**REIMAGINING THE GOOD CITY FROM ENNORE CREEK**

Interview / Story Transcription / Summary Notes

**Interview Information**

Interviewer/s: Raju K, Aditya Ramesh

Place of interview: Kattur farm fields

Date of interview: 29.01.2023

Transcription by: RK

**Interviewee Information**

Pseudonym: P1

**Interview**

**00:00:00**

In Karungali Grama Panchayat, there is a village called Ebrahampumram. 50 years ago the people from the Karungali villages gave their land to the people of Ebrahampumram which was on the other side the Kosasthalai river bank as they couldn’t maintain or cultivate; some have donated it. Previously they were cultivating some part of the lands and remaining lands were not cultivated and the shrubs were growing, where the cattles used to graze. Every household had at least 10 cows, on average 30-40 and at most it was 100.

As the clock runs, people started to cultivate the unused lands of Ebrahampuram. Later they started asking for lands that they were cultivating as a tenant, the owner of the lands too donated those lands to tenants and some sold it for their affordable prices like Rs.25 per cent. The land owners were from the Karungali village where people from our own community (a dalit community) and Reddiar caste lived there. This (interviewed) land was included under Ebrahampuram village during survey not to Kattur. Kattur village has farmland within it’s boundary. All we did was agriculture, every year we were engaged with farm work till the month of May. But, it’s just 2 days of work in this era, we just communicate quickly on the phone. Some work requires just 2 hours nowadays. We used to have just a month gap in between the paddy agricultural process cycle in a year. We would have initial showers by the 7th month (Aadi), by the 9th month we would have cultivated (/ploughed) the land for sowing seed. Then we don’t plant the paddy samplings (Naatthu Nadudhal), we used practice only direct seed sowing in the fields (Verrapaaddu - Neradi, vishai Vidhaipadhu)

I am not sure if it is good to share these things, Yet I am sharing this. The ‘UDR’ (a revenue Authority) has surveyed lands after the change in the revenue administrative service (Munisip) from a local Accountant (Kanakkupillai) at village level. The government decided to have direct governance over the land through the Revenue department and to not have local governance for land revenue accountability which existed in the Ebrahampuram. The documents were transferred from village accountant to ‘Municip’ [Terms for Revenue officials - Municip, surveyor, Thallery and Village Administrative officer(VAO)]

Municip, surveyor, Thallery and Village Administrative Officer (VAO) all have surveyed all the lands and documented it in the name of the owners. The lands were given ‘UDR’ patta status. Those officials documented the lands based on the oral information from the people. In documents officials have mentioned the oral name of the individuals which differ from their actual name in the government documents (like Birth Certificates). This is the history of the land documentation and land governance. If the ‘UDR’ patta is in someone's oral name (basically the other name of the same person) which might be the legal name of some other individual; there are all the possibilities for any individuals with such name to claim the lands. We weren’t that much aware of the land documentations. But people were loyal then, and weren't scamming anybody on these land rights. The lands were registered to individuals as they expressed their land boundaries to the officials like 20 cents or whatever they used. We have land documents for the land but we don’t have Patta.

For some years we weren't able to farm in that land due to climatic reasons and the grade of the industrial seeds. When we do farming in traditional methods without fertilizers, pesticides, the rice can be consumed directly by the cows, bird stocks and we also don’t get any kind of diseases or sickness. The usage of hybrid industrial paddy seeds like IR18 and other seeds were started 30 years back in this region but it existed in the open market prior to that. Earlier we only used rice varieties like Ponni, Vaachamanellu, Karuppu nellu (black Paddy). We used to cultivate the lands using the bullacarts with the cow dung. Then we weren’t able to get enough urea for agriculture; for 1 acre it’s hard to get at least some 2 ‘Marakkaa’ *(Marakka is basically a vessel made of metals or other agri-products like palm leave which was used as a volumetric unit especially for the measurement of agri products like paddy, pulses, groundnuts, etc.)* of fertilizers. It’s not about the deficit supply, we couldn’t afford the fertilizers price. In the traditional practice of paddy cultivation, we used to cultivate only once in a year, we had enough manures and water supply required for paddy. We weren’t aware of the implication of urea. There was good growth when we used the urea, the paddy seeds would weigh more than normal paddy and lay down as the stem of the paddy couldn’t bear the weight of the seeds on the top. The urea sucks most of the nutrients in the soil and provides it to the crops that are being cultivated. This is not natural, it’s an artificial process for cultivation. All the natural practice has changed now.

When the TIDCO reclaimed some nearby UDR' land, we all got scared that we didn't have ‘patta’ for our land and were not going to get one. Instead it would benefit us if we sell the land at this time. In 2009 the compensation amount of Rs.5 lakh for my land seemed to be a great wealth. But the same land is Rs.40 lakhs now. Then the rate was Rs.5400 per cent. Five years after selling my land, the Government of Tamil Nadu sent us a notice regarding the rate of the reclaimed land and informed the seller that any concerns with sold land would be discussed and the landowner who hasn't sold the land can discuss reclamation of their land. There seems to be some issues when we sold our land to the government, but the registration happened only in the government registrar office. Some individuals weren't able to sell their lands as they had a land sharing dispute with their siblings (mostly brothers) because of the difference of opinion. Now (current) an acre costs Rs.40 lakhs. We attended the meeting in Ponneri with government officials regarding land reclamation with a hope that we would get the present rate of that time though we had already sold our land 5 years ago. The meeting was well set up in an air conditioned hall with tea and snacks. It was a great welcoming meeting. They asked the individuals who sold their land to raise their hands. Once they raised their hands the government officials asked the non-sellers to fill the form that declares that the non-sellers are voluntarily wishing to sell their land. Individuals who have sold their land were asked to sign the letter confirming that they have sold their land.

This meeting was especially held to identify the non sellers and for proper documentation. It seems like the previous land reclamation had some flaws in it. Each official bought 25 acres of lands from the farmers in Kattur in their name and TIDCO would only buy the large lands (seems to be a political land mafia with official support). I felt that the meeting was to speed up the land acquisition process as the land rate was increasing. TIDCO would acquire the land and give the land to private industrial owners. TIDCO does land business by acquiring our land, documenting it and giving it to the industrial owners. The agriculture in 200 acre farmland in the Ebrahampuram lake which holds ‘mara patta’ was stopped by the government for the 2nd year in a row. We only did agriculture in 30 acres of ‘mara patta’ land in Ebrahampuram lake and 30 acres in this Porambokke land. I have a question how much the people in the Thiruvallur district can consume from this minimal 60 acres of land. Overall paddy production is reduced in this place. For our community there would be enough food that is spilled during the paddy processing and those that were not bought by the paddy acquiring company when there was more agricultural land. Now we only have minimal farm fields and less production, if the rice mill owners ask all the paddy for a relatively higher rate we don’t have any other option to give all the paddy to get benefitted and possess no paddy in our homes. If there are enough/excessive paddy, the mill owner would only ask for a lesser price, so we would be able to sell some and keep some for our own consumption.

A paddy sack has 80 kg of paddy. We can also assume a paddy sack is 75 kg and the current rate is Rs.1500. Currently 25 kg of rice sack (processed Paddy) costs Rs.1400. A processed paddy sack of 75 kg would yield 50 kg of rice. If we assume it to have a minimal yield of 40 kg rice. On the market rate it might cost at least Rs.2000 considering the worst case for the mill owners in most situations. In the worst case the mill owner profits Rs. 500. We (farmers) would yield the paddy after 4 to 6 months of our time and energy. The mill owners would get profited only in 2 months. If the mill owner is getting 1000 sacks of paddy from the farmers. They would earn Rs.5,00,000 from 1000 sacks of paddy. But actually they process tons of paddy. As we are farmers we couldn’t get that much capital as the mill owners and couldn’t stock the paddy. If I am yielding 100 sacks of paddy and stocking it, it would only give me loss. But if the mill owner is stocking 1000 sacks of rice, business individuals would be interested in dealing with a mill owner stocking 1000 sacks. If I am marketing the same commodity with a specific rate, the mill owner with 1000 sacks would market it for a lesser cost as it can get large profits. This stops the business people approaching me (or a small farmer) who wishes to get profited. It’s for a mill owner to use the machinaries to heat the paddy and process, it’s toxic to health to heat the food immediately to higher temperature and cool down which is not possible by natural process.

The banks would give a loan to a person who has a house over 2 cents of land with a blue collar job. But the same bank wouldn’t give a loan to an educated organic farmer who doesn’t toxicate the sand.

The industrial owner gets a loan from the bank stating the proposed industry that is about to come after land acquisition. The bank is giving them a loan with just a proposed project of some other lands with documentation just confirming that we (farmers) are interested in selling our land, but these are fraud documentation. But the bank doesn't provide a loan to us even if we hold the land and documents. They would give commission to us to sell our lands in the future, particularly a banking agent would do such a kind of work to get commission for themselves. Before selling our land, the banking agent would get a commission, they give the compensation to sell our land and the party about to buy our land will also get the loan.

The land rates are/were always increasing, the owner of the land would complete the due loan and with all the current registered land documents he would apply for a larger loan and they would not pay the loan for some 10 to 20 years. With that money they would buy other land, the land value would have increased several folds. The bank would file a case, the case would take some 10 years, at the end of the 30th year the owner can pay the loan with interest as the present value of that land would be several fold and they would also gain the profit at that time. The increase in the land value would have vast differences with the increase in the interest value for the loan.

In the Kattur salt pans during the high tide, water would fill the pans and as it’s an elevated place more fishes would come and settle here. We used to fish in the salt pans. During the rainy season in Karthigai (Mid-Nov. To Mid\_Dec.) and Margali (Mid-Dec. to Mid-Jan) months (Tamil Months) the salt pans would always be filled with water and we would have limited work in the field as the paddy would start to seed over the plants. Water would drain in a canal from the salt pans during low tide, we would block the canal grasses and place it across the canals using logs (Madai kattradhu). There would be no water on the Salt pan side, but the other side would have 2 feet of water. Salt pans exist in 2500 acres in Kattur village and Kadapakkam village; in that salt pans the fishes and prawns would boil abundantly while the water is drained. A large fish size would be of my thigh size. The whole village people would be fishing with their family. After blocking the canals with logs and grasees, we would place a valve from the salt pans and tie a net at the end of the valve, where the fishes would be caught in the ‘fishing net’ when they drain down the canal through the valve. In our village, there would be groups, say if 15 individuals in a group. If one individual from a group (vagaiyara) was present, they can get the fishes in a basket and that person should share it with their group. Some 10 individuals would go to the fishing in a cyclic manner, the caputed fishes should be shared with all the groups via any group representatives. We would form groups based on the ‘Thala Kattu’ (All men aged 18+ in a village, basically grown men of the community). From the rice from the field, we would consume the rice along with the fish curry. All those were organic that tasted good, that was nothing like anything that’s available today. The rice porridge made from organic rice would be great. Handful of fermented porridge was equal to consuming a beer which costs Rs.150 now. The porridge would cost only some 30 paise then, because of such culture people were able to live for 90-100 years because of organic foods. We were getting Raagi porridge, fishes at free of cost then. The salt pan was leased to tenants when I was 10 years old, that would be 40 years back. Prior to that, if we weren’t to do farming due to famine, we used to segregate the deposited salt where the current salt pan exists in the bull cart and sell it in Pazhaverkadu (Pulicat). Those salts were edible, now even the processed salts aren’t edible. We also used to exchange those salt to Kuppam (fishing villages) for fishes/prawns and other commodities. Now we can't get the same food (quantity and quality) as we were able to get it in the past. In the past we would consume fish for 1 week that were caught in the farm fields during rainy seasons.

Now we are running in this modern society as others; there is no hope for growth in conservative livelihood. If the others are cutting their hair (crap, local term in TN) and if we have hair bun, we would be left in the society, we have to act with others.

\_\_\_+\_\_\_