
Applying Vipassanā Meditation as a Jail Reform Technique: A Case of Nakkhu Prison, Lalitpur, Nepal

Mukti Prasad Pandey

Faculty of Buddhist Studies, Lumbini Buddhist University, Lumbini, Nepal

Email address:

muktiprasadpandey@gmail.com

To cite this article:

Mukti Prasad Pandey. Applying Vipassanā Meditation as a Jail Reform Technique: A Case of Nakkhu Prison, Lalitpur, Nepal. *International Journal of Law and Society*. Vol. 5, No. 3, 2022, pp. 242-250. doi: 10.11648/j.ijls.20220503.11

Received: May 25, 2022; **Accepted:** June 13, 2022; **Published:** June 28, 2022

Abstract: Vipassanā meditation has been historically practiced in many sections of society. By practicing this meditation technique, many householders have achieved mental peace and improved their day to day life situation. Research has demonstrated that vipassanā meditation works well not only among common householders and various sections of society but, also among jail inmates. Research studies in the past have shown that vipassanā has brought positive changes among inmates, which helps in jail reform. Recently, several studies have revealed the positive effects of vipassanā meditation on lay-practitioners. A mixed method has been used to analyze the behavioral changes of Nakkhu Jail inmates in nine different areas of their daily life before and after vipassanā meditation. Empirical results reveal that vipassana meditation helps to develop positive and optimistic attitude; reduce anger, irritation and anxiety; make self-correction of behavior; improve physical and mental health and purify their mind and character. A pair t-tests is used to compare the differences in means before and after vipassanā mediation of same inmates, and the result shows that there is significant difference of means in seven areas. With this, the research reveals that the vipassanā meditation can be used as an effective tool for jail reform in Nepal.

Keywords: Vipassanā, Inmates, Effect, Jail Reform, Meditation, Technique

1. Introduction

Vipassanā is an ancient meditation technique which was rediscovered by Gautam Buddha during his enlightenment. Not only the Buddha's follower at that time but, many lay practitioners from various professions: farmers, businessmen, employees and various other sectors of the society had practiced this technique of meditation. Vipassanā meditation not only aims for the goals of total liberation and full enlightenment, but also helps for mental purification and eradicates many psychosomatic diseases.

About 500 years after Buddha's *Mahaparinirbana*, this technique slowly disappeared from Nepal and India. Fortunately, this technique was preserved as tutor-tutee tradition in Myanmar. In 1969, S. N. Goenka, a business man of Indian origin, brought this technique in India [5]. He taught specific 10 day vipassanā courses for lay practitioners and many people of India participated in these courses. Later, in 1975, he conducted the vipassanā course for jail inmates and officials in central jail Rajasthan, India [13]. Likewise, Goenka conducted a vipassanā course for 1000 inmates of Tihar Jail in

1994, which might be the largest vipassanā course till date [2]. Seeing the positive effects of vipassanā in inmates, this 10-day vipassanā course became popular in other jail administrations of India. Two permanent Vipassanā Centers have been established in two Indian prisons: Tihar, New Delhi and Nasik, Maharashtra and they continue administering the course for jail inmates [4]. Jail administration of various other prisons of India and 15 other countries: USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Myanmar, Taiwan, Thailand, Israel, Ireland, Spain, Canada, Mexico, Colombia, Sri Lanka and Nepal also have introduced this course for jail inmates [21].

S N Goenka visited Nepal and conducted the first vipassanā course in 1981 in Kathmandu. Since then, 10-day course for lay practitioners has been continued regularly [15]. Gradually vipassanā courses in Nepalese prisons also started. Unfortunately, formal documentation of the first three vipassanā jail courses in Nepal could not be found. However, as a course conducting teacher, Mr. Bajracharya¹ reported that he had conducted the first jail course in Nakkhu Jail premises for 20

¹ Bodhi Bajra Bajracharya, personal communication, 11 March, 2022.

inmates in 1998. All participants successfully completed the course with very hard practice in a disciplined way at that time. The second prison course was conducted in Biratnagar prison for 29 inmates in August 1999². Similarly, the third prison course was conducted in same place-Nakkhu prison in 2000 in which 23 inmates successfully completed the course³. Later on, jail vipassanā course could not be continued for more than two decades. Recently, in January 2022, Government of Nepal (GoN), Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) formally decided to allow Nepal Vipassanā Center to conduct vipassanā courses in Nepalese Jail premises [20]. The decision also provided policy direction for conducting vipassanā course in prisons. Based on local demand from inmates, Nepal Vipassanā center could arrange vipassanā courses in jail premises with proper coordination with jail administration, Chief District Officer and permission from Department of Prison Management. Likewise, with due care of security rule, the center should arrange the course within jail premises and segregate meditator inmates with other inmates during the courses. After GoN's formal decision the fourth prison course was conducted in Nakkhu Prison on February 2022 for 35 inmates. And more courses are going on in Bhimphedi prison, Makawanpur. As of mid-July 2022, three vipassana courses have already been completed in Bhimphedi where 116 inmates and two officials, including Jailer himself completed the courses⁴.

With this, the research study aims to explore whether the vipassanā could be a tool for jail reform in Nepal. Mainly, the study focuses on the effect of Vipassanā meditation on inmates before and after attending the course. For this, fourth 10 day vipassanā course (28 Feb-11 March 2022) for Nakkhu Jail inmates was carried out for empirical analysis.

2. Research Methodology

Mixed approach is used as a research framework in this study. In general, qualitative method is applied. Qualitative information provided by inmates is also analyzed to evaluate the effects of vipassanā meditation. For this, conversion of qualitative information in quantitative forms has been made wherever it is possible.

Both primary as well as secondary sources of data are used in this study. A structured set of questionnaire was designed to seek primary information from inmates. There were nine specific questions among which most are related to their behavior parts where, respondents are requested to answer in Likert scale, which is the best tool to judge qualitative phenomenon. Same set of questionnaire was distributed before and after the completion of the course, and it assessed the difference in feeling from participating inmates after the vipassanā course. In addition, in the post questionnaire set, participants were requested for a written explanation of their experiences during and after the course. Related information

from various books, journal articles, study reports are used as secondary sources. Similarly, information from websites of various institutions also are used as secondary sources.

Among jail inmates, a simple form for registration for the course was distributed. Out of them, 62 inmates voluntarily showed their interest to participate in the vipassanā course. Because of the limited dormitory seats, only 35 inmates were chosen for the course. Before the course, the questionnaire form was attached along with application so all interested 62 inmates were taken as sample. Out of them, 35 inmates were selected for the course and same questionnaire was distributed to them after they completed the course. In descriptive analysis, all 62 participants are considered in pre-course, and only 35 participants are considered in post vipassanā as sample size. However, 35 participants who were responded both questionnaires, are taken as sample for pair t-tests to test the significance of means difference in before and after vipassanā course.

Changes in the perception among inmates before and after they practice vipassanā is analyzed by using descriptive statistics. And, parametric test (pair t- test) is applied to justify whether the result is statistically significant or not at five percent level of significance. Pair sample t-test is used because the purpose of the study is to check the difference on inmates before and after the vipassanā course. The participants, before and after the course, were same to apply the pair t-tests. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software is used for empirical analysis.

During the 10-day course, two vipassanā teachers and nine volunteers including myself participated for conducting the course. As a volunteer of the course, the researcher stayed with participants and observed the real changes in inmates live. In the tenth day when participants completed novel silence period, they were allowed to express their feeling in front of the vipassanā teachers, volunteers, Director General of Prison Management, Chief District Officer, Jailer and administration staffs. Such experience sharing by participants has also been used as primary source.

3. Review of Literature

Various studies show that practice of the vipassanā technique helps inmates to become peaceful, calm and happy which could be seen in the behavior of inmates. Research disclosed that the vipassanā meditation would make it easier for inmates to stay in prison as well as support them in adjusting to their society when they return [3, 6, 14]. Likewise, another study [1] highlighted that mindfulness programs like vipassanā could be an attractive tool for western jail administration because it could be applied with low costs which also helps to support in downsizing the budget pressure.

Jail inmates practiced vipassanā meditation even in ancient times. The Delhi Topara Ashok pillar (fourth) mentioned the order of Emperor Ashoka to the jail authority to extend three extra days for death penalty inmates and guide them to practice vipassanā [16]. There are a few studies which focus on vipassanā courses in prisons. Singh [13] has mentioned that it

² Kamal Goyal, Volunteer of the second Prison course, personal communication, 24 June 2022.

³ Daya Ram Shrestha, Volunteer of the second Prison course personal communication, 30 March, 2022

⁴ Madan Lama, Jailer, Bhimphedi Prison, Personal Communication 16 July, 2022.

has been possible to start gypsy camp in his state- Jayapur jail premises because of keen interest and strong initiation from vipassanā teacher S N Goenka. Since then, Jail courses are being popularized in various countries. Singh [14] has further emphasized that vipassanā in prison was conducted not only as Jail reform program but also as a governance reform program. After vipassanā practice, jail inmates felt regret for their past behavior and greatly relieved their tensions which changed their perception and behavior. And, vipassanā course also supported jail staffs to develop greater mindfulness towards their duties and responsibilities. Based on study of Donaldson Correctional Facility (USA), Phillips [10] highlighted that vipassanā helps prisoners to manage themselves in difficult situations in the jail environment. After the course, inmates expressed their experience that they could accept the prison as their home. They felt more peaceful and cultivated a sense of resolution, bringing peace in mind and helped them to adjust their way of thinking.

Himelstein [6] found that meditation practice enhances psychological well-being of the prisoners and such meditation-based programs may be used as proper treatment programs and support rehabilitation for prisoners which will finally support to decrease repetition of offence. Based on Tihar Jail vipassanā course Chandiramani, Verma and Dhar [3] mentioned that after vipassanā course there was a significant reduction in anxiety and depression among the prisoners and this, in turn helped for positive improvement in their mental health. They have found consistent results after three months and six months follow up study. After the courses, regularly practicing inmates felt changes in their feeling of hostility and helplessness and, they also changed their attitude towards the law. Kela [7] also emphasized the positive role of vipassanā in prison reform and reintegration of prisoners into society. Singh [13] has mentioned that after vipassanā course, "one of the condemned prisoner decided to withdraw his mercy petition to the president of India. He was ready to die"(p. 2). He further emphasized that coincidentally, the petition had been rejected by the president. And, as a home secretary of state, jail authority invited him to see the sad event of the execution where he noticed that the prisoner thanked jail authority and was smiling even at the time of his death.

Vora [19] has evaluated the vipassanā course of Baroda Central jail and expressed his satisfaction towards vipassanā mediation rather than other various programs implemented as jail reform measure during his 20 years' service in jail administration. After the vipassanā course, offences inside the jail itself were greatly reduced, inmates followed the rules and regulations voluntarily. There was an increase coordination between jail staffs and prisoners, it created peaceful environment among inmates, reduced drug addictions, intoxicants and smoking and vengeful behavior also drastically decreased. Based on the interview of 50 inmates in Tihar Jail, Kumar [8] summarized the effect of vipassanā courses in inmates as well as jail staffs. He listed that inmates who learned vipassanā and continue their practice succeed in better control of anger, gain mental peace, improve their relationship with other inmates and jail staffs, reduce their smoking habits and get relief from minor health

problems like headache and improve their self-discipline. Similarly, jail staffs also change their behavior pattern may become more compassionate and less hateful towards inmates and increase their devotion towards their duty.

Perelman, Miller and Others [9] found that inmates who practice vipassanā have seen higher levels of mindfulness and emotional intelligence in comparison with other meditation techniques. Furthermore, vipassanā practice also helps inmates to enhance their ability to manage emotional distress. Ronel, Frid and Timor [12] highlighted that during vipassanā courses, inmates were highly influenced by the dedicative services and positive role of vipassanā volunteers and they found them to be a role model to change their behavior. Not only this, vipassanā program could be helpful to create informal relationship between jail staffs and inmates which support to bring positive changes in jail administration. Recently, Auty [1] highlighted three specific issues on conducting meditation camps for jail inmates. Firstly, prison environment is stressful not only for inmates but, also for administration staffs. So, meditation programs like vipassanā would be beneficial both for prisoners and jail staffs. Secondly, such programs would be helpful to reduce repetition of offences by released prisoners. In USA, two-thirds of released inmates again return to jail within three years. Thirdly, cost of vipassanā program in prisons is also borne by the donation from old vipassana practitioners which, would be helpful for western jail administration to reduce their budget pressure.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1. Vipassanā Course for Inmates

After the Government's permission, a 10-day vipassanā course as taught by S N Goenka, was conducted on 28th Feb – 11th March 2022 in Nakkhu jail for inmates. For security reasons, the course was conducted in a limited space of two flats of the hospital building, which is in the jail premises, incorporating all activities; meditation hall, kitchen and dining, dormitory for participant inmates, volunteers as well as course conducting teachers. Two course conducting teachers; Mr. Gyan Darshan Udas and Mr. Mahandra Muni Bajracharya and nine volunteers from Nepal Vipassanā center conducted the course. All 35 participants successfully completed the course.

4.2. Vipassanā and Its Positive Effect on Inmates

Research findings shows positive effects of vipassanā technique not only for the other section of the societies but also to the inmates. For prisoners, vipassanā helped to reduce feelings of hatred, greed, anger and vengeance. It gave them hope, and a peaceful mind to keep themselves away from more criminal dealings in the prison environment. Not only this, the effect of this technique on criminals after being released is significant. It helps prisoners to reintegrate into society. On the other side, it makes the security personnel and jailers have a kinder, more compassionate outlook towards the prisoners which will help to minimize the negative effects on the prisoners perpetuated by the prison environment. Number of countries that

introduced vipassanā technique in jail administration has reached 16 including Nepal [21]. Vipassanā is applied as a behavioral-reform program. It facilitates for every practitioner to purify their mind whether they are prisoners, jail staffs or anybody else. Although each country's experience maybe unique, most of them continue vipassanā program and country level research and evaluation of such programs showed encouraging results. Mr. Ram Singh, the then Home secretary of Rajasthan and Ms. Kiran Bedi the then IG of Tihar Jail have played supportive roles to conduct vipassanā courses in jail environments [11]. Goenka has also credited the positive support and leading role of Mr. Singh's to start vipassanā course in jail premises [17, 18]. Mr. Singh had created supportive environment to conduct the first vipassanā course in central jail Rajasthan. Ms. Bedi successfully organized vipassanā course for 1000 inmates at a time and shared the success stories to other parts of India as well as other countries [11]. Bedi herself narrated her experience how she introduced vipassanā in Tihar Jail. She has shared that vipassanā technique works well as a prison reform measure then other various techniques that she tested in Tihar Jail [2]. Later on, two permanent vipassanā centers were established in India and jail vipassanā course is practiced in various countries. Gradually, prison vipassanā courses are being popular in various countries.

4.3. Evaluation of Effects of Vipassanā Among Nakkhu Jail Inmates

As discussed earlier, there were nine questions for the empirical analysis the effect of vipassanā meditation on inmates. Respondents expressed their view in 5-point rating scale: strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree.

Respondents answers are coded as 5 for strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for not sure, 2 for disagree and 1 for strongly disagree. Besides, quantitative analysis of respondent's perception on the effect of vipassanā mediation, pair t-tests is used to justify and validate the data whether they are statistically significant or not. Pair t-tests is applied at 5 percent level of significant.

For the analysis of effect of vipassanā, the perception of inmates before and after vipassanā meditation is presented in table 1. And, test statistics of pair t-test with p-value is presented in table 2. Based on the statistical facts, the effects of the vipassanā technique in Nakkhu inmates is analyzed in the following sub sections.

4.3.1. Self-purification

In first question, there was a statement 'to improve the outside world, I must improve myself through self-purification' where the almost 52 percent respondents strongly agreed on it before the vipassanā course. The ratio of strongly agreed participants sharply increased to 91 percent after the course. Pair t-test result is also significant ($p\text{-value}=0.002<0.05$). It means vipassanā practice could increase their capacity to purify themselves.

4.3.2. Effect on Positive and Optimistic Attitude

In the second question 'whether vipassanā helps them to develop positive and optimistic attitude', before the course, about 44 percent participants strongly agreed that vipassanā would help them to develop positive and optimistic attitude. After the course, the percentage share of strongly agreed respondents reached 80 percent. Statistical test result is also significant ($p\text{-value}=0.002<0.05$). This means, vipassanā course helps to develop positive and optimistic attitude.

Table 1. Effects of vipassanā before and after the course (In Percentage).

SN	Questions	Response before the course (n=62)					Response after the course (n=35)				
		5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
1	Improve myself through self- purification	51.6	46.8	1.6	0.0	0.0	91.4	8.6	0	0	0
2	Positive and optimistic attitude	43.5	46.8	8.1	1.6	0.0	80.0	20.0	0	0	0
3	Reform human mind and character	38.7	40.3	14.5	3.2	3.2	88.6	11.4	0	0	0
4	Polluted mind is the root cause of many problems	51.6	41.9	4.8	1.6	0.0	68.6	28.6	2.9	0	0
5	Recognize my mistakes and improve upon them.	45.2	48.4	4.8	1.6	0.0	82.9	17.1	0	0	0
6	General health, and mental health has improved.	43.5	45.2	6.5	3.2	1.6	65.5	34.3	0	0	0
7	Reduced anger, stress, irritation and anxiety.	46.8	43.5	4.8	3.2	1.6	80.0	20.0	0	0	0
8	Improve relations with my subordinates, colleagues and seniors.	41.9	41.9	9.7	4.8	1.6	54.3	45.7	0	0	0
9	Vipassanā could be used as Jail reform technique	59.7	35.5	3.2	0.0	1.6	78.8	21.2	0	0	0

Note: 1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Not sure 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree.

Table 2. Pair T-test Results.

S.N.	Questions	Pair Test Results-t value (p-value in Parenthesis)
1	To improve the outside world, I must first improve myself through self- purification	3.431*(0.002)
2	Vipassanā has helped me to develop a positive and optimistic attitude.	3.368*(0.002)
3	Vipassanā has the capacity to reform human mind and character.	4.199*(0.000)
4	Decline in moral values because of a polluted mind is the root cause of many problems in my profession.	0.927 (0.361)
5	Vipassanā has inspired and enabled me to recognize my mistakes and improve upon them.	2.797*(0.008)
6	Because of Vipassanā, my general health, and in particular, my mental health has improved.	2.766*(0.009)
7	Vipassanā has reduced my anger, stress, irritation and anxiety.	3.053*(0.004)
8	Vipassanā has helped me improve relations with my subordinates, colleagues and seniors.	1.506 (0.141)
9	Vipassanā meditation could be used as one of the Jail reform technique (for inmates and jail personnel)	2.324*(0.027)

Note: * means significant at five percent level of significance.

4.3.3. Reform Human Mind and Character

In third question respondents were asked- 'vipassanā has the capacity to reform human mind and character' where only about 39 percent responded as strongly agreed. The ratio was drastically increased to 89 percent after the vipassanā course. Pair t- test result is also significant ($p\text{-value}=0.00<0.05$). This means 'vipassanā has a capacity to reform human mind and character' is justified.

4.3.4. Polluted Mind Is the Main Problem

Respondents were asked whether 'polluted mind is the root cause of many problems' in next fourth question. Before the course about 52 percent inmates strongly agreed on this agreement. After the course, the ratio of strongly agreed respondents increased to 69 percent. However, pair t-test result is not significant ($p\text{-value}=0.361>0.05$) at five percent level of significance.

4.3.5. Recognized Mistake and Correct Them

The fifth question was whether vipassanā technique helps practitioners recognize their mistake and improve upon them. Before the course, about 45 percent respondents strongly agreed on it. After the course, the ratio of strongly agreed respondents sharply increased to 83 percent. Pair t-test $p\text{-value}=0.008<0.05$ which is significant at 5 percent level of significance. Which means vipassanā practice positively changes inmate's perception that it helps them to recognize their mistake and timely correct on them.

4.3.6. Improvement in Physical and Mental Health

In the sixth question whether 'vipassanā technique helps meditators physical and mental health', the percentage share of strongly agreed respondents has increased from 44 percent to 66 percent after vipassanā practice. To check the validity by using pair t-test also justified the result at five percent level of significance ($p\text{-value}=0.009<0.05$). This means that after vipassanā practice inmates could improve their physical and mental health.

4.3.7. Reduction of Anger, Stress, Irritation and Anxiety

In the seventh question respondents were asked whether vipassanā technique could help to reduce their anger, stress, irritation and anxiety. Before the course the percentage share of strongly agreed participants on this statement were about 49 percent which sharply increased to 80 percent after the course. Statistical test result also justified the fact, $p\text{-value}=0.004<0.05$, which is significant. This means, vipassanā practice could help to reduced anger, stress, irritation and anxiety of the inmates.

4.3.8. Improve Relation with Friends and Others

In the eighth question, whether vipassanā technique could be helpful to improve relationship with friends and others, the percentage share of strongly agreed respondents slightly increased from about 42 percent to 54 percent after the course. However, pair t-test result doesn't support this agreement $p\text{-value}=0.14>0.05$ which is not significant at five percent level of significance. It means percentage analysis shows that vipassanā has helped meditators to improve relationship with

friends and others however test result could not be justified.

4.3.9. Jail Reform Technique

Finally, respondents were also asked whether vipassanā meditation could be used as jail reform technique for inmates as well as administrative staffs. Before the course about 60 percent respondents strongly agreed on this statement. The ratio of strongly agreed respondents increased to 79 percent after the course. Test result also support this fact $p\text{-value}=0.027<0.05$ which is significant. This means, it can be agreed that vipassanā technique could be used as jail reform measure.

Overall, response of the participants after the course is sharply increased in all nine questions. No one said disagree and strongly disagree. Even if in statistical test (pair t-test) result is seen significant in seven questions. Hence, based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that vipassanā technique is useful to its participants. Regular vipassanā practitioners could develop positive and optimistic attitude, recognize their mistakes in day to day life, correct themselves and reduce their anger, irritation, stress, and anxiety as well as improve their physical and mental health. In addition, they could improve relationship with friends and others like jail administration. And, this technique could be used as jail reform program.

4.3.10. Subjective Remarks and Administrative Response

In the tenth day of the course there was a feedback sharing program from participating inmates to jail administration. Besides the course conducting teacher and other people- like volunteers including researcher, other teachers, Director General of Department of Prison Management, Chief District Officer of Lalitpur District, Jailer and other staffs of Nakkhu jail were there to listen from participating inmates. On the occasion, Director General asked participating inmates what they felt after vipassanā. A 52-year inmate who came there because of a murder case, said that before vipassanā course he thought somebody forcefully sent him to jail. Now, he changed his mind and realized that it was because of his deeds. Nobody else is responsible to send him here. He felt calmer, peaceful and happy during the course. Another inmate who came there for a banking case expressed that he would like to express his gratitude to who filed the case against him and compelled him to go to jail. Because of him, he could learn vipassanā. Another inmate, who was sentenced there for murder case realized that it was a great mistake to murder someone. Now he regrets and commits himself not to repeat the crime. Now he wants completely change and forget his desire for vengeance. In the post questionnaire form, most of the subjective remarks fall along the same lines. During the course, they feel physical pain at first, after 2-3 days they examined themselves, they feel peaceful, calm and relaxed. Most of them thank the Vipassanā Center and Jail Administration and also request further courses for other jail inmates. Similarly, in their responses, 27 out of 35 said they are fully satisfied from the course and rest of eight participants responded as satisfied. No one marked that they were not satisfied.

The researcher also participated in the follow up group sitting event which was organized after 21 days of the completion of

the course. Out of 35, one inmate went back to his home, there were 34 inmates, most of them said they are continuing vipassanā practice and it helps them stay peaceful in prison, reduces their anger and irritation. They feel happier than before.

Secretary of Home affairs was there to wish the participants before beginning the course and he expressed his commitment to organize the course for the well-being of the inmates⁵. After listening the experience from participant inmates, Director General, Department of Prison Management was satisfied and assured that vipassanā program for jail inmates will continue as a reform program⁶. Seeing bright and smiling faces of participating inmates, Jailer of Nakkhu also expressed his satisfaction.

5. Discussion

As already discussed in literature review and empirical findings, vipassanā meditation practice works to bring positive changes in behavior among inmates. In general, most of the previous studies highlighted that vipassanā practice could be helpful to reduce stress, anxiety and depression which ultimately improves the inmate's mental health [3, 6, 10]. Another study further emphasized that it could be implemented as government reform program [14]. In addition, vipassanā practice could bring positive change in behavior of the inmates so that it would be easier for them to stay in jail and support for easy reintegration into their society after they return home [6, 13]. In essence, the main message from the result of previous studies and this study are similar to some extent, however, the research framework and case of this study is quite different from others. Despite the methodological difference, this study is also found vipassanā practice helps inmates to purify their mind, development of positive and optimistic attitude, improvement in physical as well as mental health, reduction of anger, stress and anxiety which are similar with previous studies. Singh [14] further emphasized that vipassanā courses in prisons are conducted as government reform programs whereas, this study tries to justify that vipassanā programs could be used as a tool for jail reform.

The first Vipassanā jail course in Nepal was started in 1998 and, as of mid-July 2022, seven prison courses have been conducted. 221 inmates of four prisons- Nakkhu, Biratnagar, Bhimphedi and Chitwan and two officials from Bhimphedi prison successfully completed the courses. Two participants who left the Bhimphedi prison course because of their health on May 2022, again joined in July and completed the course.⁷ There is growing demand of vipassana courses from inmates at Nakkhu, Bhimphedi and other various Prisons⁸. While other studies highlighted the positive effects of vipassanā meditation on inmates, this study also found that

this technique is more appropriate and beneficial for inmates to survive in jail environment and it also helps in reintegration after they return home. Since there is increasing demand of the vipassanā courses in Nepalese prisons, the technique itself is a cost effective and non-sectarian that's why it could be useful to implement as a prison reform tool. However, empirical findings of this study are based on small sample and a pilot course in Nakkhu Jail Nepal, so generalization of the findings would not be appropriate.

6. Conclusion

Vipassanā practice helps to purify minds and works well in any sector of the society. After 1970's, customized 10-day vipassanā courses as taught by S N Goenka became widely popular not only in India and Nepal but also among a larger population of the west. When this course was piloted in Central Jail Jaipur of India in 1975 for jail inmates, it quickly expanded in other jails in India as well as jails of various countries. In Nepal, seven vipassanā jail courses have been completed as of mid-July 2022. Still there is growing demand of vipassanā courses and based on demands for the course, jail authority also agreed to expand the courses in various prisons of Nepal. Research study reveals that vipassanā practice helps inmates to purify their mind and improve their behavior so that it would be easier for them to stay in jail environment. Furthermore, it would also help them adjust and reintegrate when they return back to society. Based on the case of Nakkhu Jail course, this study attempts to analyze the effects of vipassanā meditation on inmates. Empirical analysis shows that vipassanā helped Nakkhu Jail inmates to develop positive and optimistic attitudes, reformed their mind and character, helped them recognize their mistake and correct themselves, it reduced anger, stress and anxiety and improved their physical as well as mental health. Pair t-test results also showed significant at five percent level of significance in seven areas out of nine. It can be concluded that jail vipassanā courses showed positive and encouraging results and there is possibility of expansion of the vipassanā program as a jail reform tool in Nepal.

7. Recommendation for Jail Authority

Ministry of Home Affairs also suggests jail authority to carry out the study whether vipassanā meditation could be useful for inmates to reform their behavior. Based on the study and demand of inmates, they could continue vipassanā meditation program [20]. The study also aims to assess whether vipassanā meditation could be used as a jail reform program. There seems to be a higher demand of vipassanā courses in prisons. After the fourth course, about 100 inmates of Nakkhu jail have already requested for vipassanā courses. Regional vipassanā teacher⁹ also showed the commitment from Nepal Vipassanā Center that they are ready to conduct more courses in various location of the country. And if

5 Tek Narayan Pandey, Secretary of Home Affairs, Government of Nepal, personal communication, 28 Feb, 2022.

6 Basudev Ghimire, Director General, Department of Prison Management, personal communication, 11 March, 2022.

7 Madan Thing, Jailer, Bhimphedi Prison, Personal communication, 15 July, 2022.

8 Basudev Ghimire, Director General, Department of Prison Management, personal communication, 11 March, 2022.

9 Dr. Roop Joyati, Regional Vipassana Teacher, Dharmasringha, Personal communication, 11 March, 2022.

government supports it, Nepal Vipassanā Center is ready to operate a permanent center in Jail premises.

Based on the analysis of the study, it is recommended that the application of vipassanā technique as a part of jail reform program would be appropriate. It could be cost effective because vipassanā courses are conducted by the donation from old vipassanā practitioners, there is no need to create excess burden to government. The major difficulty to segregate participants from other inmates is because of the limited spaces and the crowded environment of Jail premises. If Government of Nepal facilitates for providing specific location on jail

premises then, the program can easily be conducted. If government facilitated for permanent centers like in India, then it would be simpler and easier to run the course regularly.

8. Scope for Future Research

This research is based on a single course and a limited sample. It would better to conduct large scale research incorporating more courses conducted in the same place or other courses in other prisons of Nepal. Follow-up study after 6 or 12 months would be better.

Appendix

Table A1. Vipassanā Meditation for Prisoners.

S N	Country	First Vipassanā course	Remarks
1	India	1975	The first course was conducted in Central jail, Jaipur in 1975. The first course in Tihar was held in 1993 for 96 inmates and 23 jail staff. The second course in Tihar was conducted in 1994 January for 300 inmates. Then Vipassanā courses for 1000 inmates was conducted in 1994 April. Later, two permanent Vipassanā centres were opened in Tihar Jail New Delhi and Nasik jail of Maharashtra.
2	Tiwan	1996	In Ming Te Branch Prison for 24 prisoners.
3	United States of America	1997	The first course was conducted in North Rehabilitation Facility (NRF), Seattle, Washington for 11 inmates. Later in San Bruno, California, W. E. Donaldson Correctional Facility, Bessemer, Alabama, The Hamilton Aged and Infirm Correctional Facility and Alabama also conducted the vipassanā courses.
4	United Kingdom	1998	In Lancaster Castle Prison in U. K. for eight inmates.
5	Nepal	1998	The first prison course was conducted in Nakkhu Jail Lalitpur for 20 inmates. As of mid-July 2022, altogether seven courses have been completed in various prisons: Nakkhu, Biratnagar and Bhimphedi.
6	New Zealand	1999	In Te Ihi Tu a rehabilitation centre.
7	Thailand	2002	The first course was conducted in Kolong Pai Prison, Bangkok for 49 male drug offenders and two prison staffs.
8	Mexico	2003	In Penal de Santiaguito.
9	Spain	2003	In Can Brians Jail, near Martorell, Barcelona.
10	Srilanka	2004	The first course began in Bogambara prison, Kendy for 46 inmates (38 male 8 females). Thirteen Vipassanā courses were carried out until 2018.
11	Mongolia	2005	The first course conducted only in female correctional facility for 28 female inmates.
12	Israel	2006	The first course was conducted in Hermon Prison for 13 inmates. Second course was also conducted in same year and third course was conducted in 2007.
13	Mynmar	2008	The first course was conducted in Insein Central Prison, Yangon. There are two permanent Vipassanā centres in Myanmar: Dhamma Rakkhita in Thayawaddi prison and Dhamma Vimutti in Obojil, Mandalay.
14	Canada	2011	In Westmorland Institution in eastern Canada where 16 inmates participated in the course.
15	Colombia	2011	In Reclusion de Mujeres, a women's prison in Pereira, for 35 women.
16	Ireland	2015	In Loughan House in Blacklion, County Cavan.

Source: Vipassanā Research Institute, "Courses in Prisons" access on 2022 March 28, <https://www.vridhamma.org/Courses-in-Prisons>.

Table A2. Summary of Pair Test Results.

Paired Samples Test		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair	Difference	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	post outside world – pre outside world	0.34286	0.59125	0.09994	0.13975	0.54596	3.431	34	0.002
Pair 2	post optimistic attitude - pre-optimistic attitude	0.48571	0.85307	0.1442	0.19267	0.77875	3.368	34	0.002
Pair 3	post mind and character reform - pre mind and character reform	0.77143	1.08697	0.18373	0.39804	1.14482	4.199	34	0
Pair 4	post decline in moral value – pre decline in moral value	0.14286	0.9121	0.15417	-0.17046	0.45618	0.927	34	0.361
Pair 5	post correct mistake – pre correct mistake	0.34286	0.72529	0.1226	0.09371	0.592	2.797	34	0.008
Pair 6	post physical and mental health - pre-physical and mental health	0.42857	0.9167	0.15495	0.11367	0.74347	2.766	34	0.009
Pair 7	post stress anger and anxiety – pre stress anger and anxiety	0.45714	0.88593	0.14975	0.15281	0.76147	3.053	34	0.004
Pair 8	post relation reform – pre relation reform	0.25714	1.01003	0.17073	-0.08982	0.6041	1.506	34	0.141
Pair 9	post prison reform – pre prison reform	0.27273	0.6742	0.11736	0.03367	0.51179	2.324	32	0.027

Table A3. Sample Questionnaire.

Name: _____ Age: _____ Marital Status: _____
Level of Education: _____ Previous address: _____ Offence committed: _____

S.N.	Questions	Responses				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	To improve the outside world, I must first improve myself through self-purification					
2	Vipassanā has helped me to develop a positive and optimistic attitude.					
3	Vipassanā has the capacity to reform human mind and character.					
4	Polluted mind is the root cause of many problems.					
5	Vipassanā has inspired and enabled me to recognize my mistakes and improve upon them.					
6	Because of Vipassanā, my general health, and in particular, my mental health has improved.					
7	Vipassanā has reduced my anger, stress, irritation and anxiety.					
8	Vipassanā has helped me improve relations with friends and others.					
9	Vipassanā meditation could be used as one of the Jail reform technique (for inmates and jail personnel)					

In Post Questionnaire

10. Level of Satisfaction after the course:

(a) Fully Satisfy (b) Satisfy (c) Not Satisfy

11. Subjective feedback/experience sharing: _____

Table A4. Vipassanā prison courses in Nepal as of July 2022.

S.N.	Course Date	Place	Number of Participants	Remarks
1	Nov 1998	Nakkhu	20	All inmates completed the course.
2	Aug 1999	Biratnagar	29	All inmates completed the course.
3	March 2000	Nakkhu	23	All inmates completed the course.
4	Feb 2022	Nakkhu	35	All inmates completed the course.
5	May 2022	Bhimphedi	44	28 inmates, jailer and one administrative staff completed the course, 14 inmates leave the course because of their health problem.
6	June, 2022	Bhimphedi	50	Out of 50 participants, 10 inmates from Chitwan Prison and 40 from Bhimphedi Prison participate the course. Eight inmates leave the course because of health problem and 42 completed the course.
7	July 2022	Bhimphedi	47	Out of 47 participants, one inmate leaves the course because of health problem and 46 completed the course

Source: Nepal Vipassana Center, DharmaSringa, Kathmandu and Bhimphedi Prison Makawanpur.

References

- [1] Auty, Katherine M. (2021), "Meditation in Prison", Farias, Miguel, David Brazier and Mansur Lalljee (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of Meditation*, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, pp. 820-837.
- [2] Bedi, Kiran (2002), *Its Always Possible: Transforming on the Largest Prisons in the World*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers (p) Ltd, pp. 297-318.
- [3] Chandiramani, Kishor, S. K. Verma and P. L. Dhar (1995), *Psychological Effects of Vipassanā on Tihar Jail Inmates*, Igatpuri: Vipassanā Research Institute (VRI), pp. 17-18.
- [4] Goenka, S. N. (2003), *Meditation Now: Inner Peace Through Inner Wisdom* (A Collection Commemorating Mr. Goenka's Tour of North America April to August 2002.), Igatpuri: VRI.
- [5] Goenka, S. N. (2011), *The Great Buddha's Noble Teaching: The Origin and Spread of Vipassanā*, Igatpuri: VRI.
- [6] Himmelstein, Samuel (2011), "Meditation Research: The State of the Art in Correctional Settings", *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 55 (4) pp. 646-661.
- [7] Kela, Akanksha (2003), "Vipassanā Meditation: its Role in Prison Reform and Reintegration of Prisoners into Society", (Capstone Paper), <https://www.vridhamma.org/research/Role-of-Vipassana-in-Prison-reform-%26-reintegration-of-prisoners-into-society>.
- [8] Kumar, Sri Tarsem (1994), "Vipassanā Meditation Courses in Tihar Jail", *Vipassanā its Relevance to the Present World* (Seminar Paper Collection), Igatpuri: VRI, pp. 56-57.
- [9] Perelman, Abigail M., Sarah L. Miller, Carl B. Clements, Amy Rodriguez, Kathryn Allen and Ron Cavanaugh (2012), "Meditation in a Deep South Prison: a Longitudinal Study of the Effects of Vipassanā", *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 51, pp. 176-198.
- [10] Phillips, Jenny (2008), *Letters from the Dhamma Brothers: Meditation Behind Bars*, Washington DC: Pariyatti Press, pp. 199-204.
- [11] Raja, M. (1994) "Vipassanā Courses in Prisons," *Pagoda Seminar*, Igatpuri: VRI, pp. 97-99.
- [12] Ronel, Natti, Noa Frid and Uri Timor (2013), "The practice of Positive Criminology: a Vipassana Course in Prison", *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 57 (2), pp. 133-153.

- [13] Singh, Ram (1994), "Vipassanā in Jails: an Historical Review", *Vipassanā its Relevance to the Present World* (Seminar Paper Collection), Igatpuri: VRI, pp. 33-39.
- [14] Singh, Ram (1997), "Vipassanā in Government: an Effective Instrument for Change and Reform," VRI Series No. 101, Igatpuri: VRI, pp. 2-3.
- [15] Tuladhar, Kuldharma Ratna (1997), "The Spread of Vipassanā in Nepal", *Pagoda Seminar*, Igatpuri: VRI, pp. 53-54.
- [16] Vipassanā Research Institute (2006), *Records of Emperor Ashoka [Samrat Ashok ke Avilakh]*, Igatpuri: VRI, pp. 50-53.
- [17] Vipassanā Research Institute (2005), *Central Jail Jaipur: the First Jail course (kendriya Karagar Jaipur: Vipassanā ka pratham jail siwir)*, Igatpuri: VRI.
- [18] Vipassanā Research Institute (2011), *Supreme Ascetic Mr. Ram Singh [Param Tapaswi Shree Ram singhjee]*, Igatpuri: VRI.
- [19] Vora, Raghuvir L. (1994), "Jail Course and Vipassanā", *Vipassanā its Relevance to the Present World* (Seminar Paper Collection), VRI, pp. 40-43.
- [20] Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) Nepal, "About Vipassanā Course Operation"(Letter issued for Nepal Vipassanā Center, Ref. No. 141 Issue Date: 2078/09/27 [11 Jan 2022], Decision Date 2078/09/26 [Secretary Level]).
- [21] Vipassanā Research Institute (VRI), "Vipassana in Prisons-History and Spread" <https://www.vridhamma.org/Vipassana-in-Prisons-History-and-Spread>, 2022 March 28.
- [22] Nepal Vipassanā Center, "Vipassanā Meditation", <https://np.dhamma.org/en/about/>, 2022 April 07.