**Fisher women Interview**

Interviewers: Raju K.

Place of interview: [Irular Settlement Arunodhiya nagar](https://goo.gl/maps/2rQtREJnWQu2iMts5), Athipattu

Date of interview: 3 August 2022

Geo Coordinates: 13°15'53.58"N, 80°17'53.81"E

Transcription by: RK

**Interviewee Information**

Names: Anonymised

Pseudonyms: Prawn pickers: W1, W2 and W3

**W1:** If they go fishing by 4:00 AM in the morning, they would be back only by 3:00 or 4:00 PM in the evening. They won’t be having any food, they can have the food only when they come back to home with any income.

**W2:** Many had taken our pictures; but we have no use out of it.

(When the interviewer showed some pictures of women picking prawns, who would hang the *‘Pari’* on their back; **W2** wasn’t able see the pictures as her eyes sight were poor; the interviewer debriefed the pictures)

They are ‘Paraiyar’, who used to hang the *Pari*on their back with their heads holding it. We (irulars) used to hold the *Pari* in our mouth (teeth) and pick the prawns. They are mostly seen in Vichoor (need to verify the place as she wasn’t sure); they used to wear headgears with some clothes so as not to get the head wet. I used to search for prawns in the river by wearing a headgear and holding a *Pari* in my mouth. Many people have clicked our pictures; but we haven’t seen those pictures.

People who were working in the saltpans are now aged and dead. I have seen people working in the saltpans; We used to pick some salt from the salt pans and keep it in the home for cooking. There is another elderly woman in the community who might have some memory of salt pan workers, but she would have gone to the river to catch prawn.

**W1:** Coastal tides in the river would wash off the fishes/prawns into the sea; we could catch prawns only in absence of the tides. Earlier the river mouths were blocked from seawater by the bunds. Currently the river mouths are open. The river mouth in Pazhaverkadu has been opened and another river mouth in Thalankuppam is also opened (Ennore creek). When the river mouths were closed, there were plenty of fishes/prawns. Now the river mouth in the Ennore is constantly dredged; thus the fishes are washed away.

We can see the sands only near the river mouth at Ennore; in other places we could only see the ashes from the thermal power plants. Earlier, the river had only muds (Cheru); now it’s only ashes in the river. We aren’t getting any fish or prawns from the river due to these ashes. If the women go for prawn catching to the river; they could earn Rs.300 or Rs.200 per day; If they start by 4 AM or 5 AM in the morning. What would they do with this earnings, would they eat? Or would they pay the debts? These are the rates of the fishes/prawns here. Even there are times when those fishes/prawns wouldn’t get sold, when they (fishers) would be waiting with bunches of catches. Nowadays they aren't able to catch prawn or do fishing, rather they are buying fish/prawn from Pazhaverkadu; Kasimedu and sell it here locally.

They would be selling prawns/fishes as bunches (Kooru pottu - not as per weight) in the market. I wouldn't go fishing and the young women wouldn't be out for fishing; only the eldrely people would be going. Only people of my parents' age would go fishing. Most of people would be going for fishing;

**W3:** It would be hard for us if we don’t get the fish. We would go to Kalanji, Kattupalli and Ennore for fishing. People catching *poochi* **(lugworm)** are from Paalamedu; Maarima Nagar (the other irular settlements in Athipattu - hope that she has mentioned the other communities; because catching *Poochi* is illegal jurisdictionally and also with wider fishing communities). The other Irular settlements have individual land and they have patta land; but we (Aurnodhya Nagar) don’t have separate land and we live in houses with shared walls and shared roofs.

These community houses (a closed asbestos sheet housing with shared wall and roofing) were built in 2002 or 2003 by a civil society organization; we (her family) settled here by 2006; we are descended from fishing and prawn pickers; there are no salt pan workers here.

**W2:** The salt pan workers might have lived; but to our knowledge no one exists here currently.

**W3:** The existing community people only did catching prawn, catching snakes, insects, rats, etc. To my knowledge the salt pans existed from Kattur to Thirunavouil(?). I have seen a sac of salt sold for 30 paisa; 40 paisa; 4 Anna, 8 Anna (1 Anna = 6 paisa), 45 paise and 1 Rupee. Now people started to do aqua cultures over the yester saltpans to resource prawn, fish, etc. The male members in the families from our community work in the aquaculture ponds.

**W2:** A woman, who was helping my community to build houses told us that she would employ us in the aquaculture ponds; we denied it as it would be hard for us if we care for the pond, who would care for the family.

**W3:** It would be hard for us to get weekly wages; we don’t have any resources. I look for daily wages from my husband for daily bread. Currently we aren’t getting any good income from prawn catching and fishing. The ash deposits are being dredged from Ennore to Kattur, it also disturbs the existing prawns and fishes and deepened river is riskier for prawn catchers; as many do not know swimming. Earlier we had memories (knowledge) of ups and downs in the rivers; but after dredging the river floor we don’t have any idea of the depth of the river.

**W1:** Earlier many people have died drowning in the river (in generic) and earlier the river would be deeper than current depth.

**W2:** Currently there is no mud under the river; the river bottom is like a flat floor due to ashes.

**W3:** There aren’t much prawn, fishes due to oil effluent, chemical discharge and ashes. We have seen floating prawns and fishes killed when huge effluent discharged into the river. We wouldn’t catch or sell those prawns or fishes. The birds would be feeding on those killed fishes and prawns. It would take 1 or 2 weeks in those places for the fishes and prawns to reappear again. It would be a hard time for us without any income or food resources. We would be just sitting in homes thinking about our hardship and also would go to ponds or lakes to get Jalebi(Tilapia); Viraal(murrel); Korava (snakehead murrel); catfishes or whatever we get and sell those in the market. We use ‘Thallu Valai’ (a kind of net to catch fish). Some people tried supporting our community by lending help to get boats after joining the ‘Fisheries society’. But, we didn’t join the society as we(men) don't have the habit/knowledge of fishing in boats or Catamarans; our ancestors didn't learn or didn’t let us or our children learn to use boats. Earlier we used to be part of ‘Fisheries Society’ under the Fisheries department; now I am not sure if we are part of it. One of my relatives took us to the Kasimedu Fisheries to join us in the ‘Fisheries Society’ and he told us that would help us to make complaints on the oil discharge and effluent discharge in the river; so through the society we might get some monetary compensation from the polluters or Fisheries. We registered with your identity proofs. The person who helped us to get the ‘Society card’ by registration has died and we haven’t benefited from it so far. It should be renewed yearly and we should have voiced our issues to the Fisheries department . But we didn’t have the capacity or knowledge to approach them. We care for our daily bread and try to sur-pass the the day peacefully. If we get a good amount of fish/prawns from the river, we used to sell and get some Rs.400 or Rs.500 money out of it in the evening. Later in the evening we used to have our food. This is our livelihood. In school students are requested to produce their AADAR cards for admission. So some of children from our community does go to school due to lack of AADAR card and the parents doesn’t know the DOB of the children as many children were in the community itself and not in hospitals.

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