

Open university gives former convict a New chance at life

Written by priyank

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Dr Bhanubhai Patel will join Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University on February 2 as consultant for study centres they run in 23 jails across the state

Hemington James

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Dr Bhanubhai Nanjibhai Patel says, 'I am starting from zero'

To reform prisoners and enable them to earn and live with dignity, authorities at Sabarmati Central Jail have instituted several professional courses. And Dr Bhanubhai Nanjibhai Patel made them proud after an open university appointed him as a consultant. He is perhaps the first inmate from a Gujarat jail to have secured a semi-government job.

Dr Patel, who was sentenced to seven years in jail after being found guilty of sexual offences, was released on December 2. Appointed by Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) on S G Highway, he will work among prisoners in all state jails where the university runs its study centres.

University Registrar Piyush Shah said, "We run study centres in 23 jails to educate prisoners so they can earn an honest and decent livelihood when they get out. We have seen inmates criticise fellow prisoners who enrol for the courses. When we received the doctor's application, we thought hiring him would be a great opportunity to practise what we preach and set an example among prisoners."

Explaining Patel's job profile, Shah said, "Dr Patel will visit the jails and tell prisoners about the courses run by BAOU. He will enrol their names and issue receipts. We are still working out details of his role."

Pay and perks

Dr Patel, who is currently living with his sister in Bapunagar, will start work from February 2 and be paid Rs 10,000 per month. The university will also allot him a vehicle so that he can travel across the state.

In the time he has been inside, Patel cleared 32 diploma and certificate courses offered by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and BAOU. Patel, who completed his MBBS from B J Medical College in 1983 and received certification by Education Commissioner for Foreign Medical Graduates from the US, is studying for seven more courses.

Additional Director General of Police (Prisons) P C Thakur, Director of Human Resources Management (Gujarat Vidyapith) Sandhya Thakar and Co-ordinator (Brahma Kumaris) B K Nandini wrote references, requesting university authorities to give Dr Patel a job.

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Said Thakur, “Dr Patel is very sincere and his behaviour in jail was commendable. After being released, he came to us seeking support. So I wrote a reference for him.”

Sandhya said, “We spoke to the university. They considered his application as he is qualified for the job. If an inmate is not absorbed by the mainstream society, he will go back to the world of crime.”

B K Nandini said, “We are happy that Patel got the job. We have promised him help in future whenever he needs it.”

‘I’ve been reborn’

Dr Patel is glad he used the time in jail constructively. He holds a postgraduate diploma in intellectual property rights, diplomas in insurance, financial management, operation research, cost accounting, advance accounting and human rights. He also completed certificate courses in functional English, personal computer software, teacher’s training in yoga, computer assembling, Gandhi vichar parichay, food and nutrition and food safety.

Dr Patel said, “Being released from jail is being reborn. I am starting from zero. I have no driving licence and no PAN card. I will restart my life in every sense. In jail, I spent my life meditating and reading books. Initially, it was tough to accept my life behind bars till I decided to use the time positively. I read a lot and was given charge of the library. I enrolled with IGNOU and BAOU. I am glad all those certificates will help me build a good life again.”