**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 1.1

01:03:10 Hrs

[230601\_AnnaiSivagamiNagar\_Int\_Aud\_1.1\_AJ,GV,MS,RK\_SR.mp3](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1b-ks92QXn4aRh6Zv9pZbXBzwRb1N8GQs/view?usp=sharing)

**Interviewee Information**

Name:

Pseudonym: R (Resident)

**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 with male dominance, keeping men in mind and also represented and referred to only men in his speech.

**-00:00:00**

R: This is the temple's office; we have built an office for this temple. Anything related to the temple would be discussed and done here. Anything related to the village (ooru) would be discussed outside the temple.

GV: I would debrief about the research we are doing. What research is this? People are all part of this research. The objective of the project. We would let you know about all these project details. It is mandatory to let the respondent know about all these to the responder. Because the responder should know all these. The title of the project is ‘Reimagining the Good City from the eco-restoration of the Ennore creek, Chennai’. How shall a good city exist?

R: So you would conclude by the end of the research by identifying if it's a good city or band city or damn city.

GV: Rather analyzing what you have predicted, we are interested to know what people think about the city. We are not deciding if this is a good city or bad city. We are studying to find,’What do people see as the good city?’ Specifically, we are here to find how the city evolved in the past, how it exists now and how it will exist in the future and we have to document it. That is our job. We, the stakeholders of research study, are documenting the history, current affairs of the city and the people’s aspiration of the future Ennore. We are recording all these for research. After recording, we are disseminating this as research articles and planning for something called ‘‘people plan’ with the people. ‘People plan’ is something that addresses the development planned by the government bureaucrats. We are not sure if that plan has people's wishes in it. If Ennore needs development, people of Ennore have to be consulted about their aspirations and wishes; this has to be documented. So that the Government can refer to this if planning for something.

In this research we are looking into saltpans, fishing and then the industrialization and its intervention with people. And their aspiration for the future Ennore. This information collected from would be used only in this research.

R: Would it not get into the government's table?

GV: It would be disseminated for the public, the public can refer to this and we would also bring this to the government’s attention. At the end of this research we are also planning for a larger event in Ennore to let people know about this. We would invite all the people who ever we are meeting in the villages we are visiting. It would also get into the government’s attention. Our objective of the project is people's welfare from people’ sight. We are not registering your name as a privacy concern. We are using the pseudo names, we are also using the recorder to respond to take notes from the audio note. As an interviewer I can’t remember all the things that you inform us and also can’t make notes in the short span of time. The recording would be used and accessed only by the members who are part of this study. We would not share these recordings to any other individuals other than the people involved in the project. It’s also unnecessary and also we should not share the audio with any other individuals.

**-00:05:02**

We also only need information that is necessary for the peoples’ welfare. It’s only used for research purposes. I request for your consent in this research with your interest.

R: Okay.

GV: We request for your coordination.

R: My support and coordination for your interview. I would answer your questions. I have been here in this village for the last 57 years. We have also completed the 57th year of the temple festival some days before. Our village was formed in 1964. We have been here since then. If you wanted to know the history I would share all the history of this village.

RK: What’s your name?

R: My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I am the present village chairperson.

GV: Can you share the history of Ennore?

R: Do you need the history of Ennor or the history of our nagar (Annai Sivagami nagar)?

GV: Ennore is all together.

R: We are not sure about Ennore history. We could share our village history. Can we start?

GV: Yes.

R: We the residents of the Annai sivagami nagar belong to Tamil Nadu. Our ancestors; my grandmother, grandfather all were born and brought up here (Tamil Nadu). They were all living in the Ramanathapuram, Madurai and Rameshwaram (districts) belt. In the era before 1964, India was below the poverty line; severe poverty. It’s hard to get daily food. Because of this poor environment, our ancestors moved to foreign countries for our livelihood. They were traveling in small boats (thoni). To travel in Thoni, they don’t need to pay any money. The destiny of the livelihood of our ancestors was on the shore where the ‘Thoni’ (small boat) would land. Such destinations include Singapore, Malaysia, Paneng (island), Australia and Burma. Once they landed at their respective places, they have created their own livelihoods. My grandfather and grandmother and their relatives all went to Burma in their teens. People who have migrated from here would live as a one community or else they would reside in the places where Indians do live; like how we are residing here. They were all living there and prospered in their own economy.

My grandparents had 16 children. Of those 16 children, only my father has lived; others were killed in a riot. My father was left alone. My father got married and for our father we were 8 folks (children)

RK: Were all born in Burma or here?

R: All were born in Burma. Even my father and mother were born in Burma; 8 folks were born in Burma. We were living in Burma in this citation, my father was a government servant; he was working in the government press. My mother used to work in our house, also used to cook and sell Idli and Dosa for livelihood. We, Burma Tamils were quite wealthy there.

Eventually, the native youngsters of Burma started Partitioning stating,”why they (migrant Tamils) are living in our country; they are Tamils, why are they residing in this county”. They were thinking that their business was getting affected; if the Tamils were present there, they were thinking in line that they would get these business opportunities. They have been motivated to,”why should we keep them here” and that led to riots. Once seeing all these riots, we were all Indian, not just Tamil, Benagalis and also Pakistanis, Chinese and were living there. We people from India, we appealed to the Indian Embassy that was in Burma to save us, we could not bear the cruelty and we were protesting to take us back to India. While we were protesting, the Indian government was intervening into our issues with Burmese government.

-00:10:00

At that time. The Prime Minister of India was Lal Bahadur Shastri and external affairs minister was Surna sing. They two were visiting Burma and finding the situation of the Buma country , releasing that their (Indian) ate being affected. Then they signed a contract with the Burmese government stating, “don’t assault our Indians, we are ready to get back our Indians”; this agreement was made before 1964. The Burmese government also accepted this agreement. After the acceptance Indian government is sending large shipt travel back from Burma to India. This ship is as big as 1000 people. The ships names were ‘Saudi’, Mohammediya and some more ships. Then we all were refugees in Burma, we all were shipped to Indiia to get back to us. In Burma we were living wealthily, but we can’t take anything with us, we have to surrender our belongings to the country; even if it’s our house, we have to surrender it to their government. We can’t even our jewelleries; my mother had 100 sovereigns of gold, but she couldn't take it to India. So we sold all the belongings, made money and then came here. While coming here we can only take some 2 sovereigns gold jewels; that too is based on the fact that ‘Thali' (the jewel that husband tie it to wife) is for women; that would be ½ sovereign or ¾ sovereign and the additional ‘Kundu’ (shell in their Thali) would sum up to more than 1 sovereign; then summing up the jewels in nose and ears for women would totally add up to 2 sovereign. It would be called/ measured as Sovereign, it’s called ‘Thickal’. One ‘Thickal’ is 2 sovereign. Only one ‘Thickal’ is allowed to carry with us, we can’t take more than that. Also we can’t take money even if we have plenty; all that has to be surrendered to that country. While we were returning, they would give 15 Rupees to us; for a family to take care of their expenses in India, they (Burmese government) were only providing 15 rupees while returning to India. We only got 15 Rupees and came here; it was a 5 day trip on the ship from Burma to Chennai. In the ship we were served food; we would get giddy in the ship. Anyhow, in this situation we all came here. To my knowledge I boarded on 25 of a month and reached here on 30 of a month in Chennai harbor. Here the Tamil Nadu government welcomed us and transported us in a bus and a lorry. On the bus, they would pick the people and in the lorry they would pick up luggages.

They have set camps across Tamil Nadu in Trichy, Madurai and here they had camps in Sholavaram and Gummidipoondi each. The people in the ships that were arriving in Chennai were moved to the camps in Sholavaram and Gummidipoondi. In that camp, the government would settle each family in a room. They (government) would make necessary conveniences for us, for bathing and such facilities were there. And then they were providing ‘ration’ (-provisions) for one month; it includes wheat, rice and 60 Rupees for the expenses for a family. Like a ‘ration card’, we were given an Identity card once returning from Burma. Identity card was given by the Indian Embassy and it would contain all the family members' names. We would be provided with rations(-provision) based on the identity card and we would consume those rations (-provisions).

Then, they would be inquiring about our nativity in Tamil Nadu and desire to move/settle to any places for our future livelihood. We would reply that our native is Ramanathapuram, but we don’t have any relatives to move and settle there. But if we would say we would move to Rameshwaram, as we belong to that place, they (government) would board us in the train. It’s all government expenses, once we all reach Rameshwaram by train, families have to go to the respective native villages. As far as we are concerned, we didn’t go to our native as we didn’t know any relatives there and we came here to Ennore from Gummidipoondi. When we came here to Ennore, we rented a house next to the Ennore railway station in 1964. Though we were living in a rented house, we were thinking that we need land to live. At that time, this place from EID parry to here was a desert (palaivanam); it was filled with sand like Arab countries. It was full of sand and there were no plants, shrubs or anything. It was a desert, at that time, our ancestors were encroaching on these lands.

 **-00:15:01**

They were thinking,’ we can encroach the land and provide the land to our people to live’. They were trying to encroach, at that time it was the Kamarajar government (Indian National Congress) in the state (TN). While approaching them (government or maybe party people) they were insisting, if they were Burmese Tamils, we could let them live. Then Punniyakodi Chettiyar was the Municipality council member (nagara mandra council). He was a fisher; he was a Municipality council member from Congress (INC) party. We settled here with his cooperation. Once we settled here, we (community members) were providing land to every family who had an identity card with them. Each land plot was 60\*40 sq. ft.; it was 2400 sq. ft. Each Burma Tamil family was given a plot of 2400 sq.ft. Then we had an Association; to that association each family had to give 4 Rupees donation; The Association got 4 Rupees and gave the lands to the families. Then families started to settle here, slowly many Burma Tamil families started to move here. We (Burma Tamils) folks were the ones who set-up/formed the village here, earlier we can see the sea from this (western) side of the road end; the streets were formed straight. It was earlier 600 meter length from this (western) end to the sea and now 100 meter land has eroded inside the sea. Now we have only 500 meter length from this end. Now stones have been dumped to stop the erosion, now erosion has stopped and no more sea would get inside our place.

At present, there are 1750 families residing in this place. More than 2000 families are residing here. Individuals based on their wealth, they have built their own houses. For us the government has provided employment. When we were migrating here, it was congress governance; in Tamil Nadu Kamarajar was governing the state. A residential place needs a name, because of the Congress government we have named the place in support of the government. Only if we name like that, others would not bother/create-nuisance. Then we buried a pole and hoisted congress party flag, and we named the place as Annai Sivagami (mother Sivagami) nagar, she is Kamarajar’s mother. We would respect elders, we would only call Indira Gandhi as Mother Indira Gandhi, like that we name the place as Annai Sivagami (mother Sivagami) nagar in the year 1964; our elder gave this name. Then the reign changed, DMK government was formed. At that time, in 1971 M.G.R. (a former political leader) came to our village.

Some of our relatives are settled near Ennore railway station. Some of them were visiting us in the Gummidipoondi camps once they came to know that we were here. Like us, people from Rameshwaram, Ramanathapuram, Madurai (districts) are residing in these places. Once they lived in that belt and later moved here; they would be our relatives; once they came to know that we are here they would write letters to us; we would write response letters to them stating our presence in the Gummidipoondi. Immediately after knowing this they would be visiting us in our place. They would find us. They invited us to stay in the Ennore region; on that basis we came here.

AJ: You have mentioned that MGR has come in here. Has Kamarajar visited you place?

R: No, Kamarajar has not visited this place.

AJ: Has congress people visited this place?

R: Yes, Yes congress people would come and visit us. \_\_\_\_ (some place name) Jeyabarathi from Congress party, Kumari Anandan from congress lost here in his MLA election.

RK: How was this place looking when you were settling here?

R: I told this already, it was like a desert, there were no plants or shrubs. It was hard to water, we didn't have water facilities. But if we dug the sand, the water would be available just 1 feet under the surface; people used to consume that water. People would go to low lying places, they would dig the sand, water would come out. We relied on that spring water for our water requirements.

**-00:20:03**

Once the councilors were elected, a hand pump was installed on behalf of the Municipality. Now many of our people have become wealthier, they have become more lazy (sombal thatti pochi). They are not even drawing water using hand pumps, they want motor pumps in their house. Now, after getting consent from the Metro water department, drinking water pipelines are connected in the streets. The pipelines are deeper under the surface, people have to bend down to fetch the water from the pits, where the outlets are set up. At present from the village panchayat finance, we have bought a secondary hand pump to extract for 24 hours and we have installed that.

RK: You were talking about the desert landscape, were there any sand dunes?

R: There were no dunes. There were small ridges and downs, nothing like hills.

GV: You were talking about a change from Congress to DMK reign, later MGR was there in the reign.

R: Only after the reign change MGR is coming here.

GV: How was the period then?

R: Then we all belong to the Dravida Munnetra Kalagam (DMK). IN Burma, we formed ‘Burma Dravida Munnetra Kalagam’ and we were functioning here. From that party most of them have repatriation here, after the fall of the Congress reign, DMK group was created here and laid the flag pole here. While installing the pole for the DMK flag, there was opposition to install the flag. Even then the flag was installed, later MGR was coming to this place (from DMK), then our people threw a slipper on MGR to oppose his entry to our village. Then he was stopped from entering this place. It was the time when MGR moved away from DMK and formed ADMK in 1971, that was agitation towards moving out of DMK.

00:23:13 - 00:23:16 - not clear.

Then the issue was solved. Even then we didn’t change the name of our place, it’s the same; Annai Sivakgami nagar. It’s the same name that's being continued. We didn’t use ‘kalaignar’ (former CM from DMK) name, predominant people belong to Dravida Munnetra Kalagam (DMK) and Anna Dravida Munnetra Kalagam (ADMK) . The parties like Congress and other parties don’t have such opportunities to win here. Even now the Councilor (corporation council) is from DMK, there is another Member Councilor named G. Raja from ADMK. Our village comes under 2 wards (corporation wards); 2nd ward and 3rd ward. From the second ward we have G. Raja won the MC election, from the 3rd ward M. Veerakalai is the MC. They have become the Councilor and they two have done some welfare required for this village (ooru). the hand pump; the water facility, the road facility and the street light facility were made possible by them.

GV: You were telling about the ‘Burma Dravida Munnerttra Kalagam’, how it was formed and can you share the history of the Burma DMK?

R: My father formed during my fathers time, I was a youngster then. My father tied ‘Thali’ to my mother in ‘Burma DMK order. DMK people, they would not have any stages, they just tie the ‘Thali’, my father tied ‘Thali’ to my mother with that policy; he was living with the same policy. My father would not like God, if the temple ‘bell’ rings, he would be joking by saying, some “fire accident has happened”. After migrating here things totally changed.

**-00:25:12**

GV; Have the DMK leader visited Burma?

R; Many DMK leaders have visited Burma, Muthuramalinga Dever has come; he had great welcoming honor even from Burma people. Burma people would give most welcoming honors to foreigners by kneeling down on the floor and spreading their hair on the way; the individual(s) has to walk on that. They would be that much welcoming.

Burmese people have a traditional function for children that is something like we have ‘Ear piercing’ at some particular age; it is called ‘Pongii’, in that they would wear ‘Kaavi’ clothing on them (like buddhist monks). They would not wear any pants, shirts with buttons, it’s just red (kaavi) coloured clothing. They would have a vessel kind of plate with them to get food for them to feed on. They would only stay in the ‘Pongi’ monastery, they would not stay with parents or their family. Once they wake up, they would get ready and take the vessels to every household nearby. They would not ask for any food, they would just stand next to the door. People would have kept the food prepared, people would serve them and worship them. It’s Burmese culture, not ours.

GV; When you migrated (repatriation) here in 1964, when this nagar (Annai Sivagami nagar) was created.
R: It has been emerging step by step since 1964. This village needs a leader then, how a family needs a head, we also need a leader for this village to pave the way for village development. Our elders have decided and made a young B.Sc. Literate from Burma as the village leader, he was an engineer in a company and he was literate in English language. We kept him as a leader as he was educated, others weren't much literate. His name was Anna malai, he was a manager in EID parry company. Before him there was another person called Karaikudi Karuppaiya, he was much older and he would talk straight forward in Panchayat (grievance hearing); he would get into violence, if someone spoke badly, he would immediately beat them. After him, Annamali was in the head position, once Annamalai was in office, he brought the policy of democratic election in the village more than choosing a person from a group. This decision was made in 1975 - 1977. After this was decided, the population census was made in the village and an election was conducted. Elected representative would be the bearer for one year. After one year, another election would happen, that is being followed till now. It was started in 1974 or 1975, and is being continued till date.

In 1986, we were forming different groups within ourselves, each group would have 10-15 memes who would be administrators. President, Secretary, deputy President and deputy secretary likewise we would form the group. We formed a group called ‘Tharaasu’ (libra), our symbol was ‘Tharaasu’ (libra), opposition group was ‘Kuthuvelakku’ (a type of lamp) group; Veera Kaalai (his name was mentioned earlier) belong to this group; he has also participated in Councilor election (of City Corporation). At that time, he was a ‘President candidate’frm ‘Kuthuvilakku’ team. Opposing him ‘Kailaasam’ was contesting from the ‘Tharaasu’ group; he was working in the Leyland. I was contesting for the Secretary post, US Mani was the Treasurer contestant. In the election 'Kailaasam’ ground was won under his leadership. We had a one year reign. When we were in the reign, we started this temple.

Then this temple was on the other (eastern) side of the road. It was so simple based on our economy. It wouldn’t look like a temple with sculpture arts, it was just walls with a tent like ceiling. This God has to be kept in a more place with purity (thoomaiyaana idam), the place should not even hear the bell sounds. It has to be kept in the ‘farm’ forest, but we had this temple in the village. The place where the temple was existing, people used to move around; people without purity would also move around. There might be dirty (theetttu; referring to women during menstruation) people or also people without dirt. They would be moving on their own for their work,

-00:30:00

But it was not apt for us. Then our administration under President ‘Kailaasam’ decided to evict the temple from that place. Then we moved that God (statue) from there to build a new temple. It was 4 AM in the early morning, we initiated ‘Bhumi Pooja’ (Earth Pooja); there was opposition to this, but we all dealt with this and built this temple. We have built the temple for two Gods, we have won then. Again we planned to build the hall, again we won. This temple hall was built under the ‘Kailaasam’ reign. We won (the election) continuously 3 times. Then Kailaasam decided that,”this is enough, I couldn’t manage the welfare for the community as well as my work in Leyland”. On behalf of our team (Tharasu), there was a person called Muthu Vijayan, we approached and discussed with him.

**-00:31:00**

He said that he cannot be the President candidate as he was financially not sustained and he cannot handle things. We argued with him and we said we would provide the required support to contest in the election. Then he contested and won with 11 vote difference, then he was in the administration for 2 years. During his 2 year term, there was a riot between fishers and our community. Our people would go to the cinema theater in Ennore, the theater name was ‘Geetha Theater’. Geetha Theater would not have any seats, people have to sit on the floor.

GV: Was it like touring talkies?

R: Yes, it was like touring talkies. People used to watch cinema in that, people at the front used to pile up the sand and sit on that. People in the back could not do it (piling the sand). There would be some naughty fellows who used to pull women’s hair, likewise some guys have pulled a fisher woman's hair (kupparthaar pombala mudiya izhuthutaan). It turned into a big riot, it changed its village fight. This panned in 1992. To stop the riot, police had a shooting order and then the issue settled after that. Now we (fisher and Burma Tamils) have good friendship, they would also come here, we would also go. We are living in a good brotherhood. But in between some incidents happened but we came across that.

GV: Can you share about the Phelikhan Amman story, history and God's connection to your community?

R: This Goddesses does not belong to a particular community or particular persons or particular village. It was just built as a statue in that village in Burma. It was created normally in the farm fields. When it was created, the ‘Shakthi’ (power) of the Goddesses increased. Like here, there also people would celebrate the temple festival in Burma.

GV: Were you in a town or village or city in Burma?

R: If someone is lying or stealing and if we appeal to the goddesses, it would counter the blame on them (Pazhi theethudhum). If money fraud is done, people would go to the temple and tear the cash as ‘practice’ to ask for a remedy. Even here there is a Kali temple called ‘Vettudaiyaan Kaali’. Like this in our place in Burma people used to worship asking for a remedy,’someone stole my money’ and would practice cutting the money. The concerned person’s family would face any impacts because of this. That is why if someone lies, people would ask them to promise on God (saami sathiyama pannu) so that they would be caught. Our people would ask to promise on the ‘Phelikan Muniswarr’, people who lied would not promise, people who have done wrong would not promise. People who have done bad and courage to promise, would definitely face the consequences. The God has such power. Even the Burmese people would fear these gods; they would not worship but they have fear for this god.

GV: Is there any incident like,’Burmese people have got frightened about this god’

R: Actually, we (Burma Tamils, would come from different villages to this temple; the temple is situated in the place called ‘Pelikhan’ village next to the major town called ‘Kaiyaa’. In that village this god was there and was started to be exposed as a powerful god. It was ‘Munishwarar’ god who was present there. He was the powerful god, Anagalaeswari (the goddesses) had no power there. She has power here, but not here. There we would only worship ‘Muniswarar’. There we would celebrate the ‘Panguni (mid-March to mid-April) uthiram’ festival, which would be celebrated for 10 days; for 10 days food would be served for all 3 times. Lakhs of people would come, some would come in Bullakarts from different villages. There people would also bring dry chili (red chili) to make chili powder to use in food to mills. If you are giving 5 kilograms of chili powder to the mill, we would add 1 kg of bran (tavudu) to it. I am saying this as I was working there once. Bran would be white in color, the chili powder would also become whiter. To compensate for this, there is a chemical, if we add that chemical to it would turn into chili powder color.

**-00:35:00**

Once after grinding, we would weigh the chili powder. The original chili would be lessened by weight. So, if we could add this to it and during weight if the weight is high, we would remove some for the right weight. But if the chili is grinded for the temple, the owner would not let us add bran to it. The chili would be grinded purely without any adulteration. In the profit, the shop owner would give part of it to the temple on a daily basis. During festival time, the shop owner would go to the temple.

(Have to check if this was the pond in Ennore or any Burma) There was a pond next to the ‘Phelikhan’ temple, thousands of people would be bathing in that pond and on the 4 corners of the pond, 4 motors would be installed to pump the water out. But the pond would not get dry any time. If we need to po to Phelikhan (a place) we have to go by boat. We have to go to Thaiyan by boat from Rangoon, after getting down from the boat we have to board a car. The temple is in the center of the farm fields/forest (vayakadu); it is called ‘chottae’ in Burma. The farms would be paved a small way for the cars; while driving the car it would be full of dust.

Even during mid-night people would be coming to the temple. After 10 PM in the night, people were coming to the temple, some Burmese robbers blocked the car and robbed people's jewelry. People were scared and gave all their jewelry as they had no other option. On Saturday, there would be an event called ‘Agnikappar’. In the 10 day event, it would happen only on the Saturday, in other 9 days the God (idol) would promenade (ulaa). On Saturday,’Agnikappar’ would take place. If we ask questions to the Agnikappar, he would answer with grace (arul Vaakku). The person who took the Agnikappar, was visiting village by village. Then he suddenly started running, people ran suddenly and witnessed what was happening. The robber was standing there, he was holding the jewels packed. The person caught the robber, then opened the jewel packs and asked the people to take the respective jewels and told them not to take others jewels. He wasn't able to see then, he felt like walking but wasn't able to walk then.

GV: You said that Anglaeswari (a goddesses) have less power in Burma.

R: Yes, Muniswarar temple is the backside of the Angalamma temple; it’s 100 ft behind this temple. There in Burma, Angalaeswari is only behind the Muniswarar temple; we do worship the goddesses there also. But it was not as powerful as here. But it changed after coming here. Only Amman (Goddesses) are given preference in Tamil Nadu. Other than that, we have Aandavar, Thiruthani Mugrugan, Palani Murugan and Aiyappan, that’s it. At Most only Amman (goddess) is worshiped here, wherever you go, you would only see Amman temples. Like that, this temple also became famous.

GV: The Goddesses got famous after coming here. Right?

R: Yes. But people would worship both the gods. They would do Pooja to both the gods.

GV: I came here for the temple festival, there were more people. Were there only Burma Tamils present for the festival or people from neighboring villages also joined the festival?

R: People from surrounding villages come here and also the Burma Tamils. There are many Kuppams (fishers villages) here, they would come to the temple festival. People from Thiruvottiyor would be present here. Some people from Thanjavur and Thirichi (Districts) would come here during the festival time as their relatives would be here; they would visit their relatives and also the temple festival. They would stay here for all 10 days. There would be a special ‘ferrous wheel’, many shopt; it would be a rand festival. We would serve free almsgiving daily; At nights, it would be served on behalf of the temple. It would not be food just to fill the stomach, it would have all 6 tastes in it (Arusuvaiyoodu Annadhaanam), ‘no NO to food’ (Illai endru solla varthai illai); We would serve food till last person coming in the night. Someone asked if we can contribute, so we would allot a date to contributors. The dishes should have ‘Vadai’ and ‘Paayasam’.

**-00:39:50**

GV: How did this amman (goddesses) become more famous here?

R: We are worshiping well yearly once, We are conducting festivals and we are tramping the fire pans. People are coming and witnessing all these. We don’t have any connection with Kuppatrhukaaranvanga (fisher folks). Fishers are fishing in the sea, they wouldn’t know about him (god) or the practice like tramping fire pit. They are witnessing our practice of trapping fire pits. They wish for something to God and then they also get into the fire pits.

As I said, the 1992 riot happened with fishers. All the surrounding Fishers joined hands and started to attack our people stating,’we should not leave these people, always these Burmese Tamils are fighting with us, we should not leave them simply’. !8 villagers joined and started attacking us. It was 7:30 AM in the morning, and they had all surrounded our village. We have no other option. We have to run and fall into the sea if we need to escape. He (fishers) would even swim in the sea, but where we would go, we don’t swim. They were coming in Train from Chennai, got down in the nearby railway station (Kathivakkam) and came towards our village. From Royaporam they were coming via trains and Lorries, fisher communities working in the companies are directly coming from the company (Leyland). All of them have weapons in their hands, where would we go and survive? Even then we fought back. Our people are not so simple, they would attach hard with logs. Our people would pour water mixed with chili powder. In this battle, five people died from our village and five people from the fishermen community. Then the Police gave the shooting order. Then there was an Assistant Commissioner (AC) of Police named Mauriya, he only gave shooting orders and stopped the riot.

JA: Has a political leader visited the place after the riot?

R: All the political leaders came and asked our requirements, but they didn't help us in any way. But we managed ourselves. Other Burma Tamils visited us and helped us.

AJ: How many deaths were there in this community?

R: Five people from our community. Many people were dead from their (fishers) community, but we don’t have the counts. It was all unexpected, people were slaughtered while going to jobs. In fighting against them 5 people from our side were killed.

GV: Were there any cases proceeding regarding this?

R: Yes, there is a case. It got solved recently.

GV: What was the judgment?

R: It got resolved mutually. They came and we were discussing this,”we have built the brotherhood, why we have kept the case proceeding to grow” and we decided not to proceed with the case and came to a resolution. We are living nearby, so we came to a peace and ended the case. Leader from that time is not present today, if he was present he might object to the peace corporation or might do something else. But he is not here, the president(leader) has changed. Now we are going with peace.

AJ: You told 5 people there were, where there were only men?

R: Yes, they were only men.

GV: Have their families got any help?

R: No, they were not getting any help. To serve garland, Jayakumar (ADMK political leader from Fisher community) came to our village, but we didn’t allow him in to serve garland and he was sent outside. Then some of us met the village administrators and discussed, “they(/he) are coming here as an act of respect to the dead people and asked them to just allow us to serve garland (maalai)”. Then we made him serve the garland and left.

GV: What was your age when you were in Burma?

R: I was 18 years older then.

GV: To your knowledge, what kind of work were Tamils doing in Burma?

R: Tamils were in all kind of jobs, They would do business, had provisionals stores, had jewelry stores, had diamond stores, had watch shops, like this Tamils were in many jobs. Based on their education qualification, they were also in Government jobs; not too many people are in government jobs, but a considerable number of people were doing government jobs. And there are drivers (as a profession). But Tamils were less educated then, as education is in Burmese (not sure if it’s the language name) medium. I got educated in a private school in Burma. The school was started by a Tamil person, it’s called TKB school. My parents admitted me in that school, the teacher didn’t have any eyes. We can learn Tamil only from him, he is the only Tamil teacher in that area. When we made a mistake, he used to search for students' heads and beat on the head or hit on the head. But he teaches excellently. He used to teach ‘Arichuvadi’, if you completed learning ‘Arichuvadi’, it’s like a system where you have learned all the books (in Tamil). ‘Arichuvadi’ would contain all the things in it. From ‘Aana’ to ‘Akkanna’ (alphabets pronunciation like Alpha, Beta,...)

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Here people used to say,’Aa, Aaa’,’Ee, Eee’ like that, we would not learn like that. We used to learn as ‘Aana’, ‘Aavana’, ‘Eenaa’, ‘Eeeyanna’.....then ‘Kaana’, ‘Kaavanna’.... Like that. Then we would learn two letter words and later we learn 3 letter words,’Amma’, ‘Appa’,’Akka’, then we would move to 4 letter words. Like this we would learn sequentially. Then we would learn the poetries,’Kondrai Vendhan’, ‘Aathichudi’ and all that stuff. While completing this book one by one in this book, it’s like completely learning the Tamil language.

RK: Would you learn only Tamil there?

R: Yes, Tamils have to learn the Tamil language. We would only talk in Tamil, we would not talk in Burmese language. My father admitted me to an Anglo Indian school. I learnt english, I learnt Hindi. I also learnt Burmese language. As I was residing in that country I learnt Burmese ti8ll i8th standard. There was a security person, in Hindi he was called as,’Dharwan’ means security. My father connected me with him to study Hindi, I learned Hindi from him. I know Tamil, would speak Hindi, I would also speak Burmese and English; but I couldn’t speak fluently because I lost interest. When we came back to Tamil Nadu, we used to speak only in Burmese, but what would you think if we spoke in Burmese? You would be looking at us differently. Because of that fear we stopped speaking in Burmese language. I am Kalaignar’s devotee, I would learn his writings with interest, I would also write and do all that in Tamil language.

GV: While cooking back from Burma, the3y only gave you 15 Rupees

R: Yes, After coming here the Indian government gave us 60 Rupees.

GV: But you had no job. Right?

R: They also gave us employment in the BNC mill, they offered jobs in the Police department, and also employed our people in cotton mills. People went to the jobs that were provided. Then there was no corruption, it was easy for the people to get jobs. In Burma, I did driving work and had a license with me. Government asked what I would do, I told them I would drive. Then I was given training in driving skills. In the beach station, there was a Metro train vehicle, which would have a hand brake; I was asked to drive that vehicle, I did a driving test with the vehicle. There were 7 people, all 7 people drove the vehicle and showed them. Then they were inquiring about our age, i told them that my age is 18, another person's age was 36 years out of 7 people.. I was rejected because of my age barrier; only individuals aged between 25 years and 35 years were selected. They were not hiring any other age people, the 36 year old person also got rejected and I also got rejected as I was 18 years old.

So, we didn’t get that job. So, we were sent to do Bore Well training work; the earth boring work. We were sent on behalf of the government, for that we also received monthly stipends. Then we were receiving 60 or 80 Rupees per month. We had two months training, and we stayed there. The person who wants a borewell to board has to give us a place to stay and sleep. We stayed there and we worked, while going to work in the morning, we would cook tiffin for breakfast. Lunch has to be provided by the owner (who asked for boring service). The rice would be so large, it would be looking like the small IR18 rices, they would serve ‘Saambar’ (a curry) and as side dish coconut pieces (thenga baddhaa) were given. From that money we would save some and send that money to our mother and father as there is no other income for the family, we would not spend more on any things.

GV: When you came here, how many families were here in Annai Sivagami nagar?

R: Then, there were only limited families, it was not like these many then. Other people were afraid to come to this place. We had no other facilities, there were no transportation facilities. Only now we have buses, then we had no bus facilities either. Even the train would come rarely, even while coming it would stand only for some specific minutes and leave the platform. The public facilities were limited, once the village (ooru) started developing, the people started coming here. Then people couldn’t buy the land for 400 Rupees, now it’s 50 lakh rupees.

GV: Presently we have some 1750 families, right?

R: Around 2500 families would be living here. Earlier, when we were trying to get ‘Patta’ (legal residential housing certification) and we approached the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (SCB). The visited the place and told us, “we can provide this quantity of land per individual, we can only provide you 3 cents of land per family”. But each family here had 5 cents of land.

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Then we rejected their offers and we stayed there. Then they(SCB) left and were not intervening in this for a long time. Then the government passed an order (G.O.) in 1988, it’s called ‘Where it is as it is’. On that basis, the government has to give whatever people own, but the rate was fixed for those lands. For a square meter, the rate was fixed as 30, 45, 55 and 105 Rupees. If an individual has 1200 square feet of land, then he is charged Rs.55 per sq meter. If we calculate for 1200 sq. ft. It would be around 6600 Rupees. From this 6600 Rupees, they asked people to pay 10%; people have to pay 660 Rupees. If we pay 660 Rupees, they (SCB) would provide ‘Lease and Sales’ agreement. It's a kind of ‘Patta’ copy. It was given, but it was given only for 209 people. Out of 6600 Rupees, only 660 Rupees has been paid, the remaining amount has to be paid in ‘Easy Installment Basis’. Monthly people have to pay Rs.15. Money was collected in such a manner. To the people who received the’ Lease cum sales’ document, the government has provided 4000 Rupees to construct toilets in each house. In that 4000 rupees, 1000 is subsidiary and 3000 is given as EMI loan. People have been paying the money, in the meantime an government official named Suhander singh, who is the Commissioner at present came to do field inspection at our place and informed us that this place belongs to the Railway department and added that all the proceedings by SCB are wrong. He asked to suspend the government officials who gave orders to provide ‘Lease and Sales’ agreements. By then all our work to get Patta was stopped. Only 209 that document and others didn’t get the document till now. Even now we are trying to get ‘Patta’. Railway department was also claiming this land and stating about the Illegalities.Then, the fisheries Minister ‘KP Swami’, his father was a councilor (Municipality) from this region named ‘Parasuma Chettiyar’ helped us verywell. Then this village was surrounded by darkness. Then he (councilor) used lit the Landhar light in the streets by placing them on the pole and in the morning he would come and off the flame, the arranged drinking water facility to our village. After his son came, he installed tube light in the streets, later he made it to Sodium light. Now we are seeing the development from that, growing still. The important reason for the village development is the Administration. In the administration people used to compete to do welfare for our people. Because of that, the village has developed well.

GV: You told me about the employment opportunity in your village and career development.

R: BMC mill provided employment to us.

GV: What is the employment opportunity in the Ennore region?

R: Here in Ennore we didn’t have job opportunities. Before our village was established, we had an EID parry company. The company was handling chemicals, Phosphate was there in the company. So people's movement is not observed there, if we cross that side we would be impacted due to chemicals, and would face eye irritation. But we were below the poverty line, so have settled here as we have no other option to settle. If we go outside we have to have money, so we moved here as it was free for us. Other would not come here to settle, next to the village we have a chemical factory (piramal Pharma).

GV: When was it established?

R: It was established during 1974 or 75.

GV: It was established once after you came here?

R: It was started before that, but only after 1974 it was developed into a big company.

GV: So, can’t we find people's movements here?

R: Yes, there would be no people's movement (mobility); people would have fear of coming here. This village people were in a situation like famine, in that situation what would happen? People would try to rob people. This village was like that in the past, but this village has developed in education. In the past, there was no school in Annai Sivagami nagar. There was a Tamil teacher called Vellachaami, he is literate from Burma. He was teaching Tamil here. Then there was a Munuswami teacher, he was a leprosy patient, he would also teach good when there was no school. If parents think of educating the children, parents would admit their children to these two teachers.

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Later a teacher named David came here, he was also from Burma, he wanted to start a school here. On the corner of 9th street, he started a school in a rented house. He was teaching English, so people admitted their children to his school. Now, it has become a ‘matriculation high school’, It’s called Don Bosco Matriculation School. Many children are also being educated in that school. And from our (administrators) side we requested and the government opened a Corporation Primary school in 1997. Then there is a government high school. Both the schools were built under government funds. Then there is a school called ‘Sahaya Madha School’, that school was also started in a small room and then grown to a 3 floor school. There many children are getting education and other that we need a CBSE school in our village; this was our administrator’s initiative. Then Sankarachariya came here, owner of a CBSE school in Thiruvottiyur. We tried and represented a letter to him stating,”we are Burma Tamil, immigrants from Burma. To improve the education quality, we require such a school with quality in our village”. He said,”you would be wished”. Then he was sending a person called ‘Krishna Swami Reddiyar’, he was a Justice and he is in incharge of that school trust. He toured the whole village and surroundings and said, “This is a place filled with poor people and this place requires this school’. And also told that they are ready to construct the school if we give the land. So we gave land to them and now the school is constructed and functioning. Now children are studying in that school.

GV: Name of the school?

R: Vivekananda school. This happened when I was in the administration then, Muthu Vijayan was the president. Then we gave the land and now many children are getting the education.

GV: Does the Vivekananda school belong to the village?

R: They didn’t build the school. We got donations and built the school.

GV: Does Village administration look after the school administration?

R: No. It was separately given to them. We (village) would not involve in this separately. While building, they had fear as this land belonged to the Railway department and their investment would be wasted. Then we asked them for some ‘cement sheet’ to build the school and constructed the school initially with that sheet and other donations from our side.

GV: Now, who is the administrator of the school?

R: There is a woman, she takes care of the school.

GV: You said that people were in poverty and they were robbing, was this because people were struggling to gain their job?

R: Yes, it was too hard for us. People were struggling even for daily food. I came here in 1971, even then it’s so hard to get daily food. You know what we would be eating in the morning, it's hot hot Congee and ‘Thovayal’. Then we had some good rice, the IR18 rice that would be boiled and served and some ‘Thovayal’ as a side dish. That is our day food too, at night we used to have a rice named ‘Karrkka’, it’s a low quality rice. if we eat that, we can sense the bitterness. It costs 1 Rupee for 1 ‘Padi’ (a vessel to measure grains). For our hunger we could only buy that, at night she would cook this rice. To eliminate the bitterness from the rice, we would consume it with ‘Thirukkai’ (Batoid) fish by adding pepper to it. The dinner would be tastier than. Before me, during 1964, people used to consume steamed ‘Tapioca root’ as their food and they also consumed steamed bottle gourd. People who couldn’t digest faced diarrhea and some were dead because of that. This village people faced such hardships, from 1964 to 1971 people were suffering here to sustain.

GV: What was the change that happened in 1971?

R: Day by day, the village is developing, and the economy is growing. Here people were unemployed. In 1971, Ennore Thermal Power Station was commissioned. Then people from here started to work there. Not in engineering works, they were working as daily wage workers (Kooli work), they would be helping with shipping the loads like stones, sands other loads on their heads.

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Husband and wife would work together, in some families only the husband] would work. The salary per day was just 2½ Rupees per day. If we enquire about the salary of the workers in Ashok Leyland, now they earn lakhs of Rupees, but early then, it was only 2 1⁄2 per day. People worked hard, as they had to make their family survive. Even women worked hard. In such a manner, this village started developing. Childrens are getting educated in good schools, and at present we have graduates at everhouse household. There are 6 Doctors from our village. Burma Tamils, who came from Burma god educated in this village and have become Doctors, there is a student named Chandra Sekeran, who has done ‘MS’ (Masters in Science); he is a leader of Doctors union. There are many Lawyers in this village, more Engineers who have completed BE and also there are many degree holders, there are also Chartered Accountants. Where did all these people come from? People got educated and this area got developed. Even though it was a financial burden for the parents, they are making the children study by at least getting loans from anywhere. Children are educated and are growing well.

GV: This means that the 2½ Rupees wages from the ETPS has brought a change in the growth of the community.

R: Yes, definitely, there was a company to financially aid the people; People worked there and elevated their own life standards. Schools were all free, Primary education was free, High school was free. Now parents are paying lakhs of Rupees in private school. It’s even harder to get the seats in some (private) schools. In those days, we didn’t have things in our hands, for the ‘Vivekananda school’ we were searching for students to join the school, even if the land was available. The owner of the school stated that they could open the school only if at least 90 students are admitted in the first year. I went door to door and admitted 110 children to the school to start the school. Now the school is functioning well.

GV: You talked about the daily wage workers working in the ETPS. Were any of them got permanent jobs there?

R: Yes, Workers who have been working hard were permanently employed after some time, when they regulate the labors over time. They are forming a ‘Society’, through that society the people are chosen for employment, through that society people enter into the department and get permanent jobs. Now they are getting a good amount of Salary.

GV: Like ETPS, are there any other factories or industries where people got employed.

R: Yes. They got employed in Ashok Leyland, got employment in the Foundries, got employment in Kotharai.

RK: There was a cement factory on the site where the Housings are being built. Were people working there?

R: It was not a cement factory, there ‘Hollow blocks’ (thakka kallu) was manufactured.

RK: Weren’t people working there?

R: People were working there. But not many were working there, not even 50 or 100 were working there.

GV: You were talking about employment in the EID parry.

To be continued in

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