**REIMAGINING THE GOOD CITY FROM ENNORE CREEK**

Interview Transcription

**Interview Information**

Interviewer/s: Gajendran V

Place of interview: Ernavoor Dalit Settlement Interview 1

Date of interview: 25 September 2023

Transcription by: RP

**Interviewee Information**

Name:

Pseudonym: Interviewee

**(AUDIO BEGINS)**

**[00:00]**

**Interviewee:** If you consider Ernavoor; in the beginning times, Ernavoor was a village.

**Interviewer:** Village.

**Interviewee:** In that village; my father lived. After that, I arrived. For the village people there, there are these old customs and restrictions (*kattuppaadu)*.

Like the villages you might see of the old – it is a village with these customs. If you look at it, everyone is, as you were saying now – from the SC (Scheduled Caste) community only. Only the tribal people (*Pazhangudi vaazh makkal)* are high in number here.

**[00:30]**

In the beginning times, on the canal’s backside; that canal was a transportation hub back then. From Pazhaverkadu, they would take everything by the boats. These firewood, oysters – all the business transportation through the boats happened back then. Back then, on those sides – only thorny trees would be plentiful.

Then, the built the ETPS (Ennore Thermal Power Station). They built the ETPS in 69 (1969). When the ETPS was built, some of the areas were affected. Because, there were lot of farmland here. There were lot of trees inside there; farmlands were there. They were doing farming behind there.

**[01:00]**

If you look at all the places near the bridge – around Mullai Nagar and everything – they all used to be farmlands. They were doing farming; they were growing paddy. And then, they call this as *vilaam-pazham* (wood-apple), you know; like that, they were growing fruits. Like that – it was the area where farming happened. Majorly – it was farming, and cattle-grazing. To take care of that – lot of people were there.

What they did at the frontside was.. It was those days’ dominance. People from Sadayankuppam; some people from their community were living there. At the frontside. Only such many people were living there. Majority of them were there.

**[01:30]**

No one else – other than the SC people. Rest of the land was just empty lands. Just plantations. Palm plantation. Mango plantation. Like that – there were only plantations inside ETPS. Back then – if you look at the companies that were here – WIMCO. That was the company. Then, there was MRF. Then Enfield. (unclear). They were the companies.

If you look at them – the companies all were in empty lands. There were no towns or urban areas back then. There was no Rajiv Gandhi Nagar. No Ambedkhar Nagar. Kalaignar Nagar – nothing was there.

**[02:00]**

There was a Chinna Ernavoor village. If you look at the backside of ITC company. Behind that was Ramanathapuram village. Ramanathapuram. Then Chinna Ernavoor. And this is Periya Ernavoor. The one that came to existence after that was Annai Sivagami Nagar. Annai Sivagami Nagar formed during Kamarjar period – when people from Burma came back here. That is why it was named Annai Sivagami Nagar – because Kamarajar’s mother’s name was Annai Sivagami.

But Kuppams were there. You were telling about the Kuppams at that side, right? – Thaazham Kuppam, Netta Kuppam, (unclear - honking) – all these Kuppams were present back then.

**[02:30]**

All the *Nagars* formed only after that. This tablet company - Ramakrishna Nagar formed near that. On this side – Bharathiyar Nagar formed; all this formed later only. But *poorvigam* (original areas) were these areas only – Ramanthapuram, Chinna Ernavoor and Periya Ernavoor. If you go to that side, there are no Nagars there – only Kuppams are present. In the Ernavoor – it is split into two parts. There is a temple; they built a *Perumal* temple.

**[03:00]**

Inside here, there are two temples.

**Interviewer:** Where?

**Interviewee:** Inside Ernavoor only. *Thiruveethi amman* temple is one and *Perumal* temple is one. There are only two. There were two streets – *Thiruveethi amman* street and *Perumal* street. There was a pond near that. The name of that was – *Mangalyam eri.* Near that would be plantations. On the other side of that would be a pond called – *Puthu kulam (*New pond). There is another pond; *Maakaali amman* temple is there, right? There is a pond at *Maakaali amman* temple too. *Erneeswaram* temple is there. They call *Erneeswaran* temple as a *poorvigamana* temple (old or original temple). There is a pond near that temple too.

**[03:30]**

So, if you look at what I am saying – there is a pond near Erneeswaram temple; a pond near Maakaali amman temple; after that – at Ernavoor, there is Mangalyam Eri, there is one called Pudhu Kulam, all these… There is another small pond inside that too – it is a pond of that area. The thing was – when it rains here.. All these areas used to be plantations (*Thoppu).* There were no houses here. There would be at least 30-40 feet gap between one house and the other. In that pond area, if you go up the mound of the pond, there would be a street there called *Mettu theru (*Mound street); that’s it. Through this way only, one has to get down at Ernavoor gate and walk. There is a pond near that gate, right?

**[04:00]**

It is there still. ITC people have taken parts of it. Since sand was taken out of there, a pond formed there. If you look at the pond on the other side; it is there on that side, right? That pond is like – they used to supply water to the Railways in those days. Government did that. So, they maintained a pond there. That was it. Only these things were here. *Poorvigam* means this only. From there, you could directly walk to the beach. From here till the beach, one could go by walk itself. There would be lot of sand back then. The sea used to be till here.

**[04:30]**

There used to be 4-5 companies here. Look at all those companies; WIMCO – left here. \_\_\_\_\_ (unclear) company left; the places they used to be here – they are all occupied by the people here now. There is a Nagar at the corner there, right? Bharat Nagar. What they did was – people started encroaching it and started to live there. The political parties also moved inside there, and they made each parts as a ‘Nagar’. Many Nagars came inside Ernavoor itself.

**Interviewer:** Inside Ernavoor itself.

**Interviewee:** Lot of Nagars are here now. There are lot of Nagars now. Ernavoor is only this.

**[05:00]**

There was nothing here back then. It was fully empty back then. There was WIMCO here. From Ramanathapuram, if you climb up to Ernavoor, it used to be the ITC plantation. If you get down from the ITC plantation and walk through the sand there, then you would reach Ernavoor. If you leave Ernavoor, then you have to go to Ennore only. Back then, you had to go everywhere by walking. We would go to the *Madha* temple festival. For walking, there was the Madha temple festival only (unclear).

After that, a link came. That is – everyone used to be together. During the festival times, people would get together. Life was really good. There was no pollution at all.

**[05:30]**

The backside there would be empty. But, after that, many people started coming here. So what happened was – since many people were poor.. If you had to get a job back then, you had to go to WIMCO only. Some people would work at WIMCO, some would work for ITC. At MRL – like that, people from every street started going for work. After they started going to work… All the people who came to stay here from outside, as they started going to work; they started staying at that place itself. As they started encroaching it – someone would start a Nagar in their name. If someone had encroached a parcel of land, they would make it as a Nagar. There would be a Nagar in his name.

**[06:00]**

Someone else would buy land inside. He would make a Nagar there. As many people started making Nagars there, today… what should I say – as technological development had happened now, right? Because of that, they are all advanced now. They had registered, and kept everything *pucca* (complete), so they all come under record. If you go and search in Google, it would show his places here.

**Interviewer:** It would show.

**Interviewee:** The places of the people here would not show.

**Interviewer:** It won’t show the people who have been living here before.

**Interviewee:** Those places would not be shown. Because, he does not have any registration. They bought it, then converted them into patta and just stayed there.

**[06:30]**

All the important people have occupied here, everyone made a place for themselves, made a layout and they have filled up everything. But if you look at nature back then – if it rains; I told about Erneeswarar temple, right? If it rains on that mound, all the water would run off to the pond there. It would drain from there, and come this way. It would go from here to another direction. It would drain like this and go to the canal. It would go inside through the ETPS; and as it mixes with the Buckingham canal, it would go directly to the mouth of the river and go to the sea. So, there were no flood damages. Back then.

**[07:00]**

Flood might affect some parts of the coastal areas there. After the Thiruveethi temple, flood had never reached this side. It would not come. How much ever it rains and water rises, there would be no floods. The water would travel here; it would move around this area, but floods would not come. That kind of structure was naturally present back then.

The water that comes from there would stand here. The water from there would travel through there, and go that way itself. In that kind of natural scenario, people were living very happily. Even if they were not technically advanced, they were not worried about big storms and rains. If there was a big storm with lot of wind, there would be some trees that would have fallen.

**[07:30]**

We would go and get some fruits. We would get some firewood. If someone asks ‘What happened there?’. We would just say ‘Some storm winds broke through’ and we would just go on with life. So, at that time, when these companies came here, some of the people here started going to work there. After they started going to work, things started to develop here. They started making these layouts. ETPS came. Back then, they would come to pick people up from here. They would take them from here. But, they would come running back. They would get a jeep here – catch the people here, put them in their vehicle and rush back inside – so that they would come for work. He would get stuck there for one day.

**[08:00]**

He would get the money from them, and on the next day – if he even sees the Jeep, he would run away. He would not go to work. Things were like that back then. People were in that situation. People were having a jolly good time. How to say – though they did not have big things, they were very happy. After that.. The companies that used to be here – they were not a problem. There was (unclear – sounds like blackberry), ITC and WIMCO– they did not give any problems to anyone. After that, firstly, this tablet company came here. At that time only, everyone felt afraid – ‘What is this; things might get polluted here.’ They tried a lot of things, but they could not do anything.

And then – Kothari. It polluted around Ennore areas.

**[08:30]**

Then, problems with the groundwater started to arise. After that, people who were working in these companies, right? They came from different places, bought the lands here, started to build houses and stayed here. If you look at the majority, the original habitants (*poorvakudi)* are not here.

**Interviewer:** They are not here.

**Interviewee:** The original habitants have dispersed from Ernavoor.

**Interviewer:** By *poorvakudi,* who do you mean?

**Interviewee:** People who stayed here; from the very beginning. People who used to live at Ernavoor; they are not living here now.

Now some people are there. Well, lot of people are here. Many from Dalit community only. At the front side here, there were some Mudaliars. Back then, things were there. Back then, old combinations were there.

**[09:00]**

After that – the next generation; we arrived, right? In the next generation, when we started talking, we all became one. If you look at my times, at my school, there would be (unclear).. I would call him. He would come and talk to me. We started habituating with each other. So, the community links and all got destroyed.

**Interviewer:** Got destroyed.

**Interviewee:** I am talking about my generation; so around 80s itself, it got destroyed.

**[09:30]**

**Interviewer:** On the other day, Sigamani *thozhar* took me around the Dalit settlement here. Really, it was a good thing to see. They were playing in a cricket ground.

**Interviewee:** That is what, sir; those lands – around the canal were started as Ambedkar sports park (Ambedkar *vilayaattu thidal).*

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** We only started it.

**Interviewer:** I would like to know how the sports park started?

**Interviewee:** We only maintained the sports park at first. Some people came and occupied that park. If you see – I was with the administrative side of Ernavoor for close to 25-30 years.

**[10:00]**

I was in different responsibilities, and I had come out of it now. I had mentored the next generation here. I gave the responsibilities to them, and left. But times have changed now. Because of that situation, I do not like it. If you consider me, I do not take sides. If you call me, there is no need that you have to give me 10 rupees – no concept like that. I have to spend my money and come, that is it. Because, I had grown up in that culture. Another thing is, I have a long service at Ennore foundries – for nearly 40 years. At that company too, I did all the work – with the union.

**[10:30]**

**Interviewer:** Yes. They told me.

**Interviewee:** Back then also; if there is any work related to tuition center or something, I would come. Only I would come. I would ask if there is anything that needs to be done. But he never used to ask me anything. That was what I told him – ‘You are doing a lot now. If you had told me back then, I could have done a lot. You are telling me after I had come out.’ If I was within the company, I would have definitely given my support. Could have spoken to the management and done something. I saw his efforts. He does a lot of work. It was difficult for me – on seeing his financial background. On seeing how much he spends – from his own earnings.

**[11:00]**

Full social activities – for very young kids. When I was with the company, I did a lot. I went to a lot of places. I even went to Tambaram; took him to Government offices and all. But they cheated him.

We went to an orphanage, sir. Near Chozhavaram. There was a Godman (*saamiyaar)*, and all the children there were orphans. We went there, did all the arrangements for the children there; arranged for food and clothes for them, but in the end it was very different.

**Interviewer:** You told about the Ambedkar ground earlier, right?

**[11:30]**

**Interviewee:** That ground used to be there from the time of the original habitants (*poorvika idam).* Now, people at Ernavoor are focusing on sports – mainly on Kabbaddi. After that, football. They definitely play both of these. Games would happen between the areas here. A tournament would happen at Kuppam; at Pazhaverkadu. Like that, people would go to various places, play and come back. We maintained these things back then itself. Though some people came to occupy the ground, since there was a unity among people, it stopped. After that, for that ground, there is KPP Saamy here right?

**Interviewer:** Yes yes.

**Interviewee:** He came and set up a stone inscription (*kalvettu)*  there.

**[12:00]**

And then people developed that little by little. And now youngsters are only taking the development forward.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** The youngsters are doing that. Everyone comes and plays there. On a cricket ground, there would be no discrimination based on which community you are from.

**Interviewer:** Yes. They would not see.

**Interviewee:** Even now, that is what I am saying. Inside Ernavoor, the matter of community… In Ernavoor, there is no ‘community wing’. Everyone is mixed here to a great extent. If you go inside, see how many mosques and how much churches are inside. If you go through the backside, they would display it as Adi Dravidar Colony only.

**[12:30]**

But it is not Adi Dravidar colony, it is Ernavoor village only. It is Ernavoor village only. When they occupied that place, since majority people have come, they have kept a banner with that name. When they see that banner, others do not come inside. Therefore, they named it as Adi Dravidar colony and got in there. After they got in, they started business there. As you said earlier, all communities are involved inside. But, wherever the people needed some land, they stayed there. The Government also laid roads, installed lighting and did all facilities there. In that place…

**[13:00]**

Because that is canal porombokke land. The ground has been situated there, and the youngsters are maintaining the ground there. There used to be Ernavoor library here too. Night college library that is. There was a public well. There were two wells. Everything was here. But, as time went on – what they did was.. Even what we say now is ‘Why should we go and stick our heads in that? Let’s just live.’ If we say ‘Hey, it is wrong.’ – now times have changed, the culture has changed.

**[13:30]**

Everyone is getting some income in their hands. Income is different – when you compare earnings back then and now. There is a difference between earning back then and now. Now, the companies are all gone. To say further, there were 7,500 people in Leyland. Now, only around 1,000 people are there. At the Foundries, there were 3200 people. When I came, it was around 2600 people – around the time of 2001. Now only around 600 people.

**Interviewer:** Around 600 people.

**Interviewee:** But the production has increased. But the contract labour has also increased. He had spoken that every worker now is equivalent to a contract labour there. From food, everything is uniform for all of them there.

**[14:00]**

There is no deviation from the management. They have fully got contract labourers now. Therefore, employment opportunities at the company is not there now. Employment opportunities are gone. There are no employment opportunities at the company. Everything is gone now. Now, people are getting some income. And youngsters are…

Secondly, education levels have increased. At our times, even when we wanted to study, there were no one to teach. If you look at education levels of people inside here, everyone is a degree holder here. Youngsters are all degree holders here.

**[14:30]**

Earlier, there were people who were not educated. But, when people were uneducated.. how do I say this? There was a sense of respect. Fear and respect for the words that they spoke. A sense of ‘we should be like this; we should be like that’ was there.

**Interviewer:** *Kattupaadu* (customs)

**Interviewee:** Those were all there. Now it has changed. Now, when we ask someone, they say ‘I will do as I wish; who are you to ask?’ Things have become like that. In life – they have got some income and developed. Youngsters have grown, and people have mixed. Now, everything is good.

**[15:00]**

Now – in Ernavoor and surrounding areas, the concept that ‘people should be here, in North Madras only’ is gone. Now, people are going outside and coming back. Sources of pollution were there – one or two; but now, that has gone. This only is there. Other than that, all the other companies closed down. Enfield closed down – they went to Thoraipakkam. WIMCO closed down. ITC is nothing now – only packaging; so no pollution because of that. Pollution is only there if we go that side of the railway gate; that side of the river – there is MRL and other companies are there. This side – only this. Everyone has left this way. Adani and others have gone to the beach road side.

**[15:30]**

No one here now.

**Interviewer:** So, you told earlier that – along the Buckhingham canal, lot of Adi Dravidar people used to live here.

**Interviewee:** Yes, but not along it. Those places were empty only. They lived at the frontside only there. What is Adi Dravidar colony now used to be an empty place before. Now – as far as I know, it developed only like 5 years back. Saravanan came sometime back, right? It developed only at that time. At that time what they would do was.. I will tell you frankly.

**[16:00]**

**Male voice:** We would see the sand-dunes, right? Near Karungaali. That was how things were here.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** It used to be empty space here, sir. Nothing would be here. Houses would be at.. You have seen that Amman temple there, right?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** That Amman temple street – if you come inside that street only, there was a place. There used to be only two streets. Now, there are about 15 streets there. There were only 2 streets. That is what I am saying – all those ponds have become houses now.

**Interviewer:** Have become houses now.

**Interviewee:** The places where water stands have all become houses now. The situation has changed so much that – if they could, they would build houses on the canal also. If you look at the canal now – it would come from Kargil Nagar till the last place here.

**[16:30]**

All those has come now only. After that, people from outside had come. The people who look like\_\_\_ (unclear), they all sold their houses at the main side and occupied some land there. If there are more than 100 families inside at the area inside there, it would be a big thing. From the original times, maybe about 100 people are still here. Everything has changed now. As times changed, the setup changed, and everyone came inside.

**[17:00]**

We cannot say who is who inside there. One cannot say – ‘I am from colony; I am from here’ like that.

**Interviewer:** Yes, I saw. There was a lot of mixing there.

**Interviewee:** People used to say ‘Hey, look that is a colony.’ But that was once upon a time. There was some fear back then. But, as education levels started to increase; as people started to study, everyone changed. After everyone started studying, they changed. They are doing good things now. Some people might go the bad way or something – because of differing cultures. If you go inside this way – in depth; there is Tsunami Nagar this way.

**[17:30]**

There is a group (*gumbal)* at the backside there. That is different. But if you look now, the youngsters and kids have started studying. The people want to educate the very young kids too. So, in this area, things have developed well. Hereafter, there is no concept that people have to go for jobs at Leyland, or Foundries or at MRF. In this area too, if you go for a company, there would not be too much job growth either.

**Male voice:** Back then, if you work at Leyland, it would be a huge thing.

**Interviewee:** Back then, Leyland was great. But, WIMCO was number one.

**[18:00]**

If one worked at WIMCO, it was a big thing. It is like working at TNP now (unclear); WIMCO used to be like that. If you worked at TNP (unclear), they would give you a bride. At Leyland, the union leader would say – ‘Trusting in me only, people give their brides.’ Things used to be like that. Now, the trend has changed. There is no job opportunity here. The companies that used to be here have all vacated. There were about 1000 people working at Enfield back then. Now, at most, there would be only 20 people; rest are all contract laborers only.

**[18:30]**

Habry’s (unclear) left here. Evergreen left. The Evergreen that was here has left. There used to be lot of small companies here. At the shore here itself. They all left. If you look at jobs, at most, the people who do not have any jobs work on real estate.

**Interviewer:** Real estate.

**Interviewee:** As far as I know, in my village itself there are lot of people. If I ask them ‘What are you doing?’, he would say ‘real estate.’ The culture has changed a lot.

**[19:00]**

What people think now is ‘I could earn my income somehow.’ There is no wish to go to this particular company or not. But, for the youngsters – they have a big wish to get their kids well educated. But, everyone is in real estate now, right?

**Male voice:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** Everyone says they are in real estate now – if they have studied or not, they say they are in real estate. That is happening. That is what this is all about – about Ernavoor. The old times would not return.

**[19:30]**

**Interviewer:** Earlier you were telling me about Ambedkar ground, right? Why did they think of starting a ground there?

**Interviewee:** First thing is – to create a unity. There should be a unity among us. One thing is – if the mind gets involved in sports; if the people here get involved in sports, they would not think about anything else. If he goes to work or he goes to study; when he comes back and he goes to the ground – all his concentration would be there. Once he finishes playing, he would go and sleep. He would need rest.

**[20:00]**

What would he do after playing? He would get into a routine. For that, we need a good place. If you see, there used to be a WIMCO ground; now it is gone. If not for that, then I have to go to ETPS and play. The ETPS ground belongs to the Government. So, there was no ground in our village. Earlier, we used to play at the sand right here. If you see – Ernavoor’s entrance used to be an empty place – the village people had kept it separately. They were running a school there. Now, there is *Amma Unavagam (Amma canteen)* is there, right? That was an empty space. Now, if you take a turn at Ernavoor’s entrance, there is Amma unavagam – which was an empty place. There used to be a big well there.

**[20:30]**

The Government opened a well there; I think at 1971. With World Bank support, they dug a well there; they built a water storage bund there, and supplied water to the village from there. There used to be empty space near the well. The Kannilal layout that is in front of it now used to be an empty space. On this side too – they are private lands, but they used to be with trees. There would be palm trees and other trees there. People used to play there. It was a separate space. Back then, we would all play. We would play kabbadi, we would jump into the well – people would be coming and going. That used to be a jolly place.

**[21:00]**

After that, there was no space. The people who were here – what they did was – as the Government asked for the land, they gave it for them to build a tank. As they built a tank, that space was closed. After that, we built the *saththunavu* (nutritious food) building. Now, it is Amma Unavagam (Amma Canteen). Now there is a medical place setup nearby there. When a Government plan comes, we should not give it up. ‘If those things come, it is good for our village’ – in that mindset, they did everything. So, we needed a space. So what we did was occupied that space behind there; we built it and maintained it. After that if some big person comes – like an MLA or someone comes, they would be called and that space was made ready.

**[21:30]**

And now the youngsters are maintaining it, and playing many competitions there – mainly they play cricket very passionately. The youngsters too – even very young people are going inside and getting themselves involved in administration there. Now, the current generation – it would be the 3rd generation now and beyond – they are maintaining it well now. From the old generation, now it is the 3rd and 4th generation – they are maintaining it well. Now they have put up a stage there. And they will further develop it.

The thing is – when you open it up as a sports park, many kinds of people would come and sit there.

**Interviewer:** Would come and sit.

**[22:00]**

**Interviewee:** Now, what would someone say even if they live somewhere else? They would say ‘There is a place called Ambedkar Sports Park.’ At our times, based on that only – we built a library there. Based on that only, we made everyone to come together, beyond the differences in communities. Whatever happens or not, what we would do around January 6th is – we would have a sports day. We would have a sports day on Ambedkar’s birthday. If we call all the studying kids and arrange for a sports day, all young and old folks would come. We started it, and it is still happening now.

**[22:30]**

There is also Ambedkar *mandram* (club). We started it as Ambedkar *Narpani mandram* (Ambedkar good-work club). As a part of the party. Till now – even after we had gone out, everyone comes to that. We used to conduct meetings – there is a Murugan temple at the corner there, right? We conducted some 3 meetings there. This particular person came – what was her name?.. She is in *Thi.Ka* (Dravidar Kazhagam) – Arundathi. She also came and asked about this. Those days, I made everyone sit there. ADMK people sat there, DMK people sat there and the Communist people also sat there together.

**[23:00]**

We said like ‘You may belong to whatever party. But, this is a meeting’ – like that, we conducted a meeting and everyone came and sat there. Back then, they asked me ‘You are saying like this. It looks very different to me. How is everyone sitting here?”. There was no political affiliation for this. This is for hope. We teach children and other things; we did them back then. Since it was started, it is continuing till now.

At that ground, there is no difference between any of us there.

**Interviewer:** For me, it was a very interesting thing. When I was seeing them, they played in uniform.

**[23:30]**

**Interviewee:** That is what, sir. All the youngsters there have developed themselves well in sports. One youngster is going for sports somewhere, one kid is going outside for a game. Kids go for football tournaments and all. Many have developed themselves. Let anyone get developed. If not, then people would have occupied that place and made it into houses. Back then itself, an advocate came, sir. An advocate from High court came and said we are occupying the place. But, I was brave back then – in 1998 only (unclear). He came with a document and showed it there.

**[24:00]**

I told only one thing – ‘You bring whatever you want.’ We asked for the paper, they did not show us. We said ‘If you want to do something good, put some money in the *undiyal (*donation box) there at the temple there.’ So he dropped some money there, and went. In those days, 500 rupees was a lot of money. While the temple was being built then. Like that – this place was safeguarded. Some people came around it and occupied it bit by bit. But it was a big place. It was a bigger place than this. But every youngster is doing things in great interest – to not let go of that place.

**[24:30]**

The main concept is – if you get into sports, the style changes; everyone becomes one.

**Interviewer:** Everyone becomes one.

**Interviewee:** There would be no discrimination like – where they are coming from, if they are studying college or working or anything. If they are interested in cricket, they would play cricket. If they are interested in football, they would play football. To develop these things further, the youngsters are taking initiative and doing that. The kids who came only, young kids are doing that. Because of that, a unity arises. The concept of that ground itself is that – ‘we should have a sports park (*vilayaattu thidal)* for our village.’ That ground is still standing there. Many people came and tried to do a lot of things, but nothing has affected it. Till now, it is standing.

**[25:00]**

**Interviewer:** So, there is Ambedkar *Narpani Mandram.* You started it?

**Interviewee:** We only started it, yes.

**Interviewer:** How many people were with you?

**Interviewee:** When we started, we were all youngsters. Now, we are all old.

**Interviewer:** No.. I mean, just when you started..

**Interviewee:** We started the *mandram* around 80… I think 1984. I am fairly certain is 84. The concept of starting the *Narpani Mandram* was – there should be no politics and there should be a way to educate the children here.

**[25:30]**

Back then, there was no one at the backside there. No one were here.

**Interviewer:** How many families would have been there, then?

**Interviewee:** Around 200-300 families were living here back then.

**Interviewer:** Adi Dravidar families?

**Interviewee:** Mostly, yes. When we started, we did not see any community – we only named it. At first, we considered Vivekanda’s name, and also Bharathi..

**Interviewer:** Bharathi?

**Interviewee:** We made plans to open it as Bharathiyar *Mandram* only. What we decided later was – ‘let us not have that name.’ We would need some support inside, so we named it as Ambedkar Mandram.

**[26:00]**

There, we first started a night school (*iravu paada saalai).* First started as Ambedkar *Iravu Paada Saalai.* We built a thatched roof, and gave free tuition for the children. Then, we taught older people also. After that, we made a library there. \_\_\_\_ (name unclear) was the name of the library. We would change the name – to involve everyone. We made a library in the name of \_\_\_\_ (name unclear). We made a library, and kept lot of books there. Many people sponsored. This – CIT too. Lot of people sponsored. Our… Narayanan also bought books for the library.

**[26:30]**

What we used to do was – we would not accept money. If someone wants to donate, we would not ask for money. We would ask them to buy us the books. We would ask them to sign the books that they buy. So, like that – we kept all the books and things were going well. What my problem was – I got myself involve in Union activities. I used to sit at the classes daily – even around 8PM or so; I would come and maintain things. After going for Union activities, I did not have the time to come here at night. Then what happened was – slowly, politics comes in, right? So what happened was – people did not keep books properly at the library. It was not properly maintained.

**[27:00]**

When the school students would come, outside folks also came and were involving themselves. So, I started to slightly avoid certain things. Every year, we would conduct a sports day event. We would call everyone for that – without any sense of community discrimination. All youngsters and old people too. So, there was a unity growing then – through the Ambedkar *Mandram.* It is still there today. It is continuing now – it does not matter who takes the initiative. Now many party-people are taking the initiative there. But we have not put it forward; we have not identified it separately. We are doing these things. Things are going on.

**[27:30]**

For that library concept – I had asked the Government. First, I was moving things around like that. After that, I could not take much of the responsibilities, because of my work situation. We could not go and scope everyone inside there. Back then, we would pool some money out of our own pockets; and then everyone started to expect things. The style has become like that now. ‘If I do this, what would I get?’ ‘What would you give me?’ – things have become like that now. Can we give now?

**[28:00]**

Now there are many parties. Many institutions have come up. Earlier there would not be many political party flags here. During MGR’s fight, and during the time of Rajiv Gandhi murder too – there were lot of fights in other areas, but none in our village. It would not come to our village. Even if there is a particular community, we would not portray it outside. We would invite everyone and make them sit. Only the name is that of Ambedkar. Because he does not belong to any particular community, no. He developed all the oppressed people together. So, we would bring everyone. For each day, we would bring some big person and ask them to give a lecture.

**[28:30]**

Things were good. It is still happening. Even now, they are working on some basketball events. Based on that only, we brought up the ground. Now the ground is good. No one can do anything to the ground now. There would be no problems now. Though the name is that of Ambedkar only, everyone plays there. All community people play at the ground. That is why the ground stood till now. If you look at the Ambedkar Mandram, there used to be a library, then it disappeared. We took the initiative to re-establish it; we try, but we are not able to do it now. We cannot get involved too much and do it now.

**[29:00]**

**Interviewer:** So, you started the library, right? What were the effects of that library?

**Interviewee:** Many children started studying. As we established a tuition center there, we established a library there. In the library, all kinds of books were there. By all kinds of books, I do not mean very deep philosophical books. There would be some books about Marx and Lenin. People in that team back then kept them there. But most of the books we kept there were about small business.

**Interviewer:** Small business.

**Interviewee:** How to do typewriting. Sometimes, the youngsters were failed willingly, right? In those days, being a radio mechanic was a thing.

**[29:30]**

How to work a radio, what should we do with an amplifier, doing cycle works – we kept books based on these things. Even though books about general knowledge were less, as youngsters took those books and studied, they all developed well.

**Interviewer:** I see..

**Interviewee:** Whoever were present there are in good terms now. People who studied near that school have become MC (Member of Corporation) now, they have become successful. Everyone has become successful and big. They are all coming in cars now.

**[30:00]**

To give an example, they all live luxuriously now – after building their own houses. That kind of feeling is still there. But they all went into politics. Back then, people who did not know how to sign their signatures started signing them. As the people who used to be like that have grown well now, their children have also developed now. Everyone is studying now. That generation has gone and the 2nd generation has come now. If you take 1984, then it is going to be about 40 years now.

**Interviewer:** Yes, it is now the 3rd or 4th generation.

**Interviewee:** Now, I cannot recognize the kids who studied there. They would come and ask me – ‘How are you? Do you not remember me?’ We do not need to identify them individually, but we are happy. Because of us, he climbed up. But we could not do it continuously. Now kids are studying well. Lot of materials have come online. They are teaching and the kids are studying. Whatever we say, the youngsters search it online and say it immediately.

**Interviewer:** Is that library still there?

**Interviewee:** No. That was what I was telling – things have changed. The Government came and asked us; it looked like it was going in the way of certain private people. So when the Government offered, we took it.

**[31:00]**

**Interviewer:** What happened with that?

**Interviewee:** The place near Amma unavagam – that place only.

**Interviewer:** Oh, the place near Amma hotel.

**Interviewee:** That was where we had our Mandram, our library; our flag pole is still there.

**Interviewer:** Did private people try to take it over?

**Interviewee:** Back then, everything went in different directions. There are so many things in that. One cannot go in and understand all that. But Government took it over, and then the Amma hotel has come up.

**[31:30]**

There are couple of things there. They have opened a child-care center ( *kuzhanthaigal nala kaappagam).* It has become public now. That is it. So whatever we had thought of earlier, it had happened. What did we think? ‘Our village should develop. Children should get educated.’ They are educated now. To do some good things for the people – a hospital was built. It is a good thing that the Amma unavagam came – many people work there, and many people develop because of that.

If you look at that area, the entrance has also become good now. The atmosphere has changed that no one would say ‘this is a colony’. There used to be an idea that ‘a colony would be like this – with thatched roof huts and everything’. But things are not like that. At most, everyone has started studying now.

**Interviewer:** They have started studying.

**[32:00]**

**Interviewee:** People have started going in cars. Come inside and see how many cars are there.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** You see. Back then, there were only two streets. There were few ponds.

**Male voice:** (unclear) near Perumal temple.

**Interviewee:** Perumal temple.. He is there. The priest (*saamiyar)* is still there.

**Male voice:** Maybe we can go and meet him?

**Interviewee:** He knows few things. Come and I will take you. Tell me when you would come.

**Interviewer:** You tell me which day, and we will come.

**Interviewee:** I will take him one day to my home, and we can talk there.

**Interviewer:** Ok.

**[32:30]**

**Interviewee:** Because, when we talk to him in public, someone else would come; he would say something else, and it might be a disturbance. He was here from the original habitation (*poorvigama).* His father was an old, rich person. The priest is also good even now. (unclear) At the ground, there is a \_\_\_\_\_ He is a Mudaliar only. But back then, he was here fully. He was a person in service. I told them ‘do not show me. Highlight him.’ Because, he was working at MRF. He would pick up the garbage himself. He would not expect anyone else.

**[33:00]**

**Interviewer:** Can we meet him?

**Interviewee:** I will talk to him. I do not know his phone number. But I see him daily. I will ask him and let you know. It would be enough to just meet him and the priest. He was part of a wealthy family only. He was working at that place. Despite that, he did all these work too. I too could not do it. I had 2-3 accidents. He would not expect anyone to do anything for him. But what he would do is.. (unclear). It is part of the style. We cannot change it. I will do it for you.

**[33:30]**

**Interviewer:** So, the ETPS came right? After the ETPS came, did any people here get job opportunities?

**Interviewee:** Well, not so much. In the beginning times, they got some, but that was it. Nothing right now.

**Interviewer:** So, not now. When ETPS came here.

**Interviewee:** When the ETPS came here, there was a lot of job opportunities, sir. (unclear) not like that. Whoever knew someone who could work, they took them for jobs. There was no concept like that. Whenever they take some land, the police only comes and takes it right? We would not know for whom the land was being taken.

**[34:00]**

The people did not know that much. At least, right now they make a ruckus, or a protest and ask for jobs for 100 people or so. Back then, they did not do anything. They would go and give a letter. They would arrange something within them, but not with people in the village. There was no concept like that back then. People who work in contracts now go to jobs here. Whatever contract work is there at EB, they would go. Do you remember, Prakash Lawyer? He worked at the high court. He only won along with CITU. The one who filed a case against Sterlite industries also.

**Male voice:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** He only did that, right?

**[34:30]**

He came here, made a hut and did a fasting protest (*unna viratham);* then only some people got some jobs. At the time of protest, some people get jobs. Other than that, no compensatory jobs for taking the lands here. No one went and asked them like that.

**Interviewer:** Now, you told about how people who were the original habitants did not get patta..

**Interviewee:** I did not say they did not get patta. They got it.

**Interviewer:** They have patta?

**Interviewee:** Yes, that was not a problem, sir. For the land, they gave patta and people got it. Many people developed their own land. That is – at those times, whoever were here and developed their lands, they are selling them. Now, that is not my style. Not our style.

**[35:00]**

The land I am in was bought by my dad with money only. He sold the land that he had. He grew up there. (unclear). There was nothing there. But people back then, right? People who knew something, they did something. Those canal porombokke lands changed many hands. Not one or two people. Someone would sell to someone. He would sell it to someone else. It is still going on only.

**Interviewer:** But the canal porombokke lands are..

**Interviewee:** Canal porombokke lands belong to the Government only, right?

**[35:30]**

That is water catchment area.

**Interviewer:** Yes. There was no encroachment back then?

**Interviewee:** Sir. No encroachments back then. Encroachments on those lands happened only now. That is what I am saying – those lands are the water-catchment areas. I had the full drawing of that area with me. Right from ETPS – there is a bridge there, right?

**Male voice:** Sathyamoorthy Nagar?

**Interviewee:** Not Sathyamoorthy Nagar; beyond that. There is another bridge en route to Minjur (unclear). That is fully about 140 (unclear). All those places are fully canal lands.

**[36:00]**

The thing is – the water that comes inside gets collected there. It would get collected in that water-catchment area, and it would flow in that; which one? Through Buckhingham canal. It would go through Buckhingham canal and mix with the ocean water. But the places that sprung up after that are all encroachments. All places are like that only. Bharath Nagar is also like that. Ask him. Ask how many companies were here. Many companies like (unclear) were all here; they all left. The places were occupied by someone else; they are not people from here.

**[36:30]**

I am telling you now – land belonging to *Kanthasamy* temple were here. Where? At Ernavoor – a property of *Kanthasamy* temple was here. At Ernavoor. Now, you can see the places called as Mullai Nagar. Mullai Nagar was a pond. (unclear) pond. Do you know *Kamarajar Arangam?* That is Kamarajar *Chatthram* only, right?

**Male voice:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** Around the bridge, that Kamarajar Chatthram is there, right? Near Vyabarigal Sangam; that was a pond. Mudaliar’s place.

**Male voice:** That was a big pond, that one.

**Interviewee:** Farming used to happen there. Now, it has become Mullai Nagar, things have changed and houses were built up.

**[37:00]**

**Male voice:** Till 1990s, Raja Shanmuganathan was doing farming here.

**Interviewee:** Farming here, sir. I am telling you frankly – they were all farming areas here. People back then did not oppose anyone. After that only, many real estate brokers came here.

**Interviewer:** When did they start coming?

**Interviewee:** Now.

**Male voice:** Only after 1990s.

**Interviewee:** That is it. Only after 90s, all of them came.

**Male voice:** Dadaism kind of actions were prevalent here.

**[37:30]**

**Interviewee:** Yes, it was like that. Now they have all disappeared.

**Interviewer:** At Ernavoor, did such kind of problems occur? With real estate and Dadaism?

**Interviewee:** No. It would not come. At those times, it came; but it would not come inside Ernavoor. Because, we would go and stand with the people. Even if there is a problem at some other area, we would not consider it too much. Anything for the area, we would go and stand. For the main area or inside. Things came here long back. They lifted everything from Ernavoor. There is no wine shop too at the main road here.

**Interviewer:** Yes. You took away the wine shop?

**[38:00]**

**Interviewee:** Wine shop was there back then. There were lot of problems. Lot of things would happen, sir. When the games were going on, there would be unnecessary torture for the kids here. There were lot of problems based on the ground. I do not know how to even tell you – there were lot of problems. The thing is – since we did not have those habits, we were able to stop the shop. If we had that habit, we would have destroyed everything here. The kids do not have any habits like that now.

**[38:30]**

Secondly, I will not look at the politics. I will not look at someone as a DMK person, ADMK person, someone who has money or someone who has nothing. I will talk to anyone. If something is wrong, I will call it as a wrong. If something is right, I would say so. That was it. As I had the quality, I was able to move things forward.

**Interviewer:** Would they play football there?

**Interviewee:** yes. They play it really well. Lot of kids play – even very young kids. I do not play much games. I did not play football. I did not play cricket. I used to play kabbadi. My younger brother would play though.

**Interviewer:** Has anyone gone to work through the sports quota?

**[39:00]**

**Interviewee:** There are lot of politics in that, sir. My younger brother was a football player. He was a really good player. He was a goaler. He would play at many places.

Devaraj – you know, right? He passed away in an accident. He would be very healthy – tall and strong. When my leg got fractured in an accident, (unclear). He worked here only, right? These sports thing is there, right?

**Male voice:** Anna durai?

**Interviewee:** Not him. His son is playing football; went abroad and all.

**Interviewer:** We wanted to talk to him only.

**Interviewee:** He is right around here only.

Male voice: Who?

**Interviewer:** Anna Durai only. See if this is the number?

**Male voice:** (unclear)

**Interviewee:** Yes. Him.

**Male voice:** Are you talking about him?

**[40:00]**

**Interviewer:** Yes (unclear – overlapping voices).

**Male voice:** I did not know.

**Interviewee:** Annadurai.

**Interviewer:** We have been trying to reach him for about 10 days now.

**Male voice:** Tell me his number?

**Interviewee:** You were talking about the football ground, right? Lot of youngsters are there. If you like, I can call those youngsters for you.

**Male voice:** I would like to talk to them with brother here.

**Male voice:** Tell me the number.

**Interviewer:** 955111714(unclear).

**Interviewee:** Yes, him only.

**[40:30]**

**Male voice:** We did a shooting one day, *anna.* With respect to the respiration problems here.

**Interviewer:** I saw that *anna* then. I saw Annadurai brother back then. I asked him and he said that he was a football player. I told him I wanted to talk to him about this, but he has been quite busy.

**Interviewee:** He came into the fold much later. His elder brother was there. His elder brother passed away. His father was with us. They work at the burial ground – people call them as *vettiyan,* right? They are that team. All the brothers would live well together there.

**[41:00]**

In that, he would play football very well. He used to play, and his son went abroad. He was at Ambedkar *vilayaattu thidal* since then. His elder brother was with us before him. His eder brother and his father were with us back then. His father would work with us. So, that is what I am telling, right? We would not look at the community or anything back then. We also included him into our works. When we included him itself, people would ask ‘How could you include him? How could you include a *vettiyan* into this?’. He is also a human. Education was not a big thing for him, but he would do everything correctly.

**[41:30]**

If I say ‘Let us go here?’; he would say ‘*Thalaivarae (leader),* we can go anywhere.’ What I am trying to say is – they had a concept like that. His son is also a good son; he developed really well in sports. He plays football really well. He in turn developed his son and he went abroad and came back. That is the concept. So, he too joined well the youngsters back then, and he did well. Very small issues used to happen, but we could not do anything about it. The youngsters back then got down to work.

**[42:00]**

If you talk to the youngsters now… There is also a lawyer here. He is a lawyer now at high court. He only arranged a team. He is the one organizing things now. They came and told me that they are going to build up the ground a bit more. They are building a stage. They built a stage and readied the ground. I told them – ‘Do them freely. Do what you want to do. Call me and I will come. But you are going to do everything. If you have any other problem, I will come.’ They are all good kids. You tell me one day, and I would arrange things for you at the ground.

**Interviewer:** Definitely.

**Interviewee:** You can talk to them. You can also talk to the priest.

**[42:30]**

**Interviewee:** Share your contact number. Whenever you are free, let me know.

**Interviewer:** I am free only. Whenever you are free..

**Interviewee:** He has to come from Egmore. For you, I came here.

**Interviewer:** I am free for another 3 months. For the next 3 months, this is my work.

**Interviewee:** Do not worry about anything; I will do this for you. Youngsters from the kuppam will be here.

**Male voice:** You know about the MSSW college here, right? He is a professor there.

**Interviewee:** Very good. It is a very happy thing to hear that.

**Interviewer:** Now I am working on research at IIT-Hyderabad.

**[43:00]**

**Interviewee:** What I am saying is – when you do a project in a locality and submit it; the name of Ernavoor would come up.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** People knew about Ernavoor back then. Today, no one knows about it, right? When you do this research, people would know how Ernavoor used to be. You told me last week that he had gone to Kattupalli. I had gone to Pazhaverkadu before; people who used to work with me are at Pazhaverkadu now. But on seeing the photos that he had bought, I feel like – ‘why I have not seen this before?’

**Interviewer:** (laughs)

**Interviewee:** Yes. He takes the youngsters with him. He takes them in all the mud and clay, and he shows the Pahzaverkadu to them.

**[43:30]**

People in such kind of mindset are not there now, sir. Secondly, there are lot of problems. People are afraid to talk freely. Now, I am talking frankly to you, because I do not have any worries. I was in this line only. Only now, after leaving the company, I am looking after my family. If there is any problem for the family, I come running to them.

**[44:00]**

When you were calling me, I was sitting there. I was sitting near Nemilicherry. I could not take the phone. I saw it and it was your name. Then I saw the voice message. If I could have come, I would have come yesterday. It got late in the evening too. In the evening for two hours, he said there was some server issue. It had not happened like that before in NPTEL (unclear). Yesterday, my daughter was telling me..

**Interviewer:** What does she do now?

**Interviewee:** She is doing her M.Sc., now. She is going to write her exams now.

**Interviewer:** Which college?

**Interviewee:** At SIT college. She finished her B.Sc., exams; so I joined her there.

**Male voice:** Do you know (unclear).. Madhavan. Chandrasekar and all?

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Male voice:** Chandrasekar’s son.

**Interviewee:** Chandrasekar’s son? He was working with me – Chandrasekaran. He worked with me at the Foundries. That is what I am telling – they are all much younger than me.

**Male voice:** Daily they would come and paint (unclear).

**Interviewee:** What I am saying is – I know his father. I know him. I know his brothers; what was his name? (unclear).

**Male voice:** Yes.

**[45:00]**

**Interviewee:** I am not well acquainted with others. I would call him and tell him that I need something. He would take the call and say ‘Come at this time’. When I go there, he would have kept it for me. Nothing else needed; that was our relationship. I was telling him about this.. (unclear).

Unnecessarily, he did some mistakes. I would have told him. I do not know what happened to him.

I would call him and say ‘I need all these things’.

**[45:30]**

(unclear).

Why I am saying all this is – his father was with me. He also grew old. (unclear – bus honks). I went to work on 1983. Exactly, it has been 40 years. We were together for union activities and social activities, and everything. Those times were different sir. Hospital and all (unclear).

**[46:00]**

Now that doctor is there, right? Chokkalingam. At Devika hospital. Do you know Devika hospital?

**Male voice:** Which one?

**Interviewee:** Near Isabella.

**Male voice:** Oh, that side.

**Interviewee:** Yes, Devika hospital. Isabella. This side – JJ. All these hospitals, we would go. Do you know about Apollo’s starting period – insurance amount was for Rs.5,000. Medical insurance was for Rs.5,000.

**Male voice:** Was it panelled with the company?

**Interviewee:** The company bought it then. We also took it back then. When our people went there, they wanted to take blood. And the people started panicking saying that ‘they are taking our blood.’

**Male voice:** (laughs).

**[46:30]**

**Interviewee:** There was no awareness and development back then. Back then, if you had to take insurance, you had to take a blood checkup. They would ask your blood group and all. They were taking the blood, and the company people made a big ruckus there. ‘They are taking our blood, *pa.* I will not come*’ –* they would say. I would say ‘It is for your good only’. Back then it was only Rs.5,000. Now, can you go there with your insurance? JJ Hospital, Balaji and Sugam hospital – nothing was there, when we took the insurance.

**[47:00]**

Ramaiyya hospital. Everything. Our area developed like these only.

**Interviewer:** You told earlier that you went to work in 1981, right? At that time, how many people came to work with you?

**Interviewee:** In my company; my father also went to the same company. He got sick. As he got sick, I went to the company. He was part of the village administration.

**Interviewer:** Who were there in the village administration? Was it consisting of all the communities?

**Interviewee:** No no. Back then, there was only SC.

**Interviewer:** Which?

**Interviewee:** Only the SC community was part of it. Therefore, only that community was taking care of that area.

**[47:30]**

There is a part of Ernavoor here – behind the Bajanai kovil temple. That was Ernavoor grama sangam (Ernavoor village club). The one in front was grama nala sangam .

**Interviewer:** So, there are 3 sangams here?

**Interviewee:** 2 sangams here. First was – Ernavoor grama sangam – that was inside. Ernavoor nala sangam was Mudaliars.

**Interviewer:** Ernavoor nala sangam was run by Mudaliars.

**Interviewee:** Yes, the people at the frontside here. They were all Mudaliars. After this, people who stayed inside were SC’s. There were only two temples – and administration.

Those days – there were elders. They were taking care of the administration.

**[48:00]**

After that, we became a part of it. Like that – through many generations we had come. For the administration, there would be elections also; throughout the village. There were lot of people here, around 1200 people.

**Interviewer:** Oh, so many people were at Ernavoor.

**Interviewee:** Yes. More than 1200 people were there. Now also, the festivals happen here. Whatever happens or not, the festivals will definitely happen.

**Interviewer:** Both temples were in Adi Dravidar colony only?

**Interviewee:** Both. One temple is Thiruveethi amman. Another street has the Perumal temple. At the frontside, they have named it as Pattabi-raman. A bit away from that – people would be mixed – at Maakaali amman temple.

**[48:30]**

After that Erneeswaran temple. They are a different team. Like that, different teams were formed. But we all call it as we stay at Ernavoor. At Ernavoor, they would call this place as ‘colony’. There used to be a ‘Adi Dravidar colony’ board here. We only removed it. They had a board here in blue color.

**Interviewer:** Now they should not use it.

**Interviewee:** We removed it back then.

**Interviewer:** No. Now that word itself should not be used – by law.

**Interviewee:** As we came up, we removed the board here. We kept a board as Grama Seva Sangam.

**Interviewer:** Grama Seva Sangam.

**Interviewee:** Yes. After that, we just maintained it like that.

**[49:00]**

Festivals would happen at the village, and we did that. After that, we developed everything bit by bit. But at that time, a Nagar was forming here. They were forming a Nagar called Girija Nagar here. Girija Nagar used to be first – Bethel Nagar. Someone bought the Bethel Nagar and changed it to Girija Nagar. There were about 30-40 families there; and they came here after their education. They came here from outside. People working at Government offices. They are all staying there. They all registered it properly and they made it as Girija Nagar. But it is part of Ernavoor only. If you come inside this way, there is a Gandhi Nagar. That is also part of Ernavoor only.

**[49:30]**

Kanhilal layout is there. That is also Ernavoor only. Nethaji Nagar was formed. That is also part of Ernavoor only. Vasanth Nagar came inside. That is also Ernavoor only. Brinda Nagar too. They are all part of the Ernavoor’s land. They kept their name and it became Brinda Nagar. It used to be ITC company’s land.

**Interviewer:** So, all these areas – who came here from outside?

**Interviewee:** That is what, sir; people who came to work here for the companies, right? They first rented houses here. Then he settled here. That is not wrong; he was earning, right?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**[50:00]**

**Interviewee:** People here were doing farm work, and working small jobs like – building houses, cutting down trees, making fences. People from some families went for jobs. Things were going on like that; and people from outside were coming here, right? He needed a place to stay here. There would be a small house here. Back then, prices would not have been too much. They would be coming here looking for houses. The people here would have said – ‘You buy the house, *pa.* I will register it in your name.’ Registration and all – he would write and give. And then he would correctly register everything. So, as people were coming here from outside and doing this; what did the people who had lot of land do? They started to sell their lands.

**[50:30]**

They sold it for cheap prices. Back then, land was cheap. There would have been land for 6000 rupees, 5000 rupees, 1000 rupees – like that. Back then, that was a big thing, right? Rice sold for Rs.2.

**Interviewer:** Is there any problems related to porombokke lands here?

**Interviewee:** No problems like that.

**Interviewer:** Everyone has patta here.

**Interviewee:** Most of the people would have. Some lands on the backside would not have. But the Government is allowing all that. So, things are going on now. As people are staying there now, they would not do anything. They have become votes now.

**Interviewer:** They have become votes.

**Interviewee:** They cannot do anything. Government had let them stay. They are all living there. If there is any need for them, they would say that they have to take that land.

**[51:00]**

They came once and said that they were going to take some land there. After that, everyone made a ruckus. And then, MC and others came, and spoke. Then everything got over like that. Every time, it happens like that. That is only on the backside there. On the frontside, everyone has properly registered patta lands. Everyone has registered it. Some are building 3-4 floors here. They have all the proper approvals. That is what I am telling – everyone would write it as Ernavoor only. The name ‘Adi Dravidar Colony’ was given very recently. Maybe 10 years back. Earlier, they call it only as Ernavoor.

**[51:30]**

**Interviewer:** So, based on what you say – in Ernavoor, SC people are in the majority.

**Interviewee:** Yes. SC people and on this side – fishermen community.

**Interviewer:** Fishermen.

**Interviewee:** Yes. Others – the Nadars and all came here to do business much later.

**Male voice:** They came here much later.

**Interviewee:** To do business, two Nadars came here. They brought their families along with them here. After that, at the backside, there are fully Muslims.

**Interviewer:** Muslims.

**Interviewee:** Adi Dravidar colony fully there are Muslims now. You come here and see – at the backside, there are many Mosques. (unclear) there are a lot of people here. Come and see inside here – how many Mosques are there.

**[52:00]**

They have made big Mosques – have you not seen. Come and see Ernavoor – it is not like the Ernavoor of the old. Come inside. They are great. They do Pillayar (*Ganesha)* also.

**Male voice:** When you come one day, we will go.

**Interviewee:** You come. One day, we will go. I have not roamed around there inside either. I have not gone backside much either. Because, so many people have come here, sir. It has become like – I do not even know who they are here. For us – the village should develop. In our times – the community was going on a separate track. If you leave him, he would continue in that. If 10 people come inside right, they would start growing then.

**[52:30]**

Now, when a different community member comes in the village, you have to go and mingle with his family members. However, you have to be dependent on them too. When you go there – for some housework or something else, they would get mingled with them. And while playing – their children would play together. And in that, one cannot discriminate based on caste and all. And they would become as one. If there is some festival or death at their house – then we have to go. Everyone would have to become as one. So, when people came in and they started forming these Nagars, we were like – ‘You keep that Nagar.’ That was our system. We did not say like ‘You have to keep in Ernavoor only. You should not do like this’.

**[53:00]**

If ten houses come up there, it is good for the village. If 10 houses come up there, it is good. When 10 houses come up on this side, we become the center. Do you understand? All community people are here. You cannot go outside and say that this is a colony.

**Interviewer:** One cannot say.

**Interviewee:** They say that while talking. But when they write their address, they do not mention it like that, right?

**Interviewer:** They do not do that.

**Interviewee:** (unclear) They only brought it as Adi Dravidar colony. Why – because this is the concept. The days of calling someone as ‘Colony person’ is gone. If you look inside, all community members are here.

**[53:30]**

Everyone is here. That Kamarajar Nagar. That was developed now – it looks like a mini-Kerala now. It has also changed.

**Interviewer:** So the thing you are saying is – as diverse people came here from outside; the oppressive viewpoint of seeing something as a ‘colony’ has changed.

**Interviewee:** Yes, it has changed. It used to be there. Back then, there were sayings like ‘You should not go in that street.’ They all used to be there – before my father’s times. They all started changing during my father’s times. They all went in, spoke to each other and corrected these things. There was no way to go to the cemetery back then. Now, it has all changed.

**[54:00]**

There used to be oppression like – ‘you should not go to the cemetery this way’. You might have seen in newspapers that in some villages, they get down into the water to go to the cemetery. Those things used to exist here. They all changed. By change, I mean – we started seeing them properly, they started seeing us. We worked at the same company. Friendships started to develop. The youngsters get together well. And as the generation changes, things change. There might be some old-mentality people here. But that has stopped working now. Everyone has become one now. Now, we do not know which people in which house. Everyone has become one now. The question of ‘Who is which community’ does not arise now.

**[54:30]**

If you go inside there – for namesake only, it is called as Adi Dravidar colony. But inside that, everyone is living.

**Interviewer:** Everyone is living.

**Interviewee:** You go inside and see. They are making *Vinayaga* statues inside only. When the *Vinayaga* procession comes – the company that makes the statues is inside there only. It has been there for many years. If you go to the backside, you would get upset. See how big the Mosques are there. There are churches also there. Everything is there. But, if we take the festival for Thiruveethiamman temple, everyone would go to the temple too.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me a bit about Thiruveethiamman temple?

**[55:00]**

**Interviewee:** It is a very old Amman temple – from the very beginning. When I was part of the administration, that temple was much smaller. When I was part of the administration, I went and spoke to a lot of people – similar to what you are doing now. I went and spoke to the senior people there. No one knew the exact story.

**[55:30]**

The narrative was – ‘boats would go around here. And at one time, a flood came, and it looked like a boat was covering something. When they saw it, the Amman statue was there. In that, they built thatched roofs first, and built a temple around that.’ From the Perumal temple, they kept a picture there (unclear). After that what we did was – we made a proper statue for the temple. And whatever we had to do to the temple – by the ways of how it should be done. We brought people in for that. It used to be like – people from outside would not come over there. Only people there were taking care of it like a priest.

**[56:00]**

We brought an *Iyer* from outside areas also. And we did everything by the proper methods. We went to Kancheepuram. Over there, there is a temple called Ekambareswarar temple. There is a person called \_\_\_\_ (unclear) behind there. We went there and asked him to make the statue. We made the statue for the temple. We built a *gopuram* (monumental tower). And all the people started coming there.

There are two ways – one is Spirituality. Another is Education. If you mingle these two – the third one is Sports. If spirituality, education and sports come together, then the entire culture will change.

**[56:30]**

Speaking of spirituality, if someone has a good belief system in God, he would come up in life. In sports, he would be concentrated in that. Thirdly – education. When it comes to education – if I do not know something, I would ask you; and if you do not know something, you would ask me. So, good people will come and teach you. People with bad thoughts cannot be good students. Someone who is drunk cannot be a good student, right? Therefore, those things get developed. At that time, while building the temple and everything, we involved the youngsters here.

**[57:00]**

For the Perumal temple also, they said they should not build it at all.

**Interviewer:** Who said it like that?

**Interviewee:** People there. The team that used to be there from the older generations who used to say ‘you should not do like that. You should do like this.’ But we went and changed all that. So, while it was being built, I involved everyone here.

The temple was getting very old. It was not built then. If it were to be built – problems arose back then. Some people took money. So, in everyone’s minds there were these thoughts running regarding building the temple again. So, what I did was – I called everyone who were there, and spoke to them. I convinced them, and when we sat for the meeting, I said –

**[57:30]**

‘We are planning to build this temple. It has been so long. It looks very old. Everyone feels sad regarding its state. Why do not we do it?’ They said – ‘Yeah, we can do.’ I said – ‘Who would give money?’ To that, some people said – ‘I do not have money.’ Some said that they will get some funds. Some said that they will buy thatched roof for the temple. So, at that time, we got everything from the people there. And I said – ‘the remaining money we would pool together some money and we would take care.’ Some people said ‘I do not have any money. But I can work for the temple.’ Like that – everyone got involved and this temple was built.

**[58:00]**

Once the temple was built and everything was set – festivals keep happening there. Till now, they have not stopped anything. Whoever comes – we have made it into a situation that they have to conduct the festivals. Secondly, there were also many auspicious occasions (*visheshangal).* When we were talking with the priest there, the auspicious occasions also started to be celebrated. (unclear - interruption).

On these auspicious occasions, people got more happy. Muslims would also come there.

**[58:30]**

They would also take the *vibhoothi (ash)* and *manjal (*turmeric) back with them. ‘I am going abroad. Things are better now’ – like that, people would come to thank. And the priest was good. Like that, the temple developed very well. Secondly, what we did was – we sped things up. There was no tying up *kaappu* back then. They would put up a radio set, and give ragi porridge (*koozh)* to everyone. What we said was ‘Tie the *kaappu.* Do things properly. Do the *poojai* in the proper method’ Whatever the method was.

**[59:00]**

We started doing all that. And we would call people who were more scholarly and knowledgeable in that – what would the people think? Compared to just drinking *koozh* and dancing, doing all these systematically – they started coming to the temple with much more involvement. After that, people from outside also started coming to the temple. As people from outside started coming to the temple, the temple started to develop well. We did similar things for the other temple nearby too; and that temple also developed well.

So what people do now is – they want to bring some *kudam* for the God. They want to do a special pooja for the God. They want to keep *kolu* toys.

**[59:30]**

Everyone takes their own initiatives, and as they get mixed – everything got developed well now.

**Interviewer:** Who is part of the administration of the Perumal temple?

**Interviewee:** The village administration would take care of that.

**Interviewer:** Who are the village administrators?

**Interviewee:** Village administrators would change once a year. Once in two years, we would (unclear).

**Interviewer:** Is it made up of everyone?

**Interviewee:** Everyone would come. There is no rule that someone specific should be there. Whoever wants to come, can come. We would appoint people from the village. Once upon a time, there were rules like that. Now they do not come. So the people available – they come.

**[01:00:00]**

For the administration, there would be a committee. Everyone would be there. In those days, there were Malayalees also in that.

**Interviewer:** Malayalees also.

**Interviewer:** Mudaliars would also be there?

**Interviewee:** They are a different team. That village is a different administration. But during our village temple festival, they would come and they would mix, and do all the festivities here. They cannot come into the administration here; because they stay at the Nagar. During election times, whoever is standing from each Nagar, only people from that Nagar can vote for them.

**Interviewer:** So, that Nagar would be a different ward?

**[01:00:30]**

**Interviewee:** Not ward. Everything comes under the same ward. But, that place is a village.

**Interviewer:** So that is separate.

**Interviewee:** That village is separate. Maakalli amman temple village is different. Erneeswaran temple village is different. That place is also split into three. What I am telling is – Erneeswaran temple, there would be two streets – they are a separate administration. Around Maakaali amman temple, there would be two streets, and they are a separate administration. And the Bajanai Kovil temple – they are also separate. They would elect people among themselves only. Only the people in that village can elect them.

**[01:01:00]**

People from the wards here – someone outside cannot come here, right? But if their house is here, they can come into the administration.

**Interviewer:** So, what you mean by your village is Adi Dravidar colony?

**Interviewee:** In Ernavoor, this was our Ernavoor village.

**Interviewer:** So, you are saying that only your village was Ernavoor.

**Interviewee:** Yes, only this place was Ernavoor back then. Back then, only these people were here. After that, all the people who came from outside started their own Nagars around here. That is what I am telling – this is Periya Ernavoor. Near WIMCO is Chinna Ernavoor.

**[01:01:30]**

Ramanthapuram. Other than that – there are two parts in Ernavoor. Till ETPS, it is Ernavoor. In that, inside Ernavoor only – Erneeswaran Nagar was there. Inside Ernavoor only, Maakaali Amman Nagar was also there. The Nagars inside – they say all India Radio Nagar, right?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** That also is Ernavoor only. There were no Nagars back then. It was all cashewnut plantations back then. At the All India Radio Nagar, All India Radio used to have a tower there. Government was working there. They appointed two watchmen there. That was the road.

**[01:02:00]**

The road where the bus goes – is only that. Ernavoor gate would turn over there. Not near the pond here. The pond was done after that. They changed that. When the cashewnut plantations were here, everything would happen there only. Back then, when people were going around there at night time, something might happen there; so they diverted from there. They locked the gate there. That was the Ernavoor gate. After that, All India Radio Nagar came up there. Earlier, it was not there.

**Interviewer:** So, as far as we know – people who have been living here since the beginning were the Adi Dravidar people.

**[01:02:30]**

**Interviewee:** Yes. This side – there are some Mudaliars. They are there at Sadayankuppam. There is a place called Sadayankuppam there right. People who came from there – were all Mudaliars. Only these people were here.

**Interviewer:** There were only 2-3 Nadars here.

**Interviewee:** Nadar, to setup a store, one person came. There was a person called Mariyappa Nadar. He was the first one to setup a store here. His family came after him. After that, one by one other people came. The other people and all came very recently.

**Interviewer:** Narayanan and all.

**Interviewee:** Narayanan came very recently here. Not even Narayanan, his elder brother came here first. (unclear) he only came here first.

**[01:03:00]**

After that, they all came. They came and others came one by one, and they started doing business. In these Nagars, whoever had some more money, they could do business. They all came here and bought land. Stayed here at Ernavoor. Back then, if you get down here at the bus stand, you have to walk through that street, where his house was. There was no Kamarajar Nagar, no Nethaji Nagar – nothing was there back then. Everything was empty. The bus stand was there. And you see the gate over there, that was Ernavoor gate. There would be a tea shop there. A person called Vasu kept a tea shop there. That was the shop.

**[1:03:30]**

Everything came after that only. There was nothing else. The streets would be small. Only his shop would be there. If we leave there, we have to come to WIMCO. To drink tea, if we skip his shop, we have to go to WIMCO.

**Interviewer:** So, you are seeing things here since 1981, right?

**Interviewee:** I am not seeing only since 1981. I was there from 60….

**Interviewer:** No, what I mean is – you started going to work from 1981, right.

**Interviewee:** Yes, I started work then. Before that, I was studying. I was a small kid.

**Interviewer:** So, you were born in 1965?

**Interviewee:** Me. In 63.

**Interviewer:** So, at that time, what kind of job opportunities were available at Ernavoor.

**[01:04:00]**

**Interviewee:** Only this. They would do farming. Mainly, they would be doing some farming. Many people were doing farming on that side. After that, some 2-3 people would work at the companies here. That is what I am telling. One person was working at Enfield. As far as I know – one person at Enfield. 2-3 people at WIMCO. At the Foundries, one person. That was the work. After that, at ETPS. Some people worked there, maybe 2-3 people.

**[01:04:30]**

That was the work. After that, some 2-3 people worked at the All India Radio. Yes, that was it. That was the involvement with the companies. People who worked there built their own houses here. Mostly, it was cattle grazing here. Many people had cattle. I was telling about Saami (unclear), right? Even though his father worked at WIMCO, he had many cattle. People had lot of sheep and cattle. Some people would take their cattle elsewhere and get them back. There used to be lot of sheep. That was it. There were no other business or anything.

**[01:05:00]**

The generation afterwards only went to different companies – like ETPS and other places. Nothing else.

**Interviewer:** How did change happen during your generation?

**Interviewee:** This was the change.

**Interviewer:** You started going to jobs.

**Interviewee:** The youngsters started going to one job or another at the companies. They started studying. After studies, everyone were working somewhere. They all went to some jobs. They went for jobs like metal working, and other technical works. Now, the youngsters are going for contract labour work. Job opportunities have come now.

**Interviewer:** So, the kids started studying more..

**Interviewee:** As the kids started to study, the culture changed.

**[01:05:30]**

Now, you cannot come there and say anything. Everyone is going for some degree or another.

**Interviewer:** Education has brought lot of changes.

**Interviewee:** Lot of changes. Education is the main thing. Education gave us some changes. Sports gave some more changes. Spirituality got inside the people here, and reduced the differences between the people and made some changes. So, such deviations are gone now. Mostly. Now, the idea like ‘they are coming, others are coming’ are all gone. Beyond all these things.

**Interviewer:** Beyond all caste boundaries.

**Interviewee:** Beyond all that, this is it. Mainly Education. Then Sports. Spirituality. As these three things diffused inside, things have changed for the good mostly.

**[01:06:00]**

Secondly, people are doing things together and involving themselves. Everyone is winning because of their improved education, right? Everyone is involving in things together. We were talking about Annadurai, right; if his kids study well, then that gives us happiness. His brother’s kids are studying. Though the adults might not have studied much, the kids are studying now. They would work in lorrys. They would work on loading sand. They would work in loading goods into lorrys. Their jobs are like that. They do metal working.

**[01:06:00]**

**Interviewer:** One question is – during your times, there were lot of company work available. Now, things have changed to contract work, right? You worked as a permanent employee.

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** The kids have all studied well now.

**Interviewee:** They have studied and started going to work now.

**Interviewer:** What kind of changes have happened to them?

**Interviewee:** If you see, many kids go to ITI work. Other than that, they go for work like \_\_\_\_ (unclear). As the metro came, some work for the metro. Some ladies work at the Amma Unavagam.

**[01:07:00]**

Many ladies have started going to work. Many of them have changed like that. People who go outside and work – everyone works in different fields. Few people work at Velammal institutions. Many have come from outside, right? They all work in different fields now.

**Interviewer:** The nature of the place itself has changed.

**Interviewee:** It has changed. Earlier, from the place we were sitting, we would be able to tell. Earlier, if you had come to my village, and I was sitting outside my home; I would call and ask you – ‘Who are you?”

**[01:07:30]**

And you would say ‘I am going to this person’s house.’

And I would ask ‘To their house? From where are you coming from?’

Like that we would ask anyone. So we would know that you are going to that particular person’s house. Now we do not know. Why? Because of the cultural changes now. Now, thousands of autorickshaws and cars come here inside. They say things like Ola and Swiggy – everything goes inside there. So, who would come and talk to you? Times have changed.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that was good or this is good?

**Interviewee:** If you see, development is a good thing only. Back then, people were restricted with their customs and everything. People did not have an individuality with them (unclear).

**[01:08:00]**

There was cultural discipline for sure. Now, those things have disappeared. By disappeared, I mean – very few still follow all that. Maybe around 20% maximum. And the 80% has developed. And we should encourage the development.

**Interviewer:** So, you think that diverse people coming here is good.

**Interviewee:** It is good. Only then, the whole setup changes, right?

**Interviewer:** It changes. From the old ways, they change to new ways.

**Interviewee:** They go in the new ways, right? If they continue to be the same way, then we would not have anything here. They do not know. They go out and everything – they do everything.

**[01:08:30]**

Everyone becomes friends here. Earlier, they would be afraid to tell who they are. They would be shy. They would think to tell that they are from the SC community. Now they say ‘I am from SC. Why should I not say so?’ The doctor came; doctor Moorthy came. He is a big surgeon, you might have heard of him. He was here. From here only, he became a big person. Their family is full of doctors only. They did not involve themselves in anything. But when we invited him for the Ambedkar vilaayattu thidal for the birthday festival, he came. He said – ‘I did not think of all these things earlier. On looking all this, I feel very proud.’

**[01:09:00]**

He said – ‘I have a big respect in society now. Because of the education I received.’ So, what happens when he says like that? Ten people would think of becoming a doctor. That Ravi doctor is here (unclear), they are here. They are all from this community only. Though they came from outside, they belong to this community. Since they are our community doctor, we go to them for anything. We support them. They have developed. What happens when they say all these things? ‘I have become a doctor. I have all these respect in society. I have saved so many lives. I did these many heart surgeries. I have transplanted these many hearts.’ – when they say things like that, what happens to the kids who are studying there? They get a motivation, right?

**[01:09:30]**

**Interviewer:** They get a motivation, yes.

**Interviewee:** Pradeep is here. He is also from the same community only. But who goes to them? Everyone goes there, right? Everyone is mixed, right? So, what happens to these things?

If you look at the neighboring areas – community is not just here, sir. It is there in Ambedkar Nagar. It is there at Annai Sivagamai Nagar too. It is there at Thazhankuppam too. It is there at Nettakuppam too.

**[01:10:00]**

If you go here, ask here at Thiruvottiyur.

Hey, what is this one, *pa?*

**Male voice:** Which one?

**Interviewee:** At Thiruvottiyur, we would say right - \_\_\_ (unclear) kovil street. Everyone is them only.

**Male voice:** Fully these areas.

**Interviewee:** Yes. At Periyar Nagar, they are also there. Fully them. If you talk about the community here, from the side here till the last there, they are here. They are in the city too. They are at Egmore too. Not only that.. I will tell you another thing. I try to not associate the community with any political parties.

**[01:10:30]**

Even now, there is a statue at Nehru Stadium, right? Things are happening there even now. They are conducting Buddha Purnima festival these days too. I continue to go there. I go there. Everyone there is rich people. People who come there are all big people. Everyone did \_\_\_ (unclear), and people who worked only. Same team only. I would not be able to go; but I would still go. But only one thing I would say – I would ask them not to do politics. Thirumavalavan will come – but we do not want the politics. If you are doing what people need; if you are doing service, do it. But, do it for everyone. Because that has what he had said.

**[01:11:00]**

He has not said that help one particular community only. We have to help all the oppressed people (*keezh-thattu makkal),* as much as we can. That is it. We should not look at the community and all. We say now – it is there in everything. It is there in every village. They are there at Egmore too. They are present at Chetpet.

**Interviewer:** Here, at Ernavoor – as many different people came, it infused a change in people here..

**Interviewee:** As many people came here, it created a unity among the people here.

**Interviewer:** Created a unity, and also it paved the way for them to be modernized.

**Interviewee:** The whole village has modernized. As the base was created already, he was coming in, right? Only if you develop this area, he would come in, right?

**[01:11:30]**

If you are just sitting in the village without any development, no one from outside would come in. You are here, and let’s say that I come and tell you – ‘In my village, everyone is studying well.’ What would you do? You would think – ‘why don’t we buy some land at Ernavoor?’ That was why people bought land here, right? If it was a bit shady, and if you think like ‘This is a colony. If we go inside, people might think of us uncomfortably’, then you would not come.

**Interviewer:** So, you developed yourself.

**Interviewee:** We developed ourselves. As Education, Sports and Spirituality grew in our areas, it created the opportunities for other people to come inside here.

**[01:12:00]**

We also made efforts to involve the people who came in here. We did not torture them. As they grew, we also went and supported them. They all developed, and we also grew more. I do not know what is there in their minds, not upto me. When something happens to them, and when we go stand with them; they involve with us, right? On a personal level.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** If there is some issue tomorrow, I would go and say ‘Sir, they are our youngsters only, sir. We can talk.’ Then they would be like ‘Okay, it is probably nothing.’ And they would go. Culture has changed. We had created this place. Mainly because of education, sir.

**[01:12:30]**

Education. After that – Sports. And Spirituality. Secondly, if he gets any bad habits, we keep saying it to them, and he changes it right? He changes himself. That is what I am saying – leave aside some 10 kids. They cannot be changed any time, by anyone. In the remaining 90%, some 50% of kids would be correct. Some 20% would be a little bit abnormal. We can get him to come to our way. The rest of the kids – if we speak through his family, he can be corrected too. If we go through the family, he will listen to the family, and he would leave behind everything else.

**[01:13:00]**

He would come out of all the bad habits. I have done this in my company itself.

**Interviewer:** So, in that sense – your area has developed in many ways.

**Interviewee:** Yes. Area has developed well. It is in first-class condition. They have come to a situation where - on looking at them, others now say ‘Look at him, they have grown a lot.’ That condition has come. You let me know. I will ask them to talk to you.

**[01:13:22]**

**(AUDIO ENDS)**