

How Mahatma Gandhi Changed Lives of 10,000 Prisoners in Mumbai Central Jail in the Last 12 Years!



Tanaya Singh, May 30, 2016

Hate the sin, love the sinner,' said Mahatma Gandhi. It is in line with this belief, Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal-Gandhi Book Centre in India is trying to reform jail inmates by conducting Gandhi Peace Exams based on Gandhian Autobiography and philosophy.

Laxman Gole, was convicted for a number of crimes in 2005 and sent to the Mumbai Central Prison for four years. He had studied till Class 7 before getting involved with a gang of nine operating in different areas of Mumbai – mostly extorting money from people. One day in Jail, after reading an Autobiography of Gandhi, he decided to write a letter to the judge presiding over his case and confessed to all his crimes – accepting his mistakes and promising not to repeat them in the future. His behaviour was so good and his confession so sincere that his sentence was reduced from seven years to two and a half years.

In 2008, he became a free and reformed man. He joined Sarvodaya mandal and now helps other prisoners in Maharashtra to reform as well. And the person to be thanked for this transformation – in him as well as in others – is none other than Mahatma Gandhi!

Or, to be precise, it is an organization involved in spreading the word about Gandhi and his ideals – the Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal, which has been conducting Gandhi Peace Exams in Central Jails for about 10,000 jail inmates in Mumbai and Maharashtra, India since 2004.

“Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal started conducting these exams with the aim of teaching jail inmates about Mahatma Gandhi and his beliefs in peace and non-violence because many people are not aware of them. Through these exams, we want inmates to realise their crimes, feel sorry about them and also decide what they want to do in the future. We want to make them capable of leading normal lives when they leave jail after serving their sentence,” says Rajesh Shinde, who is currently working as a web designer with the organization.

Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal is a public charitable trust that spreads awareness about Gandhian principles among common citizens. In order to do so, it takes up different activities, like maintaining a Gandhi book centre that has books about Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy, conducting personality development camps for youths, peace rallies and holding seminars and workshops to discuss Gandhian teachings in colleges.

Additionally, it has a well maintained website www.mkgandhi.org to share information about these activities. The Peace Exams are not just conducted in prisons, but in schools and colleges too.

As a first step before the exam, organization members conduct an orientation session in the jail, where they speak about Mahatma Gandhi, his teachings, why it is good to know about him, his life, etc. The final question paper has 80 objective type questions.

“I came to know the true value of truth and *ahimsa*. I realized the mistakes I had made and took a vow not to go astray in life,” one of the inmates wrote in his after the exam. This prisoner had written a letter to the Sarvodaya Mandal last year, expressing his interest in reading books on Gandhi and appearing for the exam, after which Sarvodaya Mandal had sent Gandhi’s autobiography to him.

Mahatma Gandhi used to say – ‘Hate the sin, love the sinner.’ And these exams are conducted keeping in mind his belief that repentance can dilute the acts for which criminals are put behind bars. The organization is now trying to conduct the peace exams in other parts of the country too.

Courtesy: <http://www.thebetterindia.com/56655/mumbai-central-jail-gandhi-peace-exam/> and <https://in.news.yahoo.com/mahatma-gandhi-changed-lives-10-101524657.html>