**Interview Information**

Interviewer/s: Gajendran V.,Karen Coelho

Place of interview: Annai Sivagami Nagar

Geo Coordinates:

Date of interview: 12.05.2023

Transcription by: RK

Audio 1

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[230512\_AnnaiSivagamiNagar\_Int\_Aud\_2\_GV,KC.mp3](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZVuO_IhnczQnSPSQlaI7jguepp-Fi-17/view?usp=sharing)

**Interviewee Information**Names: Anonymised

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (R1), \_\_\_\_\_\_ (R2), \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (R3)

**Interview note:** Interviewed on the 63 Association formation, the conflict between fishers and AS Nagar people and the Burma Tamils history of migration and repatriation.

**Transcription Note**: Most of the places are called Nagars, currently being part of the Chennai city corporation wards, prior to that some were part of a Municipalities and some were villages or part of villages. Though the 63 includes nagars, part of villages or a village. Now all those are part of the city.

R1: We are approximately 70 people. If we call for action, there are 50 to 55 leaders who would organize immediately.

R2: They are presidents just like us.
R1: This evening we are going to an ‘investiture ceremony’ in Valluvar nagar. He ( R2) is also an important member in DMK, we would not show ourselves in political spaces. We would be part of DMK, we are delegated with a big position in DMK for a longer time. But sometimes we have to sacrifice those political stands. In the region, people are from all castes, all religions, people from other ethnicities, there are people from Kuppam (fishers community), people from Ambedkar forum, there are so many people. So, we have to be honest and fair. Only if we don’t consume liquor can we advise others. So we have to be disciplined. I can be fair only if I don't belong to or represent any castes. He is here (R2), but I don’t know which caste he belongs to. He is a good human, he would do service. Then I inspected him in his village and I chose him to be part of the Association. He is doing better than we are expecting.

KC: Sir, can you share about your history and this village history? How did you come here?

R1: This village was established in 1966, August month. My father and I were in Ennore before. My father was the first leader for this village. Then Gurusami, Veerakaala, Annamalai were the leaders of this village, in this line I have been the leader of the village for 4 times. For a long time I have been vice -president, joint-secretary, other postings and I became the president. The issue (conflits) with the Kuppam (fishers) happened when other presidents were in the chair before me. After that we all organized under DIG Balasubramaniam (retired) and we formed this Association on the future concern of how all villages can be united. We are running the Association successfully. We would not stuff politics into this.People with me are Kodiswarars (Millionaires), holding higher postings in MDMK, people in BJP, Congress. All are bigshots, but they would not identify themselves as the politicians in this association.

Next month we are celebrating the 25th year anniversary. Yesterday I went and invited the commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Collector and Judge. We would not invite politicians. MLA is our friend, even the Commissioner would pick up my call. This is History.

Under the world bank scheme, roads were laid and toilet facilities, schools were constructed. We cannot get patta as it’s a railway land. Everyone was saying that we couldn’t get patta, even we had taken this concern and visited Mamta Bannerji, then she was a leader in congress. Railway is a separate ministry and they have a separate police force. We also discussed these issues with Kalaignar (Karunanithi, former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu), but we didn’t follow up with him. Though we have been trying various things, it would be good if we get alternate land or else they (the government) have to compensate with money. The Politicians from the communist party, DMK party ADMK party would simply say that we would make it. But it’s not possible for them. Only after the Indian land \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (not clear; 4:20 min) officer is acquiring our land, we would be given compensation as money or land. There are more than 8000 voters from this area, each street have 800 votes and have more than 250 houses.

KC: When this AS (Annai Sivagami) nagar was established?

R1: I said; it was 1966, August month.

**-00:04:55**

KC: That was Burma Tamils.

R1: We all took the land, as we came from Burma. There was a Chettiyar (privileged men in the fishers family), he, Annamalai and my father were socially concerned; my father was in INU (INU?). Burma was part of India during the British Era, then they (parents) were able to move easily to do agriculture. My father got married here, his native was Kaarakudi, my mother’s native was Paaravakotta. They are from here, they were not born there, we (siblings) were only born there. My father was born in a Oil mill (chekk-aalai) in Karaikudi. My mother was from Paravakkottai in Thanjai (Tanjore) district.

KC: How was this place, when you were settling here?

R1: Then it was full of sand. There were no facilities for us, we would not have money to buy slippers. We can’t do anything, It was congress reign at that time.

KC: What was your occupation?

R1: We didn’t know anything. What we would know while coming from there (burma)? They (government) dropped us some places they have chosen: in Gummidipoondi, Sholavaram, Trichi, Madurai, Thanjai (Tanjore). Some people were given lands in some places.

KC: Have they given plots?

R1: In this place we made plots as we have people with detailed knowledge. That’s why we have linear straight streets from here till the seashore.

R2: It would be Pondicherry, where the streets would be straight and it would also have well planned cross-sectional streets.

R1: At that time, our forefathers (elders) were having good awareness, I was a teen guy, I was just 16 years older. I would just be along with them. We would be installing tents (pandhi la kondaandhu poduvom, irupom).

KC: Then how people started engaging in work?

R1: Now people have improved themselves. There are some poor people like even in America there are beggars; like that poor people would be there in every village and here too.

R2: But there was great development with this village (ooru).

R1: We (association administrator) did welfare with competition with each other.

KC: What kind of development?

R1: We had intervention in all the things when I was the president (of the village). Even now I am holding an important posting, I am the leader for our team (team that would contest in the association election). For exams, If a land in this area has to be sold, its rate is 35 lakhs (per acre). Everyone here is a Lachadhipathi (people with lakhs Rupees of wealth; like Millionaires). Only individuals with two wives, being alcoholics and irresponsibility would always suffer. Good person even if he works for daily wages (kooli thozhil) he would live with dignity. Many people are working with the transport department (government dep. Driver/conductor), Police department and there are doctors.

KC: Are there enough facilities like schools, colleges and hospitals?

R1: Only now work for the hospital has been initiated here, it will be opened in two or three months.

KC: Can you tell me about your village's association and your connection with it?

R1: We always would be pioneers in this village. If there are any initiatives or events in the village. It would not happen without us.

KC: Are there regular elections?

R1: Yes, we have elections exactly once in 3 years. Before that it was once in 2 years, when I was elected.

R2: It would take place as a government election.

R1: Police would be present for the security reasons during the elections. It would take place exactly as the government election.

KC: Is the government cooperating well with you?

R1: It’s based on how we behave.

KC: Did the government give the facilities like roads, water and other things to the village?

R1: We are getting the water, but it is not good enough.

KC: Are the water facilities connected inside the house?

R1: No. we are water facilities only outside.

R2: But we have good water with borewell connections in the households. Every house has borewell connections.

R1: We have the underground drainage facility (for sewage)that has been installed. For the sewage facility, we have to pay 25,000 rupees in installments with 2,500 Rupees per month for every 6 months. That we have, but we don’t have Patta for us and also we don’t have chances to get Patta as it’s railway land.

R2: We don’t face water issues here, the water would be excellent here.

R1: Anyhow we are buying canned water for drinking purposes, it costs 25 to 30 Rupees per can. If you need help in our village you can go to Paalwadi (Integrated Children welfare Center for children under age 6).

KC: You have the larger Panchayat Union. Can you share about that?

R1: Can you come again.

GV: The 63 village panchayat association. When was the association formed?

R1: I am the present for that 63 village association. Krishnaraj Chettiyar, Thalankuppam (village), Nettukuppam (village) all belong to this association since then. This month is exactly the 25th year of the association.

**-00:10:06**

R2: Now a celebration is being planned to commemorate the 25th anniversary. If our president (R1) said anything to any villagers (part of the association), they would be listening to them.

R1: Even now we went to the Redhills Panchayat, the region inspector…(conversation stopped)

Last time Sundhara Vadhanam was present as chief guest for the event; he was a good IPS officer, with him we organized a gathering with the public participation, police were present, all villagers were coming then. We also invited Doctors, but we would bring politicians/politcs into the meeting.

GV: Why did you organize the meeting?

R1: We used to meet in any of the villages, during the meeting the concerned village head would be telling their village issues. For example, if Ganja is sold in the cremation ground in Annai Sivagami nagar, that would be told to me. We would try to stop it in the back end. Yesterday I went to solve an issue concerning a person not getting admission for his child. In some villages, there would be conflicts between two groups that would be addressed.

R2: In some villages that would have issues within the streets, there would be drinking water issues. We would be

R1: Today D.S. Gopal nagar president has brought issues to our concern. We went there and discussed it.

R2: He wouldn’t be in one place. He would always be running.

GV: What was the issue in D.S. Gopal nagar?

R1: This issue is not yet resolved. The president and the MC got into a conflict. It was after a liquor consumption by one group. A school from Vellainchatti village gave a letter to us, In Nehru nagar there were issues regarding constructing houses; that would be sorted. We would do it without showoff.

R2: He would be approached first by people. The Police department would not go first, he would only go first. If he has resolved the issue, the Police department would not be required.

R1: We would make it resolve with our capacity.

R2: It doesn't work out. Police department would be involved.

GV: This Nehru Nagar?

R1: It’s over all 63 villages, so there would be more nagars. In the North Chennai region, we are only association that are orgnized to great extent.

KC: Are there any exempted Nagar (a small hamlets) in the surroundings?

R1: Yes there are exempted Nagar, we can’t be doing many things. We would are having the required villages.

GV: You said that people were coming from Nehru nagar. Like that, what are other interventions you would be doing or issues you would be addressing?

**-00:15:00**

R1: For example, In D.S. gopal nagar, we gave a petition to that MC to repair the 100 ft. road. The MC also has recently approached us stating they have issues within their area.I intervened and made compromission. We would be working based on the issues. For this year's Annual day in Kumaran Special School; it's a school for differently abled and mentally unstable children, we went and provided funds we have raised. In these surroundings people used to be invited to participate in the temple festivals. In Ezhudhurai’ village there was an issue regarding the milk, so we went there and resolved it.

R1: In every village (nagars) we would coordinate and conduct the ‘Nagar’ elections. Not all the villages, wherever we have control, would be doing there. We have done it in Bharathiyar nagar.

KC: You would be doing if they ask.

R1: Yes.

R2: They (representatives from village/nagar) would give us a letter, we would get the letter and conduct the elections. We would conduct the election as a government, we would bring police for protection and we would be present till the counting. In a village the election result was draw, then we decided based on the ‘Chit drawing’ .

R1: In the Tsunami quarters (AIR nagar)..... (Conversation stopped)

GV: Would you conduct the elections for all the 63 villages in this association?

R2: To the villages that are requesting us to conduct elections.

R1: I am not stating pride about myself, but this is not possible for everyone. We have to sculpt ourselves. In a village election, the elected candidate would also be my friend and the person who lost the election would be my friend. If I call the MLA, he would also pick my call and the MLA candidates ‘Aarumugam’, ‘Kuppan’ who lost the election would also pick up my call. I would make that balance. They would know who I am. They are all politicians, we have kept the politics outside of this association. We would never stuff the politics in our association.

R2: We have kept the politics in the corner and done the social services.

R1: We have been here for 25 years. We have invited any Ministeres.

R2: If any meeting is organized and if any big leaders are coming, we would make sure our head (R1) is present.

R1: If I am attending the event, if MLA is present. He would definitely raise, wish me and then only he would be sitting. But we would not invite MLAs, because it would happen to be a political intervention.

KC: If any development project is coming like Industrial establishments, would they (industrialists) be approaching you?

R1: It’s nothing like that. It’s not like ‘the village cannot sustain without me’ or ‘they definitely need me’ or nothing like ‘without me, there is no country’. Everyone has their own share to contribute. Now you are coming, you are taking your part and contributing to this place and you can’t be doing all the things for this place. You have to contribute with your capacity. You are doing with your capacity and we are doing with our capacity. He (R2) is joining and contributing with his capacity.

GV: While industries are established, would they be consulting with the people here?

R1: Do you need that much detail? What do you exactly want? If you get into too much detail this can’t be done.

GV: I will tell you about the project.

R1: Yes, such things would happen. 10 days ago some people approached me stating that Parry (EID parry) company is about to be closed. A person named Sudhagar approached me, I told him to give me a letter, the company cannot be closed. I told him that I would bring some 10-20 people, then we would sit for discussion with them (industry). We can’t ask them to close the industry (EID Parry), people only have resided around the industry. Firstly, It was that fertilizer industry that was established. So, we asked him to give us a letter. We know the fertilizer Industry officials. So we would go and ask,”There are people living there, The industries are for the people. They are raising complaints, what do you want to say?’ That is my policy. We would shout and say those things, we wouldn't get bribes. They would give some letters (not sure who would be giving).

Even before when I was the president there were issues raised concerning pollution. Then we approached the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board in Ambattur and bought them and checked the issues with the pollution and resolved it. We would make it to our capacity. We would not be doing insolent approaches with anyone. With that approach we could only get some money, that’s not useful.

R2: In that company 1000 people are working if we go and stop the company, 1000 families would be affected.

**-00:20:00**

KC: In any issues, would there be double stands like, this association on one side and fishers on the other side.
R1: That we would balance ourselves. If you can say what your exact need is, then you can understand those things. What is the subject?

GV: I will share the subject (context) now. We are doing research on Chennai City. Now the city is being developed, what a good city should look like? How did people live here? How are people right now? How will people be living in the future?

R1: Now I am speaking as a political leader leaving the association president post aside. The country is not like before, earlier people weren't able to buy one pair of slippers. Earlier when I was a football player I wasn't able to buy a pair of boots. Now If I need, I can buy 10 such boots. We have to walk till Otteri to boots. If we bought a shirt we wouldn't be able to wear another one till this one gets worn and torn. At present, if we open the locker cupboard we can find 50 shirts. Now he (R2) is also wearing, the country has been developing. Earlier we used to consume only tubers (kilangu). What would be my age? What do you think?

GV: about 60 years old?

R1: I am 74 years older.

KC: While he was saying 60, I was thinking to say 45 or 50 years older.

R2: He was a football player.

R1 (to KC): You didn’t coat your hair with dye.

KC: What do you think my age would be?

R1: Yours would be 45 or 48 years older?

KC: I am 60 years older.

R1: But it’s hard to guess some people's age. Here (pointing at him) is my brother, he is my sibling. He is in INA (Indian Naval Academy). He is the eldest in the family. We have a principal in politics.

R2: He (the elder brother of R1) was working with Subash Chandra Bose's daughter.

R1: He was a deputy Commissioner. What is your perspective of the country? You should know it by yourself. Country has developed to another level. In Tamil Nadu, beggars are doing it as their profession. If he/she has 5 Rupees, he/h can get 2 idli and have it. The country has developed. In politics people are developing by condemning others. If we are critical of the Prime Minister, we can’t be developing from the opposite side. We have to state that I am wiser than him. Country has developed to the next level, we have ‘Amma hotel’ (government subsidized hotels in Tamil Nadu), now breakfast is provided in all the government schools. Now we are improving in the industry sector. The migrant worker from another state is working well in Tamil Nadu.

KC: If we say development, one person would have one perspective and another person would have another perspective.

R1: I am enough with what I have now. I had 15 shops, so I gave it to them for free. The person drawing water gave me 8 houses. I got only one house, as I am satisfied with that; I had self satisfaction. I am Kodiswaran (person with crores), I get 35,000 pensions.

KC: What I am asking is, that a fisherman might have a definition for development.

R1: You know all of these. You don’t need to ask us.

KC: Just wanna check if your members have any difference from their perspective.

R1: He (R2) is a rich person, he is a Kodiswaran (person with crores of rupees). But he is doing the work under me. He built the temple and stood in front for this kind of work. He is looking forward to meeting people. He is working with the energy he has.

R2: We have built the temple, in that area we have developed 6 to 7 parks.

R1: He didn’t wear a watch or gold ring. Even though he is a rich person. We have to look down on who is under us. If our housemates need something, I can immediately get them in 5 minutes. But that was not possible in those days.

Yesterday My brother’s son bought all the required provisions. My son-in-law is in foreign, he is calling my son there. In that era, I used to buy him some slippers. Now his daughter, my granddaughter, she is talking care of me. Yesterday I got my teeth broken and I got sick. She was giving me treatment; she is working next to Simson (a famous place in chennai). She also served me idly and also after having the food, she also provided my tablets. Then at night she would be calling me. This is development. If he (brother's son) was alcoholic then his two children would not become this successful. There are millionaires in foreign.

**-00:25:32**

**GV:** Organizing of the 63 villages as an association has happened. Why did this happen?

R1: At that time, people were not willing to be leaders of their villages. If I identify myself with my caste and if I start marginalizing the other caste person/people, to protect or defend themselves the people/person would be identifying themselves with their own caste. As we practice equality which was not there before. Because of that there was conflict between the Kuppathukaar (fishermen community) and our community (AS nagar), then we (some from the community) got arrested and we were in Jail. It was a great issue, it was the ‘trace’ of the people hitting the door (by showing the door traces) with a spear (eetti). Then we were all political prisoners in the jail.

GV: Were you a political prisioner?

R1: Yes, I was in jail 5 times.

GV: What were the struggles then?

R1: For medical doctors protests, the DMK was supporting them. But the Tamil Nadu government wanted DMK men to be arrested.

While Kalignar (former CM) was arrested, while protesting DMK cadres should be jailed, so I went into the jail. (not sure if the government wants to Jail them, or the DMK parties plan to send DMK members to jail.

While DMK was on hunger strike for the Srilankan issue. Then they need someone to go to jail. Like this there are several reasons for going to jail. If our head commands us, we would go to jail. Sometimes they would just detain us and let us go later. At that time of our detention, there would be a dispute between us (Burma Tamils and Fishers) because of the wrong information shared. Fishers organized as troops and came here. A police official named Mauria, was staying opposite to his (R2) residence. He only shot the people with rifles, they (fishers) attacked 5 people from our community with a knife, they cut them. Then our people have surrounded them (fishers) by detaining them (Suthu pottanga). Later the riots I also went for that panchayat (has other meaning, negotiation or giving orders based on ethics by local influencers within village, can be referred as court proceedings with local ethics based on culture and demography) with Police officials presence, DIG was stating,”Hello brother, 10th (standard) boy don’t shout simple, tell us what would unite people in the future”. After that incident, once I became the president here in the AS nagar. I remembered his sayings,” you should not look into old things, what can be done for the unity in future”. Then I organized our village people in the (Phelikan Angala parameshwari) temple and also invited other village leaders one by one. Made Krishnaraj Chettiyar as president and organized this association. We would organize meetings at different villages. We all have good friendships.

I would have all their phone numbers here (in a notebook). In some time, they will be coming here. Before the office was there (other place). Now it’s here, it’s changed. There is DC (deputy Commissioner), he was saying he has never seen such association in his life term.

R2: No where such an organization can be formed. All these villages has been included with one man power.

KC: Do you have regular meetings? Like month wise.

R2: We have meetings based on the needs.

KC: Would everyone be participating?

R2: Next month we have the larger meeting for the 25th anniversary. All the leaders would be participating. Higher officials in the police department would be participating.

GV: What would you say to the villages if the meeting is organized in their village?

R1: Nothing much, it’s about unity. If children go to school we would teach alphabets, like this we would emphasize unity. Now people have improved themselves. Recently there was a news publication about our association meeting stating,’60 administrators discussing with police’.

KC: Will there be any specific issues that would be brought to your consent?

R1: We are not at a big level. Above us there MLA and MPs. One doctor can’t cure everyone, we are doing it with our capacity.

**-00:30:05**

KC: Are there differences in how different communities in the association wanted to develop?

GV (briefing the question): In this association of 63 villages, in 63 villages there would be different communities. They might have different requests for their communities.

R1: There are their own village representatives in the association. (Showing the photographs of the event and mentioning the happenings and pointing to the leaders in posting and the guests. Receiving a call and inviting another leader to his house). In such meetings the respective village heads would bring their concern in the meeting like there is an ‘issues in the bridge’ and also they would be giving petitions. Like this the concerned village would be providing letters (petition) on their own village issues.

GV: Would the police people be accepting the invitation and attending the meeting?

R1: If we invite everyone they won’t be coming here.

GV: Would the petitions be given to the guest officials present in the event/meeting?

R1: Yes, we are here. They would have known about us and if he (R2) goes to the police, they would be respecting him because he is in this association. He would also be behaving based on that.

GV: How have the other leaders/presidents been chosen to the association?

R2: They have been chosen in their own village.

R1: For example, a leader for a village is being posted in their own village after the election in their village. The elected leader would be joining our association. Every village would have their own issues, for every issue they can’t be resolved by the MLAs and Police offices.

GV: Are they elected by a voting system in the village?

R1: Yes.

R2: Now that system has progressed to voting; earlier they were appointed. We would sit down and appoint a person by negotiations like this time one person can be leader and next time other person can be leader. Village people would share their opinion on this and it would be decided. Now more conflicts arise, so we go with elections as people were saying there is a partiality in the earlier ‘appointment’ system. Even if the village has only two or three streets, then there would be an election for them.

R1: Everyone in the association has to respect one another.

R2: In this surrounding environment, Wimco, Kathivakkam, Ernavur and Ennore; villages from all these regions are in this association.

* R1 taking tablets

R1: Yesterday one village told us that they wish to join our association.

R2: (Showing a letter from Manali) Like this letter would be produced.

**-00:35:05**

If he (R1) selects the persons to be part of the association, they should be willing to do social service for the people. In the Tsunami quarter: AIR Nagar; All India Radio Nagar, there are 6000 houses. I was selected to represent the AIR Nagar, because I am a general person, I wouldn’t go in wrong paths.

GV (to KC): (looking into the letter shown by Rs) Manali Dr. Kalaignar nagar water to join the association, they have a letter in their letter head to this association to join the association.

KC: The important part of the government to protect the law and order are the police.

R2: For all the issues, we can’t be relying on the Police department, the local issues have to be sorted by the leaders. If there is a big problem then they can approach the police.

KC: Yes, I understand.
R2: The leader should be a good person.

GV: Can I take a photon of this?

R2: You can have the photo.

GV (on looking photo of the election in Bharathiyar nagar): He (R2) was the conducting election in the Barathiyar nagar.

R1: R2, kindly take care of the further interview. Now I have received an invitation to attend the meeting. Earlier we used to mention all the village names in the ‘letter pad’, but that practice was healthier, so we are not proceeding with that.

GV: Can I take a photo of these?

R1: Yes, you can have a photocopy.

GV: You are saying this as a small association, but this is a large association.

R1: Yesterday I also went to the Police station for an issue. Our village secretary is Balu, his son was beaten in their workplace. When I approached the police, the police were ready to do proceedings based on what I say, they were even ready to file a case. I called the boy and told him to forgive the person who has beaten you, that is a good characteristic. Nothing much after files the case, you only have to spend money for that. If you go now without filing a case, they would respect you. But If you file a case they would see you as an opponent. Then he listened to me, others were praising me stating,”I have not seen such a leader”.

GV: This means you were able to make peace in the interventions.

R1: It’s up to our capacity, we are not very big shots. He (R2) would be doing many things voluntarily without any expectations. Police would respect him, respect us.

**-00:40:04**

R1: He (R3) is the CID from the police department, he is a retired officer.

R2(to R3): Vanakkam Sir(Greetings).

GV, KC (to R3): Vanakkam

GV: She is a professor at Madras Institute of Development studies and I am a professor in Madras School of Social work, now working on this research project. We are doing research on Ennore development in the past, present and people's aspiration for the future. In that we witnessed this 63 union association, which seems to be a good example to sort the local issue within this region. How did this association form?

R: In 1991 there was an incident, there are more fishers domination in this region. Generally there was always disagreement between the fishers community and other communities in this region. Different communities are settled in different places, like fishers, SC (scheduled caste) and other communities. Here Burma Tamils are residing. Among people there would be anti-social activities, such a thing happened between this (AS nagar)community and the fishers community, that’s obvious in all the villages. This antisocial conflict between some people from these two communities has become conflict between villages; it became a group clash. In that clash, here (Burma Tamils) 5 people have died, in their (fishers) community 3 people have died (seems like the most accurate number). Mauriya IAS has opened firing (shooting) in here, at that time more than 5000 people from there community have surrounded this village. I was also a Police officer in IS CID (ulavu thurai). We initially took the disagreement between these two communities to the government notice, even informing the government in advance that there would be ‘Law and Order’ issue between the communities. The government failed to stop this issue. Only because of the government’s inaction, the casualties have happened. The SP (superintendent of Police) was Thirupathi, he later became DGP. DSP was Mauriya. I am giving the information till DGP. They (fishers) are assembling at night to attack this community, 18 villagers are assembling. Their thought was, ‘this village people are too much trouble making, we fishers community has to unite and show the opposition to them’. Fishers initially came here to show their opposition. But in common, if the gathering crowd is large, it’s hard to control them. Anbalagan (?) was heading the group, they were stating that ‘This villagers should not do ‘Rowdyism’ and they are touching (women abuse) our community people, there are more violent people (vanmuraiyaalargal) in your people. The information was ‘they are coming here to condemn these things and demonstrate slogans’. But while their strength is higher some anti-social people; proactive people started violence activities after entering into this village, then it became a group clash and because of that, the casualties happened. This led to a shooting order in 1991. After that there was no progress in smooth relationships between those villages.

**-00:44:57**

In 1992, Even though I was part of the Intelligent Service (IS), We (IS) wasn’t able to collect the message in this area. I was residing here, I was also refered as Burma nagar resident and I was receiving transfer order, I was transferred to Madhavaram. Even then I was showing attention here to this area (AS nagar). He (R1) was not the leader here, I think Muthu Vijayan was the leader/president of this area. We tried and bought him as the village (AS nagar) president in 1998. Then we are organizing a meeting to bring unity among the villages in place. It was my initiative, I was transferred by that time. Then Thevaaram was the commissioner (of Police). I am raising questions to officers that ‘why was I served punishment transferred? I am giving the messages to you’. Officials responded that I was branded as ‘Burma Tamil’ in this fishers belt, you can’t be able to work here, you won’t be getting the information, so we have transferred to another place, this is not a punishment.’ So I agreed. Even then all the people have to unite to ensure peace here. So, even after 6 years I didn’t leave this thing, after he (R1) became president I was given advisory posting at that time. We two joined and invited surrounding villagers and organized a meeting in this temple (peelikan angala parameshwari temple). We only invited 10 villages from fishers community and then the ‘ulaganaathapuram’.

R2: It’s quite a large village.

R3: Then Nehru nagar, Ernavur ‘Narayanan’ was the president of the Ernavur village. All these were the non-fishers villages. We embraced all these villagers and organized the meeting. Then Thaalankuppam Chettiyar Krishnaraj was heading the meeting. This (AS nagar) village is the most populous village. Other villages have lesser populations. Here votes alone are 8500 in numbers; I have the list. The population is more than 35,000.

KC: Is this the population at that time?

R3: Then the population would be 25,000. Now the population would be around 40,000 people.

R2: There would be more than 40000 villages.

R3: Because the palace has 11 streets, the ground land is split and resided by three people (families). The strength has increased, the children are more in number. In that meeting, I was the advisor as I was in the (police) department, I was able to start a relationship with the people here and we are discussing in the meeting that,’every village would have antisocial people, the people in charge in their village should not support those individuals doing wrong/mischievous things and become the accomplice. if anyone is doing wrong things that individual has to be identified and lawful actions have to be taken or actions at village level. By this way we united.’

How this issue started was, people were watching movies in the theaters, some would go as family and some would go with friends, there two theaters, one is Geetha theater and other one was Shanthi theater. It was in Kattukuppam. While watching movies in that theater, there was a clash between this village youth and youth from that village. This changed into a village riot. Those situations should come again, their village persons would do wrong/illegal things and our village persons would also do that; only those individuals have to be identified and we should be united and form an association. I only termed the body as ‘village coordination committee.’ R1 and I used to be close. While I was made as leader/president my contribution was always available.

KC: Do you have your name in this letterhead?

R3: As I was in the (police) department my name was not in the letterhead. Now I have retired, but my name is not in the letterhead. But R1 would be utilizing me wisely, he would be calling me anywhere I would be going to.

GV: You said that you started the association in 1998, at the initial meeting did the participants from the other village have the willingness to attend the meeting?

R3: While inviting them, they asked for the reason to attend the meeting; ‘what was objective?, the question raised by some of the fishers. I only responded to that stating,’only if we unite together, we can identify the anti-socials and such weed (kalaiyeduththal), the villages would be in peace, if we two communities stand as it is and grow our enmity, the anti-socials would be growing in the society and those peoples action can’t be stopped. If some people from the village have done something mischievous in other places, if they are identified and reported to me, I would take them to the police from our village because he is anti-social. Because of such people we are also facing issues in our village, by such intervention I would also be in solidarity with the impacted people from other villages’. With such interventions, this association was started.

-00:50:00

GV: Do you have good support from them?

R3: Yes, we have good support. Then Krishna Raj Chettiyar was the president and he (R1) was the Secretary of the association. Later he died, then Venkadesh; he is a fisherman, he was made Secretary as he was younger in age and R1 was made as the president as he was the senior.

GV: Where does Venkadeshan live?

R3: He lives in Periyakuppam.

R2: He is a good man, and stands common to everyone.

R3: He has good control over their people and his approaches in everything would be good. During the initial stage only elected people were represented in their association and later he (R1) was fixed as the President as no one else could embrace other peoples and leaders like him. Anyone can be elected, if there are any issues in any village there has to be capacity to go there and act with willingness. We should not act just because we are receiving the complaints, we have to act on the complaint thinking that the issue should not grow further; we should have that objective.

KC: Now you don’t have any big issues?

R3: After 1998 it’s now 2023, we have had no issues since then. If any issues arise, we would stop immediately. If our village person has done a mischievous thing, anyone can make complaints and action can be taken legally. We bought a system that we should allow any person to use ‘weapons (knives)’(kathi eduka koodadhu). Even after that some are using weapons, rowdyism is everywhere, but it should not be supported.

GV: Did you order that ‘Knives’ should not be used anywhere?

R3: Yes, we passed a resolution on that in every village. If anyone is using the ‘Knife’, without any investigation from our side, he would be produced to the police station. That information has reached every village. If any village person is wandering with ‘knife’, we would get the information and we would make complaints to the police department; they would take action on such persons. We bought these severe rules. Then the Police department was one on one with our association, we need to make the relationship continue, we also need to sort actions like making severe rules. It’s been 5 years since I retired, after that the relationship with the Police department is good, all the officers have to give the coordination to us, but it’s not happening.

GV: Are the current officers not providing sufficient coordination?

R3: Yes, they are giving coordination. The positioned officers at that time were good officers, then there was a DIG positioned name Honest Bala Subramaniyan. He was called as Honest Bala Subramniyan because he was corruption less official; he was a direct IPS, he raised till IG and retired. Even now he is doing agriculture. Mauriya is from ‘Sunnambu kulam’, he is also doing agriculture after retirement.

KC: In the 25 years since the formation of the association, new settlements have arrived like AIR nagar. Have any changes happened because of the new settlements in the surrounding region?

R3: If any new village is forming or if some village is bifurcated and if new names are allotted to such villages. If the newly formed village or any village that has requested to join the association gives a letter to the president (R1) would add the village to the association.

GV: There was a recent letter from a village from Manali region, how are you approaching?

R3: They are interested in associating.

GV: How long would it take?

R3: Not just Manali, residentials from Madhavam and Red hills also wanted to join the association. But we can’t be associating with them, we can’t do politics. It’s mostly politicians who wanted to join. There is an issue regarding dredging of storm water drainage in front of an advocate 's house. Then the advocate asks them to dig a little distance, then it becomes an argument and then the MC (member of council) Jayaraman intervenes into that issue;

**-00:55:01**

He is from communist party. He is stating that this is a planned site, the digging site can’t be moved, this argument grows and the advocate called the advocate association over phone and torturing the MC. The other two advocates joined and making this an issue, he is not giving up and keeping up with his stand. Then they are making false complaints stating that,’MC has beaten the lady advocate’. Then 10 people from the advocate association demanded action on him (MC). Then he (R1) is hearing about the issue, he is a communist councilor, he is an honest person. Even for him asking a righteous thing, there was a false complaint on him. Then he (R1) is calling me to sort the issues in a smooth manner. Even though the inspector knows this is a fake case, the advocates are giving pressure to file FIR on the MC. The president of the advocate association is also pressuring the police official to file an FIR, take action based on the complaint received. Who would say that given complaints are false or true. In the last 11 years of my service I was in the ‘law and order - crime’ department; I was in CID (a police department) for the last 15 years. Our (police officials) service was different, current police are not working as police.

R2: Now sir (R3) told MC Jeyaraman, he was a Ashoke Leyland employee. In Thiruvottiyur only two councilors (from their side) won from DMK, then Kalaignar (former CM) gave chairperson posting to them.

KC: What happened to that complaint?

R3: Then it was resolved.

KC: How?

R3: The police officials called the women advocate and then he (R2) explained that the false complaints can’t be registered, he (MC) is also doing public service you can give up on your stand (vittukoduthu poonga). He (R2) went directly to the police station and talked over and the case was withdrawn by the complaint party. The issue was compromised. After compromise, one person is calling (over phone) from there and saying why he (R1) is involved in this, he should be sitting at home ideally. I didn’t say to him (R1), and argued to the person who called me that, ‘he is doing service, what’s with the age? Age is not a barrier. For his age, he has experience; he is finding solutions to the issues. You don’t have to take this as a bad thing’; I thought of saying all these. But if I say that to him, he (the called person) would also get angry at me. So, I just responded that I would speak to him (R1). If he (R1) speaks, he would definitely have the background support.

R3: We are a non-political group, who get unioned among the surrounding villages and do services to the people in a friendly manner.

GV: Did you (R2) come to the village by the year 1963?

R3: I came to this village by 1974 and brother (R1) would have come by 1964.

GV: From where did you come?

R3: I am an initial citizen, my grandfather was from Ramanathapuram. In Paramakudi, he was from Perundharanai village. His (R1) forefathers were from Karakudi, his (R1) father was called Karakudiyaar; his original name was Karupaiyaa; he was addressed with his region's name. I am sharing our history as I belong to this community (Burma Tamils); Burma Tamils history. How we all became Burma Tamils is, we all went to Burma to work there (polaikka ponom) before 1 or 2 generations. Ancestors went to Burma, Singapore and such places before independence. In Burma, there were more offers for the farmers. Burmese don't know how to do agriculture. Burmese language is totally different, Tamils went there for their livelihood like Tamils went to Lanka (Sri Lanka). Like that once a time, Tamils went all over the world in search of jobs. Then there was transportation to travel to other places. The Second World War only ended in 1941; before that counties had up and down transportation across the countries. Even in the Thooni (Boats) there was transportation for people. Then after the second world war many people stayed/stopped travelling to travelled places. Once they stopped in the travel places, people got married and had children. The Tamils' strength has increased in those places.

What happened in Burma is that Nehru was travelling once to Burma. Then Woonu, the Prime Minister of Burma is sharing that ‘Indian refugees are more in pollution in Burma, when you are planning to take them back’ in an event to Nehru (former Indian PM).

**-01:00:01**

Then Nehru got agitated when the PM of Burma stated Indians as Refugees. Refugees can’t become their citizens. We didn’t have recognition, we were like secondary cityzen. Even now there are people without recognition. Then Nehru said ‘I would take them back, are you ready to send them’. Then he (Nehru) also announced ‘Interested people can go to their homeland’. Then interested people had to register at the Embassy, people who have migrated for their livelihood have been asked to get back to India if they are interested. It was announced that those repatriate people would be given employment, housing and necessaries would be provided. If you came as a refugee (repatriate) also, the government would be providing all the necessary and also informed that those people would be resided in the special camps; the announcement was made by Nehru. After the announcement the Tamils from Burma started coming back here (Tamil Nadu). This happened in 1962, since then repatriation started from Burma.

GV: It was said in 1962, there was a riot in Burma. Something like there was a last ship that was coming from Burma to India.

R3: No, nothing like that happened there. After that by 1978 the Burma government stopped sending people from their country, he was not ready to send the Tamils (Indians) from their country. Now their country has gotten worse, they are backward in the agriculture sector. Tamils' hard work was a great contribution to the county, Tamils were most clever in agriculture. Only Tamils have uplifted agriculture in Burma. The Burma government gave 12 Acres to every Tamils in the country to do agriculture by taxing the land for doing agriculture. If a person is Major and he is living with family, he would be given 12 Acres of land for agriculture like subsidies; this is something like how fishers are getting subsidies in India. Only thing we (Burma Tamils) have to do is pay taxes. Tamils lived in such a manner and had a prosperous growth. My father was a big farmer in Burma, at the end of departure from Burma my father was farming in 70 Acres land and to my knowledge in my house we had 25 cows (cattles).

KC; Did you come from Burma at your young age?

R3: Yes, I was 14 years older when I came here (India).

KC: How did you come here?

R3: We came here by 1974. We came in a ship. We thought we can’t stay there anymore under that government. So we came here. Brother (R1) came before us, by 1964; his father brought their family by that time.

KC: Did you come directly from Rangoon to Chennai?

R3: Yes, on a ship. There were two ships named Saudi and Mohamadi. Repeatedly these two ships were shipping people from Burma to India. Then the Indian government has made an agreement that those people have been living in Burma, so the government should provide the minimum wealth to the repatriating people agreed between two countries. We took some gold and some of our belongings, this is something similar to restriction in the current day flight travel where there would be minimum luggage restriction. We were restricted by Burmese government to only take only limited gold and belongings while coming back to India and not all the wealth of the family/individual stating that all the Tamils belonging are National wealth. As the Indian government promised employment, housing and also facilitated camps like Gummidipondi camp, Trichy camp. Even those camps exist now, it's a permanent camp.

R2: Even in Redhills there is a camp.

GV: Have you become a citizen of this country?

R3: Yes, I am a citizen of this country. From the start, we are citizens of this country. This is our Native country.

GV: You are not called a Refugee, you are called a Repatriate who has come to the same native country.

GV: What is the larger issue that this association has resolved successfully?

R3: Since this association was formed, only good things are happening to all the villages. Later the Sivanpadai Veedhi Kuppam (fisher village) and Thalankuppam (fisher village) clashed with one another. Brother (R1) was the Secretary ( of the Association) then, he going to that village with white towel (on shoulder; towels would be worn on shoulder as a privilege gesture in Tamil/some Indian culture) and with his hand gestures, he is trying to stop the clashes and trying to control people stating not to use knife and attach one others. Even Police officials could not enter into the clash, who would fire and beat people. Police would not compromise people, they can’t do that if people are getting into violence. But even during violence between huge crowds, he (R1) made a compromise/peace(samadhanam) between both the villagers; that was a great record. Persons who were having knives return back.

**-01:05:12**

Then they (clashers) accepted the Cooperation Committee’s requests. Then there was a discussion organised with representatives from both the villages headed by the Cooperation Committee. We insisted that ‘violence would not provide a good smooth life to everyone, this can be resolved by exchange of dialogue among you’. We made peace with them. We are there always as a ‘Peace Committee’ and acting as one.

GV: Why did the clashes between the Sivanpadai Veedhi Kuppam and Thalankuppam take place?

R3: It’s something like we had a conflict because of the issues in Theater. Similarly small issues have grown to a great conflict, that would change to gang fights and later it would become village conflict. Not everyone in the society are genuine and there would be some antisocials in all the villages, they might be in drugs like Ganja, liquor; in that state that would become an argument and fight, they would change it to group fight and make it as village riot/conflict.

GV: What intervention should be made in this region for the welfare of this region? At your association level.

R3: In this association, If the members are proposing some ideas and working powerfully or acting with willfully to do public service, some members are not accepting that.

GV: Why so?

R3: It’s the members' mindset. Politicians have increased, the government officials are listening only to the politicians. We are apart from Politics, we are a group of people who want to provide a smooth life to the people here. Politicians are present for the profit, the Police department exists for profit and all the departments are working for the profit. In that association, actions become inactive.

R2: What Sir(R3) is saying is true. The politicians are working to earn money. But we are not like that.

R3: If we do some intervention, the officers (government officers) would say ‘those things have been done in such a way. things can’t be changed’. The officials also wanted profit. No police would buy tea with money in a tea shop. Even in roadside shops the Police officials would buy tiffen(food) with authoritative commands. I was in IS (intelligent Service) in the police department, I only had to provide messages. I would be reporting weekly in written format. If any mischievous or wrong things are happening in the government department I would be reporting, all those things have to be taken to the government's attention, that is the job of the Intelligence Service department’s work. As I was working in this section of the department I know what are all the mischievous things that are done by the Police officials. I have to do compulsory reporting weekly once. When I was in this service there were only 24 districts(in Tamil Nadu), now we have 38 Districts. Each District would have 4 circles, in the 4 circles I was working in 1 circle, it’s called Ennore sub-division. From Ennore to Arambakkam is one sub-division; till Andra (next state) border. At present the police officials working on service thoughts are very limited.

KC: Even Now the police are getting bribes from the vegetable vendors on the road.

GV: How, your association wishes this place shall exist in the future?

R3: We wish to do more service in this place. There are more hindrances to us.

GV: What kind of hindrance?

R3: More hindrance from the Politicians and among the government officials. If we are going to a government office, if he (R1) is going to approach a government official; as he ia elderly person he should be seated and he has to be heard by the official. But the official would make him sit outside the cabin. Only if we are received can we state our stand. They are not even receiving us.

GV: What changes do you need in this place?

R3: The politicians should change.

GV: I am not asking about Politicians. I am asking about your dream of this place. You are here for more than 50 years, you have seen all the changes for the 50 years. How shall this place's future be?

R3: Sir, you are asking many things. But if we say, knives would be pointed towards our neck. Rowdyism has grown, who would control rowdyism in Tamil Nadu.

**-01:10:00**

Rowdyism is openly progressing in North Madras. Police have the list of the North Madras gangsters, but are they taking action? Police are not controlling those gangsters. There are 7 gangsters in North Chennai. You know how many groups there are? You say.

GV: I don't know.

R3: Kondithope (not clear), Balaji group, Kalluvetti Ravi group, \_\_\_\_ shankar Group, natarajan group and so many groups. In every group there would be 200 or 300 Rowdys, who would be collecting money and many illegal activities. The government is not controlling that, then how we can function. Rowdies are controlling things here. In the past, when I was the advisor. Why are we removing the weeds from farm land? It’s for good crop production. Likewise only if the village administrators remove the anti-socials in the village, the village people would be in peace. If we miss to do that, then there would be more anti-socials activities in the society will increase in the society and we can’t freely move in the society and public can’t freely in the society; this situation of the current era. We are aged, so we are not participating in the election. Now other people are elected as the village administrators, the mind sets are different; they are supporting antisocial people.

R2: Only if they choose that path they can withstand.

R3: Yes. Then only they can buy votes. We are not standing for vote. As the situation is changing, we can’t work smoothly. We can’t change ourselves because of that, but we are working to our capacity.

R2: You asked earlier about the Barathiyar nagar; they have asked to conduct the election for them. We would go and conduct elections; we would be coordinating the whole election process. They have mentioned all the names of our association who would be conducting an election as an election notice.

GV: What do you think is a good city?

R2: It’s what Gandhi has stated, ‘at 12 AM at night, a woman without worrying about the clothes shall walk in the street independently feeling the safety’. That would be Good city, that is what we are expecting. Until the anti social elements are freely moving in the society that would not happen.

KC: Safety is the thing you say.

R2: Yes.

KC: Thank you.

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