**REIMAGINING THE GOOD CITY FROM ENNORE CREEK**

Interview Transcription

**Interview Information**

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

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\_1.2 \_GV,RK.m4a](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qIdUULO07WWqS_uBNXQuvx_XP2xJlkne/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

**Transcription Note:** This is the continuation of the other transcription ***230401\_Toxicity\_Sengazhineermedu\_Interview\_1.1\_GV, RK.*** I was not able to identify with the voice of the particular speaker that has been addressed and given pseudo names as above with respect to the women responders. So I have entered random pseudo names based on gender like W1, W2, W3 and W4 for women and R1, R2, R3 and R4 for men.

**-00:00:00**

R2: I went to the floodplains to get some lettuce, only a few plants (vangaara vali katta) found in the.

W1: None of the plants are available right now.

RK: Are they used as a food?

W2: We would consume that plant by cooking it with prawns.

R2: We eat that as our daily food. It was our one meal per day. In the past they would make congee (kali) in their home; there was a family in our village, namely Manorama and Kadhirvel; they would make ‘Adai’ with the lettuce. Once they made 2 larger “Adai’ with more flour.

W1: We would pick that lettuce and cook the food.

GV: How would the plant look?

W1: It’s a plant that has stems as sticks and it has only two leaves at the top of the stem.It doesn't have any other leaves in the stems. We would pick that like picking the paddy seed samplings. It would contain some algae, so we would clean that in the water in flood plans, we would bring that to home by tying them to sarees (madila vechi eduthutuvaruvom) or any baskets and bring that home. Mostly at this time (late afternoon) we would be cleaning those lettuce.

W2: The plant would easily break.

R2: We would collect the plants in the sacks; cut those plants; would stream the lettuce; would add prawns and dry chilly to the dish. We would eat it with congee (kali). That’s our food.

W1: We would eat rice only once a day. We have consumed so much of that lettuce. It would taste good. The plants used to be hit with mortar (ural) to cook it.

GV: Are those plants not available nowadays?

R2: No, it has become extinct (kalinjiduchu).

W2: It would be good, though it grows in salt water. But it can’t be found now.

R2: That’s the only lettuce that grows in the salt water; it grows in Kazhuveli.

W2: There is another Lettuce called ‘Umari keerai’, it would also grow bigger. We would also bring those plants and hit them with mortar, and stream it, then we would add prawns, snails and crabs to the plant and consume that while working in the farm field. The farm laborers would have such food that is cooked in the field.

RK: Could you even eat snails?

W2: Yes, we would eat snails. Even now the snails are caught.

R2: They have taken all that food; that is why they are younger till now at this age. At that the major food was Koozl (a type of Porridge) and Kali (congee). There was no rice at that time.

RK (to W2): Where are the snails found?

R2: It’s found in lakes and

W1: It is found in the farm fields.

R2: They are found in the freshwater.

W1: Crab and snails that are used in that dish are found in the farm fields.The raw tender tamarind would be streamed and added to this dish. Because we were not able to buy tamarind (in the past). We had such foods in the past; our fathers and mothers served such food when we were children. We were that much poor in this village.

R2: Now in the farmfield, they are using the fertilizer (marundhu), we can't find the crabs (this is called farm crabs; vayal nandu).

RK(to W1): Is the situation finer now?

W2: At present the situation is even worse than that.

R2: You know what’s the situation right now. People are taking the phone, calling RR Biriyani, and ordering Biryani from there. Specifically a girl named Rohini is doing such things.

W2: Yes, her (Rohini) father is working in the IT company, he is earning good; that is why he can buy her daughter what she asks for. There was severe poverty in this village.

R2: She is even buying 30 rupees bangles for delivery.

RK: Were you working in the salt pans?

W1, W2: Yes.

R2: Most of us were working in the salt pans.

W1: If we go to the salt pans, water would be irrigated into the salt pans. The employer would ask us to tramp that mud with our legs.

RK: Would you wear anything to your feet, while tramping the salt pans?

W1: With raw feet we would tramp the muds in the pans for at least for 10 days by standing in sequence. After tramping, the bottom of the salt pan would become hard enough to stop. Later they would let the salt water into the pans and cultivate the water to a right degree (magnitude), before drawing the salt from the pans.

RK: Is tramping the pans usually done by women?

W1: Yes, Tramping. Filling the salt pans with salt water with potteries. Once the salts are drawn to the edge of the pans, we women and men would fill the salts in the basket and fill it on the shores. The salts would be stored and covered with something like huts. Then the boats would come and ship the salts from there. Once the boat transportation was stopped, we weren't able to do the salt works in this village.

RK: How would the boat take the salts?

W1: Men and women would load the salt in the sacks, something like packing paddy and then load those sacks into the boat. That would be taken via canal kaalvai (Buckingham canal).

RK: When was the last time salt was cultivated here?

W1: We aren’t sure about.

RK: How many years have passed since the salt production stopped from these places?

W2: It would be around 25 years.

RK: Is there any specific reason to stop the salt production?

W1: No specific reasons. But the boat movement is stopped when it is used for loading and unloading.

R2: I think the water is not suitable, it’s not attaining the required degree magnitude.

W2: The floodplains have become elevated.

R2: That place has been bought by a TIDCO company

R1: We aren’t to whom the TIDCO sold that place. Before that a person named Vedarathinam, came from Thoothukudi had taken the salt pan in lease and produced the salt. Then SPIC (a fertiliser company) company people came here and halted here for some time, then they were working by employing some employees here for sometimes and they left. Once they left, the salt production stopped; since then. In Kattoor, the salt produced is utilized for fertilizer (marundhu) production.

W1: They aren’t providing us the 100 days work (MGNREGA), the officials tell this,”because the land belongs to Kattor (another village) village.

W2: In Kattoor, salt production is even done now.

R2: Seems TIDCO has bought all those lands.

**-00:04:45**

**GV:** Are the salt lands still exists?

W1: Where would the land go, the land still exists.

R4: If salt needs to be cultivated, that can be done even now. That’s not big business. We have to build bunds, let the water into the pans and tramp the pans. Once the pans has become tighter, we again hit the pan with thick timber attached to a wooden log (Dhimisu). Then the pans (paathi) would be flatter and smooth. Then the would let the water evaporate to the correct degree. While the degree is rising, at the degree 18, while releasing into the ‘Paathi’, then salt would be formed in the pans. When the evaporation is more or —-, each salt crystal size would increase more. After 4 or 5 days, the salts would be collected with the help of another timber and would be stored on the shore (karai).

GV: You told that those companies like SPIC all came here?

R2: Yes, they came here and they were just managing the salt pans.

GV: The Thoothukudi SPIC company came here?

R4: Yes, they came here. They had a branch here with employees.

R1: But due to some reason, it was stopped.

R4; They were facing losses because of the more continuous rains.

R2: After the rain it would take even 10 days to recover the pans to get ready for production.

R4: People can get profit only if they do the process and cultivate the salts, by the time before taking the salt as an output, if more rain occurs, then what would happen?

R2: The degree of the water (processed) would be reduced and salt production would be impacted.

R4: Government was not compensating properly for the loss they faced. As they didn’t get profit, they stopped the production. Salt can’t be produced all the time, it’s processed only in the summertime. It’s hard for them (employer/producer) if it rains during the summer. Even if it rains, it’s fine if they get profit or at least if they get some money to spend in the salt production. If they face losses, what would they do? They have to stop.

GV: When did the SPIC company left from here?

R2: They have not seen the company.

R4: They were residing here in temporary settlements. They are from Nattar (Nadar) community (a dominant caste). We would take the workers from our village and we all would work together. They would be doing the field work there, they (other community) were stealing the salt from the pans. And we are not sure what happened next, but the salt work was stopped. They weren't able to get profit, they couldn’t get back the expenses made. So, the production was stopped.

GV: Are salt pans used any other way?

R2: It’s empty only. But if the water rises on the salt pans, salt pans would be auctioned to catch prawns and fishes.

GV: What is it auctioned for?

W2: to catch prawns and fishes.

R4: If the water rises, the prawns and fishes would come to the salt pans sites. There people would go to pick the prawns and fishes. As the pans are flatter, it would be easier for catchers.

W2: it would be auctioned to catch fishes and prawns using nets.

GV: Is that only for your villagers?

W2: All the villagers would come here and catch the prawns/ fishers.

R2: The salt pans were flatter earlier, now the pans have highs and lows.

GV: Who would do the auctioning?

W3: It’s by the village panchayat.

R2: It’s a 7 village panchayat. Now the area has been separated into 7 parts for the 7 villages and it would be auctioned accordingly.

GV: You have a partition in that?

R2: Yes, it just concerns income for the respective village.

RK: What Panchayat is this?

R2: It’s Voylur Panchayat. The meeting was organized in our village with the neighboring village, we have temples, there is no specific income for the temples.

W1: There is no income for the temples, so we would organize ‘Thiruvizha’ (festival) for the temple with the income from auctioning the land.

RK: You told, that the salt pans were flat, now it has ups and downs. What is the reason for that?

R2: That’s because people are taking slug worms (poochi) in that salt pan (under the sediments). So, it happens to have many lows and ups (pits and ridges)

W2: If you think that these lands are salt pans; this land would falter and if you start walking with that assumption, then you get into pits.

**-00:10:10**

GV: Have anyone got injured because of the pits?

R2: Yes, many people got hit.

W2: If we think of such places (digged places) and get down, then we would fall suddenly into those pits.

GV: Are there anyone severely injured because of that?

W1, W2: No, No.

R2: That is; people fall into the pits and elders would get some sprain and pains on their body. We would insist people to close the pits after catching the slug worms (poochi). They would say we would do it. But that would not happen as Panchayats get money from them to catch the slug worms (it’s banned to catch slug worms) and can’t authorize them.

(A story simply pointing another person) He is the contractor to catch the slug worms, he is giving four lakh rupees to our village. We (panchayat) would say, you can take the Poochi as you wish. What he does is, he would stir the entire land and go; like, walking path (in water), net catching places, tracing places.

GV: Who would get the Poochi from the catchers?

W1: We would not know all that.

R2: Even this is for some time, hereinafter laws might be stringent and more action would be taken. There is a law coming to regulate the water bodies,’wetland encroachment’ like that, then they would have to stop the catching of Poochi. Then they (prawns pickers) would be limited to prawn catching; they would have lesser rights. Only thing is that, they (government) should not make it as their own boundary and fully restrict our village people, we would ensure that is not happening here.

RK: While catching prawns have you been impacted by any fish bites or so?

W1, W2, W3: Yes.

R2: There is a fish called Irunkeluthi (a kind of catfish), it would be black in color.

W3: Once, it bit me and I was crying till night 12 AM. I was thinking to suicide by hanging.

W2: She had that much pain.

GV: But that has some medicine right now? Isn’t it?

W2: Yes, people are going to the hospital currently.

R2: In early days, there was no injection for this. At present if the Irukeluthi (a catfish) bites, people would go to the hospital to get injected and get first aid.

GV: Someone said there are some traditional medicine (nattu marundhu).

W2: Yes, there was a practice to rub a wooden log and apply it on the injured places. But even then, it would be more painful.

W3: If the fish bites in the morning at 9 Am, we would only be relieved of the pain by tomorrow morning at 9 AM. The pain would last that long.

R2: To my knowledge, mostly lime (sunnambu) is applied over it.

W1: Even if we get injected to reduce the pain, that too too would only last for an hour or two. After that it would start paining.

W4: I was made into a statue.

W3: laughing.

W4: See my hand, it has become immovable.

W3: See, her hands are folded because of the bite.

GV: Have you all been hit the Irukeluthi?

W2: Yes.

W1: It would definitely hit.

W2: I was hit and my swelling is much bigger (showing with other hand).

GV; Would it make the place swell this lagre?

W2: Yes.

W3: Then pus would be formed inside and if would make our hand as a statue. Then the pus would be removed. The hand or the finger would be shown over the fire and heated. People would provide powdered wood as medication, even after consuming that people won’t be able to get relief from the pain.

W2: The pain won’t stop. Even if we get a first aid injunction, we get relief for just one or two hours. Some people would get heart attacks, some would get unconscious without breath and speech (moochu pechu llama podium).

RK: Has anyone died because of the intoxication by ‘irunkeluthi’?

W2: There would be more main for some 2 days.,

R3: We would only have pain, pain, pain.

W3: Hands would tingle (kodaiyum).

W4: Once I was hit by the Irukeluthi fish at 1 PM in the afternoon and people have done ‘Poojai’

W3: Even for some people, if they are hit by the fish they would get possessed by ghosts.

W4: Yes, ghosts would possess their body. Then, people would chase the ghost from their body.

RK: Has anything other than ‘Irukeluthi’ fish bitten the prawn catchers?

W1: Crabs would bite us.

W2: Crabs would bite, the pain wouldn’t be that much severe.

W3: If we catch the crab without care, it would bite us.

W1: See, the crab has bitten me here (showing her hand).

GV: Do you eat ‘irukeluthi’ fish?

W1: Yes.

W3: Yes, it would be black in color.

W2: Some people would eat that fish and some people would not eat.

W3: But, it’s an edible fish.

W4: It’s a good fish to eat.

W2 (to RK): It would even grow to your size.

RK: Are you really saying that the ‘Irunkeluthi’ fish would grow to my size?

W2: yes, even some fishes would weigh 4 to 5 kilograms (she was just comparing the length and joking).

W3: Some fishers would catch the large (Irunkeluthi) fish with nets.

W1: Mostly that fish would be caught by ‘Muzhugaali’ (the submerger).

GV: So, it’s an edible fish. Right?

W2: Yes, it’s an edible fish.

W4 (back voice): We can even die rather sensing the pain caused by the ‘Irunkeluthi’ bite.

W1: A fisher caught 5 ‘Irunkeluthi’ fish in just one catch in a net.

W2: Ammbasu Reddiar caught the 5 ‘Irunkeluthi’ fish.

GV: Who caught the fishes?

W1: A person from our village. Two sides of the nets would be tied and on the other side net would be moved towards closed/tide nets. Then the fishes would be moving along the tied nets, then 5 ‘keluthi’ fish were caught in his nets.

GV: When did he catch those fishes?

W1: It happened before so many years, we are just saying as you asked.

**-00:15:00**

W2: Currently, some Irular boys caught 3 ‘keluthi’ fishes; they were from Kattor. It was so big.

W1: It’s been only 4 days, only boys caught 3 large ‘keluthi’ fish.

W4: Their body would be larger than a general fish.

GV: How would you clean the fish? Would you chop off the head?

W1: I am not sure about it. Only people who catch those fish would know how to clean. I won’t consume the fish.

W4: We won’t even catch those (keluthi/irunkeluthi) fishes, we would catch (pick) other good fishes to make curry. It’s hard for us to catch those fishes, we would be scared once we see those prawns.

GV: Have you ever eaten that fish?

W4: Yes we have eaten those fish.

W1: Yes I have tasted it.

W4: People eating that fish would make curry with all of the fish, even the head would be added. It’s not a fish that can be dumped down.

GV: Can’t the fish be caught by hand?

W1: It’s not the fish that can be caught by hand. That can be caught only with nets. That too after catching it with nets, its thorn has to be removed to handle the fish and use it for cooking.

W3: We call the pain ‘silavali: the most painful thing’. The smallest fish would cause most pain than larger fish.

W4: It’s most toxic, we can’t bear the pain.

GV: Are you speaking about small ‘irukeluthi’ fishes?

W1: Yes.

W2: It would spit its offsprings.

W3: It's an egg.

W1: It (irukeluthi) would eject its offspring from its mouth.

W2, W3, W4: Yes. It would take out their offspring with their mouth.

GV: Would these small ‘irukeluthi’ be present at the places where you seek prawns?

W1: Yes, it would be present.

W2: That is why we are worried and scared of the ‘irunkelthi’ fish's presence while tracing for the prawns.

W3: Algae (paasa) would be present in the water.

W2: More would be present in the algae (not sure if it’s prawn or the small ‘irukeluthi’)

GV: How do you take care of yourself at night?

W2: At night we would not go to catch prawns.

W3: Only people who use nets, would catch fish/prawns at nights.

W2: We would go at 9 in the morning and would be back by 1 or 2 in the afternoon. If we get a good catch, we would even come by 3 in the afternoon. If we don't get much we would be back by 2 or 1:30 in the afternoon.

GV: What would happen if you were supposed to find small ‘irunkeluthi’s?

W2: we would not catch that one fish. People who would catch fishes/prawns by net would catch the irunkeluthi fish.

W3: We would take it to shore and kill it with logs or stones.

W2: As we are afraid of this one fish because we would get hurt if it hit us, we would not catch this fish.

RK: Then, would you catch the other fishes?

W2: We would catch other fishes.

GV: What would you do if you found ‘irunkeluthi’ fish?

W2: We would get away from the fish.

GV: Would it nnot come near you?

W2: No, it won't come to us.

W3: It would be lying inside the algae (paasa), while tracing we would know if ‘Keluthi’ (irunkeluthi) would be present in it. By knowing that we would move far away from the fish.

**00:18:59**

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