

**EveryChild.**



**Arunthatiyar Human Rights Forum (AHRF)**

**Tamil Nadu**

**India**

**Supported by**

**EveryChild.**

**India**

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# Status of Arunthatiyar children in Tamil Nadu-India

## **Children without parental care or in inadequate parental care:**

All across the world there are many children who are living without parental care or in inadequate care. The figures are quite high and according to EveryChild (an international child rights charity), working in parts of Asia, Africa and parts of Former Soviet Union countries, it is almost more than 24 million children who grow up without parental care. These children's survival is often threatened by greater risk of malnutrition, violence and exploitation; their future lost by missing out on school and their childhood. According to UNICEF Child protection Information Sheet (2006) there are 87.6 million child orphans in Asia constituting the highest number in the world. But in several countries including India, no data is systematically compiled about these children at the national or sub-national level.

Tamil Nadu is a large state among the 28 states in India being about the eleventh largest by area and the seventh most populous state. It is one of the largest contributors to India's Gross domestic Product and the most urbanised state in India.<sup>1</sup> However despite the development, the child sex ratio with 942 girls per 1000 boys as per the 2001 Census is on a downward journey from 948 in 1991. This could be due to issues of child malnutrition or neonatal mortality or prevalence of infanticide and female feticide. Children are affected by the impact of socio-cultural identities and caste, gender, urbanisation and globalisation have a direct impact on women and children.

## **Arunthatiyar community: Children without parental care**

Tamil Nadu is also one of the states which has a high population of the Arunthatiyar community. Pallar, Parayar and Arunthatiyar are the three major dalit groups in the state of Tamil Nadu. Among them, Arunthatiyars are considered to be the lowest in the dalit hierarchy, the 'Dalit among Dalits' - the 'untouchables'. It is one of the most oppressed, depressed and the poorest among the poor in the Indian Society. In Tamil Nadu, Arunthatiyars are densely concentrated in the western districts namely Coimbatore, Erode, Tirupur, Karur, Namakkal, Salem and Dharmapuri districts and loosely spread over in the other parts of the state. There are about 60,00,000 Arunthatiyars in Tamil Nadu. They are also identified with different names such as *Chakkliar*, *Thoti*, *Madiga*, *Pagadai*, *Adi Andra*, *Madiga* and *Madari* in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Often compelled to do very menial low dignified jobs, Arunthatiyars are more vulnerable to be forced to perform all undignified tasks (manual scavenging, death messages for upper caste community, dead body burials, dead cattle removal, drum beating in upper caste death funerals etc.) in the society. Poor living conditions, desperate search for a dignified livelihood and decent wages, constant exploitation and harassment from moneylenders and upper caste landlords are part of the day-to-day life of an Arunthatiyar.

Their children are most exploited and abused and face discrimination at the hands of the upper caste community and lag behind or outside the sphere of quality education, health, development and participation. The United National Convention on the Rights of Children

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<sup>1</sup> Directorate of Economics & Statistics of respective State Governments and for All India-Central Statistical Organisation-28/02/2008

(UNCRC) core principles of promoting survival, development, protection and participation of children still remain a distant reality for the Arunthaiyar children. The children are not sent to school because of the poor socio economic status of this community. Many Arunthaiyar children having dropped out of school are part of the labour force in the industries, construction sites and brick kiln sites, many children work as bonded agricultural labourers or rope makers, domestic labourers or work in restaurants or tea shops. The children face rampant discrimination and social exclusionary practices like the two tumbler system, forced to clean toilets in schools, calling them by derogatory names and treating them as untouchables takes these children deeper in the web of exploitation and marginalisation. The look of these children indicates that they are impoverished, malnourished and anaemic.

In this situation when a majority of the Arunthaiyar community work as manual scavengers or bonded labourers, working on the agricultural farms, rope making, construction sites, the children are mostly left behind by their parents to fend for themselves while they go to work. If the child is too young, the child is left in the care of extended families or relatives or the neighbourhood community while the parents go to work. In cases when the child becomes an adolescent, he/she starts working to support the families. Most of these children never go to school or would have dropped out of school due to caste based discrimination and ridicule and humiliation they face on a daily basis in the school or in the public sphere. Hence even though these children may have parents, they do not have 'parental care'. The presence of parents does not ensure quality care and it is inadequate for the holistic development of these children.

#### **Arunthaiyar Human Rights Forum (AHRF):**

Arunthaiyar Human Rights Forum is a state level human rights forum formed in 2005. It comprises of young Arunthaiyar activists working in 14 community based organisations across 12 districts in western Tamil Nadu. Out of the 14 organisations, two community based organisations - namely Rights and Education Centre (READ) at Sathyamangalam, Erode and Rural Women Development Trust (RWDT) at Salem are EveryChild's programme partners on the '*Engal Kural*<sup>2</sup> (Our voice) programme. AHRF is working specifically towards creating awareness on discrimination and atrocities against Arunthaiyars; eradication of manual scavenging primarily associated with Arunthaiyars; fighting against the scourge of untouchability. The forum's strategy has been to mobilise and empower the Arunthaiyar community by forming thrift and credit societies towards sustainable economic stability; document and report caste based atrocities faced by Arunthaiyars to National and State level Human rights Institutions; access to quality primary and higher education for Arunthaiyar children and strengthening Arunthaiyar men and women's political participation. It conducts periodic trainings and leads on research initiatives to gain a deeper understanding of the status of Arunthaiyar women and children in Tamil Nadu. In 2008, AHRF had organized its first state level Arunthaiyar cultural night event to create a platform for the Arunthaiyar community to reclaim and assert their socio-cultural identity.

#### **Vision:**

- To build and strengthen a State level Advocacy and Networking Forum to demand rights and entitlements for the Arunthaiyar community

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<sup>2</sup> EveryChild *Engal Kural* programme focuses on prevention of exploitation and marginalization of Arunthaiyar children without parental care or at risk of losing parental care under the bonded labour system in Tamil Nadu

- Undertake advocacy and lobbying particularly at State, National and International level to address violence, discrimination and exploitation of the Arunthaiyar community
- Assert the social, cultural and political identity of the Arunthaiyar community to ensure non-violation of their fundamental rights

**Priority issues of AHRF:**

- Eradication of Manual Scavenging and liberation of Arunthaiyars as manual scavengers
- Rescue and Rehabilitation of young girls working in factories and spinning mills
- Rescue , Rehabilitation and Protection of child bonded labourers
- End discrimination against Arunthaiyar children in schools
- Ensuring rights and entitlements to the Arunthaiyar community to ensure their holistic development

**List of AHRF Members:**

<b>Member organisation</b>	<b>Tamil Nadu District</b>
Aid Foundation	Coimbatore
ASATH	Tirupur
CARDS	Shivaganga
Concept India	Perambalur
Jeevan Trust	Theni
Nilam Trust	Puddukotai
RACE	Vellore
Rights Education and Development Centre (READ)	Erode
REEDSA	Dindigul
Rural Women Development Trust (RWDT)	Salem
SEEDS	Ramanad
SIDO	Viruthunagar
SWEET	Erode
VANAVAL	Tuticorin

**EveryChild:**

EveryChild is an international development charity fighting to protect some of the world's most vulnerable *children without parental care or in inadequate care*. It works in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, South America and the Caribbean. EveryChild believes that all children have the right to grow up in a safe and loving family environment, with a secure future. More than 24 million children grow up without parental care, their survival often threatened by greater risk of malnutrition, violence and exploitation; their future lost by missing out on school, and their childhood. Working with local partners across countries, EveryChild keep children safe when they are alone and at risk. EveryChild protects children in danger of

ending up on their own by keeping families together and get children back to a safe and caring family, wherever it is possible.

Vision: EveryChild believe that every child:

- has the right to grow up in a safe and caring family
- has the right to go to school
- has the right to be heard
- deserves the chance to play
- deserves the opportunity to fulfil their potential
- deserves the chance of a childhood

Mission: To enable children to grow up in families with parental care by:

- keeping families together
- keeping children safe
- getting children back into families
- making sure children are heard
- learning, to do better
- influencing and inspiring change

In India, EveryChild has been supporting programmes and partners based in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu on the issue of most marginalized children without parental care/ or in inadequate care who are trafficked/at risk of being trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and forced labour including domestic workers and children who are living and working on the streets.

### **AHRF and EveryChild: common focus on ‘children without parental care’ or ‘children in inadequate parental care/at risk of losing parental care’**

Towards the fulfilment of its vision and mission, EveryChild in India has been supporting and strengthening AHRF to respond to the issues of Arunthaiyar children at risk of losing parental care or without parental care in Tamil Nadu. The focus of EveryChild and AHRF has been to respond to the issue of children without parental care.

AHRF and EveryChild, as a part of the situation analysis have identified Arunthaiyar children without parental care in Tamil Nadu in the following categories:

- Children without parental care: child bonded laborers; girl children working in textile industries under Sumangali Thittam; child laborers working on brick kiln sites, rope making, construction sites, restaurants, tea-stalls
- Children at risk of losing parental care/ lack of adequate parental care. : children left behind by parents engaged in manual scavenging; children of seasonal or temporarily migrant parents; children of agricultural labourers; school drop outs; HIV/AIDS affected/infected children

### **AHRF and EveryChild’s Research Initiative: 2008-2010**

Within the above mentioned categories of Arunthaiyar children, few categories were prioritised by AHRF and EveryChild. In 2008, four studies were commissioned by EveryChild

through AHRF in order to understand the status of Arunthaiyar children in western Tamil Nadu on the following priority issues:

- I. A study to understand the ***working conditions and context of Arunthaiyar bonded child labourers*** in Sathyamangalam Block, Erode district-Tamil Nadu
- II. A study to understand the ***occupational impact on the children of manual scavengers from the Arunthaiyar community*** in Coimbatore, Erode, Ramanathapuram and Salem Districts-Tamil Nadu
- III. A Study to understand the ***situation of Arunthaiyar girls employed under the Sumangali Thittam Scheme*** in Coimbatore, Dindigul, Erode, Tirupur, and Viruthunagar Districts-Tamil Nadu
- IV. A study exploring the ***discrimination and caste based violence aimed at Arunthaiyar children in schools*** in Coimbatore, Erode, Ramanathapuram, Shivagangai and Tuticorin districts-Tamil Nadu

I. **A study to understand the working conditions and context of Arunthaiyar bonded child labourers in Sathyamangalam Block, Erode district-Tamil Nadu**

35 Arunthaiyar boys in agricultural bonded labor were covered under this study from Sathyamangalam Block, Erode District of Tamil Nadu.

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- To unearth the context and conditions of Arunthaiyar bonded child labourers and the nature of their work as bonded labourers.
- To identify the reach of the governmental programmes in rescue and rehabilitation of bonded child labourers.
- To suggest some corrective measures and recommendations based on the key findings.

The Key findings are as follows:

- 50% of Arunthaiyar children dropped out of schools-mostly 5<sup>th</sup> standard onwards.
- 36% of the children were separated from their family, this category of children were living with single parent or their grandparent or relatives.
- Amount of loan taken by the parents of the bonded child laborer-almost 71% of the loan size between 10 to 50 thousand Indian rupees.
- 29% of the loan size was above 50 thousand Indian rupees.
- Nearly 3/4<sup>th</sup> of child bonded laborers monthly income was one thousand and five hundred Indian rupees.
- 1/4<sup>th</sup> of child labourers earned an income of below 2 thousand Indian rupees.
- A child started working as early as 6 years of age; most children started working from ten years and above.
- Normal working hours were 11 hours-from dawn to dusk.
- Almost all 35 children reported caste discrimination at workplace by the employers-being called derogatively by their caste identity; practice of dual tumbler system; separate bed, food etc was followed for these children by their upper caste employers.

II. **A study to understand the occupational impact on the children of manual scavengers from the Arunthatiyar community in Coimbatore, Erode, Ramanathapuram and Salem Districts-Tamil Nadu**

200 Arundhatiyar children were covered as a part of the study. The children were from Coimbatore, Erode, Ramanathapuram and Salem Districts of Tamil Nadu.

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- To explore the educational problems faced by the children of Arunthatiyar manual scavengers.
- To unearth the types and quantum of discrimination-social, culture, economic, education against the manual scavengers' children in various settings-like school, temple, community, peer groups, government schemes etc.
- To understand the consequences and after effect of the social exclusion of the children of Arunthatiyar community working as manual scavengers.
- To assess the impact of rehabilitation measures undertaken by the Government & NGOs for the Arunthatiyar community and children's lives quality education, prevent child labour and health and nutrition.
- To suggest alternative course of action / improvements to the existing system of rehabilitation and empowerment action programmes specifically focusing children of Arunthatiyar manual scavengers.

The key findings are as follows:

- 24% children dropped out from school; 3/4th were boys and 1/4th were girls.
- 28 children (upto 18 years of age) from 200 Arundhatiyar families were working.
  - 7 worked in agricultural farms; 12 worked in construction sites, factories and sales jobs.
- There was a high rate of indebtedness of all Arundhatiyar manual scavengers-ranging from below Indian rupees-10,000 to above 60,000. In the villages, large number of families had a debt of Indian rupees- 20,000; In municipalities- Indian rupees 30,000.
- Most loans were taken for the following three categories: medical, construction of homes and education.
- Irony of the situation was that none of the Arunthatiyar families covered under the study in the villages had toilets at home. Only less than half of the families had toilets in municipality or corporations.

III. **A Study to understand the situation of Arunthatiyar girls employed under the Sumangali Thittam (Girl Marriage Scheme) in Coimbatore, Dindigul, Erode, Tirupur, and Viruthunagar Districts-Tamil Nadu**

250 girls from age group of 14-18 years were covered under the study. The girls were from Coimbatore, Dindigul, Erode, Tirupur, and Viruthunagar Districts of Tamil Nadu. The girls covered were from the three categories:

- 175 Girls who previously worked in Sumangali thittam
- 50 Girls who were still working under the Sumangali thittam
- 25 Girls who were willing to enroll under the Sumangali thittam

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- To study the impact of working under the Sumangali Thittam's on young Arunthathiyars girls specifically which regard to the following: working environment, violence and abuse, health-physical, mental and psychological etc.
- To asses of the Socio-economic-cultural factors due to which parents send their young girls to work under the Sumangali Thittam scheme.
- To ascertain the violations of existing labour laws within the Indian legal framework for the prohibition of the Sumangali Thittam scheme.
- To evolve possible recommendations for ensuring prevention, rescue and protection and development of the Arunthathiyar girls under the Sumangali thittam scheme.

The key findings are as follows:

- Almost 85% of the girls worked for more than 12 years.
- 1/5th of the children who were working under the Sumangali scheme were illiterate.
- Almost 48% of the girls were enrolled into the scheme through the agents residing in the area and approaching the families.
- Most of the girls (around 98%) quoted 'poverty' as the reason for joining the Sumangali Scheme.
- Nearly half of the girls under the Sumangali Scheme had worked or had been working with an agreed amount of Indian rupees 30,000/- after an aggregate agreement period of three years.
- The nature of work involved long hours of standing (around 12 hours) and working with bare hands operating dangerous machines. Nearly all girl children were forced to work and faced verbal and physical abuse.

**IV. A study exploring the discrimination and caste based violence aimed at Arunthathiyar children in schools in Coimbatore, Erode, Ramanathapuram, Shivagangai and Tuticorin districts-Tamil Nadu**

666 Arunthathiyar children from the age group of 11 to 14 years were covered under the study. The children were from Coimbatore, Erode, Ramanathapuram, Shivagangai and Tuticorin districts of Tamil Nadu.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To find out various forms of discrimination and caste based violence faced by Arunthathiyar children in schools.
- To propose recommendations and prepare an action plan to eliminate the discrimination and caste based violence aimed at Arunthathiyar children in schools.

The key findings are as follows:

- Majority of the students' parents (534) were daily wage earners working as coolie in various sectors.
- 262 children reported being abused and discriminated on the basis of their caste name.
- 607 children reported cleaning the schools bathrooms.
- 148 children reported doing the house hold work of their teachers.
- 228 children reported being sexually harassed in schools.
- Almost 50% of children were denied scholarships opportunities.

- 532 children dropped out of schools mainly as a result of the discrimination and harassment.

### **Key Recommendations arising out of the four studies:**

#### Legal and Social Awareness:

- Legal and Social awareness to all government departments specifically focusing on children's issues towards protection, rescue and rehabilitation of the Arunthathiyar child bonded labourers, Arunthathiyar girls working under the Sumangali Thittam and children facing discrimination and violence in schools or as a result of their parents working as manual scavengers.
- Bonded labour re-survey (2007) to reflect the actual numbers of Arunthathiyar bonded labourers and child bonded labourers.
- Effective implementation of the Bonded labour System (Abolition) Act 1976; Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993.
- Establish Legal advisory forum consisting of Arunthathiyars constituted at District level to bring to the notice of the Government issues relating to violence against Arunthathiyar children- child labour or discrimination and caste based violence in schools or in the public sphere as a result of the parents occupation as manual scavengers
- Increase the Arunthathiyar reservation from 3% to 6% for employment, education.
- Increased awareness on government welfare programmes, schemes for Arunthathiyar children.

#### Education:

- Special residential schools for Arunthathiyar children - under the *Adi Dravadiar* welfare department.
- Scholarships for Arunthathiyar children with a special focus on drop-out children for primary and higher education.
- Arunthathiyar girl children, students are mobilized at a forum to create awareness and lobby the government against the sexual harassment, violence and discrimination-in and out of schools faced by Arunthathiyar children.

#### Community driven initiatives:

- Design, plan, develop and implement community based model of care and protection for Arunthathiyar children in collaboration with key stakeholders in the district.
- Organizing and reviving District and State level Arunthathiyar Panchayat Presidents' Association; creating awareness in schools and community against violence against Arunthathiyar children; action oriented training to eliminate child labour and school violence and discrimination.
- SHGs should be formed by organizing Arunthathiyar students' Parents and create linkages with financial institutions to avoid obstacles over accessing subsidised loans.

- A sharing meeting for Arunthatiyar students and parents conducted at Block level at least once a month to review issues related to violence against Arunthatiyars and disseminate information about Govt provisions and various welfare schemes of scheduled castes
  - Village level task force group initiated to specifically monitor development of Arunthatiyar children registered with the Anganwadis and *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* centers at least once a month.
  - Campaign and awareness programmes to address the psychological and sexual harassment of Arunthatiyar children.
  - Explore opportunities for higher education or vocational courses for Arunthatiyar children and same to be conducted in collaboration with organisations in all Arunthatiyar dominated areas.
  - Design and employ Community Driven Development (CDD) approach in collaboration with the Panchayats.
-