INTRODUCTION

In the words of Pam Schiller and Tamera Bryant “The values we impart to our children today, consciously and unconsciously, will have a major impact on society tomorrow. If we continue to leave the teaching of values to chance, we, as a nation, risk losing an integral piece of our culture altogether’ and so considered are our children the most important asset to our Society”.

Creating a safe and healthy world for young children is as important a task like anything else that exists on earth. Children and childhood across the world, have broadly been interpreted in terms of a ‘golden age’ that is synonymous with innocence, freedom, joy, play and the likings. Yet millions of children around the world remain out of school tossed between poverty, illness, armed conflict, delinquency and exploitative labour. The reasons for exclusion from mainstream education are diversified and may include economic, socio-cultural barriers, ill health, religion, inaccessibility, political-conflict and gender discrimination. Children out of school contribute to major loss to our national development. The Development Personnel and Social Work Researchers believe that any child of school age who is not in school is the most disadvantaged and most vulnerable (Dr. Alicia Fentiman (2004)).

This study is an attempt to understand the situation of children who are out of school in Tiruchirappalli District in Tamil Nadu state, India. In this chapter, the researcher presents the existing situation of children, children’s status at the global, national, state and district level, importance of education, rights of children, government policies and programmes, parent and community involvement in children’s education and rationale for selecting the area of the study.

CHILDREN

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines “Children as persons below the age of 18”. However, in India there are several different definitions of the child. The Census of India defines “children as those below the age of 14”.
CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL

According to the online dictionary - thefreedictionary.com website, out-of-school means not attending school and therefore free to work.

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) Institute of Statistic considered a child to be out of school if he or she was of primary school age (usually between the ages of 6 and 11 years) and not enrolled in primary school. The standard definition changed in 2005 to include all primary school age children not enrolled in either primary or secondary school.

The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 inserted Article 21-A in the Constitution of India to provide free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine. According to the Constitution of India (Article 23), no child below the age of 14 must be employed in a factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment. Article 45 says that the State will provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14.

POPULATION OF CHILDREN

A report by UNICEF (2005) on the State of the World’s children under the title “Childhood under Threat” said that over a billion children i.e, half of the world’s population of children, have been denied their childhood. The report also highlighted that millions of Indian children were equally deprived for their rights to survival, health, nutrition, education and care. In India, the 2001 Census shows the total population of children in the age group of 0-14 years is 1,028.7 million. Millions of children hail from socio-economically weaker families and are compelled in a way or the other to socially get excluded from the mainstream society.
STATUS OF CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL

Global Status

In the year 2005, 72 million children of primary school age were out of school around the world as per the estimation of UNESCO. In the year 2010, according to UNESCO’s, there are still 69 million children out of school worldwide despite the acceleration in enrolments. Current trends will still leave 56 million children out-of-school in 2015 and the rate of progress may be slow. Regional progress has been uneven. Out-of-school numbers have fallen more rapidly in South Asia, driven by advances in India, than in sub-Saharan Africa. While enrolment ratios are rising, millions of children enter primary school only to drop out before completing a full primary cycle. Some 28 million pupils in sub-Saharan Africa drop out each year, and 13% of children entering school in South and West Asia drop out in the first grade. Enrolments in countries affected by conflict and fragility are stagnating and these countries account for more than half of all children who are out-of-school. In addition, even in well-performing countries particular groups of children remain at risk including indigenous and minority ethnic/language populations, those living in slums and in very sparsely populated areas, migrants, nomadic populations, individuals with diverse learning needs, children with disabilities and the poor in general. Within each of these categories, girls’ participation tends to be lower than that of boys.

Status in India

According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the number of out-of-school (OOS) children in the 6-14 age group during the year 2005 is 1.34 crore. As per the report of Right to Education (RTE) Act in India (2010), based on analysis of annual status of education by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the number of children in the age group of six to 14 are still out of school is 81,50,619. According to the report, "Access to education is no longer the real problem now, its quality of education and for which parameters have been set under the RTE Act like infrastructure in schools, pupil-teacher ratio and professionally qualified teachers." Some of the not so encouraging figures came as
far as the notification of rules in the states was concerned. In percentage terms, 4.22% of the total children in this age group are not going to school as per the latest figures.

**Status in Tamil Nadu State and Tirucirappalli District**

As per Household Survey 2001, 5.74 lakh out-of-school children were identified. During the year 2005 another Household survey was conducted and 2.79 lakh out of school children in the age group of 6-14 years were identified covering all the habitations of the State. According to General Educational Statistics of Tamil Nadu, the total number of out-of-school children during 2006 has been estimated to be 1,11,989 in all the districts in the State, out of which 4098 children (who were out of school) belong to Tiruchirappalli district. The district wise survey conducted by the "Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)". Education Department, Tiruchirappalli district reveals that during the year 2006-2007, 1828 children, who are remaining out of school, were identified and shortlisted for enrollment by the District Authorities. According to the survey figures, though the target of out-of-school children has been reduced to some extent, after intensive drive for coverage of all out of school children during the past years, still there are many children remaining out of school on streets and work spots. The problems of children out of school are not addressed completely and its outcome is gradually distressing the future generation and the whole society.

Undoubtedly, the problem of children out of school is almost common at the global, national and state level but differs according to the circumstances and culture. The issues around the associations between social exclusion, hidden children and drop out and completion rates from primary school still remain to be solved. Particularly the marginalised groups are most seriously at risk of dropping out. Only very few issues are recorded while many such issues in different children goes as a hidden agenda. Children who do not have the capacity to bear such problems absorb them in their mind and brood over it without knowing the alternatives for the problems. In addition as these children are out of school there is no possibility of knowing about their rights or to claim their rights. This completely barrens their life and they lose the opportunity of having a bright future.
DETERMINANTS FOR CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL

There are many reasons for children to stay out of school in India. These reasons are unique for each child depending upon the circumstance in which the child is born. Some of the major determinants that lead children to stay out of school in India are given as follows.

- Poverty is one of the key determinants for children to stay out of school. Poverty situation in families affects and worsens the life situation of young children. Extreme poverty in family may increase vulnerability. Poverty contributes to various social issues which ultimately forces the child to stay out of school or become drop out from school education.

- There is gender discrimination among children out of school. A girl has a lower status in India and enjoys fewer rights, opportunities and benefits of childhood as compared to a boy. The boy has rights on family and community resources. The girl-child is also neglected in matters of feeding, health care and education.

- Lack of interest towards education also can be a determinant for some children to remain out of school. This may stem out from reasons such as illiteracy in the family or absence of motivation to attend school education. Hence lack of interest prevents many children to remain out of school.

- Lack of motivation or encouragement to participate in the school education during the very early stages of life in children can make children to neglect school environment and continue to remain out of school thus losing the career prospects in life.

- School as such intending to cater education to the children does need to be more child friendly that create interest among children to learn appropriate skills. These facilities may also include teaching aids, approach of teachers, care provided by teachers, techniques adopted to develop skill, knowledge among the children.
should always be conducive and child friendly. Inadequate conducive learning environment can always make children to remain out of school.

- Schools which are meant to provide education to the children does require being equipped with adequate infrastructure facilities. Infrastructure facilities such as child friendly class rooms, furniture, transport facilities, distance between school and home, sanitation facilities need to be well maintained suiting to the taste of children. Lack of infrastructure facilities such as sanitary latrine, safe drinking water can disappoint children and their parents. It can also affect the health of the children. Hence lack of appropriate infrastructure facilities in school can always make children to remain out of school.

- Children of migrant labourers and construction workers are deprived of health, nutrition and education facilities. Day care facilities or educational institutions, which provide care needs of these children, are negligible for these children in the places wherever they migrate for the purpose of work. Hence the children belonging to the migrant workers always stay away from school. Many children do not even get the chances for getting enrolled in education due to frequent migration.

- Official agencies estimate that only one per cent of children with disability have access to education. Some of the person with profound form of disabilities does not have any mobility access or learning capacities required to attend to school education. Hence these children always continue to remain out of school due to their profound nature of disability and lack of adequate facilities for their rehabilitation.

- Chronic illness may be a determinant factor for children to remain out of school. Certain chronic illness such as Small Pox, Cancer, Cardiovascular diseases, Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B, HIV / AIDS can cause disturbances to children’s education and overall development. Many children affected with these diseases continue to stay out of school.
IMPLICATIONS OF CHILDREN BEING OUT OF SCHOOL

Though the Government is taking enormous steps to integrate the socially excluded children, it is still found that many children continue to be out of school and contribute to great loss to their own living as well as the society. The major implications of children being out of school to the child and their family in India are given below.

- According to the National Labour Institute in India, the children who are neither enrolled in schools nor accountable for in the labour force are all potential child labourers. Children who stay away from school environment are forced or attracted towards labour in unorganized sector. Out-of-School Children are also the main target of the labour market. They can be hired at much lower wages than adults. The meager earning generated at the end of the day encourages these children to involve them in the labour force. Ultimately they lose their career prospects and tend to lead ignorant lives as their parents did. Hence child labour is one of the major implications of children being out of school.

- India has the dubious distinction of having the population of street children. Street children suffer from destitution, neglect, abuse and exploitation. Education catering to the needs of street children is inadequate. These children find it difficult to stay with the mainstream society as their way of life is socially excluded. Hence street children always tend to stay away from the school environment.

- A number of children in prostitution are children of prostitutes. Children entering in to the prostitution industry learn to make easy money and develop business contacts which ultimately force them to neglect studies. Educational services catering to these children at the brothel houses such as open schooling are not available in India. Hence these children tend to stay as out of school children and ruin their career prospects. Many of these child prostitutes have never been enrolled in any forms of school for education.
- Children remaining out of school develop antisocial behavior and engage themselves in committing law breaking activities in their early stages in life and may become social deviants. These children tend to be socially excluded from the mainstream society. As a means of social exclusion these children ruin their life and develop negative attitude and behavior in their life.

- Children out of school many times tend to engage themselves in the easy money making ventures. Begging is one among the easy money making venture. The parents, who are able bodied beggars, force their children to beg and earn income. These children stay away from school. The hunger felt by them forces these children to accept left over and thrown out food from hotels. This affects the health of the child and causes mental health problems.

- Children out of school often are exposed to child abuse and develop negative attitude towards the society. Child abuse causes physical, sexual or emotional imbalances in children. As these children are out of school many times they are abused verbally, physically, orally and sexually either in their own family or the neighborhood. Most incidences of child abuse occur in the child’s home and then in the community.

- Children out of school lack guidance, adult support, social skills and life skills required for socialization. These skills are developed in children from the school environment by the teachers and parents at home. Most children hail from illiterate families and as a result the parents do not understand the children’s abilities and they do not make any attempt to teach them such required skill for effective socialization. As these children are out of school they also do not get opportunity to acquire such skills through their teachers. Hence these children are susceptible to child trafficking and easily trapped by pimps and other traffickers.

- As the children who remain out of school do not attend school or get dropped out in the middle of their education, they continue the remaining part of their life as illiterate. They live in meager ignorance and ruin their life without being useful to the society. The human power these children possess is lost and is never
contributed for family development as well as community development. Illiteracy prevents these children to understand the human rights and these children ultimately lead life without having the access to exercise their rights. These children are becoming disadvantaged day by day and do not cooperate in the development process of our nation. Poverty and illiteracy make these children marginalized and worsen their life situation. They grow as unproductive citizens to our nation. The presence of these children is in millions. Every child’s situation is different and has unique ways of dealing with the consequences of being out of school.

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 1989, spells out the basic human rights to which children everywhere are entitled. It came into force on September 2, 1990 with 20 ratifications. It covers all children under the age of 18 years, regardless of sex, colour, language, religion or race. India ratified the CRC in 1992. It has since been ratified by all governments except the richest, the United States of America, and one of the poorest, Somalia. The UN Charter sets international standards for the rights of children and confers the following basic rights to children across the world.

- right to survival - to life, health, nutrition, name and nationality
- right to development - to education, care, leisure, recreation
- right to protection - from exploitation, abuse, neglect
- right to participation - to expression, information, thought and religion

The following sections of the Convention are of particular interest to anyone concerned about the relationship between children, young people and the media.

- Article 12 refers to children's rights to express their own opinions and to have them taken into account in any matter affecting them.

- Child's right to freedom of expression is defined in Article 13, which also says that they have a right to receive and disseminate information.
- Article 17 recognizes "the important function performed by the mass media," and calls on those governments who have signed up to the Convention to "ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources.

- Articles 28 and 29 (the right to education), Article 31 (the right to participate in leisure, cultural and artistic activities), and Articles 34 and 36 (which require that children should be protected from sexual and other forms of exploitation, including pornography) are also relevant.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, based in Switzerland, monitors the progress of the Convention receiving reports from individual countries and recommending how each country could further improve the lives of children.

MILLENNIUM REPORT – VITAL STATISTICS

- East Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean are now close to achieving universal primary education.

- 1948 - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations. Education is declared a basic right of all people.

- 1959 - The Declaration on the Rights of the Child. Education is declared a right of every child.

- 1966 - The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination proclaimed the right of all to education, regardless of race or ethnicity.


- 1990 - The World Declaration on Education for All, adopted at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, defined a bold new
direction in education, declaring that "Every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs".

- 1993 - The E-9 Education Summit where governments from the world's nine high-population countries pledged to universalize primary education and significantly reduce illiteracy in their respective countries by the year 2000.

- 1996 - The Amman Affirmation adopted at the Mid-decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, called for accelerated efforts to meet the goals of Education for All set in 1990.

- 1996 - The report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century promoted a holistic view of education consisting of four "pillars": learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together. The text was widely adopted.


The set of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs given below) formulated in 2000 with targets for 2015 crystallized the growing consensus which emerged during the 1990s, namely, that poverty reduction and the provision of basic social services need to be at the centre of development policy.

- MDG 1 - Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- MDG 2 - Achieve universal primary education
- MDG 3 - Promote gender equality and empower women
- MDG 4 - Reduce child mortality
- MDG 5 - Improve maternal health
- MDG 6 - Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- MDG 7 - Ensure environmental sustainability
- MDG 8 - Develop a global partnership for development
Of the eight MDGs, two are directly related to education systems. MDG 2 calls for the achievement of universal primary education by 2015 whereby every child will complete a full course of primary education. MDG 3 calls for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women with, specifically, the elimination of gender disparities at primary and secondary school levels by 2005 and across all education levels by 2015. The remaining MDGs focus on other interrelated development areas that are greatly influenced by the progress made towards MDGs 2 and 3.

RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN INDIA

The Constitution of India, which came into force in January 1950, contains provisions for survival, development and protection of children. These are included both in Part III and Part IV of the Constitution pertaining to ‘Fundamental Rights’ and ‘Directive Principles of State Policy’. The Major constitutional provisions relating to children are given below,

Fundamental Rights

Article 14 states that State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. Article 15 affirms that nothing shall discriminate any citizen, prevent special provision for women, children and any socially / educationally backward classes or Scheduled Castes / Scheduled Tribes. Article 17 emphasize that “Untouchability” is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. Article 19 says that all citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, form associations or unions, move freely throughout India, reside and settle in any part of the territory of India. Article 21 states that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law. Article 21 A declares that State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years. Article 23 states that traffic in human beings and beggar and other similar forms of forced labour are prohibited. Article 24 assert that no child below the age of fourteen years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engage in any other hazardous employment.
Directive Principles of State Policy

Article 39 highlights that the tender age of children should not be abused and they should not be forced by economic necessity to enter a vocation and are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood is protected against exploitation and abandonment. Article 45 provides early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years. Article 46 declares that State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. Article 47 emphasizes the raising level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health. Article 51 asserts that the State shall endeavour to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations and Article 51A stresses the parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or ward between the age of six and fourteen years.

Salient Features of the “Right To Education Act”

The “Right To Education Act” (RTE), 2009 provides for:

i. The right of children to free and compulsory education till completion of elementary education in a neighbourhood school.

ii. It clarifies that ‘compulsory education’ means obligation of the appropriate government to provide free elementary education and ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education to every child in the six to fourteen age group. ‘Free’ means that no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education.

iii. It makes provisions for a non-admitted child to be admitted to an age appropriate class.
iv. It specifies the duties and responsibilities of appropriate Governments, local authority and parents in providing free and compulsory education, and sharing of financial and other responsibilities between the Central and State Governments.

v. It lays down the norms and standards relating *inter alia* to Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTRs), buildings and infrastructure, school-working days, teacher-working hours.

vi. It provides for rational deployment of teachers by ensuring that the specified pupil teacher ratio is maintained for each school, rather than just as an average for the State or District or Block, thus ensuring that there is no urban-rural imbalance in teacher postings. It also provides for prohibition of deployment of teachers for non-educational work, other than decennial census, elections to local authority, state legislatures and parliament, and disaster relief.

vii. It provides for appointment of appropriately trained teachers, i.e. teachers with the requisite entry and academic qualifications.

viii. It prohibits (a) physical punishment and mental harassment; (b) screening procedures for admission of children; (c) capitation fee; (d) private tuition by teachers and (e) running of schools without recognition.

ix. It provides for development of curriculum in consonance with the values enshrined in the Constitution, and which would ensure the all-round development of the child, building on the child’s knowledge, potentiality and talent and making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety through a system of child friendly and child centred learning.
GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR THE CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEAR PLANS (1951 – 2012)

Development programmes in India, including those for children, are carried out within the framework of the Five-Year Plans. Some of these programmes are wholly funded by the Central Government, some by both Central and State Governments, and some entirely by the State Government, depending on whether the programmes are classified as Central, centrally sponsored or State sector schemes. In addition, wide range of programmes are also being implemented in collaboration with international organisations and non-governmental organisations, which are now growing as a vibrant sector in the development and empowerment of children. The milestones achieved by India on the whole ever since it achieved independence with regard to survival, development, protection and participation of children both at the national and international level are given below,

The first five year plan (1951-56) identified health, nutrition and education as major areas of concern with regard to children. In 1953 the Central Social Welfare Board was set up to address the needs of children, women and persons with disabilities.

The second five year plan (1956-61) aimed at strengthening the child welfare systems. Welfare projects were extended to become the Coordinated Welfare Extension Projects in 1958 and the Children's Act was passed in 1960. Internationally the Declaration of the Rights of the Child came into being on the 20th of November 1959.

During the third five year plan (1961-66) the child was recognised as a human being with special needs and special efforts were made to coordinate between sectors to ensure these needs. Nutrition programmes were set up and the Kothari Education Commission was set up in search of solutions to the lack of universal education for children.

The fourth five year plan (1969-74) focused on getting basic services to children. Two major policies for children came into existence, The National Education policy in 1968 (as recommended by the Kothari Education Commission)
and the National Policy for Children in 1974. The Policy Resolution recognised children as the nation’s supremely important asset and declared that it is the responsibility of the State to nurture them. It further emphasised that it shall be the duty of the State to “provide adequate services to children, both before and after birth and through the period of growth, to ensure their full physical, mental and social development.” And that the “State shall progressively increase the scope of such services so that within a reasonable time, all children in the country enjoy optimum conditions for their balanced growth.” To achieve these objectives, it called for the adoption of the following measures – comprehensive health programme; provision of nutritional services, nutrition and nutritional education to expectant and nursing mothers; free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years; provision of non-formal education, promotion of physical education and other types of recreational as well as cultural and scientific activities in schools and community centres; provision of special assistance to children belonging to the weaker sections of society; upliftment of children in distress; protection against neglect, cruelty and exploitation of children; protection against child labour; provision of special facilities for children ailing from various kinds of disabilities and encouragement and assistance to children especially those belonging to the weaker sections of the society. In achieving the above, the Policy gave special recognition to the role of voluntary organisations. The fourth five year plan also saw the establishment of the following schemes: The Special Nutrition Programme, Balwadi Nutrition Programme and Prophylaxis Scheme against Blindness due to Vitamin A Deficiency among Children.

The fifth five year plan (1974-79) saw a shift from child welfare to child development where again coordination of services was the main agenda. A major accomplishment in 1975, which was a result of all plans so far, was the launching of the Integrated Child Development Scheme. 1975 also saw the start of the Scheme of Crèches/Day Care Centres for Children of Working and Ailing Mothers. Another major achievement was the setting up of the National Children's Fund in 1979. The year 1979 designated as the International Year of the Child (IYC) by the United Nations General Assembly and number of activities and programmes were
undertaken. In India, a National Plan of Action was prepared to observe the IYC with the main theme of ‘Reaching the Deprived Children’.

The sixth five year plan (1980-85) was that the first time planners took into consideration the needs of working children. Programmes were undertaken to improve the health, nutrition and educational status of working children. Health concerns of children also took priority in these plan years with the introduction of the National Health Policy and the formulation of the Indian National Code for Protection and Promotion of Breast Feeding.

The seventh five year plan (1985-90) saw the establishment of the Department of Women and Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development. In 1986 the Government of India repealed the Children's Act and passed the Juvenile Justice Act instead and updated the National Education Policy. The enforcement of Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 was also strengthened. In pursuance of the National Policy on Child Labour, National Child Labour projects (1987) were undertaken in industries where the incidents of child labour were found to be very high. Measures were taken to cover families of child labourers under income generation schemes. Public opinion on the evils of child labour was mobilised through investigative journalism, use of electronic media and the support of activists’ groups. Finally in 1990 the government set up the Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA), to handle all concerns and issues regarding adoption. Internationally this period was a witness to the first comprehensive convention for child rights, the UNCRC.

During the eighth five year plan (1992-97) India ratified the UNCRC thereby making it a legal binding document. There was continued work in areas of day care, education, health, etc. But this plan pays special focus also to the needs of the girl child. In 1992 the government adopted the National Plan of Action for the Girl Child. Some states also prepared similar documents and schemes for the girl child, for example, Haryana instituted the 'Apni Beti Apna Dhan' Scheme, Tamil Nadu initiated the 'Cradle Scheme', and Rajasthan introduced the 'Raj Lakshmi Scheme'. In the education sector, the main strategy for achieving the target of “Education for All by
2000 A.D.” was adoption of a decentralised approach to planning. In pursuance of the revised National Policy on Education, 1992 and the Programme of Action, various steps were taken to expand early childhood care and education activities, and universalise elementary education. An NGO Cell was specifically set-up in 1994 to facilitate on varied issues concerning children. In the year 1994, District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched as a centrally sponsored scheme in adopting a holistic approach, emphasis on converting existent programmes and services, and encouraging community participation.

The ninth five year plan (1997-2002) continued to address the plight of the girl child, concentrating on addressing the problem of the declining sex-ratio as well as female foeticide and infanticide. Concerted efforts were made to eliminate all forms of discrimination and to provide special incentives to the mother and the girl child so that the birth of a girl child in a family was appreciated. In 1998, the Government with the support of UNICEF launched a special service for children called Childline. This is a free telephone service that can be accessed by a child or anyone on his/her behalf simply by dialing the number 1098. In the field of health the government introduced the Reproductive and Child Health programme (RCH). In 2001-02, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched with the aim of providing quality elementary education to all children in the 6-14 age groups by 2010, besides bridging all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007. 2000 also saw the adoption of the new Juvenile Justice (care and protection of children) Act.

The approach of the tenth five year plan (2002-07) has shifted to a right-based one, insuring the survival, development and protection of children. The Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act was amended in 2003 to further address the problems of female foeticide and infanticide. Many other goals were set out such as reduction of Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) to 45 per 1000 live births by 2007 and reduction of Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) to 2 per 1000 live births by 2007. These goals were to be accomplished by expanding existing scheme such as ICDS, universal immunization, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, etc. Major accomplishments have been a constitutional amendment making the Right to education a fundamental right, the revision of the National Health Policy to take into consideration more recent health concerns like HIV/AIDS, the amendment of the
Juvenile Justice act, the amendment of Child Labour Prevention Act on 10th of October 2006 banned children under 14 working as domestic servants and the adoption of the Goa Children's Act of 2003. In its quest to guarantee quality basic education throughout the country, the Government of India, in the year 2004, imposed an Education Cess @ 2 per cent on direct and indirect Central Taxes. At the international level, it adopted the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All. The Framework identifies six goals, which includes, inter alia, progressive expansion of Early Childhood Care and Education, Universalization of Elementary Education by 2015, achieving Gender Equality in Education by 2015, and improvement in the quality of education.

The current plan, the eleventh five year plan (2007-12) clearly states "Development of the child is at the centre of the Eleventh Plan". According to the MWCD (Ministry of Women and Child Development) working group report the plan outlines its work based on the National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC). There are four key areas addressed by the plan such as ICDS, Early Childhood Education, Girl child and Child Protection. The plan calls for further expansions of the ICDS services and reiteration of major concerns about infrastructure, training of workers, quality of services, etc. Early childhood education needs a boost with regards to access, day care services, infrastructure, training, minimum standards and regulatory mechanisms, and revamping curriculum. With regard to Girl child the plan reiterates the goals set out in NPAC. Age specific and setting specific interventions are needed for girls. This eleventh plan recognizes the need for Child protection programmes and initiatives. It specially addresses the need of those children that have fallen out of the purview of previous interventions and hence fallen on difficult times. According to the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) report the eleventh plans’ idea of child protection is very limited and does not cover all commitments of NPAC. An important change recommended by the MWCD which was not included in the previous five year plans is the introduction and adoption of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) in the protection agenda of the XIth Plan. India has moved forward to a rights based framework that casts a legal obligation on the Central and State Governments to implement this fundamental child right as enshrined in the Article 21A of the Constitution, in accordance with the provisions of the Right To
Education (RTE) Act. But despite these laws, policies and commitments, what is the actual situation of India's children vis-à-vis health, early child hood care, education, and protection?

**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education For All Scheme)**

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) or “Anaivarukkum Kalvi Thittam” is a comprehensive and integrated flagship programme of Government of India, to attain Universal Elementary Education (UEE) in the country (India) in a mission mode. Launched in partnership with the State Governments, SSA aims to provide useful and relevant education to all children in the age group of 6-14 ages by 2010. It is an initiative to universalise and improve the quality of education through decentralised and context specific planning and a process-based, time-bound implementation strategy. Its goal is consistent with the 86th Constitutional Amendment (2002), making elementary education a fundamental right of every child and with the Millenium Development Goal (MDG) of universalising primary education by 2015.

The three development objectives of the SSA project are as follows:

1. To reduce out of school children by at least 9 million in the 6-14 age group, with an increase in enrolment, in the process of universalising elementary education by 2007.
2. To narrow existing gender and social gaps so that enrolment of girls will be near parity with boys, enrolment of children of SC and ST will be near parity with that of other groups; and enrolment of children with disability will increase.
3. To increase the quality of education of all elementary school students so that learning will be improved and transition rates from primary education to upper primary education will increase.

SSA is a national programme largely resourced through national resources, supplemented by external funding from the World Bank’s International Development Association (IDA), United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) and the European Commission (EC). As per the Agreements, the GOI
(Government of India) and Development Partners (DP) will carry out a Joint Review Mission (JRM) twice a year.

The program has generated considerable interest and commitment in all the States of the Country. Enrolment drives, learning achievement surveys, opening of new schools, education guarantee scheme centres, ECE facilities and alternative learning situations like Bridge Courses. Whether it is positioning additional teachers, or building better and bigger school buildings or adding teaching - learning materials or participating in PTA meetings, the community participation in school development has quite visibly increased. The Pupil-Teacher ratios are approaching a manageable level of 40 students per teacher. The SSA framework has enabled existing teacher training institutions to be strengthened and new resource institutions like Block Resource Centre (BRC) and Cluster Resource Center (CRC) to be set up.

SSA has also brought in greater convergence between various programmes and the states are beginning to view schemes like Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), total sanitation and water supply as crucial inputs to the larger Mission of Education For All (EFA). SSA has brought together an increasing number of NGOs and civil society partners into a collaborative relationship. Data collection, data analysis and data use are crucial for measuring progress and in lending the mission a sense of direction.

In Tamilnadu, the state government has made steady progress in achieving the goals of universal access and enrollment. During the year 2001, out of 574,069 children, who were out of school in the State, 108,000 children were enrolled in regular schools during the year 2002 – 2003 and 255,144 children enrolled in SSA Schools / centres. At the beginning of the academic year 2004-2005, the State estimates that 210,925 children are yet to be enrolled and 68,533 children had dropped out of the school system. Thus, the total number of out-of-school children in the state remains as 279,458. Of these, approximately 42,000 children are those who are working. The State has also been able to network non-governmental organizations and Civil Society partners into a synergistic relationship. This is likely to help in accelerating the pace and quality of implementation of the scheme. As envisioned in the RTE Act, Universal Enrolment is one of the aims of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.
mission. The State has taken persistent efforts to enroll and mainstream the out-of-school children and to reduce the target of out-of-school children.

EDUCATION AN INSTRUMENT TO MENTOR CHILDREN

Absence of primary schooling in the life of a poor child has a permanently debilitating impact on a child’s ability to develop capabilities. In a hierarchical and stratified society like India, the primary school emerges as a progressive social institution that questions status by ascription or accidents of birth and promotes status by achievement. Therefore, children also need to be made capable like parents. Hopefully, it is this remedy, which will ultimately reduce the causal factors of economic disparities and social inequalities.

In a modern society education is as essential as the basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. It is one of the essential ingredients of the quality of life. That is why basic education has been recognized as an inalienable human right and forms an essential component of Human Development Index (HDI) representing developmental level of nations. Education is also the most important factor in achieving rapid progress in all spheres of life and in creating a social order discovered on the values of freedom, social justice and equal opportunity. Programmes of education lie at the base of the efforts to forge the bonds of common citizenship, and are essential to harness the energies of the people and to develop the human resources of every segment of the society.

Basic education encompasses a broad sense of learning which includes formal, non-formal and informal at any stage of life. Learning takes place in and out of school, in the home, in the community, the workplace, and in recreational and other settings. Basic education is always the key to freedom from subjugation, fear and want. Education is an effective weapon to fight poverty. It saves lives and gives people the chance to improve their lives. It gives people a voice to raise their thoughts. Basic education encompasses competencies, knowledge, attitudes, values and motivations that are necessary in order to become fully literate. Education also increases a nation’s productivity and is instrumental for social progress and human
freedom. Children who do not get education tend to lead a miserable life and ultimately find it difficult to adjust to the social environment.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION FOR THE SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

During their elementary school years, children undergo important developmental changes. Their reasoning becomes more logical, their attention gets more adaptable, their perspective taking grows more sophisticated, and their reading and math skills blossom. With entry into formal schooling, children spend more time away from their families. Often, this time includes many hours spent in schools and out-of-school time programs. Throughout elementary school, children begin to integrate knowledge from their interactions with teachers, peers, and families in order to construct identities based on their understanding of what they are good at and capable of doing.

During early childhood, family involvement is critical for school-age children's learning and development. However, in elementary school, the specific activities and nature of these processes change. The quality of the parent–child relationship influences how well children do in school. Child development experts characterize a positive parent–child relationship in terms of support, whereby the parent conveys warmth, sensitivity, and encouragement; appropriate instruction based on the child's development and characteristics; and respect for the child's growing autonomy. Through interactions with parents and other caregivers, children learn to develop social skills that they transfer from the home to the school context. One study of kindergardeners found that a positive mother–child interaction—one that is sensitive and elicits pro-social behavior is associated with children's social and academic performance in middle school. Parents impart the self-regulation skills that have a lasting effect on their child's ability to relate positively with their peers and to attend and participate in class activities.

The nature of the parent involvement in the development of disadvantaged children is found to be poor in research reports. The minority or low-income parents are often underrepresented among the ranks of parents involved with the schools.
There are numerous reasons for this: lack of time or energy (due to long hours of heavy physical labor, for example), embarrassment or shyness about one's own educational level or linguistic abilities, lack of understanding or information about the structure of the school and accepted communication channels, perceived lack of motivation by teachers and administrators, assumptions of teachers and administrators on parents' disinterest or inability to help with children's schooling.

Perhaps one of the most important findings of research, however, is that parents of disadvantaged and minority children can make a positive contribution to their children's achievement in school if they receive adequate training and encouragement. Even more significant, the research dispels a popular myth by revealing, as noted above, that parents can make a difference regardless of their own levels of education. Indeed, disadvantaged children have the most to gain from parent involvement programs.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLING AND TO PREVENT NON-SCHOOLING

Instead of flaying the state for its failures there is a need to understand that quality education needs autonomy from the state. The reform of education in countries like India has to begin necessarily with the conviction that schools have to become accountable to parents and neighborhood than to bureaucrats. A far-away central authority cannot ensure accountability. Jan Shiksha Act, however, provides a legal space to the parents to come forward and get involved in PTAs. Hence enhancing the capabilities of the stakeholders in effective management of school is being considered as a key to ensure quality education.

With the strong push towards decentralization under the newly launched SSA scheme, the education system is looking to the community for participation in the functioning and monitoring of their schools. The community ownership is central to the SSA programme. However, it seems the districts are as yet unclear how SSA will actually become a movement and will be different than other programmes of similar nature implemented in the past. But there are several caveats to the successful implementation of such an initiative. For effective local-
level planning and administration, capacity at the grassroots level needs to be built up. There is a lack of organizational mechanism to institutionalize the capacity that is created. In the absence of such mechanisms, the local level units will continue to depend on higher-level institutions. Therefore, to sustain the efforts made towards decentralization, there is a need to institutionalize local level planning competencies and withdrawal of central and state government initiatives in a planned manner. This involves a sea change in the cultural landscape and that the process is bound to be slow. There are also some practical preconditions that must be satisfied before a society can claim to be ready for decentralization. Such civic capacities and capabilities include among other things basic literacy and numeracy, basic organizational and management skills within the community and an active acceptance of public accountability applied to civic associations, demonstrated by the creation of transparent reporting systems with implementing structures, and training citizens in the use of these systems.

Enhancing capabilities within local communities is thus a pre-requisite to effective decentralization. Communities need to be made aware of how they can and must hold schools and teachers accountable. It must be impressed on them that teachers and HMs (Head Masters) are government servants placed in schools to serve the community, their job being to teach and train the children belonging to that community. They should be trained about the basic qualities exhibited by an effective school, the meaning of quality education and their constitutional right to demand it for their children. The importance of setting expectations of teachers, HMs, schools and students learning must also be stressed. Strong expectations can influence and shape what a teacher or administrator feels responsible for in his or her work.

When the community understands the importance of simple concepts such as the effect of time for learning in children’s education, they can perform informal supervision of the school. Monitoring could be done on a daily or weekly basis in small, informal measures such as keeping track of the time the school starts and closes, the lunch break time and other types of recess breaks, the punctuality of teachers and teacher absenteeism. This monitoring needs to be conducted in an open, guilt-free and transparent manner.
CRITICS ON RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

Resource Allocation for Children

Legal and programmatic commitments have to be matched by financial commitments, as reflected in the national and provincial budgets. The allocation and spending of adequate financial resources on children, although not the only an indicator, is an important reflection of the government's commitment. Though the percentage share of children in the Union budget has gone up from 1.2% in the 1990s to 4.91% in 2006-07, there is still quite a gap between need and allocation, and allocation and actual spending. The disparities in India are stark. Thirty-five per cent of Indians are illiterate and yet India produces millions of highly-skilled global knowledge professionals. The government is celebrating India’s “unprecedented high rate of economic growth”, huge Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) and Foreign Institutional Investments (FIIs), and yet thousands of our children are dying of hunger. Their rights continue to be neglected. As the children do not even have a voice and the right to be heard, the Government should develop ways to assess the impact of budgetary allocations on the implementation of children’s rights, and thereby to mainstream the children not in school.

Child Survival and Health

Right to health is a basic human right that cascades from the right to life. The Constitution of India under Article 21 makes right to life a Fundamental Right. Health being a key factor in a nation’s growth and development, has been a subject of Government intervention through public health programmes for several decades to control and eradicate the major diseases. While there has been success in some areas, in general, yet the burden of disease has fallen disproportionately heavily on the poor, the worst affected being children, which has not only caused pain and suffering to them, but also affected their growth and influenced performance in school. So it is essential to concentrate on child’s health in order to prevent them being out of school in the long run.
Early Childhood Care

Provision of early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years by the State is emphasized in Article 45 of the Indian Constitution. Since the initial six years in a child's life are crucial, the government has launched several programmes, the most important being the Integrated Child Development Services programme. The early childhood care and education also includes comprehensive maternal care and entitlements; provision of crèches, child care, nutrition; immunization and health care; pre-school education; protection and care to children; and creating child care services to release girls from sibling care responsibilities, so that these girls can get education in schools available for them. Yet many girls are forced to look after their younger sibling at home, which reflects that the access to early childhood programmes to the under six years need to be reinforced.

Education and Development of Children

The development of children is integrally linked to their right to education as per Article 21A of Indian constitution. This is to be achieved on the basis of equal opportunities, free compulsory education to all between 6 to 14 years, higher education accessible to all children, educational and vocational information and guidance, measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and to reduce the dropout rates. The main causes of school drop-out are school related factors and factors concerning family and home. Of late, there seems to be some improvement in the children’s enrolment in education but, by and large, they are still deficient, particularly in rural areas where the children do not get a fair deal due to the indifference of teachers, influence of caste, poor functioning of schools and no academic support at home, as their family members have very low level of education. Access and quality are the issues which need to be seriously addressed by the Government along with other stakeholders in order to reduce dropout rates.

Protection for Children

Despite implementation of various laws and programmes in accordance to the Article 39 the right to protect children, there are a large number of children still
living in difficult circumstances such as the physically and mentally challenged, those affected by drugs, victims of natural disasters, street and migrant children, orphans, beggars, children with HIV/AIDS, children of parents with HIV/AIDS, trafficked children, children of prostitutes and children forced into prostitution, children in conflict with law and children whose labour is being exploited. These categories of children are increasing day by day and because of their dispersed character they have escaped the attention of policy makers. The present programmes need to be strengthened in such a way that these hidden group of children are identified, their problems studied and programmes developed whereby they could be rescued and rehabilitated effectively so as to protect them from out of school environment and prevent them from becoming non school goers.

RATIONAL FOR SELECTING THE AREA OF THE STUDY

Tiruchirappalli lies 320 km to the South of Chennai on the bank of the river Cauvery and located in the center region of Tamil Nadu State in India. The town is a place of tourist attraction with important tourist spots like Rockfort temple which perched on a massive rock that stands 83 meters upwards from the flat surrounding plains. Some of the inscriptions in the caves are have been from the days of Mahendra verma I (600 to 630 A.D.). Tiruchirappalli is predominantly characterized by wet farming. Bharat Heavy Electrical Limited (BHEL) has brought Tiruchirappalli town in the Industrial map of India. It is a leading educational center. It has many recreational centers, with a number of cinema halls and music sabhas.

The profile of Tiruchirappalli district would give the impression that it is a fast developing city. It indeed is true. But, there is sizeable number of children who are out of school including street children, beggars, child labourers in cigarette industry, gem cutting, quarry, agriculture sector, etc. Besides existing welfare measures, there are thousands of children who are deprived of the basic rights and pushed into a vulnerable situation. Extreme poor quality of life is one of the commonest among all the problems faced by out of school children. The exposure to this problem might even happen in their early childhood. It paves way for becoming drop out or even non enrollment in schools at an earlier stage. Poverty in the family
leads to poor parenting among children. Various dimensions of poverty such as lack of livelihood opportunities, inaccessibility to resources, feelings of insecurity, frustration and inability to maintain social relationship with others among the adults in the community tends to affect the well being of the younger generation. On account of these issues existing among the adults the ignorant children are exposed to different social evils such as child labour, street children, juvenile delinquency, child abuse and violence. The exposure to such social issues causes imbalance to the physical, social psychological well being of the child. It also hampers the holistic development of the child, their family and the community in general.

To accomplish the mandate of the Constitution, the Government and Non-Governmental Organizations are taking onerous efforts towards improving the interventions for these children, who are out of school and many programmes at the micro and macro levels have been undertaken in this direction. As a result, according to the Government statistics, the children’s right to enter at the primary stage of education has reached the universal levels and the incidence of out-of-school children has reduced to some extent. But, on the other hand, students’ accomplishment stages have been generally low and there are extensive differences in students’ attendance and completion of education levels. The indicators for child development need to be further progressed towards more positive life promotion. As the district is still lagging behind on social as well as economic development indicators, it will continue to make children more vulnerable especially those living in the rural and urban slums.

These children need to be taken care of and prevention measures need to be sought out vigorously to reduce the incidence of out-of-school children as well as to get rid of children being out of school. The vicious cycle of illiteracy, unemployment in adults, poverty and child labour are interrelated with each other and this cycle can only be broken by ensuring education for all and by creating more and more Child Friendly Zones as well as improving the living status of the families of out of school children throughout the country. This study helps to find out the situation of out-of-school children in Tiruchirappalli district and the existing gaps, which have to be reviewed for safeguarding the rights of children.