**REIMAGINING THE GOOD CITY FROM ENNORE CREEK**

Interview Transcription

**Interview Information**

Interviewer/s: Gajendran V., Raju K. (GV,RK)

Place of interview: [Senganimedu](https://goo.gl/maps/kVLFB9xt9Y3kiM1C8)

Geo Coordinates: 13.322950 N, 80.302154 E

Date of interview: 01.04.2023

Transcription by: RK

Audio:  [230401\_Toxicity\_Sengazhaneermedu \_Interview\_1.1 \_GV,RK.m4a](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SzaFkW3X_ry8jQOkyfjlx2OtkB08IYCE/view?usp=sharing)

**Interviewee Information**

Pseudonym: R1, R2, R3, R4, W1,W2,W3, W4

R1: Respondent 1

R2: Respondent 2

R3: Respondent 3

R4: Respondent 4

W1: Respondent 1

W2: Respondent 2

W3: Respondent 3

W4: Respondent 4

**Interview Note:**

**Transcription note:**

* I have used the terms, ‘prawn catching’, ‘picking’, ‘tracing' in many places to report the prawn/fish tracing (thavuradhu: people here only apply their hands in the sediments of the flood plains to trace the existence of the prawns or fish and they would catch the prawns or fish once it get it into their hand and put into the pari).
* The backwater is also referred to as Flood plain. In Tamil language it is called Kazhuveli, Uppu Kazhuveli, Paraval.
* Responded R2 refers creek as the Buckingham cana and Buckingham canal as just ‘canal’
* Interviewer introduced the term ‘ Vannathi nandu (fiddler crab)’. They are sure about the crab and they have responded and discussed a different crab in the interview.
* NCTPS is mentioned as ‘Company’ in most places.

**(00:00:00)**

R2: Until the center of the Ottagavaal canal there will be a lake, we have cultivated even upto that and even patta land is there. And adjacent to the Buckingham canal there is a canal, there is a 1 kilometer gap between them. Buckinghan kaalvai (canal) is Ennore creek and next to that there is a channel named canal; that canal is in the google map covering the way till Marakanam. People used to travel in that canal in Pondicherry. We have cultivated lands in between Buckingham Kalvai and the canal, there is also some Patta lands in that place to it and there is a patta land too. To that level we walk from here and do all the work. In between all these only the Uppankazhi (floodplains;back water) is the one that supports our village. Regarding that they two can tell. He is older than him. His name is R1. and the other person’s name is R3. Behind them W1 and W2. Those two are ones who catch prawns; they are still catching prawns. At present only for just two months did they not catch prawns. They are still actively catching prawns, they will continue it and even the generation next us will do the same. FAs we are going to work we stopped this. This is Rohini, our village Cameraman(In a funny way). She is the one who updates status. If you have some doubt, ask them. They will clear that.

R2 (to villagers): You can just be honest and can tell what is true.

W1: Even yesterday we went there (Kazhuveli).

**(00:01:45 to 00:02:45)** Discussion between respondents and interviewer, regarding seating.

**W1**: I live only because of prawns, only if we catch prawns and sell them, we can eat food. Only if we cultivate salt will we survive. can’t we speak those?

R4: Salt pans don’t exist anymore. It’s been 30 years since salt was cultivated.

W1: Only if we go there can we exist, yesterday also we went to Kazhiveli, No prawns were caught. Because of that, we both (other prawn catcher) stayed here. If we go to a prawn catch in the summer, we are trembling and couldn’t come back. If we only sell those we get our food. If we get them well, we get like a kilogram or else we get like 300 or 400 rupees of prawns.

-Discussing on how to take the interview.

GV: My name is Gajendran. We are conducting this interview regarding your livelihood , this river. Particularly, about prawn, crab and the sands of the river we are trying to conduct this interview.

-People Talking randomly

W2: Where is the sand? It’s only muddy. If we get into the backwater, our leg is getting immersed into the mud.

RK: What is the reason for your legs getting immersed?

W2: After Poochi are taken from the sediment, they dig the sediment and take Poochi under it. After that, they leave the place as it is. The digged sediment is piled in the backwater, if we (prawn catchers) get into those sites, our leg gets deep into the sediments.

R1: He (Poochi catcher) piles the digged sand to one side. He digs and makes pits in the plains, if we (prawn catchers) go that way, one leg would be on the plain and another leg would get into the pit. Our legs would be in pain because of this.

RK: Would they catch the Poochi (slug worm) on the banks or inside the river too?

W2: They catch Poochi inside the river.

R2: All the places, they would catch Poochi.

**(00:05:11)**

**GV:** How long have you been fishing prawns here ?

**R1:** We are catching prawns from my father’s generation. Catching prawns and crabs is our livelihood. We don’t have any-other ways to earn other than this. Due to the company (NCTPS), prawns, crabs and fishes are severely impacted. Since then our livelihood dependent on the fisheries has reduced to 50%, even we can say only 30% catch is possible. Before all these, we used to earn 100 or 200 rupees a day. Now it has become hard even to earn Rs.50. They are letting out these waters a day per month and due to that prawns, fishes and crabs die.

**GV:** What kind of water are they letting out here ?

R1: ETS Company (they are addressing NCTPS, but some are referring to it as ETS or EB company) waste water.

**W1:** They are letting out hot water.

**R4:** Its color is yellowish/ Once it mixes with the water here, it affects fish, crabs and prawns altogether.

R1: For 4 days we won’t get anything at all. After 4 days, if the water gets clearer We get prawns for 4 to 10 days only after the water becomes clearer. Once in a month they let out that water. Our village people whose livelihood was only relied on Kazhuveli, other than we don’t have any other job to do. In-between in a year we get this work of planting paddy seedlings for a month. After that we only work in Kazhuveli; we work on that. And we eat and sell whatever we get from it.

GV: Does that yellow coloured water come up to Kazhuveli ?

R3: Yes

R2: It goes up till Pazhaverkadu.

GV: In which part of the river, do you fish prawns?

R1: From our village we have to head East for fishing. We fish the southern side up-till 3 kilometers and the northern side up-till 3 kilometers.

GV: Is it in Ennore river or Kosakalai river ?

R1: The river that has its origins within Kazhuveli (in the backwater itself). We don’t call it a river. We call it Uppu Kazhuveli (backwater).

Q. So you fish the sea creatures from that Uppu Kazhuveli ?

R1. Yes

Q. Where does the water for it come from ?

R1. It comes from the sea.

R2: It comes from the “Mugadwaram”(river mouth).

R3: It comes from Ennore Mugadwaram and Pazhaverkadu Mugadwaram as well.

Q. So from both of these sources, you get the water in Uppu Kazhuveli ?

R1: Yes, Prawns and fishes come here and be sited here in Uppu Kazhuveli. We fish from there a Kilo or 2 kilo and running our lives. For 4 or 5 days in a month, we never get to fish as the wastewater is being let out during those days.

Q. How did it get its name Uppu Kazhuveli ?

R3: For ages, it has had the same name. From generation to generation.

R1: This place had salt pans, so it’s called as uppu Kazhuveli and never had any fresh water.

W1: When the salt pans were cultivated, salt water was drawn only from the kazhuveli by the setting engine pumps.

GV: Okay, only because of that you call it as Uppu Kazhuveli isn’t it?

R1: Yes

R3: Yes.

W1: Yes.

GV: Do you have water stagnated in Uppu Kazhuveli right now?

R1: Yes, it would be there.

W2: All the water has drained due to heavy winds. The backwater bed can be seen right now.

W1: All the water has moved out to Pazhaverkadu Mugadwaram.

GV: Is there water now?

R1: Yes, it is there. Thing is, In a day only 6 hours the water would be there and for 6 hours water drains. Only for 6 hours we can earn something. As the company water is drained, they have made a contract, for 6 hours water would drain via river mouth (reponder is connecting different and saying the dredger used by ETPS to keep the river mouth open to drew water); because the water runs down and drains to the sea.

GV: In which part of Kazhuveli, do you get more prawns ? How big is this Kazhuveli ?

R1. 3 kilometers this side (south), 3 kilometers that side(north) and 3 kilometers to the east.

GV: So it's 3 plus 3 that's 6 kilometers and that side its 2 kilometers isn’t it?

R1. Yes, That’s it.

GV. So out of these 8 kilometers, in which part do you get prawns more ?

R1. We can’t exactly tell that Sir. Each day we get more on different sides.

GV: So we never know where we are going to get more on a particular day ?

R1: It depends on the day. One day we get more this side, another day another side.

R3: Where-ever the vallam(high tide) is rising we get more there. If vallam is not coming (low tide), we get less prawns.

GV: So the prawns that you’ve talked about are produced here or does it come from the outside?

R1. It does come from the sea.

GV: So it is not produced over here?

R1. If it rains, it comes via two paths they have; two river mouths. Prawns come from other places and stay here in the ‘Paraval’ (flood plain).That we would catch daily and make our livelihood.

**-00:10:00**

GV: So it doesn’t get produced here

R1:Yes. Prawns aren’t produced here.

GV: OInly if it comes from there do you get to catch prawns here. If the prawns don’t come from there, then there are no prawns.

R1: No prawns.

R3. Prawns come from two sides. Either this side or that side.

R1: If it only comes from those sides we get prawns here.

R4: It has to come over water (higt tide) (Thanni mela vandhaa thaan era).

GV: Do you know what is the lifespan of the prawn ?

R1: We don’t know all that. But it is available for 3 to 4 months.

Q. In which months do you get them?

R1. In the Tamil month of Maargazhi we get them more. Because that is when the rain water stagnates here.

w2: We get a good amount of prawns only up-till Tamil months of Thai, Maasi (mid-Jan to mid-March)

GV: So you get prawns only in the three Tamil months of Maargazhi, Thai, Maasi ?

W3. After that we had to constantly get into water and check in the Tamil month of Karthigai (mid-Dec to mid-Jan) if the water level had risen enough.

R1. In Karthigai month, we get heavy rains; at that time, water would be out of reach. So we can’t fish.

GV: What do you mean,’Water would be out of reach’?

R3. More water would come in.

GV: So that water level won’t let you go reach the sediment, sit and fish; is what you are saying ?

R1. Yes, we can’t sit and fish. So we have to stay in our house for one or two months.

GV: What are those months? Karthigai and?

R1. Karthigai and Maargazhi (mid-November to mid-January)

GV: So in these two months, you can’t fish prawn as the more water would come?

R1. Yes

W2: No, it’s Karthigai, Aipassi (mid-October to mid-December) only in these Tamil months we can’t fish prawns. After we get into Maargazhi, we can catch.

Q. What happens after Maargazhi?

R3. We can fish prawns in Maargazhi, Thai and Maasi (mid-Dec to mid-March).

Q. What about Panguni and Chittirai Tamil months?

W3. No, we won’t get it. We have to go and sit simply.

R: Even this month, we can only catch prawns only for our personal consumption, side dish for the meal and curry. We will be able to get some prawns.

GV: So you would be able to get just for your personal use but you won’t be able to fish as much as it can be used for commercial purposes?

W2. Sometimes even it won’t be available even for our personal consumption and commercial purposes as well. I can't even sell the prawn to buy provisions for daily meals.

GV: In months like Chithirai when you don’t get income from fishing prawns what kind of work do you do ?

R3. There is this 100 days work scheme (MGNRES). They have started only today but we don’t know if they will hire us.

GV: That is the latest scheme. Before all this how did you manage?

R1. We had salt pans back then and people didn't even used to go to any other work properly. We used to pack sacks, some would lift the sacks; we even worked till 4 pm in the salt pans.It was comfortable for us then. After those salt pans stopped working we found it difficult. (Uppalam illaadhadhu naala engaluku Paadu kammi)

RK: How do you fish prawns in Paadu or just randomly?

R1. Just with hands we used to do.

R2. We search for it in a casual manner.

RK: You get an idea then which side to go and all ?

R2: If we go to this side one day, the next day we would go to the other side.

W2: Some, who know how to catch prawns with nets, they go with the nets.

R1: For example if a person asks another person. And that person says he just caught one kilogram of prawns. All others would go that side to fish prawns.

W1: These Pattninathavar are coming in the nights to catch prawns by boat and emptying away (valichi eduthunu poidraanunga) all the prawns in the river.

GV: Are they coming into Kazhuveli ?

(more the 5 people were saying yes)

W1: Yes they are coming. During Karthi month, they would come to kazhuveli.

R1. From this side fishers from Pazhaverkadu kuppam. They would come here in 40 to 50 boats and catch prawn here. They would pick all the prawns in the river.

R3. In the month of Karthigai month; they would not leave the place, 10 to 20 boats would come here.

R1. So it’s hard for us to catch enough prawns if they come here.

RK: Do they have Paadu here ? (review the word Paadu before this)

R1:. Yes, as they are fishermen, they say they have the right to fish prawns here.

R3:When we ask them, they would say, we have equal rights here.

R1: They would say, At night we would catch fish/prawns only at night and you can catch prawns in the morning. We are not coming in the morning, we just spreading nets in teh night.

GV: That means, at night they would catch and in the morning you would catch prawns.

R1. Even in the morning they come. But we can’t ask them why.

GV: Why can't you ask?

R3: They have fishes’ cooperative society.

W1: From the government they are providing subsidies, loans, money and provisions. If they (sea fishers) didn’t get the catch, they are providing money. We are only suffering. Here. (fishing community have society membership)

GV: Don’t you have Sangam (society)?

R3:I’m joining and he is the leader; I didn’t join, but there are some 25 members here. They are all the net-catchers. We are Thadavukaarars (prawn tracers). So we did not join the society (cooperative Society for fishers).

**(00:15:13)**

GV: Why didn’t Thadavukar didn’t join the society?

R1. There was a time when they let people join, at that time we weren’t here. That time didn’t come again.

GV: How many types of Prawns are there ? Are there types?

R1: Vellai Era, Kal Era, Karuppu Era that is also called Kota Era. Only these three types of Era are there.

W2. Sevva Era (red prawn) is also there, tell that.

R1. Sevva Era is very rare, and comes once in a year..

R3. It will be small in size. It moves faster and its body would be somewhat red in color.

R1. Other than that, crab and fish.

GV: Do you get to fish crab and fish here ?

R1&R3: Yes, it is available. We can easily get it to cook in our home.

GV: In what situation would prawns grow well?

R1. We don’t know about that.

GV: So you fish them and come back ?

R1. Yes

GV: In what situation, it would thrive, all those are things you don’t know?

R3: Yes. If the prawns are breeds and produced here, we might know those. They are grown outside and come here through water (high tide), while water is pulled by the sea (low tide), the prawns would also go.

R1: Whatever the size, it would go during low tide and if any of them gathers somewhere in pits or pools, cranes or sparrows would eat them.

GV: What are all the beings that eat Prawns ? Crane, Sparrow and what else ?

R1. Mostly it’s cranes and sparrows.

GV: What about Fish ?

R1. Yes, even fish.

GV: Apart from cranes and sparrows, it seems even foxes eat them. Is it true ?

R1: No, Foxes won’t eat them.

R2: Now we are going to Visari Valai (cast net), whatever we consider as non-usable, we leave it on the banks, the foxes there would eat.

R1: He is not asking that. He is asking what species eats the prawns in the water.

R2: prawns would be eaten only by the cranes, fishes. We would catch the prawns in the water and shed them on banks, we would take only what's needed and leave some which is not required. Foxes would consume that. Sometimes even when we keep the prawns in the bag and go to throw the fishing nets a long distance away, the foxes come and eat them. So we tie the bags high in the trees. Foxes would follow us if we go to fishing. Foxes and pigs exist here.

GV: Do you know, how long does it take for the prawns to grow ?

R2: In Chithirai month water is low. During summer, for the sea species to breed, there would be a fishing ban prohibition period. During that time only prawns would breed, more prawns would come via Mugadwaram (river mouth), in our place, the paraval (flood plains) are large. As the paravel (flood plains) are large, the sediments would be sandy, there are places called ‘Periya Katt’ where sediment would be completely sandy. Only in those places, prawns would breeds and produced more; there would be more production for 3 months, in the ‘Kattu vidura season’ From Karthi month to Chithirai month (mid-November to mid-February) (hope the respondent was about say Thai month), only in that season, prawns would be produced more and started to grow. In just 3 months, the prawns would grow. Even small size prawns would grow larger in 3 months. Even the aquacultured prawns would not grow that big enough.

GV: Why does it grow so fast here?

R2: Because prawns get more space here. From the sea via Mugadwaram (river mouth), then it comes via Buckingham Canal (respondent is mentioning the river channel as Buckingham canal). It gets towards the low lying areas and, in the low lying space there are 2-3 canals. If you come via those channels, there would be larger Paraval (flood plains); If you can go there, you can understand, it’s just 2 minutes away from here.

Paraval would be with lots of sand; how the sand formed were? some 50 to 60 years before they started a salt factory there. So when they set the paathi (salt pans), around that they set up the boreset, surrounding the canal (here it’s river). All of that got destroyed now.

00:20:00

When all that got destroyed, it remained as Paraval. Since than fish and prawns started thriving more and also mangroves (thillanchedi) were helpful for the vultures to hunt them (by sitting over the mangroves). The fishes, prawns and crabs also started growing well because of the mangroves. Thillanchedi (mangroves) and Vangalavarukattaa Keerai (sweda Lettuce) which are the main things in the paraval.

W2: Karupera (Black prawns) would only exist in those plants.

GV: Which plants?

W2: Inside the Thillanchedi(mangroves).

R2: In that mangroves, there would be more roots and inside the roots there would be more alage, fishes(/prawns) eat the algae in that. So the prawns if they come here once they would not go into the sea again. There they would breed and as the water level goes down and down, their (prawns and fishes) counts come down. At the same time, only when the water reduces, the crab’s count would increase. There are lots of spaces, if you can see that, you would get mesmerized, it would spread vast (pravala irukum; means spread across). That much space is available for the prawns and fish to breed; the breeding space required for the prawns and fishes exceeds here for several kilometers.

Up-to 3 to 5 kilometers the space is available.

R1: 3 km in the South, 3 km in the North and 3 km in the East

R2: There are two Mugadwaram present now. One is Pazhaverkadu Mugadwaram and another one is Ennore Mugadwaram. Ennore Mugadwaram is near to us, prawns coming via Ennore Mugadwaram are more. Near Pazhaverkadu Mugadwaram there are other river drains.. The prawns and fishes that come via the Ennore Mugadwaram are more and those (prawns) are one that stays in the Paraval.

GV: In what method, do they fish Prawns ?

R1: They fish using Pari; they (fishers) pick the prawns with their hand and place it in the Pari. The second method is Mani valai;Visiri Valai (the cast net). They (fishers) fry the Thavudu (bran) and put it in the water, then they catch prawns with nets. The third method is for catching fishes; as the water evaporates, fishers would build obstacles (Madai) with muds. It’s called Kuthu veikuradhu. As the water evaporated, the fishes would come closer in the less available water, then those would be caught. It’s something like how a fish festival is done in lakes of inland villages. They have caught even the biggest of fishes. They have caught one full lorry load of fishes and prawns here. Please ask this person.

**(00:22:34)**

R2: You know, gigantic fishes were caught here. Lorry comes and loads the fishes. Lorry would directly go to the fishing site, it would go to the edge of the backwater (uppankazhi); that much quantity of fishes were caught. At present our situation has changed because of the company (EB; NCTPS); because of the hot water drained into the Buckingham canal fish species has vanished. Large numbers of people's livelihood has been affected, people started to look for different jobs.

R1: They would come on the edges of the blackwater to load the prawns. Lorry would come to the place where fishes are caught. From the fishing site, we bring the prawn and fill the prawns in the baskets and the basket would be loaded in the lorry.

R2: Two baskets full of fishes/prawns would be tied to a log in its ends and the center of the log is lifted and shifted to the lorry.

GV: So many prawns were caught that filled the entire lorry. Is that right?

R2: Yes, that's the truth.

W1: That’s true.

R2: Prawns would be transported to [Pattalam](https://goo.gl/maps/VxtpUK9qMu2GmqqP9); to our Puliyanthoppu Pattalam.

R1: Pattalam, Vannarapetta, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (not clear; 23:22 [gajendranvpr@gmail.com](mailto:gajendranvpr@gmail.com)), Choolai; prawns were taken to all those places.

GV: When did this happen?

R2(to others): Would it have been 80 years ago? This happened when his (o)grandfather was catching prawns.

R1: Yes, it would have been 80 years. At present his (---)age is 60 years, then you think of the time; it happened in his grandfather's time.

R3: That's what I am saying, the lorry would come closer to us, we used to bring the prawns/fishes by bearing the prawns in baskets tied to a log from the other side of the Uppankazli to load them in the lorry. My uncle (mama) would be standing next to the lorry. The lorry would leave with the fully loaded prawns in it. Sometimes the lorry would have space to hold more baskets.

R2: At that time there was a company and even a transportation facility was not available. Even the Stage I plant (NCTPS) next to Pudhunagar wasn’t present at that time.

R1: The company was established all, all have gone.

R3: From here we would be able to see Ennore Mugadwaram (Creek). The space was tat much vacant then.

R2: When the company was established, our income was reduced and also the prawn;fishes got reduced.

R3: Additionally, they are constructing more bridges across the river.

GV: How did women catch the prawns?

R2: They used to catch prawns by hand. They would use ‘Pari’. (asked to bring Pari to one child)

GV: What’s her name?

R2 Her name is W1

W1: Janaki

GV: How do you catch prawns?

R2: They would tie Pari to their hip. They would only (preferably) catch (pick) prawns in the hip level water. In the neck deep water, they would tie the Pari in the head. They would also submerge and pick the prawns (with hands) and also they also pick prawns in the limited water. They would trace for the prawns in the backwater bed with their hands. If there is movement in the surface water, the prawns would lie down on the sand, then they (prawn catchers) would pick the prawns and put them in the Pari. This is the prawn catching Pari (showing the Pari), it’s made up of the palm leaves (panai oolai).

(00:25:14)

R3: This is the Pari we use to catch prawn.

R2: We would be using nothing else except Pari.

R3: If the water level is low, we would tie the Pari to our hip. If the water level is high we would tie the Pari to our head and sit in the river.

R1: We would tie the net in two different ways based on the water level.

R2: People catch prawns till 85 years. Yelakutti ( 25:34) caught a prawn when she was too old. She used to walk with a bent body as she is elderly. But if she gets into the water to pick prawns, she would move freely; once she gets into the water, it provides her energy, it’s her wor; she would not forget it. I am telling her age by a guess, but she might be even 100 years older, we aren’t sure about it. Till her death she was catching prawns.

R3: Once she wakes up in the morning, she would brush her teeth and she would be in Kazhiveli (backwater) by 6 in the morning to catch prawns and she would be back home only by 12 or 2 in the afternoon.

RK: When would you start to catch prawns? What would you take with you? When would you be back?

R2: We only take Pari with us; nothing else. By 7 in the morning fishers would eat ‘old rice’ (porridge) and go to the prawn catch. Then they would be back only by 1 in the noon..

W1: We would be back only by 1 or 2 in the noon.

R2: Inbetween, they would have any water or food.

R3: Only now they are taking plastic water bottles in the summer.

R2: Only now water can come into existence; only 10 years ago we were aware of the water bottles.

GV: Earlier, how you used to drink water?

R2: On the water to the backwater, there are lakes; there are pools; rain water would have stagnated, we would drink those waters.

GV: Would that water be clean?

R2: Yes, it would be clean to drink.

R1; Water would not look clear.

R2: But we would consume the water to quench thirst.

R1: Cows would cross over those waters, even then we would drink just to quench thirst.

R2: That too only in the rainy season, the water would be good. But even on quite sunny days the water won’t be good to consume.

R3: Even then we would consume water; even if the water gets turbid, we would drink water while taking the cow for grazing.

R2: If we get to the near shore side, we would be able to drink water from the springs. Near Kalanji sides we have farm gardens(thoppu), where springs are available. We would drink water from the springs.

R1: If we go to Kazhuveli, what would we do?

R2: We would not have any issues. We would not drink any water if we go to Kazhuveli (back water)

R1: If we take cattles, what would we do? We would drink water from the lake. Even if the buffalos are lying in the lake, we would just flap (to remove the surface dusts) and

drink water from the lake. What else can be done?

GV: Are similar prawns caught like before?

R2: No.

GV; Why couldn’t you catch it?

R2: Reason is the company. Many companies has come; hot water is discharged

R1: Company (EB) water is discharged (ash). Three times hot water is discharged. When the discharged water started coming here, prawns were getting lost.

R2: Muds have increased in the river. Earlier the Mugdwaram was cleaner, water was coming from the sea and draining good. When the company came here, more ash got deposited leading to more muds in the Kazhuvlei.

GV(to women): What is the difference between the current muds and suds in the past in the river?

W1: Now the muds are cement color.

R2: Because of the company. Earlier there was no mud, it was full of sand.

R1: At present, we can’t keep our legs on either side of a path, it would be full of mud. We have to follow a particular one way path. Only were able to grow for a particular place in the backwater, and couldn't go to all the places.

GV: Are the prawns able to survive in this muds?

R2: Even if the prawns are living here, their income is less than in the past. Prawns wish to live in the sandy sediments.

R3: In the muds prawn production is less, but Jilebii (Tipila) would be available, because it rolls in the muds. Prawns need sandy sediments, only then the prawns can grow and breed well; the prawns would stay here in the sandy flood plains. In our village sandy flood plains exist. Like that we have 3 sandy flood plains. One is periya kattu, Thaiyar kattu and Semmadi kattu.

**(00:30:06)**

It was named for the partition of the sandy flood plains to catch prawns/fishes. The flood plains would be auctioned and respective village panchayats would use the earnings from the auctions for temple festivals or some welfare for the villages.

GV: What was the auctioning prices?

R2: Now, the place is being auctioned for lakhs.

GV: it was said prawns grow well in the muds?

R2: They wouldn't have said that the prawns would grow in the muddy places, prawns would be available in the muddy places, but it wouldn’t stay (/live) in the muddy places. If the prawns are coming with the river flow (high tide), they won’t stay in the muds sediments; it will search for sandy places and settle there. I would travel over the muddy places, feed on slug worms(Poochi), but it would stay there. I would lay on the places where its sand is available. It would dig the sand and get into it. How many feet **(kuzhi adikkum)** would it get into the sands (to other prawn catchers)?

R1: It would go inside this much (showing his hand).

R2: It would keep on digging and get into sandy sediments. Then I would lie inside.

GV: What kind of sand would it dig into? Is it like river sand or something softer?

R1: Those sand are not river sands, it would be more granular. Only the prawns used to stay. River sand would be rougher.

GV: What you are saying as muds is the waste settled in the sediment?

R2: Yes, we are only saying the waste as mud. The prawns would not stay in the those waste muds (kazhivula nikkadhu). The prawns would creep and come (in high tide) to the backwater, if they don't find space to stay, leave (in low tide) along with the water.

GV: So prawns would only grow in Kalimannu (soft sand).

R2: Prawns would stay in the non waste sediments (Kalivilladha idam).

GV: What do the prawns consume?

R1: Prawns eat slugworm (poochi)

GV: What Poochi?

R1: It would be red in color present inside the sediment.

R2: Kind of worm (Poochi), many people are doing business with that Poochi at present. You could have also seen people taking Poochi on the river bank while coming here. Prawns, fishes and crabs, all of these species would consume the Poochi, it would inside the sand (sediments).

GV: Why are people catching Poochi and not before?

R2: We don’t know what’s the importance of the Poochi, but it’s a business now. One Kilogram of Poochi is sold for 1000 or 1200 rupees. With that we aren’t sure what kind of medicine is extracted or made.

GV: To whom the Poochi is sold?

R2: Not sure about that. But the business is done regularly. Forest department has to decide on that. Because it’s shipped between states.

R1: People from here are not catching the Poochi, others from outside are doing that.

GV: To which state Poochi is sold?

R2: To Kerala, but it might be sold to different states (feels the respondent was reluctant as the Poochi trade is illegal and the question was also more direct). We are not sure about it.

R1: People who catch the Poochi are different and People who buy and trade Poochi are different.

GV: How do you let an outsider in?

R2: It’s only our people who are catching the Poochi, but getting the Pooching and trading it are from outside. That person would trade it to another person.

RK: Does this impact the prawns?

R2: Yes, because of this prawns are impacted. If we don’t find any livelihood here (a place) we would search for a job for another place. Similarly, prawns would go to some other place to search for food. Now the prawn population has reduced. If he (other fisher) goes for prawn catch at morning 7, earlier it was like, he could catch 1kg prawns in 1.5 hours. But at present, he would get the same prawn only if he catches it for the whole day. Fishers weren't able to catch the prawns in the net. Now fishers using nets to catch prawns have completely stopped. A person from a house used to catch prawns with a net. At present no one is going to Net-work (fishing), they are searching and moving for some other income as we have no other option to run their family. If there are no prawns, they can only try for 2 days and on the 3rd day they would opt for some other job.

GV: Do you think that because of the muds, the river has spoiled?

R1: Yes.

GV: How did the river get spoiled?

R3: Our livelihood and our income has been affected; our income has reduced abruptly.

GV: Do you think that prawns are toxicated?>

R2: Definitely, Because of the chemical water, prawns are getting diseases.

GV: What kind of diseases?

R2: We aren't sure about that. But the prawns are dying sooner.

R3: If the water gets heated for 1 or 2 hours, the prawns would die.

R2: If it’s raining then the prawns would be fresh. In the summertime, if the chemical water (discharged) is discharged. Prawns and fishes would die.

R3: It’s not that these specific species (prawns and fishes) are dying, all of them would die.

R2: We are not sure how it’s dying. How the chemicals affect the fishes/prawns. We are also consuming those prawns too.

R3: Last month 1 to 2 kg Viral fish was dead.

GV: Why because?

R3: The company water (effluents) came here. Sometimes the effluents would be cooler and some it would be hotter; at that the fishes/prawns would die.

**(00:35:08)**

GV: Do you have to catch prawns in the night?

R3: No we would not go at night.

R1: People would go in the night. Before the company was built, people used to go to catch prawns in the night; 20 to 30 women would go in the night. They would go till Oornamedu Crematorium; at night they used to trace (Thaduvuvaanga). We (men) would go by 2 0r 1(am) in the night to get the prawns that are caught. Once it was like that. Once the company (EB;NCTPS) was established. We stopped going at night.

GV: Do only women do prawn tracking (Era thadavuradhu)?

R2: Yes, Mostly women would do that.

R1: Men would also go. May be one in 100 would go.

GV: How would men catch prawns?

R2: They would nets to catch prawns. They would use Visuru valai (cast nets).

R1: It would be before 40-50 years. The thing I said about catching prawns at night.

GV: At that time, there would be no lights. How would they go?

R1: Yes, they would go at that time. Moon light would be there. After they (women) went to the prawn catch, we (men) would go by 10 or 11 in the night and wait there for the arrival on the banks of the backwater (somewhere near). They would voice out once they arrived from the river. Then we (men) would get the prawns from them with the baskets.

GV: So the cast net is used by men.

R1: Cast nets are only used recently; that too only for just 10 years before people started to use the castnet. Before that there were no cast nets.

GV: Before 10 years how men would have caught the prawns?

R2: Men have been using cast nets atleast for 20 years.

R3: Some men would go for prawn tracing and others would go for any other jobs.

GV: What work would they do?

R3: They were working in teh Uppiu kaayal (saltpans).

R1: They would go to salt pan works and agricultural work.

R3: My uncle (peripa) used to work in saltpans.

R4: Since my childhood I was working in the saltpans.

R2: His age is now 60 years. He might have been working in the salt pans for 15 years.

R4: We would release 3 degree water in the salt pans. hen, we would form Paathi (small pans) in the 10\*10 (sq ft). we would tramp those salt pans. In that water would be left to dry (evaporate). Water would be reduced (evaporated) step by step. When the water reaches 18 degrees, we let the water into the salt pans (tramped salt pan). Only if the water is 18 degrees (degree is measure salinity in the water), salt crystals would be formed. Edible salts are harvested only in 18 degree water, not more than that. If the degree crosses 25 or 30 degrees, that is for the production of drugs. When it is done like that, we have to tramp, check the degree and cultivate.

R2: Other than prawns, the next income to our village is through the salt pans. If we can’t earn from the salt or fishes, then people go for salt works.

GV: What's your name?

R4: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Father name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

RK: Age?

R4: 60

R4: Since I was aware of things, I worked in the salt pans. (enaku vidhi therinji naa uppaltula thaan vela senjan).

R2: The cast nets are used for 45 years. Because since my childhood people have been using cast nets. I went to a prawn catch in my childhood; now I am 40 years old, then how would you say it was just 10 years (to R1). I went with Deva (anna) and Seenu (anna) for a prawn picking (to assist them to segregate the prawns that are caught with nets) in my childhood. Before that nets are being used. Between these two works, we were doing agriculture. From Puratasi month (mid-October:mid-Novermber) to Thai month (mid-Jan:mid-Feb). Planting paddy seedlings, groundnut sowing, Paitham paruppu (green gram) farming and watermelon plantation. And also Raagi was also cultivated. Everyone would do agriculture, they would cultivate any of the farm crops next to their house like gardens. Something or other they would grow.

In between agriculture, salt works and prawn tracing work is done. Once the paddy is grown, during harvesting period (Thai month; January) people walk to many villages to harvest the paddy in the land owner field. People would walk till [Velur](https://goo.gl/maps/EF9Uwq95ECrWeTES9) village.

R3: Only now people are working in the field in Poramboke land. Earlier they would not work here. They used to go Velur, Kumarathoppu; they would have to work in the villages across the Thiruvelavoyal.

R2: Minimum they have to walk 10 kilometers away.

R3: Because the farmer there had bore pumps, privileged people are on that side. Here other than these two professions (salt work and fishing). Either one has to do salt pan works and people who know how to catch prawn would do that. These were the only two professions at those days.

(00:40:04)

During rainy days, there would be no salt pan works, generally those people would opt for agriculture works as laborers to Velur and other villages as they don’t know prawn tracing; Prawn pickers would go to the prawn tracing work (thadavapovanga).

GV: Do these waste muds have brought any changes with the prawns?

R3: Nothing has changed with the prawns, but because of these muds, the prawns have been reduced here.

R2: It’s like, in a place where 10 prawns existed. Only 2 prawns exist now; the other 8 prawns don't exist. We know some places where more prawns would exist, but in those places prawns are not found at that rate. Slowly prawns started to disappear from those places.

GV: In some places, people have said that prawns are not active; aren’t bouncing’; they are dying soon. Is that same here?

R3: Nothing like that. Prawns would be alive only for some time.

R2: They are alive nly in water.

R3: After 1 or ½ hour, they would die automatically. We would collect them in the Pari after catching them, while coming to the banks (karai), it would have died in ½ hour.

R2: But, Kallera (tiger prawns) do exist; when does it die? While shedding them after coming to the house they would still be bouncing. Among Kallera, Vellera and Valechera, Kallera would be active even after coming home.

GV: Is Kallera still present?

R2: Yes, Kallera is present till now.

GV: Who would segregate the prawns based on the size and their kind?

R2: Same people would do that. If the prawns are larger, then it would cost 150 Rupees per kg. If it’s Podiera (smaller prawns) people would buy it for 100 Rupees. They (prawn tracers would definitely take some amount of prawns for their house. If there is a need for money, they would sell it all.

GV: To whom do you sell?

R3: People would come and get it from our home (within the village).

R1: If the neighbor is asking for 100 rupees, I would give them. Like that 4 other neighbors would ask and prawns would be sold.

GV: Would the trader come here to get the prawns?

R2: There are traders(mostly women fish sellers), who would get prawns from the prawn tracers and sell them in any bazaar (markets).

R3: If the trader would get the prawns for some 200 rupees. They would sell it for 300 rupees to get profit. Some individuals directly come to the fishers house to get the prawn for a lesser rate rather than going to a nearby market. My village women only trade the prawns, they would get the prawns here and sell them in the bazaar.

GV: Do you think prawns and fishes would have toxicity in them?

R2: It would have toxicity. Because of the current situation, the water is impacted by chemical water (effluents) and ash water is also coming to our place. Sometimes prawns have situations to eat the ashes ; If it’s eating the algae, sequentially it would consume the ashes that are deposited over the algae. Because of that, prawns might get diseases, we could also get the diseases. Some fishes would have wounds in their mouth. Like humans, fishes also might have some diseases. If that fish died in the river; that fish would be consumed by the other fishes, prawns and crabs; through that fish, disease can spread to other organisms. That's the reason for prawns and fishes dying in the flood plains and their decline.

GV: Do you think, if humans would be impacted by such affected prawns?

R2: We are consuming those prawns and fishes till we survive. If we get a fever, we would get an injection from the hospital; that’s it.

R3: We are aware if we are affected by it or not.

R2: We haven’t done any research on that. There is no quality in any food we are consuming now.

GV: Are you consuming those prawns at present?

R2: Yes.

R3: Yes we are consuming.

R2: If we eat prawns, our expenses are less. If we don’t eat prawns, then our expenses would get high. If prawns are there, we would just add any vegetable to the prawns and consume that. If there is no prawn, we have to make Sambar, a vegetable side dish and Rasam; this would lead to more expenses.

GV: This means prawns are part of your daily food; it reduces your expenses.

R2: It’s part of food; in making our livelihood prawns and fishes are part of life. If those don't exist here; our village would have faced severe hardships. There are no companies here and there are no farm lands in our village. We are quite developed because of the prawns and the Uppankazhi (oru alavukku theri vandhom). It can be stated,”We (village) rely on this Uppankazhi (flood plains)”. We can surely tell that for 100%. Still many people of our village rely on that.

R3: We are relying on that.

R2: Only because of the chemical water (effluent) discharge from the river; as the fishes and prawns are diminishing, we (some people) started to search for other income. If we get sufficient income from our village, why are we going to other places? Currently it is said that the port would be developed further. If they keep on developing, water bodies are getting affected, we couldn’t go fishing. If rain comes, all the rainwater would be drinking into the river, now those draining water are coming back into our village. Earlier water had never come (inundated) till this level in our village. Only during a big storm surge or severe rain such a level of water comes into our village. At present, it is hard to get out of the house even in the little rain.

**(45:30)**

R3: Because of the company (EB), the muds have increased.

R2: Muds have increased and water is not draining.

R3: All the pits (pallam) are filled by the mud; the pits have become plain.

R1: No, not just the pits and plain. The water body (river + floodplains) has narrowed, the empty places have been used to build companies.

R2: Many companies has come along the Kosasthali river; all the places were compounded, there are no ways for the water to drain into the river. There are no canals to drain the water; at present.

GV: Then the canal has been blocked by the industries by compounding.

R2: Yes, water is not drawing enough into the river.

GV: Then prawns migration also stopped. Is that right?

R2: Prawns would come here and move out through the river mouth. The sufficient water is not drained into the river.

R1: After pouring, the rain water stays stagnant here. Only if the river has enough empty space, the water would drain. Both sides of the river have come closer (nerungiduchu).

R2: Wetlands are being encroached and aquaculture ponds are formed, many people are encroaching, companies are being built and canals are narrowed down. Now a new bridge (chennai Peripheral road) is also being constructed like Outer Ring Road, that bridge is coming over the river; by that construction canals have been slitted, water moving spaces have been closed. Because of that, if it rains, the water is not moving and water is inundated into the villages.

R3: Earlier, in that canal, salt would be shipped by boats. Now there is no way to for salt shipment, that canal has been slitted. (speaking about Buckingham canal)

R2: From our village; from here, there is a small channel through which we can reach the canal (Buckingham canal), which leads to Marakkanam; we can see the canal in google maps. From Chinthamani lock (in Buckingham canal), the canal has lock till Pondicherry. Here British people stayed, those remainings are left there. There is an estate behind our village, they have been here since British people. They would use horses, they would come in boats. That place was great; now those buildings were demolished. To that far, our place was fantastic.

R1: There were many central government houses (houses for salt workers). Many higher officers were here.

RK: Is there any other name for Era (prawn)?

R2: Era is called Era, even if you search on the net, it would only show as Era. There are 4 types of prawns. One is Kallera, Vellaera, Kottaera (Black prawn); it’s black prawns, we call large prawns it as Kottaera; others would call it Karuperra. We call it Kottera, because it’s larger and has good growth than other prawns. Even if it stays in one place it would grow larger.

GV: Is the Fiddler crab here?

R3: Yes, it would be available only near Mangroves.

R2(to others): Would we eat that prawn?

R5: We would not catch that. We would not even catch that. I would go and hide if sees humans.

R1: It would exist as Bochu Bochu (as a group; Bouchu Bouchaa irukum). One person used to eat that.

R2: That is the only person who used to eat that. No one would eat that. We would eat only sea crabs and kattu nandu.

GV: Where does the fiddler crab breed?

R2: It will also stay inside the water and also stay outside the water. Mostly it can be seen on the banks of the back water.

R1: Plenty of fiddler crabs can be seen only on the banks of the water.

R3: I would stay much in water, it would be produced on the banks.

GV: Do you know what it's life period is?

R2: Every living being would have life till we catch it.

GV: Are there different kinds of Fiddler crabs?

R2: We only know the fishes, prawns and other crabs. Only have named it from our village. We don’t like that crab. It used to have a dot dot outer, would live as a cluster; we wouldn’t like that. We couldn’t bite it, we couldn't break its leg. We won’t like seeing it.

R1: But it would weigh more weighter.

(00:50:04)

R2: We can bite the crab; legs cannot be broken.

GV: Is Fiddler crab friendly to the environment?

R2: We don’t know the history. We are sure about it.

R3: It would stay idle in the water. We didn’t know much about ecology, only after the Tsunami, we came to know about the importance of Mangroves. Before that we used to cut the Mangroves and build fences for houses. Now we have stopped cutting mangroves. We are aware that it would protect us. Now the mangroves have been planted by the forest departments. One sister has given work opportunities to 3 people in our village and planted mangroves. They are also providing seed to households to grow plants at home.

GV: Generally you call Fiddler crab as Ghost crabs (pei nandu)?

R2: Generally we don’t like that crab; we would consume those prawns, so we call it Ghost crab. The crabs would exist inside the water, while tracing for prawns people can easily catch the crabs that are sitting inside the water. These crabs can't cough, it would only have crab in the banks and it's hard to trace them inside the sand.

R3: It would generally be present under the mangroves' roots. People won’t take such efforts to catch these prawns.

R1: It’s even hard to catch.

GV: Do you think the fiddler crabs count has declined?

R2: It would survive even without water. It would survive even if the enormous water was reduced.

R3: I exist as usual (numbers not declined).

R2: If you know their history. Please tell us.

R2(to others): Have you heard of Vannathi nandu (fiddler crab)

R1: No.

R2: It’s showing in google. After reading that only he (GV) is asking us questions.

GV: Where in the floodplain, the waste mud (Kazhivu) more?

R2: Waste is more near our village. From here, Ennore is 7 kms. Because of the more waste (mud), the algae has increased in the water and it started to stink. It has become like sewage. The clean water has become like sewage because of the ash water and chemical water.; the waste got settled in the bottom. It also stinks. When fishes are consuming the things in that river, they are getting diseases.

GV: Even in this bad situation, people are catching prawns?

R2: Yes.

GV: Are the fishers impacted by it?

R2: No, people are not much impacted by this. One thing is that we would not go into the places where there are more waste muds. We would go to a cleaner place to trace prawns.

R3: Half the places are left, we are catching only the other half.

R1: We are choosing to catch only in particular places.

R3: He (about R1), he would go to any place with courage. She (another fisher at that place). She won’t go to such place as she said before that her leg got stuck (in between the interview, not heard in the interview).

GV: How has this waste mud changed your life?

R2: If the company’s (NCTPS) waste muds don’t exist, 75% of our income for our livelihood would be earned from the prawn and fish catches. As the more prawn and fishes are not coming to our place, we started moving to other jobs. From our village, people are pushed to work in jobs that are 10 to 25 kms away from here. Because of that our expenses are also getting high. If this floodplain is cleaner, it would be good for us. Many times we met RDO, Collector and produced letters to them. No action was taken. Electricity has become an essential thing for people. Electricity production has become a major thing. We couldn’t do anything opposing it. So, we are just accepting whatever is happening. Nothing could be done about them. They are saying we would get you to sea. It’s the same situation in the sea; sea fishes are only coming here. In the sea also wastes are going. It’s the same situation everywhere. Situation has become so bad that we can resist anything. A project is initiated stating that as ‘people’s development’; they are saying neighboring villages members would get employment; till the company is buil, they are providing ‘housing keeping work (sanitation)’; after the company is built, they provide employment to qualified people and make us unemployed. Again we have to go to old situation to catch prawns or we are pushed to any Kooli work (daily wage job)

(00:55:17)

GV: Are there people who went to work in the company (NCTPS) and then reverted back?

R2: Yes. Even I worked in the company for 2 years and reverted.

GV: Why did you come out?

R2: They told me that my work is done here. There is no work then.

R3: It was just contract work.

R2: Most people are not going to any company work. They are going to Kooli work (daily wage jobs). Because the salary is very less in the company. Salaries are not paid regularly. Work would be only for some tenure like 3 or 4 or 5 months, after that employer would not give us jobs. How can we run our family?

GV: Would they people sing songs while catching prawns?

R2: Yes, there are singers in the next street(joking). They would only talk about the village stories while catching prawns.

GV: Would you not get bored? While catching prawns at night?

R3: At night we won’t catch prawns, only in the day we catch prawns.

GV: I am asking about the past.

R2: Only they would tell any stories. People would trace prawns in groups. They would be talking about where yesterday one has got more prawns and they would go to that place. Only such things would be discussed.

R3: At night, they wouldn’t go alone. From one end to other end at least 20 to 30 people would be catching prawns by standing in a sequence.

R2(to the women there): Do you sing any songs while catching prawns?

W2: We don’t get any prawns. We would say,”Chaa, no prawn is caught”(”Chaa, onnu kooda aapudala” nu solluvom - joking).

R2: If 4 people go to the prawn catch, if one gets more prawns. Others would say,”how she could only get more prawns, but we couldn’t”. Likewise fishers would get separate and do prawn catching. They would sing ‘Gummi Paattu’ (a kind of folk song). Temple was built by singing ‘Gummi’ songs. People would go to many villages and sing ‘Gummi songs’ and collect some 5 rupees or 10 rupees, with that money a village temple was built. They have done many achievements, those are slowly getting destroyed. They would sing gummi songs; they would sing songs while planting paddy seedlings in the field. Anyone might have sung while catching prawns in the past.

W3: No, we would not sing, we would just lamen if the prawns are not caught.

R2: Just they would be talking and discussing.

GV: Are there any prawn related stories?

R2: No.

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