

# 19<sup>TH</sup> | ANNUAL REPORT



**19<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024**

**JOURNEYS OF RESILIENCE:  
EMPOWERING NOMADIC TRIBES**





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

About Vanavil	3
Founder's Note	4
Impact	5
Struggles of the Nomadic Tribes listen to our community elders	6
Vanavil Projects	13
Impact stories	17
Highlights of 2023-2024	23
Testimonials	26
Financials	28
Media Mentions	29



# About Vanavil



**OUR VISION - The Nomadic Tribes attain Identity, Equality and Dignity.**

**OUR MISSION** - To ensure equality and dignity for nomadic communities by working for their protection, development and well-being in Tamil Nadu through Education, Livelihood, Advocacy, Health and Nutrition.

Vanavil Trust (<http://www.vanavil.org>) was started in 2005 in the aftermath of the 2004 Asian Tsunami to support the children of two Nomadic communities, Boom Boom Mattukarars and Narikuravars, in Tamil Nadu. After 19 years of working with the communities, Vanavil has grown into an organisation with multiple projects that aim to support the education of the children from the nomadic tribal communities.

Child protection

Health & Nutrition

Holistic Education

Livelihoods

Started as an anti-begging childcare institution, Vanavil has, in the 19 years of its existence, grown into:

## 1. Vanavil Nursery & Primary School

Supporting children from extremely marginalised communities with a customised curriculum and arts and performance-based Pedagogy

## 2. Vanavil Children's Home

A home and a safe space for nomadic Girls and young boys who are at risk of early marriage and begging

## 3. Village-based Child Protection

Supporting Nomadic Children with family - based child protection to prevent child rights violations and ensure education

## 4. Vanavil After School Centres

After-school centres in 14 Nomadic Hamlets providing supplementary education and Nutrition to 1084 Children

## 5. Nomads Higher Education Project

Providing higher education scholarships to Nomadic Community youngsters who are the first in their community to reach college

## 6. Alternative Livelihoods & Skilling Program

Rehabilitating 500+ women from Nomadic communities from begging through creating alternative income generation possibilities

## 7. Vanavil Golden Baby Project

Monitoring pregnant women and infants up to age 2 in Nomadic hamlets. Creating awareness and providing nutritional support to all children in their first 1000 days of Life





“ We hold steadfastly to the calling, “Every Dream Has a Right,” by Mahasweta Devi, as our guiding light. We trust that the values of Justice, Equality, and Compassion will continue to direct our path.

## Founder's Note

The year 2023-24 was significant for us in many ways, bringing success in remarkable forms. Winning the SVP Fast Pitch Gold Prize, competing with some of the best NGOs in the country, was a surprising and delightful gift to our children and community. The support of the incredible promisors of the Living My Promise through the Freedom Fund grant, along with our continuing partnership with Dasra as part of the Rebuild India Portfolio, has provided us with the stability, resilience, and capacity to learn and grow.

This year, we embarked on several critical journeys within Vanavil. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) has been an aspiration for us, and I am thrilled that we have initiated this in a robust manner. By measuring impact, we aim to strengthen our credibility and use feedback to refine our programs and processes, delivering more meaningful outcomes for the Nomadic Tribes we serve.

A decisive turn toward well-being has also marked this year, beginning with my own sabbatical, made possible by a generous grant from the Cocoon Initiative. We have embraced well-being training and are integrating it into our core objectives and activities, starting with our team.

In our work for the education and empowerment of children and women from Nomadic Tribes, we are deepening our focus on pedagogy and learner relationships. We are documenting effective processes—both those we’ve created and those we’ve adapted—that have proven to be transformative tools in educational spaces. Additionally, we are weaving gender into our current programs and learning from peers’ successes and challenges.

Of course, this year has not been without its challenges. Rising addiction and dropout rates, an increase in suicides previously unheard of in Tribal communities, and escalating violence have deeply concerned us. The uphill task of securing state welfare for the Nomadic Tribes remains demanding, but we have seen progress through research and collaboration with the state.

We hold steadfastly to the calling, “Every Dream Has a Right,” by Mahasweta Devi, as our guiding light. We trust that the values of Justice, Equality, and Compassion will continue to direct our path. Thank you for walking this journey with us. Your support strengthens our resolve, and we extend our deepest gratitude as we hold hands with you in this shared mission.

With Gratitude

**Revathi R**  
**Founder | Vanavil**



# Overall Impact

**546**

Children educated in our School



**1348**

Children provided educational and Nutritional support through afterschool program



**202**

At risk children provided child protection in Communities



**616**

Children provided care and protection in our



**201**

First generation Nomadic students



**38**

Dropout students provided Skill training



**666**

Women provided livelihood



**155**

Pregnant women, and babies provided monitoring and Nutrition



## 2023-2024



School

**117**



After School

**1084**



College scholarship

**109**



Child care institution

**41**



Child protection

**64**



Golden baby project

**155**



Livelihood support

**90**



Skill Training

**16**



## A STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY & DIGNITY - Voices of our community elders

My name is **Valli**. Five years ago, I moved from Nagapattinam to Aaparakudi. I now live in a rented hut, paying ₹1,000 per month. I have five children—two run a plastic business, one daughter is married, another is in college, and my youngest son is working. My daughter-in-law helps support the family by selling fancy items.

I once sold old sarees in Maanjur, earning ₹600–700 daily, but had to stop due to the long travel and lack of capital. In Nagapattinam, I owned a tsunami rehabilitation house but sold it. Now, we live without basic facilities—electricity is unreliable, and water is available only once every 10 days. The water is salty and unfit for drinking, forcing us to fetch water from elsewhere, often facing rejection. This has led to frequent illnesses, especially among children.

I have known Vanavil since the tsunami. When we were homeless, Revathi and Natraj Anna found us, fought with officials, and provided food, clothing, and a place to stay. Later, Revathi started a school to keep our children away from begging. I even helped by cooking at the school in Sikkal.

Because of Vanavil, many children in our community are now educated. My son is studying in an arts college, planning to work in Mumbai with Revathi's help. My daughter is in the drama department at Thanjavur University and has performed in several places. This wouldn't have been possible without Vanavil's support.

One major struggle is getting the right community certificates. In Nagapattinam, we were recognized as Scheduled Tribes (ST), but here we are classified as Most Backward Class (MBC). While my children got ST certificates, my grandchildren are being denied the same, creating constant obstacles.



I was born into a nomadic lifestyle, begging and moving from village to village. But a turning point came when my son refused to bring friends home, ashamed of our way of life. That moment changed me—I stopped begging and started selling clothes to earn a dignified living. My greatest hope is that my children and grandchildren never return to the struggles of our past. Education and stable jobs are the only way forward. With continued support from Vanavil and the government, I believe our community can build a better future.





My name is **Manikandan**, and I live in Aaparakudi. I work with the Tamil Nadu Police Department. My father is a Thavil Vidwan, dedicating his life to music—performing at funerals, weddings, and temple festivals. Our community, about 150 families strong, has relied on music for generations, with most men playing Thavil and Nadaswaram, while women support the family by selling plastics and bangles.

Despite our rich cultural heritage, our village lacks basic facilities. There are no proper roads, sanitation is poor, and water shortages prevent the construction of toilets. Most families struggle to afford education for their children.

In 2011, while in college, I learned about Vanavil and sought help for the children in our village. Revathi responded immediately. Vanavil set up a tuition center, provided nutritious food, and helped women with zero-interest loans. Their efforts have helped children stay in school and ensured better nutrition.

Over the years, education in our community has significantly improved. Almost every household now has at least one graduate. But the next step is government employment—we need more young people entering civil services and professional fields.

Even though I work in the police force, discrimination still exists in subtle ways. Caste-based bias is real, and our background is often held against us. These barriers require resilience and determination to overcome.

## A Legacy of Music and a Vision for Change



Our community, historically known as Boom Boom Mattukarar, is evolving. In some areas, we are called Paal Mattukarar or Azhagar Mattukarar. While some still depend on music, many families now focus on small businesses.

The future lies in education and new opportunities. We must push for more job-oriented training, government employment, and financial support for small businesses. Vanavil's efforts have been instrumental, but we need more investment in career coaching, computer training, and professional development.

No child from our community should feel inferior. By embracing education and career growth, we can change our future. Our children deserve dignity, respect, and the chance to succeed.





## Our Future lies in Education

My name is **Pichai**, and I am from Neelapadi. For 20 years, I have earned a living by selling plastics and old clothes wholesale. Before that, I went door-to-door seeking alms.

Our community has 73 families and around 300 people, most of whom are engaged in the same trade. I am 74 years old and have lived here since I was seven. Before that, my family was nomadic, moving from place to place and surviving by begging.

Seventy years ago, our ancestors settled in this village. Back then, there were only a few houses. Over time, government support and our own efforts have helped us build homes. Today, we have government-built houses, community certificates, and financial aid, but many challenges remain.

The biggest shift has been in education. Through government programs and Vanavil, children are now attending school, some even graduating from college. Women have benefited from zero-interest loans, allowing them to start small businesses and contribute to household income.

However, access to stable jobs remains a major challenge. Despite being educated, many youth struggle to secure employment, leaving them dependent on small trades.



I dream of seeing more people from our community in government jobs—IAS officers, doctors, and teachers. If even a few of our children reach influential positions, they will inspire the next generation to break free from poverty.

We cannot go back to our old ways. Our future lies in education and financial independence. With sustained government support and initiatives like Vanavil, I am confident that the next generation will achieve success and stability.



## From Nothing to a Future of Dignity

My name is **Subramani**, and I am 65 years old. I was born in Neelapadi and have lived here all my life. Earlier, I earned a living by seeking alms, but now I sell plastics. Some families in our village still rely on begging, while others have moved to selling goods.

Life in our village has improved. Some of us have government-built homes, ration cards, and basic facilities. But progress is uneven—water is available only once a week, roads are poor, and jobs remain scarce.

Traditionally, weddings in our community were simple, held under a tree. Now, families rent marriage halls and conduct ceremonies with gold thaali.

I learned about Vanavil only in recent years, but their impact has been incredible. They provide zero-interest loans, educational support, and even helped families during COVID-19 with groceries. Many of our children, who once dropped out of school, are now college graduates.



However, major challenges remain, alcohol addiction affects many men in our village. Despite this, I believe our children will break this cycle. They are studying hard, and I hope to see them hold respected positions. We may have started with nothing, but we can build a future of dignity.

## Struggle for stable livelihoods and Housing



My name is **Sundaram**, and I am from Bamani, Thiruvapur district. I lead the government-recognized Adi Dravida Sangam. Our community has lived here for four generations, mostly earning a living by selling fancy items and chains.

This land was given to us during the Kamaraj era, and later, more houses were built during the Kalaingar era. However, these structures are now falling apart. A few families have managed to improve their homes, but most still live in unsafe government-built houses. During the rainy season, a child was injured when a roof collapsed—we urgently need proper housing.

Water is another crisis. We only have access to salty water, which has led to frequent illnesses and even deaths due to the lack of medical care. Clean drinking water should be a basic right, yet we are still fighting for it.

Financially, survival is tough. On good days, I earn ₹500, but after repaying debts, there is little left. Some days, we earn nothing at all. Having two meals a day is a luxury.

We have come a long way from our nomadic past, but challenges remain. Education is our only way forward. If our children get proper jobs, we can finally escape this cycle of hardship.



## A Struggle for Stability and Identity

My name is **Ganapathi**, and I am from Villathur. I make a living selling Dhristi Bommai (evil-eye dolls), earning ₹500–600 daily. My wife does the same work, and together, we support our four children, all of whom are in higher education.

Our village has 15 houses, all simple thatched homes without modern facilities. Water is available only once a week, making daily life a struggle. Roads and school access are also poor.



I was born into begging, like my parents, but I chose a different path. Selling goods allows me to earn a living with dignity. However, our biggest challenge is recognition—our district refuses to issue Adiyar community certificates, even though our relatives in other areas have received them.

Financial hardship is another problem. We live hand-to-mouth, repaying daily loans and surviving on small profits. Vanavil's support through zero-interest loans has helped many in our village start small businesses.

Progress is happening—some youth have graduated, and two have become engineers. However, without proper recognition and job opportunities, they remain underemployed.

I dream of a future where our children hold government jobs, live with dignity, and never face the struggles we did. With continued support and education, I believe we can break this cycle forever.

### Land and Housing are Key

My name is **Selvam**, and I am from Veeranagar, Thiruvarur. I lead the Nari Kuravan community in our village. In 1992, the government allocated us land and built 50 houses, promising patta (land ownership documents)—but we are still waiting for them.

Because we lack patta, we are denied basic amenities like electricity. Some homes don't have power connections, forcing children to study in neighbors' homes. Sanitation is another problem—toilets built after the Gaja cyclone broke within months. We need durable housing and clean facilities.





Most of us earn ₹300–500 a day, traveling far to sell goods. Vanavil's work in education has been life-changing. Thanks to them, our children regularly attend school. Their tuition centers and nutritious food programs have made a huge difference.

However, discrimination persists. Even today, some bus drivers refuse to let us board. Many of us struggle to obtain community certificates, which prevents access to higher education and jobs.

We need the government to provide patta for our homes, build safe toilets and repair damaged houses, ensure electricity in every home.

Education has already started transforming our community. Our next goal is to see our children in government jobs, working as teachers, police officers, and engineers. We are determined to leave the hardships of our past behind.

### Community certificates are Critical to our empowerment

My name is **Veeraiyan**, and I am from Poondi, Thanjavur. I belong to the Adiyar community, part of the Boom Boom Mattukarar tradition. Our ancestors lived a nomadic life, moving from village to village, staying under trees, and surviving by hunting.

In 1974, we settled in Poondi. Over time, some of us built permanent houses, while others still live in makeshift huts. While 22 families have patta, the rest do not, making it difficult to access government benefits.

Despite these struggles, education is changing our future. With Vanavil's help, children now attend school regularly. They have also provided a tuition center, food, and learning materials.

However, we face an urgent issue—community certificates. The government has failed to issue consistent documentation. Some of us are labeled as Adiyar, while others receive Jogi or Hindu Paraiyar certificates. This inconsistency prevents youth from taking exams or securing jobs.



To break the cycle of poverty and discrimination, we need patta for all families, government-built homes and proper community certificates.

Our children are eager to learn and succeed. If given the right opportunities, they will achieve what we never could.



## Envision a future without Stigma and Prejudice

I am **Chellammal**, from Kullanchavadi Anna Nagar in Cuddalore District. We belong to the Boom Boom Mattukarar community, traditionally earning a living by singing songs, blessing people, and selling Suruku Pai (cloth bags). Our ancestors lived a nomadic life, traveling with decorated oxen, but this way of life left us marginalized and in poverty.

Today, our children are breaking away from these traditions, embracing education, and striving for a better future. However, systemic barriers remain. We live in a settlement of 13 houses, built over 30 years ago on donated land, now in poor condition with leaking roofs and no bathroom facilities. Requests for repairs have gone unanswered, and the congested streets leave no room for improvements.

Our earnings remain meager. After eye surgery, I can no longer stitch Suruku Pai and now go door-to-door for small amounts, earning ₹100–150 daily. Despite being educated, many youth remain unemployed due to the stigma associated with our community. My son-in-law, a trained teacher, is forced to sell plastics to support his family because he cannot find a job.

Organisations like Vanavil Trust have transformed lives. They supported my youngest daughter's Paramedical education, covering her college fees, hostel expenses, and mess charges. They provide free education and meals for children, distribute groceries during crises, and offer zero-interest loans to help women start small businesses. Thanks to their support, many children, including girls, have graduated from college. However, the lack of job opportunities remains a serious issue.



Being from the Boom Boom Mattukarar community still carries a heavy stigma. Despite their qualifications, our educated children are overlooked for jobs and struggle to live with dignity.

We envision a future where our children thrive, free from prejudice. Our children have moved away from traditional practices, but without jobs, their progress will be in vain.





## PROJECT OVERVIEWS

### Vanavil Nursery & Primary School

Vanavil School weans children from nomadic communities from begging practice and runs KG to the fifth standard. Our care for these children is comprehensive. It covers education, health, and well-being. Our child-centred educational environment and arts and performance-based pedagogy recognise the strengths of all our students and work with the values of freedom, equality, and fraternity. We believe in Equality in Education and Education for Equality. Children are provided three meals a day (breakfast, lunch, and evening snacks with milk) and we monitor the health of our students, from ordinary ailments to serious chronic issues.



**Number of Beneficiaries: 117**



## Vanavil Children's Home [CCI] After -School Centres

Vanavil runs a Child Care Institution [CCI] registered under the JJ Act for Nomadic girls and young boys who are in need of Care and Protection. Children who need shelter and care due to broken or dysfunctional families and families struggling under debt trap and medical ailments are provided with holistic care at the CCI. Children are part of the decision making process and are encouraged into sports, vocational skills and academics.

Vanavil has created access to education to 1084 children from nomadic tribes through the community learning centers run under the after school program. We have 14 Community learning centres in 5 districts. 27 Teachers are trained in child friendly and activity based pedagogy to teach in the community learning centers. Enrollment of children in nearby public schools, monitoring their attendance, making sure of their retention in schools, conducting daily classes, providing protein rich snacks everyday and weekly extra curricular workshops are the key activities of the program.

## Higher Education

Vanavil supports the higher education of adolescents from the nomadic tribal communities across Tamil Nadu. We provide career guidance in class ten and twelve, help the children to choose and apply to quality courses and write entrance exams. We support the children in the counselling and admission processes and then provide scholarship for the tuition fee. We also provide hostel and mess fees for students who get selected in professional courses away from their village. During the college years we conduct quarterly workshops for the children. These workshops provide motivation and critical communication skills to the students.

**Number of  
Beneficiaries: 41**

**Number of  
Beneficiaries: 1084**

**Number of  
Beneficiaries: 109**





## Community Based Child protection

Community Based Child Protection provides care and protection for the nomadic tribal boys. For the students with no stable family or shelter, we help by placing them in the government SC/ST hostels. We also help them with transportation to school, monitor their school education, and provide nutrition support to the students in need. We also supplement education of these children through offline and online classes.

**Number of  
Beneficiaries: 64**

## Alternative Livelihoods

Through our Alternative livelihood program we provide interest free micro credit and Skill training for the nomadic Tribal women. We form SHGs and conduct tailoring training for the women. We are designing an eco livelihoods program for the benefit of the women who've chosen to get trained and have decided to leave the traditional menial occupations behind.

**Number of  
Beneficiaries: 90**

## Research and Advocacy

We have stepped up our efforts in advocacy for the rights of the Nomadic Tribes and Research is one core part of how we decided to go about it. We conducted a participatory survey of Socio economic status of Nomadic Tribes in Tamilnadu in collaboration with Praxis. The report we made by partnering with TENT ngo and ROSA, a researchers collective brought out some startling information about five nomadic tribes living in Tamilnadu. The Report was released by Member of Parliament Ms. Kanimozhi Karunanidhi and received by Mr. Daxxin Bajrange, president of Joint action group for NT&DNT. Praxis CEO Tom Thomas, Feminist Historian V.Geetha, Retd Chief secretary of TN govt Mr. Christudoss Gandhi spoke at the Seminar held at the Madras School of Social Work on September 06, 2023.





## Vanavil's Golden Baby project

This project aims to curb malnutrition among Nomadic Tribal infants and pregnant mothers. Research shows that malnutrition needs to be addressed in the first 1000 days of a child/person's lifetime. The project monitors this crucial period of first 1000-day starts from conception in the mother's womb till the child's second birthday. In collaboration with FMCH an organisation specialising on Mother and Child Health we provide critical and customised awareness and nutritional support for severely anemic mothers and malnourished infants.

**Number of  
Beneficiaries: 155**

## Vanavil School Of Art and Technology

This project caters to the children who dropout of the school system due to difficulties of coping with academics and exams alongside poverty and pressing need to earn money. Aims to bring STEAM learning + Life Skills + Secondary education (non-formal) + Employability for adolescents from Nomadic Communities in the age group of 14 - 18.

**Number of  
Beneficiaries: 16**



## Impact Stories

SELLUR

STUDENT

Kasthuri

Kaliyamoorthy and Selvi, residents of Sellur village in Nagapattinam district, belong to the Boom Boom Mattukarar community. Their daughter, **Kasthuri**, has been studying at Vanavil School and staying at the Vanavil home since childhood, along with her two elder brothers and one elder sister.

Kasthuri's family does not have a house to live in. Her mother earns a meager living by begging at Velankanni and collecting plastic items. The family's income is insufficient to meet their needs. All four children have been provided with education, accommodation, and care at Vanavil School.

Kasthuri attends school every day. The colorful library, engaging play equipment, and the various activities conducted in her classroom motivate her regular attendance and contribute to her academic and personal development.

Kasthuri, who started her journey at Vanavil in the Thalir Thulir preparatory program, is now in Grade 2. She demonstrates a unique blend of

quiet observation and focused determination in class. While she may not respond immediately during activities, she surprises everyone by performing them excellently after carefully watching and understanding.

Though she struggles to articulate songs fully, she puts effort into humming the tunes correctly. Her standout talent lies in stitching — she combines her creativity in drawing with her sewing skills, making her a gifted child in this area.

When asked about her future aspirations, Kasthuri confidently expressed her dream of becoming a police officer. Her reason? "I want to arrest those who drink and give them proper punishment." Her determination is inspiring, and Vanavil School is committed to supporting her journey toward achieving her dreams.





PORAKUDI

STUDENT

Vaishnavi

My name is **Vaishnavi**, and I am studying in the 6th grade at the government high school near the Porakkudi center. I live with my aunt because my mother is no longer with us, and my father, Vadivel, works as a daily wage laborer. I have four siblings, and life has not been easy for us.

Since I was in 1st grade, I have been attending the evening center regularly. It has always been my favorite place because I get to learn and do the things I enjoy. But going to school has been hard for me. Between 1st and 5th grade, I only went to school two or three days a week, and in 5th grade, I stopped going for almost three months.

I didn't like going to school because I had to take care of the house, look after my younger siblings, and help with chores. I also found it difficult to read and write since I didn't know the letters properly, which made me feel embarrassed.

But things started to change. The headmaster of my school visited my house and spoke to my aunt. After that, I decided to give it another try. For a whole month, I didn't miss a single day of school.

It felt good, but it was still challenging. Now, I go to school about three days a week. It's not perfect, but it's better than before.

One thing I never miss is the evening center. I love going there to learn and spend time with my favorite books. My absolute favorite is *Kaindha Ilayum Mannangkattiyum* (The Dry Leaf and the Clay Doll). I enjoy reading it and narrating the story to everyone.

I also love drawing and often spend time sketching at the center. Even though school is still tough for me, I feel proud of the progress I've made. I hope to keep learning and growing, one step at a time.

When I asked Vaishnavi what she likes the most, she always says, "I like my village and the trees there." Vaishnavi's dream is to become a nature enthusiast. Though she doesn't explicitly say "nature enthusiast," her dream revolves around forests, rivers, and trees being close to her.





My name is **Pandiyammal**. I stayed at the Vanavil Home and studied at the Vanavil Primary School up to the 5th grade, starting from the Thilir Thulir class. I am now studying in the 10th grade at a school in Puducherry.

My father's name is Jeeva, and he works as a case repair technician. My mother's name is Mary, and she earns a living by seeking alms at Velankanni. I am the fourth child in my family, and I have two elder sisters, one elder brother, and one younger brother.

My eldest sister, Sakunthala, works as a Montessori teacher at Vanavil Primary School. My second sister had to discontinue her studies after suffering a leg injury during a long jump competition while in 11th grade, which left her deeply affected. Vanavil stepped in to support her but she did not go back to school.

My elder brother, Sivasakthi, is in the 12th grade, and my younger brother is in the 6th grade at Kadambadi School. All of us are pursuing our education with the support of Vanavil.

During my time at Vanavil, I learned various skills such as crafting, making clay handicrafts, painting, reading library books, and playing Parai drumming. I participated in the play "Aadhiyam", which we performed in places like Theni, Thoothukudi, and Thanjavur.

We also performed Parai drumming in competitions at Kadambadi and Nagoor Pappa Koil, where we won prizes. I participated in a cycling race at the District Collector's office and secured second place, receiving the award from the District Collector.

I also participated in a painting competition on the theme "Environmental Pollution" and secured second place, receiving the prize from the District Collector.

In the 10th grade, I secured 407 marks and ranked first in my school. I have been selected to join a Government Model School.

After completing my higher studies successfully, I aspire to become a doctor.



KRISHNAGIRI

STUDENT

Madesh

Student **Madesh** hails from the Kattunayakanpalli village in Krishnagiri district and belongs to the Adiyar community. His parents, Murugan and Vellachi, earned their livelihood by traveling from village to village, selling bangles beads and plastic items and by running a small shop in one location.

This modest income supported the family. Madesh has three younger brothers and a sister, and his father was deeply committed to ensuring all his children received an education. However, the lack of a community certificate for the aadiyan people in Kattunayanapalli prevented Madesh and his family from obtaining the necessary documentation. As a result, after completing his 12th grade, Madesh could not continue his college education because no institution would admit him without the certificate. At this point, Madesh sought help from the Vanavil Trust which facilitated his admission to the Chemistry program at Arignar Anna Arts and Science College in Krishnagiri district. Madesh made the most of this opportunity, successfully completing his three-year degree.

He now works at Sanmar Specialities, a chemical company in Perigai, Krishnagiri district. Despite his father's tireless efforts to secure the community certificate, Madesh could not pursue his dream field of study. Nevertheless, he excelled in the opportunity he received and is thriving in his career. Madesh acknowledges the struggles faced by his marginalized community and aims to serve as a role model.

He hopes his efforts will inspire others in his community to strive for progress and success. "I want to complete my education and be an example for my community. I want others to make efforts like me and rise higher," Madesh firmly states.



My name is **Anbu**, and I am from Sellur village. My father, Perumal, works as an old clothes trader, and my mother, Murugammal, collects plastic bottles. My elder brother, Satheesh, is studying at the Vanavil School of Arts and Technology, while my younger brothers, Hariharan and Vishnu, are in 8th and 5th grade, respectively. I have been studying at Vanavil School since my early years in the Thalir Thulir program. Currently, I am in the 9th grade at Nagapattinam CSI Higher Secondary School. Last year, due to family poverty, I had to stop attending school and start working. However, Vanavil intervened, helped correct errors in my transfer certificate, and re-enrolled me in school. I am now studying well and have passed all my subjects in the recent term exams. I have a keen interest in kabaddi, drawing, and sculpture. My aspiration is to excel in sculpture and become a skilled sculptor in the future.



My name is **Vennila**, and I am from Porakkudi village in Nagai district. My son, Akhilan, is now seven months old. My husband, Selvakumar, is 21 years old and works in the plastic trade. I studied up to the 12th grade at Vanavil evening school, and with the support of their assistance fund, I pursued higher studies in botany. I got married when I was 18, and Akhilan is our first child.

Through Vanavil's "Golden Child" project, my family has received tremendous support. This project was started to address malnutrition in nomadic and tribal communities like ours. Health workers from the Vanavil malnutrition reduction program visit our home every month. They check Akhilan's weight and height, provide nutritional supplements, and give me advice on how to take care of

him. They've helped me understand the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and have provided awareness about vaccinations at the Anganwadi, IFA tablets, and other preventive care.

It's not just me who benefits from their guidance. They also share this knowledge with others in our village, which helps all of us care for our children better. Knowing we're not alone in this journey gives me hope for Akhilan's future.

My name is **Mariammal**, and I belong to the village of Aaparakudi in Thiruthuraipoondi. I am part of the tribal community. My profession involves selling bangles and bells, a business that has been passed down through generations in my family. I have five children—three sons and two daughters—all of whom are married. Every morning, I leave for my bangle business and return around 2 PM. With support from the Vanavil Foundation, I received an interest-free loan of ₹10,000 per person as part of a group initiative. This funding allowed me to expand my business. My daughters have also taken up the same trade, while my husband and three sons work as drummers. The financial support provided by the Vanavil Foundation has helped me progress in life. Using the income from my business, I have been able to sustain myself and repair the hut I live in. I am currently continuing my bangle business, and the assistance from Vanavil has been a significant boost to my livelihood.



AAPARAKUDI  
Mariammal



SRIVANCHIYAM  
Sathish

My name is **Sathish**, and I am learning sculpture, fashion design, and computer training at the Vanavil Arts and Technology School. My hometown is Srivanchiyam. My mother, Murugammal, receives alms, and my father, Perumal, runs a plastic business. I have four siblings. The Vanavil Trust helped me pursue my education. Initially, I was not interested in school, but with Vanavil's tremendous effort, I managed to complete my 9th grade. After that, I stopped studying further. I have always been passionate about drawing and painting, and Vanavil Arts and Technology School provided me with the training to showcase my artistic skills. I participated in a street art event in Chennai, where I displayed my paintings and received appreciation.



# HIGHLIGHTS of 2023-2024

**Arivu, the Tamil rapper** who is topping the charts, visited Vanavil to grace the Annual Day of the school and home. Known for his anti-caste anthems and other songs about equality, Arivu urged the students to pursue their dreams while attending school and college diligently. Kilvelur MLA and leader of farmworkers in the delta region, Nagai Mali, presented prizes to the children.

**Vanavil Summer Camp** was held in the month of May. Parai drumming, Folk dances, vocal, music and rhythm, theatre, origami, painting sculpture, coconut shell crafts, movie screenings, jewellery making and palm crafts were demonstrated and taught to the children.

Six students from the 10th grade successfully passed their exams. Among them, **Pandiyammal and Amudha** secured Second and Third ranks place in their school and were selected to join the Government Model School for high achieving students.

On **January 26, 2024**, Vanavil Children's Home student **Pandiyammal** participated in a district-level cycling competition held at the Nagapattinam District Collectorate. She cycled from the Collectorate to Akkarai Pettai, securing second place in the competition.

On **September 5, 2023**, Vanavil Childrens Home students Sumathi and Revathi, along with former students currently studying at Vanavil School, organized a **Nomads Art Exhibition**. The exhibition showcased the students' paintings and photographs. The Deputy Collector participated and encouraged the children.

On **November 4, 2023**, Komatsu India Limited through their CSR initiative provided school uniforms, shoes, and notebooks for Vanavil School and Home students. The District Collector, **Mr. Johny Tom Varghese**, attended the event, distributed educational supplies, and motivated the children.

In honor of Salim Ali's birthday, month of November was celebrated as **#Birdnov** during which children were taken to **Kodiyakkarai bird sanctuary** where they watched and photographed birds. A photo exhibition of amazing bird photos taken by Bird watcher **Ms. Anita Veeravendan** was organised at the School and a virtual interaction with the Photographer took place.



Aadhaar cards and caste certificates were arranged for students who lacked them. As a result, **20 children received caste certificates**, and **21 children received Aadhaar cards**.

The celebration of **World Indigenous Peoples Day** in August saw the parents and community members perform their transitional music at the school and sharing the history of the Boom Boom Maatukarars with the children and teachers.

**Birsa Munda's birthday** was observed as Tribal Peoples Day, honored Mr. Pichai from Neelapadi village with an award and children performed his life story as a performance.

**In November, 2023, Stephanie Janaina**, a dance artist from Mexico, conducted a three-day workshop for children, teaching them how to channel anger into creative expressions through body movements.

**Ambedkar's Birthday** was celebrated in all the Vanavil After School centers on April 14th with talks, drama, songs and dances.

**A library girl workshop** was conducted for 25 girl children drawn from 13 afterschool centers. The girls perform the role of library leaders in their community libraries.

**Summer training programs** were conducted for the children at the Sellur, Neelapadi, Thiruthuraipoondi, Aaparakudi and Vilathur centers.

**Vanavil Afterschool program** set foot in the **Thanjavur** district with the inauguration of three centers at Ottankadu, Thuravikadu and Poondi.

Between **July to August 2023**, 20 students who had dropped out were re-enrolled at Mannai Nagar Pamani Veeranager Government Center. Additionally, 2 students were re-integrated into the Trichy center.

This year, **190 library books** were provided to each center.

A **solar light** was donated to the Thuravikaadu center.

Four students who had failed in their 10th-grade exams **appeared for reexamination, passed**, and were enrolled in 11th grade







**Jodogyam Mathematics activity training** was provided to the evening center teachers in September 2023.

On **January 20, 2024**, students from Veeranager center visited the Saraswathi Mahal Library in Thanjavur on a library tour.

In the current academic year, **17 students from Grade 10** scored 60 marks or higher in Mathematics from our Afterschool Program.

Campus interviews were conducted, and students received job offers from companies. **Sumega Sree** was placed in Sri Alten India Pvt Ltd, **Madesh** got in Sanmar Specialities Berigai, and **Bhuvaneshwari** got placed as Community Development Officer at Srinivasan services trust. These students are now working in their respective roles.

Student Guidance meeting focussing on Communications was held on 13th August 2023 for the **Nomad Higher Education Scholarship** students. The workshop was held at St. Joseph's College in Trichy on the World indigenous people's day in August.

In February 2024, Motivational meeting was held in Pondicherry, with 32 students attending. After the meeting, the students visited the **Arikkamedu archeological excavation** area in Pondicherry.

Our long time **donors and mentors Mr. Subramanian and Mrs. Usha Subramanian** met with 24 higher education students in Apprakkudi and provided valuable advice and guidance regarding their specific fields and educational curriculum.

In 2023, four women's self-help groups were established in the villages of Neelapadi, Mannargudi, and Poondi, providing interest-free loans to **48 women to start their own businesses**.

In the village of Kattimedu, in Thiruthuraipoondi, **30 women were trained in sewing and embroidery** design, and certificates were issued to them upon completion of the training.

On March 13, 2024, the Vanavil Trust, in collaboration with the **Tribal Welfare Department** and **Indeco Serve**, provided a food truck for the livelihood advancement of tribal woman Mrs. Lakshmi, valued at 15 lakhs. The project was inaugurated by the **District Collector, Mr. Johny Tom Verghese**.

Students from the **Vanavil School of Arts and Technology** spent 7 days in Marutham Farm School, Thiruvannamalai, where they learned handicrafts.

# WHAT THEY SAY



Vanavil holds a special place in my heart—a place I longed to visit since my undergraduate days. However, it was only after completing my postgraduate studies that I finally had the opportunity to experience it firsthand.

Vanavil is much more than a school; Vanavil has evolved into a significant organization, tirelessly working to integrate this marginalized community. It operates with a sense of responsibility and dedication that one wishes to see from government initiatives.

The school adopts an alternate education model, equipping children with the skills and confidence to transition seamlessly into the 6th standard. Moreover, it nurtures their resilience to face societal challenges.

Vanavil continues its remarkable work, powered by the love and trust of the community. Every moment I spent there was inspiring, filled with joy and affection from the children and the kindness of the community members. Their love and resilience have left an indelible mark on me, and I make it a point to visit Vannavil at least once a year.

Vanavil is not just an organization; it is a family, a movement.



---

**With heartfelt gratitude,  
Poovizhi Thendral,**

M.A Anthropology, UGC NET



We were travelling as a family to different schools and visited Vanavil. We stayed at the school for about a month and what an experience it was! This was one of our first close encounters with children from extreme poverty and social stigma and our conventional ideas about schooling/education failed miserably. On multiple occasions, we were witnesses to the fact that Vanavil is the “HOME” for many of the children and youth of this community. We saw children taking care of each other and a strong sense of togetherness prevailed.

Such quality work is possible because of Vanavil's committed team, deeply concerned in helping these children to become happy/responsible learners/citizens. The way Vanavil's team came together in owning responsibilities was amazing to behold. Because, working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds is not just about teaching them or coaching them to clear exams. Most often it also involves being there for them for their emotional/personal needs. Vanavil's teachers are highly motivated and open to try out new ideas. They are constantly on the look-out for helping out the nomadic communities wherever they are. We wish the team go from strength to strength and reach out to many more children.

---

**Ram and Archana,**

Thulir Trust, Sittilingi.





My first introduction to Vanavil school and trust was via Ramesh Sundaresan who has been training government schoolteachers on methods of teaching math to young children. The origins of Vanavil trust was a very inspiring story to hear: a young idealistic journalist on a reporting gig about the tsunami of 2004 gets involved with the community and ends up setting up a trust and opening a school for them. Ms Revathi Radhakrishnan set up the trust specifically for the children of the Nomadic tribe called Boom Boom Mattakarars in Sikkal, Nagapattinam. While on a road trip immediately after the Covid lockdown was lifted in 2020, we visited the school as a



group of friends. What struck one immediately was a sense of pride and happiness in school. The young teachers and the young children owned the space and acted as warm guides, showing every nook and corner. The dorms were especially welcoming with the amazing paintings done by the children on all available surfaces.

Our second stint at Vanavil was as architects for the new Montessori school that the trust wanted to construct. Ms Revathi and her dedicated team of teachers at the Vanavil trust had a very clear vision for the new spaces for bright, happy children. We did not have to look far for design inspiration as the existing school building is beautifully designed by the Bangalore based Biome Environmental services. The vision for the school was to have an environment friendly approach in materials and construction, a space for the children full of their art and their expressions, and a place for them to be happy and to be inspired to learn. That the school should have a strong sense of identity for the kids through the artwork and materials was something that we all worked on together.

It has been a privilege to be involved in the Montessori school design for us at NIVASA. When the older kids come and complain that why the school was not built earlier during their kindergarten years or why should the little ones get this space and not them, we feel a weird sense of happiness that something has been done right in the new school.

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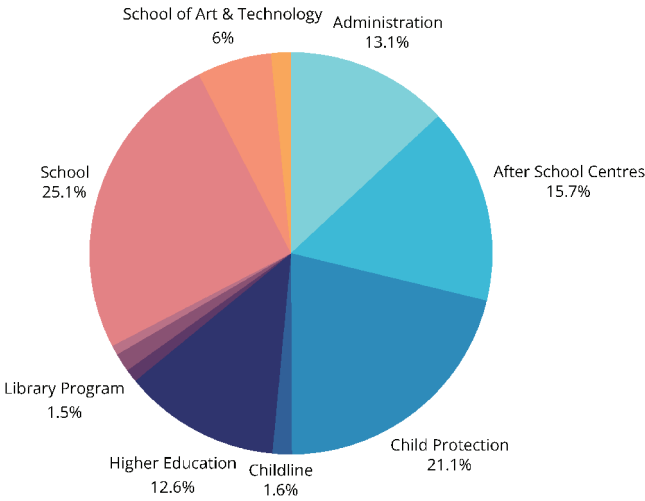
**Meenakshi,**

Trustee and mentor at NIVASA

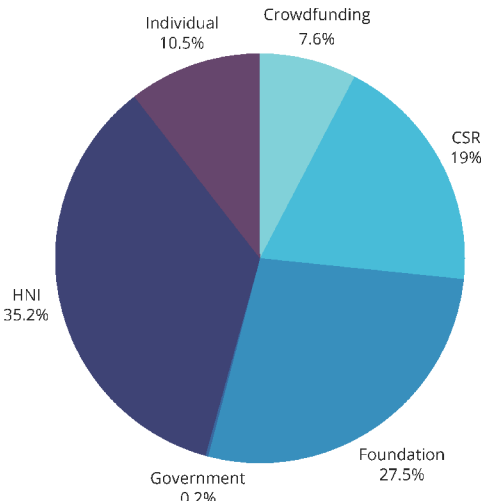
# FINANCIALS

Vanavil Trust Balance Sheet as at 31-03-2024				
Liabilities	As at 31-Mar-2024 Rs.	Rs.	Assets	As at 31-Mar-2024 Rs.
<b>Capital Account</b>		<b>10,01,000</b>	<b>Fixed Assets (Net)</b>	<b>47,03,072</b>
Corpus Fund	1,000		Land(Agricultural Development)	87,561
Endowment Fund	7,00,000		Building	32,96,146
- Mr. Beins			Computers	84,303
Other Funds	3,00,000		Electrical Fittings	71,287
- Father Manu			Equipments	1,45,202
- Mrs. Premiswathi			Furniture & Fittings	2,76,441
			Granlery & Cow Shed	1,63,105
			Kitchen Items	1,72,956
<b>Accumulated Surplus</b>		<b>83,12,307</b>	Two Wheeler	80,546
Opening Balance	49,42,678		Washing Machine	14,775
Current Period	43,69,629		Car	3,60,750
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		<b>5,000</b>	<b>Current Assets</b>	<b>56,15,234</b>
Audit Fees Payable			Deposits	
			- Fixed Deposit	35,94,190
			Loans & Advances	
			- Rental Advance	3,10,000
			Cash-in-hand	2,314
			Bank Accounts	16,56,991
			(T Refund Receivables	51,739.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,03,18,307</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>1,03,18,307</b>
For Vanavil Trust: As per our report of even dated REVATHI RADHAK RISHNAN Digitally signed by REVATHI RADHAK RISHNAN Date: 2024.09.28 14:57:49 +05'30'				
For Kumar & Raj Chartered Accountants KUMAR VAIDYAN ATHAN Digitally signed by KUMAR VAIDYAN ATHAN Date: 2024.09.28 14:54:09 +05'30'				
Revathi R Managing Trustee M No: 027762 Firm Reg No: 0015785 UDIN: 24027762BKCP19241				

Vanavil Trust Income and Expenditure Statement for the Year ended 31-03-2024			
Expenditure	For the year ended 31-03-2024 Rs.	Income	For the year ended 31-03-2024 Rs.
Administration	24,29,064	Donations and Contributions	2,33,37,331
Learning and Development	1,94,685	Donations	2,30,37,331
School	46,60,944	Childline Contribution	3,00,000
Child Protection and Care	38,19,952	<b>Other Income</b>	<b>1,70,411</b>
After School Centres	29,27,077	Interest From FD	1,70,048
Nominal Higher Education Scholarship	23,40,281	Interest From SB	
Library Program	2,78,497	Profit on Sale of Fixed Asset	363
Research & Advocacy	1,43,823		
Women Empowerment	2,95,859		
School of Art & Technology	11,10,887		
Childline	2,89,503		
Farm	1,11,634		
Loss on Disposal of Fixed Asset	45,906		
Depreciation	4,90,002		
<b>Excess of Income over Expenditure</b>	<b>43,69,629</b>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,35,07,742</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,35,07,742</b>
For Vanavil Trust: As per our report of even dated REVATHI RADHAK RISHNAN Digitally signed by REVATHI RADHAK RISHNAN Date: 2024.09.28 14:59:32 +05'30'			
For Kumar & Raj Chartered Accountants KUMAR VAIDYAN ATHAN Digitally signed by KUMAR VAIDYAN ATHAN Date: 2024.09.28 14:55:41 +05'30'			
Revathi R Managing Trustee M No: 027762 Firm Reg No: 0015785 UDIN: 24027762BKCP19241			



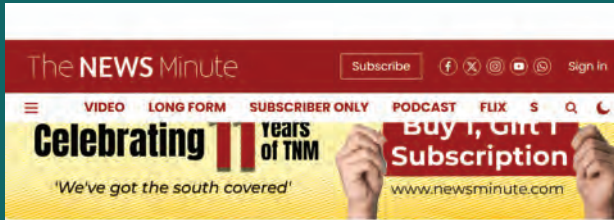
## Expenses



## Donations



# Media mentions & Showcases



Tamil Nadu

## Will address issues faced by denotified communities in TN, says Kanimozhi

Tamil Nadu government is working towards creating an inclusive society, said Kanimozhi Karunanidhi while releasing a report on the Status of Nomadic Tribes in Tamil Nadu.



Kanimozhi Karunanidhi released a report on the status of nomadic tribes in Tamil Nadu

Written by: Nithya Pandian

Published on: 07 Sep 2023, 2:05 pm



Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, Member of Parliament, Thoothukudi, has promised to institute a mechanism to ensure that Nomadic/Denotified/ Semi-Nomadic Communities (NC, DNC, and SNC) in Tamil Nadu get community certificates without hassles. Releasing a report on the Status of Nomadic Tribes in Tamil Nadu, she assured the community that the issue would be taken up with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin.

The report was released at the Madras School of Social Work (MSSW) on September 6 to mark the 71st Vimukta Day (the day in which criminal tribes were denotified and observed every year on August 31). The study was conducted in 1485 households of the Narikuravar, Boom Boom Mattukaran – Aadiyan, Lambadas, and Kattunaykars in

eight districts of Tamil Nadu. The study explored various concerns of nomadic communities including educational status, access to infrastructure, and government facilities and alarming gaps in education.

"The Tamil Nadu government is working towards creating an inclusive society. But, we could also see hesitation among officers while issuing community certificates to the Denotified Community members," said Kanimozhi. She acknowledged that some communities in her own constituency faced such issues. Getting a community certificate and availing schemes introduced by the government is still a challenge for many households, she said, assuring to bring this to the notice of the Chief Minister.

Of the 1485 households which participated in the survey, 1118 (75%) had no members who completed Class 10. A total of 1275 households had no members who passed Class 12 and 1378 households had not even a single graduate. The study also found that the students from the community faced barriers and discrimination in educational institutes.

The comprehensive participatory study of four nomadic tribes in the state was conducted by Vanavil Trust, a Nagapattinam-based NGO that works among the Aadiyan community, in collaboration with Praxis and with the support of the Research Organisation for Social Action (ROSA) and the Empowerment Centre of Nomads & Tribes (TENT).

THE HINDU

HOME / NEWS / CITIES / TIRUCHIRAPALLI

## Collector inaugurates mobile snacks van for tribal women

Updated - March 13, 2024 08:47 pm IST - Nagapattinam

THE HINDU BUREAU



Collector Johny Tom Varghese inaugurates mobile snacks van for tribal women in Nagapattinam on Wednesday. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

A mobile snacks van worth ₹15 lakh was offered for on subsidy by the Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department to 'Vanavil Trust' that exclusively works for tribal welfare here on Wednesday. This initiative was inaugurated by Collector Johny Tom Varghese.

Speaking with R. Solai, Deputy Director, from the Vanavil trust said, "We have given the vehicle for free of cost. Through this, for the first time, the Adhiyan community, a nomadic tribe community in this region, has set up a snacks shop. This shop will be run by four tribal women and would also have the products made by tribal women for sales. The Tribal Welfare department assured us to provide additional vehicles to more tribal women in the coming days. We hope this will elevate their living standards."

Published - March 13, 2024 08:46 pm IST



**From the Lived Experience to the classroom - an Arts Education intervention supported by India Foundation for the Arts enabled Vanavil to create art integrated pedagogical activity book, recordings of community songs, an exhibition and performances.**

## With their fortune on the wane, the once popular boom boom maatukarans have transitioned from divination to hawking plastic

### WHEN A TRADITION GOES SILENT

Mechuan Ahmed  
@mechuanahmed

The sounds of the maatukaran playing popular Tamil songs burst through the quiet streets as a boom boom maatukaran walks up to a doorway with his nose pressed in colourful robes and painted horns. "With this family become rich" asks the maatukaran as the family eagerly waits to see what the bull has to say. Seeing the bull shake his head the family members are pleased and give both bull and beggar a treat. Such was the life of the nomadic boom boom maatukaran community which made a living out of begging. A common occurrence in Tamil Nadu till a couple of decades ago, today the vibrant tradition of boom boom maatukarans has faded. Most have given up the trade and taken up selling plastic and second hand wares.

"The community has been around since the Nayak Period from 16th, however, the decline in their culture happened around early 2000s owing to the end of the herder system," says Revathi R, founder of Vanavil, an NGO which works with the community. "Legend has it that our life as wanderers began because we betrayed a priest," says 67-year-old V. Pichai, a boom boom maatukaran from Sellar village in Nagapattinam, which is home to the community. Today there are 41 boom boom maatukaran families in Sellar.

**OF RITUALS & TRADITIONS**  
Marriage proposals in the boom boom maatukaran community are rather unique. If a man likes a woman, he puts a stone in a pot and then collects stones in brass cups from 10 people. These stones are put in the pot and taken to the girl's house. "If the girl and her family accept the pot and the stones, we take the girl's hand and give it to the boy's hand and considered them wedded," says Pichai, a resident.

They have punishments for those who marry outside the community. If a man marries outside the community, his head is shaved, grass is applied on his body and he is made to walk around the village, after which he has to pay a certain amount as a penalty to be let into the community again. In the case of a woman, she is excommunicated.

Seeing how well the business was doing, several families in Sellar moved to selling. "This community is able to hone their skills and adapt," says Revathi. Over the last decade, she has helped educate the children by setting up a school. "We would take our children along to earn money to buy a bicycle for them," says P. Sankar, a first generation student. Sankar now studies at Madras Christian College. "Our history will die because our kids don't speak our tongue and our traditions are alien to them," he laments. "It's good to see a way because with education they are moving forward," says Sankar. A resident of Sellar, Sankar slowly created a lineage of their own tradition, the boom boom maatukaran, in the village of Sellar. "We have a lineage of boom boom maatukarans in Sellar, which was heavily influenced by Telugu, as their ancestors were from there. The language is only oral, it today a mix of Telugu and Tamil. Owing to their constant travelling, each family kept hunting dogs, which continues to this day. The community has held on to several of its customs over generations. The village elders adjudicate disputes. Families assemble on the fifth of every month to discuss problems," says Pichai. Money is lost without contracts or collateral. "A person's word is enough," says M. Kaliamma, a resident.

Around two decades ago, the boom boom maatukaran culture slowly began declining with fewer takers for their way of fortune-telling. And that was when the idea of selling plastic wares took hold. "I made more money selling plastic items going to door to door than with my bull," says Kallagan, one of the first in the community to switch trades. Seeing how well the business was doing, several families in Sellar moved to selling. "This community is able to hone their skills and adapt," says Revathi. Over the last decade, she has helped educate the children by setting up a school. "We would take our children along to earn money to buy a bicycle for them," says P. Sankar, a first generation student. Sankar now studies at Madras Christian College. "Our history will die because our kids don't speak our tongue and our traditions are alien to them," he laments. "It's good to see a way because with education they are moving forward," says Sankar. A resident of Sellar, Sankar slowly created a lineage of their own tradition, the boom boom maatukaran, in the village of Sellar. "We have a lineage of boom boom maatukarans in Sellar, which was heavily influenced by Telugu, as their ancestors were from there. The language is only oral, it today a mix of Telugu and Tamil. Owing to their constant travelling, each family kept hunting dogs, which continues to this day. The community has held on to several of its customs over generations. The village elders adjudicate disputes. Families assemble on the fifth of every month to discuss problems," says Pichai. Money is lost without contracts or collateral. "A person's word is enough," says M. Kaliamma, a resident.

Only a handful of families in Sellar continue the boom boom tradition. The community is scattered in villages in Thiruvavur, Thanjavur and a couple of families near the borders of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. The last boom boom maatukaran in those villages too the boom boom is a mere whisper of the past.

Email your feedback with name and address to southpole.lets@timesgroup.com



For Tamil Nadu's Tribal Youth It's An Uphill Battle For Higher Education Due To A Lack Of Community Certificates: More Than 90% Have Given Up On The Idea Of College. Says A Study

# NOMAD? NO PROOF, NO SEAT

Mukesh Ahmed/Timesgroup.com

Living in a nomadic home with her husband and two-year-old son, barely making ends meet, was not the life Thulasi from Dinakari dreamt of. "I was pursuing BA in History but I had to dropout in my first year as I did not have a community certificate to continue my education," says the 24-year-old, who belongs to the Kankaraiyarkar tribal community. "I wanted to be a teacher."

With a few months left to finish her Bachelor's in Commerce, M. Mahesh from the boom town Marudakurav community in Krishnagiri says he too is in a similar situation. "I don't know if I will get my degree as I do not have a community certificate to submit to college," says the 20-year-old.

Thulasi's and Mahesh's narratives mirror the experiences of many within Tamil Nadu's nomadic tribal communities, where youngsters face an uncertain future as they lack community certificates that ensure recognition for them at educational institutions.

A recent study by Varadachari et al. says that work towards empowering nomadic tribes, found that among 1,600 households across districts such as Oudikudi, Krishnagiri, Mayiladuthurai, Madurai, Nagapattinam, Tiruvannamalai, Thanjavur and Tirunelveli, only 12% of the residents are pursuing a college degree.

One of the major reasons for the low number of college graduates is the lack of community certificates and the means to avail them.

"There are 50 families living in my village for the past 10 years, and yet, I am the first person on the road to complete college," says Mahesh, who was forced to study at a private college paying an annual fee of ₹10,000. "Most of us in my village have a community certificate. This is a battle we have been fighting for generations, but nothing has come of it."

A community certificate is a document issued by the state revenue department to recognised communities such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. It helps them get reservation in education and employment.

Despite securing a seat in a government college, Mahesh's younger brother Subashini, 18, had to give it up and enroll in a private college, because he did not have the certificate. "I gave it back a year ago as, my father makes money as a weaver and earns a monthly income of ₹2,500. Affording my education is difficult for him but he encourages me because he wants a



**POINT TO LEARN:** Most children in nomadic communities drop out of school to make a living by begging or as fortune tellers.

community certificates because they want to provide their children with an education. "No one to education should not be a better life they must wage it to their rights," says Mahesh.

M. Maheshwari, secretary at TENDI, says since nomadic tribes are constantly on the move and don't have permanent homes, the certificates are a struggle to get. "Until the early 2000s, nomadic tribes travelled across villages in TN in search of work and set up temporary housing at various places. Many of the communities cannot be found in government records and there are more yet to be identified."

Maheshwari explains that as the government does not officially recognise the names of some of the tribes, when individuals fill out applications and are asked to specify their community, tabularians often assume the tribes are fabricated and reject them.

"Since the nomadic tribes don't belong to a village or district, members speak a dialect that is a mixture of words from Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada and so, the name of the community does not have any recorded roots in Tamil," she says.

Krishnagiri collector K.M. Saranya says when an application gets rejected, a revenue department official is supposed to inspect and verify if the family belongs to a nomadic community. "For instance, if the family claims to belong to the boom town Marudakurav community, they investigate what they eat, how they live, the way they dress, the language they speak and so on. If there are discrepancies, we bring on board an anthropologist to help investigate. If there

**"I don't know if I will get a degree as I do not have a community certificate to submit to college"**  
M Mahesh's concern

In a mission, the certificate is not issued. The nomadic tribal community can apply for community certificate through several means," she says.

Murugan, a boom town Marudakurav from Krishnagiri, was forced to go from pillar to post to prove he belonged to a nomadic community. "While applying for the certificate, they told me that if my relatives had a community certificate, they would be able to issue it to me. But since the community has always been on the move, my relatives are now settled across seven districts in Tamil Nadu. I took a photograph of their certificates and submitted it, but they rejected it."

Murugan says the tabularian told him to bring his relatives to the office to verify his application, which he did, only to be rejected again. Later, they told him that since they belonged to a different district he would need to apply there. "When I went there, they told me I had to apply in the district I'm living in. It's been 42 years, and I still don't have a certificate."

திருச்சி/மாவட்டங்கள்

திங்கள்நிறைய, 4 நவம்பர் 2024

## பழங்குடியினர் சான்றிதழ் கோரும் ஆதீயன் சமூக மக்கள்!

பழங்குடியினர் சான்றிதழ் கோரும் ஆதீயன் சமூக மக்கள்!



**ஆதீயன் சமூக மக்கள் பித்தூர் பகுதி பழங்குடியினர் சமூக மக்கள்.**

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இவர்கள் தங்கள் பூர்வீக ஊர்களில் உதவிக்கொடுக்க வழங்கப்படும் இந்து ஆதீயன் ஐதீயன் சமூக மக்கள்.

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