

## II REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study “**Adolescents of Arunthathiyar population - An exploratory study**” reviews topics to capture a broad picture of the concept of Arunthathiyars, their socio-economic, cultural and occupational status with its related problems. However, review of worldwide research studies reveal that there is no such study existing on this sample using the present variables. Hence, the most relevant information was explored, collected, consolidated and presented to get familiarity with the body of knowledge, authenticate the purpose of the study and establish credibility of the research. The entire chapter reviews topics under the following titles:

- A. Theoretical perspective of adolescent development
- B. Arunthathiyars – their origin and concept
- C. Social, cultural, economic and occupational life of Arunthathiyars
- D. Policies and programmes for the welfare of Arunthathiyars
- E. Educational status of Arunthathiyars and relevant case studies
- F. Health status of Arunthathiyars and relevant case studies

### **A. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT**

In order to understand at a deeper level how the adolescent’s educational, nutritional and mental health aspects are influenced, and determine their well being, some of the key concepts from the American psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory (1994) is discussed.

According to Bronfenbrenner’s theory, development occurs through complex process of interaction between a developing person and the immediate, everyday environment. To understand these processes, we must study the multiple context in which they occur. These begins at home, class room, and neighbourhood, connect to outward social institutions such as educational and transportation system and finally encompass historical and cultural patterns that affect the family, school and virtually everything else in a person’s life.

Bronfenbrenner identifies five interlocking systems from the most intimate to the broadest. The microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. Although the various levels of influence seem to be separate, in reality they continually interact.

Micro system is a pattern of activities, roles and relationships within a setting such as a home, school work place or neighbourhood in which a person functions on a first hand day to day basis. The mesosystem is the interaction of two or more microsystems that contain the developing person. This may be the linkage between the home and school, between the family and the peer group. The exosystem is also the linkages between two or more microsystem, this could be parents work place etc., and does not contain the developing person and therefore affects him indirectly. The macrosystem consists of overall cultural patterns, such as dominant values, beliefs, customs, economical and social systems which filter down in countless ways to individual's daily lives. The chronosystem is the degree of stability or change in life, this may include changes in family composition, place of residence, parent's employment and waves of migration. By highlighting the interrelated context of, and influences on development this theory provides a key to understanding the processes that underlie such diverse phenomena as academic achievement and mental health.

### ***The relevance of Bio ecological Theory on the thesis***

The studies show that among dalits, Arunthathiyars, have been the most dependent on upper castes. They were tied to the village economy and unable to position themselves favourably in terms of new opportunities that became available. This seems in part related to their lower level of education and the group's mentality that led to intergenerational maintenance of social positions; the adult's attitude of withdrawal and indifference to change seems to be passed on to the younger generation. Therefore the role of immediate family or home settings, neighbors and the cultural aspect such as the beliefs and values estimated from micro to macro system, have all played their role in the development of adolescents.

Poverty as a single entity, has played multiple roles on all the three aspects of well being, that is education, nutrition and mental health. In general the

adolescents in poverty do have problems of economical constraint; however the Arunthathiyar adolescents specifically are prone to emotional constraint due to the nature of their parent's work and change of jobs, place and migration as described under socio economic lifestyles and relevant to their exo and chrono systems. Changes in infrastructure, improved communication, new job opportunities and social policies, including good education system as specified in recommendations could all help the younger generation explore better opportunities, build healthy life styles for their well being.

## **B. ARUNTHATHIYARS – THEIR ORIGIN AND CONCEPT**

The term caste is derived from Portuguese term ‘Casta’ means breed or race. Beteille (1965) defines caste as a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system, based on the concept of purity and pollution.

Arunthathiyar is one such caste within the list of 76 *Scheduled Castes* notified by the President of India under Article 341 of the Constitution of India, and (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 as amended from time to time. Based on Hindu caste system, Dalits are placed at the bottom of the caste hierarchy in the Indian society. Dalits are further categorized into sub castes in Tamil Nadu as Pallar, Parayar and Arunthathiyar. Among Dalits the Arunthathiyars are placed at the lowest status (Athiyamaan, 2009). The nomenclature ‘Arunthathiyar’ is not familiar to the majority of the Tamils; there are certain other names that both the Dalits and non Dalits are accustomed to address them. Arunthathiyars prefer to be called themselves as Arunthathiyars, as they feel they are degraded by the other names denoting their community.

Rengasamy (2009) illustrates that the Arunthathiyars have a strong courageous history. Many brave faces could be seen between the period of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century such as Maduraiveeran and Ondiveeran. A similar caste to Arunthathiyars can be found in Kerala state of south India, where, they were assigned different services in the Hindu temples, such as the preparation of garlands, the sweeping of the floor, fetching of firewood, carrying of the idols in

procession, singing, dancing and so on. Traditionally they were agriculturists but some of this sect people had technical knowledge in leather crafting. There is a belief among the Arunthathiyars that Arunthathi – the mythical Hindu character took birth in this community and therefore they associate themselves with her name (Singh, 1995).

The Arunthathiyars are one of the socially excluded and marginalized social groups in Tamil Nadu. They form the largest Dalit group and are believed to have moved from Andhra Pradesh into Tamil Nadu along with other Telugu speaking people. In Tamil Nadu 'Adi Dravida' is a term used to denote Dalits and it means original natives or indigenous people of Dravida land. The term was coined by a Tamil social activist Periyar Ramasami who worked against casteism and division among the people based on castes (Jadhav, 2010).

The prefix of "Adi" denotes the aboriginal inhabitants of the land. Etymologically, the word 'Dalit' comes from Sanskrit, and means 'ground', 'suppressed', 'crushed' or 'broken to pieces'. It was first used by Jyoti Rao Phule in the nineteenth century. According to Victor Premasagar, the term "Dalit" expresses their "weakness, poverty and humiliation at the hands of the upper castes in the Indian Society" (Kumar, 2013).

Arunthathiyars are descendents of "Athiyars" in Tamil Nadu. Historically Tamil Nadu was ruled by kingdoms. Apart from the large Chera, Chola and Pandiya kingdoms, there were smaller kingdoms ruled by various kings belonging to the sect of Velir. One such sect of the Velir is known as Athiyar.

They ruled over Vadugan in Tamil Nadu comprising of Tagadur, which is now known as Dharmapuri. The name Athiyar has undergone transformation over the years to become Arunthathiyar. Adhiyamaan Nedumaan Anji is the greatest of the Athiyar Kings. He ruled over the Thagadur region. Even to date, Arunthathiyars are predominantly found in the regions surrounding Dharmapuri District of Tamil Nadu. Historically, Vaduganadu comprised of various parts of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The Tamils

living in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka regions learnt the vernacular. With the demise of the British Empire, the regions were united with their parent states. For various reasons, these Arunthathiyars returned to Tamil Nadu but continued to speak the vernacular Telugu and Kannada in addition to their mother tongue Tamil (Elangovan, 2017).

Shyamlal (1997) develops the concept that the Arunthathiyars were once warrior castes particularly from Kshatriyas. According to him the view of scholars that the present-day Bhangis (Arunthathiyars) were from the warrior castes is accepted then, it can be easily seen that Kshatriyas were reduced to the status of the untouchables. Therefore, we can safely draw conclusion that historically known Bhangis (Arunthathiyars) were at one time Kshatriyas. He also observes that this process of social change has occurred in almost every part of the Indian subcontinent. The Arunthathiyars claim that they are the children of Matangi, a legendary character (Thurston, 1975).

There are also two theories about the history of Arunthathiars in Tamil Nadu. One theory implies that these people were brought by the Naickars from Andhra Pradesh during the Vijayanagar Empire some 500 years ago to make shoes and other kinds of leather works. They are said to have come here from Kadappah District of Andhra Pradesh and spread over Tamil Nadu during the Naickar Rule. According to the second theory, before the Indian States were linguistically re-organised in 1956, all the southern states were under one Presidency. The people would go from one place to another for their livelihood. When famine or severe atrocities were meted out to them or when a human sacrifice from their own fold was offered, they managed to learn Telugu or Kannada and moved over to Andhra or Karnataka. The Arunthathiyars are therefore conversant with these three languages – Tamil, Telugu and Kannada. Considering these factors, one can infer that they were inhabitants of Tamil Nadu, but living a nomadic life was a necessity to cope with the situation (Rengasamy and Suresh, 2017).

The Arunthathiyars are present in almost all districts, their concentration is relatively high in the western districts namely Coimbatore, Erode and Namakkal, Tirupur, Karur, Salem and Dharmapuri, and loosely spread over in the other

parts of the state. Brought into the state five centuries ago mainly as warriors by the Nayaks from the Vijayanagar empire, a substantial number of Arunthathiyar, who speak either Telugu or Kannada, work as menial servants or as sanitary workers (Athiyamaan, 2009).

Karuppusamy (2010) presents an estimation of about 60,00,000 Arunthathiyars in Tamil Nadu. The Figure - I gives a clear picture of the spread of Arunthathiyar population in the southern states of India where Tamil Nadu is one of the states seen with a dense population of Arunthathiyar.

Ambedkar asserts that "caste is not a division of labour; it is a division of labourers". Caste is neither racial nor economic; but the ideological and religious factors, being the base, have stronger emphasis in the caste system (Omvedt, 2011). Caste system has created a polarization of relationship among humans. With this back ground and realising the enormity of the caste issue and its challenges among the Arunthathiyar population, the investigator with a hope of mainstreaming them took up the current research.

## SPREAD OF ARUNTHATHIYAR POPULATION IN TAMIL NADU

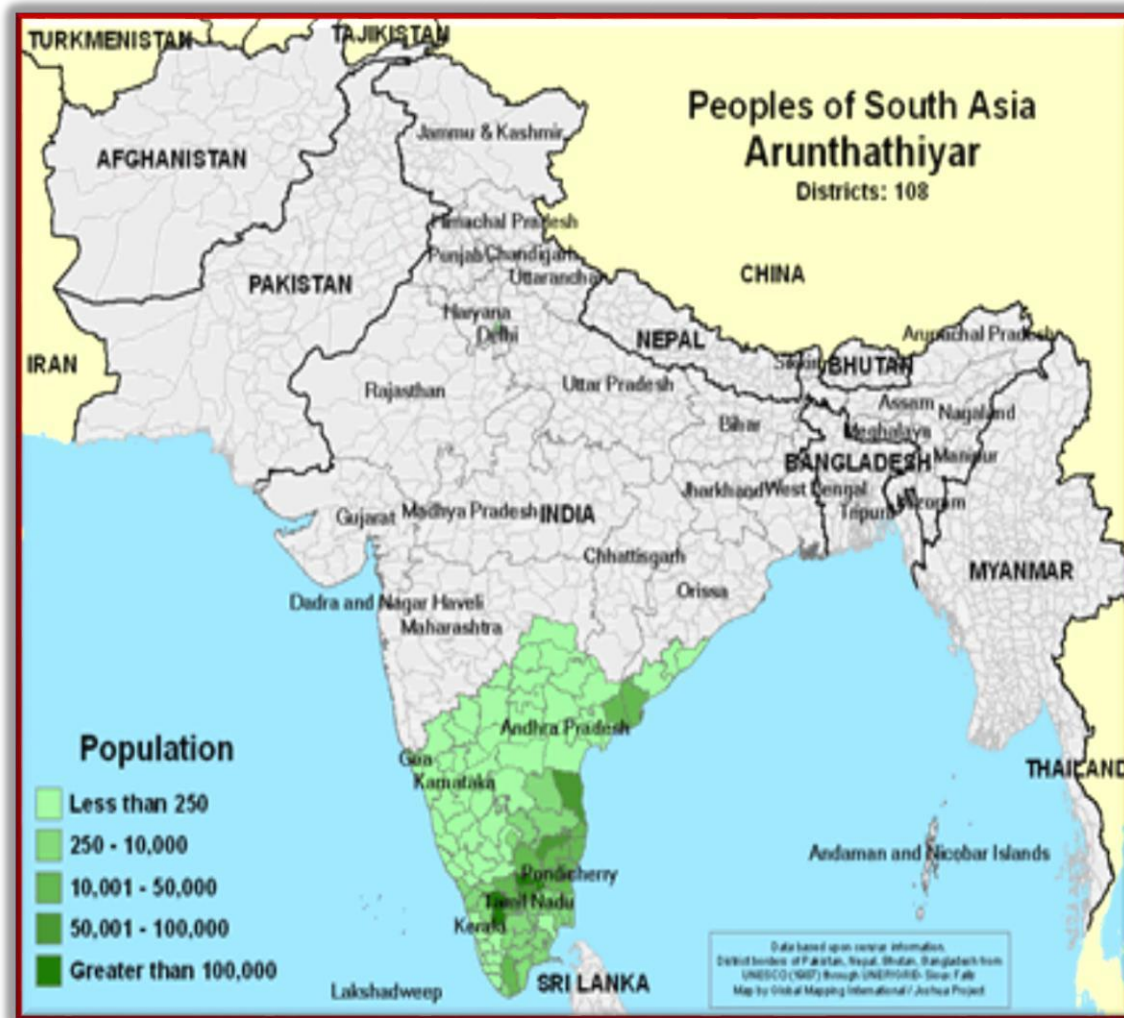


FIGURE - I

## **C. SOCIAL, CULTURAL, ECONOMIC AND OCCUPATIONAL LIFE OF ARUNTHATHIYARS**

At some point in history, a class of people who were soldiers and military commanders were forced into submission of menial labour due to political and social change. This resulted in this community's devolution to the low caste status. The place of residence of Arunthathiyar is said to be "Palayam" which literally means the place of army who did the Kavalgars job. There are claims that they are closely related to Madigas of Andhra Pradesh (Charsley, 2007). This section would reveal the life style of Arunthathiyars with reference of their social, cultural and economic walks of life.

### **a) Social life of Arunthathiyars**

Historically, the community was carefully kept away from mingling with other communities in mainstream social life, the situation has not much improved to this day; they are kept outside the main residential areas. They are prevented from getting education and acquiring any special skills useful for their economic development. It is indirectly the denial of rights and entitlements, which is a forced social situation to make their survival impossible. Social norms, conforming to the set rules of the society, are followed which prevents their access to the basic rights of survival. When such was the lives of Arunthathiyars, historical events drove them to even worst condition. The Europeans came to India and they also brought their life styles to the Indian soil, they introduced lavatories for the first time in their residential places in India. These lavatories were needed to be kept clean every day for which they required manual assistance. Arunthathiyars, who were always vulnerable to this sort of work, fell prey to this victimisation (Narayanaswamy and Sachithanandam, 2011).

According to Vivek (1998) sweepers and scavengers community also known as 'Safai Kamgars family' rank the lowest; they have no choice left than to discharge most of the degraded tasks left by the persons of the so called clean castes. The menial tasks that they perform for the rest of the community are so impure, profuse, unhealthy and disgraceful in the eyes of the religious

Hindus that there by they are made 'Achut' or 'Untouchables'. The caste system as it operates against those placed at the bottom is more than merely a social institution. As a system, it brings about the fragmentation of society into a number of self-contained and segregated units on the basis of functions performed. Thus, there is little social mobility possible and those at the bottom have little opportunity of improving their social status. In the religious context, it proclaims that people are born into caste due to acts committed in a previous life (the Karma concept) and thus there is absolutely no scope for those at the bottom to escape from their lot at least in this life. The caste govern all the relations and events in life, social behaviour, occupation and status, food, dress, marriage and with what precedes and follows life. In the cultural connotation those at the bottom are regarded as 'untouchables'. They are deemed to be polluted and hence the possibility of interaction between them and the rest of society is remote.

The Times of India (2015) reported shocking incident that smack the level of inequality that still exists in our society. A 40 year-old Dalit was tied to a pole and severely beaten by non Dalits for walking through an agricultural land, owned by the latter near Udumalpet in Tirupur district. The victim walked up the land as it is supposed to be a shortcut to reach the next street. He was tied behind his back and his legs bound by his trousers he wore and was beaten until he fell unconscious. Fortunately the police arrived and admitted him in the hospital. The incident came to light after four days when the human rights activists took up the issue. An NGO that works mainly for the development and rights of Arunthathiyars says that the discrimination continues in several villages in Coimbatore and Tirupur districts.

A new study by the Ahmedabad based civil rights group Janvikas with the help of a dozen community based organizations (CBOs) was conducted in 250 areas and 5,827 households across five states of India, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The study has found that, despite the legislations seeking to eradicate manual scavenging (the Construction of Dry Latrines and Employment of Manual Scavengers (Prohibition) Act, 1993 and the recently enacted Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their

Rehabilitation Act, 2013), the system of manual scavenging still exists in India and exacerbated with increasing urbanization across the country. Of the 5,827 households / families engaged in scavenging work (25,082 persons) surveyed, 149 belong to other backward classes (OBCs) and minority (Muslim) families, 389 are scheduled tribe (ST) families, an overwhelming majority of 5,289 families, belong to the scheduled castes (SCs). This clearly shows that sweeping, manhole cleaning and manual scavenging are largely caste-based occupations (Janvikas, 2014).

With regard to maltreatment to the Dalits by the upper caste members, it is imperative that the members of the upper caste to whom the Dalits are related due to occupations or any services, be advised to change their behaviour pattern, have humanitarian view point and keep healthy relationship with them. In this process the office bearers of Harijan Sevak Sangh, Indore were very active. Periodically, members and social workers are visiting upper caste for changing their hearts. It can be said that constitutional safeguards, state action, reservations and even conversions have not much affected the status of scheduled castes in India. They are to be educated and schemes be framed for the occupational rehabilitation of the Dalits particularly in rural areas. Gandhi's prescription to the untouchables was education, self improvement and a patient self-suffering for a change of heart among upper caste Hindu. If this is processed at the national, regional and village level, untouchability will die out eventually (Kumar, 2013).

Devi (1999) elaborated Mahatma Gandhi's principle of self-suffering and education, she opined that it is necessary for a man to have respect in society, and that he must be well educated. By becoming educated one can learn how to live with honours and discipline be independent and intelligent. Ignorance is a great sin; the untouchables always lived like dogs and cats due to ignorance. They could not understand that education was the only means to make them enlightened to realize their rights and duties. It is therefore essential for them to make their children highly educated as possible so that they can build a new life.

The government has numerous facilities, yet most of them know nothing about them, because they are ignorant and illiterate and the advantage of the facilities are

not used to the optimum. They must understand that all men and women are part and parcel of nature. There is no superior or inferior, no society, government can do complete justice to them, and they must stand themselves up to mitigate their own miseries.

### **b) Cultural life of Arunthathiyars**

Arunthathiyars speak the Dravidian languages and are also conversant with other regional languages. Their staple diet is based on rice. The Arunthathiyar women participate in economic activities and also contribute to the family income. Some of the Arunthathiyars are artists, painters, craftsmen and engaged in leather and embroidery work, while others are teacher. A few of them are into micro enterprises and civil services (Ramaswamy, 2017).

Dalits as a whole and the Arunthathiyars as a community have their own art as their spirit that is inseparable part of their lives. But the practice of their art is equated to indignity and a caste designated function rather than a cultural expression. Arunthathiyar's art forms have been the symbols of their existence as low caste people for ages (Karuppusamy, 2010). Marriages between cross-cousins and uncle and niece alliances are permitted. Their marriage rituals are performed at the bridegroom's place, the elders of the community officiate at the social functions. They worship community deity Mathamma, and have separate wells and burial grounds (Ramaswamy, 2017).

Arunthathiyars are one of the communities that was long ignored and neglected within the discourses of Dalit studies. Both the state and civil society groups have contributed to exclusions among the Dalit caste groups by this neglect. However, the political organizations of Arunthathiyars have had a long history. Though, most of the organizational efforts have been sporadic, restricted to specific regions of Tamil Nadu, there have been quite a number of studies that articulate the existence of rebel and symbolic leaders down the line. Despite the political organization, the high dependency of Arunthathiyars in the western Tamil Nadu on the land owning land lords for their sustenance can be gauged by the way in which they have been integrated in the local Annamar Samy festival. This ritual is a primary mode by which the inferior status of Arunthathiyars is reinforced and internalized (Nagappan, 2012).

Several months before the Annamar Samy festival, the upper caste would give two pigs to an Arunthathiyar family in the village. Each family following a routine would feed those two pigs. During the year, those two pigs would multiply into about six pigs. Then these six pigs would be taken to the temple where they would be killed by piercing a dagger in to the head. Then they would open the abdomen and insert bananas and make a paste out of it. All the people, of course the Arunthathiyars only, would then eat that disgusting substance. Even today they follow this ritual. The people of the community refuse to abandon this practice because they think that it is ordained by God. They would say, "Don't talk to us about this, call us for an agitation, we will come. Don't talk about the God". They call this ritual Annamar Nombi or Pig piercing Nombi. The Arunthathiyars spend more for this festival than any other festivals. The upper caste collect ₹.10, 000/- to ₹.15,000/- from each family towards the expenses of the festival. The Dalits generate this amount as a loan from persons of other communities. They have to repay that loan with interest or work as bonded labourers until the next Annamar festival. Originally, the Annamar Nombi was the festival of the upper caste, but passed it to the Arunthathiyar to celebrate it telling them that rain had started and so they had to go to take care of the sowing in the fields. Thus, the Nombi was thrust upon the Arunthathiyars (The Human Rights - India, 2007).

There are several traditional practices and customs that violate human rights, including the practice of dedicating girl children to become Mathammas, which is practiced by shoemakers (Arunthathiars). There is a strong belief that the goddess Mathamma has got healing power. So when a Dalit girl is sick, she is taken to the temple and left there until she is cured. Once cured, the child is named after Mathamma and married to the goddess. She becomes a dancer who belongs to the temple, and dances at festivals to earn her livelihood. She cannot marry and lead a family life; Dalit women dedicated to Mathamma end up in the sex trade and become vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. Superstition coupled with poverty and illiteracy is responsible for such practices (Mittal, 2010).

### **c) Economic life of Arunthathiyars**

The contribution of the Arunthathiyar women to the economic development of our country is significant, especially in the agricultural sector. They are exploited by the upper caste landlords and are paid marginal wages for their hard work (Sharma, 2011)

A study conducted by Anandhi (2013) at Valluvapuram village has 250 Arunthathiyar families, out of this, five of them hold a small land (below 10 cents), they have neither education. All the Arunthathiyar families therefore are dependent mainly on the land lords and work as agricultural labours on daily wages or domestic worker. Some of them rear cattle of the landowner. The dependency on the landowners is narrated by an Arunthathiyar woman "My husband gets a weekly salary from the upper caste or herding their sheep. His and my wages from agricultural work is insufficient to survive on, therefore educating children remains a dream. We are forced to borrow money from the upper caste and when we are unable to repay, we have to work unpaid". This also defines their continued social and economic subordination.

Arunthathiyars are traditionally associated with the task of cleaning up the dead animals, scavenging the village, and work related to animal skin and leather. While such traditional work still continues in some villages, many have taken up jobs in urban areas. The poor living conditions, desperate search for jobs with decent wage, and constant harassment from money lenders and landlords are part of day – to – day life of Arunthathiyars (Karuppusamy, 2010).

Gayathri Devi (2011) considers that the traditional jobs (ritually) as polluting and economically unrewarding. They neither get a reasonably good income nor the social status. The occupation and the resultant low status of scavengers are characterized by much similarity where ever they are in the whole of India, given their low socio cultural position, stigma associated with their occupation and the absence of stable economic base. The scavengers are not in possession of economic assets like agricultural land and are generally isolated socio culturally in their own settlements. The assignment of the lowest social status in the caste hierarchy to them has led to various forms of

discrimination towards members of these castes and being branded as the most exterior and polluted people throughout India.

According to Krishnasamy (2011) only 10 Per cent of the Arunthathiar population own a small piece of land. Most of them are landless labourer. They work as temporary coolies on minimum wages in agricultural farms, stone quarries, and brick industry. For a few months every year, they are jobless and hence migrate to urban areas and other villages in search of jobs and moreover due to extreme poverty they go into debt.

Vivek (1998) presents the details of his survey, according to which the income of a "Safai Kamgar family" is around ₹.300- ₹ 350/- per month, that is earned by way of salary and rag picking at ₹.15/- per day. On an average, the expenditure of a Safai Kamgar family is one and half times more than the family income. Inevitably, there is borrowing of money from the employer or taking loan from other sources at the rate of ten per cent a month deductible at source. Therefore, practically every Safai Kamgar is in debt for a smaller or bigger sum of ₹.50 – ₹.3000/-. The purpose of loans taken was:

- Marriage in the family or among relatives
- For a visit to a native place
- Repair to the hutment
- Payments to the police as there are frequent cases of arson
- For medicines in time of sickness

Arunthathiyar Human Rights Federation (2011) carried out a recent survey and revealed that the combined income of these families was in the range of ₹.1000 to ₹.2500/- per month. The economic status of the Arunthathiyar family has deteriorated day by day because of the local money lenders who levy unfairly high rates of interest on the money given as loan to those families. About 71 per cent of the loan size was between ₹.10,000 to ₹.50,000. In urban or rural areas, all manual scavengers invariably have a debt of some amount ranging from below ₹.10,000/- to above ₹.60,000/-. However the amount taken as loan in municipalities is slightly more when compared to the villages. In corporation areas they take loans mostly for the purpose of their children's

education but a significant portion of the debt amount is being spent on medical purposes, a small amount has been spent on construction of houses. In (town) Panchayats and municipalities, medical expense exceeds all other expenses. In villages, the loan is taken to manage their day to day life and they use the loan amount to repay another loan or its interest. In villages the loan is taken from local money lenders, where as in municipality and corporation areas they approach banks for taking loans. This economic back ground also affects their children's educational development to a large extent.

#### **d) Occupational life of Arunthathiyars**

The Janvikas (2014) study across five states including Tamil Nadu have found that out 3,799 persons engaged in manual scavenging, 60 per cent (2,294) are women, this is more visible in rural areas. Only 11 per cent doing manual scavenging have permanent employment with government or private organizations. About 43 per cent are contract workers, while majority, 46 per cent (1,745 or 3,799) are casual workers without any kind of job security or social security. Whatever is the nature of employment of manual scavengers, sheer work of manual scavenging is breach of law of the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. Here, the government agencies, panchayats, municipalities and municipal corporations, as well as private organizations are at equal fault of continuing the practice. In total 90 per cent of the Arunthathiyars have no basic facilities in community life. Less than one per cent of Arunthathiyars are in government employment. Of all Arunthathiyars 90 per cent are living below poverty line and 70 per cent of them are suffering the plight of private money lenders (Mosse, 2017).

The Hindu (2014) reported the problems of the Arunthathiyars in the urban context, where he is named as the "Conservancy worker". This is a euphemistic term for manual scavengers and sweepers, who due to society's indifference, continue to work for urban municipalities. The job involves cleaning toilets with inadequate tools and frequently with their bare hands removing human excreta and discarded waste like sanitary napkins, and worst of all, going down the manholes into the muck of sewers to clear blockages. It is a term that neatly obscures the fact that in the city of Chennai, 95 per cent of the 10,000 odd

conservancy workers hail from one particular caste, the Arunthathiyar caste, and are condemned to manually handle the 5000 tons of solid waste that is produced by the city every day.

Globalization has led to feminization of workforce in the garment industry in which labour form a major part of production costs. Female labour is preferred over male since it is cheaper and they are seen as more docile and loyal than their male counterparts. 60-80 per cent of the workers in the textile and garment industry are hired on a temporary basis. According to the report, the much criticized Sumangali Scheme was introduced ten years back by textile and garment manufacturers in the Coimbatore and Tirupur districts and has now spread throughout Western and Central Tamil Nadu. It has been estimated that 120,000 workers have been currently employed under the scheme. Nearly 60 per cent of the workers belong to the Arunthathiyar caste. 10 to 20 per cent of workers are child labourers, aged between 11 and 14 year. The upper caste landlords compel Arunthathiyar girls and women to get recruited in the Sumangali scheme. Most women get attracted to the lump sum payment between ₹.30,000 and ₹.50,000, that was to be paid at the end of the contract period, to support them for their marriage expenses. In many cases, workers did not receive the lump sum amount that was promised at the end of the contract period.

On a regular basis the women work 12 hours per day, to complete one and a half shifts. This means that they work 72 hours per week. A maximum of ₹.110/- per day is paid as the wage on an average. Approximately ₹.15 a day are deducted from the daily wages towards the cost of food and boarding. During peak season they even have to work on Sundays. For overwork, workers are legally entitled to receive overtime payment, but more often they do not receive any compensation. When a worker refuses to work more than one shift, she is often verbally abused by the supervisors and threats are made to withhold a month's pay (Saravanan, 2010).

Pragati (2005) studied the occupation patterns of Arunthathiyars in Pondicherry and they are: agricultural workers 21.7 per cent, leather workers 4.4 per cent, private sector workers 8.1 per cent, retired persons 1.4 per cent,

government servants 3.5 per cent, daily wage earners 2.6 per cent, petty business 2.5 per cent and other 55.8 per cent, did not have a permanent occupation among the Arunthathiyar community.

Mahar (2009) observed that caste disparities in self – image and social - skills imbibed from childhood influence the ability of adults, and prevent them to face the challenges beyond the village. Untouchables dependence upon upper caste interventions and influences in dealing with government authorities, appear in many aspects of village life.

Celeti (2015) studies also show that among the Dalit population, Arunthathiyars have been the most dependent on upper castes. However the gradual changes from the studies by Heyer in the villages of Coimbatore District from the 1980's to 2000, focused on transformations in the lives of Arunthathiyars. There was a high degree of subordination since many were attached or bonded labourer. When Heyer returned in 2008/09, the Arunthathiyars were employed in better non-agricultural occupations. There was little agricultural bondage and practically no child labour, increased access to education and deeper penetration of social welfare. There was also reduced dependency on the elite in the village with social policy playing a key role in facilitating integration into the industrial economy that was booming.

The Census of India (2001) paints a positive picture of the Arunthathiyar population in Tamil Nadu, they are 15, 48, 798 which is 13.1 per cent of the total SC population. Some of them who are still indulging in menial works as required for livelihood, they now enter into all levels of government and private jobs, under various dignified positions. Thus this section of people gradually organise themselves to gain empowerment, immediate measures has to be taken to scaffold the present generation and bring out an attitudinal change in them towards facing the society with confidence.

#### **D. POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR THE WELFARE OF ARUNTHATHIYARS**

The community who do the conservancy job are found under different caste names throughout the country, such as the Bhangis in Gujarat, the Pakhis in Andhra Pradesh, and the Arunthathiyars in Tamil Nadu. Arunthathiyar community is one of the 76 Scheduled castes. The policies and programmes, formulated by the Central and state government is to the Scheduled castes as a whole. However, there are a few programmes, specifically to the Safai Karmacharis (conservancy workers).

The Arunthathiyar population, around 65 per cent of them are spread out in the rural area, and the rest 35 per cent are urban residents. Their main occupation in the rural area is related to daily wage labour in the agricultural sector, while the urban population are mostly engaged in conservancy work. They are located in the slums and occupied either as permanent employees in corporation, municipality on a regular monthly salary, or on daily wage basis under the contractor. Their work is involved in most unhygienic and hazardous conditions. The Hindu (July, 2017) reports that Safai Karamchari Andolan, a national movement for total eradication of manual scavenging, filed a Public Litigation Petition to the Madras High Court. The petition says that 30 persons have lost their lives in six districts of Tamil Nadu between the years 2014 to 2017. The petitioner, therefore wanted the court to pass directions to the union and state governments to implement the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, to lodge FIR's and initiate criminal proceedings against persons those engaging manual scavengers.

This section attempts to list the various policies and programmes. Quite encouragingly, in Tamil Nadu the government has implemented a few programmes exclusively to the Arunthathiyar. The three per cent inner reservation (out of 18 per cent for the Scheduled castes) to the Arunthathiyars in Educational Institutions and Government jobs is one of the programmes. The following section presents the union, state policies / programmes, and the initiatives of the voluntary organisations to promote educational, economic life of this group of people.

## **a) Educational policies and programmes**

The primary educational problems of the Schedule Castes are: 1) The prevalence of low literacy rates 2) High, school dropout rates 3) Low quality education 4) Low retention rates at higher levels of education 5) Discrimination in some form or the other including admissions to educational institutions. Therefore the focus of the government programme has been on improving both at school and higher education level to facilitate enrolment and admission, reduce the dropout rates, improve the quality and capabilities of educational content and encourage retention at the higher levels, including professional education and research that could lead to better educational attainment.

In accordance with the above aims, the government schemes include measures to improve the educational infrastructure, facilitate admissions to educational institutions, provide financial support at various levels of education and conduct remedial coaching to build capabilities among the educationally most backward sections. The section below explores certain important schemes, policies and programmes formulated and implemented in the education arena.

### ***i) National policy on education (NPE)***

The NPE lays emphasis on the attainment of minimum levels of learning at all stages of education – primary, middle and secondary – and overall personality development of the student. The special provisions for the SC's have been incorporated in the existing schemes of the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy, Secondary Education and Higher Education:

1. Relaxed norms for opening primary schools
2. A primary school within one Km walking distance from habitations of 200 people instead of 300
3. Incentives like free textbooks, uniforms, stationary and school bags to students
4. Priority given to areas with high concentration of SC's in major programs of the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy like the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Non Formal Education

(NFE) and the National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NPNSPE)

5. Abolition of tuition fees up to senior secondary level in most states
6. Out of the 43,000 scholarships 13,000 are reserved for the SC/ST candidates, 70 scholarships are also reserved under the National Talent Search Examination
7. Strict observation of reservation of seats for the SC Candidates in central government institutions such as the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT's), The Indian Institute of Management (IIM's), Regional Engineering Colleges, central universities, Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas. In public educational institutions apart from reservation, there is also relaxation in the minimum qualifying cut off percentages for admission. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has established SC/ST cells in 103 universities, including central universities, to ensure proper implementation of the reservation policy. A standing committee has also been set up by UGC to review the implementation of the reservation policy in various public educational institutions
8. Remedial and special coaching is provided to improve the academic skills, linguistic proficiency and levels of comprehension of SC students. The IITs have scheme under which SC students who fail by a small margin in the entrance examinations are provided a year's preparatory course and
9. The UGC has also special provisions for the SC / ST candidates, they are:
  - a. A scheme to coach candidates for National Eligibility Test (NET)
  - b. Relaxation of 5 per cent marks (from 55 to 50) at the Master's level for appointment of lecturers and to appear for National Eligibility Test (NET) that which qualifies for lecturer ship; subsequently there is also a relaxation of 10 per cent cut off marks for the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) test and

- c. Every year 50 JRF's in the Science and Humanities subjects are awarded for those candidates who qualify in the NET and appointed as lecturers.

### ***ii) Special Education Schemes***

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) implements various centrally sponsored schemes for the educational development of SC's through state governments and Union Territory (UT) administrations. Some of the schemes are:

1. Central sector scheme of up gradation of merit of SC students
2. Centrally sponsored coaching and allied scheme
3. Pre - metric scholarships (PMS) for the children of those engaged in unclean professions
4. Post - metric scholarships for the SC students
5. Book banks for SC students
6. Scheme for girls / boys hostels for SC students
7. National overseas scholarships for SC students
8. Passage grants for SC students and
9. Dr. Ambedkar national merit scholarship

### **b) Policies and programmes for economic development**

The private sector engages more than 90 per cent of SC workers, yet there is no action policy. The state has used general economic and social programs for SC's to improve the private ownership of various sources of income such as agriculture (land and nonfarm assets), capital assets, human resource capabilities (education and skills), and the access to social and basic services like housing, health, drinking water, electricity etc. All the programmes are part of anti poverty and other social and economic programmes for the empowerment of the poor.

The other special schemes for improvement in the employability of labour include:

1. Training of labour for up gradation of skills and capabilities to enhance their employment opportunities
2. Coaching – cum guidance for occupational information
3. Coaching schemes for job seekers and
4. Registration with employment exchanges

There are also special schemes for occupational groups such as sweepers, in the areas of education, health, housing, etc. As SC's constitute about 61 per cent of bonded labourers in the country, the government has separate programs for their release and rehabilitation.

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) is the nodal ministry at the central government responsible for policy initiatives, intervention, and implementation of various schemes / programmes. The programmes and schemes of this ministry aims at supporting and supplementing the efforts of other union government ministries, state governments UTs and voluntary organizations by way of providing financial assistance in the form of grants, etc. The ministry's Scheduled Caste division (SCD) administers these schemes. The other important administrative set – ups are:

- National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC)
- National Commission for Safai Karmacharis (NCSK) and
- National Safai Karmacharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC)

### **c) Tamil Nadu State Initiatives**

Tamil Nadu pioneered in framing the Act 4 of 2009, exclusively for the welfare of Arunthathiyars that came into force on 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2009. It is a Special Reservation of seats in educational Institutions including private educational institutions and of appointments or posts in the services under the state, within the Reservation for the Scheduled Castes (3 per cent inner reservation, out of the 18 per cent reserved for Scheduled Castes as a whole).

Narayanaswamy and Sachithanandam (2011) consolidate the special care taken by the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazagham) Government of Tamil Nadu towards:

- Construction of Samathuvapuram – this is a colony, where all caste people live together without any discriminatory practices
- Samathuva Mayanam– it is a common burial ground for all caste people
- Personal contribution of 62 lakhs for the benefit of higher education expenses for the Arunthathiyar students
- Samachirkalvithittam, which means equitable education i.e. a system which adapts a common syllabus for both Tamil and English and other media of instruction and different types of school education like matriculation and state board and
- Special order to purchase latest equipments for cleaning underground drainage in ten corporations in Tamil Nadu.

The SC's, particularly the Arunthathiyars living in the urban area, have their major occupation as conservancy work and are the main occupants of slums. Although, many of the slum dwellers are residents for more than a decade, not all of them would have their ownership rights. Possibly, they can be evacuated at any time, often they are also the victims of riots and other untoward happenings and natural calamities. The residents in the coastal areas are often the victims of floods. Some of the special programmes to address such situations and few of the central schemes that are channelled through the state administration are presented below:

***i. Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB)***

The major objectives of the Board are:

- a. To clear slums, particularly those located in flood prone and other vulnerable areas
- b. To prevent private land owners from evicting the slum dwellers from their settlements

- c. To make slum areas habitable, through providing basic amenities like drinking water, roads, drainages, storm water drains, electricity etc.
- d. Resettlement of families living in objectionable location
- e. Flood alleviation programme, construction of houses to families and
- f. Provide fire proof houses.

## ***ii. Adi Dravida Welfare Programme***

The Adi Dravida Welfare Department of the government allots funds every year to support the education of children of the “Unclean occupation” with scholarships. The allocation is made district wise for the purpose of primary / pre metric education.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, established National Scheme for the Liberation and Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (NSLRS) in the year 1993. In Tamil Nadu, THADCO (Tamil Nadu Adi Dravida Housing Development Corporation) is the state agency for implementation of schemes to the conservancy workers, wherein they provide them and their dependents with alternate employment.

Tamil Nadu has many schemes for the school - going children in the government schools. It has provided free public education up to lower secondary level since 1964 and for upper secondary level since 1978 (Kajisa and Palanichamy, 2009). It was the first State to make schooling compulsory in 1993 (Gold and White, 2004). Kajisa and Palanichamy (2009) present the details of policies implemented in the 1980s, such as midday meals (1982) and free uniforms and books (1985). This helped reduce the costs of primary and upper primary education to almost its opportunity costs, therefore benefitting many families when investing in their children’s schooling. Since, most of the Arunthathiyar children are enrolled into government schools; they are also the beneficiaries of the schemes.

The Hindu (2015) presents the positive role played by the District Collector, the district administration and the health department, who

empathetically accepted the representation given by these manual scavengers to put forth their pathetic working condition. Sanitary workers aged 36 years and 14 others from Tirupur city, working as manual scavengers for many years, saw a new dawn. They complained that they get deep into septic tanks, man-holes and drains to clean the human excreta and other rubbish, the firms that employed them did not bother to provide with protective gear. The team of officials found jobs with the agency that was outsourced for housekeeping and now all of them are happy carrying out housekeeping at the hospital. Their response to the new role taken by them was “Now we have the feel of dignified life for the first time. Our health related matters are also taken care by the hospital”.

#### **d) Voluntary initiatives**

The International, national voluntary organizations have also contributed to the betterment of the conservancy worker.

Kompier (2012) presents that the different UN agencies had taken different entry points as far as the issue of manual scavenging was concerned. UNICEF has taken manual scavenging as a water and sanitation issue; World Health Organisation (WHO) has taken it up as a health issue. UNDP has set up a special task force on the issue of rights of the Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribes. UN Women have also come on board to address manual scavenging based on the fact that 95 per cent of the manual scavengers were women. ILO facilitated a National Consultation in Gujarat at the Indian Institute of Management to gather understanding on some of the major issues affecting the manual scavengers' community.

Singh (2014) journeyed across 11 states meeting manual scavengers, different in language, dress customs and even in their expectations of liberations but united by the dehumanising nature of their work and the caste enforced blight on the entire community. The government of India sanctioned one hundred crores in 2011 and 2012 -13 for the rehabilitation of manual scavengers and elimination of this practice. The money was not spent; instead it lapsed, as they said that no manual scavenger came forward to take this help. The Safai

Karmachari Andolan (SKA) supported her and she now runs an auto rickshaw. The change is heralded by the woman to declare that she will no longer do the manual scavenging job nor allow the children to do it.

Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak was the founder of Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, a NGO in India whose pioneering work on low-cost sanitation benefited millions of people within and outside the country. Dr. Pathak's work on sanitation began four decades ago, now popularly known as the Sulabh toilet, with a crusade to elevate the social status of scavengers. He knew that his only chance of changing this 4,000 year old practice was to eliminate the need for scavengers, by making latrines maintenance - free, or as close to it as possible (Asian Development Bank, 2011).

Sulabh has built 1.2m of the latrines across India and helped 60,000 scavengers find new work. "The toilet is a tool of social change," declares Bindeshwar Pathak, a (high-caste) Brahmin who started the charity in 1970 and has developed a passion for lavatory technology. At Sulabh's training centre in Alwar, in western India, dozens of scavengers have learned cleaner ways to earn money, from pickle-making to tailoring. One of their best-selling products is the tiny white wick used in the oil lamps of Hindu temples. Lalita Nanda, an ex-scavenger who is bundling the wicks into bags, says with a grin that they are all bought by priests who until recently would not let her cross the threshold of their temples (Economist, 2008).

However the civil society need to be more inclusive of the manual scavenging community, according to Bezwada (2012) as stigma attached to the identity of a manual scavenger did not allow the other members of the family to live with dignity, rehabilitation was important not only for the Manual Scavengers but for their families, and for the whole community at large. Live telecast on the issue of manual scavenging will help a long way, yet the TV channels has not been receptive to the request.

An interesting story presented by Nivedita, The Hindu (2017) tells that some of the people accept their situation with a positive outlook and contend emotionally. According to her "As the night sets in, the work of the sanitary workers begin at 10 p.m. at Vishakapatnam Municipal Corporation, and finally

lay down their broom and the orange reflective jacket at 5 a.m. before heading home the next day. They are the unsung heroes behind the city achieving the tag of the third 'cleanest city' in the country in Swachis Survekshana – 2017. One of the sanitary worker working in the unglamorous task for 15 years comments "I treat these streets as my home" further she adds "Last year we got fifth place and it made me feel good and I did know that this year we got the third position and it is a matter of pride and that our efforts have paid off somewhere, sometimes people come to us and appreciate that we are doing a great job and it makes us feel happy".

In spite of various policies and programmes the scenario of the life of Arunthathiyars looks quite gloomy. Their social, economic and occupational status is all-similar in the four districts visited by the researcher, namely: Ramanathapuram, Erode, Cuddalore and Coimbatore. Ranjith (2012) in his study points out, that the elite SC communities (non Arunthathiyars) maintained significant influence and managed to gain entry into the educational institutions of the state. This inequity provoked Tamil Nadu government to develop an independent policy for the Arunthathiyars by allotting the three per cent inner reservation. According to him, lack of awareness is also the reason for not accessing many of the welfare programmes. Another study by Saranya (2013) indicates that 71 per cent of the study population were not aware of the government schemes.

It is therefore evident from these studies, personal observation and interaction, that the influential SC persons (non Arunthathiyars) have stronger influence with the local leaders, politicians, local administration and other government departments. The 18 per cent general reservations for SC's in all welfare programs do not trickle down to the bottom and reach the Arunthathiyars. As they are placed at the bottom of the Dalit community due to their occupation, the information about the benefits hardly reach them. Secondly, Arunthathiyars are comparatively milder than the other SC's, they depend on a representative to approach the government offices and finally, the nature of their work limits their mobility and motivation. Hence, the present study was aimed at eliciting information on the kind of programmes/ entitlements accessed by

Arunthathiyars, to help understand the extent of its utility for the ultimate benefit of their children, the adolescents.

## **E. EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF ARUNTHATHIYARS AND RELEVANT CASE STUDIES**

According to the 1951 census only nine per cent of the female population and 27 per cent of the male population was literate. Under the British rule, the contributions to Indian education were made mainly for the purpose of reinforcing elite that could help to administer the country. India has 22 per cent of the world's population but 46 per cent of the world's illiterates, and is home to a high proportion of the worlds out of school children and youth. Within the purview of overall education, primary education is recognized as a basic human right, vital both to the development of individuals and societies (UNESCO, 2008).

At the time of India's independence in 1947, the literacy levels were very low. Mahatma Joti Rao Phule (1826 – 1890), was the pioneer of Dalit education. He started a separate school for untouchable children as early as 1851 in the Marathi speaking area of Bombay presidency. It was the first school in India for the untouchables, as he felt the necessity for modern education and the acquisition of scientific knowledge as a weapon, to bring about a cultural revolution. He established eighteen schools between 1848 – 1852 in the vicinities of Pune and later he was supported by his wife, Savithri Bai Phule (1831 – 1897). This was perhaps the most radical step that influenced various parts of the country. Later, several Indian princes, chiefly those of Baroda, Mysore and Travancore developed a philanthropic and political interest in the case of untouchables, both under the impetus of Hindu reformism and of their British advisor. In the process, the Maharaja of Pithapuram established a school with free hostel facilities for untouchables. In fact many of the Dallit intellectuals of the early twentieth century were products of these schools (Yagati, 2012).

The educational scenario in general fairly improved after independence, the 1950 Indian Constitution declared that "the State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free

and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years". The aim of free and compulsory was reconfirmed by successive central governments. The compulsory primary education Acts were passed by most of the state governments. However, in spite of great efforts, the educational level of the population increased rather slowly and large differences among social groups and gender disparity still remain (Kingdon et al., 2005). Children from the richest 20 per cent of the population have an average of 11.1 years of schooling, compared to 4.2 years for children from the poorest 20 per cent. Poor rural girls do even worse, with an average of only three years of education. Children from the lower castes and tribes have school attendance rates well below the national average (UNESCO, 2010).

Dalit children, most heavily suffer the ills of an inequitable and ineffective education system in India. In 1993 only 16.2 per cent of primary school age Dalit children were enrolled in school as compared to 83 per cent children from non scheduled castes. According to the India Education Report, school attendance in rural areas in 1993–1994 was 64.3 per cent for Dalit boys and 46 per cent for Dalit girls, when compared to 74.9 per cent among boys and 61 per cent girls from other non Dalit groups (Singh, 2013).

The study by Narayanaswamy et al., (2011) found that in village Panchayats and town Panchayats dropout occurs in the early stages of education. This may be attributed to the difficulty for the Arunthathiyar children in coping with the school system. The difficulty level increases as he goes up in the education ladder and it gradually ends up in dropout. Most children expressed their inability to be at par with their class mates, this situation makes them lose their self confidence and develop irrevocable inferiority complex that ultimately ends in school dropout. Some rural children relate their inability to cope with school curriculum and believed that it is due to their non conducive family environment.

Arunthathiyars used to send their children to other schools, in nearby town and cities; majority of the children were in the age group of 11 -14 years; 25 per cent were in the age group of 6-8 years and 17 per cent were in the age group of 9-10 year. 54 per cent were male students and 46 were female students and the

majority of parents of 534 students were daily wage earner. Nearly 50 per cent of the students faced discrimination in seating arrangements, participation in sports and extra- curricular activities, noon meal programme, some of the girl students were asked to clean the toilets and classrooms. There were even verbal abuses and calling caste names, all this led to students drop out (Parthiban et al., 2010).

While the socio economic status is static and a perennial problem for the Arunthathiyars, the caste atrocities also add up to this. The Hindu (2011) reports related incidences - Fourteen year old Ravi used to be a beneficiary of the Self Employment Scheme for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) 2007, as his mother was cleaning the toilets in the village. One day she gathered enough courage and to quit the job, instantly the scholarship funds were stopped and she faced hostility from the villagers, she was asked "If you don't clean the toilets, then who will? Due to the stigma, mother could not get a job, Ravi belonging to a family of six siblings and daily life has become difficult for him.

The Hindu, (2015) reports that a 14 year old Arunthathiyar girl was gang raped by five men on two different days, while she was on her way back from school and the same was photographed to further victimise and black mail the girl. Consequent to the report in the Hindu the National commission for Scheduled caste's fact finding team arrived and held in camera proceedings with the girl and her family. The team supervised the issue of relief of ₹.1.80 lakhs to the victim by the administration. The girl's father holds a Master Degree in Arts and a B.Ed (Bachelor of Education) but works as a wage labourer; though he never got a job he is keen on his daughter's education.

The Hindu (Dindigul, 2014) reports a study in Virudhunagar presented by the MLA. Out of the total respondents, 198 or (44 %) of Arunthathiyars are illiterate. It is evident that only 4.9 per cent go beyond school education for higher level studies and only 4.4 per cent of respondents have done diploma and U.G. courses. The admissions into Post Graduate and Professional courses are only 0.4 per cent. Mosse (2017) states that the Arunthathiyars are least educated when compared to the other Dalits. 65 per cent of males and 80 per cent of females among Arunthathiyars are illiterates. Pragathi, (2005) conducted

a study related to the education and occupation of Arunthathiyar community in Pondicherry. The author says that the dropouts are very high in level among them. The reasons are: to help their mothers, failing in examination, to look after the younger siblings etc. The study concluded that 48.3 per cent are illiterates, 33.8 per cent have attended high school, 33.8 per cent higher secondary school, primary 12.9 per cent and diploma / degree five per cent. This data reveal that no person has gone for higher education in Pondicherry except the case of a boy who is doing his engineering degree course.

The educational status of Arunthathiyars is consolidated and presented, according to that only 1.75 per cent people of Arunthathiyar community are literates and the rest of 98.16 per cent are illiterates, 0.16 per cent of the people have completed their high school. Because of the poor socio economic status of the community the children are rarely sent to elementary school, even when they go, they drop out of school. Most of the children in the rural areas work as bonded labourers in the agricultural farms of the upper caste. Children in the urban areas work as temporary workers in restaurants / hotels, automobile mechanic sheds, garages. Even with much difficulty if they complete 12 class, they are unable to pursue college education due to poor economical stability (Krishnasamy, 2011).

In Tamil Nadu “The Self Respect Movement” was founded in 1925 by Periyar popularly known as EVR, to encourage the lower caste develop and appreciate the concept in the context of caste based hierarchical society. He described the movement as Arivu Vidutalailyakkam, that is, a movement to liberate the intellect. The term ‘tan – maanam’ or ‘suyamariyadai’ meaning ‘self respect’ are traceable in ancient Tamil literature considered a virtue of high valor in Tamil society. This movement was extremely influential not just in Tamil Nadu, but also in countries with large Tamil Populations, such as Malaysia and Singapore. Among Singapore Indians, the groups like Tamil Reform Association, and leaders like Thamizhavel and Sarangapani were prominent in promoting the principles of the Self Respect Movement among the local Tamil population through schools and Publications (Geetanjali, 2011).

On the positive side, India has encouraging progress in recent times that is raising schooling participation (Kingdon, 2007). Tamil Nadu has many schemes for the school going children. It has provided free public education up to lower secondary level since 1964 and for upper secondary level since 1978 (Kajisa and Palanichamy, 2009). It was the first State to make schooling compulsory in 1993 (Gold and White, 2004). Kajisa and Palanichamy (2009) present the details of policies implemented in the 1980s, such as midday meals (1982) and free uniforms and books (1985). This helped reduce the costs of primary and upper primary education to almost its opportunity costs, therefore benefitting many families when investing in their children’s schooling. The data from MHRD was given by Celeti (2015) in his study, the enrolment of SC students to various classes in Tamil Nadu as compared to the national SC population as well as the general population seems to be encouraging. The Table - I details the enrolment rates of SC students in India and Tamil Nadu.

**TABLE- I**  
**GROSS ENROLMENT RATES FOR INDIA AND**  
**TAMIL NADU (2010–2011)**

Place		Primary (I – V)	Upper Primary (VI – VIII)	Lower Secondary (IX- X)	Upper Secondary (XI – XII)
India	All	116	85.5	65	39.3
	SC’s	132	92.3	70.9	38.3
Tamil Nadu	All	111.8	112.3	82.3	50.4
	SC’s	126.2	129.3	104	59.5

Source – \*Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), 2012

Gandhiji ‘The father of our nation’ perceived village schools as the primary agencies of social transformation aimed at facilitating the process of self reliance of the local communities. To him, rural education schooling was more than the mere exercise of enabling each child with the basic knowledge of 3 R’s, namely reading, writing and arithmetic. He visualized the village schools as the basic agency of preparing future citizen’s who could act as role models of the key architects of the destiny of their communities. According to his belief the school children were best suited to play the role of the change agents in the

transformation of the local community. Bapu's vision was to ensure that village schools function as a temple of learning to prepare a potential cadre of the 'Servants of the society' at the land of each community (Singh, 2006).

Jawaharlal Nehru declared that if all were well with our educational institutions, all would be well with the nation. Educational institutions are intimately linked with society at large. As a student spends most of his life at school, the school environment is highly responsible for inculcating great values in him (Lawrence and Vimala, 2012).

Apart from government even the civil society organizations have taken initiative for educational development. A new insertion community called KARISAL at Alangulam, a remote village in Virudhunagar district came into existence in 1997. In KARISAL the Jesuit team decided to tutor school students in the evenings for the following two reasons: teaching the children seemed to be an easy entry into Arunthathiyar settlements; secondly, the children badly need education, and evening study is likely to reduce school dropouts and child labour. Later with the help of a few donors and the Madurai province administration, put up two buildings: one to provide boarding and lodging for the school students, and the other to accommodate the technical training girls as well as a small health centre to provide basic medicines and treatment. Most Arunthathiyar students today are the first generation to go to school or college (Ratinam, 2015).

The Hindu (May 21, 2013), report's the plight of S. Gayathri, aged 17 years hailing from Chinnamaruthur, about 35 km from Namakkal town. She has scored 1,129 (94 per cent) in the Plus Two exams, her parents have never been to school and are daily wage farm labourer. Gayathri is the eldest child and has two sisters and a brother, the family always had trouble meeting their day to day needs as her father often fell sick and on many occasions the mother was the sole breadwinner of the family. Gayathri aspires to become a doctor and she has 197/200 cut off for entry into medical course, according to the President of Malar school "In 2012, the lowest cut off score for a candidate from the Arunthathiyar community to get a medical seat in a government medical college was 188.25.

But poverty has forced her to work in agricultural fields as a daily wager so that she can earn ₹.100/- per day to support her family.

The Hindu, (June 28, 2015) reports the childhood dream of Prasanth, an Arunthathiyar student from a poor family of agricultural labourers in Perambalur district, had a dream to become a doctor. 57 students were handpicked from government schools of the district for special coaching in Plus - Two under the 'Super 30' initiative of the district administration. He scored 1,108 marks and a cut-off of 193.25, Prasanth has been allotted a seat in the Chenglepet Government Medical College. He is one of the three Dalit students who have secured MBBS admission, However, Prasanth's parents were unable to pay the initial fees for admission into medical college and he was trying for sponsorship.

Organizations, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), have also been involved in providing educational programmes with the same aims in Tamil Nadu. The key research findings that emerged pinpoint the way debt bondage is tied to a broader social system that reproduces itself by maintaining the Arunthathiyar within a low social-cultural position, amongst other things, by undercutting their education. The findings also highlight the role education can have in integrating formerly bonded labourers, by assisting them to gradually move out of their low caste position. This includes changing their mentalities, teaching them the official state language and providing skills to engage in the broader labour market.

The Rural Women's Development Trust (RWDT) an NGO in Salem help release bonded labourers and support to further their education. The organization also assists around 75 villages spread throughout the area by establishing night tuition centres in partnership with AID India. The latter is a large NGO which, amongst other things, aims at improving the quality of education in the rural context. The NGO trains village youth as "motivators" to teach village children Tamil, English and math in the afternoon. An estimated 4,752 children have benefited from these night centres which are usually held at the village temple (Celeti, 2015).

The Hindu reports that Coimbatore District Collector Archana Patnaik honoured Arunthathiyar and other students who had secured the first three ranks in the Plus Two examinations. She presented certificates and cash awards to the students. According to READ (Rural Education And Development Center, 2012) only two out of 100 Arunthathiyars are literate, therefore they have organized 150 Child Activity Centres across Erode and Salem districts. These centres cater to the educational needs of Arunthathiyar children, coaching in maths; improve reading and writing skills in Tamil and English. 8000 children benefit from the programme, the drop out children and child workers are identified in the community. The children thus identified are prepared to go back to schools. Frequent school enrolment campaigns also ensure that children continue education in school. 43 children who were school drop outs and child labourers were supported to continue education.

Vizuthugal, (2016) an NGO working with Arunthathiyars has supported students for higher studies. Rajkumar is the son of a sweeper in Tiruppur Municipal Corporation; the monthly income was scarce to support his education. The NGO motivated him to continue his studies and enrolled him in their evening coaching centre. Through this exercise he got first place in the class in the half yearly examination, and third place in the public examinations, the marks scored were 488 out of 500. Vizhuthugal introduced him to the District Collector, who arranged for free education at Anthiyur Adharsh Vidhyalaya where he completed his higher secondary education for two years as a hosteller. He hopes to score good marks and get into MBBS. Similarly Priyanka hails from Panapalayam sweeper's colony in Palladam, her parents work in a garment manufacturing unit. She was supported to continue her graduation (B.A) in L.R.G. Women's College. Simultaneously she has joined B.Com (part time) and she intends to join C.A.(Chartered Accountant) course. Vizhuthugal organizers also supported her younger brother for admission into B.E (Bachelor of Engineering). Kalaichithra's father is a daily wager labourer she completed D.T.Ed (Diploma in Teacher Education) course and now she works as a teacher in a private school and joined B.A. English literature through distance education.

Ranjith (2012) gives the number of engineering seats allotted to Arunthathiyars in the year 2006- 07 and 2007-08 were 478 and 681, similarly the number of medical seats were 10 and 16 respectively. However, due to the special reservation policy in Tamil Nadu for the community, during the year 2009, the number of seats allotted was 56 medical and 1165 engineering seats.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that education is a tool for the abjuration of traditional values and prepare for change. He visualized education as a powerful weapon not only as a means of livelihood but also to liberate Dalits from ignorance and to strengthen their fight against injustice and humiliation. His slogan "Unite, educate and agitate" is a message to Dalits to organize as a movement. Obviously one such solution to all the problems of Arunthathiyars is education. The present study goes deeper to understand the various factors influencing the academic achievement.

## **F. HEALTH STATUS OF ARUNTHATHIYARS AND RELEVANT CASE STUDIES**

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity as defined by World Health Organization (WHO, 2007). Further emphasizing on mental health, WHO states that, "There is no health without mental health". Mental health is not just the absence of mental disorder, it is a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These conditions are ultimately shaped at two levels, the structural and proximal. The structural is the differences in status, power, privilege, and access to resources and information: these are the national wealth, income inequality, educational status, gender norms, or ethnicity. Proximal determinants are the circumstances of daily life, like the quality and nature of family and peer relationships, availability of food and housing, opportunities for recreation, and school environment, all these directly

influence a person's attitudes and behaviour. The cultural, religious and community factors also play their role, and can lead to wide variations in young people's exposure and vulnerability to health (WHO, 2014).

The Arunthathiyar population seem to be the victims of both structural and proximal determinants of health to an extent. Malnutrition is a major health problem of our country, assessment of nutritional status is one of the most important health indicators of a population group. Various studies have confirmed that malnutrition exists among the poorest section of our country in which children are victims (ICMR, 1984). The Arunthathiyars living in a small village in Virudnagar district have just one square meal a day. The rest of the two meals may not be a meal in total. A study undertaken in 1998 shows that 95 per cent of these people are affected by malnutrition. Some of the children engaged in match box and fireworks industry are exposed to fire accidents that often led to injuries (Ratinam, 2015).

The phenomenal growth that occurs in adolescence, second only to that in the first year of life, creates increased demands for energy and nutrients. Total nutrient needs are higher during adolescence than any other time in the lifecycle. Nutrition and physical growth are integrally related; optimal nutrition is a requisite for achieving full growth potential. Failure to consume an adequate diet at this time can result in delayed sexual maturation and can arrest or slow linear growth. Nutrition is also important during this time to help prevent adult diet-related chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and osteoporosis (Stang and Story 2005).

Poverty drives the Arunthathiyar adolescents to any level of work, girls from various districts succumb to the work at the textile mills in Coimbatore, Tiruppur and Erode. A base line survey carried out in Erode district found that 81 per cent of the workers in the textile mills are from Arunthathiyar community. The majority of these workers are in the age group below 18 years, who have dropped out of school at primary and middle level joined the "Sumangali Thittam". The main reason for joining the mills is due to their family economic condition. The non-conducive living conditions also including dust pollution at the work place, long hours of work and the kind of food provided have led the girls to

loss of weight and its related problems, headaches, fever, menstrual related problems, skin infections general weakness, osteoporosis, stress and respiratory problems including asthma and Tuberculosis (Karuppusamy, 2014).

The community who do the scavenging job are found under different caste names throughout the country, such as the Bhangis in Gujarat, the Pakhis in Andhra Pradesh, and the Arunthathiyars in Tamil Nadu. The Union Ministry for Social Justice and Empowerment during 2002 - 2003 has acknowledged the existence of manual scavengers spread across 21 States and Union Territories of India. Manual scavengers are employed by private and public employers, in the military engineering services, the army, railways, and other sectors of the state. This has severe repercussions on their health, according to the February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007's report from the Centre for Human Rights - Global Justice, New York - the majority of scavengers suffer from anaemia, diarrhoea, and vomiting, 62 per cent suffer from respiratory diseases, 32 per cent afflicted with skin diseases, 42 per cent have jaundice, and 23 per cent have trachoma that lead to blindness. Many scavengers have also died of carbon monoxide poisoning while cleaning the septic tanks (Narayanaswamy and Sachithanandam, 2011).

As WHO rightly says health is holistic, good mental health is essential to lead a satisfactory life. It is estimated that globally over 450 million people suffer from mental disorder. Currently mental and behavioural disorders account for about 12 per cent of the global burden of diseases; this is likely to increase to 15 per cent by 2020. Major proportions of mental disorders come from low and middle income countries. Most strongly associated factors with mental disorders are deprivation and poverty. Individuals with lower levels of education, low household income, and lack of access to basic amenities are at high risk of mental disorder (Reddy et al., 2013).

Around 20 per cent of the world's adolescents have a mental health or behavioural problem. Almost 50 per cent of mental, behavioural and psychological problems have their onset during the adolescence period; the stress faced by the children and adolescents in current situation becomes enormous. The prevalence rate of psychiatric disorders in India is 12.5 per cent among children aged 0-16 years and 12 per cent among the 4-16 year's

children. Suicide death rates in India are among the highest in the world. There is rapid globalization and urbanization, thus leading to breaking up of joint families and the traditional social support systems (Vranda, 2015).

Poverty and mental health go hand in hand, in the heart of Coimbatore city, a partially visually impaired man, aged about 55 years earns his livelihood by begging, and that would fetch him ₹.250/- per day. Subsequently he had also built good relationship with the families living in the slums and working as manual scavengers and sanitary worker. Further he would lend money on interest to the families, and also provide eatables to children. The proximity thus developed with the Arunthathiyars was later used to exploit the families. He managed to have sexual relationship not only with the women but also with children. Two female children were thus psychologically traumatized due to endured sexual exploitation for six-seven year. The children were sent to Children's home for counselling and rehabilitation, which helped them return back to normalcy.

A group of about 15 Arunthathiyar children in the age group of 13 to 14 years, dropped out of the middle school. These children would collect iron and plastic scraps or sieve in the drainages near the goldsmith shops and thus collect the gold granules. They would later sell these materials for a paltry sum, eventually due to the lack of parental care they also got addicted to substance abuse. One of the boys who was intoxicated for the past four years, recently died due to brain fever (AHRF, 2010).

Khalid, Hasan, Ossama, (2009) identified the prevalence rates of mental disorders among children and adolescents range from 1per cent to 51 per cent, with a mean rate of 15.8 per cent for adolescents. In developing countries the prevalence of mental disorders among adolescents attending primary health care facilities ranges between 12 per cent and 29 per cent. Several studies indicate that prevalence rates of the individual disorders: depression, anxiety and stress are growing among adolescents.

Depression and anxiety are recognized as common and serious disorders, and debilitating mental health problems in the changing social context and are

afflicting adolescents and student population to a large extent (Andrews and Wilding, 2004). Lifetime prevalence increases drastically from 1 per cent of the population under age 12 years to 17–25 per cent of the population by the end of adolescence, with an increase in cases in age-group of 15–18 years (Kessler, Avenevoli, Merikangas, 2001).

According to WHO (1994) depression is characterized by significantly impaired mood with a loss of interest or pleasure in activities that are normally enjoyable. Depression may be mild, moderate, or severe as described

- Mild depression ; Effort is required to do normal daily work
- Moderate depression: Involves occupational and social impairment. Depression prevents the individual from doing things that need to be done
- Severe depression: Involves marked social and occupational impairment and may include psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations or delusions

Most people experience depression from time to time. However psychiatric illness involving a major depressive episode can be distinguished from normal depression by its severity persistence and duration (WHO, 1997).

Dysthymia a milder but more persistent form of depression, involves long periods of at least two years during which time the individual experiences depressed mood, loss of interest and energy, social withdrawal, poor concentration and memory, feelings of inadequacy, low self esteem, guilt anger hopelessness irritability and despair. Dysthymia does interfere with social and occupational functioning and some individuals experience major depressive episode.

Also from negative thoughts might include negative views of self negative interpretation of one's experiences and negative views of the future. Adolescents respond to depression in a variety of ways, some run away from home, some particularly boys express their feelings through externalizing behaviour and may act out aggressively. Girls more often express depression by internalizing it, worrying or becoming anxious.

Sibnath and Pooja (2010) observed “Anxiety is one of the most common psychological disorders in school-aged children and adolescents worldwide. The prevalence rates range from 4.0 per cent to 25.0 per cent, with an average rate of 8.0 per cent. These figures could only be approximate, since anxiety among a large number of children and adolescents goes undiagnosed owing to the internalized nature of its symptoms. Anxiety is associated with substantial negative effects on children’s social, emotional and academic success. In India, the main documented cause of anxiety among school children and adolescents is parents’ high educational expectations and pressure for academic achievement. In secondary school, all 16-year old children attempt the Class X first Board Examination, known as the Secondary Examination. Results of this Examination is vital for individuals, as it is the main determining criteria for future admission to a high quality senior secondary school and a preferred academic stream”.

Kathryn and David (2007) claim that everyone is anxious at times and being anxious can be useful. Relatively high levels of anxiety can be helpful when they are consistent with the demands of a situation for example during a game of football, an exam or a job interview anxiety may help to increase alertness and performance. Unfortunately, too high level of anxiety may reduce performance.

According to American Psychiatric Association 2001 four common types of anxiety disorder are:

- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Social phobia
- Specific phobia and
- Obsessive compulsive disorder

Generalized anxiety disorder is characterized by long periods of persistent and excessive anxiety and worry, the source of which is non specific. Adolescents experiencing generalized anxiety disorder may present with symptoms of nervousness, restlessness, trouble falling or staying asleep, poor concentration, frequent urination, irritable mood, depressed mood, dizziness,

light headedness, dizziness, muscular tension or becoming easily fatigued. Exhibit an additional anxiety disorder such as social or specific phobia. Social phobia is characterized by significant anxiety when exposed to certain types of social or performance situations. This disorder often leads to avoidance behaviour. Specific phobia is characterized by persistent or irrational fear of a particular object or situation and can also lead to avoidance behaviour. Obsessive compulsive disorder individuals may experience unpleasant or intrusive thoughts which are difficult to control for e.g. they be obsessively concerned about contaminating or harming themselves or their family.

According to Roy, Kamath and Kamath (2015) "Stress as the imprecise response of the body to any demand for change, it is also defined as a state of equilibrium where individuals ability to cope with stressor is productively less as compared to the demands of the situation. Adolescence can debatably be one of the stages that is most marked by rapid and potentially tumultuous transition, including various changes in biological, social, and psychological aspects. Globally, studies have reported the adolescent stress levels range from 20 per cent to 45 per cent, and the adolescent stressors can be broadly classified under five broad dimensions namely stressors at school, family, peers, personal health, and appearance. School environment and socioeconomic status (SES) of children also add up to determine the stress levels among adolescents".

Morgan et al., (2007) Stress is an internal state which can be caused by physiological demands on the body (disease conditions, exercise, extremes of temperature and the like) or by environmental and social situations which are evaluated as potentially harmful, uncontrollable or exceeding our resources for coping. The physical, environmental and social causes of the stress state are termed stressor. Once induced by stressors, the internal stress state can then lead to various responses. On to one hand it can result in a number of physical bodily responses. On the other hand psychological responses such as anxiety, hopelessness, depression, irritability and a general feeling of not being able to cope with the world can result from the stress state. Almost any change in the environment, even a pleasant change such as a vacation demands some coping and a little stress is useful in helping us adopt. But beyond some point stress becomes 'distress'. What acts to produce distress varies greatly from person to

person, but some events seem to be stressors for many of us. Chief among them are injuries, or infections of the body, annoying or dangerous events in our environment, major changes or transitions in life which force us to cope in new ways and anticipated or actual threats to our self esteem.

Stress is derived from the Latin word "*stringere*" which means "to draw tight". Stress is a general term applied to the pressures people feel in life. The stresses can be good or bad, sometimes, it is helpful, providing people with the extra energy or alertness they need. It could give a runner the edge he or she needs to persevere in a marathon and his good kind of stress is called eustress. The term stress was first employed in the biological context by the endocrinologist Selye in 1936. He used this term to identify physiological responses in laboratory animals, later broadened and popularized the concept to include inappropriate physiological response to any demand.

The concept of stress in relation to living organism was studied by Selye, according to him stress is a part of life and a natural by-product of all our activities. He stated that stress is manifested by a specific syndrome which consists of all the non- specifically-induced changes within a biologic system. Selye proposed three stage pattern of response to stress that he called General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS). Alarm is the first stage. When the threat or stressor is identified or realized, the body's stress response is a state of alarm. During this stage, adrenaline is produced in order to bring about the fight-or-flight response. Resistance is the second stage. If the stressor persists, it becomes necessary to attempt some means of coping with stress. Exhaustion is the third and final stage in the GAS model. At this point, all of the body's resources are depleted and the body is unable to maintain the normal function. The result can manifest itself in obvious illness such as ulcers, depression, diabetes, and trouble with the digestive system or even cardiovascular problems, along with other mental illness (Alka and Jatinder, 2016)

In order to measure mental health of adolescents in the study DASS- 42 (Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale) was used; the tool is reliable and valid measures in clinical and nonclinical population and different cultural and ethnic groups (Taylor et al., 2005).

Among the community factors, employment is one of the important determinant of health, it not only supports earn an income, but also defines a social status and improves self-esteem. The social contact, by participating in community life enhances opportunities for regular activity, which in turn results in individual health and well-being (Bartley, 1994; Barnett et al. 1995; Mathers and Schofield, 1998; Morrell et al., 1998). Poverty has been described by economists in terms of inadequate incomes and low levels of consumption. However in the recent past, various indicators of human development have been identified, which also includes health and nutrition (Human Development Report, UNDP, 1997).