**Interview Information**

Interviewer/s Anthony Jude Sahaya Babu,Gajendran V., Mohammed Shakib M

Raju K. and Sangeetha J.

Place of interview Ennore Sri Peelikan Angala Parameshvari Temple, Annai

Sivagami Nagar, Ennore.

Geo Coordinates 13.198580 N, 80.315085 E

Date of interview 01.06.2023

Transcription by RK

Audio Note 1.2

00:46:34 hours

[230601\_AnnaiSivagamiNagar\_Int\_Aud\_1.2\_AJ,GV,MS,RK,SR.m4a](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G1-C_94lHdGSjOWJidm6d6fBZE9bEWqZ/view?usp=sharing)

**Interviewee Information**

Name: Anonymised

Pseudonym: R (Resident), R2 (Resident 2)

**Interview note:** The respondent was the President of the resident Association of Annai Sivagami nagar, where the Burma Tamils live. He was aspiring to get ‘Patta’ to their community and work for welfare of the Annai Sivagami nagar people. Annai Sivagami nagar is also called Burma nagar; Burma nagar is the most vocal identity to the place.

**Transcription note:** The respondent was speaking in understandable language. Thus transcribed as the response. The response has addressed mostly in with male dominance, keeping men in mind and also represented and referred to only men in his speech.

**-00:00:00**

R: Then we were getting only 2½ Rupees as daily wages. Then I have to take care of my family, so I was going to those (hard skilled/unorganized) jobs. More than money we need some regular jobs to protect our children. So we would go for any other work. Lazy people would not go for that job stating who would go for less wages, lazy people would sleep in the home, he might not worry about his wife and children. Even his wife would go for daily wage work, but he would not go. She (wife) would go to any domestic work and raise their children. There were such situations in families.

After I came here in 1972, I went for a job interview. I was selected for the interview, I was asked to appear in the Directorate of Medical Service (DMS) Campus and got selected. The salary was minimum, it was only 272 Rupees per month. But there were 11 members in our house, so we had to fill our stomach with 272 Rupees. I got married by then. On the day before the interview, I was going for a daily wage work of 2 1⁄2 Rupees. I went to a farm to dig water drains for Banana fields, though I passed the English medium matriculation school. My mother would not let me go to such jobs pointing to my education qualification. But I would resist that and I went to such jobs as I was the elder person in the next generation of my family, I had the responsibility to save all the 11 members in the family. I was working in Banana plantation fields, brick stone kilns; there I had to arrange the bricks on the woman's head, who would carry the bricks. If we go by morning 8 AM, the employer would employ us till dusk for 2 1 ⁄ 2 Rupees wages. Only if I get that money and give it to my home, everyone can eat. What we can buy for that 2 ½ Rupees, we could only buy 1 ‘Padi’ rice which is 1 Rupees and then the fish, it was cheaper then. We can get fishes for 10 Paise or 20 Paise. My mother used to buy that and serve our family. Our life was like that.

With that 2 ½ Rupees that was earned on the day before the interview, I went to the interview. I didn’t know the routes as I was new here from Burma. I went to different places, I went to Saidapet and then I reached the DMS at 1 PM in the afternoon. There I was informed that the interview is at 11 AM and how can we let you at 1 PM. I said,”I am a refugee from Burma, I didn’t know the route in Chennai. So I have been wandering without knowing the route”. Then I was asked to have lunch and come back to the interview. They gave me an application and I filled the application and left to have my lunch. I didn’t have money to have lunch, I only had 2 ½ Rupees, that too I have spent some for the bus charges and again I have to go back to my home. Then there was a Banana shop, so I had bananas and some water.

By the time I reached the DMS campus again, I was told that the interviews were over, so I called for the interview; by that time you were not present. I went directly to the incharge officer and met him. There is a traditional practice in our place, which a native person taught me. He told me that our country is a palace where people expect respect, we should approach people in a rough manner, we have to present ourselves with humility and simplicity.While I am going to the interview, I was wearing only a simple shirt and pants, I kept the watch in my pocket. While entering into the officers cabin, I left the slippers outside and went inside.

I wished him with my folded hands, I addressed him ‘Aiyya’(Sir).

Then he said the interview was over. Then he asked,”will you work well?”.

I responded that I would work well.

Then he asked where you are from?

I told him, I live only nearby.

Asked if I have a cycle.

I didn't cycle. But I told him ‘Yes, I have a cycle’.

Then he rang the bell and gave me the appointment order.

I have obtained the order and saved that job. It was 10A-1 employment. In government 10A-1 means temporary employee, the government may fire the employee any time. While working there, I took the Service Commission exam. Then I passed the exam and became a permanent government employee and I served in the government for 37 years. I have faced so much hardship, it was not just me, all our people have come successfully in such a manner with their hard work. If you ask anyone they would be sharing their hardships in their life. At present the people of Annai Sivagami nagar are living a good life, all of them have good facilities, there are motor bikes with the people, people have cars, they have their own houses; ceiling hoses. They all are good.

GV: Is that all because of the hard work and employment?

R: Yes, definitely. It’s their hard work and they work without disdain (considered to be unworthy of one's consideration). the kind of work and saving the money with their hard work.

**-00:05:00**

Whoever is disdaining the work would become lazy. Even my father-in-law had seven children, but he also worked for 2 ½ Rupees daily wages. Many others stopped working there, but he worked and now he is in a good phase. If we become lazy, we couldn’t have made this.

GV: Then the people from here were working in all the surrounding companies?

R: Yes.

GV: Were they providing employment to the people here?

R: Yes they have been providing employment here. If we show the Burma Tamil identity card, they would provide jobs to us. We could freely travel in Train, during checking if we produced our Identity they would let us travel freely. We had those kinds of offers in our early days. —---------------- (not clear). In the starting days there was an order to provide permanent jobs to Burma Tamils by the government; this order was concerned for the temporary government employees to make them permanent employees.

GV: Is there any G.O. on that?

R: Yes, there are G.O. on that. I have that G.O.

GV: Aiyya, you told me about the G.O. of ‘As it is, where it is’, can you share that G.O.?

R: Yes, I have that G.O. we are moving with that G.O. to get Patta. Now the Railway department is stating that it’s completely our land. Then K.P.P. Swami won the election, he is from this constituency and we have had a close relationship with him since his father's era. I told you about brother Veera Kaalai; Kailasam and Veera Kaalai were the leaders of the Village administration.

We all went to the Secretariat and visited K.P. Swami, then he called (over phone) Railway GM (General Manager) and discussed our visit to the secretariat for the land rights to get Patta and asked to make progress and help us.

-The GM asked to come for discussion.

-We went to his office in the Central (Chennai Central Railway station) and visited him at 2:30 PM.

-He enquired about the issues and status of the issue.

-Then we said that,”We are here for these many years, we need the residential Patta for us”.

-GM said,”Who’s land you are sitting and you are asking for the Patta (Yaaru edathula vandhu ukkanjikittu, Yaar kitta patta kekkuringa) I am saying this with respect, kindly get out of the land by yourself (mariyaadhaiya soldraan neenga gaali panni pooidunga), don’t make me to evict you (enna gaali panna vechidaandhinga)”

-We all were shocked by his approach with us. Only now we are slowly growing well since 1964 from the huts (64 la irundhu ippo thaan thalaa thookki vandhutu irukom, oola kudusaila irudhu). We got offended,“Why is this guy speaking like this?”

-We said,”How can we accept this sir (ipadi sonna epadi sir), Please give us a solution (edhadhu solution sollunga sir)”

-He said,”what you have asked is a fair question” and added, “you folks can also come to the court and we would also go to the court. Then we both shall accept what the court is deciding on”

What would the court say? It would only favor the government, not to us. Because it’s the government's land. Then we didn’t go to the court and kept silent. I have been the secretary since 1986 and then I contested for the President election and I became the president in 2017 by 2398 vote difference. Before that candidates would only win with minimal vote difference like 8,9,10 or 48. After becoming the president, I decided that we can’t be talking with our mouth, we have get into action, so we have decided to make a ‘letterhead’(letterpad), then we typed letter in English and sent letters to the Prime Minister, President and to the concerned officials/ elected representatives. I approached a lawyer, he was asking for 6000 Rupees. After paying then he helped with letters to all the government servants.

After sending the letter the Railway department has sent officials to inspect the land termed ‘Coordination Committee’. In that committee, the officials from all the departments were included. They were inspecting the land adjacent to the railway track to look for a number of houses in the railway land. In that inspection, they are finding 7 villages/areas along the track from Chennai to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Not sure if it's 7 or some other counts. The report says all these places have to be evicted. As we have sent the representative in the past stating our presence for these many years, then the railway department has decided that, other than 4 listed villages/areas they only required land from other listed villages/areas. These 4 villages include Moopanaar nagar, Durga nagar, Annai Sivagami nagar and Kalaignar nagar. They (officials) stated that,’’these 4 villages were 300 meters away from the train track, to the future expansion of the railway line these railway lands are not required. The people residing in those palaces are refugees (repatriate) from Burma. So, the land can be handovered to them”

**-00:09:57**

And in 2021, India’s Prime Minister made a statement stating ‘Housing for All’, it’s called Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) scheme. On that basis, every person has the right to get free housing. It’s an order made in 2021. Now we are progressing with all these documents with the central government, we are also approaching CMDA and looking if CMDA would provide approval as a residential place. If CMDA doesn’t approve our plots then we are planning to move to the Minister. That’s the status of our land rights to get Patta. We hope we have a 90% chance to get Patta.

GV: If you have the concerned document can you share it with us? Like G.O.s

R: Which document do you need?

GV: Government documents like G.O. that were passed during 1988; the railway petitions, the information concerned to the formation of coordination committee in the Railway department.

R: They (committee) were ground truthing across Tamil Nadu with different agendas, which has 35 agendas over all. The agenda concerning our village was listed as agenda no.29. I would also give a copy of the 2021 ‘Housing for All document’. I would also share the report of the of the Railway Department’s Coordination Committee report except the letter by Annai Sivagami nagar’

GV: Okay. You said that the GM of the railway department telling us to evict was a sad thing to you. Do you think that this place is very important to you in your life? You also mentioned that “we have grown till this position for those many years, now only we have constructed ceiling houses”. Do you think of that as growth in your life?

R: Yes.

GV: Do you think that land is an important domain to take your life to the next step?

R: Today, we have worked hard in our life and constructed our houses with our small small savings. We resided in hut houses; we were struggling in the severe winds and rains. While we were living in the hut houses, once every two years we had to spend on replacing the huts due to severe winds and rains. So once we got some economy in our hand, we would save some money, we would get PF (provident fund) loans, in some ways we would get money in our hand to start constructing our house, if the expenses exceed the limits, we would pawn our jewels. Even then, if the expenses except we would get loans locally and anyhow we build the houses. After all of this, if our houses asked to be evicted, how can we just sit and watch that. We would be resisting that, we would not leave the things as it is, we would be protesting.

GV: Have you done any protest for your residence?

R: Yes, we have done. Year by year we were facing coastal erosion, there would be houses on the shore. Sometimes, even erosion has taken the houses into the sea. Those impacted people has been given land in the 11th street of Annai Sivagami nagar and they are residing there. To address that issue we had a hunger strike, then the yester Chief Minister Kalaignar signed to save the village (not sure if Kalaignar was CM at that time). Then the stones (sea wall) were installed and our village was saved from the coastal erosion.

GV: Has there been any newspaper clips or news regarding your protests?

R: I have to check on that. It’s been so many years.

GV: How did the native community people, i.e. fisher, receive you? How was the relationship with them?

R: We are Tamils and we are coming here as refugees (repatriate). Anyone would have kindness (eeva irakkam) to such people. We are also Tamils coming from other countries with issues, so people would support us, would not bother us or resist us. But if you could get into our village now, we would not let you in easily, we would raise concerns,”what’s your duty here?”. Like this they were not creating nuisance with us. They were governing their own duty, we were governing our duty; just built huts and residing here.

GV: Can you share about your life in huts? You said it was a forest, it would be darker, how did nights in the huts feel?

R: After 6 in the evening the whole village would be surrounded with darkness; there would be no people's movement or buses, bikes mobility in this place.We go to work and we directly get into home. At most by 7 in the evening the whole village get settled in houses (ooru adangidum). Other than life would run in the hut houses; the land is larger and houses are smaller. So children would be playing in the open space and we would be sleeping outside on mats in the empty space or in streets.

**-00:15:01**

**GV:** Since when is the shore facing coastal erosion?

R: When the sea is turbulent, then coastal erosion would happen. During the storm surge, then the clouds would be faster while crossing the sea and it would erode the coast. Because of the erosion the houses on the coast would be slowly lost in the sea one by one.

GV: Do you remember the year when the shore had high coastal erosion because of the cyclone?

R: In 1984-85, there was coastal erosion here. Another one was in 1995-96, after that only we allotted land in the 11th street to the families who have lost their houses in the erosion. It was a larger cyclone, 14 houses were lost into the seas because of the coastal erosion caused by the cyclone.

GV: Do you remember the name of the storm?

R: No.

GV: Is it exactly in the year 1995?

R: It was in 1995-96. As the 14 houses were lost into the sea, the present councilor of that time was Beema Rani; she was from the DMK. Then the Municipality President was Vishvanathan. We met them and were informed about the issue, then the village(Annai Sivagami nagar) president was E.K. Ezhumai was also present for the meeting with the Municipality leaders. We told them that people have been impacted; people don’t have houses to live in and requested for a place to live. At that time, there was a canal at that place (11th street), which was filled with sand and houses were provided to the people who have lost their houses. The houses were given to all the impacted families that are 30ft \* 18 ft dimension.

GV: You were talking about the land provided for 4 Rupees. Who was surveying the land?

R: We did it by ourselves, we only encroached on that land. So, we could only do that. We are Burma Tamils; Refugee Tamils; we all are Refugees from Burma. If anyone speaks more by causing nuisance, we would give blows to them; our people would beat others immediately; our men would fight any billhook/knife immediately. So people would have fear and would not bother us much. Our elders settled in this place and they measured the land in 60 ft.\*40 ft\* dimension. Then the village was set up. Government didn’t help us with the survey, we did it by ourselves. But now the government has surveyed and kept it as a repository. To provide us Patta, Slum Clearance Board (SCB) from the government has surveyed our land and they are keeping it with SCB along with the family details.

GV: You were talking about the ‘Thirukkai’ (Batoids) fishes, like what food you used to consume?

R: It is not just ‘Thirukkai’ fish, there are several fishes, but ‘Thirukkai’ fishes were the cheapest fishes. Have you seen that fish? It used to feel like ‘pig’ meat. I would have flesh and bone in the center, even the bone can be eaten by scrunching it. But it’s only fish, not pig. It would be cut and sold (not as full fish). It’s the cheapest, it would be sold for 1 Rupees or 2 Rupees. Our economy was such that we could only buy that. Do you 1 ‘Anna’(6 paise)?

GV: I have seen and also seen that.

R: In 1971, we were all using 1 ‘Ana’s and 2 ‘Ana’s.

One tea was 2 ‘Ana’ then (might in next year)

1 ‘Ana’ is 6 Paise.

For 6 Paise we were getting 1 ‘Vadai’ or 1 Tea.

For 10 Paise, we used to buy fish.

I was staying as a bachelor for 6 months in the camp. In the evening at 4 PM we would come to market, we would buy tapioca (maravalli kilangu), that was 20 paisa per 1.5 kg. In Burma we would say measuring weight as ‘Veesa’, here it’s kilo. 1.5 kilo (kilogram) is one ‘Veesa’. As we were from Burma, they (vendors) would sell the things in ‘Veesa’. So, we would buy things in ‘Veesa’; we would buy big big tubers. We (bachelors) would go to buy fishes, the rate would be 10 Paise or 20 Paise per kg. A good fish with thorn was 10 Paise per kg, so then 10 to 12 fishes were enough for us.

GV: Surprising thing for me is that you Burma Tamils were residing on the shore, but did you not go for any jobs related to the sea?

R: No, we didn’t go.

GV: you opted for other jobs.

R: No, we didn’t know those jobs. How we would go to the unknown jobs.

GV: Did you not have the intention to learn that job?

R: No. People in finger counts have gone fishing, if a fisherman has a boat, they have been working in the boat. But they would not catch fishes with nets and they would not make fishing as their job. But they would do fishing with baits, rather than being idle at home some people (Burma Tamils) would sit on the shore with bait and do fishing. They would take the fish home and consume it with their family.

**-00:20:06**

Burma Tamils have been maximum as Drivers in profession. If you check on the PTC (Public/Pallavan Transportation Corporation; a government bus service agency) drivers, maximum Burma Tamils can be identified and also bus conductors. There were many Police from here, but it was then in the past generation. Now, people are not choosing police as their profession. Currently people are choosing different professions; many have chosen the IT field. I have 2 sons and 1 daughter. In Burma I didn’t study much, I stopped with Matriculation Schooling by the age 12. My situation here has changed a lot, I couldn’t continue my studies here, I had the responsibility to care for 11 people in my family. Then, how can I go and study? I didn't go. I went to these kind (hard skilled) works and in 1972 I joined the government job. I only didn’t study, but our children had to study. I made all 3 children study, my elder son graduated with a B.ScAfter completing the graduation, I made him join a medical store thinking he shouldn’t be idle. Because he might be roaming around if he is idle. But, after seeing the money from the job, he lost interest in education and he got into the same business; then he started doing contract work in the construction sector in the ETPS. Then he got more interested in the job and left it to him, I didn’t bother. Then I admitted my daughter to Ethiraj college in B.Sc. after completing her standard 12 and later she also completed M.Sc. in the same college. Then she completed M.Phil. in Pachaiyappa's college, now she has also completed B.Ed. Now she is a lecturer in a college. Then my second son, my son completed 10th standard, I asked him,”what would you like to study”. He said to me,”I would like to do polytechnic”. I asked him,”what subject you would like to learn”. He told,”ITI”. I only have to pay the fee, but he was securing good marks. I didn’t pay any donation or bribe to admit them into colleges; they were securing good marks. I paid 25,000 Rupees for polytechnic, he completed the 3 year study and passed out of the college. After completing the polytechnic course, he told me that he was interested in studying B.E. (Bachelor of Engineering). Then he was trying for Alagappa college in Karaikudi, then made him write the entrance exam. He couldn’t make it. Then I admitted him in the Veltech college and he completed his B.Tech. in that college, then he passed with third rank. Then he got a job in the campus placement. But he didn’t go to that job. Immediately after completing his studies, he got employed. Then he was supposed to go to Bangalore for his job. Then there was an economic blockage, he got stuck in that. The company informed him that, “we are not hiring because of the economic blockage” and was asked to come after the economic blockage to join the job. Because of that he got a 2 year break. If the break was for 2 years, the employer would not hire employees, especially the B.Tech./B.E. graduates. He was sitting idle in those 2 years, he didn;t go anywhere. He was supporting his brother. Then a person told my elder son to admit my younger son to a course called ’SAP’ which would provide a good job to him. So I admitted my younger son to that course in Taramani. The fee for the entire course is 3.5 lakhs; it’s only a one month course with 4 Sunday’s leave. I bought a 3.5 lakh loan for the one month course and I paid the debt. I admitted him and made him study. He scored good marks and he got employed immediately. He reached heights and now he is in high class. He is working as a manager in Nilaite’ company; it’s an American company. I think I am a deputy manager. His age is just 25 or 26. He even traveled foreign countries, he was sent by the company to work there. I was even surprised to see him at that range; if I ask him about his monthly salary, he does not say his salary amount. Then when I enquired, his salary was 25 lakhs per annum. He wasn’t getting a monthly salary, he was getting a yearly salary. I was surprised: Who is that company that is providing this much of a salary to an individual. Now he is sitting in that position.

Initially, if you hear his stories; I admitted him to Don Bosco School (a private school) as he was the last child and sweetie child to his mother. I would get over my cycle, but he would be adamant to go to the school and roll over in the road. Then I would lift him and make him sit on the carrier and take him to school in the cycle. Then he would scare me that he would let his leg into the cycle wheel. I would say let your leg into the wheel. Anyhow I would bring him to the school entrance. Once I brought him to the school entrance, he would get into the school. I made him study like this.

**-00:25:00**

Then he completed his 5th standard school and to the 6th standard class, I admitted him to the St. Paul's Mahajanam School in Thiruvottiyur. While going to that school, he would say,”I have a stomach ache, I have defecated”. To resist going to school, he would tell so many stories. If he wants to defecate, I would let him go to the toilet and wait outside till he comes outside. Then I would take him to school. Then he would insist me to communicate to his teacher that he/she should not beat him because he is late. I would say to the teachers that he is quite scared of you, please don’t beat him and take care of him. I made him study like this, now he has grown to this level. We have to compulsorily educate the children; we should not leave the children on their own will (avnagala ishtathuku vida koodadhu).

I would be monitoring, my son was pursuing his graduation in the Presidency college, I was working in the DMS campus and I would get many chances to go to the Secretariat and then I would give a jeep to commute. While getting out I would come to the Presidency colleague and I would get into the college and visit his class room if he was present at the college or bunked the classes. Because that's the college where students used to bunk generally. In the evening the students would go to the beach and to the cinema theater. So I would go to his college, only if I saw his head in the college I would come back.

Even to some of his (son) friends, he told me that I was not his father.

When his friends see me, they would be saying,”hey, there is your father”

He would respond to his friends,”He is not my father”.

I am not worried about it. I was there to know if he is giving the attendance and going to college regularly. After all that now he is a leading businessman.

GV: What is your dream about the Annai Sivagami nagar in the future?

R: It should be more developed in the future than the current statues.

GV: What kind of development do you dream for?  
R: What dream?

GV: You might have some dreams. Like you have moved from hut to this level, How shall the future Annai Sivagami nagar be? Such a dream?

R: Our dreams would not happen here. If I go to the shore, I can see the beach. On this side (south) we have Kuppam (fishers village) and on the other side (North) we have Kuppam. Any Kuppathukaar would only live on the shore. They would not have the thought to buy land, build their own house and live in that. They would never have this thought. Even if the government built the houses and provided them, they would not stay there. They would rent those houses and again move to the coast to live. Then our dreams can’t be theirs.

But to our village, we need to bring developmental plans. We would not leave any government schemes. We don’t have a sewage drainage system, I tried. I would go to Adyar, then K.P. Munuswami was the Municipal Administration Minister from ADMK. I would go to him at morning 7 AM and would be discussing this, he would keep pulling the work to be done. Then I took ADMK party members to force him to take action. Then he said that only 6 cores got sanctioned, the project cannot be completed and the project was set aside. Then we met Kuppan MLA and informed about our issue. This was discussed in the State Legislative Assembly and 8.5 crores was sanctioned and now in our village (ooru) we have sewerage drainage system. Today our village has good growth, people have built their own houses and are living well; well educated. I would say people have been getting more and more education. Only drawback is we don’t have IPS and IAS from our village. I tell them to study these, they are encouraged to do it. But no one is here to attain it. If people attain it, my dreams would be fulfilled.

GV: Why do the IPS and IAS dream?

R: That's the high level qualification in education. If a person completes IAS, then there would be a Collector from our village; isn’t that a pride to my village?

GV: Yes, it’s a pride.

R: There are even judges in our village. If someone says,”see there, she is Annai Sivagami nagar Judge”. It’s a pride to us. That's the same for the IPS and IAS postings. There are many constables, but don’t have IAS and IPS are not there.

GV: Your future dream is your village people have to go to bigger responsibilities and to good jobs.

R: Yes. There are people who are in a good position. Even though they have to achieve more and get elevated.

MS; You have faced many hardships and you have brought your village to this good position. Now you children, other children have faced lesser hardship and experienced good things than you. For example you son is working in foriegn country; suppose if that is happening for everyone in the community like they are getting good jobs, good salary and they are getting chance to travel abroad for jobs. Then, would this village be present with the dream that you aspire for? Would Annai Sivagami Nagar be the same as this unity?

R: Everyone would not think like me. I had the experience, so I have told you. I have faced hardships, my son's situation was supposed to be like that, my family situation. I have been hit by many obstacles—-----. If we ask the same, how would he say the same thing? He might have different mindsets and different aspirations for their children.

**-00:30:22**

My son went to the foreign, and his expenses were taken care of by the company. So, I was able to share it with you. I wish this would happen to everyone. But there are uneducated people, what can be dreams of children who are not educated.

MS: My question is not with education; I am asking that you have taken the village responsibilities, in future who would be taking these responsibilities?

R: There are people, who would take responsibility. There is an upcoming election next month. Then people would be contesting, then whoever is elected would take over the responsibilities. My tenure gets over by then. I might also stand for the election. People might give another chance to see my service to them or they might also give a chance to the new candidates.

MS: You came from Burma, while coming you might be accompanied by people from other communities. How is the relationship with them, do you consider that you all are from Burma or there are community differences with Burma Tamils.

R: We don’t see that, in Burma there are no caste and religion biases. There were Hindu, Muslim and Christians, we are Hindus, Muslims were from Burma and there are christians. In the school certificate they would only ask this, additionally they would ask for the Nationalities. But they would never ask for castes in Burma. We didn’t practice those (caste identity) in Burma. We Tamils used to live in one region as a community.

GV: Are Muslims living here?

R: Not many Muslims are living here. Muslims would go to the places where their (Muslims) people live. In Kottakarai, Gummidipondi there are many Muslims, so the Burma Muslims also chose to live there; they have also moved to Manadi. They mostly chose to reside in places where the Muslim live as a community.

MS: In Burma, you were living without the practice of caste partition. Is that the same followed here? Because there are Kuppathars (fishers) and other communities here. Are you seeing that difference?

R: We don’t see the differences, we engage normally with them. Even now there is a festival (kumbabishegam) in a temple in Periyakuppam (fishers village). We would be attending that festival. They are coming to our temple festivals. If our god statue is carried (procession) to their village, they would welcome the god and worship well. So there are no such differences observed here.

SR: Which communities are residing here?

R: The residents belong to all the castes.

SR: Is there any majority caste living here?

R: I said it’s all the caste. There is no majoritarian caste. If I am there for an event, many people belonging to my community (caste) would be coming to that event. If another person is there in that position, the community (caste) belonging to that person would be joining. It would be based on the position and not based on the caste. Not any particular caste people would be dominating here.

GV: This means that people are having the bond of one community.

R: Yes, people are united here.

RK: Is there any particular reason for the Asbestos sheet used much in this area?

R: We used to construct huts using thatch (olai), now the rate of the thatch is too much. 100 coconut leaves costs 1000s of rupees. The thatch would withhold only for 2 years, after 2 heavy rains the water would make the thatch ineffective (iththu podium), then the roof would would be leaking. So cement sheets were used here. Cement sheets would be permanent, so people are choosing that.

GV: What were the situations during the Tsunami (2004)?

R: We were not much impacted by the Tsunami. Tsunami has impacted only the people residing near the sea. It came to the edge of our residence; the water had just approved the edge of our residence next to the shore, but the houses and people were not impacted because of the Tsunami. One woman who was residing next to the shore was dead as she wasn’t expecting the Tsunami, so she died. The water was raised here from the sea and it drained within half an hour.

GV: How much water has been raised here in the village?

R: The water raised till our knees.

**-00:34:59**

AJ: Is there any library here?

R: Yes we have a library, there is a market here. Over the market there is a library. That guy (from Annai sivagami nagar, volunteering in ‘Kalam Nanbargal’ volunteer organization). He has been coordinating with the ‘rotary club’ to provide books worth lakhs of Rupees. But there are no people to read those books. It’s open. There is ground, there is a park. The brother is passionately interested in social work; getting books to the childrens, helping schools, planting trees. If anything is requested, he is approaching the people and working out that well. He also set up ‘public shelf’ called ‘Aiyyamittu Unn’ to provide food to the hungry people. We are welcoming all this, this is also part of village development and village welfare. We are not restricting those; we would not do that. We would be welcoming people.

SR: I have heard that in Vyasarpadi, Burma Tamils have a society to help themselves financially to lend loans. Is there society or association or self help groups to lend loads or help financially?

R: We don't have such societies. But we have a society called REPCO Bank, this bank was established for Burma Tamils. Established by the Central Government. We can be members of the society if we produce the Burma Tamil Identification card provided by the government. In that, they would be providing loans, we can mortgage the jewels.

SR: Is that existing now?

R: Yes, it’s functioning. But we can’t form a society at present; we have not done it.

GV: Is pollution a major issue because of the surrounding industries here?

R: Yes, but we are not facing much issues with pollution at present. It was there in the past, but we fought and now the companies are taking that pollution into the sea directly. So we are not affected by it.

GV: Have you done any protest against the impacts of the pollution?  
R: Yes, we have done that.

GV: Do you remember the age?

R: That was based on impacts of the pollution when the new new industries are established. We have done many protests.

GV: Was the pollution a big issue here?

R: No

AJ: There are water bodies opposite to your residence, Are there any changes in the water bodies present here?

R: This land belongs to the Railway department, there was a canal, then there was a lake. In the past the Railway department was supplying water to Chennai Central railway station by setting a ‘tank’ next to the lake. The department was storing the water in the tank to draw water to the Chennai Central railway station. It’s been years since the tank was abandoned.

RK: Is there any name for the lakes?

R2: It was called ‘Vanna Kulam’ (washers pond).

R: ‘Vanna kulam’ is not a name, just a reference as ‘Vanna’ (washers) were using the pond to wash clothes. (Vanna is a term to refer to the washers, it’s also typically a practice of community and connected to caste). It’s not a permanent name.

R2: It’s mentioned in Google as “Vanna Kulam’.

AJ: Were there any canals (oodai) in the past?

R: No there were no canals, the water used to stagnate in the lakes/water bodies.

GV: What was the food practice in Burma?

R: We had the same food practice. As we Tamils, we would consume rice,

GV: The ‘Athoo’ food?

R: It’a Burmese food, we would \*(his age group; adolescence) all have that too. But our parents would not eat that; they would not be interested in those foods. We would consume foods daily, ‘Moingga’, ‘Kowso’, 'Lettho' like there are many foods we used to consume.

GV: Do you continue those food practices here?

R: There are 50+ shops which sell Burmese food. You can visit them in the evening. All the shops would have good businness. One plate is 70 Rupees, it would be hard to complete that, then a soup would be served along with that food. I would taste good, additional if required eggs would be added to the food.

GV: Would you cook that in your home?

R: We (family) would be cooking, but we can’t say that everyone would be cooking. It’s quite a time consuming job, we have to stream the noodles, we have to cut the cabbages and onions. It takes more work to make the dish.

R2: Soup is the important sideish that would be served. It’s made of Banana stem, it is a good medicine for kidney stones. Many corporate employees would be interested in eating Burmese foods. People would even come from far south of the city; from Velachery, Tambaram, etc.

**-00:40:20**

R: There is a Burma bazar, there are Burmese food stalls.

GV: Are there any people having shops in Burma bazar(near Chennai Beach Station)?

R: Yes.

GV: How many people would have shops there?

R: Not many, but some 10 people would have shops there. Here people are not much interested in business, they are into different professions for earning. Only some people are doing business.

AJ: As the senior leader from here, what advice would you give to the youngsters of this village?

R: Youngsters have to get a good education, they have to live with discipline. They have to do social service to the public. They have to coordinate for the growth of the Nagar (Annai Sivagami Nagar). Today, the habit is increasing with youngsters, it’s Ganja. In every corner it’s Ganja and liquor, even a good person is getting addicted to liquor. He has taken care of his life, they should be involved in these habits. Once there was no liquor (saarayam was sold); we chased away the liquor shop; I was made to close the liquor shop. What can we do when people from here are going outside and consuming liquor and coming back. But we would not let the liquor shop be set up in our village. Some are hiding and selling the ganja, what could we do? We have to correct ourselves. I would say,”don’t drink liquor while I'm there” and I can only advise don’t smoke Ganja. Even then youngsters would go somewhere and practice these habits. Beyond that, many youngsters are in a good phase by getting education.

GV: Since when has the use of Ganja been increased ?

R: It has increased only in recent times. Before that its use was not that much.

GV: Why so?

R: It’s been sold much and more trafficking is done. Some are earning good from it. If they sell one pack, 10 to 20 Rs is earned by them. It’s only a small pack. A person going, giving the money and getting the pack and inserting in the dress packets and leaving the place, that’s it. The guy selling it is not bothered about people, he is only looking at his own growth.

There was a good person, he sold and smoked Ganja, he got caught by the Police. Then I retrieved him at the police station stating that he should not do that again. But he has started doing the same after being released. I told him not to sell the Ganja, but he was doing it again. What can I do to him?

MS: Are there any other stories that stop the village's development?

R: Nothing else. Youngsters shouldn’t fall toward the liquor and Ganja. I have even told it to the Police station, but they are caring for that. They are a waste, because the Police officials are bribed in this matter. What can we do then? If the Police department and public come together, there is nothing that can’t be achieved.

SR: Are there any people who have settled recently?

R: There are people who have no land. If you have money I can buy land for you in this village. You can settle newly (joking)

SR: Are rented people living here?

R: Yes, people can live here to live in rented houses.

SR: Are the people living already in the rented houses?

R: Yes, people are living. It’s cheap and best. Minimum 3000 Rupees is the rent here, it would be a roof with cement sheet. It would have all the facilities, it would have rooms, bedroom, bathroom, toilet and all the facilities. Even houses are rented for 15,000 Rupees. People can live with harmony, the environment would be good here; if we go to the terrace, we can sense good wind. Once, the residents of Burma nagar (Annai SIvagami nagar) suffered, today they have progressed well. There were no children attended the school here, now children from different areas are coming to the schools in Annai Sivagami nagar.

**-00:45:11**

But the teachers are saying that the seats are filled, they couldn’t provide seats for requested admissions. This place has developed that much.

GV: This means you are accepting people from outside?

R: Yes we are accepting, but before that we wouldn’t be accepting people from outside. They won’t be coming here. They would resist coming to Burma nagar.

R2: Even if we call Auto (-rickshas) from Ennore, they won’t be coming. Now people have started to get educated well. Now we are inclusive.

GV: Are people from here moving outside after getting education?

R: Yes, they are moving. I told you about my younger son, he bought a house in Valasaravakkam (Chennai) and left there as his office is nearer to that place. They are choosing on their own confort. He would come here on Friday and go back on Monday on leave days.

GV: Then there is a movement of people coming here and people from her moving outside?

R: Yes.

**-00:46:15**

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