

**LABOUR PROCESS AND HEALTH OF CHILDREN—  
A Study of Match and Fireworks Industries in  
Two Villages Around Sivakasi.**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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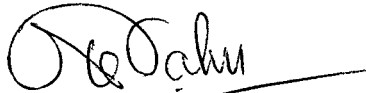
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This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "Labour process and health of children - A Study of Match and fireworks industries in 2 villages around Sivakasi", submitted by Miss R. Radha is in partial fulfilment of requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of this University. To the best of our knowledge this dissertation is her own work and has not been submitted to this or any other University for any other Degree.

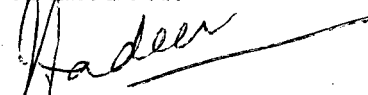
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## AN INTRODUCTION

Child labour does not exist as an isolated social evil, anticipating the welfare state to carry on 'constitutional operations' in order to remove it. Any interpretation of child labour as one of the social 'evils' or 'problem' would rather distort the roots of the problem. Child labour has in fact been made an indispensable part of the labour process -- the labour process, which has been reflecting the evils of an exploitative social structure. It is not that the welfare state, which makes promises to the mass and serves the small minority of the dominant class, has not done anything. Rather what the state has done so far in the name of 'practical and pragmatic solutions' has led to the perpetuation of child labour and the strengthening of the exploitative social structure which forces the child into labour. The action of the 'state' which is visible in the form of laws and welfare policies has contradiction and limitations inherent in itself. On the other hand one can see the object of state action - 'the working children' whose number runs into millions continue to struggle along with their toiling parents just for survival. Needless to say that the problem of child labour reflects the problem of a socio-political system which creates false hopes in the minds of the suffering millions and ultimately leads them to

despair. Such a complex problem which is more than in one way is linked to the larger socio-economic set up needs a careful examination.

Coming to the definition and views on child labour we see that, most of the definitions of child labour carry an inherent source of legitimizing child labour itself. The views present child labour as something 'historical'. It is also being treated as a 'natural phenomenon'; which is very difficult to be eliminated. Some of the sociological studies also help in building up another view which says that child labour is a cultural one, as, such an attitude for child labour exists in the tradition and belief of the people. The definitions of child labour are not uniform and co-herent and do not seem to be based on the understanding of the social realities surrounding the labour process. They distort the reality, consciously or unconsciously, to the benefits of the ruling class and the ruling elite. The ruling class subscribes intelligently to a view which is convenient for its continuity and which does not question the status quo.

Ironically we do not find definition of child labour as a problem but rather what we find in all works on 'child labour, is the definition as 'a concept' The working child is presented as an isolated social entity who belongs to a

particular age group and participates in some kind of labour process. They hardly reflect the intensity of the ;problem of child labour 'Who is the working child?' To what class does he belong? These are the questions seldom asked.

For a better understanding let us look at the definition and views on child labour.

The definition of a child is not uniform all over the world. It varies from one society and from one time to another and also according to both class and gender". While some have defined 'child' as "someone who needs adult protection for physical, psychological and intellectual development until able to become independently integrated into the adult world"<sup>1</sup>, while different cultures have their own notions of childhood, it is essential to adopt a definition based on chronological age rather than the social notins of childhood. Even though the definition centres around age, in the Indian legislative enactments, there has been no uniformity. For example the mines Act 1973 defines child labourer as a person below 15 years of age; while the central children Act 1980 defines it as a person - a boy who

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1. Maria de la luz Silva; "Urban poverty and child work : Elements for the analysis of child work in Chile" in Gerry Rodgers and Guys Standing (eds) *Child Work, Poverty and Underdevelopment*, ILO Geneva, 1981, pg. 160.



has not attained the age of 16 years and a girl under 18 years of age.

In the Indian census the definition of a 'worker' varies between 1971 and 1981. The 1971 census defines a 'worker' as a person whose main activity is participation in any economically productive work by physical and, or mental involvement. The definition excludes children whose main activity is not work but who work for a few hours per day. However 1981 census defines work as 'participation in any economically productive activity taking into account main and marginal workers',<sup>2</sup>.

According to the Operations Research group Baroda, a working child is one within five to fifteen age bracket and who is at remunerative work paid or unpaid and busy any hour of the day. The concern for working children group defines child labourer as 'a person who has not completed his fifteenth year of age and is working with or without wages on a part time or full time basis'. As there are variations in the definitions the statistics quoted by the non-government agencies vary from the census reports regarding the child labour force.

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2. Terence Hall; "Perspectives and data requirements for the study of childrens work" in Gerry Rodgers, and Gays Standing (eds), *Child Work Poverty and Underdevelopment*, ILO, Geneva, 1981, pg.63.

The 1971 census reports that 6.6% of the male and 2.6% of the female children were in the labour force. Rural areas had high child labour participation (7.5% male and 3.0% female) than urban areas (2.8% male and 0.8% female). The national sample survey in 1983 estimated that there were 17.36 million working children below 15 years of age. However the Operations Research group estimated around 44 million working children out of which 21% are in urban and the rest in rural areas.

Though the estimation varies, it cannot be denied that the intensity of the problem is acute. Musing over the origin of the use of child labour it can be said that it has roots in two traditions:

- a) that of the family norm where children learn their discipline and skills of work from their parents.
- b) The second is that of bonded labour where a child is given as a bonded servant instead of debt repayments. Many of the researches emphasize that traditionally as the trades were all family enterprises, the child participated in them as a helper or an apprentice<sup>3</sup>.

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3. Musafir Singh, V.D. Kaura and S.A. Khan *Working children in Bombay - A Study*, National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development, New Delhi. 1980, pg. 2.

Also skills are best acquired if learning is begun fairly early as the human body is soft, flexible and pliable in childhood<sup>4</sup>. They go to the extent of also saying that work under the protective mechanism does not deprive a child of his physical and mental growth, rather it inculcates in him a positive self image by preparing him to assume adult role in future<sup>5</sup>.

In the technological primitive societies the adults took to relatively effort intensive tasks. while children took the more time intensive tasks. However, where there has been a growth of feudal relations of production, there has been an increase in work intensity and exploitation. Peasants have been exploited through various rental and wage obligations, children however have had to contribute. With the growth of capitalist relations of production followed an increase in industrial production, shift to cash crop farming, commercialisation of agriculture and growth of unemployment, resulting also in increasing landlessness. Migration of landless peasants and they becoming wage earning labourers and the conditions of poverty forced the

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4. Leela Dube 'The economic roles of children in India. Methodological issues" in Gerry Rodgers and Guys Standing (eds) *Child Work Poverty and Underdevelopment* ILO 1981 P. 188.

5. Parveen Nangia, *Child labour cause effect syndrome* 1987. Janak Publishers. Page 6.

entry of the child into the labour. Lack of alternative employment for adults and lack of education reinforced the process<sup>6</sup>. This being the scene during the early days of the industrial revolution in the developed countries, towards the middle of the 19th century, the factory reforms were introduced to protect the children in the industrialized societies who were working especially in the textile mills from the age of six in abysmal working conditions for 14 hours a day<sup>7</sup>.

This trend of introducing legal measures to protect the working child started in India in 1885 with the appointing of the Bombay factory labour commission. Since then there have been various committees set up from time to time to examine the causes, distribution, extent, working conditions and problem of the working children.

However the problem of child labour has entered the public consciousness for the past few years and the debate on this was initiated when the state announced its intention to introduce fresh legislation to deal with the phenomenon of child labour. Over the years there has been broadly two types of approaches adopted towards the problems. The first

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6. Smithu Kothari "Child labour in Sivakasi" *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 2nd 1983 pg. 1198.

7. Elias Mendelievich '*Children at Work*' ILO Geneva, 1979.

is the humanitarian approach where by child labour is viewed as a natural phenomenon and has been in existence from time immemorial. It acknowledges the fact that "there is an in built parental feeling that a child is a property and must do what the parents need and want and this being at the root of family solidarity and the internal relationships and loyalties that create the structure"<sup>8</sup>. There also prevails this opinion that "an imprint acquired in childhood is not easily erased. The need for a minimum of training and practice in a skill and the idea of catch them young", both play their part in sustaining the pattern of early employment, involvement of children in hereditary crafts.<sup>9</sup> The approach aims at improving the status of the working children and not removing it. It suggests the improving of working, living conditions, welfare and security measures. Thus there are two opinions: those who think that it should be banned since it is detrimental to the growth of the child and it is against the Directive principles of the constitution and those who think that work in itself is not bad for the child but only hazardous.

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8. Tara Ali Baig 'The plight of the working child' (unpublished). Paper presented at Workshop on Child Labour Indian Sociological Institute. Aug. 9th 1986.

9. Leela Dubey op.cit, p.188.

It is a paternalistic view which is reflected in policy-making that decides what the children should do for themselves, as seen in the Report of the labour Investigation committee 1946 and Report of the Harbans Singh committee 1977. The earlier committee suggests the need to enforce the legal provisions and provision of educational and other facilities to the children. The latter however suggests the reduction of working hours, increase in wages and linking of wages to the cost of living index and providing compulsory formal education, with the assumption that banning child would not remove all the children from the labour force. However much the need for welfare measures have been suggested, this approach fails when put into practice and it does not alter the situation at all.

An improvement of the former came up later in the form of an economic approach which traces the problem beyond humanism and identifies child labour as a sign of poverty and thereby suggests a change in the general socio-economic conditions.<sup>10</sup> Even they however do not analyse the specific nature of the economic life which forces children into the labour force. Some have however attempted but failed.<sup>11</sup>

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10. Neera Burra 'Child labour in India: Poverty exploitation and vested interest' *Social Action*, Vol. 36 Jul-Sept. 86.

11. Nasir Tyabji 'The match industry in Sivakasi and Sattur: Towards Removal of child labour' *Madras Development Series*, Vol. XVI no: 5 & 6.

While there is this debate going on among the aware and the intellectuals, the government has made use of both at different points of time according to its needs and the pressures. Given the nature of economic planning where profits of the private sector play an crucial roll the government policy for child labour has changed from time to time. Intially it simply ignored the problem, then made some human itarian motions and finally came efforts to introduce new legislation to regularise.

Over the years the number of children working in the industries and factories has gone up considerably. The national sample survey organisation in India estimates that child labour has increased from 10.7 million in 1970 to 16.2 million in the 1978.<sup>12</sup> It has gone up inspite of the fact that several committees have been formed by the state and a few legislations have been made. Article 24 of the constitution prohibits employment if children below the age of 14 years in any factory, mine or any hazardous employment, Article 39 protects children against exploitation and Article 45 directs the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children until 14 years of age. Among the

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12. Centre for Social Research, Madras 1984. *Working conditions of children employed in unorganised sector - A study in Sivakasi.*

various legislations the factories Act is relevant to our context.

The factories Act 1948, prohibits the working of children who have not completed fourteen years in any factory, regulates the working hours to four and a half hours a day for children between 14 and 15 years of age and prohibits employing children during night. However one of the loopholes of the Act is that it does not apply to factories where the number of employees is less than 10 in case of factories where power is used and less than 20 where power is used for manufacturing.<sup>13</sup>

The recent Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986, lists out a few hazardous occupations and processes where children, who have not completed 14 years of age are not permitted to work and its special feature is the constitution of an advisory committee called the child labour Technical Committee to advise the central government on child labour. Apart from this, it fixes the period of work to three hours of work after which there should be an interval of one hour for rest to be continued for another 3 hours. It prohibits work overtime and allows a day off every week. The other aspects are maintenance of register

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13. *The factories Act 1948.*



by every employer, cleanliness and safety measures. Violation of the law is punishable with imprisonment for a minimum period of three months or with fine not less than ten thousand rupees.<sup>14</sup> Though one is aware of the absence of strict enforcement of the laws, one observes that the most significant outcome is that of the interactions between the problems of child labour and pressures for state action; and the state's response to both the problems and the pressures, is the formation of various committees and legislations. Here is an attempt to look into the salient general features of the various committees.

a) Though all the committees (Harbans Singh Committee, 1977, Gurupadaswamy Committee, 1979) admit that it is poverty which forces the child to work, they do not go beyond 'the child' while suggesting changes. They take a humanitarian approach and aim at improving the conditions of working children without antagonizing the employers.

b) The framework within which the committees are asked to operate like looking into only aspects as working conditions, working hours and wages, limit them from looking into the roots of the problem.

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14. Ministry of Labour. *Report of Committee of State Labour Ministers on Child Labour 1984* (unpublished).

c) The committees recommend changes in existing laws or adopt new policies. This takes a form of cyclic process, one committee suggests some legislations which after being enacted has little effect which again leads to the formation of another committee to introduce further legislations and so on. Moreover the committees always refer to the existing laws like Indian factories Act 1948 as being ineffective especially in the field of child labours.

d) The recommendations of the committees relate to only specific aspects like reducing the age of working children; prohibiting employment in certain sectors before the children attain 15 years of age (It would in no way be a solution for the family would go through the same problem).

Again the successful implementation of the law depends on the administrative bureaucracy on one hand and the employers on the other hand. As it has been repeatedly pointed out that the legal and administrative bureaucracy have not succeeded in implementing the laws, it is essential to note that the cooperation of the employers cannot be full, simply because the very existence of the employers depend on the continuation of a certain basic minimum level of child labour exploitation.

Moreover the laws does not take into account the totality of the child labour problem and fail to integrate aspects which are inter related. It has also failed to take into account the proper place of child labour in the whole economy. Finally the laws are negative in character, they only prohibit certain things or processes of work but does not cover wider aspect for instance a child prohibited from working in the fire works industry goes back to a greater circle of poverty because he cannot get education or take up any other vocation. This has a worsening effect but the law does not suggest anything. Moreover the law taking a paternalistic attitude does not talk of the absence of options or less options available to the children of the poor families compared to the children of the rich families. These children are treated as those who need some improvements in their lives because they have to work to survive anyway.

Thus we see that the government policy is a reflection of its own contradictions on the one hand the state projects on image of great concern for the child labourers but on the other hand it has only succeeded in promoting efficient use of it. It does so firstly by encouraging voluntary agencies to improve the situations of the working children and look into their welfare so that these children are healthy enough

to put in their optimum labour. Secondly the laws that have been lastely introduced, instead of abolishing child labour makes it an integral part of the economy. These laws however are introduced in the name of child welfare and prevention of misuse of child labour. By doing this the government not only silences the hues and cries raised regarding the living and working conditions of the children but also pleases and enables the powerful industrialists to squeeze out the maximum labour potentials of the children.

The emerging pressures to abolish child labour and attempts which have focussed upon the plight of the child have forced the government to recognise the problem.

The purpose of this dissertation is thus to understand the social forces that make this possible.

### **Labour Process and Health**

Any discussion on the health status of the working child first brings into sight an obvious question, "Does the working child have a health status?" What are the factors that determine the health status of working children?. As health is dependant on the various socio-economic and political factors influencing it, the health satus of the child is decided by two major factors; the physical and

social environment he lives in and the economic status of the family.

The physical structure that he inherits combined with lack of nutritional inputs and an unfavourable atmosphere detrimental for the growth of his personality, puts him in a weak and vulnerable position. These children are the ones who belong to the unfortunate and unprivileged parents, who are the victims of an unjust social order; the parents who toil in the industries from morning till evening just to feed the family for a meal. The child born to them inherits a weak physical structure even before he confronts an unhealthy social environment, directly, which forces him into labour, long before he can realize that he should also have some aspirations as his peer groups in the privileged sections of the society. An inherited weak physical structure due to absolute poverty and days of hard work make him vulnerable to different diseases. The time he should have spent in schooling and games is spent toiling hard in the industry just for survival.

The poor economic status leading to the inheritance of a weak physique and a deterioration in the already poor health status will again lead to the decline of the existing economic status because of low labour output. This being so,

the poor health status is maintained by the unhealthy conditions at the factory and poor nutritional intake. However, assuming to provide health service to the children of which these children are a part, the state at best only aims at bringing changes in the health status, without taking into account the economic status. Considering the limitations that are already found in the existing health structure and the institutions and considering the medical personnel and their links with the dominating class to whom they cater, one cannot be but doubtful about the change which they can bring. All these along with the environment and the type of processes he is involved in the workspot raises his disease potentiality. Thus, one examines here, the factors beyond just the occupational health or the physical well being.

#### **The Scene at Sivakasi**

At an age when the children should be playing with playthings the majority of children in and around the urban agglomeration of Sivakasi; broadly speaking, in a huge segment of Sattur taluk in Kamarajar district of Tamilnadu, are playing with match sticks and fireworks. Firstly, the concentration of about 45,000 children in one area and their exploitation itself quantifies the problem. The fact is

that the children work in poor occupational conditions in various hazardous production stages and are exposed to insidious hazards as cumulative poison. Child labour also leads to the unhealthy substitution of the adult labour force by the child labour force and prevalence of low wages. Neither are they covered by any health scheme nor compensation benefits. Apart from losing their learning and productive age they reach the thresholds of life to join the existing band of unemployed adults.

Tamil Nadu has a high rate of poverty proportion and highest unemployment of 12.17% due to extreme inequalities in the ownership of land and other assets<sup>15</sup> and the present Kamarajar district is a backward district and drought prone. Sattur Taluk of Kamarajar district has a significant proportion of 53% of workers as compared to 44% for the district out of the total population. The taluk is totally dominated by the match and fireworks industry and the printing presses which produces more than half of India's output of matches. 75-90% of fireworks and approximately 40% of offset printers. Sivakasi is one of the areas covered by the National Child Labour project and around

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15. S. Guhan, Growth inequalities and poverty in Tamilnadu. quoted by Centre for Social Research in , *Working conditions of children employed in unorganised sector - A study in Sivakasi*, 1984, Madras.

45,000 children are estimated to be working and around Sivakasi.

## **THE PRESENT STUDY**

Studies on Sivakasi have pointed out that the children are brought in from the interior villages around the town to work in the match and fireworks. However, this study intends to cover the children working in the unorganised sector which is the cottage sector namely the 'D' class units; since there is a mushroom growth of such units in and around the village near Sivakasi and a bulk of the labour force are employed in such units. Two out of the six villages visited around Sivakasi are chosen for the study on the basis of these criteria.

- a) its proximity and nearness to the industrial towns of Sivakasi or Sattur and accessibility by road.
- b) concentration of child labour.

The villages chosen are Meenampatty and Venkatachalapuram (hereinafter referred to as Village I and Village II respectively) which are both situated on the Sivakasi to Sattur Road. The study was conducted from Nov. 1987 to March 1988.



## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

On one side we have the theory of the nimble fingers supporting the argument towards employing children. The other view is that of employing children in the unorganised sector for lower wages and other reasons, perpetuating exploitation. However, with this background the study intends to look into the forces which have led them to succumb to this demand of the capitalists.

The areas probed are:

- 1) The reasons for the existence of the child labour which would include:
  - a) the reasons for the shift in the economy from agriculture to the match or firework industry.
  - b) how this shift is legitimised and rationalized
- 2) The socio-economic profile of the child workers and their families - includes the nature of work, services, etc.
- 3) The health profile - includes the health facilities and services available and their perception of their health problems.

Out of 199 families in Meenampatty and 148 families in Venkatachalapuram, which have working children, a sample of 125 families from each village is chosen. The families are divided into 3 economic groups:


- 1) below Rs.500 per month
- 2) Rs.500/- to Rs.1000/- per month
- 3) Rs.1000/- and above.

Out of each group a random sample of 42 families is chosen for the study. The respondent for one half of the interview schedule is the parent and the other half is the child.

Qualitative data is gathered from informal, interviews and group discussions with different groups of people in the villages, by talking to officials and periphery workers and from the reports available at the district collector's office and office of the Inspector of Labour, Sivakasi. Data is also presented in the form of case studies of child labourers, of families both in the industry and out of it, and of people who had worked as child labourers depicting their views on various aspects like the social structures, relationships between the different classes and castes, health, and so on.

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Here, by 'child' we mean any person male or female below 15 years who is working full-time with wages in match or firework industry; 'unit' refers to a matchwork or a firework factory; 'industry' refers to only match or fireworks or both.

## CHAPTER II

This chapter comprises of three parts.

Part A Contains an account of the villages, their physical structure, demographic pattern, caste-class compositions, occupational pattern, facilities and services available within the village.

Part B Traces the growth of the match and firework industries, the labour processes in which the people are involved and the reasons for the shift in economy.

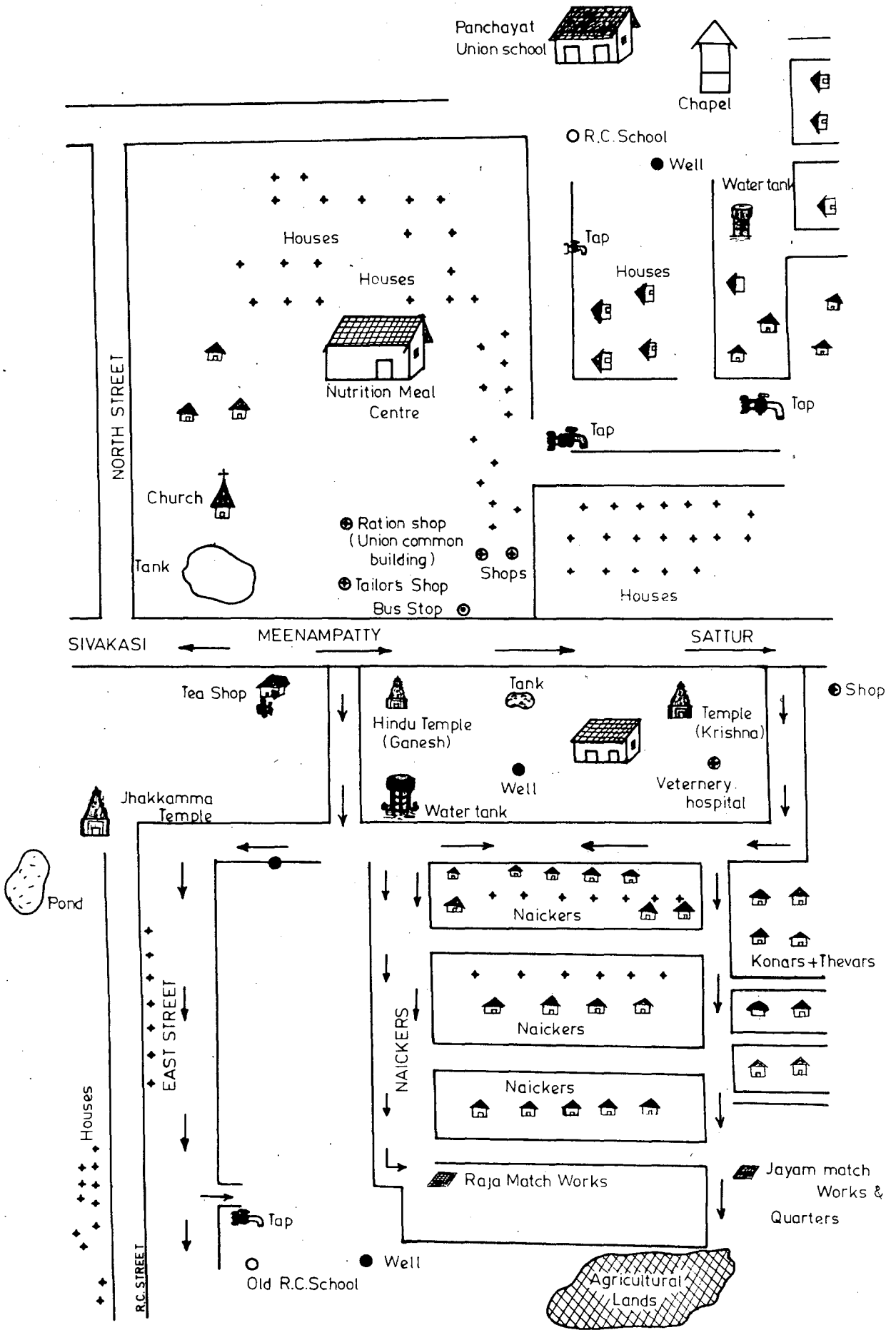
Part C is a glimpse at the life of the people and health by presentation of case studies depicting the lives and views of different sections of people and the health and welfare provisions for the children.

### Part A

We shall have a look at the two villages Meenampatty and Venkatachalapuram one by one.

#### Meenampatty

Meenampatty is situated on the sivakasi to sattur road and comes under Annupamkulam panchayat. It's total area is



0.35 sq km and has a total population of 2998 as on 20th November 1987. Annupamkulam panchayat consists of 9 villages of which Meenampatty is one. The village is spread on both sides of the Sivakasi-Sattur main road. It has 662 households and is divided into three main streets which are the North street, Naduvloor and R.C. street. The North street which consists of Pakadai and the harijan colonies consist of 368 families where as the Naduvloor which combined with the R.C. street consists of 294 families. The north street is situated on the left side of Sivakasi to Sattur road and the rest are on the right. Twenty years back, the village consisted only of the R.C. street and Naduvloor which had around 40 and 120 households respectively. The North street is occupied by the parayar (s.c.) and the sakkiliyar community (s.c.). The R.C. street which is behind the Naduvloor and almost at the end of the village consists of the sakkiliyar community. The North street is thus an extension of the village and consists of migrants mostly from nearby villages.

#### Castewise distribution

1. Scheduled Castes (sakkiliyar and parayar)	.....	419	households.
2. Konars	.....	92	"
3. Naickers	.....	64	"
4. Asaris (carpenters)	.....	35	"
5. Thevars or Maravars	.....	25	"
6. Pillai, Dhobis, maistry etc.	.....	11	"

The harijans are all mostly christians- Roman catholics (The north street and the R.C. street) North street consists completely of the harijan colonies. Initially 5 cents of land were provided by the government for each family then the scheme was to provide 3 cent of lands for which only Rs. 100/- was paid by the family. However the government, which had to provide Rs. 6000/- per family to build a house in the 3 cents of land, did give only Rs. 4000/- in instalments. The scheme now is changed to the provision of built brick houses (by TUDCO). The Naickers and konars however, live in their own houses unless they are recent migrants to the village.

The Naickers are by tradition, agriculturists and most of the families still hold a minimum of 10 acres of land. However the average distribution of land per s.c. family which has land is 1.5 to 4 acres, roughly. The thevars or the Maravars do not own any land. 18 konars have a minimum of 2 acres each. Mostly paddy and millers are grown. The average yield as per 1981 census is 15 quintals per acre (paddy) and 2 to 3 quintals of millets per acre.

#### Class Structure and Economic Activities

Monthly income above Rs. 1000/-	127 families	- 1
Rs. 500/- to Rs. 1000/-	387 families	- 2
below Rs. 500/-	148 families	- 3

It is found that in the Naicker households and in about 40 of harijan households, there were many teachers, bus conductors, clerical staff, government employees, etc. However a significant proportion of the families are totally dependant on the match and fireworks industry. The caste wise distribution is as follows:

Harijans	-382 families
Konars	-41 "
Naickers	- 8 "
Thevars	-23 "
Asaris	-19 "
Others	-114 "
Total	<u>477</u>

Labour force

	R.C.+ Pakadai	Asari	Naickers	Konars	Thevars	Others
Fireworks	831	6	-	27	9	7
Match	64	55	32	54	20	17
Govt. (Teachers, Bank also)	40	-	10	6	2	-
Agri.coolie	41	17	6	25	24	6
Agriculturists	4	-	37	18	-	-
Press	13	12	13	19	8	4
Private	4	-	19	7	2	2
Others (business, shops)	4	3	28	12	11	3



The families which come under the income group of above Rs. 1000 mostly consists of teachers and other professionals and a few harijan household which have more than 4 working member and the second income group and the third completely comprises only of match and fireworks labourers and the third income group includes most of the agricultural labourers which is as meagre as 40 members. Many of them till rely on agricultural labour for they belong to the older generation and have not been used to working in the industry.

Although this village had been before a decade an agricultural village, for the past 8 years due to lack of rains adequate rainfall, agricultural has been slowly replaced by the match and fireworks industry. There are 3 match units in Naduvor and one in R.C. street. Surrounding the village there are 3 more match units. The match units are all owned by the Nadars of Sivakasi. Previously one of the units belonged to a Naicker however due to heavy loss he was forced to sell it. It was told that other community other than the Nadars can survive in this industry. Since the Nadars have a sangam (association) no other community manufacture (matches) can stand the competition. The rates or the selling price at the market does differ if it is for a Harijan match unit owner. However one firework unit in

R.C. street is owned by a harijan. Surrounding the village at a radius of 3 miles there are a number of fireworks all owned by Sivakasi Nadars. Most of them have purchased the lands and set up the units due to high labour potential of the villages. Many of the units are all suppliers for the bigger groups of fireworks. There are around 12 fireworks surrounding the village. TAN fireworks which is a renowned brand in fireworks has an unit near the village.

In the match units that were visited mostly women and girls out numbered boys and men who were just 3 or 4 including the foremen in each unit. The boys and men are usually employed in fireworks. Since the wages were comparatively higher in the fireworks and since there are many fireworks around the village, working at the fire works is preferred by the people. Agricultural wages is at present Rs. 12 for a male adult and Rs.5 per female adult. However this is not stable. Only because of the recent rains, there is cultivation otherwise only fodder and some essential food grains are cultivated. Earlier the rate in the match unit was 32 ps. per frame, now it is revised to 55 ps per frame. However average wage rate ranges from Rs 4 to Rs. 7 in case of a child (below 16 years) and Rs. 6 to 12 in case of an adult per day in a fireworks. In a match factory, a child earns about Rs 5 to 8 per day and an adult about Rs 10 to 14

per day on an average. However when asked why inspite of the increase in the wages, they prefer to go to the fireworks all of them answered that the advance given is more than that given in a match factory and also the bonus rate is more. In a fireworks factory an advance of Rs.500 is given for each member where as in a match unit it is Rs 100 to 200. Also bonus is given twice a year is Rs 20 per Rs 100 (earning) whereas in a match unit it is Rs 10 for an earning of Rs 100. In only special cases, advance is given in a match unit only one or two families are given the advance and Rs 10 per person is deducted from the wages every week if any advance had been provided. During the fireworks season between July and October or sometimes lasting till December work is provided even during the nights and double wages are given along with one meal. Also in some factories during the Deepavali season, incentives are given to workers who finish a certain target. If one finishes 1000 rolls one is given a saree or some utensil.

The latest trend in the village is that during the off seasons between December and February some families migrate to Ernakulam (parur and Anga maligai) in kerala where the industry is being nurtured of late. During the lean period one or two members or the Whole family goes to work there for a few months. There, they are provided a flat rate of

Rs 15 per day and are given a two room quarter with 3 meals per day. Around 15 families during this season have gone to Kerala and are expected to return in March. While 7 people whom the investigator spoke to, said that the factories in Kerala are now being constructed by the Nadars in Sivakasi, two families who have been there, denied it.

Within the village one of the match units has quarters where there are 40 houses. 30 the families working in the match units are given only 45 paise per frame. However the families have to work in the match units owned by the owner only. It is said that in this village many families are engaged in making small crackers in their houses illegally during the Deepawali season. They being the various ingredients and manufacture crackers at home.

This year because of the unexpected rains, the fireworks season has not started again. However cultivation of cotton, sunflower, vegetables and some food grains like ragi are going on. The land mostly owned by Naickers and some konars are usually given for lease 2 or 3 harijan families and some Maravars along with a few Naickers cultivate the lands by taking it on lease. Since land and pumpset is provided, 2 shares of the field goes to the owner and are share to the tenant. In cases where this system is not accepted Rs 2000 to 3000 per year is paid by the tenant

without giving the owner any share of the field. The present rate of agricultural land ranges from Rs 1500 to Rs. 3000 per acre and residential land is Rs 1000 per cent.

It was observed that in the families involved in agriculture, both the harijans and konars and Naickers it was mostly only the older generation (40 to 50 years of age) who still continued to go to the fields. They however have not learnt the work done at a match or fireworks factory. It was only after the 60's that the match industry and the firework industry has started growing. The present youth today, to whom the investigator spoke to, highly despised the thought of being an agricultural coolie. Many of the children and even women said that they preferred to sit in one place and work. They did not like the thought of soiling themselves and sweating under the sun. They preferred to go to the "fire office" instead. Many of the parents to whom the investigator spoke to, asked her in turn.

"What does a parent prefer? - ones daughter toiling in the heat and growing more dark or sitting in the shade and come back in the evening as fresh as she had been in the morning".

Some of them said "let this (agricultural labour) job go away with us. Atleast let our children earn more and like decently".

This strange, unhealthy change in the attitudes of the people of this generation about the dignity of labour is highly frightening. It is one of the disadvantages of industrialization. However in a country whose backbone is the field from the soil, this distance created from the soil created in the minds of the younger generation is alarming. The shift had been by a huge leap from agriculture to fireworks or match works.

#### **Institutions and Facilities**

There are 2 elementary schools and one primary school in the village. One school called Bharathy School comes under the management of the Naickers. This is situated in Naduvloor where the Naickers dwell. The other school which is run by the Roman Catholic church had been functioning in the R.C. Street for the past 15 years. However, this is shifted to the north street of late, in competition with the panchayat union school. The students go to Sivakasi for their schooling after the 5th standard.

Two temples of the local deity Vadakathi Ammar and Ganesh temple are in Naduvloor and one is in north street (Kaliyamman). Except a few households in the north street, a majority of them are Roman Catholics. The north street and

the R.C. Street are completely dominated by the R.C. Church. The Church is situated in the R.C. Street.

Almost all the houses have tiled roofing only a few are thatched. According to the reports at the panchayat union, one public latrine has been constructed in the village. However, it was seen that it was in a bad condition. 2 wells and one tank are available in the village and there are totally 6 taps for drinking water. However, for the past few months there was acute water shortage. When the wells dried up they had to purchase water from a neighbouring village where there was a bore well.

The Balwadi, noon meal scheme and the Tamilnadu Integrated Nutrition programme are functioning here. A non-formal school for child labourers is functioning in one of the match units. The adult education programme is being implemented here. However, as there are no adults attending the classes, the children are being taught.

60 families have been benefitted by the IRDP programme. Out of which 20 are scheduled castes. Goats and pigs are reared along with a few cattle (buffaloes and cows).

Ditches have been built in the Naicker and Konar streets. However, in the harijan settlements the ditches have been dug by themselves, temporarily. Under the massive

agricultural production programme 2 wells have been deepened.

The political scene is quite alive here with different sections of the population linked with different political organisations. The Congress Mandram (Association) which is totally supported by the Naickers is a traditional one. The Konars and around 20 members of the north street belong to the D.M.K. mandram. The youth sangam which has around 125 S.C. members only, is the most active now. The North Street and the R.C. Street mostly belong to the AIDMK party.

For the past 15 years, one of the Naickers, a M.L.A. during the Janata period was the president of the panchayat union. However, since he was not stable in one party he lost support. The present president is from Perapatty a neighbouring village. The local unelected leader among the Konars, harijans and Naickers is one Mr. Chinnaswamy of AIDMK who is also a harijan. Among the Naickers the ex-M.L.A. is still powerful. The local disputes are solved and decisions are taken by both of them together.

Regarding religious activities, the church has a powerful role in the lives of the Roman catholics of the village. Right from the christening of the child, the priests have a strong say in each and every activity of the Christian household. One of the girls remarks "If we fall



sick we prefer going mostly to church rather than to a hospital". The christians were mostly converted 30 years back. In the temples however the Naickers are the most privileged and it is they who are given the first honour of worship. Then come the Konars and then Maravars followed by the others. When the village celebrates the festival at the local temple it is in this order that the pongal (cooked sweet rice) is prepared. The scheduled castes who belong to the parayar community and are hindus are not still allowed to worship in the temple that the others worship. They have a Kaliamma (shakthi) temple of their own. Even today, a harijan cannot enter a Naicker household. The educated harijans and other big men of the harijan community are allowed till the verandah of the Naicker household. However, the Naickers attend functions at these harijan households where special arrangements are made for cooking etc.

It was seen that there are 25 graduates in the village; a doctor, an engineer and 4 people with Diploma in engineering who are serving in the defence. However, most of them are employed and settled outside the village. About 14 teachers belong to the harijan community. While the Naicker girls do not study beyond school, it is seen that a few harijan families educate their girls till B.A. The local panchayat school has 68 children attending classes

regularly. It is observed that they are mostly boys and only a handful of girls.

Out of 892 children in the age group of 0-15 years; 271 of them are working. The number of children working in the fireworks and match works is as follows:

	<u>Children</u>	<u>Families</u>
North street (consisting of Parayar and Sakkiliyar)	138+ 29	92 19
R.C. Street	37	25
Naduvloor (consisting of backward castes)	67	47
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Total	271	199

Out of 271 children who are working 156 of them are females and 11.5 are male. The children accompany their parents who go to the fireworks or the match factory as early as 4 or 5 years, though they are not treated as workers until they are 7 or 8 years old. The children who go to the fireworks are mostly around 9 to 15 years of age. Most of these families have more than 2 children .

It is observed that in the harijan household to which a majority of the children belong to, both the father and mother work in the same fireworks as the children. The children from the Konar, Naicker, Asari and Thevar families

usually go to the match units. While talking to the people one could sense that working at a fireworks is not considered as prestigious as working in a match unit. The children who go to the fireworks start off at 6:30 and return around 7 p.m. Most of the girls help their mother in the household work in the morning and then start off with a meal of the previous nights' rice for the afternoon. Sometimes the mother cooks a meal and starts to work around 8 a.m. as the firework season had not started most of the families were jobless in December. Since there are not many match units in the village; not many could be employed in those units during the off season. However, some children who know the other work too (at a match unit) would try to occupy themselves there wherever job is available.

All the children to whom the investigator spoke to, said that the foremen or the employer scolds them only if they are found sitting idle or if they do not do their job properly. Many of the people said that the owners encourage the boys and girls to move freely with each other so that they are assured of the couple continuing to work in the same unit. It is said that, due to this situation of youngsters of all communities working together many inter caste marriages are common of late.

Since the families take the advance money from the employer in the beginning of a season; it is a sort of contract that they enter into and they are forced to be in the same unit and do anything for the employer until they repay their money which is not quite possible. By the time they pay back their loan; they are faced with another off season which leaves them without any work and they are forced to go back into debt. This becomes thus a vicious circle. Most of the families cook only one meal a day mostly at night. The families buy their provisions from the shops inside the village where they keep an account. When they have money in hand they buy their provisions from Siyakasi.

Though the children are sent to work in many cases, one cannot say that the family is depending completely on the income of the child. In many houses 2 children are sent to work and one boy is sent to school. In most cases the children have gone to school and studied till 1st or 2nd standard. Some children say that they felt like earning like other friends and going out for movies, so they quit school and went to the fireworks. Now they feel like going to school. However, they cannot think of losing their income. Many children who are interested in learning are now attending a class conducted by one of the local (adult education scheme) teacher who has begun teaching the

children who are eager to learn. A non-formal school which is run in the premises of a local match unit has only a strength of 18 children out of which a few have written the 8th standard examination this year. Though Rs. 100 is given as compensation for the loss of income during the two hours of study per day the children say that since they can earn more than this amount during that time they do not want to lose their income. The children or the adults are not given any medical benefits and are not covered by any schemes. Even when they fall sick they do not get any amount from the employers. Since they cannot afford to lose their wages and go to the hospital they usually do not go to a doctor unless it is quite serious.

Many of the children, whom the investigator spoke to; spoke like adults. They narrated an accident which took 5 years back in which 30 people including men, women and children were charred to death while working in a shed. This accident had occurred in Aruna Match factory near Mettupatti during one of the seasons when night shifts were done. A compensation of Rs. 12,000 per family was given later. Since the accident had occurred during the rains and as many minor accidents without any human loss have occurred during the rains; it has left a scar on the people that as soon as it starts to rain or if one suspects a lightning to follow; the

workers run to their homes. When the children narrated how they do not leave their houses when they fear that it would rain; their faces expressed fear and fright out of helplessness. One of the girls says, "Before we join, we are all ready for anything. We know what a risk we face. If I die let me die. But I should not know even a minute before, that I am dying." Another girl continues, "That is why we keep talking and laughing while we work. We are careful also. But to forget the fear, we enjoy ourselves." All the time the children spoke; their faces were lit with smiles but at the thought of an accident their faces darkened and only 3 out of the 10 kept speaking.

One of the girls Lourdemary says, "I go to work because I know that we will be able to live better and cook everyday." The women to whom the investigator spoke to, were always in the defense when it came to the issue of sending their children to work one parent says, "which parent will like his children to work? The cost of living is increasing and there is no other go unless all of us work." "we have not studied and we wish to educate our children but it is not possible." When asked why the child cannot be sent to the government school; the parent said, "where do these children study. They see their playmates earning and they also want to earn."

Except during the lean period or the off season it is said that one cannot see many unemployed people. The women in the North Street and many in the Konar, Thevar households are all working. However, in the Naicker families one cannot see working women. All of them are housewives. The general age when a daughter is married is 16 to 20 years. The amount of dowry depends on the occupation of the bridegroom and the status of the family. In the Konar families, a few sovereign of gold and some thousands in cash is given where as in harijans, if the boy is also working in a firework the cash is not given in most cases. However, a gold earning and a mangalsutra is to be given. The amount of gold and money increases and is determined by the educational qualification and income of the boy. However, it was found that a boy's parents have to make the proposal in the harijan community.

It was generally found that the women in the North Street are aware of the day-to-day affairs and are more cooperative, while the women of the Naicker households did not part with any information readily; the others are quite frank, on many a occasion the harijan women openly criticized their husband's behaviour. It is found that there is much difference between the women of the North Street and the Naduvloor. (depicted later through case studies).

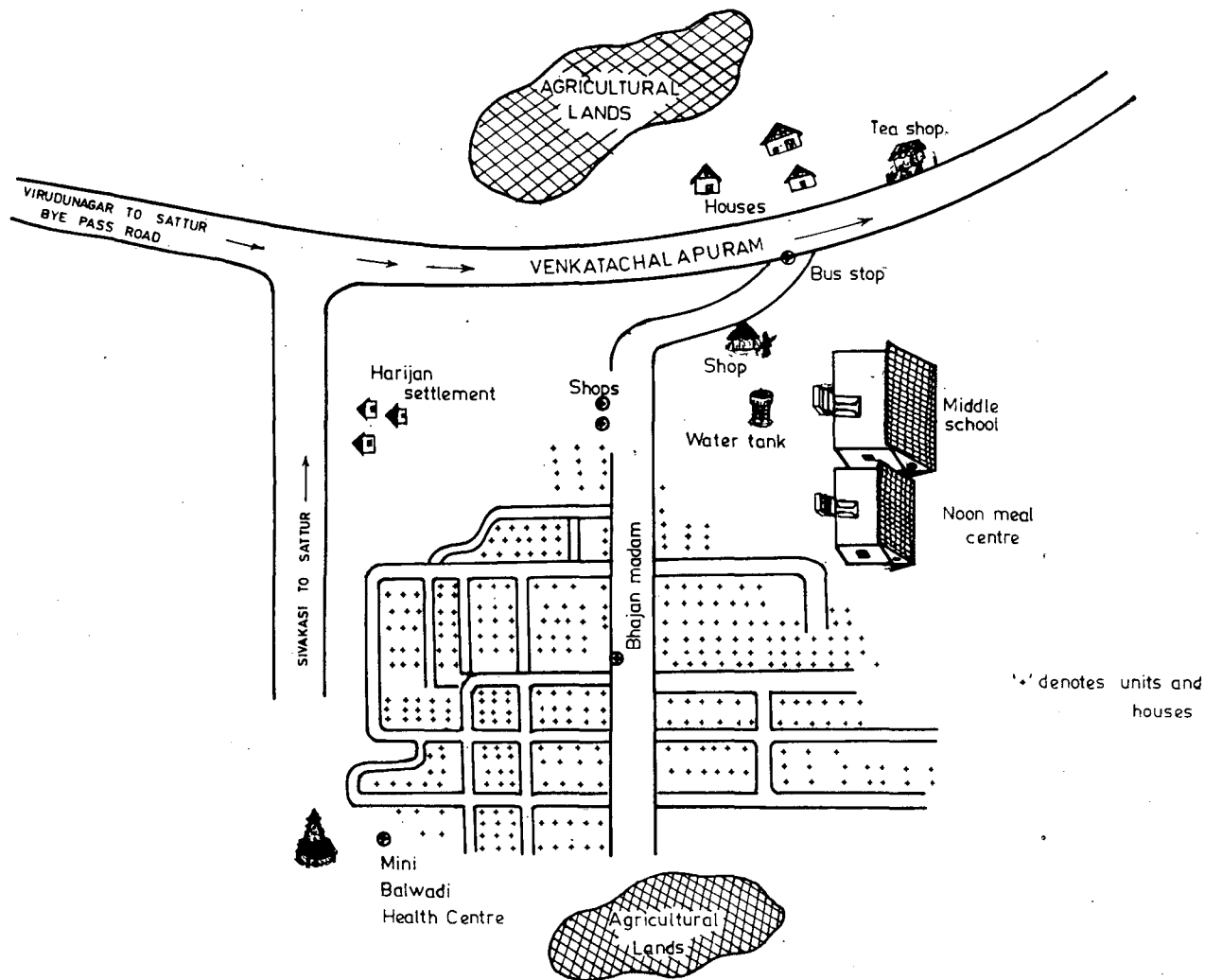
Now regarding the health facilities; the PHC headquarters is at M. Pudhupatty. A multipurpose health worker however resides in Meenampatty itself. According to most of the villagers her being there is of no use because the worker is not available at home during the day and in the evenings. The people usually go to private clinics in Sivakasi mostly in the evenings. They did not like going to the government hospital at Sivakasi because it would be more time consuming and the treatment offered is not satisfactory. There is no doctor practising inside the village. According to the health worker there is no major illness prevalent in the village except T.B. which she feels is quite common. Also she finds Vitamin A deficiency among children who work. A mobile team from the PHC headquarters and general hospital Sivakasi visits the village once a month. However, it is a fact that the working class would not be available during their visit. The workers of the noon meal scheme and the Tamilnadu Integrated Nutrition programme along with the MPW registers births and the village administrative officer enters all deaths. Since Rs. 100 is given in case of any death in a harijan family by producing a death certificate; of late it is said that all deaths are promptly registered.



The deliveries are mostly conducted at the hospitals. However, in cases where normal delivery is foreseen, it is conducted at home. There are 2 or 3 trained Dais and 2 untrained Dais in the village. Out of 204 eligible couples; 19 have undergone family planning during this year. An IUD camp was conducted before 3 months in the village. The school health programme is in progress. Laproscopic method of family planning is not usually preferred whereas permanent sterilization is preferred by majority of the couples. There were only 2 infant deaths in 1986 in the village. Apart from the MPW, a malaria worker visits the village. A para medical worker for Leprosy has just been appointed. It is observed that in cases of emergency (like fever or diarrhoea) the women usually go to the worker of the nutrition scheme as the health worker is not available.

Among the people the investigator spoke to the girls say that once they start going to the fireworks they develop a dryness on their face and some of them who are allergic to the chemicals have joined the match works. After the rains almost one person in every family that the investigator visited complained of loose motion and fever or bodyache. There are also 2 patients who had undergone treatment for T.B. in Nagercoil and are feeling better now.

# VENKATACHALAPURAM



### Venkatachalapuram

Venkatachalapuram or 'Small Japan' as it is called is a village situated on the Sivakasi-Sattur and Virudhunagar-Sattur highways just 2 kms. away from Sattur which is the Taluk headquarters. Venkatachalapuram is a separate panchayat which includes an adjoining hamlet and comes under the Sattur panchayat union. The village is well connected by road to Sattur, Virudhunagar and Sivakasi towns. Having an area of 7.17 sq.km., it has a population of 1784 (857 males and 927 females) out of which 1040 belong to backward castes comprising of the Naickers, Maravars, Konars and Veerakudi Vellalars. (The Naickers are officially called the Vadugar community. Hence they are also considered Backward). The rest of the population consists of the Harijans and the Pakadais (s.c.), a few mulsim and other communities like the pillais.

There are 490 households altogether in the village. Out of the 1040 backward caste population, 135 households belong to the Naickers. The caste wise distribution is as follows:

No. of naicker households	: 135
No. of harijan households	: 53
No. of households belonging to communities like Konars, Veerakudi vellalars, Dhobis,	

Barbers, Asari, etc.	: 284
No. of Thevar households	: 18

The Naickers, Harijans and konars are the traditional inhabitants of the village. The rest have migrated from the nearby places in search of employment.

### **Physical structure and housing**

At the entrance of the village, to the right (a private management) a middle school is situated and the harijan households are found in the right corner of the main street. They are totally isolated from the main village. The main street divides into lanes and by-lanes running horizontally and vertically almost in perfect straight lines. Almost every street has 5 to 6 match units along with its quarters. The houses of the owners mostly are a part of the unit itself or adjoining it. The lanes are quite narrow and congested. However they are quite clean. Most of the houses have tiled roofs except a few which have terraced roofing. The harijan houses are usually thatched huts. The quarter provided for the labourers consists of just one room which is quite small for a family of 5. The houses have electricity and a few naicker families have latrine facilities. There are 8 wells, 25 taps and handpumps at present in the village. 10 years back drinking water was

bought from Sattur. However with the digging of 3 borewells and a watertank there is comparatively no problem. The area occupied by the village is 7.15 sq.kms. Out of this, recently 200 acres has been occupied by the NGGO colony and 75 acres has been occupied by the housing board. This has therefore reduced the extent of the agricultural lands which had been 2424 hectares - 17 cents according to the 1981 census.

The Naickers who are the dominant community in the village are all owners of the match units. They apart from owning their houses, also own 2.50 to 4.50 acres of agricultural land on an average. The village's economy is predominantly dependant on the match industry. The labourers are mostly migrants who belong to the konar, thevar, pillai and other communities. The owners, apart from engaging 10 to 15 people in their units, also work in their own units mostly as foremen or supervisors. The soil being black soil; Cotton, Khambu, Maize, Black gram and other foodgrains are grown here. Implements like country plough, Ironplough are used in agriculture. The village is covered by the massive agricultural production programme. In spite of many wells being dug in the fields, the amount of water essential for cultivating the major portion of the lands is not available. Hence some of the lands be used for

growing fodder for the cattle. Agricultural loan of Rs.3000/- per head and Rs.1000/- for fertilizers is provided by the agricultural credit society in the neighbouring village. Many of the local farmers are said to have benefitted by it. Some of the families have given their lands on lease for a certain amount per year but many of the Naicker households cultivate their own lands.

The match industry however has replaced agriculture which is the traditional occupation of the village. There are 130 match establishments within the village itself. This is an unique feature of the village. Out of the 130 registered 'D' class units, 125 are working, presently. According to a survey done by the labour department labour force of the match industry is as follows:

<u>Adults</u>	<u>Adolescents</u>	<u>Child</u>
104 males	8 males	21 males
336 females	125 females	66 females

However a recent survey done by the National child labour project shows an estimate of 222 children alone working in the units. In spite of the variation in figures 340 are families are dependant on the match industry alone for their livelihood.

The match industry which was started in Sivakasi, slowly crept into the Sattur area in 1958 and in 1962 it was fully industrialized. The first co-operative for match units was formed in Sattur co-operative society. Slowly co-operatives were formed at Elayirampennai and Kovilpatti. Then, the Venkatachalapuram society was formed consisting of all the 'D' class registered units which were restricted to produce only 2000 gross of match sticks per month. During the Janatha period, when the cottage industry was encouraged; most of the units were set up here. The duty for 144 match boxes was then reduced from Rs.3.75 to Rs.1.60. Since then the industry flourished. About 40 owners have so far availed the small scale industry loan to set up their units. All the rest have set up the unit with their own capital. The owners of each match units have 3 or 4 houses each to be provided to the families which migrate from other places and settle their for their livelihood. These families are provided an advance of Rs. 1000 to Rs.300/-. The money given as advance depends on the labour force or potential of the family. The families which have come here have relatives or known people in the village. Some families however have come here, on hearing about the advance given here. They have come from nearby places like another owner and move into his units.

With the match industry; providing livelihood for a majority of the households, it is seen that the Harijans belonging to the Parayar community are still the drumbeaters for both funerals and also for some auspicious occasions. However the younger generation and the woman folk are employed in the match units. One observation is that the language spoken by the Naickers - Telugu is the commonly spoken language through out the village. The dominance of a certain community is thus felt through the language. The other communities also learnt to speak Telugu and very rarely one hears people conversing in Tamil.

Regarding the wages in the match industry, it is seen that by the recent raise in wages, the rate per frame has been revised from Rs.378 to Rs.5.50. But since the quarter is provided for the family the rate is reduced to Rs.4 or Rs.4.50 in some cases. The harijans who go to beat the drums earn Rs.10 to Rs.20 per day but they usually get job for only 15 or 20 days per month. The other men, are employed in construction work in Sattur. One of the contractors, a naicker, employs about 40 people in construction work. A few naickers who do not own an unit take it on lease from their relatives. The migrated people have come from Kovilpatti, Virudhunagar, Sattur etc. and also from places as far as Thiruchendur, Tuticorin etc.



Many of them are acquainted with the job while the others learn it after coming here. No other village in the Sivakasi-Sattur area has such a concentration of units where advance is easily available. This is the main attraction which brings people and allows them to pledge themselves for a few thousand rupees. Many of them, who could not depend on the agricultural labour due to the drought and having sold their property in their villages have reached here in search of employment.

These families are given just a one room quarter without any toilet or bathroom facilities and are mostly adjoining the unit. The whole family is forced to work for the particular owner and even when work is not available in this unit, they are not allowed to work elsewhere. The families are almost bonded labourers and they do most of the jobs, right from cleaning the units to arranging the packed boxes. They start to work as early at 6 'O' clock and finish at 8 in the night. Many of the families are unable to repay the money and are stuck to the same unit for almost 2 years. In some cases; if they are displeased with the employer, they try to borrow the money as advance. Apart from engaging workers in the units some of the owners supply raw materials like sticks, frame etc. to the nearby NGGO colony and collect the loaded frame at night. A few men are

employed in some nib companies in Sattur. After the fall of the nib manufacturing industry, the men who were earlier employed there in large numbers have for the past few years taken up jobs like construction work, painting work in match frame manufacturing company. All these jobs fetch an income of about Rs.8 to Rs.17 a day. In a match unit with the revised wages an adult gets around Rs.14 and a child around Rs.9 per day. However among the migrant families those were observed; it was seen that in many of the cases, the male adult was mostly at home and the women and children were the source of steady income. One can easily categorize the migrant families to fall in the income group of Rs.600 to Rs.700. In most of the cases only one meal is cooked per day. Only on days of weekly wages the night meal is cooked. Since the women are all employed in the village itself they take a break at 1 'O' clock to cook food in case the owner relieves her. Otherwise the meal is cooked at night.

It was observed that the children of the Naicker households go to sattur to study. However mostly a majority of them wind up after the 10th standard (of late). The census of 1981 shows however the literacy rate as 40 per cent. The girls are generally sent to school only for primary education in the Naicker households whereas a majority of the working class donot have any education.

Among the female workers (adults) very few are literate. It was told by one of the mothers that "unless one puts the girls to sit and work at an early age of 3, the girls will not cultivate the habit of sitting down to work continuously". Another woman says "After all we cannot send our girls anywhere outside to work. So it's better that they learn the trade at an early age and get experienced. One lady asks "What is the use of studying? Can one earn as much as one earns now, even without studying? In this area it is enough that girls know to fill up frames than talk in English".

It was observed that the women, the labourers as well as the employee who sits in the unit supervising are very shrewd and also did not want to leak out any information unnecessarily. Though a few women of the village took the investigator to a few units, the women employers would ask them why they had to risk themselves and pay a fine. Apparently a few days before the investigator had reached there the local labour department had issued show cause notice to one or two owners. Hence the investigator was also suspected to be another person from the labour department. As soon as one enters in the unit, one can easily spot more than 3 young innocent faces, ready to get the signal of the owner to leave the unit on some pretext

and the owner would promptly add that the mothers are the ones working here and these children having nothing to do, sit there with them and try to learn the job.

Out of the 490 households, 148 families have children working (222 children are working). It is seen that children as young as 4 years were working. Some of the children who go to the balwadi stay till noon until they are given the meal and then run to the match units to fill atleast 3 frames a day. The rooms in which they work are very poorly ventilated and crowded. The match boxes and sticks are strewn or heaped very closely and in one occasion when a match stick caught fire (due to friction) when it was rubbed against the empty boxes, one could see the danger of a quick fire being caught very easily. However, the workers say that they atonce stamp it or put it off with sand and there have been no such accidents. Only on one occasion, a fire was caught but no one was hurt. In a match unit, one often sees that the girls keep talking but are always under the scrutiny of the lady of the house (the owner). In some, units there were radios and the children were singing along with it. Looking at the pasture in which the girls work, one feels that it would be very strenous to sit in the same position from 6 in the morning to 8 in the night with a break in between. One of the women, when asked way they did

not remain as agricultural labourers in their own village they said that apart from unstable income, one need not (especially the children) work in the scorching sun and also there is no efficiency of work involved in this, like agricultural work, where the owner might replace them by a more efficient worker.

Bonus is also given every years; which comes to Rs 50 per adult worker. These workers also do not have any health schemes covering them. No benefits are provided by the employer. Even if a person is ill, one does not easily refrain from going to the unit. The people generally, go to the private clinics in Sattur or Viadhunagar, as there is frequent bus service to both the places.

Earlier a subcentre with a doctor visiting once a week and 2 ayyahs had been functioning in the village. It had been receiving foreign funds for medicines. Since the general population was not satisfied with the sub centre, not many used to go there regularly. However, there are a few traditional healers for snake bite, chicken pox etc. and it was said that 80% cure is guarenteed. There is a bone setter in the village and the treatment would take 15 days to 3 months. Other than this, the health visitor is said to attend to the village regularly. However, the

balwadi is the place where she often visits to give vitamin A doses to children. A dental check up had been conducted for the balwadi children in December and the balavadi worker visits the village once a month. A sanitary inspector also is said to frequent the village. One could however find that these facilities and check ups usually stop with the balwadi. Except the balavadi worker no other worker visits the households. Talking about the personal hygiene of the children many of them have rashes or small eruptions on their face and hands. With strewn hair and dirty clothes they look pathetic. Many of them have stains on their teeth. There have been no health camps or even family planning camps organised in the village. However, an eye camp which is highly publised and conducted by a Hindu mission is conducted once in every 2 months in sattur. Most of the villagers spoken to, did not know where the nearest PHc is; however situated 7 miles away in Kanniseri though the village comes under M. Pudhupatty. The people says that they do not prefer to go to the government hospital firstly because they give the same medicines for almost all complaints secondly they would have to wait and waste the whole morning and loose around Rs 4 of their income. Thirdly in the private clinic with a shot of injection and medicine, they are relieved in a day or two though they have to pay Rs 10 for every visit. Also, they believe in certain

doctors being more luckier or auspicious than others. They however do not treat them as cattle as it is in the government hospital where they would rather keep asking the patients about how they feel than diagnose with out asking questions. This seemed to be a major complaint that the doctors do not have patience to diagnose.

Apart from the Bakwadi the mid day meal scheme centre is attached to the school. Adult education programme is also conducted here Alcoholism is quite high here. The Naickers or the elite village have of late taken up to drinking foreign stuff available at the market. "Until 1977", says one of the big men of the village, "the village was a peaceful place". Today there are many who take illicit liquor though the rules of the village. However the village is quite unsafe after 7 pm. It is this habit of the working class or the labourers which does not allow them to come up".

The Panchayat union president belongs to this village and belongs to the Naicker Community. The president of the village is also a naicker. This village is of the holds of the state minister, Mr. K.K.S.S. Ramachandran. Originally during the Kamaraj period, it was a strong hold of the congress. However for the past few years AIDMK has more

support among a good majority of the younger generation and the working population. A few of the migrants belong to CPI (m). As in the past a few families still belong to the Congress party. Among the women, only the ruling party has good support. They seem to attribute the reasons for increase in wages to M.G.R. 3 or 4 women complained that people with political influence and money, only get the ration supply in full. In the village the youth association which is pro - AIDMK; a Kamavar or Naicker association and a match industry association are active. A total fund of Rs 10,000 is collected from the harvests and match production and is used for general administration of the village. The decision making power wholly rests on the big people of the village who are the Naickers and any sort of communication is done through the harijans who beat the drums and announce the message. Apart from the other associations; a ladies association organizes a few tailoring classes and a cine artist fan club also exists.

Pongal and Deepavali are the main festivals and a majority of them belong to the Hindu religion. The local festival is during pongal (which is the Kaliyamman festival). The upper castes do not go anywhere near the harijans households. However a few of the harijans are allowed to enter the match units to work. A male match work labourer



demands a minimum of 3 to 5 sovereign of gold (equivalent to Rs.9000 to 15000/- at present rate). The amount increases with the property owned by the family. The marriage expenses are completely borne by the girl's parents. Until one year of marriage, gifts like dresses and watch have to be given during the festivals. The middle class parents however, have to present gifts for the couple for 2 or 3 deepavalis. In the Naicker households 25 to 30 sovereigns of gold alone with Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000/- dowry has to be given by the girl's parents. Apart from this, gifts have to be given for 3 years during pongal and Deepawali. In spite of many of the girls earning as equal to a male; the situation has not changed at all.

Apart from 2 or 3 families owning a T.V. there is no common T.V. in the village. The people usually frequent the theaters nearby and it is told that each family sees atleast 2 movies per week. Even if the entire family does not go, the girls go in groups on Sundays which is the weekly holiday. The main means of transport are the buses and cycles. However one person owns a car and a few others own motorbikes.

These are in brief, some of the facts about the village. A better understanding of the life of the people

is presented through the case studies in the latter part of the chapter.

## **PART B**

### **The Growth of the Match and Fireworks Industry and the Processes Involved in Manufacturing**

In 1922, P.Ayya Nadar and A.Shanmugha Nadar of Sivakasi went to Calcutta to take training in match industry and home made fireworks. On their return they started the first semi-mechanical match factory. The first industrial fireworks factory was set by them at Sivakasi in 1923. But 1970 with the availability of raw materials like potassium chlorate, potassium perchlorate, magnesium powder and so on in the proximity of the producing centre and with the availability of indigenously produced items like tissue and fancy papers, the industry made a rapid growth. Today there are over 350 industrial firework factories. Some of the small factories work during a season of 8 months and have a turn-over of business upto Rs 70,00,000/- and five to six large type of factories exceed Rs 2 crores. This industry sustains several other industries which produce paper and boards, chemicals, steel wires, printing and packaging and the transport industry.

The factories which are around Meenampatty are primarily engaged in the manufacturing of quick matches, atom bombs and chinese crackers. As one walks away from the village one can spot clusters of sheds with tiled roofs and a couple of doors with fencing around. One of the sheds is the mixing room where only men are assigned the job of mixing chemicals. Salt petre, charcoal and sulphur are brought from the ingredient shed and are mixed by hand in the mixing room and then sieved five or six times to make a homogeneous mixture. As one enters the shed one is bound to spot only aluminium, silver-grey coloured men walking around. The men working there are totally covered with the chemical mixture and only in rare cases one spots gloves on their hands. However the floor is usually covered with rubber mats or linoleum in all factories.

After the mixing is done, in the case of manufacturing quick matches, the powder is mixed with dextrine and moistured with water and then taken to the dipping room. The different number of plys of thread are dipped in the above solution and the dipped threads are dried in the same room by hanging. The threads which are hung for drying are cut into size after they dry completely. This stage is very crucial because it is said that most accidents occur during this stage when the threads are removed without caution. As the threads are hung on nails and if one is not careful,

there can be an explosion due to friction. The thread which is cut is wrapped in a white tissue paper in a fuse making room and is finally coated with flour gum and dried. It is now ready to be used as a fuse.

Manufacturing of chinese crackers is one of the most common works in the factories near Meenampatty. The children who work in the fireworks can mostly be spotted performing the initial process of different types of paper tubes in circular aluminium ring each containing 500 to 600 tubes one side closed with mud are brought to the factory. The tube rings are brought to the filling room where the white powder mixture is filled into the tubes partially with enough empty space at the top for fuse and plugging by clay. Then the rings are brought and the top side of the rings are plugged with clay. Again the holes corresponding to the tubes are punched by means of non ferrous sticks or nails. Then this is dried and fuse, cut to length, are put in each of the tubes with the help of gunpowder and gum solution. Then, crackers are braided with thread to each other. Finally it is wrapped and labelled. Except for mixing and drying, the thread and filling the clay, the investigator has spotted women and children engaged in all the other processes. The most common process however is piercing the tubes in the aluminium ring, fitting the fuse thread and

braiding the crackers and lastly packing and labelling. In the firework industry risk is inevitable at almost every stage of manufacturing. In one or two cases boys working there playfully threw stones at each other and the stone hit on fireworks, kept for drying and due to the friction the whole thing went on fire. Though there are doors on both the sides of the shed, escaping from an explosion is not possible, according to the people who have witnessed accidents. The workers say that it just takes seconds for the whole shed to explode and the roof is taken to a tremendous height and when it drops backs the fire spreads to the remaining sheds. Moreover since the whole unit is fenced the chances of running in different directions are reduced. One has to run towards the main entrance wherever he might be. Another common observation is that the units do not have any fire extinguishing devices except some sand piled up in two buckets at one end of the unit. All these speak for the immunity to risks on the part of the workers and the indifference on the part of the employers.

The other industry which is equally dominating in these areas is the match industry. While Meenampatty is predominantly dependent on fireworks, Venkatachalapuram is totally dependent on the match industry. The match industry in general consists of the mechanised and unmechanised

sector. However the villages chosen here do not have any mechanised units. The units in both the villages come under the cottage sector. However a few of the units have registered themselves as members of co-operative societies which<sup>o</sup> provide raw material and distribute the produce of their members. Three of the six units in Meenampatty however are sister concerns of bigger units of sivakasi. The rest which consist the bulk have long or short term agreement with some match manufacturing units and meets the orders given to them by the units. Except for units in Meenampatty the rest are smaller units mostly employing two to three families. The unit is mostly a crowded room with dim light and is mostly adjoining or to a part of the owners house.

The match making process is as follows. The initial process is that of frame filling where the match splints are arranged in the wooden frames. The chemicals which are required to produce the flame are mixed, after which the splints are dipped firstly in wax and then in the chemical. This process is called the dipping. The outer boxes are placed in side frames in some cases for the chemical to be painted on the two sides. However in most cases the boxes are brought or supplied by the co-operative society as a part of the raw materials. The matches are then filled in

the boxes and the excise duty banderol is stuck on the outer and inner side of the boxes since the boxes are labelled even before the boxes are filled. The final process is that of packing in dozens or gross and bundles to be sent for marketing.

In Meenampatty the children are engaged either in frame filling or box filling or labelling whereas in Venkatachalapuram, there is no specific task allotted per day but the children do every thing except chemical dipping or wax dipping and packing. The chemical dipping and wax dipping are the only areas where the foremen are employed, otherwise it is totally the women and the children's job. Regarding the risks involved during the manufacturing process one has to agree that one feels that the risk is minimal when compared to that of the fireworks. However if one is careless about handling things, a small spark can demolish the whole unit. In the factories at Meenampatty, the frame filling process is made less tiring because the frame is fixed or allowed to rest on a long wooden bar as support and one does not bend or hold the frame to oneself while filling the frame. This also reduces the backache that one often complains of.

While having a discussion with the male members working in the fireworks regarding the job and the

facilities available, most of them are of opinion that the total profits made and the wages are in the ratio of 10.1. Most of the fireworks enroll only 10 permanent workers and the rest do not place their signatures, even while receiving their wages. This leaves the rest with job only for 9 months of the year. Regarding the attitude of the employers, the men feel that the employers treat them well or infact 'look' at them only during the fireworks season, otherwise they do not try to pay any need to the workers' claims. Even in case of accidents, unless the unit is insured and if the worker is a permanent worker he would not be able to claim compensation or else he has to accept whatever the employer wishes to give. The men are all aware of the legal provisions and about the welfare schemes like provident fund, leave allowances, E.S.I. etc. but they say that they are helpless about not fighting to claim those. More because the employers are powerful and would eliminate the leader in no time and also because the workers would not all unite. They say "we are hungry, how can we all be united" "when one cannot even succeed in asking for monthly wages how can we ask for better facilities?" asks one worker while another named shanmugavel says "We cannot get together and fight. We are weak. If we abstain from working we will starve." It is said that when the employer spots the leader or the trouble maker' he is thrown away from the job and the



word is carried around to the other units so that he does not get job in any of them too. The workers thus have to please the employers to stay on in the same unit by doing things like proclaiming falsely during some inspection that he gets certain amount as wages while his actual wages is much lesser. Another feature is that no family or worker is allowed to stay in the same unit for more than 5 years. It is a moral contract after which they shift to a different factory. It is because the employer may have to treat them as permanent workers if they stay for long.

A few of the women workers feel that the employers are considerate towards them because they lend them a good amount of money in the form of advance and even if they cannot pay it back during the same year they allow them to pay it the next year. Also they see to that the girls are comfortable in the unit and provide radio and arrange for tea with in the premises. However they feel that they are working with death and are quite conscious of it while working. One of the women narrates an accident which happened in TAN fireworks an year back when seven people were charred to death. However none of them was from this village. It had happened when a match stick was lit to light a lamp for puja and it fell on the crackers and caught fire. People thought that it was just a lamp being lit. But when the fire blew, they ran out in different directions

across the fence to see the bricks and the tiles thrown out. It is said that the explosion sometimes roots up the buildings or units nearby. The impact of this psychological fear of fire is so intense that even if anyone hears a cracker sound or see a lightning the girls run back home and the common worker wishes that his family is safe. One of the men says "It's good that most of us work. Even if I die, my family will look after themselves. They would somehow survive". "You can ask any child what she prays every day ". She will only tell you that she prays that all of them should come back home that day". All these reveal the deep insecurity that has been nurtured over the years in their minds. One of the men says. "It is the pain of living a life, anticipating the end any moment, which compels many of us to regress our fears by taking alcoholic drinks. However the women and children enjoy seeing movies." We live totally with chemicals: will it not eat us after some years?"

As one hears these workers speak, one is compelled to wonder how the working of children in the fireworks or the plight of these workers did not create as many hues and cries as those of the ones employed in the match units. It is true that the processes involved are more safer at the match units. Moreover while talking to the workers of the

match units, one heard complaints more about the strenuous posture, lighting, low wages and irregular work rather than the risks involved.

### **The Agricultural scene**

As already said, Kamarajar district to which Venkatachalapuram and Meenampatti belong have no perennial river irrigation systems. The agricultural operations are mainly carried out during the North East monsoon which normally sets in October and lasts upto December. This district is predominantly drought prone and Sattur and Sivakasi along with three other blocks are covered under the drought prone area programme<sup>1</sup>. None of the irrigation projects like the pilavakkal at watrap, kullursandai reservoir or venbakottai reservoir is beneficial to these villages. The striking feature of the agricultural scene is the extent of unirrigated land which represents nearly 84 per cent of the lands available for cultivation. While well irrigated land occupies 13 percent of the area, about 3.5 percent is within the command of the tanks<sup>2</sup>. Regular demands

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1. Report on Kamarajar Dist. 1987, compiled at Virudhunagar Collector's office.
2. Madras Institute of development studies: The match industry in Sivakasi; Sattur - Towards removal of child labour. Aug. '85.

by the farmers to launch irrigation schemes have had no effect and even the Tamilnadu Vivasaigal sangam which is a state wide peasant organisation has failed in getting any relief for the peasants of the district. It is said that in 1937 the british had envisaged a plan of building the keerayan Alager dam in the western ghats which would irrigate 3.5 lakh acres of the old Ramanathapuram district. However this scheme which had come up for review several times has not been considered. Though other schemes like deepening the existing wells are carried out it does not even barely improve the drought prone situation<sup>3</sup>.

The agricultural situation being so, the government on the other hand enabled the growth of the small and the cottage sector firstly in 1943, granting them subsidies and later in 1979 during the Janata government, the excise duty of the matches made in the cottage sector was reduced from Rs.3.42 to Rs.1.60 per gross boxes. Thus the cottage sector springing up, provided employment opportunities to the agricultural labourers and small farmers who were suffering badly. The banks and the other credit societies provided loans to set up units. Needless to say it was the elite who avail these loans, as, political and social status matters

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3. Smithu Kothari 'There's blood on those matchsticks' Economic and Political Weekly XVII July 2nd, 1983.

much. While many of them invested their own money quite a few registered themselves through the co-operative societies. In Venkatachalapuram the Naickers being the upper castes and comparatively richer, control the total accessibility towards acquiring loans and setting up units. However in Neenampaty where the match and the fireworks are totally controlled by the nadars of Sivakasi, (though the Naickers who are agriculturists are the powerful community within the village) the growth of the industry was facilitated by the tremendous boost that the Nadar community received during the period where Kamaraj, himself a Nadar, became the chief minister of Tamilnadu in 1953.

The Nadars who were traditionally communities of toddy tappers ranked last in the hierarchy of castes after the Naickers, monavars and the Reddiars. In the early nineteenth century when many of them were converted into christianity, they could migrate to Malaya and ceylon. They came back making money and invested it in trading activities and slowly establishing themselves in the Nadar towns of Sivakasi, Virudhunagar. Thirumangalam etc. As they monopolised the trade of food grain and groceries the establishment of the match industry by two people from their own community gave them another chance to expand or shift their trading activities to match and fireworks. The Naickers, Reddiars and Maravars could however not compete

the race with the united Nadar community. It was at this juncture that Kamaraj became the chief minister. Apart from the easy availability of bank loans to the Nadars, the community got themselves the status of 'backward caste' in 1963 which enabled them to get more concessions officially. Apart from setting up factories in Sivakasi, they set up units in the surrounding villages where land uncultivated land was cheaply available. Thus all these facilitated the growth of the match and firework industry and the shadowing of agriculture.

These being the broader causes for the shift in the economy one has to examine how the shift is rationalised by the people themselves in both the villages. In Venkatachalapuram though there are about 10 wells there is hardly any water to cultivate; usually fodder for the cattle is grown in the lands. Due to the recent rains, grains like Cambu, Raji and Cholam along with vegetables are being cultivated. However only fifteen families mostly the Naickers who own the land or have taken it on lease have been cultivating the land. Many of them avail a loan of Rs.3000/- per head and Rs.1000/- for fertilizers through the agricultural credit society at Mettamalai. Though a few of them still try to cultivate inspite of the odds just for home consumption, they feel that investing in a match unit

is more profitable. Firstly because there is a guarantee of returns and secondly because there is a demand for agricultural labourers. Only the older generation which has earlier been working in the lands are still available whereas the younger generation have learnt the other jobs and prefer it. This preference is not more because of the nature of the job of having to toil in the sun as many of the workers put it but the job security and economic returns is more than that of being an agricultural labourer. The women and girls feel that working in the units is less strenuous and more paying while they have to slog under the sun for Rs.10/- they could sit under the shade and earn the same amount. Moreover they are assured of job for most time of the year. They are also provided with radios within the unit and they are not restricted in any way while working in the unit. The parents feel it safe to send their daughters to the units because mostly women are employed there. Also, the children easily pick up the skill unlike in agriculture where more labour is essential.

In Meenampatty, there is a tank from where water is supplied to the lands and there are wells in the lands of the Naickers. When a borewell was sanctioned to be dug, the Naickers did not want it to be anywhere near their lands because the ground water would all be observed. Therefore it was dug in the natural lake (Kanmai) which remained dry

for many years. However due to the recent years it is full with water. The Naickers who cultivate their own land, have also established themselves in some business. Many of their children are educated and employed elsewhere. They have however cultivated their lands with pulses this time. The main reason for them to reduce their agriculture according to them is the lack of rains and inadequate water in the wells and even if they get water for a couple of years, the yield is not profitable enough to employ labourers whose wages have comparatively gone up especially after the coming of the match and fire work industry. Therefore they cultivate their lands on their own or with very minimum labourers. According to them the shift in one way is good because the younger generation prefers to be educated and employed in offices or banks more as a status symbol. Most people in the match and fire work industry however feel that economically they are benefitted and the industry employs a whole bulk of them. However they would prefer if the government sets up an alternative perhaps a public sector industry where they would get job security. At a time when they were struggling it was the match and fire works which gave them jobs. Though the wages were comparatively lesser and they were attracted because it provided jobs, even for children. The advance system is another factor which is an incentive, along with the bonus.



Other than this, there is complete freedom within the unit and unless they really neglect the work, there is no one to chide them. This is one factor which encouraged children and girls who inspite of the danger involved conditioned, themselves to working there. It is also true that mixing of girls and boys which is considered a taboo in the villages, is possible within the unit. The parents feel that it cannot be restricted. However they prefer their girls to work in the same unit as them so that they would have control over them. One of the girls, Mary says that anyway the girls will not be married by anyone other than a fireworks worker unless a lot of dowry is given, so some parents do not mind their children moving with the opposite sex but see to that they get settled. However as the custom is that the boy's parents come to propose the girl it is essential that the girls conduct themselves well within the unit. Thus one can easily conclude the social impact and the acceptance that the industry has achieved in the villages.

It is at this juncture that one should consider the attitude and the views of the clergy or the church which occupied a large part in the lives of the families in the North and the R.C. street of Meenampatty. The Parayar community have all been converted a generation or two back

into Christianity. A church exists in the R.C. street and a priest from Sivakasi church does the service on Sundays. While talking to the head priest about the life of the people in the village and the role of the church, he strongly felt that the people in Meenampatty do not have any economic problem as they are all employed in the fireworks. As there are no other industries other than the match and fireworks, it is a common feature that people are employed in it. He feels that people are untended in the village however they are not true Christians and it is due to some 'immoral' habits that they have not made their lives better. When asked what role the church would play in alleviating their problems, he feels that the church could only morally influence the life of any person. Any help could be provided only if he respects and attends the church. Moreover, he feels that there is no unity among the Christians there and not many would contribute towards the church each if they earn well. The attitude of the church is thus indifferent even regarding child labour as it is yet another common feature seeing people of all age groups being active and industrious and that it is this phenomenon which is the secret behind the industrial growth of Sivakasi.

On the one hand we have the people especially the working class of Meenampatty, strongly expressing their

belief in God and fate, on the other we see the opinion of the church about these people. It is a fact that the fear of death any moment and the basic insecurity which has been built in them, force them to search for something which would provide them an anchor in life. The fatalistic views and their resignation of facing their end of their lives, even they have just started and finally the concept of suffering today for a better tomorrow are all off shoots of the preaching that they have listened to and which have conveniently suited them. As one of the women Rathinathai syas : "When we know it (death) can happen anytime and no man can help it, it is natural that we have to believe in God only to save our lives". No a day passes without a majority of men, women and girls starting off the day with a prayer to bring them back safely.

The church, though not directly linked with the match or the firework industry, does have among its members, the Nadars of Sivakasi. It is these Nadars who are the owning class and most of them have bigger units or factories in Sivakasi inspite of owning the smaller ones in the villages. Most of the fireworks belong to the bigger groups like TAN, ARD and Ratna fireworks. Therefore, it is only natural that the 'active and powerful' members would not be displeased on any account. However, one of the older men remarked that

the families converted themselves into Christians expecting assistance from the church with respect to job or seeking admission into educational institutions run by Christian Missionaries. Now they are being abandoned both by the government and the church. Thus one can see many of the families registering themselves in Hindu names in order to avail concessions. The people in the north street commonly felt that the church would recognize them only if they belong to higher castes or if they are employed well and are rich. In spite of all these opinions, the people, as a ritual, go to the church regularly.

## PART C

### Case Study of Children Below 15 Years Employed in the Match and Fireworks Industry

#### 1. Mangalamary 13 years (Meenampatty)

Mangalamary is the 5th child of Sebastian and Amalapushpam, both employees of TAN fire works. Two of her sisters, Insamma and Mary are married whereas the others Alphonsa (16 years) Lourdamma (14 years) and Anthoniamma (11 years) are all working in the fireworks. Her last sister Grace is studying the 1st standard.

They belong to the Harijan community (Parayar - scheduled caste) and the family has converted into christianity a few years back.

Mangalamary, a quiet and a shy; frail looking girl works in Lord match works which is inside the village. She was however sent to school, like her sisters, who have been in school for 2 or 3 years. Since she had to look after her youngest sister, she was taken out of school and sent later to the fireworks. But as she developed an allergy - sort of rashes and dryness of skin especially on the face she switched over to the match works. On asking if she was allowed to go by her employer she replies that since the

other members continue to work in the same factory she did not have much problem. Though she went to a private clinic in Sivakasi in the beginning for treatment, she discontinued since it lessened after she started working in the match factory. She earns about Rs.10/- per day now, after the wages have been revised. On days, when no work is available at the match factory, she joins her parents at the fireworks. Her parents, seem to sound helpless when they say that they want their children to study but due to the situation at home and all being girls, they cannot help it. Her mother says " I'm not unhappy about having female children, now. Look at the boys in the village! Not many go to work and earn as much as the girls here. The girls obey their parents and don't roam around. They are responsible atleast. It's true that I tried again and again for a boy baby but now I don't regret".

The boys whom the investigator observed did go for job but not very regularly. Even if they went, they would not give the salary completely to the parents unless the whole family works in the same unit and all their salaries are given together to the head of the family. The boys are too sure that their mother and sisters would earn more than them and keep the routine going. It is very much accepted if the son demands a good share of his salary and spends half the

days idly. Hence, many parents feel that girls are better than boys.

Mangalamary says that she is interested in studying and therefore she attends the non-formal school functioning in the match factory itself. She does not mind losing money and her parents also encourage her to study; she has now appeared for the 8th standard exam. "Though I know that I wouldn't be earning more even if I study, people will respect me only if I have studied. If I don't go to work our family will suffer. We cannot live only with our parents earning" says she. "Only if we save something we can get our daughters married" interrupts her mother. "If we educate them much, we will have to find educated husbands who will demand more money. Where can we go for it? It's enough that they know to read and write. But this girl wants to study so we do not want to disappoint her".

Mangalamary's day starts at 6 a.m. After she helps her mother in some household work. She goes to the unit at 6 a.m. while her mother leaves a little later after cooking a meal the children leave early. The family returns after 6 p.m. Mangalamary says that she prefers the match works since there it is less dangerous and the wage rate is also higher. "The work is very easy and we talk and easily finish the work: I give the money to my parents. I don't take any

money except to go for movies. Every week we see one or two movies. This is a must. We go as a family otherwise I go with my neighbours. Out only recreation is this.

"In any circumstance I don't want to stop earning until I have strength I'll keep working - Even if they get me married I'll work." ended Mangalamary.

2. Alphonsamary 14 years (Meenamatty)

Having lost her mother when she was 12 years old, Alphonsamary was brought up by her grandmother who lives in the same village. She was abandoned by her father who has married again. It is said that her mother was a T.B. patient and Alphonsamary had a brother who died when he was one year old after he had acute diarrhoea. Her mother had neglected her health for fear of losing her income with which she had to support her children. She had undergone treatment at the government hospital and later at private clinics but not regularly until it became acute. Alphonsamary was sent to school but since her mother fell sick and could not go to work regularly, she was taken out of school. She says that she did not then want to study. She wanted to go to the fireworks and earn in her mother's place; since her father's income was not enough.



She has studied till the 4th standard and today she regrets but feels that she cannot go to school only, since she feels that she has to contribute something to the family for bringing her up and giving her shelter. She says that due to situation at home she was compelled to leave school even before her mother suggested and today when she is earning she regrets that she could not continue her studies.

Her maternal uncle is a college lecturer. However her aunties are both working in the fireworks as her, while her youngest uncle is studying in Sivakasi. This family is another example of the trend which is found in this village where the girls are denied education and sent to work in order to educate boys. However Alphonsamary attends the classes that the adult education teacher conducts in the evenings. She says that while living with people other than one's parents she cannot even, imagine of doing things that she wants to do. Though she is thankful to her grandmother for bringing her up, the girl is slightly reluctant when she tells "If it is my parents I can somehow convince them that I wish to study and with my mother around, I did not have to do the household chores unless she was sick. But now I feel quite depressed at times." Tears were almost ready to flow from her eyes when the other girls whispered to the investigator. "This is how she becomes when we start talking about home while we work". Her grandmother relating

about Alphonsa's mother's death and how she managed to bring her up is always on the defence everytime the time she spoke. She says "If we have money, would we send our children to work? I wanted to send my granddaughter atleast to school but what will she do in case I die suddenly? Who will look after her if she doesn't earn? Afterall it is not a sin to learn working. We poor people cannot think of getting our girls married to families where they can just sit at home. Now tell me, can you fix up a job if she has studied? Now a days it is difficult for even boys to get a job."

When asked why the boys are educated in her family, she says "they will have to shoulder the responsibility of their family and then may be they may not have to send their wives to work, another thing is that they were interested in studying so I somehow educated them."

Alphonsa's maternal uncle, who is a lecturer in one of the colleges in sattur feels that it is a common thing, sending children to work, especially in the villages. He had grown up seeing this and feels that it is the need for survival which compels them to take up the fireworks job. Though he is well employed, he is not able to stop his sisters from working because he knows that their earning would contribute to the dowry that he has to pay to get them

married off to someone who would keep them comfortable and not send them to work. About his niece he feels that he has responsibility over her just as his sisters. He regrets that he is unable to let her go to school for he knows very well that if he educates her he would have to find an educated boy for her and that would again mean giving a lot of dowry. So he says that he has to be contented with what he is able to give them. When asked if he would educate his children, he says that he would definitely try to give them the best.

The girl's aunts who are also working said "we have also been working from the age of 8. Now we cannot think of not earning". They agree that the type of work they do is dangerous. They argue saying that no other job is available there and that they are lucky because many other villages do not have any means of livelihood throughout the year. One of them says "what is not risky nowadays. Even when one walks on the road, he dies of an accident for no fault of his" while referring to a road accident which occurred a few months ago in the village. When the investigator just left the house she heard a comment from behind " people outside should know our lives. But can anyone help us out? It is not enough if one just hears everything."

3. Celina: 13 years (Meenampatty)

Celina is a shy, petite and thin looking girl who works in Tan fire works. Her father Lourdesami is a casual labourer who goes to break stones for construction work. Her mother Soramani also works in Tan fire works. Her brother and sister are married and they live separately. Her younger sister is studying in the 5th standard. Celina however has not entered school. She earns about Rs. 6 to Rs. 7 per day. Her father, who is suffering from T.B. was taking treatment in a hospital in Nagarcoil. Since it was a reputed hospital and because he found the treatment offered at Sivakasi was not satisfactory, he had gone to Nagarcoil. He says that he is recovering. He therefore does not go regularly for work. It is her mother and she who are the breadwinners. Celina's day starts at 5.30 a.m. Having helped her mother in some household work, she sets off to the fire works at 6.15 a.m. and returns at 6 or 7 p.m. She carries the left over of the previous night's meal and her mother finishes up the remaining chores at home to join her at 8 a.m. in the factory.

When Celina, grew up, old enough to go to school, she had to baby sit her sister when her mother went to work. Her mother says that she would send her youngest daughter to school until she could afford it. As she and her mother have got an advance of Rs. 400 and Rs.500 respectively they

had to work very hard to repay it. So she goes on Sundays to the match factory and on the other days during the season, she and her mother try to save money to send her father for the treatment. Celina says "I go along with the other girls to the small church everyday in the evening at 7 p.m. and I have belief that God will one day show us some way. We were desperate when my father fell sick. We only want him to live. He need not work. When I grow up my sister can help my mother". Celina complains of having stomach ache and diahorea very often during the summer. She also says that it is quite a problem because she would be threatened by the employer that he would not give any advance if they are irregular. So she would not afford to rest at home even if she is sick unless it is acute. She says that once she starts working regularly during the season, she also has dry patches on her face and her arms and that when she applies turmeric the skin develops an irritation and gets pulled. Celina, finally say "why should I feel bad that I did not study? Am I not earning without studying? I'm happy because we can eat twice a day. We should thank God for it".

4. Lourdemary 13 years (Meenampatty)

When the investigator met a bunch of girls one afternoon, this girl, Lourdemary was the first one to answer

any question. She is quite a sharp, smart young girl who sounded quite defeated and fatalistic. To hear a girl in her teens speak of life with such undue indifference is quite startling. Lourdemary works in Parvathy fireworks. Her father does not have a job where as her mother works in Guru fireworks earning Rs.10 to Rs.12 per day. Her brother Anthonicrusu has migrated to Kerala for the off season. Lourdemary works for Rs.8 to Rs.9 per day. The girl, when asked about her work says "Like how you educated people go to office, we go to the fireoffice here. Actually I prefer it to working in the fields. It is so decent. When we work we keep talking. Only 5 or 6 of us are in one room and usually we friends sit together. We talk about the sermon we hear at church. We talk about the movies etc. and we whisper mostly because our foremen would scold us saying that we might not be able to earn much". Since her mother had got advance from Gurufireworks. She is forced to work there for some time. However she had initially accompanied her mother until she finished her 3rd standard. After that she joined her friends at the age of 8 and started working regularly. When asked about how she felt while working with fireworks she says that until they are 15 years old they are usually made to join or make the cracker ignition thread. They also make small crackers. She then suddenly says, "we are all very frightened of the rains and lightning. All the

accidents have occurred during the rains. All of us drop everything and run home when we hear the rain: Though we have this fright, we know well about the risk we are taking. If we have to die there, no one can stop it". She pauses and when the investigator interrupts she continues this time with a voice so firm, 'If I die let me die. We are ready for all that before we join'. The ease with which these girls spoke of death was something very unnatural at this age. When asked if she wanted to leave the job and go to school if given a chance, Lourdemary just gives a smile and says "when I was in school, I wanted to go to the fireworks and now I want to go to school we will get food in the school but what can we do about the others at home. I want to go to work also" Lourdemary does not complain of any sickness she however says "we (I and my friends) prefer to go to church rather than to the hospital when we fall sick and it is effective."

After this talk, many a day the investigator spotted Lourdemary often talking in a similar tones quite cheerfully looking as if she is making the best out of every minute that she is living. She sounds very triumphant, trying to defeat the very same causes which have driven her to face such situations in life. (It was observed that she was the unelected leader of her clique and it was only after she replied the others joined, every time).

As observed, all the children spoken to justify their preference to work rather than to just study only in the grounds that it could enable them to have a meal everyday. They feel that they would be a burden if they do not economically contribute to the family. To them education is a luxury and something which does not pay back.

5. Murugalakshmi 4 years (Venkatachalapuram)

When the investigator visited the Balwadi inside the village, the teacher there showed her a few children who attended the Balwadi regularly but after finishing lunch they would run back home to join their parents to work in the match unit; Murugalakshmi is one among those. She looks very miserably thin and looked up with a frightened expression, suspecting the investigator, to be a health worker come to give injections. Murugalakshmi's father Pichayya is a construction worker and mother Azhagamma goes to sattur (a neighbouring town) to powder or grind flour. She comes back to work in the match unit where the family is given a house. Murugalakshmi goes to work at 2 '0' clock in the afternoon and at the end of the day manages to fill up only 2 frames which fetches her Re 1/- a day.

The family have migrated from Edasuruli near Tuticorin about 3 to 4 hours away from the village.



Murugalakshmi is the only daughter and her parents in their struggle to make their ends meet did not think of having any other child. The mother who is not very much used to this work at the match factory works only for a few hours here and then goes to grind flour at Sattur. They have been given a quarter only with the agreement that the mother puts in most of her time in the match unit and does a few sundry jobs like cleaning the unit. They had been agricultural labourers and also working at the salt works. However they did not have regular income.

They had come here one and a half years back in search of employment and since her parents are new to the job they are unable to earn much. Their family income is barely Rs.400/- per month. Her mother did not want to part away with any details for fear that the owner would be displeased. She however says that they have got an advance of Rs. 800/- when they came and are unable to pay back now. She says that Murugalakshmi has to learn the job now itself so that she would get used to working very soon. 'There is no other go' she says 'I cannot educate her. We do not have money. Moreover we have to pay back the advance. We have spent all the money that we got as advance.' Murugalakshmi says that she wants to study in school. She adds that she does not play. She does not speak coherently and often blinks when asked something.

6. Rajaveni 10 years (Venkatachalapuram)

Rajaveni looked like many of the other children of the village, dressed in duty clothes, hair strewn and stained teeth. She was with her mother, not working for the past few days since she fell sick too after. She looked pathetic leaning on one of the pillars, coughing continuously. Her father krishnaswamy Naicker is a building contractor who takes people from the village for construction work at suttur. Her mother perumalamma works in the match factory belonging to one of her relatives. Her brother is also a foreman and her sister Manjula is working in the match unit. Only her younger brother, studies in the 4th standard in the local school. Though everyone is employed in her family, Rajaveni like the other girls in the village was expected to learn the trade rather than go to school. She and her sister have never entered school. Her mother says that if they have also hired a factory or built one like many of her relatives then she could have thought of educating the children. Her husband is not interested in it and moreover they did not have enough capital. They are one of the few Naicker families working in other people's unit. Rajaveni is however allergic to the chemicals used in match making and she has breathing problem often. Her mother says that even before she started working she had the problem and she was taking treatment at a private hospital at Vindhunagar.

However it was not of much use. Now, the girl does not work regularly but as there is no one who could afford to spend a whole morning to take her to the hospital for regular treatment, they prefer to give her injections at a private clinic and arrest it for the moment. She also adds that many children have the same problem but not as acute as Rajaveni. Her brother says "we can only give her the treatment that we can afford. We cannot see her suffering but what to do?" Rajaveni just said "Akka (sister), I get a backache and I know. I' will get the attack after it. I used to get frightened but now I am used to it. No one else should ever get this problem".

"When I see my brother's slate and pencil, I feel like writing and reading but I don't have time and there is no one to teach".

"When I have the breathing problem, I feel like drinking something hot always and each time I cannot trouble my mother".

Her mother ends up saying "I cannot take care of her even when she is sick. On those days I cook twice a day. Such diseases should come only for rich people".

7. Yasodhai 14 years (Venkatachalapuram)

Yasodhai is a young attractive girl dressed in a half saree and also hails from a traditional Naicker family. Though she is employed, she does not go to a match factory to work. However she fills up the frames at her home itself. Like many of the middle class and upper middle class naicker households; it is a matter of prestige which restricts her from sitting in a unit along with the other children. Except for a few words, she is not allowed to answer anything while the investigator speaks to her.

Yasodhai has lost her parents; she lost her mother when she was quite young and father passed away 2 years back. Her sister-in-law says that they have an own house and brother works for a firm in sattur. After her father's death she was forced to learn the job and her sister-in-law says that since her brother's income was not sufficient she sent the girl to work and she wants her to share the responsibilities. "If not for anything atleast for her own sake and for her marriage she has to earn something." The sister-in-law however does not know the job so she has taken up tailoring. It is remarked by her neighbours and her sister-in-law that Yasodhai works only if her sister-in-law is around to check her. Otherwise she is not inclined to work. Yasodhai admits that does not like working and

prefers to be a housewife. While some of her friends went to school (to sattu), she also wished she could join them. When asked why she did not take up tailoring she says that she cannot earn much with it. She now earns about Rs.10 a day. She frankly says "If we were well off I would not like to work. I don't like doing anything else except household work."

8. Vijaya 12 years

Vijaya works in Shivaraj Match Works. She has a brother, Suresh; 8 years old and a sister Revathy one and a half years old. Her father Paulraj is a lorry cleaner and her mother also works in a match factory. She goes at 6 in the morning and comes back at 6 or 7 in the evening. She is another girl, who detests working. She often pesters her mother to send her to school. She has just studied till the 1st standard. Her mother however says that she was poor at studies, so she was taken out of school. She feels that it is a waste of money sending children to the local school and cannot afford to send elsewhere. Though her mother earns Rs.10 to 12 per day and her father Rs.400 per month; and she earns Rs.5/- per day; her mother says that she cannot save anything for Vijaya is prone to some sickness often and she is very weak and they have to spend almost Rs.100 for medical expenses. Though her mother has undergone

Laproscopy, it was a failure and she had the third child. She even says that she is an unwanted child. Her mother then said "only if we put our girls to sit to work, they will get into practice. Just like how we teach household work at an early age; they are made to get into the practice of sitting to work for some hours continuously. Only if we make them sit now, they will learn". She continues saying "we do not have lands. We have a own house. "I don't prefer my daughter to work in the sun and moreover this work does not need any special skill. Whereas in the fields one should do it efficiently and toil hard." The girl, Vijaya however says that she now feels like going to school, for the work is monotonous and tiring. My mother will not be convinced if I tell her that I would rather study and get a good job. I have to listen to whatever the foreman or owner says: When I was young I had to go anywhere on errands that they ask me to go. Now they do not send me to shops. They give us job so, they want us to do anything that they want. I don't like being like this."

## Case studies of Boys Working in Match and Fireworks

### 1. Kalimuthu 12 years

Kalimuthu works for Royal Match Factory in Venkatachalapuram along with his mother, Subba. His father Motaisany (40 years) is a casual labourer who takes up jobs like loading cargo in Sattar and he earns around Rs.8 per day. His mother and sister Krishnamma (20 years) together earn Rs.25 to Rs.30 per day. He is the fourth child in the family. His elder brother Marinutha (16 years) is not working anywhere and his next brother Shankar (14 years) grazes cattle. He has 2 younger brothers and a sister who stay at home. Kalimuthu earns around Rs.5.50 per day. However, his mother says that he is very irregular and suddenly absconds. He has been working from 7 years of age before which he used to accompany his mother but does not work seriously. Since they belong to the scheduled caste (Pakadai) the government has helped them in building their house. They belong to the same village and Motaisany had earlier been working as an agricultural labourer during the rains for the Naickers. The parents feel that the girl is better off than their sons as the sons roam around idly and the girls are more responsible towards their home. The father however agrees that it is easy for the girls to get a job within the village whereas the boys have to go to Sattar

and earn some job. None of the children have entered school and the father feels that it is enough if one knows to sign for the type of job they would all get. Kalimuthu does envy children of the Naickers who go to Sathur to study because they do not have to work. He says that his mother does not scold him if he works properly. But he feels restless when he sees the other boys roaming around. Kalimuthu looks very weak and when asked if he falls sick often, his mother says that he complains of headache and stomach ache often and has fever very frequently. He is usually taken to the government hospital and never to a private doctor because they have to pay him. Kalimuthu says that his employer is strict with him if his mother complains to him. When asked about the welfare schemes and legal provisions, his mother and sister are aware only of the Minimum Wages Act. But they are highly sceptical about any of the provisions for they believe that since all of them are dependent on this industry within the village they will be forced to work with whatever conditions and rate of wages is provided. Moreover they cannot demand for anything; more so because they are harijans and even their parents do not talk back to the Naickers. Kalimuthu however is only interested in going to movies and is ignorant of anything happening around him when asked about his sister's marriage and as to who will contribute to the family earning after her, he says that his



parents would get her married in some months and he will work here only for some more time and then would switch on to some other job because 'boys do not work in the frame filling and before filling section after they are grown up.'

2. Kathiresan: 12 years

Kathiresan is the youngest son of Sewaraj (48 years) and Kolandaitheres (44 years). Selvaraj has a cart with which he carries loads or goods in Sivakasi. He earns Rs.90 per week. His wife is employed in the fireworks. He has studied till the 6th and she till the 7th standard. Out of 7 children, two of his children Gunaskharan and Rosemary are married and they live separately. Their son Ravi died in a fire accident in 1979. While Baskaran (20 years) is doing his graduation, Moorthy (18 years) is employed as a tailor. Next is Krishnaveni who is employed in the fireworks like Kathiresan. Krishaveni and Kathiresan have studied till the 5th standard while Moorthy has studied till the 8th standard. Kathiresan earns only Rs.20 per week for he does not work regularly.

The family migrated to this village twenty years back from a village near Kavilpatti in search of a job. While they still have some land in their village, they are unable to cultivate it because they have to invest a lot on the land and lack of rains is another factor. They preferred to

work in the fireworks because previously this was more profitable than match industry. They have also taken an advance of Rs.800/- which they would repay Rs.10-Rs.15 per week. Though their family income is around Rs.1000/- they are not able to cope up because Rs.300/- per month goes towards the son's education.

After Selvaraj who was employed in the fireworks earlier was forced to go out of it after his son's death. This family is another example where the male member as the head of the family has priority over the women and children who are dispensable. Kolardai Theres says: "If anything happens to me, he can look after the children or marry again but if he dies, I will not be able to manage the family in all ways. Moreover, I will have to depend on my children. If he is alive I need not fear". The family, however, received a jolt by Ravi's death. As one of the boys threw a stone at him and as he was loading the powder and fixing the ignition thread the stone fell and a spark was produced, thereby reducing him into ashes a few minutes later. No compensation was given by the Vadivel Match Works where he was working because they refused to sign a blank paper. Later as the case was taken to court by one of Selvam's well wisher, the owners agreed to pay Rs.2000/- in each instalment towards a whole amount of Rs.,.16,800/-. He says

that he was able to fight only because he had some contacts.

The accident has left a tremendous impact on Kathiresan who says that he does not like accidents to happen to him or family members. He has started working when he was 10 years old. He usually does the job of braiding the crackers. He wanted to study and become a bank officer because he could earn a lot of money. But since his brother was studying and he has to go to Sivakasi for higher studies his parents could not afford to send him. He does not like working in the fireworks. Therefore, he does not go most of the days. The parents feel helpless and they say that they would like to educate all their children. Anyway they are looking forward to a better future when their elder son goes for a good job. Kathiarsan however feels it will be too late to study. He says : "I sometimes feel I should not have been born in a poor family." He would however go to Sivakasi in a couple of years, when he grows up, earn some job in the printing press because he dislikes fireworks. He also believes that his family's future is dependent on his brother's growth and achievements. All he wants to do is to earn money through hard work and toil. His parents are however of the opinion that they can get their daughter married off to some educated boy so that she

does not have to fall into the net again. They do not want their children to continue working in the fireworks because they have had a personal loss. The family says that they are completely away from the village politics and know nothing except the factory, home and church. They do not have many friends within the village because they have come here to serve and it would be better if they are aloof and keep up their respect.

#### **Case Studies of People who had been Child Workers**

##### **1. Sankaramma- 27 years (Venkatachalapuram)**

Sankaramma is presently employed in Jayakumar Match works. She belongs to a village near Kovilpatti and has been working from the age of 8. Since she is married to Ganapathy Nadar who was previously a rickshaw driver in Madurai, she did not work after her marriage for some years. She has 2 daughters, Sabri (7 years), Veeralakshmi (5 years), and a son Veerapandi (2 years). Since her husband did not have a steady income, they had migrated to Venkatachalapuram hearing about the place from some of her relatives who are in the nearby village. [Sankaramma started working even before, she realized that there was something that she has not been able to lay her hands on. As she grew up she would envy the privileged lot who sat in school the whole day without having to work. But when she realized that working meant food she did not want to even

play after work. During those days the children were not paid as much as today. They went with their parents and the employer used to treat them very badly. Today she feels that the situation has improved much. She remembers occasions when she was beaten by her employer and treated badly by the boys of her age. She recollects the time when she was happy about getting married for it meant getting away from the drudgery of work. Being away from the match industry for some years, she had to fight her ends with the meagre amount that her husband earned. Since she is familiar with this job only, they decided to move to some place where both of them could be employed.

She feels that the relationship between the employer and the employee still continues to the same except that modes of coercion have changed. She feels that the employers still squeeze out the labour, but indirectly. Today they use the advance giving system and they provide housing etc. According to her "They throw the small fish to get hold of the bigger fish".

Her husband still drives the Rickshaw in Sattur for rent. But his income is not steady so she is forced to take up the job on all days. She however, has sent her daughter to study in her mother's village. She regrets for not being able to study and thinks that if she had studied she would

have got a job at least as an ayah or a worker in mid day meal scheme. Her husband has also studied till the 3rd Standard. She wants to educate her children and not send them for work. She fears tht the atmosphere prevailing here would tempt her daughter to quit school and start earning like the other girls of her age. So she has sent her daughter to her native village. She has already got Rs 300/- as advance for the year, but has not been able to return anything so far. She confesses that she had a tough time convincing her husband and inlaws about undergoing family planning and finally won. Her husband is not very happy about educating their daughter for he feels that he cannot afford it and has to get her married to a suitable match with lot of money. However she is firm about not spoiling her childrens' lives like hers.

2. Pasupathi - 18 years (Venkatachalapuram)

Pasupathy belongs to a harijan family and is perhaps one of the few harijan women who are employed in the match unit. She comes from a family of 6 and had been working from the age of 10. She had been working in the fields for 2 years before she came to work here. Previously harijans were not allowed into the units but when one or two units started employing them, the units in the entrance or in the streets near the harijans settlements are employing the

families. Her husband goes to beat drums. She is married very recently. No one in her family has gone to school. They had never thought of it, she says. She now earns Rs 7 perday and her husband earns Rs 300/- to Rs 400/- per month. She however has not saved anything so far. She says that she would like to send her children to school. But would stop after they know to read and write. The reason she says is "Anyway there is no other job in the village and education is not essential for this job. One does get a good job and earn more, by studying but we cannot afford to send our children to Sattur. Our money will be enough for our living. People say that we harijans get lot of concessions. But we do not seem to get any. We are still like this". She however, says that she would not have more than 2 children. She finally says, "However we try to come up we cannot compete with the Naickers. Nobody else can come up in this village. So we people should feel happy that they give us jobs".

Pasupathy very well understands that the Naickers are the highest in the power structure. Over the years the Naickers have been the ones who have owned lands and today they own the total match industry. The Harijan who were employed only in the fields have been now 'favoured' by some

Naickers to step into the units which adjoin their households. However, this is possible only in some streets even today. When Pasupathy says that no one can compete with the Naickers, she is very right in understanding the present situation where the Panchayat leaders or president, the MLAs of the area and other powerful head are all Naickers. Moreover, the industry which is totally dominated by Naickers has not so far given a chance to any other community, especially the Harijans to get into the Match industry.

Like other villages, Harijans here have not been influenced by the missionaries. Pasupathy says that if the Harijan families are assured of livelihood by the church then they would convert themselves. However, if they have to live in this village, they have to adhere to the wishes of the Naickers directly or indirectly. She prefers this job to that of working in the field because this is more lucrative and less tiring. She feels that unlike the Harijans in other villages, they are not united for any cause for most of them do not want to raise their voice against the Naickers. Within the harijan families, only a handful are conscious of what is happening to the coming generations but since they are caught in the web of power relations, they like to swim along with the tide. She is of the opinion that unless one or two sons from each family get



away from the traditional occupation of drum beating and boldly go out in search of fresh pastures outside the village the situation would not change. The older generation, however, restricts the mobility and wants to please the big heads of the village. The Harijans today are economically at a very low level that they cannot think of sending their children to study. It was before a few months that some party men tried to organise the harijans of the village but were thrown out of the village by the Naickers. Though they know that the state provides them certain concessions, they are not aware of how to avail them and are more worried if they would displease the naickers by doing so. Pasupathy ends saying that perhaps if they get out of the village they would be able to live differently until then, they would be obliged to please the Naickers.

3. Vinayakam - 20 years

Vinayakam and her sisters are all employed in Vellammal match works in Venkatachalapuram. They are working here for the past 6 years. They are the natives of Tuticorin and were working in the salt manufacturing units there. Having heard from their relatives about the advance and the wages here the family shifted to Venkatachalapuram. Her father who was working in a press, passed away 3 years back. Her mother Vellamma is an ayah in the Nutrition-meal scheme. The

girls prefer working in a match unit to their previous job since they need not work in the sun. None of the sisters have gone to school. Vinayakam does not regret being uneducated because she did not have any loss because she did not have any loss because of it. Her work does not require it, she says. "Now all my friends talk about educating their children. But if it is decided that they would be in the village it is better they learn this job". She hears people talk about unemployment among the educated and feels that it is better that one learns some trade and become skilled. Her sister argues that, after all, one has to always buy matches and the industry would survive for a long time. Also they need not have to go out of the village to work and it is best suited for women. But if they get married and go elsewhere they will have problems. They however conclude saying that decision about marriage is left to their mother and relatives. When asked how much of freedom their economic independence has given them, Sornam says "women should be women, how much even they earn".

Their mother said "My daughters do not even go out on their own, either I accompany them or they go with our neighbours. My eldest daughter decides everything in my absence. If I had a son he would have taken over". Having lost their father, the mother has taken over the responsibilities because they do not have a brother. So in

this case, the mother decides the major things like ceremonies, marriage etc. along with her older relatives with whom they have contacts. The daughters however manage the rest of the show including daily activities. The mother agrees that other than economic contribution, the father had control over the daughters which she does not have fully as the girls are grown up and are independent. The father had always been taking care of the things outside home and when the mother had to manage things both at home and outside, it was a little difficult, for women who only go to work inside the village and manage the house. The father had always had the last say and had never left the girls on their own; though they were working. The girls feel that in their father's absence, they would have to listen to their relatives and the headmen of the village. Thus in this case too the male has a distinct role of breadwinner but not the sole breadwinner, along with the deciding authority on all matters. The women, however has a hold only within the home and how much ever she earns has to be the subordinate.

4. Anthoniiveevijan - 16 years

Anthoniiveevijan works in Parvathy fire works in Meenampathy. Her father Anthonicurusu is also a foreman at the fireworks. She has 5 sibblings and her mother passed away due to chicken pox recently. Her brother Geetharajan

studies B.Sc. at Sattur and her 2 younger brothers study at Sivakasi and at the local school respectively. One of her brothers other than the two mentioned above is adopted by her uncle. She is the only daughter and she was also sent to school where she studied till the 6th standard. Since she saw her friends and girls of her groups earning and spending of their own, she also wanted to stop studying and earn. This tempted her to go to the fireworks. Initially, before 4 years, she was frightened to work; but by seeing the other girls, she gained courage. Now she feels that it is good that she joined for she sees two of the educated girls sitting at home without any job. She says "If we are not educated, we donot feel bad about taking up any job but only if we study we are not satisfied with the job one gets. Everyone wants a bank job or wants to join some school". Talking about her future -- she says "I will work if my husband wants me to work". When asked if she would educate her children, she says that she would send them to an English Medium school if she can afford. For she feels that if one studies, one should study in a good school. According to her, studying in an English medium school is almost like a dream. She is of the opinion that the educational standard is higher in the English medium schools and people who pass out of it do well in colleges than people from vernacular medium. She has heard from her

brother about the adjustment problem that they have, when they enter college, about having to write some papers in English. To her, talking in English is directly linked with good education. She is totally convinced about the idea of having to talk in English if one has to get into the outer world and do well. She winds up saying that she believes in fate and if God would give her a different life she is bound to accept it. Otherwise she doesnot want to aspire and get disappointed. However, her family being religious, it is the only thing she wants her husband also to be.

While talking to her father who is employed in an established firework factory, he slowly expresses his desire to get his daughter married off to someone who would not send her to work in the fireworks even at the cost of giving a dowry. He says that he has sent his daughter to the fireworks and not to the match works only because he was not earning much, when he started working. He, however, wants to educated his sons because only with education and a good job, they can command respect. Otherwise, being Harijans, the Naickers and others would talk to even elderly harijan people without respect.

## Case Studies of Families which are Employed in the Industry

1. Paramasiya Asari = 60 Years
2. Ramalakshmi = 50 years

The couple have 7 children (5 girls and 2 boys). They have migrated to Venkatachalapuram before 10 months. The father is not employed for he is quite sick. In order to get their daughters married they had sold their possessions that they had in their village which is near Kovilpatti and as they heard that they could get advance here, they came to this village. They paid back their loans which they had bought for their daughter's wedding with the advance and since then the whole family is working here. Apart from the mother one of the married daughters, Vijaya (21 years), the others Jaya (16 years), Eskiammal (8 years), and Nagaraj (13 years) work in the same factory. They stay in a quarter (one room) adjoining the unit. The mother who is just learning the job can only work for Rs 3/- a day. Jaya earns Rs 10/- to Rs 12/- per day and Esakiammal earns Rs 2 per day. The parents could not afford to give any dowry for their daughters however they pawned themselves for the marriage expenses. The family works from morning 5'o'clock to 8 p.m. Even before the work starts this family cleans up the whole unit and starts working from 6 a.m. Though they have got an advance of Rs 2000/-, they have not

paid even 1/4th of it. The daughter, Jaya says that since their house is near the unit itself, they are constantly required to answer to the back and call of the owner. The small girl Eskiammal, is often shouted by her mother to keep her eyes open and fill the frame. The girl works as if she is playing with something. She looks very lost and almost everyday the investigator saw her dozing off in the afternoons. She was very reluctant to talk in the beginning though her mother asked her to talk and and keeps looking at the foremen. After a few days, she started speaking and told that she could not sit and work continuously. She always feels hungry and sleepy. Asked if she played after her work, she says that no one plays here. Everyone is busy working. So she sits inside the unit and plays all by herself with the match sticks. The other daughter Vijaya one day says "we have got the advance and they have bought us also. We cannot go and come as we wish. Even if I fall sick I do not and cannot be without working firstly because I will loose the money and secondly they would not believe it". None of the children have been to school. They can afford to cook one simple meal every day consisting of rice and some greens. Most often they have plain rice with a little buttermilk or pickle. Mainly during the rainy season they take the greens grown in the nearby fields. They cannot buy vegetables daily. Only on days when they get

wages they include vegetables. They take the same rice mixed with water, left over of the night the next afternoon too. One day when the whole unit had gone for lunch; this family had to complete a work allotted by the owner (after 2 p.m.) and only then take a break. The owner interrupts even in the investigator's presence and asks them to finish pasting the excise stamps completely without talking and go for lunch.

One of their sons 17 years old is working in a hotel at Kovilpatti. The elder son who is 17 years old and is working in Kocilpatti says that he is not contented with his job but since he has not got the opportunity to study, he is unable to go for any other job. His father had spent all his money on his daughter's marriage and they are now left with nothing. According to him it's a boon that there are many match factories, otherwise the women would not have any job. He also feels that it would be difficult to live with just one man's income and all the work at the match factory are fit only for women and children. Since there is hardly any other job other than the match and its allied processes, men have hardly any choice, if they are not educated. He would not prefer to send the women folk to work but he is helpless now because of his meagre income. His only interest is politics and he keeps himself well informed for



he feels that it is the politicians who decide the life of the common man. About his future he feels that it is useless to worry about tomorrow when one is not sure of today. Marriage to him is a ritual which his parents would decide. About getting his sisters married, he feels that fate would decide their lives. "After all" says he "girls from similiar class background have all got married". Being the eldest in his family he accepts his responsibility. He would however prefer to get married to a girl who is working.

His younger Sibblings Eskiammal and Nagaiaj are too immature to talk an any matter coherently. The boy is very playful and affords to get away from his mother's control by just absconding, whereas the girl has no other option than to sit and work. They only know and feel that if they stop working they cannot afford to eat. About their health, Eskiammal often has fever and cold. Her mother says that the children would be healthy if they eat regularly. The children have not had any major illness so far. The younger one who works in the same factory does not work regularly. His mother says "This is why we prefer girls. They, by nature are not so restless as these boys. They do what we ask them to do. These boys do not listen". With the family income of about Rs 500 to Rs 550/- per month, can this

family expect to eat more than 2 inadequate meals a day still try to pay back their loan? The father is quite haggard and sickly. They cannot afford to take him to the doctor regularly. In another 2 years when the other daughter will be married off, the last daughter Eskiammal who is 8 years now, would have to shoulder the responsibility of the family as the boy is not inclined to work sincerely. The son, Nagaraj, says that he cannot sit and do this work. He is not interested in working anywhere else too. His mother says that she will have to feed him till her death. Looks like, if children are not the earning members they would only be considered to be adding to the burden of the family. About the comment made, this has been an observation throughout especially whenever the mother is upset and shouts about the carelessness of the children towards doing their job. It only reflects the helplessness of the mother because she is not able to feed all her children with her salary alone. She often gets into fits of anger and keeps shouting at her son, asking him to become useful. It is only her anxiety that the children can be fed more if their income increases. She believes that she would not be able to feed her children for long with her income because she feels that she is becoming weak and cannot work for long. She would be only happy to see her children looking after themselves as they grow up.

2. Perumanayakanpillai - 50 years

Perumanayakanpillai's family hails from Thiruchendur. He had a teashop there which he continues to have it here also. However, since the others in the family did not have any other job he decided to come to Venkatachalapuram on hearing about it from his relatives who stay in the nearby village. His wife passed away due to Tuberculosis 8 months ago. They had migrated to the village 11 years back. They stay in the quarter provided by the factory. His children work in Vellammal match factory. The daughters, Seethalakshmi (23 years), Gnana (17 years), Bhuvaneshwari (14 years) and Uma (7 years) all work in the factory. His son Chidambaram (20 years) does not have a regular income. He is presently unemployed. However, he takes up any work like painting etc. The other son 13 years old helps his father in the teashop and the last son is only 4 years old. The girls here, too, adhere to the 8'o'clock schedule. The monthly wages that they earn is as follows :

Seethalakshmi	-	Rs. 200/- per month
Gnana	-	Rs. 300/- per month
Bhuvaneshwari	-	Rs. 300/- per month
Uma	-	Rs. 500/- per month

Their family monthly income is around Rs 950/-. However, they pay only Rs 50/- per month towards the advance

that they had got. ( It is said that Rs 10 is deducted from each family regardless of how many even members are working).

Their house has electricity and they have a radio. They look idly for breakfast and simple meal for lunch or dinner. Except the elder daughter and son no one else in the family knows to read or write. The girls say that they see at least 2 movies every week and do not work on Sundays. All the daughters look cheerful and answer without any hesitation. They say that they are happy that they have to come such a place where they could get work almost throughout the year. Talking about their mother they say that she was sick only for the past few years and was working too. The mother was taken to a private sector in Sattur only at a crucial stage. Though she was quite sick for a few months, just like for most families in the village she tried to control her cough with some home remedies. As there was no one to look after the household duties, while the children were working, she continued to prolong her visit to the doctor. Later she did consult the local health centre, which was functioning then. However, her disease was diagnosed only when she consulted a doctor at Sattur. She was taken to Madurai for some days but admitting her again meant lot of expenses and two members of the family,

getting out of job. So she was brought back home where she died few months later.

The eldest daughter Seethalakshmi was advised to wear glasses since her eyesight was poor and has constant headaches. But she does not want to wear it because she feels that she cannot work with it. She feels too tired often and has severe hip and Backache. Though she has gone once or twice to the doctor at Sattur, she feels that she would suffer until she stops working. When asked if they regret about not studying they say "we not feel like studying we cannot do anything now. We have to work and cannot think of studying. This is more important". Talking about their interests in things other than work, the girl says "who is bothered about what happens outside or in the country. We only want to know to read and write, do not see newspapers we are not interested in reading anything even novels".

The father is quite pleased about his daughters and recalls the time when his family was almost starving. He asks us why education is ever essential for women when they have a job. He says that if he had money earlier he would have educated his sons. Also, he did not want to talk about family planning. As two people had died in his native

village after the operation, he did not believe in it. When asked about why they paid very little back to the owner for the advance the girls say, "we cannot give the whole amount even if they ask us. In case they force us, we would get from some other person and pay them and switch on to the other factory". It is surprising how these girls, act and speak boldly even in the presence of the owner. They say that they give the money to their father and they think that he saves for their wedding. One of the girls is so obsessed with movies that she even goes to the extent of saying that she would marry a cinema-script writer. While the girls say that they would want to work even after their marriage, they would not do so if their husband earns enough and stops them. The whole unit is quite lively compared to the other units where girls just fix their eyes to the frame. About the unit, the match factory owner herself feels that it is essential and difficult to get a reliable and co-operative family who would stay for a long period. She says "we do not mind giving them freedom because we feel that if we provide them a good atmosphere to work and do not interfere with them, it is good for us also. They work with sincerity and stay long with us". The girls feel that the owners are happy with them for their is a big family and if they quit the owners might have to engage two families and provide housing for both of them.

This family seemed to be very different from most of the other in the village. The girls are comparatively more outspoken and independent and are optimistic about their future. The girls do not have any qualms about not being educated and feel that it is sufficient for working within the village. They seem to be interested in movies and nothing else. The boys have not been sent to the factory because the only work that the men do is mixing the chemicals. Since the owners themselves usually do the job, there is not much demand for other men. Hence the boys prefer to go out of the village and try for press or workshop jobs after 10 years of age.

3. Selvaraj = 46 years  
Kolandaitheres = 40 years (Meenampathy)

They are the parents of 6 children; of which one son Ravi (14 years), passed away in a fire accident, 1.5 years back. Selvaraj now drives bullock carts for hire whereas his wife is employed in Tan fire works along with 2 of her children. Their two daughters are married and living separately while working in the same factory. Their son Murthy (14 years) works in a tailorshop in Sivakasi while Krishanaveni (13 years) works in Tan fire works. After the death of their son Ravi, who, died in an accident while working, the family received a great shock and have just

recovered. The son was working in the shed twisting the thread, the burning end of the cracker, when one of his friends flung a stone at him, which fell accidentally on the chemicals piled up and caught a fire. Before he could realize what happened the boy was charred to death. The father who was also working in the fireworks was forced to give up the job by the family. They did not want him to work there for fear that the same end might occur to him. But it is an irony that while the father was compelled to leave the job, the mother and the girls continue to work there. This speaks for the superiority and the chauvanism culturally created to add to the image of a male. The mother and daughter says "we want him to be alive, he need not earn much. We will be on the streets without him". Though they are economically independent they are tied down to the traditionally developed emotional dependence -- the concept of moral support which a male can give to the so called weaker sex. This has also led them to send their eldest son to work in a tailorshop and the other son to school. The youngest son Kathiresan however joins the others to the fire works on holidays. Krisnnaveni says that she wanted to study but since her mother wanted to send her brother to school, she was forced to stop after the 1st standard. She and her mother have got Rs 300 & Rs 400 respectively as advance in order to send her brother to



school and manage through the off season. However, she since she has this job already, she wants her brother to study and get a good job. She is interested in learning informally but she cannot spare time for it. Her routine starts at 5.30 a.m. when she does some house hold work and goes to the factory at 6.30 a.m. After she returns at 7 p.m. she carries water from the well; atleast 10-12 pots which increases her backache. However, since backaches are common among people who work in the fire works, she does not feel the need to go to a doctor. Her mother feels that the people outside are giving undue publicity to their children, working at a young age. She asks "why do you people have to throw mud on our stomachs? After all if our children do not work how can we survive. Can we live with just the parents' earnings?" The youngest son to whom the family's whole attention and expectations lie, says that he wants to study and become a big man (was not clear about what he wanted to be ) but feels bad to see all others working and is tempted to go to the fireworks. While speaking to Kolandaitheres, more on the concept of dependency on males; she likes most women in the village is clear that their men give them physical security part from emotional security. Living without a man means many threats both at the workstop and in the village. Socially, a women is a zero without a man. She would not even be able to

attend auspicious events. However, she is clear about managing her life economically all by herself. Although her husband's income is not really substantial, she prefers that he works at a safe spot. It is she who is really running the whole show at home, managing all the affairs. She does not have any other future plans except building a home for themselves and seeing her children settle down well in life. She feels that however much a woman earns, the presence of a man is essential. She asks if one can guarantee a safe life without any sorts of threats to her within the village, in the absence of her husband. She says that she is not really bothered about anything except her family and so is the case with her husband. They are basically religious and want their children also to be so.

The whole family relaxes over the weekend and a movie on every Sturday night is a must. The mother finally says "we are thankful to God that we earn enough to live and cook a meal a day. We want to live a decent life till our end. That is enough. When asked why she did not restrict her family size she says that in those days they feared family planning and also true christians will not be expected to even talk of abortions. As her family like other families in the village respects the church and the priests they would not do anything against the church. They seek advice from the priests for everything regarding their

family. Thus it is seen that like many families in the North street, the attachment to the church is quite strong in this family too.

4. Sellaraj = 38 years

Anthomiamma = 32 years (Meenamathy)

Parents of 5 children, Sellaraj works in Maharaja fire works and Anthomiamma in Aruna fire works. Their son Pushparaj 14 years is an employee in Cornation press in Sivakasi. Michaelragini (daughter) is 12 years old and is employed in Maharaja's fire works; Anthonimuthu (son) is studying in 5th. The youngest Mariapushparani is just 3 years. They live in the Harijan colony and are the inhabitants of the village for many years. They have dreams of educating their sons at least with a family income of Rs 900/- they are quite satisfied with their jobs for they say that getting a job like this for a major part of the year is difficult. Moreover, since they are uneducated, they cannot find any other job. Since they feel much about not being literate they want their sons to study. They would toil till their last breath, they say, to educate their sons. They feel that since the daughter would anyway go to another family, education is not essential it is enough that she knows to sign and read. Michealragini, a smart, active girl however says that she wanted to become a doctor and

wanted to study but she was taken out of school in order to educate her brothers. She says "Now a days we see, in movies and also in Sivakasi, many women who work as Doctors and nurses. I always think that if I had become a doctor, I would be serving in my village itself". Her father, she says has continuous cough and they suspect it to be T.B. He would not listen to her or her mother's pestering to go to a doctor. He would not like to take a day off, she says. Michealragini is working for the past 3 years and has studied till the 2nd standard. She works from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. She says that she and her friends talk to each other in whispers throughout the time they work so that they do not have any tensions while working. They only talk of the movies that they see and about things happening in the village. Michealragini says that she does not like her sister to work in the fireworks. She wants her to get education and a slightly different life that she has not had. Ragini says that most elder sisters feel so. Her friends feel that they should at any cost try to educate their sibling or their children. She does not have any other go, and since she realizes it, she wants her sister to be different. About her brother getting preferences she feels that it is natural that they expect a boy as the next day head of the family to get a good job and change the situations at home. She feels that as the girls will not be

sent out of the village, it is the boys who have to be educated and placed in good jobs. The next generation would at least be able to marry boys who would not want them to work in fireworks. Many of Ragini's friends feel the same and they agree that they do not, now, have any other go than dreaming of their co-workers, as their husbands. It is a fact that the people in the village acknowledge such relationships unless there are personal differences between the families. Also it is commonly felt, that, the girls need not be educated, not only because, they go away and investing on them is a waste, but also because they might have to search an educated groom, which would mean more dowry. However, investing on the son would be an asset and their couple also feel that their sons would keep them comfortable.

Ragini then slowly says that she sometimes has problems when she and her friends are followed by boys working in the nearby units, which all girls working in the fireworks will have to face. The boys of the same village do not normally tease them and she narates how some of the girls ran away from their homes to marry the boys. When asked if the employees do not object to them she says that they are happy because they would be assured that the family would come back to work in one place and even the parents will not have the problem of searching a suitable match. Michealragini in

the absence of her mother asks "who else would marry us other than those who also work like us? We cannot think of marrying educated boys. We will have to give dowry".

It is quite surprising how girls of this age could start thinking of marriage. Yet this is another reality that they are getting prepared to face.

The women who do not work in the match or fireworks business belong mostly to the Naicker community in both the villages. In Venkatachalapuram, the Naicker women in most cases take the charge of supervising the match units in the absence of the male member. Apart from attending to the household chores, one spots the Naicker women spending some time in the units to see if the work is going on well. On the other hand we have the women from other communities like Konars Thevars Pillay etc. who have migrated from elsewhere in search of jobs. There are however about 20 families among Naickers where women are sent to work in the units. The families have either been diowned by their relatives or have not been able to make money over the years to set up a unit. The rest of the women who work in the match units belong to the Harijan - parayar community. A few are employed as teachers, Balwadi workers or agricultural coolies.

In Meenampathy one can divide the total population into different groups, i.e.:

(1) The Naickers who are well off and do not send their women to work. (2) The Naickers and a few Thevars and Konars who are really not well off but insist on not sending the womenfolk to work. (3) The non-Harijan households where the whole family goes only to the match works and not the fireworks. (4) The families where both husband and wife are working either in government service or elsewhere. (5) The non-Naicker families along with the Harijan, who go to the fire works.

As the main focus throughout is on the families who are employed in the match and firework industry, it is essential that one has to portray profiles of the families which are out of the industry totally from both the villages.

Natarajan 34 years

Laisa 33 years

The Natarajan and Laisa are residents of Meenanpathy and they belong to the Parayar community (Harijan). They have 4 children -- Dev Anand (12 years), Vijay Anand (9 years), Lenin Anand (7 years) and Sumangala Devi (4 years). Natarajan is a conductor in Pandyan Roadways Corporation and

Laisa is working for the Tamilnadu Integrated Nutrition project. Both of them have studied till the intermediate (pre-University course: equivalent to 12th standard). Since both of them are from slightly well to do families, they have had the opportunity to study. However, they had both been without jobs and were forced to go to the fireworks. Natarajan totally detests working in the fireworks. He recalls the days when they were unemployed and having no other support, were forced to go to the fireworks. Today he feels that none of the children should go through the experience of working in the fireworks, anticipating anything to happen any time. Though he feels that the present education system does not guarantee jobs for all, he is still optimistic that if his children are given enough encouragement and opportunity to study more, they would definitely rise to good positions. Though he is a Christian by birth, he has changed his name and none of his children have Christian names since they believe that priority for jobs in the government sector is given to the Scheduled Castes - Hindus over the Christians belonging to the Scheduled Castes. He feels that over the years the Harijans in the village because of their increased number have been able to put up a stand against the Naickers on some issues. A few people among the harijans are being recognised by the Naickers because of their economic



position and the influence they have on the rest of the harijan community. However, he feels strongly that the stigma placed on the harijans cannot be erased for a few more generations. Laisa adds to him saying that till the present day the Naickers do not allow them to enter their households; they would have to wait only in the verandah. The Konars, Thevars and the other communities also do not step into the harijan colonies unless they need their help for something. Talking about the difference over the years in terms of the relationship between Naickers and the Harijans, the couple felt that the hold that the Naickers had over them has lessened much because no longer do the harijans depend on them for livelihood. However, politically the Naickers still have their candidates and they also depend on the harijan unelected teachers for the votes.

Talking about the economic opportunities available to a common man without much education, the couple feel that being a harijan sometimes helps because they do not have hang ups about going to the fireworks, if there is no other go. Whereas in other communities they still try to get into other jobs even if it does not pay much. Apart from the fireworks, one has the match works. However, not many men can be employed. Therefore, they are left with no other

option than go to Sivakasi to carry loads in transport agencies or elsewhere.

Laisa earns Rs.500/- per month and Natarajan Rs.1200/- per month. However, as they have taken loan for building a house, money is deducted from Natarajan's salary. Though Laisa is bent on studying further through correspondence, only to get a promotion in her job, Natarajan is totally against it. He strongly asks her if he has gone blind or lame that he is unable to support her. Laisa agrees that they have ego clashes and he has asked her to choose between him or her promotion. Many a time the investigator has found Natarajan arguing about this. She says that she has to give him total liberty to do whatever he pleases. He spends a lot on drinking liquor and cigarettes and regularly beats her up. Laisa however say that she stays on and puts up with him because for the sake of the children and also because she cannot go back to her parents or live alone in the village. It is he who mostly decides on anything about home. The relationship between Laisa and Natarajan especially that of considering the woman as a weaker sex although she is a common feature among most families in these villages. Though the children are frightened of their father, they still consider him more knowledgeable and powerful than their mother. Unlike many children of the

village, these children have dreams of becoming someone. They seem to be ambitious and even when they play the girl images herself to be a teacher or a doctor and the boys to be I.A.S. officers or pilots or even a chief minister. It is quite surprising to hear the elder son talking about politics with much vigour especially against the common political culture existing in the state. The children do not want to go to the fireworks at any cost because they are frightened and would prefer to go out of the village in search of jobs in case they are forced by situations. The elder son studies in Sivakasi where many of the Naicker children also study. However, when they come back to the village he does not spend much time with them because he is aware of the differences. Thus he prefers to be with a group where his presence is acknowledged.

Selvam    27 years (Venkatachalapuram)

Mallika   21 years.

Selvam is the eldest son of his parents. He has an elder brother and a younger brother. His elder brother is employed in the gulf countries whereas his younger brother is helping him with the match unit. Selvam's father Thiru V. Naicker has been an agriculturist and is among one of the respectable men of the village. They belong to the same

village and they own a match unit in which four families are employed. Though the family owns lands (4 acres) they usually cannot cultivate it due to lack of rains and ground water. However, this year they are looking forward to a better yield. Selvam has studied till S.S.L.C. and his wife till the 6th Std. They have two children. He lives along with his parents and their house is one of the terraced, modern houses in Venkatachalapuram. Selvam manages the match unit and is one of most enterprising young men of the village. This family is a typical Naicker family in which the women of the household do not even come out of their house unnecessarily and is very traditional in terms of customs and rituals. Naicker is of the opinion that the culture of the community should be preserved and by and large the Naickers of the village being related to one another try to maintain their unity. The boys are all married within 26 years of age and the girls soon after they attain puberty. The boys are sent to Sattur to study and since many of them have their own units they stick to their family business. Few of them have passed their degree and are working in private concerns. Whenever any opinion is asked from both Selvan's wife and mother, they mostly prefer it to be asked to the men because "they know better than us". The women's role is purely domestic and they do not find anything missing in their lives. Mallika says that her

husband unlike the other men does not mind looking after the baby when she is away or busy. The only outing that she has is going to her mother's house and they very rarely go to the movies or the bazaar. She says that most of the girls know what role they have to play in their in-laws house and since they are trained domestically and in all other ways, they do not have adjustment problems. As most of them are joint families the girls have 'expected, and realistic dreams' about their future until the girl gets married she has to listen to her father and then later to her in-laws and her husband. Since the women do not have any exposure to the outside world, it is the men who decide things and buy the essential things. As the girls will not be sent to work it is enough that they have some basic education and as many of them come from families owning match units it is not difficult for them to manage if it is necessary. Talking about their relationship with the employees, she says, "it is better to keep a distance because how much ever we do, they consider us as employees only. They are paid well now, given advance and housing. What else do they need?"

Coming to the question of the future the couple is optimistic about the existence of the industry and since the match sticks are essential commodities, the demand would be there. However, they want their son to study and become an

officer because being in the government means power and respect outside the village. Selvam feels that though the village might become urbanised, the Naickers will still be high in the social status because it has been so over the years and since most of the others are migrants they do not have sense of clanish feeling as the Naicker community.

## Services Available to the Children

The children employed in the match and the firework is Kamarajar district especially in Sivakasi and Sattur taluks to which the two village of study belong to, have been in the limelight for the past few years. Due to tremendous pressure from voluntary agencies and journalists the government was forced to review the situation in and around Sivakasi. As a consequence of the child labour (prohibition and regulation) Act 1986, the national child labour project has been launched on 20.4.80 in Sivakasi at an estimated cost of Rs. 13.89 crores for a period of 3 years. The main objective of the programme is the elimination of child labour, their physical and mental development and protection against exploitation. It aims also at raising the income levels of the families of the child workers by coming them under the existing income generating schemes such as IRDP, NREP, non formal education to children and parents, provision of better health care, improvement of their conditions of work and nutritional level by providing one meal a day<sup>4</sup>. However Rs.5.98 lakh has already been released and through the project special schools would be started through voluntary organisation with provision of vocational

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4. Revised project Report on NCLP, Sivakasi: Available at the National Child Labour Project Office, Virudhunagar.

education, supplementary nutrition stipend and health care for the child labourers.<sup>5</sup> This being a special project for the child labourers, the other services available for all children in general are the Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition project (TINP) and the school health programme under the TINP, one nutrition centre for every 5000 population and one health subcentre with a multipurpose health worker is provided. Then, there are the primary health centres providing basic medical care, mother child health including immunisation of antenatal mothers and children under the TINP scheme, anti natal and post natal mothers are selected on the basis of undernourishment and given special nutrition food. Similarly the children under 3 years of age are weighed regularly and given nutritious food. A mobile health team also visits the villager regularly. Again as a part of the school health programme, immunisation of children is carried out, apart from the chief minister's nutritious noon meal programme.

These being the services which are available for the children, other than the services of the paediatric units in the government hospitals at Sivakasi and Sattur, one has to examine how far they services are carried out in both the

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5. *The Hindu*, dated April 5, 1988.



villages. Firstly regarding the implementation of the NCLP programme, it has to be pointed out that 25 of the 199 families where children work have been covered by the IRDP scheme till '87-'88 in Neenampatty. A non formal school is functioning within just one of the units (match) whereas the rest of the children primarily those going to the fireworks have not been covered at all. However the TINP scheme, is implemented well though the mobile health team does not regularly visit the village. Immunisation and nutritious noon meal scheme are also carried out in the village.

However in Venkatachalapuram, 51 of them have availed loans under IRDP, However where as 40 of them have benefitted through the small scale industries loan Beneficiaries of the loan are financed by Indian overseas Bank, Canara Bank, State Bank of India, Agricultural credit society etc. However as the beneficiaries are selected by an advisory committee consisting of Block development officer, the panchayat president etc, one has to have certain amount of political links. No form of non-formal education is available to the children or the parents. The TINP and the nutritious noon meal scheme are carried out though many of the villages are skeptical about the quality of the services.

## HEALTH

The sub centre which is functioning in Meenampatty does not in any way contribute to the welfare of the working class. It clearly speaks for whom the service is meant to be available. The people say that the health worker, though stationed at the village is not available, except when she completes the visiting the school for the school health programme. This being the efficiency of the delivery system; can one expect it to reach the ones to whom it has to reach? The PHC M.Pudhupathy is way off, however, Sivakasi is nearer but the timings of the hospital are not in any way convenient to the working class. Even the family planning programme, which has a good number of beneficiaries, does not in any way suit the people's way of life. As most of the women, say, it is not advisable for them to undergo it because, they cannot afford to take rest or avoid carrying out strenuous jobs. For they have no one to assist them and have to get back to work as soon as possible. Similarly, many men felt that with vasectomy being done, their potentiality of labour has decreased and in one or two cases, the women have conceived even after the insertion of the I.U.D. This being the scene, the trust of the people on the state services cannot, but be discouraging.

However the Tamil Nadu Nutrition project is being carried out well. Though the focus of the nutrition programmes are on both mother and child, the child is taken into care only till 36 months of age after which he is abandoned. This brings us to the question : What services are available to the working child?

The primary health centre to which Venkatachalapuram is attached is which is 19 Kilometres away. It is situated near Raghapanaickenpatty and the bus service from suttur is not very frequent to Uppathur. The PHC is well staffed and the main focus of activities are immunisation and family planning while Malaria and Tuberculosis scanning topping the rest. Then comes the epidemic control and public health activities like watersupply, of digging wells etc. According to the medical officer they have achieved 60% success in Laproscopy. There are no x-ray facilities. When asked about the health situation in the village, the medical officer was not clear about anything regarding the village. However she agrees that apart from the health workers and the sanitary inspectors visiting the village, a negligible percent of the villagers come to the PHC, because it is faraway, the workers do not come under the E.S.I scheme too because many of them are not entered in the employment register and even if they are, going to the hospital at Sivakasi is not preferred because of the distance.

Though one could not get a clear picture of the specific health problems of children and workers in general, a report of the medical examination conducted by the medical officer, National child labour project serves the purpose. The health problems are Vitamin deficiencies<sup>6</sup>, iron deficiencies, malnutrition, worm infection, poor personal hygiene, poor dental hygiene, backache to posture adopted for work and contact dermatitis are the findings of a study conducted by a sub-group under the 'Social Inputs in Area Development project' regarding children. Regarding women the findings are as follows:

Back ache due to faulty sitting or working positions, contact dermatitis and Eczeme in working with irritant chemicals in the levelling and filling section, altered bowel habits and urinary tract infection due to lack of proper toilet facilities (indirect consequence). Vaginitis and leucorrhoea due to unhygienic surroundings with poor personal hygiene and lastly menorrhagia. The major gynaecological disorders are mainly due to multiparity and repeated childbirth with spacing failure to follow the family welfare measures.<sup>7</sup> It should also be kept in mind

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6. National Child Labour Projects, Sivakasi - Health Report, Dec. 1987.
  7. Vijayaraghavan, L.N.: Integrated project for the betterment of living conditions of women and children employed in match factories in Sivakasi area. Oct. 1985.

that nearly all workers are prone to air borne concentrations of chemical substances. The diseases can be identified only after cumulative accumulation of poisons. These risks are more insidious because it takes effect after a long period of continued exposure.

Inspite of identifying the high risks, the services for the workers and children have not been made adequate. Most of the families are neither covered by the E.S.I nor have the time to go the government hospital, losing a part of their wages. They are thus left to the mercy of the private practitioners. Thus the very purpose of providing health service is defeated. When the health services do not satisfy the needs of a vast majority of the population of the district who are also in the high risk group working with chemicals whom is it meant for? The passivity of the so called under privileged pushes itself to the choic of choosing an alternative only when one can afford it. All these reflect the gap between the government and the privileged and the economic reality within which the bulk of the masses live.

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

### Demographic pattern

A look at the tables brings out some significant features; firstly out of a total population of 685 in village 1, 45.69% are children while in the second village 42.87% are children. The family size of 4, 5, 6 and 7 are more common in both the villages. A high percentage of the migrant population is found in both the villages and in village one the majority are scheduled castes where as in village two, they consists of the 'others' namely the Chettiyars, Reddiyars, etc. Out of the total labour force 33.969% constitute the working children while in village II 30.935% constitute the working children.

Unemployment is high in male and female in both the villages in below 6- 14 years of age. It is high in Meenampatty as the children are no longer allowed into the fireworks.

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

	Adults			Children			Total	% of children
	M	F	T	M	F	T		
Village I	194	178	372	147	166	313	685	45.69
Village II	187	210	397	133	165	298	695	42.87

TABLE 2 : The Caste and Class Profile of Families

Castes	Below 250		250-500		500-750		750-1000		1000-1250		1250-1500		1500+		Total
	V <sub>1</sub>	V <sub>2</sub>	V <sub>1</sub>	V <sub>2</sub>	V <sub>1</sub>	V <sub>2</sub>	V <sub>1</sub>	V <sub>2</sub>	V <sub>1</sub>	V <sub>2</sub>	V <sub>1</sub>	V <sub>2</sub>	V <sub>1</sub>	V <sub>2</sub>	
Naickers	-	-	1	-	2	-	3	2	3	3	-	2	-	-	16
Konars	1	-	8	2	5	3	2	2	6	3	1	-	-	-	33
Thevars	-	-	1	2	2	5	2	1	4	6	-	1	-	-	23
Pillai	-	-	-	5	-	1	1	2	2	7	-	2	-	2	22
Parayar	3	-	15	10	8	3	11	8	9	2	4	3	4	-	80
Pakadai	-	-	7	7	2	1	3	4	8	3	-	-	-	-	35
Nadars	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	4
Dhobis	-	-	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
Others (Asari, Chettiyar, Reddiyar, etc.)	-	-	3	11	-	5	1	5	1	6	-	1	-	-	34
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>252</b>



TABLE 3: EMPLOYMENT

Age group	VILLAGE-1						VILLAGE-2					
	MALE			FEMALE			MALE			FEMALE		
	Emp	Unemp	T	Emp	Unemp	T	Emp	Unemp	T	Emp	Unemp	T
Below 6	1	26	27	-	26	26	8	25	33	13	22	35
6 - 10	16	39	55	48	27	75	21	28	49	59	8	67
10 - 14	52	13	65	61	4	65	25	27	51	63	-	63
15 - 20	45	8	53	43	2	45	39	10	49	61	-	61
20 - 25	11	-	11	28	1	29	18	-	18	34	-	34
25 - 30	31	-	31	26	1	27	12	-	12	29	-	29
30 - 35	25	1	26	24	1	25	17	-	17	28	2	30
35 - 40	28	1	29	24	3	27	33	-	33	26	3	29
40 - 45	16	2	18	12	-	12	22	3	25	15	2	17
45 - 50	12	2	14	7	-	7	21	1	22	6	2	8
50 - 55	8	2	11	3	2	5	1	3	4	3	2	5
55 - 60	2	3	5	1	-	1	1	5	6	1	3	4
60 & above							-	1	1	1	1	2
Total	247	94	341	277	67	344	217	103	320	330	45	384

	Village I	Village II
Employed (m + f)	524	556
Unemployed	161	148
% of the labour force employed	76.5	80
% of the unemployed	23.5	21.3

TABLE : FAMILY SIZE

No. of Members	Village I	Village II
2	-	4
3	11	10
4	29	22
5	35	28
6	18	23
7	21	25
8	6	8
9	2	4
10	1	2
11	3	-
<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>		
Total		

TABLE 4 : OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE OF THE VILLAGES

VILLAGE	INDUSTRY MATCH	FIREWORKS	AGRI- CULTURE	GOVT.	OTHERS	TOTAL WORKING POPULATION
V <sub>1</sub>	136	312	22	5	49	524 (57.77)
V <sub>2</sub>	364	-	42	6	144	556 (42.23)
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TOTAL	500 (46.30)	312 (28.89)	64 (5.93)	11 (1.09)	193 (17.79)	1080

TABLE 5: OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE OF WORKING CHILDREN

AGE GROUP	INDUSTRY				OTHERS			
	V <sub>1</sub>	V <sub>2</sub>	T	%	V <sub>1</sub>	V <sub>2</sub>	T	%
2 - 6	1	21	22	6.29	-	-	-	-
6 - 10	64	73	137	39.14	-	7	7	43.75
10 - 14	113	78	191	54.57	-	9	9	56.25
TOTAL	178 (50.86)	172 (49.14)	350	100	-	16 (100)	16	100

Children % of the workforce

INDUSTRY - Match and Fireworks

OTHERS - Press, Nib Manufacturing Company, Tailor, Hotel Worker, Slide Company and other jobs.

V<sub>1</sub> - % of the Total workforce - 33.97

V<sub>2</sub> - % of the total workforce - 30.93.

TABLE 6: EDUCATION

Educational Level (Years of Schooling)	-----Village I-----						-----Village II-----					
	Adults		Children		Total	%	Adults		Children		Total	%
	m	f	m	f			m	f	m	f		
No education	74	103	60	73	310	45.26	53	111	47	89	300	43.98
Primary (1 - 4)	81	69	70	84	304	44.38	101	94	68	76	339	49.71
Middle (4 - 10)	24	6	17	9	56	8.18	21	4	18	-	43	6.3
Higher Sec. (10 - 12)	10	-	-	-	10	1.46	6	1	-	-	-	-
B.A. and above	5	-	-	-	5	0.73	-	-	-	-	-	-

### Opinion about boys and girls education

While 28 of the respondents in the village I felt that the education is essential for girls also so that they become independent, 37 and 46 from village I and II respectively said that the girls should not be educated because if they enter the job market, they would deny the boys of jobs. 65 and 69 of village I and II respectively did not feel it essential as the girls cannot be sent out of the village for jobs.

Similarly 52% of village I and 57.9% of village II is of the opinion that the boys are to be educated in order to get into good job and earn more, the rest feel that however much the boys study, getting a job with out bribing and political connections and getting any other job apart from the industry, is not feasible in this area.

It is seen that the contribution of the children in the first income group ranged from 10% to 15% in both the villages where as in the second income group the contribution ranged from 24% to 43% and in the third income group the contribution ranged from 45% to 62%.

### Housing.

Out of 126 families in village I (Meenampatty) 94 are living in pucca houses, while 59 houses have first one room

each. out of 82 who live in thier own house 33 of them have built it with government help. 65.07% of the total families live in their own house. Out of the rest 44 families who live in rented houses, only 12 of them have been provided with quaters from the factory.

In village II however 107 live in pucca houses and 103 house only one room in their houses; while 23 have two rooms. Out of 26 of the families who own houses 20 of them belong to the scheduled castes and the other six consists of families who have settled in the village for more then twenty years and are naickers. Howerver the bulk of the families live 103 of then live in houses provided by the factory.

#### Ownership of Lands.

Just 3 family which are Konar families owns 1 acre of land each in village I; but do not cultivate it because they donot have money to invest and do not find it profitable. 3 of the families who had land had to sell it because of financial need.

In village II it is essential to note that 17 of the families had land in their native places but sold it because of the drought and less returns. 14 of the families

continue to have small holdings of land, in their native villages and since they did not find cultivating lucrative they have migrated to better pastures.

It can be seen that the migration is equal in all the income groups in village I and is slightly higher in the higher income group. Parayars and pakadai families have in both the villages migrated by a significant profession. The influence of migrants to the village II has been more by the other communities consisting of the Reddiyars, Chettiyars etc. While the advance giving system is an attraction of migrants to the village II, job opportunities in both the villages in the main reason for the villages from where the population has migrated may be totally dependant on agricultural economy.

40 of the respondents in village I answered that the primary reason for the decrease in agricultural activity is due to lack of irrigation facilities and lack of rains. 12 of them felt that there is demand for agricultural labour while 36 of them said that the industry is more profitable and 19 of them said that apart from the earlier reasons, the agricultural lands are being sold for fire works. The rest felt that loans are not available for common man.



In village II 48 of them said that lack of rains and irrigation facilities along with the industry being profitable, agriculture has declined. The rest felt that the industry is profitable and the cost of investment is high for agricultural.

### Employment

7 of the families in village I are employed in the same unit; 33 of them in two units while 10 of them in different industries; 13 in 3 units and 3 in 4 units. Many of the families are provided job according to the number of working members. The same system works out in giving advance also. However the families who are working in two or three units, choose to do so because someone would be employed in the family even if one unit closes.

In village II 102 of them are employed in the same unit. Since their quarter is provided by the owner they have no other choice other than working in the same unit.

The concept of dignity of labour developing the villages after industrialization is not surprising. However it cannot be denied that though one gives the reason of not liking to work in the fields because one has to toil in the sun, the hidden reason is that of the economic gains. Only

in places where there is choice, preference has a meaning. In these villages there is no industry which is an alternative to the existing industry.

40.47% of the families in village I had earlier been in agriculture and have left it for new pastures. The rest were employed as casual labourers and were absorbed into the industry because the wages were comparatively lower and have left the jobs because in the industry the system of advance in centuries or bonus attracted them.

In village II 62% of them were in agriculture before they left their jobs for the present job for the same reasons of greater economic security. However in village I 4% of them have switched over to the match industry from the fire works for fear of danger. Two of them had misunderstanding with their owner. The others had change of workspot because their service period of five years at the fireworks had ended. In village two 16 of them left their previous jobs for economic reasons.

From the table it is evident that it is families in the income group of 250 to 1000 who are claiming the advance. Their income already being low and with just Rs 10 or 15/- deducted from the weekly wages, one cannot but be skeptical

about their eternal debts. This debt would tie them more to the bondage of the employers. Who use different weapons to imprison the working class, over the years. Thus forcing the workers to be obliged to them for ever.

However, about satisfaction towards wages 58 of the families answered that it is not enough for the work done at the fire works, in Meenampatty. 27 were of the opinion that if regular work was given it is satisfactory at the match works. The rest were not happy because the wages were in no proper relation to the rise in prices.

In village II, wages being raised of late was felt to be better than earlier but since regular work is not given it does not suffice. 11 of them were of this opinion. The other felt that the wages were not enough due to decrease in purchasing power of the money owned.

#### Security Acts and measures

In village I, 73 of them had a knowledge of the minimum wages Act and E.S.I where as the 26 of them knew about provident fund and the rest were not aware of anything. In village II, only 88 of them were aware of the provident fund, E.S.I and minimum wages Act.

In village I, all the 99 of them, wanted the facility of provident fund because their service would be entered. 24 of them considered E.S.I a waste because most of the workers are not eligible to avail the scheme for they are not permanent workers. However they could get a loan from the provident fund. In village II 65 of them preferred the provident fund and also the E.S.I if only the dispensary is nearer to the village.

The respondents were too skeptical about both the security benefit or the Acts being implement and also the setting up of the union. In village I 113 of them found that a union is essential but the rest 23 felt that it cannot be formed. In village II 87 of them also felt that it cannot be formed as the owning class would not allow.

Rights to be claimed

Here is a list of the security benefits that the respondents look forward to claim.

	<u>Village I</u>	<u>Village II</u>
Housing -	21	-
Increase in wages, bonus -	56	32
Security benefits -	40	58
leave compensation		

Medical benefits	-	32	41
Loans, advance	-	26	8
Safety Measures	-	24	-
Job security, monthly fixed wages	-	55	73
Educational benefit	-	15	21

Apart from the increase in wages or bonus, it is essential to note that the respondents place importance on the security of job and leave compensation. It speaks of the uncertainties involved in working in this industry. Apart from this industry village one, which is predominantly fire works centred; does not have any other jobs to offer. 47 respondents feel that there would be no additional benefit even if one goes to sivakasi to work. 70 of them find it convenient, to be near home so that one can send their girls also. However 9 of them go to sivakasi too. In village II since the men go out of the village to sattur, the women find it convenient near home. 74% of the respondents acknowledged the opinion that it is good for women and children.

#### Feeling about child labour.

60 of the respondents totally justify children working saying that it is a common feature and there is nothing to

feel bad about it. 39 of them feel that they are helpless for they are unable to educate their children. 25 of them feel that the children would learn the trade soon. For anyway one has to get into the same job.

Nature of Job done by children.

		<u>Village I %</u>		<u>Village II %</u>	
Filling the frame	-	13	10.31		
Filling the box	-	14	11.11	126	100
	-				
Packing	-				
Piercing the ring	-	48	38.09	-	
Braiding the ignition thread	-	29	23.01	-	
Packing the fire wages	-	3	2.38	-	
Placing the ignition thread	-	15	11.90	-	
Cap office	-	4	3.17	-	

Age of joining.

In village 1, 49 (38.8%) of the children; have joined the job when they were 5 years of age. 65 (51.5%) of them have been to school and joined an their 7th year; 5 (3.9%) of them when they were 8 years. 7 (5.6%) childrens joined at 9 years.

In village II, 19(15.07%) of them joined when they were 5 years old; 6(4.8%) of them at 4 years; 48 (38%) of them at 6 years; 53 at 8 years (42%).

Liking towards job.

In village I 6 of the children preferred to work because they can earn and can eat. 21 of them found it very tiring. 8 of them had wanted to study while 30 were frightened to work in the fire works. In the other village 108 of them preferred to work because they could not survive otherwise. The rest wanted to study.

When asked about how the owner treats them 99 of them said that they treat them well and does not interfere. 8 of them feel that they scold them if they misbehave, 19 of them felt that the owners were demanding. In the second village 87 of them said that they were happy with the employers for they give them freedom while the other said that the owners are obliged to keep them well because they want them to put in their maximum.

None of the children in both the villages had any accident. However, the health problem as perceived by the mother and the child is as follows.

		<u>Village I %</u>		<u>Village II %</u>	
Stomach ache and diahharea	-	16	12.6	12	9.5
Skin allergy	-	11	8.7	5	3.96
Fever frequently	-	10	7.9	13	10.3
Cough and Asthma	-	4	3.17	10	7.93
Backache	-	28	22.2	32	25.4
Others	-	-		-	

In village I, 29 of them had treatment for their illness while the rest felt that it was not a serious problem. Out of the 29, 19 had gone to the private hospital. 24 families fo both to the private and government clinic. while 37 out of the rest find the timings in convenient the rest find it far and also the hospital is crowded. A study on Sivakasi by centre of social research (1984) remarks "It is significant to note that 19 chilgren get fever and head ache very often. This is not only due to mal-nutritional factor but also due to other variables such as the physical environment, ventilation facilities etc and long hours of work without rest, pause provided in the workplace for the children"<sup>1</sup>

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1. Centre for Social Research, 1984, Op.cit.



Thus only 19.04% of the families go to the government hospital in village, where as in village II 38 families that is 30.15% of the families avail the state health services along with the private clinics. 44 of them find it far from the village and cannot afford to loose a day's wage by going to the hospital. Out of the 41 children who had taken treatment for their illness all of them had gone to the private clinics, for they find the timings convenient.

Finally regarding the childrens view on their working and asking if they regret; in village I, 48 of them said that they cannot read or write well and therefore they regret; 67 of them said that they would get the same job here and they do not loose anything but not being educated. 11 of them do not regret because if they had gone to school they wouldn't be able to earn. They seemed to question the relavance of the whole educational system which does not offer job opportunities or security. In the other village 89 of them were of the same opinion because they were clear as to what their priorities one. The rest felt that they would not get any other job in the village therefore there is no need for education.

To end up 31 children from village I and 23 children from village II felt that they are given more freedom at home since they are working.

## Discussion

Based on the various conclusions arrived at from both the qualitative and quantitative data, one observes certain trends which are significant and in certain cases do confirm the findings of some of the earlier studies.

The transition from the feudalistic agrarian economy to an industrial economy which centres around match and firework industries is too evident with several implications for the existing social relations. First the dominant social structure reinforces itself in the changing realities that the same landlords (in our case Naickers in Venkatachelapuram) switching over to the match industry, the fruits of production are also enjoyed by them. Secondly the exploited section of the society which is dependant on agricultural labour finds industry more certain so far as the wages of labour is concerned. The changing realities make the nature of exploitation more sophisticated by creating an impression in people's mind that their future and their livelihood can be more certain in match and firework industry than in agriculture. The disadvantages of an agricultural economy also supplements to their conviction. In any case, they have to depend on wage labour for survival, so they prefer that which gives them a

certain and sure wage. This is how the new system gets legitimised.

Child labour in and around Sivakasi is a by product of this new economy which centres around match and firework industry. The amount of advance that is given to a family to join a match or firework unit is quite alluring. But by accepting it, the family mortgagages itself to the owners because paying it all back is not possible with the limited wages they get. It is too evident that economic compulsions do force the child into labour but in many cases the sophisticated mechanisms of the capitalistic process, brings the child into labour. For example, in the absence of more options, parents cannot decide the future of the children. They ultimately prefer the available and affordable option of putting them to labour. To them the world outside provides lot of uncertainties (relating to the future of the children) than the world inside, despite of the exploitative nature of the world inside. Also, children are made to perceive the industry as their 'home' and their working parents as a part of that 'home'; for they see their parents working in such an atmosphere from morning to night. Even when they grow up they think of getting married to their co-workers thus making match and firework industry, a life for them. The female children are forced to settle

down with co-workers also because their parents cannot afford a dowry if a better proposal is chosen from outside. Lack of education makes them further handicapped. In certain cases, it is evident that parents send their children to work in order to save some money to get them married in future. Incidentally the number of female working children is more than the number of working male children. The industry, while on one hand continues it's efforts of making them feel at home by creating such an artificial atmosphere - the latest technique being providing them music through radios while at work, on the other hand tries to create a fear psychosis in them as to not to go against them.

Though the units are scattered over the area, having placed under individual owners it rather helps the industry in more than one ways. First it does not affect their unity and they can avert any attempt at harming their interests. On the other hand it further continues to the disunity and disorganisation of the labour force. The class consciousness of the labour force is difficult to take place in a totally disorganised sector. Because of their closeness to the employers (in Venkatachalapuram), who often employ themselves as 'supervisors and foreman' the relationship between the labour and the owner gets highly personalised. The labour force perceives the owners as the 'real' and

anyone else as 'unreal'. In such a case, they are least likely to be assertive of their rights and demand something out of their employers. The limitations inherent in the state bureaucracy and legal process alienate them from the outside society.

The plight of the working child which is also the plight of the family that he represents remain unchanged and in some cases leads to further deterioration in spite of government policies, programmes and laws. The industry finds them passive and soft and their labour easy to be exploited. The state looks at them as if these children belong to 'sub-humans', thus they think of bringing changes within the industry only. Working children are being treated as an indispensable part of the labour process. A false sense of dignity of earning is being nurtured in them as evident in the study, some children feel proud of earning at an early age.

Coming to the health status of these unfortunate children who have been a victim of an unjust social order is not encouraging. Children of 5 to 6 years, though there are instances of 4 year old ones, are seen working. These are the ones which have inherited weak physique whose parents within their limited wages cannot provide good food or

nutritional support to them. At a time when they need good care they are sent to the industry. The environment existing in the industry can never be healthy and hygienic. It would contribute to the disease potential in them and make them vulnerable to diseases, though not now but at least at a latter stage of life.

The existing medical institutions as it is seen in the two villages do not cater to the needs of the labour force. They often identify themselves to the elite of the villages. As found in the study the health institutions are yet to create an impression in the labourers' mind that the system exists for them, too. They look at the medical institution with distrust and rejection. They prefer private medical services because for a labour force, immediate cure is more important even if it is expensive, than free state care which would cost them wages of some days labour. This assumption is being confirmed by our studies in both the villages. The opening hours of the state health units also clash with the hours of the industry, making it further irrelevant to them. The national health programmes like Malaria, family welfare and immunisation programmes do reach them mainly because they are target oriented and the job prospects of the medical personnel depend upon their achievements of the programmes. Follow-up actions of such programmes are not to be seen.

The state health service machinery looks to be the indifferent about what happens to the child who gets immunised or what happens to any person who has undergone tubectomy or vasectomy. Also, the state health service system overlooks the fact that these programmes do not suit the working population. This however does not mean to say that medical institutions or programmes are the single factors contributing to the health status. They are no doubt significant in the sense that they directly deal with the curative part which is more vital to the labour force, considering the nature of the unjust labour-capital relationships that exist in the industry. The factors that would bring the real change in the health status are rather not medical. For example, a rise in their living standards, which in many ways would contribute to a good health status is a political and economic question.

Thus, one wonders if the existing measures to even provide health care (under the health service system in general and the E.S.I. scheme for labourers) do not provide relief to the working child or the family of which he is an integral part. Under the existing odds the improvement of the health status of the working child remains a challenge - challenge in the sense without bringing a total change in the labour process which would further require a change in

the socio-economic structures, is it possible to improve the health status of the labour force especially of the working child? As we see in our studies health status has not been an independent phenomenon easy to be improved by a general health strategy. The problems of poverty, labour process and ill health are the interdependent phenomena which need serious and sincere attention. What the state does in the name of practical solution and pragmatic policies can only add to the complexity of the problems rather than resolving it. Any isolated approach which does not take into account the totality of the problem can seldom be helpful in changing the plight of the working child.



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INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE PARENT

1. Name of the village

2. House NO.

3. Caste

4. Name of Members	Age/Sex	Primary Occupation	Secondary Occupation	Educational Status
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1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

5. Income of Members

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

6. (a) Type of Housing Kutcha/Pucca

(b) NO. of rooms

(c) Owned/rented

(d) If owned has Government helped in building it ?

(e) If rented has the factory provided it ?

7. Do you own land? yes/NO.

(a) If yes (ii) how much it cultivated? (iii) if cultivated for how many months does it suffice?

(iv) If not cultivated why?

8. Did you own land and Sell It? yes

9. Have you migrated to this village?

If yes when?

why?

10. why is agricultural activity becoming less?

11. (a) Is the whole family employed in one unit? yes;NO

(b) If NOT in how many units? and which ones?

12. Reasons for choosing Match/Fire Works

13. (a) what were your previous Jobs before Joining the factory?

(b) what were your wages?

(c) why did you leave it?

14. Have you taken advance. if so how much? yes

15. Are you Satisfied with the present wages? yes/NO

If yes why?

If No why?

16. (a) what do you know about Social Security Laws?

(P. F., E. S. I., Minimum wages Act, I. D. Act, Factories Act)

(b) Do you think they are beneficial to you? yes/NO

Are you for it or against it? (Specify Reasons?)

17. (a) Do you think you should have an organised union to claim your rights? yes/NO

If yes what are the rights you would like to claim?

(C) If no, Specify Reasons?

18. Do you consider Girl's Education desirable?

yes/NO

If so why?

19. Do you consider Boy's Education desirable?

yes/NO

If so why?

20. what are the Job opportunities in and around the village?

21. why did you, Notgo to sivakasi where Wages might be higher?

22. Does the family go to the Government Hospital when some one falls sick? yes/NO

23. If not why?

24. How do you feel about sending your children to work?

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE CHILD

25. what is the nature of work done?

26. when did you start working? (age)

27. Hours of work put in per day? How much of break is taken?  
specify hours

28. (a) Do you like to work? yes/NO

(b) If yes why?

(c) If No why?