**REIMAGINING THE GOOD CITY FROM ENNORE CREEK**

Interview Notes

**Interview Information**

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Place of interview: Kattukuppam

Geo coordinates: 13.2193625°N 80.3188391°E

Date of interview: 10 December, 2022

Notes by: NJ

**Interviewee Information**

Names: Anonymised

Pseudonyms: Fishers 1 – 6

**Interview Notes**

**Stories of canal**

**Fisher 3**, Kattukuppam

Kuruvimettu canal is an important canal where the boat enters and comes back through other canals. There are more flood plains on either side of the canal that where the prawn, fishes and crabs breed. The floodplains were culturing the offspring. Government encroached the Kurivumedu canal for the construction of the Vallur NTECL. The people were then afraid of the politicians who helped the government for encroachment. The prawns would be larger in the canal, the Koduva fish climb up in the canal insearch of prawns.

**Fisher 1**, Kattukuppam

My father doesn’t know the use of the ‘suthu valai’ (the net which is commonly used by the fishermen in the Ennore backwater) and wasn’t having the county boat. We had a big 10 ton boat used to transfer salt from the salt pans. The livelihood based on transferring salt work would be for 9 months in a year and for the remaining 3 months in the rainy season we would not have any income as salt pans would be flooded. In those 3 months my father and I would go to Kurivumedu canal to catch prawns/fishes with ‘ Yendhu kacha’. The water catchment from ‘Athipattu Pudhu Nagar’ would drain via Kurivumedu canal. The canal mouth would be present at the north of the railway bridge and there would be another mouth in the west. This canal also joins with the Kottamunai canal and also joins with a canal next to ‘Jamarangal paadu’. Canal would be sided by the larger grown mangroves. Crabs, prawns and fishes reproduction has been completely stopped by the construction of the Vallur NTECL. The prawns and crabs would breed in these canals and in the mangroves. Once the reproduction is abundant in this canal the prawns would roll down to the river. Fishes got highly benefited from the Kurivumedu canal. Kuruvimedu canal was an important livelihood source for the fishermen in Ennore. In my childhood my family completely relied on the Kurivumedu canal for catching prawns in the 3 months of NE monsoon (rainy season) as the salt work would be stalled.

Nandu kacha nets were widely used in the ‘Maan Kalvai’ that was running between the HPCL and BPCL.

**Fisher 4**, Kattukuppam

In my childhood I used to go fishing with my parents. In the roots of mangroves we used to pick/catch ‘Bhuttra’ (a prawn species). We would get at least 10 to 15 prawns in one catch in the Kurivumedu canal. We use ‘pari’ to collect the prawns. There was a canal named ‘Eli kaava’ only spanning the width of a single salt carrying boat. My parents would use ‘Konda valai’, (a type of net) for fishing/catching prawn and we would catch the prawns by hand.

**Fisher 3**, Kattukuppam

All the canals are not natural. The British created employment for all the peoples. To establish salt pans, the British created canals to facilitate the water required for salt production. These canals carry salt water from sea during high tide and were used as transportation channels for boat movement to load salts from salt pans.

**Fisher 6, (8th mins)**

Canals are the greater prawn and crab producing area than the Kosasthalai river and back water. The Kattukuppam and Mugadwarakuppam are practicing the ‘Paadu’ system, if I am going to the river we catch fishes like ‘Madava, Kelanga’ and prawn using nets.

The invasion of Thermal power plants has deviated people with the help of government officials and politicians. This led to loss of canals and degradation of the river. The reason for choosing the Ennore region for industrial establishment is the natural wealth and the population of Ennore are predominantly Scheduled tribes, Scheduled Caste and Most Backward Class and the literacy rate was also least but had a greater labor force. The important issue that we had earlier was the lack of unity among the people. There have been more protests from individual villages and also as a collective, but the politicians have distracted those protests with divide and rule policy through their party, as many of the people choose a party or have been a part of a party. Again we are organizing as a collective group called ‘Ennore 8 fishers village welfare association’. We would like to work with unity to protect our environment and to protect ourselves. We don’t just have a threat to livelihood and more than that we have a threat to our (people) life.

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# Stories of Canals, Vegetation, Wild Animals, Salt pans and Infrastructures

**Fisher 2**, Kattukuppam

Fisherfolks and salt workers had a mutual understanding. We (fishers) used to exchange fish for salt with the salt workers. There would be sheds in the salt pans and during cyclones and flood calamities, we would reach out to the sheds in the salt pans for protection. The salt workers have supported us during hard times and saved our lives from big climate calamities. Though they were from other communities, we lived in harmony with understanding.

Not just sheds in the salt pans that has saved us from climate calamites; now we fishers use engine boats, earlier we only used to have country boats; to stops boats wandering in the river during strong windy hours, we would park the boats in the canals of Kosasthalai river where the big mangrove trees on either sides of the canals would have least impacts by wind. Many fishers have escaped from such hard times by harboring themselves with the boats in the canals. Currently we face threads like transmission towers and debris across the river, we don’t possess any harboring spaces like canals. The boats are getting damaged due to the debris in the rivers. The infrastructure developments like roads, bridges, transmission towers doesn't help fishing, cattle grazing; moreover these infrastructures have impacted our (fishers) livelihood. There were abundant cattle at this place and in Kattupalli there were more deers, wild cows which are no more. In some places there were more foxes; all these have co-existed in the same geographical spaces and haven't attacked humans. I have heard about Hyenas, wolves rovering on the banks of the river. When fishers pick fishes from the nets on the banks of the river, some small/damaged fishes would be left, the foxes used to consume those left fishes. Though we were scared of those foxes, we used to go as a group of people and fishers going alone would make sounds by tapping their thighs to indicate their presence to the wild animals.

Earlier we didn't face any casualties because the boat turned down in the river because of winds. The major casualties happens when the bridge (Kattu Bridge) to NCTPS was built across the river leaving a small portal for the water flow and for the boat movement spanning the length of 8-10 ft in a larger Kosasthalai river; people has also died spinning in their own nets because of this the ‘Kattu’ Bridge. Earlier there were only natural deaths like heart attack or ghost attacking people.

People used to worship big trees adjacent to the banks of the rivers, people wouldn't cut the trees. Now we don’t find any such trees. One tree's name is Jammaram.

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# **Stories of Spirits and gods**

**Fisher 4**, Kattukuppam

People used to prioritize the worshiping deities like Kaali, other tradition deities as their traditional (/family) lords than worshiping hindu mytholigical lords like Muruga, Perumal (Vishnu), etc

**Fisher 3**, Kattukuppam

There are gods, ghosts, good spirits, bad spirits present from Karungali to Kattukuppam region.

Earlier we used to have our ‘Paadu’ (fishing grounds) till Jallikuzhi Paadu (a Jallikuzhi Paadu north of Kalanji) North the Sinthamani Eswarar Temple. There was a Lockmunai paadu near SaattangKuppam, South to which there was a Paadu called ‘Aalamaram (Banyan Tree) Paadu‘; at that place ‘Muneeshwaran’ (a traditional god) was present.

In Kalanji, another ‘Muneeshwaran’ lord (as statue) was present. The place would be silent, the windy noise would make us shiver. Sometimes when we crossed that place while fishing, we used to see some dog-like shadows that would change its figure as a Cat; then it would increase the size by changing the figure to a Bull; that figure would keep on increasing its size to a large palm tree and then reduce the size and get diminished. People would insist not to get frightened of those shadows stating that as lord Muneeshwaran (a traditional god) would not attack us.

People from Mugadwaram have said that individuals have died because of the spirit ‘Mohini’; 3 people have died because of it (Manjan, Sivakumar and other people). It’s up to us to see those things as good and bad; It’s as our thoughts of mind. The important places where we worship the lord's/spirits are Jamaadam(Jammaram?) Puzhudhivakkam wire Kambi (a Paadu) - Ellaiyamman temple.

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**Fisher 1**, Kattukuppam

There is a Banyan tree next to the Sinthamani Eswarar temple, it is referred to as bad spirit. So, we don’t tie our nets nearer to the Banyan tree. If we feel the bad spirits we immediately go to the Sinthamani Eswarar temple and lay down in that temple. We don’t worship any god near Kalanji, there is a net tying area (Paadu) near Voyalur; where hundreds of people have died during the construction of the Buckingham canal in the British era due to an epidemic at that time. We fishermen are frightened of the Voyalur region as many people have died and they all were buried at the same place.

**Fisher 4**: While we used to fish using the wooden boats (we used to row the boat using ropes) in that place we can sense ‘Jasmine’ fragrance (a smell culturally historically to bad spirits). Still people have fear over that place, fishers used to tie their nets (fishing) away from that place. At Least there would be one instance of spirits disturbing people crossing that place once every 10 days. Fishers need strong willpower to fish near that place.

The next site is near the ‘Kovilmunai’ Paadu; earlier it was called as ‘Jambaada Munai’ Paadu. Now ‘Kovilmunai’ Paadu is being a oyster bed; straight to that place, ‘Jambaada Thatha’ (Jambaada Grandpa) tree was standing where ‘Annamar’ statue was existing and worshiped by Ennore Kuppam people before evicting them from earlier settlement where NCTPS was commissioned. ‘Jambaada Thatha’ tree fell during a cyclone. Now there is another tree growing at that same place but not the same species. We used to go to the SIndhamani Eswaran temple only once in a year during the Chithirai month (a Tamil Falls from mid April to mid May); at that time we used to worship the god at the ‘Jambaada Thatha’ tree.

**Fisher 4**: In Karukkumara (a tree species) there are bad sprites that would appear as shadows; throwing stones over the water creating splashing sounds; we won’t bother those thing and continue to fish.

~27:00

**Fisher 1**:

Those sprites would not disturb us when we got near the Puzhudhivakkam Ellaiamman temple. During a tsunami disaster that was one hundred years before as communicated by ancestors; the tsunami buried the Puzhudhivakkam Ellaiamman temple, my father has told these stories when we were fishing the river. This temple was completely buried under the sand. Later as intimated in someone’s dream, the temple was dug and opened. The Amman ( Tamil reference to Goddesses) statue in that temple looks aggressive. Currently the temple is located inside the Kamarajar port compound. The access was completely restricted by the KPL management; later people protested and accessed the temple. Currently the temple is open on every new moon day night. The temple is administered by representatives from Kattupalli, Nettukuppam and Thiruvathur (Thiruvottiyur) Kuppam. Every year there is a grand festival in Chithirai month (A tamil month from mid-April to mid-May). Before the establishment of the Kamarajar port, we used to draw water from the 3 wells near that temple. One well is completely covered by the banyan tree and bushes; in my childhood our ancestor used to say that the statue's jewelry is in the well covered by bushes. There are other 2 wells, in which the water would taste like holy water that would be given in most of the temples containing Tulasi (herbal) leaves. The Goddesses statue is aggressive/arrogant that an individual would tremble by watching the statue alone.

**Fisher 5**: There is a history of this temple about a boat approaching the shore seeing the light reflection from the nose ring of the Goddesses statue.

# Stories of historic settlements

**Fisher 1**: To my knowledge this temple was not built in recent times. This place was a larger village called ‘Kavalanji’. There were/are some remains of the earlier settlement at that place, such as pottery pieces. People from this village migrated to Pazhaverkadu (Pulicat) and [Arambakkam](https://goo.gl/maps/F2XedGnHPMVXiMCu8) ( A village in TamilNadu sharing a border with Andra Prasdesh state ). All those regions were once agricultural lands. There was a community called ‘Kavalanji’ having it as a surname like people in Andra used to have surnames (most commonly a caste name in India). This place was abandoned because of the disaster caused by the Tsunami a century ago.

There was an old hostel in Kattupalli. We used to carry the cement, bricks, stones, gravel in our big boat (the wooden boat used to carry salts) from a place near the graveyard next to the Maadha temple (Mary’s temple). People's mobility would be there at that place. Approximately 20 people would work in our boat to load the construction material. My father hasn't seen the temple while working in that place; 20 people working in our boat used to make the current post with gravels, cement and iron bars meant to hold the current carrying wire installed during the construction of the NCTPS stage I. The workers were from this village where the NCTPS stage I stands.

**Fisher 5**: This place had mango plantations and cashew plantations. There would be some people and a watchman to maintain the plantations. We used to exchange fishes for the fruits; we won’t pick the fruits without their knowledge (not steal) as our livelihood is in this river next to their plantation lands. This plantation belongs to Reddiyars living in Kattupalli. Before establishing any industry in this region, owner/agency members would worship in this temple. (ITT, L&T, etc)

There is a sandbar in the mid of the sea next to the coast of the Kattupalli.

**Fisher 1**: There is a pond next to the Buckingham canal near the gate of this temple. There is also a coconut tree next to the pond.

-When people from Nettukuppam protested to provide access to that temple where they practice their tradition and culture, the KPL management denied entry and access. Thiruvathur (Thiruvottiyur) kuppam, Nettukuppam and Kattupalli kuppam protested and made it an issue for the restriction to entry. This issue reached the GM of the port and access was given based on registration prior one month.

This incident happened after commissioning of the port. The temple festival hasn't been celebrated for 1 or 2 years. The priest used to go regularly on Tuesdays and Fridays and provided access to only the KPL employees on those 2 days in a week. Before commission of the port there was no priest appointed to the temple, we people used to clean the temple and worship on our own. Later the port management appointed a priest with wages.

Our temple festival would be celebrated the whole night 10 years ago, not like the current year that would be over by mid-night. We would take the lord statue to ‘Sivan padai veedhi kuppam’ and to ‘Yeezhu kudusai’ (7 huts) now it’s called ‘Thilagar nagar’. We would hand over the lord ( statue) to the ‘Sivan padai veedhi kuppam’ people and later they would hand over the lord (the statue). Once, while lifting the lord, it (people from Sivanpadaiveedhi kuppam) fell down accidentally. From then, we stopped handing the lord to them and they also stopped asking the lord statue. The communications regarding those traditional habits have stopped between two villages. Yearly once we used to have a festival for lord perumal (vishnu) and once in 5 to 6 years we used to have a festival for Goddesses ‘Porkaalaiamman’.

There are more stories about ‘Ulagaathamman’ temple that aged people would be aware of. The temple was abandoned for many years and elders have insisted that organizing festivals for that temple might have a bad impact on communities.

The muslim communities live traditionally in Kattukuppam. People living in Kattukuppam have the same rights as we have. The muslim people have ‘Paadu’ alloted for them. We have shared the ‘Paadu’, job opportunities and also the quarters allotted for people in Kattukuppam. Not just Kattukuppam, all the surrounding villages too have equal rights for the muslim community in their village. If the are issues in the village like any health issues or such things, the muslim community would organize worships concerning the common issues. There is another festival celebrated by muslim people called ‘Ursu/Santhana Koodu’ where we (fishers) would participate and they would be part of our temple festivals like pulling temple carts, worshiping and all other events of the village. If there were any financial issues with the community they would lend support. Earlier I used to have a country boat (wooden boat) crafted by Sardar bhaii. Sardar bhaii used to make country boats and repair the boats.