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Editor's Note

ARTICLES

M.V. Lakshmi Reddy	Sustainable Library Strategies for Adult and Lifelong Learning	3
M. Chandrasekharan Nair	Learning from One Another - An Extension Education Experience with Stakeholders of Primary Schooling	25
D. Usha Rani V. Sreedevi S. Thulasamma	Quality of Life and Economic Security of the Aged	37
K.O.Kester O.A. Shadare	Will They or Will They Not Change ? The Application of Games Show Method to Attitudinal Change Among Trade Union Leaders in Nigeria	48
Boyede Micheal Ayodeji Adeola B. Ogunrin	Net-working in Distance Education : Problems and Prospects	64
P. Adinarayana Reddy M. Prahalada Reddy	Vocational Training Programmes and Interests Perceptions of the Women	73
K. Vasantha A Swarnalatha	Capacity Building of Aravanis and Kothies	93
Soubam Kiran Singh Khundrakpam Laishram Niranjana Devi	Social Anxiety among the Adults of Imphal East District, Manipur	101
Contributors		107

Capacity Building of Aravanis and Kothies

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Eunuchs – castrated males – have been in existence since the 9th century BC. They are called in Hindi as Hijras, in Punjab and in much of northern India they are known as Khusra or Khoti or Chakka, while in Tamil Nadu they are called aruvani or aravani (Dutt, N., 2006).

Eunuchs – Who They Are?

They are people born with a male body, but with non-male or female gender identity: transgender, transsexual or androgynous people: individual born with ambiguous genitalia or hormonal differences (inter sex) and individuals who have had castration/genital reassignment surgery performed on them. In India, for instance, a recent study of “eunuchs” revealed that only 8% were actually castrated and less than 1% were intersexed (hermaphroditic) (Wikipedia, 2006).

Generally they are physically male or inter sex person who is considered a member of “the third sex”. They usually refer to themselves as female at the language level and become woman by their own will and through life threatening operation and taking several kinds of hormone tablets to change their physical appearance. They prefer to wear sarees and churidhars, which are very common dresses for Indian women. There are at least one million eunuchs in India and their number are steadily growing. They call their goddess as Mathaji and god as Aravan. They have several kinds of performances, poojahs and rituals (Mausi, S., 2006).

Social Status

Most of them live at the margins of society with very low status. Few employment opportunities are available to hijaras, who must often resort to begging or prostitution. Moving bad luck also provides part of their income (Nanda, S., 1998).

Most of the young Eunuches are earning by dancing in marriages, birthday parties, temple festivals etc. Older Eunuchs go shop to shop and beg by clapping daily (Famwal., 2006). Few employment opportunities are available to hijaras, who must often resort to begging or prostitution. Eunuchs are spread all over India, and particularly they live in mega cities. At all cost, they are living without hope of eternal life and they face terrible disease like HIV and all kinds of venereal diseases. Many

of them are dying without proper medical care, as they feel shy to go to doctors. They are among the highest risk groups of people for HIV infection in a country with the second highest rate world wide at five million people (Talwar,R., 1999).

Because of their unaccepted, atrocious behaviors they are not getting any social acceptance at large. But they says "If we don't get jobs that are meant for all human beings, that is what pushes us towards prostitution, dancing, begging and other unusual behaviors. There is no other livelihood for us. Give us an opportunity and see how we blossom" (NESA.,2006).

According to state Government, there are 140,000 "Aravani" in Tamil Nadu but only meager per cent were registered voters. Eunuchs wanted to present themselves in such a way that society will acknowledge them.

Leading a dignified life is a right of each citizen of any community. Development and upliftment of each community will culminate into the right development of the constituency and the nation as well (Narain,S.,2003).

In a move to integrate the eunuchs in the society and in-build their personality, the present study was taken with the following objectives,

Aim of two fold –

- ☞ **To instill a new sense of self-worth and**
- ☞ **To equip the eunuchs with skills they can use to earn a salary.**

METHODOLOGY

More than 100 Aravanis and kothies in Coimbatore districts were approached through Native Medicare Charitable Trust (NGO) who works for the benefits of Aravanis and Kothies. Among them, 45 aravanis and kothies came forward to participate in the study. A questioner was developed to assess the socio economic status of the aravanis and the skill training programmes were planned based on their knowledge and interest.

Results and Discussions

The results and discussion of the study is discussed under the following headings.

- I Profile of aravanis**
- II Capacity building of aravanis**

I Profile of aravanis

The emerged outcomes were discussed under the following headings.

- A. Family background
- B. Educational status
- C. Economic status
- D. Social status

A. Family Background

Table I gives the age and marital status of the selected aravanis and kothies

Table I

Age and Marital Status of the Aravanis and Kothies

S. no	Particulars	Number	Per cent
I	Age group		
1	25-35 yrs	21	47
2	35-45 yrs	19	42
3	> 45 yrs	5	11
II	Marital status		
1	Unmarried	19	42
2	Married	14	31
3	Living together	12	27

About 47 per cent of the aravanis were in the age group of 25-33 years, followed by 35-45 years (42 per cent) and >45 years (11 per cent). When we see their sexual differentiation, by birth, they were males. But within their groups they called each other with their feminine names. Majority (91 per cent) of them dressed like male and nine per cent dressed like females during the training period. Among them 31 per cent were married to women and living with their children. 42 per cent were unmarried and 27 percent were living together with another male member.

58 per cent of the aravanis followed Christianity, 40 per cent followed Hinduism and the remaining 2 per cent were Muslims. But whatever religion they might be, their god and goddess are mostly related with Hinduism and they perform poojahs like Hindus.

B. Educational Status

Table II gives the educational status of the selected aravanis and kothies

Table II

Educational Status of the Selected Aravanis and Kothies

S.no	Educational status	Number	Per cent
1	Degree	5	11
2	Higher secondary school	6	13
3	High school	15	33
4	Middle school	12	27
5	Primary school	4	9
6	Illiterate	3	7

It was happy to note that 93 percent of them were educated and only seven percent were illiterates. Among them, 33 per cent were completed high school education and 11 percent were degree holders.

C.Economic Status

Occupational Status

Fig I predicts the occupational status of the selected aravanis and kothies

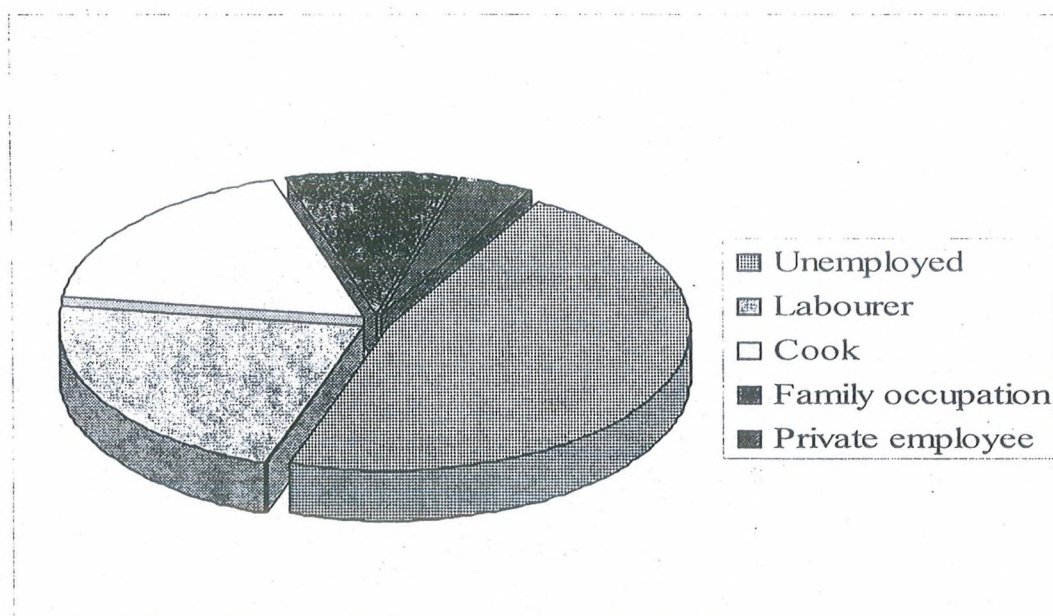


Figure I

Occupational Status of the Selected Aravanis and Kothies

The above figure shows that the economic status of aravanis was found to be very poor. About 47 per cent were found to be unemployed and were struggling to sustain their lives. Greatest percent (22 per cent) were employed as cooks in their local catering service centers. Nine per cent of them were involved in their family business namely bakery and agriculture and only 4 per cent were in private sectors.

Majority (82 per cent) of the aravanis were getting below Rs. 4500 per month for their income followed by Rs.4500 – Rs.7500 per month (18 per cent). Only 38 per cent had own house and the remaining 62 per cent were residing in the rental house.

SOCIAL STATUS

Table III illustrates the social relationships of the selected aravanis and kothies

Table III
Social Relationship of the Selected Aravanis and Kothies

No	Particulars	Number	Per cent
I	Attitudes towards their gender		
1	Superior than others	31	69
2	Inferior than others	14	31
II	Equally treated by the society		
1	Yes	19	42
2	No	26	58
III	Equally treated with other children in the family		
1	Yes	26	40
2	No	19	60
IV	Expectation from the society		
1	Recognition and respect	42	93
2	Love and affection	39	87
3	Employment opportunities	21	47

When we see the social relationship, it was found to be very poor and 58 per cent expressed that they were not accepted by the society and 60 per cent were not getting proper recognition and respect from their family members. They were deprived of love and affection from the dear and near ones. They were not availed any benefits under government schemes.

They were deprived of several rights under civil law and even do not have the right to vote, marry and own a ration card, a passport or a driving license, or claim employment and health benefits. They also put forth their demand that they be allowed to lead an honorable life and stressed the need for availability of basic amenities entitled to other citizens.

The discrimination and violence that hijaras face shows that it is high time that the government, the human rights movement and other educational organisations in the country begin to take this issue with the seriousness it deserves and find solution for their issues.

II Capacity Building of the Aravanis

In order to enhance the capacity of the aravanis and kothies to undertake economic activities or to get employment in the competitive fields, skill training programmes were planned .

A. Skill Training Programmes

Details about the skill training programmes conducted for aravanis and kothies are given in Table IV.

Table IV

Skill Training Programmes given to Aravanis and Kothies

S. no	Name of the skill training programme	Number of participants	Per cent
1	Catering and canteen management	22	49
2	Cell phone service and maintenance	9	20
3	Basic tailoring	7	16
4	Basic Computer application	5	11
5	Herbal beauty therapy	2	4

Table IV visibly predicts their field of interest. Based on the felt needs the training programmes were organized. Best part (49 per cent) were trained in catering and canteen management, followed by cell phone service and maintenance (20 per cent), basic tailoring (16 per cent), basic computer application (11 per cent) and Herbal beauty therapy (4 per cent).

B. Impact of the Training

The impact of the training programme was evaluated six months after the completion of the training. The results were given on the next page:-

No matter what attitude individuals have towards aravanis, it definitely believes to be true that when they get opportunity to shape their livelihood, they will mould their life in a socially accepted way. This was proved by them through the skill training programmes organized.

The following table V obviously illustrates the positive impact of the training programmes. Greatest per cent of the aravanis applied the learned skills in a constructive way to built their future in a respective manner.

TABLE V

Impact of the Training Programmes

S. no	Name of the skill training programme	Number employed	Per cent
1	Catering and canteen management	11	24.4
2	Basic tailoring	7	15.5
3	Basic Computer application	3	6.7
4	Cell phone service and maintenance	2	4.4

After getting training in various fields, 51 per cent of trainees were got decent employment in their respective fields such as catering service centre (24.4 per cent), dress designing centre (15.5 per cent), computer centre, (6.7 per cent) and cell phone service centre.

Conclusion

The training programmes proved their thirst to learn new things and their exertion to establish their identity. The post evaluation results showed that the skill training programmes certainly brought improvement in their overall personality. They assured that they would shape the future in socially accepted way with the newly acquired skills and work for the development of their community.

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