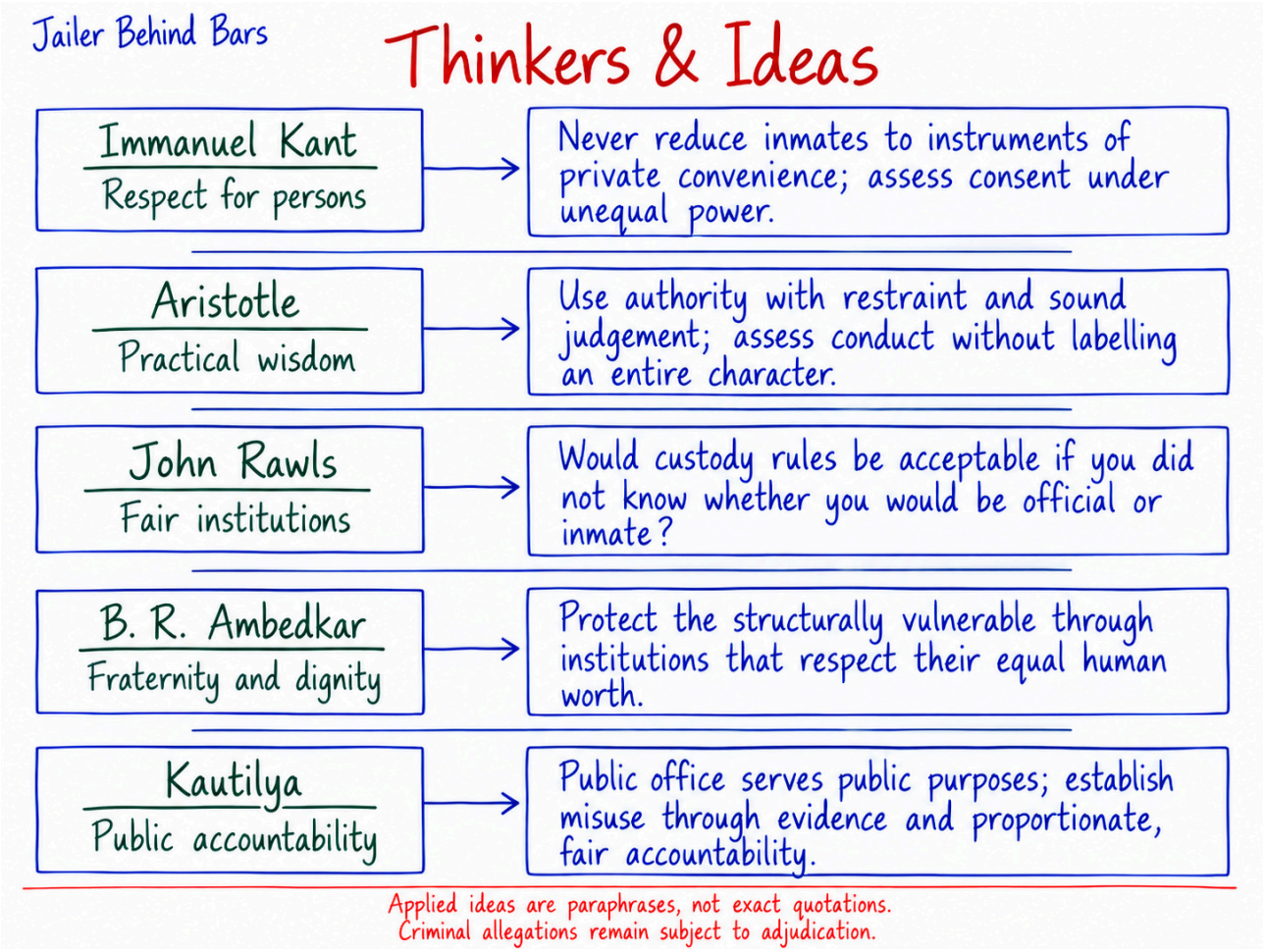
Governance: Care + Accountability • Handwritten revision aid

- Implementation of movement controls: The reported episode does not prove an absence of rules. It raises questions about whether authorisation, gate checks and escalation procedures were followed and whether staff could enforce them despite a superior's pressure.
- Supervisory accountability: Examine gate records, instructions and the response to staff objections. The reported internal inquiry and subsequent FIR should be acknowledged. Determine whether avoidable lapses occurred before attributing responsibility.
- **Perverse incentive of unchecked discretion:** Jailers hold wide discretionary power over inmates' daily conditions. Without external accountability, that discretion is vulnerable to self-interested abuse.
- Safety of reporting channels: Staff objections and a guard's report are important evidence of resistance. The reform question is whether reporting channels are accessible, confidential and backed by effective anti-retaliation measures.
- Police and prison interface: Departmental inquiry and criminal investigation serve different purposes. Preserve evidence, coordinate with investigating authorities and protect witnesses while maintaining the accused official's procedural rights.

- **Needed reforms:**
- Reliable muster and movement records, cross-checked independently; adopt technology only with appropriate privacy and security safeguards
- Independent prison visiting committees with authority to receive inmate complaints
- Rotation of jailer postings to prevent entrenchment of personal networks
- Confidential complaint records accessible only to authorised oversight and legal-aid personnel

Evidence-based supervisory accountability, with fair inquiry into authorisation, negligence or failure to respond

07 Thinkers & Ideas



Thinkers & Ideas • Handwritten revision aid

The entries summarise ideas and their application; only the Kant passage is presented as a quotation.

Thinker	Idea / Quote	Application Here
Immanuel Kant	"Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or that of another, always as an end and never as a means only."	Using inmates as domestic instruments would violate the duty to respect their dignity
Aristotle	A person of good character exercises practical wisdom (phronesis) - knowing not just what is lawful but what the virtuous officeholder would do	If established, the alleged conduct would conflict with practical wisdom and self-restraint; avoid drawing a definitive conclusion about a person's character
John Rawls	The principles of justice must be chosen from behind a "veil of ignorance" - not knowing whether one would be the powerful or the powerless	Behind the veil, no rational person would endorse a prison regime where officials may exploit inmates for personal use; custodial responsibility must be designed to protect the least advantaged
B.R. Ambedkar	Liberty cannot be real without fraternity; the weakest members of society need the most robust institutional protection	Prisoners - stripped of liberty - are among the most structurally weak; the state's duty of protection is at its maximum, not minimum, here
Kautilya (Arthashastra)	A public servant who misuses office for private gain must be punished; the king's officers exist to serve the people, not themselves	Abuse of authority for personal benefit is an ancient failure of governance, and ancient wisdom already prescribed accountability as its antidote

08 Adapted Case Study

The following fictional scenario is inspired by the ethical issues in the news report. Its names, duration and employment circumstances are illustrative, not additional facts about the Ajmer incident.

Priya Sharma is a senior jailer at a large district prison in a state capital. She has served for fourteen years and has an otherwise clean service record. For six months, she has selected two or three inmates nearing the end of short sentences and taken them outside on the pretext of official errands. They clean and cook at her residence before returning for the afternoon muster. Their temporary absence is not formally recorded. Mohan, a junior warder, notices discrepancies and becomes concerned. During a routine visit, a legal-aid lawyer tells him that an inmate has informally described this arrangement and asked whether it is lawful.

Mohan has credible grounds to report the suspected misconduct, although an independent inquiry must establish the full facts. His contractual term ends in three months, and Priya has given him favourable assessments. He fears retaliation affecting renewal. He also recognises his duty to protect inmates and avoid facilitating unlawful conduct.

(a) What are the options available with Mohan in the above situation?

(b) Discuss the ethical issues involved in this case.

(c) What are the ethical dilemmas being faced by Mohan?

(d) Which of the options, do you think, would be most appropriate for Mohan to adopt and why?

(e) What policy measures would you suggest to prevent the misuse of custodial authority in prisons?

09 Model Answer

Public office creates a duty to protect people who depend on the state. Mohan should combine moral courage with practical judgment: safeguard inmates, report credible concerns accurately, seek protection and enable a fair inquiry. The aim is to stop misuse through lawful action while reducing the risk borne by those who speak up.

(a) What are the options available with Mohan in the above situation?

Mohan, a junior warder with direct knowledge of an ongoing illegal practice, has four substantively distinct courses of action:

Option	Merits	Demerits
Continue to stay silent and do nothing	Avoids immediate confrontation, but offers no reliable long-term protection	Leaves inmates exposed and may create disciplinary or legal risk if Mohan knowingly assists or conceals misconduct
Raise the matter informally and privately with Priya Sharma	Could prompt correction, but is unsafe as the sole response to serious ongoing abuse	Allows her to suppress evidence or retaliate; places Mohan in a one-to-one confrontation with a more powerful officer with no institutional backing
Report formally to the Prison Superintendent or the Inspector General of Prisons	Triggers official investigation through the correct chain of command; creates a documented record; aligns with custodial responsibility obligations	Retaliation risk remains; the competent authority's independence and response must be assessed
Report directly to an external authority - police, judiciary, State Human Rights Commission, or legal aid board - especially given the lawyer already has informal knowledge	Can secure independent scrutiny where the normal chain is implicated, ineffective or unsafe	Requires accurate documentation, confidentiality and selection of a competent authority; protection is not automatic

(b) Discuss the ethical issues involved in this case.

Several distinct ethical issues are woven through this case.

First, and most fundamental, is the violation of **human dignity**. Inmates are persons in state custody, not a domestic workforce. Compelling them - even without physical force, since inmates in this position cannot freely refuse - to clean a private home treats them as mere instruments. This is an assault on their personhood that no operational convenience can justify.

Second is the **abuse of authority**. Priya Sharma's power over inmate movement is a public trust delegated by the state for custodial purposes alone. Redirecting that power to personal domestic benefit is a betrayal of the office she holds - precisely the conduct that erodes public confidence in prison administration.

Third is **custodial responsibility**: the state assumes a heightened duty of care when it deprives persons of liberty. That duty is not merely to prevent physical harm but to ensure that incarceration is not used as a platform for exploitation by the very officials charged with protection.

Fourth, Mohan's position raises questions of professional responsibility and complicity. He should not carry out unlawful instructions. His obligations and any legal liability depend on applicable rules, what he knew and what he did; mere awareness should not be equated automatically with criminal guilt.

Fifth is institutional responsibility. In the fictional scenario, secrecy and the fear of retaliation have allowed misconduct to persist. An ethical institution must protect inmates, respond to credible concerns and make it possible for vulnerable employees to report without relying on personal heroism.

(c) What are the ethical dilemmas being faced by Mohan?

Mohan's dilemmas are concrete and severe.

- **Duty vs. self-interest:** His obligation to report an illegal practice that harms vulnerable inmates sits in direct tension with his need to protect his contractual renewal - a livelihood question, not an abstract one.
- **Loyalty to a supervisor vs. loyalty to the institution:** Priya Sharma has given him good performance remarks. Reporting her feels like a betrayal of a personal debt, yet the higher loyalty owed is to the law and to the inmates.
- Courage versus prudence: Reporting is ethically necessary, but a precariously employed warder faces real risks. Practical wisdom means choosing an evidence-based, confidential route and seeking support, rather than dismissing fear as cowardice.
- Internal reporting versus external escalation: The normal chain may resolve the issue promptly, but an implicated or unresponsive chain may require independent intervention. A lawyer can advise and support him; the lawyer's knowledge alone does not guarantee protection from retaliation.

Mohan faces a genuine conflict between protecting inmates and protecting his livelihood. Silence can also create risks for him. A sound institutional response reduces the personal cost of good-faith reporting through confidentiality, independent scrutiny and safeguards against retaliation.

(d) Which of the options, do you think, would be most appropriate for Mohan to adopt and why?

The most appropriate course of action is **formal reporting to the Inspector General of Prisons or the equivalent supervisory authority**, coordinated with the legal aid lawyer who already holds the inmate's informal complaint.

The reasoning flows directly from the anchor concepts:

Human dignity requires an effective response. The inmate's approach to a legal-aid lawyer is an exercise of agency under difficult conditions. Mohan should support that lawful channel and report what he has observed, without exposing the complainant unnecessarily.

Custodial responsibility extends across the institution. Mohan should report his own observations accurately, distinguish them from what others told him and avoid knowingly facilitating further misuse. His response should protect inmates while enabling a fair investigation.

Abuse of authority of this kind, once known to a subordinate, cannot be a private matter. Aristotle's virtuous official does not calculate what he can safely ignore; he asks what his role demands. Mohan's role demands disclosure.

Practically, he should:

- Document the discrepancies he has personally observed - dates, times, names - before taking any step.
- Approach the legal aid lawyer to formalise the inmate's complaint through the proper legal channel, giving Mohan corroboration and the inmate institutional backing.
- Submit a factual written report to a competent, unimplicated supervisory authority and retain an acknowledgement. If immediate risk, complicity, inaction or retaliation makes that route unsafe or ineffective, seek advice about approaching police, the State Human Rights Commission or the legal services authority within their respective remit.
- Seek legal advice about applicable service safeguards, confidentiality and witness-protection measures. Do not assume that the Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014 provides an operational remedy: the Government's parliamentary reply of 11 December 2025 stated that it had not been brought into force.

This option is not without risk. But Rawls reminds us that a just institution is one we would choose not knowing whether we might one day be the powerless inmate. Mohan's courage in choosing it is the very mechanism by which such institutions become just.

(e) What policy measures would you suggest to prevent the misuse of custodial authority in prisons?

Systemic reform must address the conditions - unchecked discretion, absent oversight, silent subordinates - that allowed this abuse to persist for months.

On inmate movement and roll management:

- Reliable periodic muster and time-stamped movement records, with independent cross-checks; evaluate technology for necessity, security, accessibility and privacy before adoption
- Any authorised movement outside the prison - however short - must be recorded in a digitally time-stamped logbook, countersigned by a second officer

On internal oversight:

- Independent prison visiting committees - comprising magistrates, lawyers, and civil society members - with authority to receive complaints directly from inmates and staff without routing through the prison hierarchy
- Surprise inspections by the Inspector General's office, unannounced and conducted at variable times including morning hours when this abuse was occurring

On whistleblower protection:

- Accessible confidential complaint channels through competent oversight bodies and legal services authorities, with careful identity handling and clear anti-retaliation procedures
- Explicit safeguards for contractual and probationary staff, including independent review of adverse employment action connected with good-faith reporting

On accountability of senior officials:

- Supervisory accountability: assess whether senior officers authorised, ignored or negligently failed to prevent violations; impose proportionate consequences through a fair process
- A clear prohibition on soliciting private services from persons in custody, supported by conflict-of-interest reporting and effective supervision

On training and values:

- Induction and in-service training must include modules on **custodial responsibility** and **human dignity** as lived obligations, not merely legal categories
- Case studies of exactly this kind of abuse should be used in training to shift institutional culture from compliance-on-paper to genuine internalisation of the officer's duty of care

Conclusion

The strongest response joins dignity with due process. Mohan should neither conceal credible abuse nor pronounce guilt himself. By documenting what he knows, seeking legal-aid support and reporting through a competent, safe channel, he can help protect inmates and restore the purpose of custodial authority. Lasting reform requires institutions that make ethical action workable for ordinary employees.

Value addition for answer writing

- Constitutional anchor: Article 21 protects dignity within custody; lawful detention does not extinguish personhood. Apply the principle to the treatment of inmates and to fair procedure for the accused.
- International benchmark: Rule 1 of the Nelson Mandela Rules centres inherent human dignity. Use it as a standard for humane prison management, not as a substitute for the applicable Indian legal procedure.
- Administrative sequence: protect against immediate harm, record observations, choose a competent reporting route, seek anti-retaliation safeguards, cooperate with a fair inquiry and review preventive controls.

- Analytical distinction: failure to prevent an incident and failure to respond afterwards are separate questions. Acknowledge evidence of staff resistance and corrective action rather than assuming every layer of the institution was complicit.

10 Practice Questions

- What do you understand by the ethical obligations of a public servant towards those in their custody or care? How are these obligations different from those towards the general public? (10 marks)

Syllabus: 3.4 Dedication to public service

- Examine how family and educational institutions can build in young people the moral courage to resist wrongdoing even when silence would be personally safer. (10 marks)

Syllabus: 1.5 Role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values

- Self-interest is a natural human motivation, yet it can corrupt a person's sense of duty when they hold power over others. Critically examine this tension, with suitable examples. (10 marks)

Syllabus: 1.1 Essence, determinants and consequences of ethics in human actions

- Suggest concrete measures an organisation can adopt to protect a junior employee who has no power to safeguard herself when reporting wrongdoing by a superior. (10 marks)

Syllabus: 6.4 Accountability and ethical governance

11 Sources & Reading Notes

1. News context. The Indian Express, article dated 8 October 2026, updated 9 October 2026: staff objections, internal inquiry, guard's report and arrest chronology.
https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ajmer-jailer-divya-chaudhary-arrested-inmates-domestic-work-10912577/

2. Whistleblower law. PIB, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, parliamentary reply dated 11 December 2025: the Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014 had not been notified into force. Do not infer an operational remedy from enactment alone.
https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2202426

3. Dignity in custody. Supreme Court judgment dated 13 November 2024 discusses Sunil Batra (II) and constitutional protection against degrading treatment in custody.
https://api.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2022/12239/12239_2022_2_1501_57147_Judgement_13-Nov-2024.pdf

4. International benchmark. United Nations: the Nelson Mandela Rules provide principles for humane prison management; Rule 1 centres inherent dignity.
https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/nelson-mandela-rules-protecting-rights-persons-deprived-liberty

Reading note: The Mohan-Priya scenario is fictional. Its names, six-month duration and contractual employment setting are not additional facts about the Ajmer incident. Proposed safeguards are recommendations rather than claims that every measure is already mandated or available. The study does not claim a criminal conviction or a subsequent judicial outcome.

Thinker note: The applications of Aristotle, Rawls, Ambedkar and Kautilya are explanatory paraphrases. They should not be reproduced as verbatim quotations.