



## Empowering Transgenders Through Self Help Groups in Tamil Nadu

### KEYWORDS

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### Introduction

Gender is a pervasive facet in all aspects of one's life. Socially and biologically gender is pre-determined into two categories, Male or Female. Gender is a distinct category that describes particular human characteristics. The most important thing about gender is that its meaning is created by society and people are expected to behave and express themselves in certain ways that are consistent with the socially pre-determined gender role associated with their sex. Unfortunately, because of the intimate connection that our society has made between gender and sex, the important distinction between the two categories has been blurred. Gender is very much about how people perceive us, and our behavior (personality, identity and self-expression) determines how we will be "perceived". How we behave though, depends greatly on how we are influenced as we grow up, as well as on our experiences as adults. Gender identity is understood to refer to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.

### Social Phenomenon of Transgender in India

Human cells have twenty third pair that determines the gender. The female eggs contain only X chromosome which gives feminine characters, whereas the male sperms contain either Y chromosome or X chromosome but only the Y chromosome gives Masculine features. During the formation of a normal DNA, XX pairs form female and XY form Male. In some abnormal cases the 'X' chromosome in the ovary multiples or the sperm releases excess of 'X' or 'Y' chromosome. The child born with this abnormality is genitally identified as male but has the characteristic of both male and female (Hermaphrodite). Thus, a child born as a male and in the course of time transformed, as a female, is called "Transgender".

### Social-Economic and Political Status of Transgender in India

#### Transgender in India

The Transgender community in India, represented largely by hijras and kothis, has long borne the brunt of male chauvinistic social prejudices and draconian laws that criminalized alternative sexuality. This is despite the fact that India has a 4,000 year history of 'third gender' and eunuch culture. Only if they enjoy basic human rights, social and political, can their self esteem grow. In India, there are approximately one million Transgender people and they are looked down upon and they are removed from society.

The vast majority live in slums with limited job opportunities. Their basic survival, sources of income and everything are removed and they are forced to a pathetic life. Generally most of the Transgenders are engaged in sex work and begging. Transgender in Mumbai plays a main role in all the rituals from birth till death, because the people in Mumbai deem it a boon to be blessed by the Transgender and they readily pay whatever the Transgender demands. Apart from this there are many other sources for the Transgender to earn a living. They usually begin shops, do some menial household works for the Jains and help them in shopping, while most of them are sex workers.

### Transgenders in Tamil Nadu:

In Tamil Nadu, there are approximately 60,000 Transgender people and their socio economic and political status is very poor and deplorable. Most of the Transgenders live as a group with a strong bonding. Males who identify themselves as female join the Aravaani community. In a family when the Transgenders are identified they would be forced to leave their home and society was equally unwelcoming and very few of them are accepted by their families and hence they often associate among themselves even if living in different places. Those detected very early are discarded by the family and are picked up by the transsexuals who raise them as their own. It's because of the social stigma attached to them Transgenders are not able to get any conventional jobs. The most common sight is to see them clapping their hands and begging in streets, trains and buses. They may swoon on the house that has a new born and would go only after they take money from the parents of the child. Some even indulge into sex work and petty crimes. Most of them are usually residing in slum areas and infrastructure in their houses is very poor and they are living in small houses without bathroom and toilet facilities. Often the number of Transgender persons living in a house is more than the capacity of the house. People generally do not prefer to have Transgender persons as tenants and so rental accommodation is hard to get. Transgender persons also complain about facing ridicule and insult in public places. Derogatory remarks, alluding to their sexual orientation, are directed at them. Most of them are beggars and/or sex workers.

### Micro Finance Programme for Transgenders in Tamil Nadu

To empower Transgenders and marginalised women, a microfinance programme was launched by Tamil Nadu TAI Viluthugal Federation (TAIVF) under which 16 groups were given a loan of ₹.50,000 each. To ensure long-term impact and sustainability, any programme for the promotion of Transgenders and marginalised women groups to stand on their feet, has to make self-reliant and help take charge

of their lives. The State Government has initiated several steps to improve the quality of lives of Transgender community like issuing ration cards and voter identity cards. So far 451 land pattas have been distributed among the Transgender community. Since its formation last year TAIVF has been working on the microfinance project and has enrolled around 30,000 people. The members held cultural shows to build a sizeable corpus. A total of ₹.2 million has been mobilised ₹.8,00,000 was distributed to 16 groups - each getting ₹.50,000. The groups in turn would lend money to their members to carry on an economic activity so that the loan and the interest could be paid back to TAIVF. While the Federation will lend money to the Self-Help Groups at 12 percent per annum interest, the members will have to borrow at 24 percent rate. The rates are far less than what is charged by other microfinance organisations. Having observed Jan 18 as 'Transgender Day' for the past six years, the community has now petitioned the government to officially recognize and dedicate the day as Transgender Day.



Member Engaged in Beauty Parlor



Member Involved in Mobile Fruits Shop

#### Empowering Transgender through Self Help Groups in Tamil Nadu

It is possible to generate employment opportunities for Transgenders to undertake initiatives to do particularly economic activities and social upgrading. Its aims are enhancement of their skills, capacity building, gaining self-confidence and participating in decision-making activities after joining SHGs. There is necessity to understand and analysis the status of employment for Transgenders. Their employment generation activity through SHGs had added

new dimensions and was hoped that they had been contributing positively in the national economy. It is expected that employment generation of Transgenders through SHGs had created desire to succeed and desire for autonomy, self confidence and self reliance, risk-taking and hope of success, hard work habits, enhancement of the economic status, knowledge, skills, innovativeness and leadership.

Transgender Self Help Group is otherwise termed as "Special Group". Unlike Non-Transgender Self Help Groups. They can function even with 5 members. The President, Treasurer and Secretary are responsible for maintaining the accounts in 7 Ledgers. Economic Assistance along with Revolving Fund is allotted to them. This scheme provides them with ₹.25,000 which should be repaid fully without any installment due. As the name indicates, the scheme benefits them for 6 times with ₹.10,000 subsidies. And, more importantly, it would serve as an example for other members of the Transgender community to take up economic activities. Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Dr.J.Jayalithaa, has announced that the Thirunangaigal (Transgenders) Self Help Groups would be formed and financially supported with an upper ceiling of ₹.15 Lakhs for undertaking livelihood and economic activities. As on 30.11.2011, district wise Transgenders and Self Help Groups formed in Tamil Nadu are given in table.

#### District wise Transgenders and Self Help Groups formed in Tamil Nadu during 2010-2012

Sl.No	Districts	No. of Transgenders Registered	ID Card Issued	No. of SHGs Formed
1.	Ariyalur	30	10	2
2.	Chennai	578	465	6
3.	Coimbatore	332	281	13
4.	Cuddalore	180	108	9
5.	Dharmapuri	65	42	3
6.	Dindigul	150	34	5
7.	Erode	114	98	5
8.	Kanchipuram	119	98	4
9.	Kanniyakumari	45	31	3
10.	Karur	69	29	5
11.	Krishnagiri	60	26	2
12.	Madurai	230	136	6
13.	Nagapattinam	44	28	5
14.	Namakkal	123	82	10
15.	Nilgiris	420	0	3
16.	Perambalur	52	19	6
17.	Pudukkottai	12	8	1
18.	Ram-nathapuram	104	34	2
19.	Salem	157	115	5
20.	Sivaganga	32	27	2
21.	Tiruvannamalai	122	64	3
22.	Tirunelveli	125	32	5
23.	Thanjavur	76	40	3
24.	Theni	125	78	5
25.	Tiruvallur	222	222	10
26.	Tiruvarur	14	14	1
27.	Tiruppur	30	23	2
28.	Thoothukudi	68	37	5
29.	Tiruchirappalli	162	50	4
30.	Vellore	180	123	6
31.	Villupuram	160	118	11
32.	Virudhnagar	116	83	10
Total		4,316	2,555	162

Source: Directorate of Social Welfare Office, Chennai

#### Conclusion

The Transgender community in Tamil Nadu is leading a highly deplorable life and experiencing all sorts of inhu-

man treatments meted out by the civil society. They are disowned by their families, discarded and condemned by the society. Their economic condition is very poor and social status is at very low ebb and there is no political party or group to take care of them. At present the Transgender persons are mostly engaged in illegal prostitution and shameful begging to earn something for their livelihood. Of late the popular Government and charitable institutions are taking care of them and are taking some welfare measures and activities to uplift the Transgender persons economic and social actually which will pave the way in future for their political empowerment.

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