



## PIONEERING INCLUSIVITY: THE TRANSGENDER MOVEMENT AND GOVERNANCE IN TAMILNADU

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### **Abstract**

Tamilnadu, for the past 6 decades was majorly ruled over by Dravidian parties. The role of Congress and its contributions are never underestimated. Kamraj's the rule then Chief Minister of Tamilnadu was very much applauded in the sector of Education, Agriculture and Industry. But Cinema Industry influenced the people of Tamilnadu much greater, than the welfare policies. The role played by Annadurai, Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran, and Jayalalitha is incredible and all of these personalities have had a good background in the field of cinema industry. May be it is hypothesised that the background of cinema, made the former Chief Ministers to attempt take good actions for the welfare of the Transgender community.

### **Introduction**

Tamilnadu is also the first state in India to make free Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS) in the Government Hospitals. Although transgender population got majority place and space in the Northern and Western parts of India, things always worked good for the transgender people in Tamilnadu. In terms of all basic rights, Tamilnadu governance stands as a beacon of tower and power which is being recently realized and recognized by other States in India. Albeit of high level of population in North and Western states of India, Tamilnadu in its activism and movement topped all other states as such mentioned elsewhere in this report. The aim of the transgender movement in Tamilnadu is to annihilate the wrong mind set up of the common humans and also to relieve the people from all sorts of exploitation, abuses, assaults, harassments and other obscene activities. The movement started by number of transgender emphasised for great degree of change i.e., inclusive change in the stratified society. Number of movements started by transgender organized different kind of sensitization and as well as awareness programmes in order to make the people acquainted with positive and remediable issues of the transgender community. The ultimate motto is welfare schemes and reforms which transgender received only in the year 2008. Although Modern states are Welfare states, vote bank politics and power aggrandized governance plays pivotal role by which transgender community is absolutely marginalized one.

### **Inbuilt Issues**

The schemes and policies thus introduced in the legislature passed for next step i.e., implementation. The then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi once remarkably made a statement that "for each and every rupee of government allocation, people are receiving only 15 paisa". Thus it is to the assumption of intellectuals that rest of the 85 paisa goes into the hands of political and permanent executives. The greatest ever threat for the strong fabric of democracy is none other than corruption. The corruption practices also play a deleterious role in the sector of transgender community which may be considered as a shame of the Nation. That said, initially the transgender' name was rephrased as 'Aravanis' by an IPS officer Ravi in 1998 during the "koovagam festival" which occurs periodically. It draws attraction and attention from all corners of the world and astonishingly more number of transgender are participating in this mythological event. In the greatest epic, "Mahabharata", Arjuna and others to win in the war, his son Aravan has to marry a girl. Aravan is a charismatic personality with all 36



“Samuthrika Lakshanan”, the holistic traits of a good male. But the fate is if he is married, at once he will be dead. Knowing fully well, Krishna took avatar of a girl and married Aravan and at last won in the Great War.

This myth served as an anecdote for transgender and they perform ‘rope function’ and the post death rituals like mourning, weeping the death of Aravan. These kinds of “post death “rituals happen in “koovagam” in Ulundurpet Taluk, Villupuram district. The place is renowned for transgender, since they consider it as a sanctified one in their life.

The events occur every year in “chitra poornima” a special day in the Indian calendar in which all transgender including effeminate, gay men, cross dressers, queer community, cis gender participate and grace the occasion. The event also comes across its limitations, such as security and other breach of human rights. The harassment faced by transgender is huge enough and high level of security is being beefed up for in order to control the situation. The local people, especially lodge owners hesitated to provide boarding facilities for transgender. Initially Ravi, IPS took charge of situation and convinced the owners and other authorities to provide the needed arrangements. The civil society and individual initiatives plays and should play a very pro-active role in doing welfare for the transgender community. It is this vacuum, which kindles transgender to develop aversive attitude against the male community.

The Aravani welfare board created in 2008, made a great impact in the lives of transgender community. The programmes and schemes were very well received by the beneficiaries and that too with full media coverage. Media is the fourth pillar of democratic governance. Media in Tamilnadu always supports transgender people and its coverage of documentaries reached all corners of Tamilnadu by spreading out awareness. In such a same way and manner transgender people were affected with rights violations in Tamilnadu. They were mocked, ridiculed by police and hoodlums /extortionists who keep this community for running errands. Recently in tamilnadu, a mutilated body of transgender was located in the river side of Ulundurpet. Without any protection and support from anybody, these people were humiliated, harassed, stripped and even murdered for various known and unknown reasons. Apart from right violations, the stigma of the society is the cause of the concern. The changes in the behaviour and in physique made other people to mock against the victimized community. The way in which they are discriminated is another sector to be pondered.

Anywhere in the society, they are not seen as normal humans and all governmental measures are refuted for them, since they belong to neither of the gender. Another cause of concern is the ‘transition period’ of transgender people. The ‘transition era’ is such a one which is never tolerated inside the family. Obviously, they are forced to leave the house and make their own ‘hide outs’. Mostly the rural people prefer forest area in which unprecedented harassment may occur at any time which may end in drastic destiny for the transgender people. Family is the primary place of denial of basic rights for transgender. Parents initially could not understand the behaviour and physical changes. If it is in urban sector, we may expect some sort of tolerance, understanding and patience. But in rural areas, this kind of ‘Tolerance culture’ is not at all prevailing and often they were beaten by their parents.

The educated parents hesitate to allow transgender to live with them. This causes a severe psychological anxiety and disorder in the minds of transgender and made them to evict their houses. A lot number of transgender migrated to North and Western part of India for “fearless transition” and to lead peaceful life. Because in North and Western parts of India, people used to get blessings from transgender, since transgender are blessed by Rama in Ramayana. Other transgender who are



uneducated and poor opt for street dancing, begging and sexual work activities. The sex work of transgender made them under illegal category and that is the reason for getting misused, abused by police people. Also in sex work, most of the transgender will not disclose their real health condition to the co-partner. Even if they are inflicted with HIV/STD, they used to have sex with the people and that makes the people to be against the transgender.

After realizing the truth, almost they are beaten by the co-partners and others in the public places which increase the negative impression against the male gender. Transgender have a soft corner towards female gender, females don't understand the physical and biological nature of the same. Female gender always thinks them as male and keeps distance in order to sustain their safety.

### **Activism in Tamilnadu**

In 2009 Tamilnadu government took great efforts to locate the real population of transgender in Tamilnadu. And it was identified as 2683 in tamilnadu. But the fact finding team couldn't identify the exact population, since most of the people may be in the transition era. The recent survey located the population as 3,300 in Tamilnadu. This miniscule population or community doesn't do anything with the formation of the government and that is the cause of irresponsible attitude of the government towards the transgender people. The basic rights are refuted, denied or exploited by the fellow humans in multi-manner. Their rightful life in the modern society is under severe threat and unanswered which has to be answered and accounted by the government machinery. The poor economic condition and unsafe society make transgender to indulge in sex work. Sex work is being exploited by other parts of protective agency in different manner.. In 2004, in Tamilnadu, Madras High Court delivered a strong and landmark verdict of providing voting rights for transgender for the first time in India. The High Court said that transgender community may choose male category or female category to utilize their voting rights. Also the movements and associations gained momentum after this verdict and claimed their rights for different kind of Citizenship Documents including Ration cards and Applications for Passport. The action aid also conducted a programme in which the rights of transgender were discussed. There were 36 cases heard by the committee and located the causes of the plight of transgender people. The reasons are ill treatment, isolation and transition of physical component.

In 2010 August, transgender all over Tamilnadu organized Dharna against AB organization. Almost all the transgender throughout Tamilnadu participated in the standing Dharna. The allegations were corruption and misbehaviour, humiliation by the concerned head of the organization. Also the head was discouraging (SRS) operation which was vehemently condemned and agitated by the transgender community. The issue took a giant momentum, when media focussed the issue in a magnified way. Transgender considers media as their own medium, since it highlights the sensitive news and occurrence throughout Tamilnadu. NGOs and CBOs use media as a bridging component for spreading awareness and sensitization related transgender community. Also beauty contests are organized through the publicity of media. The concept of media comprises of print, audiovisual, electronic and mobile oriented technological devices. Media is always close and nearer to transgender community. The Self Help Group Scheme and Income Generation Group (IGP) promoted a lot of savings and propelled transgender for starting small scale industries and sustain them to self-stand in the modern society. By these schemes most of the uneducated transgender were protected. However there are more transgender who still pursue sex work instead of having the aforesaid welfare schemes.

Moreover transgender ID cards was issued by the board in order to prevent the pretenders who intend to intrude and enjoy the benefits of transgender. Health insurance was also assured by the welfare board



of Tamilnadu which took hard endeavour to implement the policy at the earliest. Most of the transgender as per the survey conducted are affected by ill-health conditions. And during the sex work, they are inflicted with cutting wounds and bruises by the co-partners. The health insurance assured them the expected finance and shows a safer heaven for the deprived community. If this is the case in one place, the educated with tolerance and patience work in CBO, NGOs' and as an independent units. The autonomous and volunteer organizations also provide opportunities for transgender to develop themselves. Most of the uneducated and illiterates work as daily wage labourers and in agricultural sector with the help of IGP. They use to rear cow and turn themselves into milk vendors. Moreover transgender also work as vegetable vendors, in petrol banks, tailoring Unit, snack stalls, and others go for begging and as sex workers. The educated are known to be free minded and uneducated are deprived because of joblessness.

### Conclusion

Thus transgender in Tamilnadu comparatively exercise and enjoy much amount of benefits and rights. Other states are looking Tamilnadu as a model state which strive hard for the development and emancipation of transgender community. The citizenship documents, voting rights, scholarship, employment opportunities, right to passports, health insurance schemes are all good and noble initiatives implemented by the government of Tamilnadu. However the stigma towards transgender was not changed. The crimes against this deprived community are not at all dwindled. Tamilnadu acted as a pioneer for so many initiatives and organized movements. "Samathuvapuram" is one of the unique schemes which is established to get rid of complexities of caste system. In the same manner innovative cum constructive schemes are always welcomable for the flourishing development of transgender people in Tamilnadu. Political will is the need of the hour for the all-embracing development of transgender community.

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