

“LEGAL AID CAMP: SENSITIZATION OF SOCIETY TOWARDS THIRD GENDER PERSONS”

*(Report on the event conducted in Chandigarh
on 6th June, 2015)*

Abstract: This event was conducted by two para-legal volunteers from Legal Aid Centre, S.L.S.-Noida. Firstly, the villagers of Khadda Alisher, Kansal and Naya Gaon were informed about the pathetic life that the persons belonging to third gender are forced to live because of the restrictions imposed upon them by the society. Then, the participants were informed about the ‘rights’ that the ‘law’ in India provides to such persons. They were further informed about their moral duties towards such persons.

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I. Concept Note

There seems to be no reason why the third gender (TGs) must be denied basic human rights. It is time to make the society aware towards these 'rights' so as to ensure a dignified life of these people. The Legal Aid Center of Symbiosis Law School Noida conducted a one day legal aid camp on **Sensitizing the Society Towards Third Gender** in villages around Chandigarh, namely *Khuda Ali Sher, Kansal and Naya Gaon*. It gave an opportunity to members of the Centre to reach out to people, spread awareness and contribute their bit towards the society, and at the same time, gain practical experience.

Almost all the rural Indians are God fearing people; therefore the idea was to deliver the message of equality by association of TGs with God. The plan was to gather the people and tell them stories of Rama sanctioning the power of blessing to TGs in *Ramayana, Krishana and Mohini, Ardhnarishwar* etc. Also, stories of the agony faced by them were to be put across through pamphlets and posters. We also planned to tell them about the various researches that show being a TG is not a physical or mental ailment. Later, we were to aware the village population about TG's rights and other implications of the SC judgment.

We knew that the people of the village were agitated with TGs and it would be a very difficult to change the mindset of the village population towards the TGs. So we had to come up with an innovative yet radical idea about this issue. The idea was to tell people that once the TGs started earning a living for themselves, the problem of giving and taking will end for once and for all. This could only be done by first, admitting them to the educational institutions, second, providing them with employment opportunities and third, providing them with equal status in the society.

The places that were chosen were three villages in and around Chandigarh and Mohali. These three villages are very near to each other. The main programme was held in *Khuda Ali Sher* and in rest of the villages pamphlets were pasted on the walls and put up on the notice board at the community centers. The pamphlets and posters were in Hindi for the easy understanding of the locals.

II. Objectives

The primary objective was to create in the mind of the people a sense of respect for the TGs.

The secondary objectives were as follows:

- To make people aware of 'rights' of the Third Gender.
- To make people aware of the implications of the Supreme Court judgment: ***National Legal Services Authority V. Union of India.***
- To make people aware of the pain, agony and trauma faced by TGs every day.
- To make people aware of the rights of TGs and their duties towards them.

III. Preliminary Preparations

- Made a list of the nearby villages and choose the appropriate place to conduct the programme.
- Meeting few of the villagers in advance to have an idea of their mind-set.
- Meeting some responsible person, like, someone from 'gram-panchayat', to inform them in advance of the scheduled programs.
- Got the pamphlets and posters printed.
- Asked friends to volunteer for the event.

IV. Conducting the Event

We went to the village and asked the locals to join us at an open space, a sort of gathering area in the village. We were directed towards a community hall which was near to a Gurudwara. A few people were already sitting in the hall, while we asked other people sitting in and around the Gurudwara to come there. We pasted a few posters and introduced ourselves.

We started with narrating the story of Rama sanctioning the power of blessing on the third gender people. As and when we completed the story, we were asked to go and read the notice board outside the community center (refer to the picture with notice board, attached with this report). Having read the notice, when we came back, people started telling us how the TGs

have created a problem for the poor village people. They said that they would always demand more money than anyone could afford, and if not given, they would say ill about the family and even abuse. Moreover, not one group, but two-three groups would come asking for the money separately. Furthermore, sometimes they come dressed as a TG just for the sake of money.

For us, it was getting very difficult to calm the villagers down, let alone have them listen to us. But once they were calm and started listening to us, they soon agreed that the TGs should be given employment so that this problem of giving and taking could end for once and for all.

We told them that these problems could be easily tackled if we start admitting them to educational institutions, providing them employment opportunity and treating them like equals. We told them how we have to rise ourselves, including the TGs, as a society and make it a better pace for living for all the genders.

V. Response of the Target Population

All of us were surprised to see the agitation amongst the people. The session soon became more of a debate. It became very difficult to convince people to just listen to other side of the story. But once they heard what we had to say, they were convinced that if the government provides these people with jobs and admissions into educational institutions, the problem of giving and taking of money could be done away with for once and for all. Later on, one of the ladies offered to get pamphlets and posters pasted on the walls of the nearby villages and on the notice board of their community center.

VI. Future Plan of Action

We suggest organizing a similar camp but with a different target population - the third gender people themselves. This would help us to know about the day to day problems faced by them and together we can come up with a solution.

VII. Suggestions/Feedback

If the number of volunteers were increased, more population could have been targeted. It was very difficult to gather people.

VIII. Concluding Remarks

Overall it was a great experience. We were surprised to know how people were agitated by the TGs, and they had put up notices regarding them at various places in the village. It was good to know that keeping their frustration aside, they were also curious about their rights. It was good to see them actively participate. The fact that they offered to send the posters to the nearby villages and get them pasted on the walls as well as the community notice board was worth appreciation.









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