

Minorities

Kiran Children of Less er God

'I was known as the badtameez Khawaja Sira (ill-mannered transgender) within my community. I had temper issues and could not control my anger. I would get into fights regularly', said Kiran.

Haji Kiran belongs to the transgender community and lives in Dhok Kala Khan Mohallah, Rawalpindi.

'I first met the Vision team when I had gone to Guru Kala's house. They were imparting a training and I immediately liked them as the discussion was very informative. During the first ten minutes of the training, my knowledge substantively increased', recalls the 47 year old Kiran.

'The trainings have transformed me as a person and I feel that the love given by the project team has brought about a very positive change in my life. I feel that I am a much better person than before, due to which my relations with others have improved significantly', says Kiran. The social stigma and discrimination attached to the transgender community makes them outcasts in Pakistan's conservative society. Like many fellow community members, Kiran was also shunned by her family members. This left her no option but to join the close-knit Khwaja Siras communities led by gurus who take on the role of guardians. 'The life of a Khwaja Sira is not given an iota of value in our country. There is continuous physical and verbal abuse which made me bitter and hateful.



We are humiliated by people from all walks of lives and are treated as children of lesser God. Institutions mock us instead of providing support. The staff of the Vision addressed all these points and taught us not only our rights, but how to make sure that we gain access to them', said Kiran.

The silence around the transgender communities in Pakistan makes it difficult to accurately assess their rights. Fear, secrecy, isolation, forced marriages, family and community pressures try to conform Khwaja Siras to heterosexual norms. The trainings not only serve to create a system of social support for the transgender communities but also sensitize the society regarding their issues. Kiran says that the street theatres which are also an integral part of the training have played a pivotal role in generating acceptance of the marginalized transgender community in the larger parts of the society. People have become more empathetic towards their issues now. The theatre captures the harrowing life stories of transgenders. It captures various elements of discrimination and hatred, which continues throughout the span of their life.

'The Vision trainings have not only transformed my life but it has helped me in improving the lives of my fellow community members. I have been able to help ten Khwaja Siras to get their CNICs. Before these trainings an ID card would seem as a very big task since the process was not very clear. The officials would complicate it further by asking for our birth registration forms which most of us do not have. It would seem a dead end after that. Some people would ask for 15000 or 20000 rupees in return for an ID card. The trainings taught us that every individual is an equal citizen of the state. They showed us different processes for the issuance of CNICs', says Kiran. She feels more confident in terms of decision making and dealing

with society and law enforcement agencies. People have started respecting Kiran as they know that she talks rationally and is well aware in terms of not only her rights but her role in the society. The love and care which was given to her by the project team was one she craved her entire life. Kiran had been deprived of this care since childhood and it played a significant part in inculcating nonviolent communication skills in her. 'I attend a lot of birthdays and tea parties. Before the commencement of a function I always request the host to spare me ten minutes where I talk about the useful learning from the trainings so that maximum people from our community are able to reap its benefits. This has resulted in increased wellbeing of our community in terms of day to day issues.'

Kiran feels a great sense of pride and achievement each time she is able to guide a fellow member. 'Compassionate handling of transgender community should be advocated by everyone in the society. The system alienates our community which results in continued brutalities towards this marginalized section of society. These trainings aim to promote rights and responsibilities within the community in order to improve their lives', says Kiran.

The transgender community largely depends on singing and dancing at weddings and birth celebrations for their livelihood. They are also treated as sex objects and often become the victims of violent assault. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS is also on the rise among this community. 'Social exclusion has pushed most transgenders to commercial sex work thus putting them at high risk of HIV/AIDS. I want to dedicate a considerable amount of my life to create awareness and resolve this issue', said Kiran who has joined hands with the Vision team for this very important cause.

