

# **English Language Pedagogies in Some Selected Alternative Education Institutions in India for Empowering the Subalterns**

Dissertation submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, in partial fulfillment for the award of M.A. degree in English Language and Literature.



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## Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **English Language Pedagogies in Some Selected Alternative Education Institutions in India for Empowering the Subalterns** is a bona fide record of sincere work done by N A ASNA THASNIM, Register Number: 220011028699, Bharata Mata College, under my supervision and guidance and that no part of this thesis has been presented for the award of any degree, diploma, title, or recognition of this or any other university.

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## Declaration

I hereby affirm that the dissertation entitled **English Language Pedagogies in Some Selected Alternative Education Institutions in India for Empowering the Subalterns** is a record of *bona fide* research work done by me under the guidance of **Dr. Mini Abraham**, Assistant Professor, Post Graduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College and that no part of this project has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, title, or recognition of this or any other university.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The landscape of education is continuously evolving, with alternative pedagogies emerging as powerful tools for addressing the diverse needs of learners, particularly in the context of English language education. This dissertation explores the efficacy and impact of alternative English pedagogies in India, with a specific focus on their role in empowering marginalised communities. As the global lingua franca, English proficiency has become increasingly crucial for social mobility and economic opportunities. However, traditional teaching methods often fall short in addressing the unique challenges faced by learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and communities.

This dissertation analysis the syllabus, courses, and integral modes of imparting education in selected alternative education institutions in India which aims at the enhancement of physical, emotional, mental, intellectual, and spiritual intelligence of children from marginalised sections of the society.

Alternative educational programmes can be considered as a system separate from the mainstream or traditional educational programmes, as it is designed for interested students and the parents, especially those who face academic or behavioural difficulties. Alternative Education System refers to the approaches in teaching and learning employed outside the mainstream traditional state provided educational system which works either as public or as private schools with a creative curriculum and programs which is largely based on individual student's interest, skills, abilities, and calibre. It also includes special programmes for school-dropouts, pushed-outs, pulled-outs, differently-abled students etc.

Mainstream Education often adhere to a standardised-pre-determined curriculum, qualitative as well as quantitative assessment system and are predominantly lecture based. Majority of these institutions follow a uniform pattern of operations and gives more importance to competition, selfishness, and comparison by avoiding the collaborated activities which are the soul of Alternative Education Institutions. The Mainstream Education often has a uniform perspective on students and shapes them to conform to certain anticipated as well as

expected social norms and patterns. Mostly, the students who come out from these mainstream Institutions are like industrialised market products.

Alternative Educational environment can be run in collaboration with state governments or as an independent school or by NGOs. It may follow a home-based learning environment. Majority of Alternative schools prioritise a sense of community among the students. They follow a holistic and progressive educational method using all aspects of the learners like mind, body, and spirit simultaneously. Progressive education is based on modern, post-industrial experience by stressing the expeditionary and experimental learning with thematically arranged curriculum which emphasis on the problem-solving and critical thinking skills, cooperative and collaborative learning which also leads to the development of social skills. Collaboration-operative learning and de-emphasis on text books are the crux of this method.

Subaltern studies, postcolonial theory, and criticism gained significant traction in the final two decades of the twentieth century. Subaltern studies which rooted from Marxism as well as post-structuralisms, becomes a part of postcolonial criticism and played a significant role in giving voice to the voiceless. The term ‘subaltern’ coined by Antonio Gramsci refers a subordinate position in terms of gender, class, race, culture as well as caste. The term gained great attention with the publication of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1985)

In this thesis, the two nomadic tribes have been taken as representatives of the subaltern Community. The study follows how these tribes were elevated through continuous Alternative Education programmes initiated by institutions like *Vanavil* and through various outreach programmes of *Auroville*. The thesis also concentrates on the role of ELT in empowering and elevating these nomadic tribe’s current position in the society. ELT, or English Language Teaching, refers to the practice and profession of teaching the English language to non-native speakers by employing wide range of methods with the aim of language acquisition as well as development of language skills which also includes listening,

speaking, reading, and writing etc. ELT may occur in various contexts such as classrooms, language institutes, online platforms, or through private tutoring. The goal of ELT is to empower learners to effectively communicate in English for academic, professional, or personal purposes.

All the information used in this thesis are collected using first-hand information gathering tools like site visiting, surveys, interviews with the faculties, students and their parents, alumni as well as with other employees and non-teaching staffs of the selected institutions under study.

This project will focus on how alternative education institutions in India, such as *Vanavil* and the outreach programs of *Auroville*, implement innovative pedagogical approaches to English language teaching (ELT). These institutions serve as case studies to understand how non-conventional educational methods can be tailored to meet the needs of subaltern communities, including nomadic tribes like the *Boom Boom Mattukarars* and *Narikuravars*.

The research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on alternative education and its potential to transform lives through language empowerment. By analysing the pedagogical strategies, curriculum design, and outcomes of these alternative approaches, this study seeks to inform educational policy and practice in India and beyond.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one gives an introduction about alternative education systems and an overview of two alternative education imparting institutions - *Vanavil* and five outreach organisations of *Auroville*. Chapter two delineates the theoretical framework applied in this thesis, namely ELT and Subalternity.

Chapter three analyses the work of *Vanavil*, an acclaimed NGO of Tamil Nadu in empowering the subaltern by using the scope of alternative education system. It also analyses pedagogies of *Vanavil* in empowering the students of two marginalised nomadic communities namely, *Boom Boom Mattukarars* and *Narikuravars*. The dissertation also focuses on the modes of ELT that they are using.



*Vanavil* started in 2005 after the Asian Tsunami of 2004 to support these two nomadic tribes who were often neglected by the government and discriminated in the refugee camps as they had no id proofs or ration cards to identify as a citizen of India. The organisation was founded by Revathi R who visited the Tsunami affected areas as a journalist and empathized with these nomadic tribes who settled on the roads and nearby parks as they had no place to go. The institution succeeded in its project and its first generation of students are working in many fields and many students have opted for higher education. The institution used a mix of Montessori and other teaching methods to bloom the children from the beginning. The institution also gives special attention to English Language teaching as an instrument to empower and improve the standard and quality of students along with other subjects- art, and skilled activities.

The institution also provides *After School Program* for children who goes to government schools after their primary education in the *Vanavil* Schools. In this project the students get a revision of what they learnt from schools and a doubt clearing section. The organisation also provides housing for girls and small boys in '*Vanavil Children Home Project*'. The organisation also provides scholarship for children in the form of their education fees and hostel fees, stationary materials for studying etc.

The fourth chapter analyses the four selected organisations of *Auroville*- a utopian city in Tamil Nadu in empowering the marginalised sections of children and women in the nearby villages. *Auroville* which in French means 'city of Dawn', is an experimental utopian township which is founded in 1968 by Mirra Alfassa who is called as the Mother and designed by the architect Roger Anger. The city rests mostly in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry in India. It is named after Sri Aurobindo. This thesis traces the functioning of outreach programmes of *Auroville* Foundation like *Arulvazhi*, *Tamil Ulagam*, *Thamarai*, *Ilaignarakal*.

*Arulvazhi* in Tamil means 'Way of Grace' and is an outreach programme *Auroville*, which meets the educational as well as cultural needs of children from the age group of three

to fifteen years of the nearby villages. The crux of the organisation is the ideas propagated by Mira Alfassa and Aurobindo. It also aims to empower the women in neighbouring villages through education. The main objective of the organisation is to provide value-based education as well as organic development of children's skills and calibre in harmony with nature as well as peers and other beings.

*Tamil Ulagam* or the 'Tamil world' is an initiative of *Auroville* to help the disadvantaged Children with an objective to impart knowledge by exploring the artistic talents and skills using special camps, interaction with native English speaker faculties, cultural programmes, summer camps etc.

*Thamarai* is an organisation under the outreach project of *Auroville* since 2006 which stands for the value education, potential building, well-being and empowerment of children and women from neighbouring villages through after-school service, natural healthcare education program, English Language teaching, environmental program with field work, capacity, and leadership quality development.

*Ilaignarkal Education Centre* helps the village workers and their children around *Auroville* to learn English language, Mathematics, Science, Arts, and other technical and skill trainings which would improve their stand of living.

The last chapter concludes the pedagogies used in these two institutions and analyses the scope and need of these kinds of institutions to empower the subalterns. The primary scope of this research includes a comparative analysis of pedagogical methods, case studies of alternative educational institutions, focus on marginalised communities as well as nomadic tribes, role of English Language Teaching, evaluation of educational outcomes, implications for educational policy and interdisciplinary approach.

By addressing these areas, the thesis aims to contribute to the academic discourse on alternative education and its potential to transform the lives of marginalised individuals. It provides a detailed examination of how alternative pedagogies can foster empowerment and social change, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers

interested in creating more inclusive and effective educational environments. While this thesis provides valuable insights into the pedagogical approaches of selected alternative education institutions in India and their impact on empowering subaltern communities, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations like limited case studies, geographical constraints, scope of pedagogical methods, data availability, etc.

This research is grounded in several interconnected theoretical perspectives:

a. Critical Pedagogy

Drawing on the work of Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux, critical pedagogy forms a cornerstone of this study. It emphasizes the transformative potential of education and the importance of developing critical consciousness among learners. In the context of ELT, critical pedagogy challenges traditional power dynamics and encourages learners to engage with language as a tool for social change.

b. Sociocultural Theory of Language Learning

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory informs the analysis of alternative ELT approaches. This perspective emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural context in language acquisition, aligning with the community-centred approaches observed in the case study institutions. This is very evident in the working of both the institution and outreach programmes as their language acquisition is a social and continuing process of engagement between students, faculties, native English speakers, collaborative learning between students themselves etc.

c. Multiliteracies Pedagogy

The New London Group's concept of multiliteracies provides a framework for understanding how alternative pedagogies can address diverse modes of communication and meaning-making in an increasingly globalized world. All the institutions and outreach programmes studied in this thesis encompasses linguistic, cultural, and technological diversity.

Methodology

This dissertation employs a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive analysis of alternative English pedagogies:

a. Case Study Analysis

The primary research method involves in-depth case studies of *Vanavil* and selected outreach programs of *Auroville*. This approach allows for a nuanced examination of their pedagogical practices, syllabus, organizational structures, and impacts on learners.

b. Qualitative Data Collection

The study also employs the information gathered using the first-hand research tools like semi-structured interviews with educators, administrators, and students, alumni as well as with employees and other teaching and non-teaching staffs, classroom observations to document teaching practices and student engagement document analysis of curricula, teaching materials, and institutional policies of all the institutions under study.

c. Quantitative Data Collection

It includes the number of students enrolled in each institution since its beginning and total number of beneficiaries, alumines, those who pursue for higher education, number of graduates, number of those who were employed etc.

d. Comparative Analysis

The study compares the alternative pedagogies employed in the case study institutions with traditional ELT approaches in mainstream Indian education. This comparison helps identify key differentiators and potential areas for integration into broader educational policy.

e. Ethical Considerations

The research adheres to strict ethical guidelines, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, and being sensitive to the cultural and social contexts of the communities involved.

Through this comprehensive methodological approach, the study aims to provide a robust analysis of alternative English pedagogies and their potential for empowering marginalised

learners in India. The findings will contribute to ongoing discussions about educational reform and the role of innovative language teaching approaches in promoting social equity.

## Chapter 2: ELT And Subalternity

Knowledge and power are intrinsically linked each other. Power is based on assumptions, information and analysis of people and events. Thus, power is about a cultural condition of knowledge. The dominant group generated knowledge and meaning to keep a section of people under control through ideology's system of representations. People who possess power uses knowledge to discriminate, imprison or even kill those who lack power. Those who lacks power which means the subaltern are often oppressed and marginalised in the society. This marginalisation is rendered natural through a system of commonly circulated beliefs called ideology.

In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality. (Foucault 52)

Foucault argues that power structures are depend upon structures of knowledge and once the power structure acquired knowledge then they began to control and create subject and act like supreme power. People who had no power to determine their own lives as well as future lack agency. They are called subalterns. Every society had its own subalterns. The dominant, elite groups who construct subaltern also uses different modes to ensure that the subaltern remain powerless.

Foucault's interest was not directed at the expression of power in its most central and institutionalized forms such as class relations rather, he was concerned to examine how power relations of inequality and oppression are created and maintained in more subtle and diffuse ways through ostensibly humane and freely adopted social practices.

(McNay 2)

Subaltern theory is a theoretical framework within postcolonial studies that focuses on the marginalised and oppressed groups of people who are disenfranchised in the society by the

dominant groups at the social, economic as well as political levels. The term subaltern first coined by Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci for referring the subordinate groups whose voices were suppressed or marginalised within dominant power structures. The imprisoned Antonio Gramsci used the term to stand in for proletarian to escape the prison censors.

In the context of postcolonial theory, the term has been expanded to encompass not only class-based oppression but also various forms of oppression in the form of race, sex, gender, ethnicity as well as religion. Subaltern theory analyses the ways in which dominant groups exert power and control over subaltern groups, often using mechanisms such as colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. It also aims to amplify the voices and perspectives of subaltern groups, providing a platform for their narratives and experiences. Hegemony, resistance, agency, and cultural hybridity are the major terms relating to subaltern theory.

The term subaltern owes its origin to Antonio Gramsci's writings and underlines a subordinate position in terms of class, gender, caste, race, and culture. 'subaltern' means the colonised/oppressed subject whose voice has been silenced. The term has a relevance to the study of third world countries especially to India. (Das 145).

The term Subaltern is a combination of two Latin terms 'sub' means 'below', 'under' and 'alter' means 'other' or 'alternus' meaning 'alternate', which produced 'subalternus', meaning, 'subordinate'. It refers to a subordinate or inferior or marginalised position in the society. Earlier in term was mainly used in the military contexts for referring the commissioned military officers who were inferior in the rank of a captain who is the dominant power. It also used to refer the inferior officers at the various grades.

Term, taken from the work of Antonio Gramsci and used initially to define proletarian and other working-class groups, subaltern is employed in postcolonial studies after Gayatri Spivak to address dominated and marginalised groups. (Wolfreys et al. 80)

It was Antonio Gramsci who first coined the term subaltern in a political context in his essay "Notes on Italian History." According to Gramsci lower class were often deprived of their identities, history, and culture by the hegemonic domination of social elite class.

Gramsci wanted to make the subaltern voice and culture heard as it was often manipulated and erased by the dominant ruling class elites.

Leela Gandhi explains the term clearly in the following lines:

In 1985 Gayatri Spivak threw a challenge to the race and class blindness of the western academy asking '*Can the subaltern speak?*' (Spivak, 1985). By subaltern Spivak meant the oppressed subject, the members of Antonio Gramsci's 'subaltern classes' or more generally those 'of inferior rank,' and her question followed on the work begun in the early 1980s by a collective of intellectuals now known as Subaltern Studies group. The stated objective of this group was "to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, castes, age, gender and office or in any other way. "Fully alert to the complex ramifications arising from the composition of subordination, the Subaltern Studies group sketched out its wide-ranging concern both with the visible "history, politics, economics, and sociology of subalternity" and with the occluded "attitudes, ideologies, and beliefs systems- in short, the cultural informing that condition. "In other words, 'Subaltern Studies' defined itself as an attempt to allow the people finally to speak within the jealous pages of elitist historiography and in so doing, to speak for, or to sound the muted voices of, the truly oppressed. (Gandhi 1-2).

Subaltern Studies emerged around 1982 when series of journal papers published by Oxford University Press in India as well as when a group of Indian scholars trained in the west wanted to reclaim their history. Their main aim was to regain history for the underclasses as well as for the voices that had not been heard before. Advocates of the subaltern hoped to break away from histories of the elites and the Eurocentric bias of current Homeric history. The primary leader was Ranajit Guha who had written workshop on peasant revolutions in



India. Another of the leading scholars of subaltern studies is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The distinguished literary and cultural critic Gayatri Spivak utilizes methods and approaches from Marxism, feminism, and deconstruction. Many other South Asian historians, social critics, and scholars like Touraj Atabaki, Shahid Amin, Dipesh Chakrabarty, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Gyan Pandey and Sumit Sarkar who dissented from this group due to its disappointing turn to postmodernism. Ranjit Guha defined the Subaltern Studies as a name for the subordination in South Asian society whether it is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or any other way.

English language had a significant place in the Indian Education System and national life. It was the British colonisers who firstly introduced English Education System in India, for as Macaulay said “a class of people, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect”. English as a language rich in literature and culture play a significant role for making a unifying force in India’s freedom struggle as it acts as a link language in multicultural India. English still had its clutches over Indian crowd as it is still a language of the government public administration of India, Indian legislature, law courts and educational institutions. It acts as a bridge language for international and national commerce and business. English language had a great significance in a person’s life as it is an international language, for its library importance, national importance, recreational importance, cultural importance, educational importance, vocational importance. English is the language of the world and the knowledge of the language makes a person, a citizen of the world. Pandit Nehru has said, “English is a big key on the modern world” Its importance as international language can be denied by none.” (Patel and Jain 6).

English Language Teaching (ELT) refers to the process of instructing and facilitating the acquisition and development of English Language skill in individuals, encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing as well as grammar vocabulary and pronunciation by using various methods and techniques. ELT means teaching English not only to those who use it as a second and a foreign language but also to people with English as First language also.

English as a Second Language (ELS) refers to the teaching and learning of English by non-native speakers who were residing in a foreign country where English is a primary or dominant language. For example, the immigrant communities of Australia, New Zealand, or Canada.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to the teaching and learning of English by individuals who reside in a country where English is not the primary or dominant language, here English is usually taught as a subject in schools, universities, colleges etc. Thus, it had limited opportunity for the immersion and exploration of English outside the classroom or groups. For example, Brazil, Japan, and Thailand where English is not used for communication but only for elementary levels of education. They use English as a bridge or international language when there is a lack of another common language. English in India is considered as ESL/EFL Blend or World Englishes. It is because of the status and function of English in India vary according to the context and region. In urban it is treated as ESL and in rural and less educated area it is taught as EFL.

ELT uses various methods and techniques for the purpose of teaching and learning of English for individual learners. It includes G-T method, Direct method, Audio Lingual method, Audio Visual method, Communicative Language Teaching, CALL, Structural Method, Notional Functional Approach, The silent way, Suggestopedia, Community Language Learning, Classroom Procedures, through introducing literatures of that particular language here English Literature, Teaching English Prose, Teaching English Fiction, Teaching drama, Teaching without lecturing, Student participation, Group work, Seminars, Tutorials, Library work, Lessons planning.

Audio Visual Method is fundamentally based on the behaviourist approach which gave importance to oral proficiency and practices. Here language is mainly introduced through sound and image instead by a text.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Communicative Approach (CA) is a contemporary approach helps the learners to create meaning rather than helping them to

develop perfect grammatical structure or acquire a native-like pronunciations. Here the learner had an active role and teacher act as a facilitator of group discussion, negotiation, cooperation between learners, fluency-based activities which facilitate a certain amount of confidence to learners through continuous drill practices. Fluency, accuracy, and appropriateness is given equal importance.

Silent is a method in ELT devised by Caleb Gattegno, here we can see a problem-solving kind of approach towards learning by using a cognitive method. Here teacher is supposed to be a silent engineer and learner himself/herself discovers or creates what is to be learned. Learners' errors and mistakes are solved through self-monitoring and through peer correction. Here in this approach students are the centre not a silent inactive listener.

Natural Approach by Stephan Krashen is a method of teaching used in ELT is a combination of different methods and techniques used for the natural comprehension of language by the learners in a similar way that they learnt his/her Mother Tongue in Childhood.

The representative of subaltern community taken in this thesis are *Boom Boom Maatukarars* and *Narikuravars*. Both these communities are highly marginalised and stigmatized form pre-colonial to colonial times and even continues after independence. The two alternative education organisations discussed in this thesis are *Vanavil* and *Auroville*, both these initiatives use various methods and technique of ELT in the pedagogies for empowering these subaltern communities. The methods of ELT like Audio Visual Method, CLT, Natural Approach along with Montessori and other similar pedagogical strategies are blended to elevate these two communities through their innovative alternative educational institutions and programmes.

The thesis also used the Critical Pedagogy propagated by Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux, which emphasizes the transformative potential of education and the importance of developing critical consciousness among learners and challenges the traditional power dynamics and encourages learners to engage with language as a tool for social change.

Freire argued for learner-centred education, calling for a dialogue between teacher and student and he argued for problem-posing education. The dialogue-based approach is to engage students in questioning and exchanging ideas, to inquire and to learn.

Problem-posing education is designed to engage the student in solving any problem through brainstorming. (Uddin 112)

The key concepts of critical pedagogy are dialogical method, conscientization, praxis, criticised banking model of education, liberatory education. By dialogic method it means that education should be based on dialogic and collaborative learning between teachers and pupils rather than a teacher centric method. Conscientization means developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action. Freire believed that by becoming aware of social, political, and economic contradictions, individuals can take actions against the oppressive elements of reality. Through praxis Freire emphasizes the combination of reflection and action. The action without reflection is mere activism and reflection without action is mere verbalism. Both are necessary for true liberation. He also believed that education should empower the oppressed to regain their sense of humanity and overcome their conditions. This is what *Vanavil* and other outreach programmes of *Auroville* worked for.

The thesis also points out the use of sociocultural theory of language learning as proposed by Vygotsky in these two institutions which emphasises the fundamental role of social interaction and cultural context in the development of cognition and language learning. This dissertation also employs a mixed methods of approach to provide a comprehensive analysis of alternative English pedagogies in *Vanavil* and outreach programmes of *Auroville*.

The thesis undertakes a comprehensive case study of both the institution under study along with qualitative collected through interviews with educators, students, alumni, classroom observation, teaching materials, student engagement, institutional policies and quantitative data collected. It also offers a comparative study of traditional ELT approaches in mainstream Indian education and alternative pedagogies used in these institutions.

### Chapter 3: *Vanavil* - Empowering Nomadic Tribes through Education

This chapter examines the work of *Vanavil*, a non-governmental organization founded by Revathi Radhakrishnan, dedicated to uplifting children and women from Nomadic Tribes through education and empowerment. Revathi Radhakrishnan, hailing from a modest background, has emerged as a dedicated advocate for Nomadic Tribes. Her academic credentials include a B.Sc. from Bharathi Women's College, Chennai, as well as a Diploma in Theatre for Education and Social Transformation from Shiv Nadar University, along with a MPhil from Indira Gandhi National Open University. Prior to founding *Vanavil*, Revathi Radhakrishnan's professional experience encompassed television journalism, show production, work in the film industry, and volunteer work during the *Asian Tsunami 2004* in Nagapattinam.

The impetus for establishing *Vanavil* came from Radhakrishnan's experiences during the *Asian Tsunami 2004*. A pivotal encounter with a malnourished infant named Lakshmi, who subsequently succumbed to malnutrition, prompted Revathi Radhakrishnan to investigate the challenges faced by Nomadic Communities, particularly the *Boom Boom Maatukarars* and *Naraikuruvar* tribes. Her research revealed several key issues, including lack of official documentation hindering access to government relief, social segregation and discrimination in refugee camps, precarious living conditions, and educational barriers due to social stigma and economic pressures.

She started studying their issues, and realised that they live in temporary shelter near the sea shore. At the time of tsunami, they faced great destruction. They did not get the government relief because they had no id cards or ration cards to prove as a citizen of India. They were not allowed in the refugee camp by others, because they were nomadic tribes, so people segregate them, shewed them away. When Revathi found them, they used to live in parks and roadsides by making a temporary shelter. Revathi using her somewhat political influence tries to help them a lot. But the question of their empowerment and improving their situation is remained. So, she herself tries to educate the children from these

nomadic tribes for a period of six months and make sure that they got the basics and she sent them to the nearby government schools and she returned to her work.

But soon she came to know that children are no longer attending schools mainly because the other children began to segregate them because they are nomadic and comparatively not good looking and because of their dirty clothes. And these pushed out children of nomadic tribes goes to the largest religious destination in Tamil Nadu i.e., Velankanni for begging. Their parents also supported this because many children earn up to seven hundred to thousand rupees a day. It is much more beneficial for them for their day to day living instead of going school which offers no instant benefits. It is Revathi's determined mind and actions helps to impart the value of education and its benefits to both children and their parents. She started Vanavil Schools in 2005 for their primary education purpose.

But it is very difficult to make these children sit and learn with complete attention and to make a thirst of knowledge in them because they are hyperactive. So Revathi uses Montessori methods of teaching along with other similar techniques. Along with the primary schools she also started hostel for girls and boys and nutritional programs, scholarship programs. After educating in primary schools of *Vanavil*, children are sent to the government schools. Even though they faced segregation now, they are more matured now and moreover, had a thirst for knowledge that Revathi impart in them. Revathi also started *After School Program* for the regular school going children for revising their lessons and clear their doubt.

It is from children that she got the idea to name the organisation as *Vanavil*. Later, *Vanavil* has evolved into an organization that has rescued over 500 child beggars, providing them education, and creating livelihood opportunities for more than 500 Nomadic Women who early engaged in begging. Revathi's innovative educational model and financial support program have positively impacted the children and women in the *Boom Boom Maatukarars* community.

Established in 2005, *Vanavil* Schools aim to provide primary education to children from Nomadic Tribes. The schools implement Montessori teaching methods, adapt educational techniques to suit hyperactive children, and provide hostel facilities for boys and girls. Since its inception, *Vanavil* has rescued over 500 child beggars, provided education to these children, and created livelihood opportunities for more than 500 Nomadic Women previously engaged in begging. The organization's efforts have resulted in 100 children reaching college-level education, with M. Lakshmi becoming the first graduate from the program in 2006.

The *Boom Boom Maatukarars*, a nomadic tribe primarily found in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, traditionally made their living by traveling with decorated bulls (*Boom Boom Ox*), entertaining through music and dance performances, and fortune-telling. The *Narikuravars*, also known as the "bead people," are semi-nomadic indigenous groups from Tamil Nadu, known for their skill in bead-making and selling. They were classified under the *Criminal Tribes Act of 1871* during British rule, denotified in 1952, and recently granted Scheduled Tribe status in January 2023.

*Vanavil Trust* has implemented various programs aimed at the upliftment of *Boom Boom Mattukarars* and *Narikuravars*, focusing on education, child protection, health and nutrition, and livelihood development. Educational programs include *Vanavil Children's Home*, *Vanavil Nursery and Primary School*, *After School Program*, and *Scholarship Schemes*. Livelihood programs offer skills training for children and women and support for alternative income generation.

After 18 years of operation, *Vanavil's* impact is significant, with 495 children educated in *Vanavil* Primary School, 541 children provided care and protection in *Vanavil* Children's School, and 104 first-generation college graduates. The organization has also provided relief materials to 1,500 families, educational and nutritional support to over 1,000 children, and livelihood support to 446 women.

*Narikuravars* are semi nomadic indigenous groups from Tamil Nadu, also called as 'bead people' due to their bead making skills, which they used to sell in various festivals in

religious places and other places. During the British rule they were charged under *Criminal Tribes Act of 1871*. According to this Act British government termed entire communities of a tribes as criminals, barbarians, vagabond, or thieves. It also had its roots in the Indian caste system and untouchability. Thus, according to this some tribes are notified as criminal tribes and can charge for non-billable offences. Once a tribe became notified, all its members must register with the local magistrate, otherwise they would be charged with a crime.

Thus, *Narikuravar* community were stigmatised for a long time and continues even they were denotified in 1952. It was only in early December 2002, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha voted to grant the *Narikurava* communities for a scheduled Tribes status. And the bill got the assent of the president on 2nd January 2023. They mainly used to speak the unclassified Indo-Aryan Language called *Vaagri Booli*. Hence, they were also called as *Vagris* or *Vagilavas*. They were also well versed in Tamil. But most of their liturgical hymns as well as folk songs are in *Vaagri Booli*.

Each clan had bundle of cloth called God's bundle or *sami mottai* and the bundle of one clan not be touched by other. It is filled with blood of sacrifice, which is usually animals, by the *Narikuravar* and they dipped the clothes in it. When head of the family dies the eldest son inherits the *Sami Mottai*.

*Narikuravars* face significant challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, diseases, and discrimination. They face discrimination due to the consumption Golden Jackal, which is prohibited by settled Hindu communities, leading to their ostracization from areas inhabited by upper castes. Because of traditional livelihoods, hunting of fox and endangered species have been outlawed, many *Narikuravars*, particularly youth are indulging in criminal activities. *Narikurava Seva Sangam* in 1996 formed with the aim of educating *Narikurava* children and helping them for a settled life. Also, various social-welfare organizations like *Vanavil* also worked for the welfare and ensuring a quality life for them.



*Vanavil Trust* along with its active volunteers and members as well as the founder Revathi, were entrusted with the vision of the upliftment of these two nomadic tribes namely, *Boom Boom Mattukarars* and *Narikuravars*, for attaining their equality, identity, and dignity in the society. *Vanavil* on the wings of transformation introduced various programs in the educational field for the empowerment of these nomadic children like *Vanavil Children's Home*, *Vanavil Nursery and Primary School*, *After School*, *Scholarship Schemes*, *Livelihood programs* for children and women from these nomadic tribes.

*Vanavil Trust* mainly concentrates on the education, child protection, health, and nutrition supply, and introducing a new livelihood for these nomadic tribes in this modern era where their traditional livelihood had, nothing can do to meet the two ends. After eighteen years of the establishment of *Vanavil* and genuine working for the upliftment of these subalterns now became an organisation with multiple projects and innovative programs. The impact of *Vanavil* on the empowerment of these group is very significant as 495 children educated in *Vanavil Primary School* since its established, 541 children provided care and protection in *Vanavil Children's Home*, it also moulds 104 first generation college graduates, 1500 families were provided with relief materials, more than thousand children got educational and nutritional support, 446 women got livelihood support. In the year 2023-2024 *Vanavil Trust* gave scholarship and support for 125 nomadic students for getting quality higher education and for passing degree.

In *Vanavil Schools* teachers led a thematic pedagogy, FCN (Foundational Literacy and Numeracy) instilling a love for reading through after school community libraries. The institution is very much aware about the peril of begging, labour, and child marriage. So they give adequate attention to children's absence and tries to reintegrate long absentees back to school. The contributions from the alumni, who were also from these nomadic groups who were educated on this *Vanavil school*, come back to the school after their education and work along with other members for the upliftment of their own tribe.

*Vanavil Nursery and primary school*, which is often called happy school, consist of

108 children from pre kinder garden to fifth standard. The crux of *Vanavil school* is safety, freedom, trust, and friendship. *Vanavil Schools* mainly follows Montessori methods, activity-oriented class, and experimental projects.

The pre-KG and KG sections are the basic steps and most important turn over in the life of these nomadic children. If they got right orientation from the begging it is easier for them to continue pursuit the happiness of learning. As they are nomadic children it is not easy to handle them by teaching discipline. It is not practically possible by shouting at them. If they find it offensive or harsh they will surely get a negative impression and will never come back to school. Their parents also not pressure or scolding them for not going school because for them sending these children for begging is more profitable than attending classes. Miss Gayathri is the principal teacher and school coordinator; under whose guidance all the schedules and syllabus is created.

The principles and disciplines of a school is insisted on these children form KG session onwards. Each student is allotted a mat made up of grass which is completely eco-friendly. The students of the KG section used to take the mat when they come in the morning and wrap it neatly and put exact place when the class is over. This is the first step of teaching them attention and discipline in a creative way.

Then like in the Montessori teaching, the syllabus of KG students are structured in a way which enhances the five senses of touch, smell, sight, taste, hearing. Everything has an order here. The children should begin from the first lessons as per the teacher's order. Only if they complete one activity or lesson they are allowed to next work. Students who finish earlier helps his/her friend or teaching them. It creates a sense of patience, compassion, peer group, and a community formation among these children. Once everyone finishes an activity, the teacher introduces another activity in a week. This is the routine of KG section. Friday is the day of revision for KG sections to fifth standard, so on this day they just revise what they had learnt during the week and previous weeks under the guidance of the teacher. Various activities are introduced at first for KG sections to make their fingers and hands to grip and

hold the pencil; like clay shaping and beads counting. The sense of touch is used to recognise various texture of materials, blind fold tests are also used, hearing activities are also practised along with this. All over they try to enhance the activity of learning through a comprised use of all sensory organs, which will help them to get more attention and concentration.

Only basics of things are learnt from KG section through these kinds of activities. English language teaching is done by introducing it like their exposure to the mother tongue. The teachers do not force them to learn English Language speaking and listening. They just give them the sounds of the English by introducing the words and things of daily use in English. Teachers introduce day to day words and gestures and actions like sit, walk, stand, etc. Also, they ask children to tell the names of things that they see in the household in native language, then teacher translates or introduce the English word of that thing. Only after introducing all the sounds of English by using various words, they start showing them the graphic or pictorial representation of letters in boards or wood. Thus, the children get an idea of each letter in English Language. Teacher teaches the children to how to pronounce that word and ask them to tell other words that they know begin with the same letter. Only letters, pronunciation, sounds of entire alphabets in English are introduced at KG section through these kinds of activities.

In KG section along with English, a little bit Mathematics like counting numbers, abacus, etc are taught similarly using pictorial, graphic representation and through activities. In first standard they begin to learn more about words and pronunciation, how to write the alphabet, how to hold pen, how to use it for writing etc. Children use slate and pencil, book, and pen for writing here. Teachers along with pictorial representation on board use copy writing and Cursive writing book. This will help the children to familiarise more about each letter in English, its pronunciation, sounds. The chart showing names of birds, animals, flower etc were introduced, it will help more to familiarise and encourage to speak English in daily life.

In second standard children learn to speak English little bit using simple sentences

without bothering about grammar. The word formation, spelling, each are introduced in a detailed way in first standard.

From third standard onwards, grammar is introduced and children began to learn articles, past, present tense and began structuring grammatical sentences. Activities like 'write about a tour experience or life experience' etc. help them to frame a narrative in English even though some mistakes are there, teachers will help them in an encouraging way.

Each student is allotted a dairy from third standard onwards. In that dairy they write about their daily activities in English which is very effective for familiarising sentence structuring. In this dairy they do all their activities, projects, collections. Some children used dairy as a creative space and used to draw, write poems, story that they heard in native language by translating it into English on their own way. Fourth and fifth standard covers subjects like English, Mathematics, science, social, Tamil etc. *Vanavil* also appoints a special communicative English teacher for these students.

Teacher takes these children outside and made them to learn from nature through these kind of study excavations. They came to know about photosynthesis, food cycle etc. first hand by standing along with nature rather than byhearting the textual paragraph.

A special room is allotted for library. Each class is allotted an hour in a day in the library. They can also take books home and return it within the allotted time. The children and teachers come to library and sit on the floor in a circle. Then teacher chooses a student to take a book from library and ask him to read it. If this child makes any mistake the book passed to next student, whenever the second child make mistake in reading the book passed to other one. These kind of activities helps them to familiarise the story of the book, improve reading skills, accuracy in speaking, language, confidence, patience, and attention.

Every day lunch is provided from school along with milk and egg in the evening. A small breakfast is also arranged for them in the morning because *Vanavil* did not support

teaching students on an empty stomach. Teachers make an individual relation with students, and watch them for any sign of mood swings, talk personally about personal affairs, problems at home etc. just like a counsellor does.

*Vanavil* runs twelve *After School centres* at Nomadic hamlets in Nagapattinam, Mayiladuthurai and Thiruvarur districts with 740 children attending classes daily. The centres are set up in each nomadic community in Tamil Nadu Delta district in available spaces. In some places *Vanavil* has made a temporary study hall; in some other area they use a hamlet of one of the students.

*After School* as the name suggests, is intended to educate children after their school sections in the morning. It mainly concentrates on children from higher secondary classes who are studying in governmental schools after completing *Vanavil Schools*. The children who go to governmental schools after *Vanavil schools* mainly face the issues like the attention they get from *Vanavil* teachers are not received from government schools. Teachers are in a rush to cover portions; they are not worried about whether children understand the topic or not. In that case this kind of *After School* in their own village in evening times helps these children to clear their doubt and provide a better understanding. Also, the parents of these children are not educated enough to understand and teach them. Alumni of *Vanavil*, and other volunteers take classes in these *After School* programmes. So, *After School* helps nomadic children like a tuition centre. It also gives special attention to English and Maths. The classes are mainly held between 5-7 pm in every working day and on Saturdays also. *After School* centre also provide nutritious snack and drink like milk. It also attracts children to learning. *After School* also monitors children's school attendance and reach out to children who fall into child labour and begging and help them to get back to school.

Also, *After Schools* conducts events and competitions, sports days, Arts day. The things will give the students a confidence which will helps them perform better in school competitions and helps in realising their own talents. Also, it gives guidance and orientation to students of tenth and twelfth standard for higher education.

*Vanavil* also provides Nomadic Higher Education Scholarship for children from nomadic communities for the higher education in collages. The scholarship is provided as fund for books, notes, stationary items, hostel fees, collage fee, exam fee etc. The first women graduate from *Aadiyan* community is a *Vanavil* Alumni and had a Reporter too from this community. Many children opted their higher education in Fine arts, Fashion design, sports education, nursing, biotechnology and more.

*Vanavil Children's Home* provide a homely and safe space for nomadic girls and young boys who were at the peril of early marriage and begging. *Vanavil Children's Home*, provide safe shelter for children from parental pressure for begging, early marriage, abusive family circumstances especially for girls, drunkard father etc. It mainly gives shelter to boys of minor and girls. It also helps kids who are homeless as well as whose parents are semi nomadic. *Children's Home* provides these children a safe shelter, education, health, and nutrition. *Children's Home* take care of their education till college. It also conducts health checkups and runs medical camps. It also acts as a platform for vocational training skills like tailoring, basket weaving, and palm craft. Sellur in one of the main centres of *Vanavil Children's Home*.

*Vanavil Livelihood Program* is for students who failed in exam in higher education like tenth or twelfth or in colleges. This project helps them to learn a vocational skill instead of wasting a year along with their preparation for exams. They are also provided with nutritional food as seen in *Vanavil Schools*. Computer skills, type writing, tailoring, graphics, animation, website designing, coding etc are introduced to them as per their interest.

There is also another project of *Vanavil* which organise livelihood program for women from nomadic communities. This project helps to rehabilitate more than five hundred women for nomadic communities from begging by creating an alternative income generation possibility which in turn improves their living condition and standard. Under this project milch cow to single women and tailoring skills including power machine tailoring for younger

women. Also, interest free loans are provided for nomadic women who are willing to come out of begging and start their own small business.

*Vanavil* also supports the education of first-generation collage goers from nomadic tribal communities all over Tamil Nadu, especially these two prescribed tribes. *Vanavil Trust* ensures that all the students who complete higher secondary education continue their studies till they finish their undergraduate education of their own choice and interests. The trust also organise meeting once a quarter in which they will be taught a skill, interact with students who completed their higher education and pursuing jobs in the city and attend sessions in self-development, goal setting etc. conducted by experts from this field.

*Vanavil* Schools employ a thematic pedagogy, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) methods, and community libraries to instil a love for reading. The curriculum focuses on sensory development in pre-KG and KG sections, gradually introducing English language and Mathematics in primary education. Daily library sessions and interactive reading activities are incorporated to improve language skills and confidence.

The *After School Centres*, operating across Nagapattinam, Mayiladuthurai, and Thiruvavarur districts, serve 740 children daily, focusing on English and Mathematics while monitoring school attendance and preventing child labour. The Higher Education Scholarship Program provides financial support for college education, including funding for books, stationery, hostel fees, and examination fees.

*Vanavil* also offers vocational training for students who failed exams, developing skills in computer literacy, typing, tailoring, graphics, animation, and web design. A women's livelihood program aims to rehabilitate former beggars, providing interest-free loans for small businesses.

In conclusion, *Vanavil's* multifaceted approach to empowering Nomadic Tribes through education and livelihood development has shown significant impact. The organization's innovative educational model and financial support programs have positively influenced the

lives of children and women in the *Boom Boom Maatukarars* and *Narikuravar* communities, contributing to their social and economic upliftment.



#### Chapter 4: *Auroville*- Empowering marginalised communities

*Auroville* is the first and only internationally endorsed ongoing experiment on human unity and transformation of consciousness. It is a utopian town where men and women of all countries can live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, politics, nationalities. The purpose of *Auroville* is to realise human unity. *Auroville* is all about a different way of living and receiving the world.

*Auroville* located in Vilupuram district mostly in Tamil Nadu and in some part of the Union Territory Pondicherry. It was founded on 1968 by Mirra Alfassa who is known as the Mother and designed by architect Roger Angès in the structure of a galaxy.

The term *Auroville* is of French origin in which 'Auro' meaning dawn and 'ville' meaning village or city. It is also said that it named after Sri Aurobindo. He is a prominent Indian philosopher, yogi, and poet, played a significant role as one of the co-founders of *Auroville*. Born in 1872, Aurobindo Ghose, as he was originally named, emerged as a key figure in India's struggle for independence from British rule. However, his contributions extended far beyond politics. Sri Aurobindo delved deeply into spiritual philosophy and practices, ultimately founding the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, India, in 1926. His teachings emphasized the evolution of consciousness and the potential for humanity to transcend its current limitations and achieve a higher state of being. Aurobindo's vision inspired the creation of *Auroville* in 1968, as a tangible manifestation of his ideas for creating a new model of sustainable and harmonious living, not just for India, but for the entire world.

Mirra Alfassa was born as the second child of an Egyptian mother and Turkish father. She is an extraordinarily gifted one. She had many inner experiences from early childhood onwards. In her twenties she studies occultism in Algeria with Max Theon and his English wife Alma. Later she returned to Paris and worked with several different groups of spiritual seekers. She organised Sri Aurobindo Ashram from November 1926 onwards. After his death in 1950 she created the *Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* to fulfil his wish to provide a new kind of education for Indian Youth.

In 1968 she established the *Auroville* International township project envisioning it as a broader platform for the practical realisation of Sri Aurobindo's vision for innovative individual and collective lifestyle. This institution aimed to pave the path towards on a more promising future for the entire planet.

*Sri Aurobindo Society* in Pondicherry at its Annual Conference in 1964, with Mirra Alfassa as its executive president passed the resolution for the establishment of city dedicated to the vision of Sri Aurobindo. She is a spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo. He believes that man is a transitional being.

The inauguration ceremony of the city attended by the delegates of 124 nations on 28 February 1968 in which soils from all the countries were brought to the Matri Mandir area to represent the human unity.

The *Charter of Auroville*, which is handwritten by Mirra Alfassa in French set the ground for her vision of integral living. According to the Four Point Charter, *Auroville* belongs to nobody, instead it belongs to humanity. To live in *Auroville*, community people must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness, will also be a place of an unending education, of constant progress and a youth that never ages. It also acts as a bridge between past and future. It will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.

The handwritten invitation letter of Mirra Alfassa to the world about *Auroville* carries the crux of *Auroville*. It says "Greetings from *Auroville* to all men of goodwill. Are invited to *Auroville* all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life." *Matri Mandir* is the middle of *Aurville* which according to Mira Alfassa is a symbol of the Divine's answer to man's aspiration for perfection.

The collaboration between *Auroville* and its neighbouring Tamil villages is facilitated through the *Auroville Village Action Trust*, by overseeing various projects aimed at community development. The largest initiative within the trust, the *Auroville Village Action Group* (AVAG), focuses on women's empowerment, education, and economic support, while also

engaging in social enterprise activities under the names *AVAL, Surya, and Kudumbam*. Other endeavours under the trust include educational, cultural, and healthcare initiatives such as the *Life Education Centre, Auroville Industrial School, Mohanam cultural centre, Auroville Health Services, Deepam school* for handicapped children, *Thamarai community centre, Martuvam Healing Forest, and the Reach for the Stars! program*, which facilitates higher education for village youth.

The tribal or native communities surrounding *Auroville* primarily consist of the Tamil people, who are indigenous to the region. Tamil Nadu, the state where *Auroville* is located, is home to various indigenous communities, including the *Irula, Kurumba, and Paniyar* tribes. These communities have their own distinct cultures, languages, and traditions, and many of them have lived in the region for generations, maintaining close ties to the land and its natural resources.

In addition to the indigenous Tamil communities, there may also be other marginalised or economically disadvantaged groups living in the vicinity of *Auroville*. These include rural farming communities, Dalits, and migrant labourers from other parts of India who have settled in the area. The outreach schools and organisations of *Auroville* covers the most underprivileged areas in Tamil Nadu including *Kottakarai, Alankuppam, Rayapudupakkam, Bommayarapalayam, Irumbai Village, Kuilapalayam, Rayapettai, Thuruval*.

The thesis mainly focusses on four outreach educational programmes as a part of *Auroville* namely *Arulvazhi, Ilaignarkal, Thamarai, Tamil Ulagam* which actively worked for the upliftment of the most underprivileged areas and villages in many parts of Tamil Nadu. Most people in these villages are uneducated and ignorant towards the value of education. So, they were not ready to send their children to school for a bright future, but sent them for housework in the homes of higher caste and class people, including coddling, looking after children. These outreach programmes help in ensuring that children attended schools and further helped for their higher educations. The active involvement of foreign people who were the members and volunteers of *Auroville* helped to give a good exposure to the international

language and culture. These organisations succeed in convincing underprivileged parents about the importance of giving education to their children as well as sprouting the joy of learning among the children also. Spoken English classes and English lessons impart by these organisations give a good exposure to English Language. These organisations actively worked for the empowerment of women, children, and underprivileged workers in nearby villages.

*Ilaignarkal Education Centre* actively worked for the upliftment of *Auroville* workers of all ages, both male and female, and their wards by providing essential life skills education. The centre of *Ilaignarkal* education located north of *Matri Mandir*. It is considered as an anytime school for *Auroville* workers of all ages and their wards by providing learning programmes and courses in essential life skills. It also organises regular workshops on personality development and leadership training for young people, both men and women.

The contemporary Tamil Modern Poet R. Meenakshi is the founding figure of *Ilaignarkal Education Centre*. Meenakshi is settled in *Auroville* in 1976 and worked there as a Tamil teacher, creator, and one of the mother figures ever since. She fostered *Auroville's* growth at every level. Under her guidance, many underserved villages and *Aurovillians* can complete or supplement their education. Her pen name is *Madurai Magal* and her few poems were translated into English. She taught at the local school for decades and is still teaching and training teachers at *Ilaignarkal* and other outreach centre.

After completing her master's degree, she worked in the slum areas and rural communities and got a lot of experience in dealing with the underprivileged. She reached in *Auroville* on 1976 as a volunteer. While she was volunteering, she met a Dutch Man named Toine and after two years they got married. In *Auroville*, Ruud Lohman inspires her a lot and introduced her to the villagers who were mostly illiterate and underprivileged as well as their children were neglected and suffered from malnutrition.

At first, she started a *Youth Club* for the village youth to spent their free time ideally. Further, she tried to introduce them learning, life education and the world of reading. She was

also organised a ten-day *Children's Annual Book Fair* in *Auroville* of which around five thousand children were participated.

She is the editor of *Auroville Magazine* named *Auroville Grama Seydhi Madal*. It is a Tamil monthly magazine published regularly by *Ilaignarkal Education Centre* since 1992 and privately distributed among all the educational institutions, libraries, service units and Tamil lovers and well-wishers of *Auroville* at large. It includes articles about The Mother-Mirra Alfassa, Sri Aurobindo, *Auroville*-Tamil culture, history, environmental science and the socio-economic life of local Tamil people, current affairs, political developing, developmental programmes of *Auroville's* cultural region. Typical content of the magazine includes educational and engaging material accompanied by visuals and illustrations for children, women, and young individuals. Contributions to the Magazine come from diverse range of individuals including academics, community members, and experts in the field such as agriculture, cultural heritage, arts and craft, health and wellness, yoga, meditation, music, sports, and recreation.

*Ilaignarkal* is the first experimental prototype outreach school for the workers of *Auroville* and their family. It also promotes research on preservation of Tamil culture as well as acts a bridge between Tamil and Non-Tamil speaking residents.

*Ilaignarkal* is a place of infinite education, constant progress, and providing overall development to youth that never ages from primary English classes, personality development skills to ethical practices and holistic education. It also provides counselling centre, traditional medicines, human resource development and scholarships. It also provides a site of cultural research on language, literature, healing techniques, demographic, anthropological studies and lifestyles of the native Tamil people with a motive of preserving and promoting heritage and moving towards embodiment of human unity with an educational approach through festivals, events and publications.

Under the guidance of *Ilaignarkal Education Centre* regular language classes are conducted from Monday to Friday from three to six in the evening. The classes introduce the

scope of learning English to these children and workers. The English language is introduced to them by the native English speakers who were the residents of *Auroville*. They got the basic idea of English language and spoken English lessons. It will help the workers to communicate with their boss and interact with them. It also uplifts and enhance children education status also. A regular Yoga classes were also conducted from evening six to seven by professor R. Anan Don. There is also an art and craft session conducted on Monday to Friday from three in the evening onwards by Pachaiammal. In the *Viazhavattam circle* which means on every Thursday classes were held on literature, history, language etc.

*Ilaignarkal* also provided a good library for these workers and children. The library mainly includes stories and children's books, activity books etc. Childrens can take the books and complete reading within the centre and teachers guide them if there is any doubt. There is also a notice board in the *Ilaignarkal centre* which they updated every day. They mark the noticeboard with what day is today in history, mark the importance and speciality of the day, recent news and political developments and notes which gave them an awareness of political happening around them and encourage them to read as the pictures and illustrations are so attractive. They also used these notice board to introduce new knowledge, poems, sports, quote of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, different cultures. It also tries to impart the human values and a sense of community among the peoples. *Ilaignarkal* succeed in finding the inner skills and talents of the children, adults and women and encourage and enhance them.

*Arulvazhi* is yet another outreach programme of *Auroville* which worked for the upliftment of children and adults from *Morattandi Village* and outreach schools. *Morattandi* is a small village with numerous hamlets like a slum area in the Vilupuram district of Tamil Nadu. *Arulvazhi* in Tamil means 'Way of Grace' is an organisation run in hand with *Auroville*, which meets the educational and cultural needs of children aged three to fifteen years of the neighbouring village. The soul of the organisation is the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Later the organisation also expanded its projects to empower the women in neighbouring villages through education. The institution also serves as a platform for

interaction with well-known delegates from different parts of the world. The main objective of the organisation is to provide value-based education in an atmosphere of simplicity, beauty, joy and harmony where the children can develop naturally.

Various seminars and workshops are conducted in cooperation with the *Tamil Heritage centre* in various subjects and themes like Sri Aurobindonian Literature. Various delegates from *Auroville*, Puducherry and other parts of Tamil Nadu participate for mutual improvement of Knowledge. Here, children got practical exposure to the actual human unity and unity in diversity. Various excursions are conducted to the places of great cultural, educational, and spiritual interest are arranged.

In *Arulvazhi*, children are encouraged to practise and develop indigenous forms of art, folksongs, stage plays etc. Due to the four-lane national highway project the major part of the building in which the centre of *Arulvazhi* was functioning is demolished.

*Arulvazhi* had five areas of activities including *kindergarten group*, *Primary stage children group*, *special yoga asana group*, *adolescent girl's group*, *puduulagam group*. *The kindergarten groups* included children from the age group of three to six years. *The primary stage children group* includes children from primary classes. *Special Yoga Asana group* includes those who interested in yoga and their activities extending for a one and half hour. *Adolescent girls group* includes girls from the age group twelve to seventeen means the teenage girls. This program gives them training in asanas, cultural expressions, health education, social awareness particularly in relation to gender problems. *Pudulagam* is a children's group for games and academic education after school in the evening from five to eight.

*Arulvazhi* provided technological education, basic skills, Spoken English lessons. Moreover, it also provided nutritious support for the children and women. Due to *the covid 19 pandemic* the school activities continued in different way through online platforms. At this time, they give reading books, drawing pads, colours for the children at home. it keeps children encouraging and attentive in learning even in pandemic times.

*Tamil Ulagam* is yet another outreach programme of *Auroville* working for the benefits of the local nearby villages including *Kottakarai, Alankuppam, Rayapudupakkam, Bommayarapalayam, Irumbai Village, Kuilapalayam, Rayapettai, Thuruval*. In *Tamil Ulagam* means world, *Tamil Ulagam* meaning the ‘Tamil world’ is an evening school comes under the outreach projects of *Auroville* works as a joint venture of *Secours Populaire from France* (SPF) and the members of nearby villages of *Auroville*. *Tamil Ulagam* evening schools is an initiative of *Auroville* to help the disadvantaged Childrens of nearby villages where some of them did not get an opportunity to attend regular school in daytime as some of them are drop outs, stay -out, pulled- outs, and pushed-out. The main objective of the organisation is to impart basic knowledge to these children and gave them a sense of identity and usefulness. The organisation explored the artistic talents of the students and gave them special camps and workshops, training in organic farming’s, summer camps and cultural programmes, weekly tours, co- curricular activities, the first Sunday of every month all teachers and volunteers of the night schools meet in *Auroville* and share their experiences and thoughts. Children got a good exposure to the English language and become confident to speak English as many of the teachers and volunteers are foreigners. Interactions with these native English speakers open a new horizon to them.

It acts as a night school for people and children from surrounding villages and is supported by the income from “*Les Enfants de poudy patch*.” It runs almost eleven-night schools in various villages around *Auroville* since 1980s. Initially it was only three schools, at that time villagers were not much concerned about the education of children. The coordinator of *Tamil Ulagam* encouraged them and made the parents and children realise the importance of learning and education. Now the parents encourage their children to receive educational inputs from different sources.

At present almost seven hundred and sixty-five students have benefited from *Tamil Ulagam* evening schools. About thirty-eight teachers have worked for encouraging and empowering these students. Sundara Vinayak, a Tamil Man, and a member of *Auroville* from



its inception, is the founder of *Tamil Ulagam*. He himself, an uneducated man well knows the value of education and tries to uplift his society and people by convincing them about the opportunities that children can get if they were educated in some way. So, he takes the snacks from his own bakery and visits all the underprivileged nearby villages, meets the children, befriends them, and convinces the parents. This is the basic story of *Tamil Ulagam*. At present, the foreigners who are the members of *Auroville* are also part of *Tamil Ulagam* by working as teachers and volunteers. They interact with children and give them English classes. The interactions with these native English speakers enhance their skill in English Language.

The classes of *Tamil Ulagam* begin after their school session. After the school the children come to the *Tamil Ulagam* centre for learning. They got nutritious food and drinks from the centre as the founders do not allow students to sit in class on an empty stomach. This also attracted many more children. *Tamil Ulagam* mainly uses the veranda or balcony of one of house in the village as their centre of education. Reading sessions and storytelling sessions in English were organised to improve their confidence and speaking skills.

Night schools were originally established with the primary aim of supporting underprivileged children who lacked access to regular daytime schooling. Initially targeting drop-outs, those who stayed away from school, those who were compelled to leave, and those who were excluded, these institutions focused on providing fundamental education and fostering a sense of identity and purpose among such children.

In addition to academic learning, these schools actively promote artistic talents like music, dance, painting, theatre, writing, Kolam drawing, and hobbies, alongside encouraging participation in sports activities. Collaborative events with other night schools are organized, often through work camps, fostering social connections and community engagement.

To equip students with practical skills, weekly training sessions in organic farming are conducted, involving students in activities like soil preparation, planting, and harvesting. Students are rewarded with a share of the produce they have contributed to cultivating.

Furthermore, efforts are made to facilitate cultural exchange and unity through summer camps and student exchange programmes, aiming to broaden the cultural horizons and deepen mutual understanding among rural children.

The evening schools operate between six and eight in the evening, offers classes, organizing cultural events, weekly study tours, work camps, and various extracurricular activities. Additionally, on the first Sunday of each month, teachers and volunteers from these night schools gather in *Auroville* to share their experiences and insights.

The instructors at *Tamil Ulagam* night schools are predominantly long-standing members of the *Auroville* community, many of whom are actively involved in various units across *Auroville*. A significant number are volunteers are from the local village. Their responsibilities include maintaining the school premises and attending to the children during evening sessions. While they may not hold formal teaching qualifications, they undergo regular training to effectively impart knowledge to their students. Collaboratively, they engage in developing fresh educational materials and seek guidance from specialists and resource persons to explore innovative and joyful teaching methodologies.

The staff comprises six rotating teachers specializing in cultural activities, physical sports, art, counselling, and yoga. Embracing a rotation system ensures that instructors vary periodically, fostering the evolution of innovative teaching approaches. This dynamic structure allows for the continual exploration of new and effective teaching methods.

*Thamarai*, in Tamil meaning lotus flower is an organisation under the outreach project of *Auroville* since 2006 which stands for value education, potential building, well-being and empowerment of children and women from neighbouring villages. The organisation includes a series of projects including daily play group of thirty children and an after-school service, natural healthcare education program, English Language teaching, environmental programmes with field work, capacity, and leadership building quality development.

*Thamarai* provides education services for the most marginalised sections of the village near to the international township of *Auroville* in Tamil Nadu. It supports children and Youth

from nearby villages through afterschool projects, regular health care, well-being programmes provided at local schools and at work units or village centre for adults with a vision to promote health and well-being for all. It tries to increase the literacy rate at these villages. The illiterate and drunkard parents ignorant of the value of education send their children for housekeeping, or as servants, for house work in the homes of upper-class people. *Thamarai* struggled a lot and convinced the parents.

*Thamarai* provides access to educational resources and opportunities to these students, which has changed their lives. It also supports children resulting in academic as well as personal growth.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis underscores the transformative potential of alternative education in India for empowering the marginalised communities. By examining the pedagogical strategies of institutions like *Vanavil* and the outreach programs of *Auroville*, the research highlights the distinct advantages of non-conventional educational approaches in addressing the holistic needs of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds which encompasses not just academic growth but also physical, emotional, mental, intellectual, and spiritual well-being. The analysis of these institutions underscores the effectiveness of alternative education systems in addressing the holistic development of learners. Unlike the mainstream education system, which often emphasizes competition and standardization, alternative education prioritizes the individual needs, interests, and capabilities of each student. This approach nurtures physical, emotional, mental, intellectual, and spiritual growth, fostering a sense of community, collaboration, and personal empowerment.

The analysis reveals that alternative education systems, with their emphasis on individualized learning, holistic development, and community engagement, provide a stark contrast to the often rigid and competitive nature of mainstream conventional educational institutions. *Vanavil's* success in using a mix of Montessori methods and tailored pedagogical strategies has significantly impacted the lives of children from the *Boom Boom Mattukarars* and *Narikuravars* communities. The focus on English Language Teaching (ELT) has been particularly effective in enhancing communication skills and expanding opportunities for higher education and employment. The institution's comprehensive support system, including after-school programs and residential facilities, further ensures that students receive continuous guidance and support.

Similarly, the outreach programs of *Auroville*, including *Arulvazhi*, *Tamil Ulagam*, *Thamarai*, and *Ilaignarkal Education Centre*, demonstrate the efficacy of value-based and experiential learning. These programs not only provide educational support but also foster

essential life skills and personal development. The integration of ELT within these programs has enabled students to gain confidence and engage with a broader, global community.

The thesis also highlights the importance of subaltern studies and postcolonial theory in understanding the dynamics of marginalization and empowerment. By focusing on nomadic tribes and other marginalised groups, this research illustrates how alternative education can serve as a powerful tool for social change by promoting inclusivity and equality.

In conclusion, the pedagogical approaches employed by these alternative educational institutions offer valuable insights into creating more inclusive and effective educational frameworks. Their success stories emphasize the need for continued support and expansion of such programs to reach more marginalised communities as well.

The exploration of pedagogies in selected alternative education institutions in India for empowering subalterns highlights the transformative potential of non-traditional educational approaches. This thesis delved into the unique educational frameworks of institutions such as *Vanavil* and various outreach organizations of *Auroville*, illustrating their impact on marginalised communities, particularly children and women.

The teaching method used in *Vanavil* mirrors the natural language acquisition process experienced with one's mother tongue during childhood, and can be characterized as an immersive and experiential approach to English Language Teaching (ELT). Similar to how children are immersed in their native language environment from a young age, *Vanavil* creates an immersive English language environment for its students. This may include using English as the primary language of instruction, communication, and interaction within the classroom and school environment. The natural language acquisition process provides opportunities for students to listen, speak, read, and write in English. This mirrors how children learn their first language through exposure, repetition, and interaction with native speakers. In case of *Auroville* the native English speakers are a good source for children for flourishing their conversational English.

Language learning in *Vanavil* and outreach schools of *Auroville* is often contextualized within real-life situations and meaningful contexts, making the language more relevant and memorable for students. This could involve incorporating English language learning into everyday activities, such as storytelling, role-playing, or problem-solving exercises.

Also, these two institutions create a language-rich environment where English is not only used for formal instruction but also integrated into various aspects of school life, including signage, classroom materials, and extracurricular activities. This constant exposure to English helps language learning and encourages students to use English confidently.

The ELT method in *Vanavil* and outreach schools is very much student-centred, focusing on the individual needs, interests, and learning styles of each student. Teachers adapt their teaching strategies and materials to accommodate diverse learners, ensuring that all students have opportunities to actively engage with the language and develop their language skills at their own pace.

Both these institutions to enhance language acquisition incorporate multisensory learning techniques that engage multiple senses, such as visual aids, audio resources, kinaesthetic activities, and interactive technology. This multisensory approach appeals to different learning preferences and strengthens language retention. This could include tasks such as conversations, presentations, projects, or writing assignments that demonstrate practical language proficiency rather than rote memorization of grammar rules or vocabulary.

In case of *Auroville*, native English speakers or volunteers are used to provide authentic language input and cultural exchange opportunities for students. This exposure to diverse language models and authentic communication situations enriches students' language learning experiences. Through all the methods and approaches both these institutions aim to foster confident, proficient English language learners from the most disadvantaged sections of society.

The thesis attempts to comprehensively explore and analyse the pedagogical approaches of alternative education institutions in India by focusing on their role in

empowering marginalised communities, specifically children and women. The primary scope of this research includes a comparative analysis of pedagogical methods, case studies of alternative education institutions, focus on marginalised as well as nomadic communities, the role of English Language Teaching, evaluation of educational outcomes, implications for educational policy, interdisciplinary approach.

It may be noted that most of the mainstream school education evaluates English language learning through writing only, by ignoring the other skills like listening and speaking. This in turn gives importance to rote learning. In *Vanavil* and *Auroville*, the students get opportunities to interact with native speakers or indulge in immersive environments, making their learning far more effective than the mainstream marginalised learners.

The thesis tries to give an overview on the pedagogical approaches of selected alternative education institutions which worked for the upliftment of subalterns helps in making a social change and proves the words of Nobel prize laureate Mala Yousafzai “One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world. “It is an eye opener for mainstream education systems following conventional teaching methods and technique along with a teacher centered curriculum constantly working to mould childrens from a uniform perspective which as Foucault said working for the agency of hegemonically dominated elites who creates and control the subjects. In Alternative Education each student is explored by the teachers with much care and attention and they dig out the real gems and pearls in each student. It also tries to examines the innovative curricula, flexible study programs, and individual-centered teaching methods that distinguish alternative education from conventional education.

The thesis emphasises specific institutions, such as *Vanavil* and various outreach programs of *Auroville*, address the educational needs of marginalised communities and foster holistic development of children. The research specifically looks at how alternative education empowers children and women from marginalised communities, including nomadic tribes such as the *Boom Boom Mattukarars* and *Narikuravars*. It highlights the unique challenges

faced by these communities and the tailored educational strategies used to address and overcome these challenges.

As per the *Annual Report of Vanavil 2022-2023*, 495 children educated at *Vanavil Schools*, 541 children provided care and protection at *Vanavil Homes*, 104 first generation college graduates, 15000 nomadic families provided with relief materials, more than 1000 children provided with educational and nutritional support, 466 women provided with livelihood support, 39 students goes for higher education, 196 children were protected from begging and child marriages, more than 850 students got access to quality education, more than 200 students got daily nutrition, many children opted higher education on the basis of their skill and interest like physical training ,nurse, fashion designing etc 20 students continue working with *Vanavil* to empower their own community. The condition of neighbouring villages and marginalised section with the active working of various outreach programmes of *Auroville*, almost 5000 people were employed from neighbourhood, 500 women got skill education and were self-employed, more than 800 students got quality education and opportunity for higher education even in abroad.

The thesis also examines the role of ELT in alternative education settings and its impact on the empowerment of children. It discusses how proficiency in English can enhance communication skills, increase access to higher education, and improve employment opportunities and climb the social ladder for marginalised individuals.

The study assesses the outcomes of alternative education programs in terms of student achievements, skill development, and overall empowerment. It includes qualitative and quantitative evaluations of the success rates of these programs, particularly in elevating the socio-economic status of the participants.

The thesis explores the broader implications of its findings for educational policy and practice in India. It suggests how the principles and practices of alternative education can be integrated into mainstream education systems to create more inclusive and equitable educational opportunities.



The research incorporates insights from subaltern studies, postcolonial theory, ELT, educational theory to provide a nuanced understanding of the issues that faced by the subalterns and steps taken by the alternative educational institutions like *Vanavil* and Outreach programmes of *Auroville*.

By addressing these areas, the thesis aims to contribute to the academic discourse on alternative education and its potential to transform the lives of marginalised individuals. It provides a detailed examination of how alternative pedagogies can foster empowerment and social change, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in creating more inclusive and effective educational environments.

While this thesis provides valuable insights into the pedagogical approaches of selected alternative education institutions in India and their impact on empowering subaltern communities, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations like limited case studies, geographical constraints, scope of pedagogical methods, data availability, etc.

The research focuses on a select number of institutions, namely *Vanavil* and various outreach organizations of *Auroville*. While these case studies provide in-depth analysis, they may not fully represent the diversity of alternative education institutions across India.

The institutions studied are primarily located in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. The findings may not be entirely applicable to alternative education institutions in other regions of India with different socio-cultural and economic contexts.

The thesis concentrates on specific pedagogical approaches within the chosen institutions. There may be other innovative pedagogical methods in use in alternative education systems elsewhere that are not covered in this study.

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