

Human Rights Education & Training Program (HRE&T)



Program Profile:

Venue: Sri Venkateswara College of Engineering and Technology (SVCET), Thiruvallur, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India

Date: 22-23 Nov 2012

Facilitator: Bro. Albert Xaviour

Participants: 60 Engineering Students

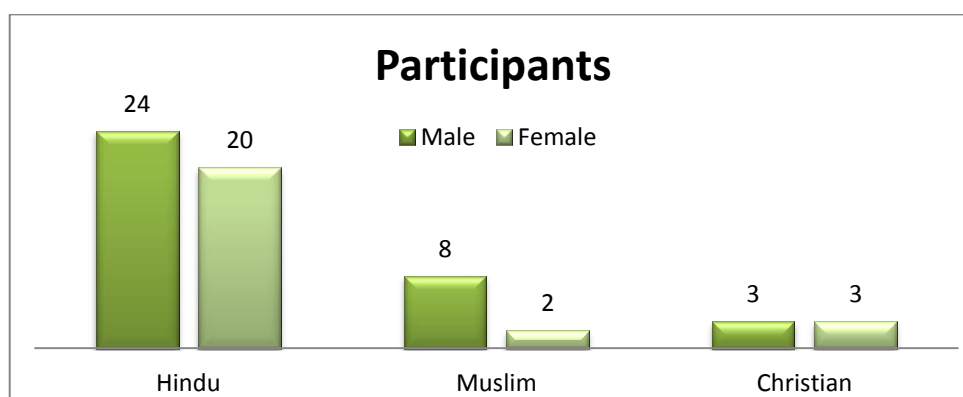
Age Group: 18-24

Local Supporters: Adv. Rengapashyam & SVCET

Organizer: Adv. Rengapashyam

Guest : Mr. Robert Papini

Sri Venkateswara College of Engineering and Technology (SVCET) is an engineering college located in Thiruvallur, a district adjacent to Chennai city (formerly Madras) in Southern India, comprising eminent personalities in the field of education for the underprivileged & downtrodden of the Telugu Linguistic Minority in Thiruvallur and the adjoining areas inhabited predominantly by Telugu migrants. The college was established in 1999 with AICTE approval and started functioning from 2000-2001.



Program Outline

The two-day program was driven by a Powerpoint presentation including video.

The first day included: information about IARF; a profile of RFYN; outline of the UN's work including UDHR awareness; our three RF docu-dramas.

The second day involved the sharing of current Human Rights issues and stories, and means of implementing the UDHR to bring peace and harmony among the religions and in wider society.

Important issues raised by students in discussion

1. **CHILD TRAFFICKING:** This is one of the major problems in Tamilnadu. Parents receive an amount from a company to commit children to work for a year. They are not allowed to study. *Example:* in the place Sivakasi, all children are sent to crack industries and every year around 10-15 children are affected by disease of various kinds.

CHILD LABOUR: 60 million in India, 40% from Scheduled Caste families (80% of those in carpet, matchstick & firecracker industries). Dalit children do the hereditary jobs of tanning, colouring and leather processing, lifting dead animals, clearing human excreta, cleaning soiled clothes, collection of waste in slaughter houses and sale of toddy.



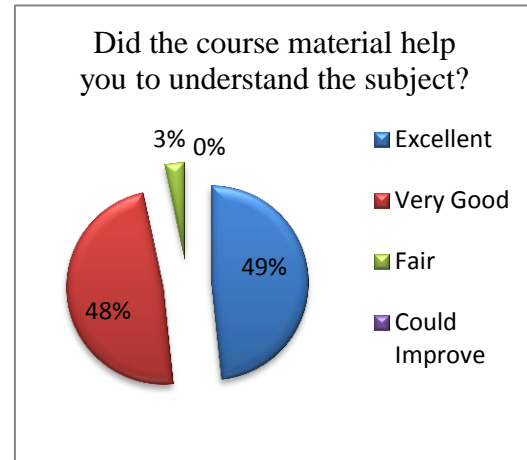
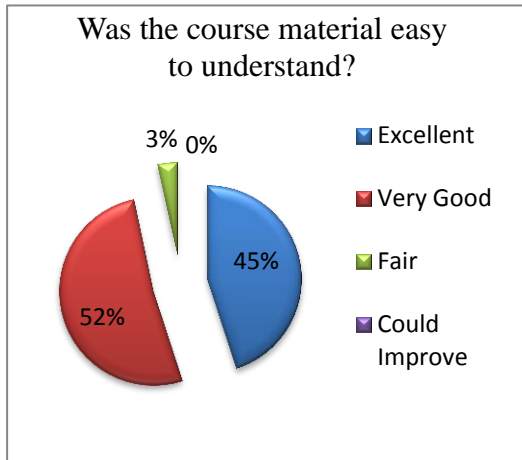
2. **CASTE SYSTEM:** Another major problem in Tamilnadu. **Inter-caste Marriage:** The girl named Divya, 20, belonged to Chellankottai near Naikankottai. She was studying for her B Sc (Nursing) in third year in a Dharamapuri college. The boy named Ilavarasan, 23, was from Natham. He had studied up to 10th standard and was reportedly just selected in the state police. They had a love affair for some time but their parents feigned ignorance. When a proposal for Divya came from a boy of the same (Vanniyar) caste, who was employed with a salary of Rs 35,000 a month, Divya's parents wanted to accept it but Divya did not. She declined it saying she would not get married till she finished her education. The boy was prepared to wait. However, soon thereafter she and Ilavarasan secretly married around 8 October. It slowly leaked to the village including the girl's parents. Although girl's parents were not happy with the marriage as reportedly the boy did not have a good reputation, was not educated enough to be a match to Divya, did not have sound economic background, and was in the neighboring locality (to be constant embarrassment), they did not have visible reaction. There were number of inter-caste marriages that happened in the village, both ways, which were accepted by both the sides.



On 7 November, when Divya's father, Nagaraj learnt of the girl's resolve that she would not come back, he committed suicide in mysterious circumstances. Some people, led by those who shouted threats in the meeting, immediately used his dead body to mobilize Vanniyars to attack the three Dalit colonies, Natham, Anna Nagar and Konampatti. The attack was unique; in sense it spared people of any bodily harm and only targeted their property. In all 268 houses were looted and then set on fire. Valuable assets such as motorbikes, cycles, refrigerators, television sets, almirahs in most houses were damaged and burnt. All of their inmates were reduced to penury as all their savings were either looted or burnt to ashes. The government had set up sheds as temporary shelter for them and erected pandals for kitchen.

Feedback

A feedback sheet was given to participants to evaluate the entire program.



Decision taken for Future Work

The management of SVCET has appointed Prof. James, their Placement Officer, to support an HRE&T program in their college, and extend it to other engineering colleges (Prof. James is the secretary of the state association of engineering colleges).

A team has been selected from the participants to support Prof. James, and they resolved to take up this work as one of their extracurricular activities. They are willing to join with IARF to implement the Human Rights Education and Training program in Tamilnadu, especially in other engineering colleges.

HRE&T team from Venkateshwara:

- Prof. James – Program coordinator
- M. Sathish Kumar – Team Leader
- M. Sowmya – Secretary
- K. Sathyanarayana – Treasurer