**REIMAGINING THE GOOD CITY FROM ENNORE CREEK**

Interview Transcription

**Interview Information**

Interviewer/s: Bhavani Raman (BR), Gajendran V. (GV) and Saravanan K.(SK)

Place of interview: Ennore Salt Bungalow

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Transcription by: RK

**Interview Notes**: The respondents explains about the relations between the merchants, manufactures; the time when the salt production increased. He also adds how the merchats work it out sales based on climate, flood in salt pans. He argues and states that railway department non-cooperation to avail the trains for shipment of salt as decline of salt industry and doesn't implicate about the pollution as decline of salt industry

**Transcription Notes:**

**00:00:00**

BR: We are doing some research on the salt pans; How has the government extended the salt pan to a larger extent after the 1940s by providing subsidies and they increased the production? But after 1960, some kind of decline in the salt production was observed; that is what I am thinking. But during the time of the decline in salt production, the people have resisted the decline of the salt pans; they resisted and wanted the salt pans for the nation’s interest and their interest. We have seen such things studied in the archives and other places. In your experience can you share about the history of the salt pans and how it is connected to your life? Second thing, in 1996 a case was filed by the ‘South Indian salt Manufacturers Association’.

GV (explaining in Tamil to the respondent): தென் இந்திய உப்பு உற்பத்தியார் சங்கம்.

BR: They have made an alliance with the Salt Department and filed a case against the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board. The judgment of the case was stated in the year 1996. In the judgment, it was beautifully explained about nature, salt and nature’s benefits. Do you know anything about the case?

R1: We have filed the case against the railway department.

BR: Is that the same case? Or a different case?

R1: No, we and the department have made an alliance. Railway department has decided not to load the salts in Railways.

BR: But that case was in 1991; the case I am talking about now is in 1996.

R1: I don’t know about that case. We filed the other case against the railway department as they were being an obstacle to our employment and also the trade; stopping the loading of salts in the railway goods.

BR: Do you remember the year?

R1: No, I don’t remember it. Only because of that our business was impacted; we had great business before that. The railway department has made an order stating that we should not export salt through our railway. We couldn’t do business because of the railway department. Then we filed a case from our ‘salt manufacturers’ association’.

BR: Then, were you not filing the case after the establishment of the North Chennai Thermal Power Station?

R1: There is no connection between NCTPS and us; that place is different, the salt industry establishment is at a different place.

BR: Then you have not filed any case against the NCTPS?

R1: No, there is no connection between the salt pans and NCTPS land. Because it’s a separate place, Ennore, Puzhuthivakkam and Kattupalli, only in these villages they (NCTPS) occupied land and they built the NCTPS. But we don’t have any connection with them. Salt pans are central agent department’s land; it belongs to the Salt Department. There is no connection between the Salt department and North Chennai Thermal Power Plant.

BR: Yes, the land belongs to different stakeholders. I can understand that. Can I share about that case? It's an interesting thing. I can only state the case with its judgment; I don’t have any other information. What they are stating in the case is, after the NCTPS was established; that ash slurry has leaked from the carrying pipe and fallen into the River water. At that time, the South Indian Manufacturer's Association had made negotiations with the NCTPS regarding where to discharge the ash. How to discharge? Where to build the canals and Roads? In this domain they have made negotiations. But that didn’t happen as expected. Instead, ash was discharged in the water; the water degraded and because of that salt couldn’t be produced in the saltpans. Because of that the South Indian Salt Manufacture Association filed against the NCTPS.

R1: Yes, that's true. But because of that our salt production was not impacted; our business was not impacted. We had the hindrance in transportation; but our business was not impacted by that. Did you understand? For us, the impact was mainly due to the railway department.

**00:05:23**

BR: But in the affidavit, it is mentioned that the production has stopped after the ash discharge in the River.

R1: I don't know about that, we were impacted by the action of the railway department. For us there was no other way for shipping the salt other than the railway department. So, we stopped the production by then and we have handed over the salt pans to the government.

BR: What happened after that?

R1: Government provided those salt pan lands to the companies. Some got compensation for the salt pans and some didn’t get any compensation. We, ourselves have surrendered the salt pans land to the government. According to the agreement we had, if we don’t produce salt continuously for 3 years, we have to surrender the saltpans to the salt department, if not they would take over the saltpans by themselves.

BR: Were the locks closed by then?

R1: ‘Locks’ started to be closed one by one from 1967; then slowly all the locks were closed. All the goods used to be shipped only to the basin bridge; but the locks were closed by 1967 and 1969. It was informed the Buckingham canals would be desilted and cleaned; by this the canal was closed in the DMK governance. Even our boats used to ship the salt to Basin Bridge; but it was stopped by then. We started to load the salt here and we shipped the salt to the city.

BR: How did you ship the salt? Was it by lorries?

R1: Yes, by lorries and also by the wagons (railway) to the ‘salt kotta’ (salt stockage yard. Then we got an order from the railway department to load the salt in the rails and later we also received an order to load the salt in the Minjur railway station. I managed to get this done with the support from the salt traders. Since then we started to load the salt in the rails from Ennore railway station. Here we have the salt department land; there we installed the shed. There we used to load and unload the stats that come from the saltpans. And from here we used to load the salt in lorries. In this way our business was going on and after 1994 our business was impacted. This water (ash mixed water) is also a reason for affecting the salt production; even if we produce salts, we wouldn't be able to sell those salt products; this was also the reason for impacting our livelihood.

BR: Are you talking about the railway department?

R1: Yes, they are saying that we should not export (shipment) the salt; if we should not ship the salt by rail, then what is the use of producing the salts? That’s how our work got impacted; that was our situation here. Similarly, salt production in Kovalam and Andhra also dropped down. It happened by the railway board G.O. (Government Order); we couldn’t do anything about it. Now, only in Thoothukodi (Tuticorin) such export (shipment) is happening. There is a station called as \_\_\_\_\_\_ (not clear); only from there salt is loaded in rails. Even there, salt has to be loaded in 30 wagons at the same time and the rail has to ship those salt to a particular place; that should reach only one destination or one trader who buys all those salts. How can this be done? It’s 30 wagons, each wagon holds 240 sacks of salts; one sack is 100 kilograms. Thenm one wagon carries 24 tons of salts; like that 30 wagons would be caring the salts. Is that possible? It’s really hard for the salt producers.

For us we had a loading point in Ennore railway station; Parry company and Kothari company used to get their load in the wagons; they would unload it; after unloading those materials, it would be handed over to us. We load the salt in those wagons, then it would be shipped from Ennore to other places. Hindrance happened in this process.

GV: I have heard that the salt workers had a separate labor association.

R1: Yes, in Vallur they had a Sangam.

GV: The salt manufacturer also has an association; that is what I heard. Do you know who were all part of these associations?

R1: People who were part of those associations no longer exist. The businesses were closed, so no one is existing right now. The salt worker were also impacted because of this; most of them belong to Vallur, Naapaalayam, Vellivoyalchavadi; all of them were local people, they would be harvesting the salt, lift and ship the produced salts in the salt pans and they would be loading the salts to sacks; all these work were done by the people in those village. People used to work in salt pans for 6 months and other 6 months in agriculture. From February to June-July, they would be working in the salt pans and then at other times, agriculture would be happening.

**00:10:00**

This was what happened for a long time; but once when the salt pans got impacted by many factors like the salt pans are surrounded by the Thermal power plants, hot water is discharged; fishers’ community is also impacted by these factors. For fishers, the bad water is impacting their livelihood; for us (salt producers) mostly dumped ashes were impacting our livelihood. Because of that our salt production has been severely impacted.

BR: Can you share more about that?

R1: I don’t know the details of how the ashes impacted the salt production; we have left the salt production job. Since then, we haven't gone to the salt production. In Kovala, there are 2000 acres of salt pans owned by a person; the water from Kalpakkam (Nuclear power research center) was impacting the salt production; thus we went there and resisted the action along with the salt department. Then they took us to Kalpakkam; the representative of this village took me to Kalpakkam; then from the government we were informed that,”we would not be impacted by the water discharged from Kalpakkam”. Even now salt production is happening next to Kovala, they (owner of the salt pan) in Thiruporur; they have 2000 acres of salt pans. The owner name is \_\_\_\_\_\_ (M); they are having the salt pan from their grandfather era; in their salt pans, even now the water comes from Kalpakkam, though there is no impacts due to that water from Kalpakkam (where nuclear power research plant is located); but we had fear over it. Even you see here, from the Ennore thermal power plants, the smoke used to come; we used to collect the salt and shed it aside on the salt pans. Within some time, we used to see a layer of black pollution dust over the salt; we have made objections regarding this.

BR: When did you make the objections?  
R1: By 1970, the thermal power plant was commissioned; we made our objections by 1976. We filed a case over it. But the case was not much valued in the court.

BR: Do you have those papers?

R1: Nothing remains with me. The traders association (salt) has had this.

BR: Do you have papers for the ‘traders associations (vyabari sangam)’?

R1: Once the association was closed; the paper was all thrown.

BR: Can’t we even get the documents of the case filed against the railway department?

R1: No, nothing is available now. Those people are also not available now.

BR: First the Lock was closed by the 1960s; since then, there have been several instances of destruction in the salt pans; can we ‘state’ like that?

R1: If we need to mention any thing as hindrance; we can only say the action by the railway department which stopped the salt shipping in the railway wagons. The railway department G.O. (Government’s Order) has only affected us. There is nothing to say that has impacted the salt production; that's the truth.

BR: The railway department G.O. is only 20 years after the ‘Lock’ (in Buckingham canal) was closed. Inbetween, in your knowledge you could have made many complaints regarding the ash discharge, ETPS about the concern department.

R1: No, we haven’t made any complaints to any departments.

BR: Then you have just informed the department that ashes are impacting the salts.

R1: Yes, we have just been informed that ashes are impacting the salts and again they (government) responded that,‘there are no impacts because of the ashes’. After that we were not making any complaints; after that there was no requirement for us to make any such complaints. If we need to protest, we need a reason; but in fact we had no reason to initiate a protest. Because we weren't able to produce salts, naturally we had the issue in salt production; we had been pushed to a situation that we had to handover the saltpans to the government; then why do we need to protest against the company (NCTPS); so we avoided it.

GV: What is the name of the association that you were part of?

R1: Salt Manufacturers and Merchant Association (uppu urpatthiyaarlargal and Vyabarigal sangam); it was a combined association, we were not having separate associations; because, the salt manufacturers were also merchants, so we formed a combined association.

BR: Is that also called ‘South Indian Manufacturers Association’?

R1: No, we were not named like that; not like South India or North India, we had a common name.

**00:15:02**

BR: Can you share more about your life?

R1: I learned salt works and then I did salt works (uppu thozhil), that’s it.

BR: Have you worked in the salt pans?

R1: Yes, my full life is with salt pans. We have to cultivate salts, we have to produce salts and we have to sell those salts to the merchants. We have to manage the laborers; I was doing that management works.

GV: You said that you were also working as a laborer in salt pans; when did that happen?

R1: It starts from the year 1957. From 1957 I have been doing the salt works.

GV: When was the first time you started trading salt?

R1: I was not trading salt directly. We would just provide the salt to the merchants to sell the salt in the market. Salt manufacturers are different and salt merchants are different, in between I was working as a bridge between those two people; like an agent.

GV: When did you become an agent?

R1: Since 1957.

GV: You were also a laborer and also an agent.

R1: Yes! Yes!

GV: How did you come to know about these merchants?

R1: My ‘Peripa’ (Father’s elder brother) used to be a salt merchant; we did salt work, so because of that connection I was able to do this work. From the government, we have been provided with 100 acres of salt pans; the government provided us with a license for the salt pans. We came here to cultivate those salt pans; since then I have experience in salt related work.

GV: Where did you come from?

R1: I came from Chennai.

GV: In Chennai, where are you native?

R1: In Mannadi, opposite to Chennai Beach station (railway); my Peripa (Father’s elder brother) house was in that place, I studied there. Then I was given a job in my ‘Peripa’s Uppu Mandi’ (salt wholesale shop), I went as an office boy. Later I came to Ennore, I started to manage the salt pans here, I was in Ennore as an agent for 1 company and later I continued to be an agent for 5 companies; I had that much growth. The merchants have used me; I was useful to them and they were very much useful to me. It’s the business.

GV: You said that you leased the salt pans.

R1: From the government, the salt pan was leased to us. It would be leased for 25 years. If the government is providing you those salt pan lands, you have to use the land and produce salts, then you have to sell the salts and you have to bear the profit and loss of the business. For that, we have to pay tax. Once you produce salts and while shipping the salts from the salt pans, you have to pay the tax; without paying taxes you can’t take even a single sack of salt from the salt pans. That’s the British rule followed from their era.

BR: It’s called Exercises;

R1: Without taxes, no salts could be taken from the salt pans.

BR: How it would take place is, first the British made salt production as a monopoly system; all the produced salt should be provided to the British company. Later this system came into existence.

R1: What are you saying?

BR: The system you are saying is called ‘exercises system’.

R1: Since the initial time, it was the same. Even during British rule, it existed the same. There are no changes in that. After independence, the same system was followed.

BR: When you started your job in salt pans, We observe the government's approach to expand the salt pans and salt production. Have you observed anything like that?

R1: Not like that.

BR: Has the salt production area been increased by the government?

R1: 67 acres of salt pans given to my ‘Peripa (father’s elder brother)’; the license was provided. We did cultivation in that, produced salts and we did trade the salts; we have our own boat, we used that boat for business. Like that there were some 14 merchants. I had that growth, as I had that management skills and responsibilities; the other merchants also gave the responsibilities to handle their salts, so I did it.

GV: What are all your responsibilities and work?

R1: We have coordinated the labor force required for the salt production; how we are doing the agriculture, in the same way we have done for salt production.

GV: Is it like ‘Mesthri’/’Kankaani’?

R1: Yes, to work in the salt pans; people from Thoothukudi used to come here. To gather the workforce, I would go to Thoothukudi and I would provide them with advance money. They would come as a group of 10 or 12 or particular based on the particular number we wanted, based on the number of acres of salt production planned; they would be coming only for salt production.

**00:20:03**

Not for any other works. To fetch and shed the salts aside in the salt pans; to fill the salts in the sacks, the local laborers workforce would be used. They were from Vallur, they were the important work force in packing the salts in sacks. There were 4 different groups, there were 4 ‘mestheri’, each ‘mestheri’ would have a labor force of 15 people. In total there would be some 60 laborers. In the morning I went to Athipattu and I would be providing instructions to them. One ‘Mesthiri’ would have 10 rice bags in his hand, he would be loading salts in the 10 sacks, that’s the agreement; the understanding we have within ourselves. To such persons I would give instructions to fill and load the salts to trucks or to the boats; that’s my work. Merchants would send me letters, based on the fact that I have to manage to get the salt loaded and shipped to their place. That kind of management work I had here.

GV: How did people from Thoothukudi start coming here?

R1: they come by train.

GV: Did they come on their own?

R1: No, we would go there and provide them money; we would be providing the train fare, other transportation fare, get ready the residential facilities, wages for the workers, weekly ‘padi (a vessel used to measure rice and pulses)’ for their food (vaara vaaram saapaattuku padi); all the necessary things would be done for them. They would come here in January and they would be residing here till September month.

GV: My question is who first brought the laborers from Thoothukodi to Ennore? Were you the first person to bring them here or were they habitually coming here for years before you?

R1: They have been coming here for ages; each group has their own ‘mestheri’. To a particular licencened (salt pan) person, there would be a particular ‘mestheri’; the laborers would be coming to work here in Ennore every year.

BR: Were they coming here since British time?

R1: I don't know about British time. I only know things since 1957, I am not sure what was happening before that.

BR: Then, by the time when you came here, they already had their practice of being employed here.

R1: Yes, we started our salt production by bringing them here. For me it was new then, I was just starting here to work in the salt pans; I didn't know the salt works by then. The government has only provided salt pan land to us, money is ours; say it’s my Peripa’s money. But the production work was implemented only by them; they only know the alignments of setting up salt pans. If we say 10 acres of land is available for salt production, in that only the 3 acres of land would be used for salt cultivation; the other 7 acres would be land to heat (/evaporate) the water. They (laborers) would only know how to modify the land alignment to store water and to cultivate salt in the salt pans; they would only be sectioning the lands and making the land ready for the salt production. It’s their work, only from them we learned (stage stage ah nilatha avanga theen pakkuva paduthuvaanga).

BR: Only because of them this salt production has happened.

R1: Yes, we learned all the salt works only from them. If you work with an Engineer, the ‘Mesthri’ would learn the (civil) engineering from him; similarly we learned from ‘Kankaani’, who brings salt workers and does the salt production. I wasn’t aware if the salt was produced from trees or from land when I was learning. Only after coming here, we did salt cultivation and got experienced with the salt.

GV: When you first went to Thoothukudi, how was your experience there? How did you find the salt laborers?

R1: Our merchants were there in Thoothukudi, we were buying salt goods from them and we would be traveling there. We know the merchants house there, there is a village called Muthiyahpuram, on the way to from Thoothukudi to Thiruchendur; Muthiyahpuram, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (not clear), there are several other village in that route. From those villages, people used to come here to work in the salt pans, they were helping us.

GV: Okay, you had the merchant's connection between Chennai and Thoothukodi.

R1: Yes, we had that connection.

GV: When was the first time you leased the salt pans individually?

R1: No, I wasn’t leasing the salt pans individually, my ‘Peripa’ had the salt ‘mandi’ business and later he leased the salt pans lands. I joined as ‘kumastha’ (clerk) after my education.

GV: Did you lease the salt pans later, individually?

R1: I was working in the ‘peripa’s’ salt pans, once the government took over our lands, we left all those salt works. For us, the main impacts of the salt production was/is because of the railway department. If not,even today we could have done the salt production. But we couldn’t do anything about it. We filed a case, but the judgment was not in favor of us. The court told,”it's the railway's G.O. (Government Order), we can’t do anything about that”

GV: Do you remember the railway G.O. number?

R1: No, I don’t remember that.

BR: You told something about the ashes.

R1: These ashes were dumped in the backwater, that’s it. Because of that we were neither impacted nor benefited. If we need to state any impact means, the ash deposit has hindered the boat movement and impacts were observed in production.

**00:25:02**

BR: How did it happen?

R1: The ashes would mix in the water; we are only drawing that water for the salt production. If you see there from that bridge, the water would be mixing with the backwater from the North Madras Thermal Power Plant, that water spreads in the backwater. What would happen to the fishes and prawns? Their breeding is affected, its production is impacted. That is why fishers engage in disputes and protest often. We also had a similar problem then.

BR: When did this happen?

R1: It was started in 1984 , as the pollution hiked, we were able to observe its impacts by the 1990s. But in 1992 the railway department threw stones over head (railway kaaran thla mela kalla pottan). So, the necessity for giving importance to the impacts due to the ashes did not arise among us. If we had produced salts and done other salt related works by then, we could have witnessed its impacts. It’s their (NCTPS) initial stage, we were in the last destruction stage. Because of that we were able to sense the impacts. But definitely there have been impacts because of the ashes.

BR: Okay, the ashes have impacted the salt production.

R1: We didn’t sense the impacts by experience, but the impacts were there (anubhavareedhiya baadhippu therila, aana baadhippu iruku). The situation didn’t arise to the extent of show up impacts of the ashes (Baathippu nu naanga sollura alavukku engalukku soolal urvaagala), because we had stopped the salt production by then. So, we weren’t aware of it, thus we could say that we are not impacted because of that. If we would have done the salt production continuously, we would have known if the ashes discharged has impacted us or not. But we didn’t get that chance.

In Thiruporur the salt manufacturer/workers protested as they felt they were impacted (by the Kalpakkam Nuclear research plant). They protested, but the government did not agree. Even after the salt production is practiced, even now that water is coming to the salt pans. There are 14 pipes in there, they are very big. If you see the water out-pour, it would be terrible. The water would be flushing out forcely, all those water would be coming in the back water. That water is coming to Thiruporur, from where? From Kalpakkam. Where is Kalppakkam and where is Kovallam-Thiruporur, see how long that water is traveling in the backwater. I went there and witnessed it. At Least for us if the River mouth is closed by the natural sand bar, we can’t have sea water in the River. But for them (Kovalam), the sea water would be always flowing in the backwater, even if they hotter the sea water to the salt pans. If there is more wind and good sunshine, the temperature of the water increases. The density of the sea water is 2.5 (not so clear), for us if we only get the consistency to 23 degree (degree is measure of salt in water), the salt would be forming.

BR: If it exceeds that value?

R1: If it exceeds 30 degrees, it would become toxic salt; people call it gypsum salt, that would be formed. We have to maintain the salt pans, we would start cultivating the salt in 19, 20 degree. I already told you, that in 10 acres, only 3 acres of salt pans are used for the production/cultivation, in the other 7 acres the water would be under heating (under sun) process. While we let the water into the salt pans, the sea water would have 2.5 degree salinity consistence; the same water if we draw by bore well, we would get the saline water with a range of 5 to 8 degree salinity consistency; it’s based on the earth where we dig borewell. People holding around 10 acres of land would dig the borewell and use it; But for the people having 50 acres of salt pans, the borewell would not be adequate for them. Because of that, we have to do salt production with sea water (from the backwater). We have canals, the government has built us canals for us; it was built before us. This (salt) water would be flowing in the channel that runs through the salt pans, wherever the salt is produced; in all the places, the canals were established.

BR: When were all the canals closed?

R1: Canals were not closed, even today it exists the same. But once the companies (the industries in the flood plains) came, all those were blocked. Then, the canals were existing for the boat's mobility and for the water mobility; we would also dig canals at our expense and the government would also spend on the digging canals for us with ⅓ (one third) concession. If 100 rupees is spent on the canal, 70 rupees would be given by the government and the balance 30 rupees would be given by us (factual mistakes, this forms ⅔ concession). We have to collect that money and we have to pay that in the Reserve bank (of India); to our shed, I only paid that money; there were 14 merchants part of this, while going you can go and witness those.

BR: After that hot water has arrived in the salt pans; to produce salts, was the temperature (heat) of the water useful? Was the water showing a higher temperature?

R1; Yes, the water would show higher temperature; anyhow the water would evaporate in the sunshine. We couldn’t say as any impacts, but if we had continued the salt production, we could have analyzed if it has impacted the salt production or not; then only we could confirm that.

GV: You said ‘degree’, is it the heat or something else?

R1: It’s the hydrometer rating, we would be using that in the salt production; it would be a long one, we would have bamboo hoes for the hydrometer. We would draw the water with that and we would check the salinity, if it’s 10 degree or 12 degree or 23 degree or above the required degree; it would show us. Even in that salt production we would separately segregate some amount for the gypsum salt production; if the measurement crosses the 29 degree, automatically gypsum would be formed. If we found that we would remove that liquid salt consistency aside with the ‘palagai’ (plank), because people should not consume that salt.

**00:30:09**

**SK:** Did you share about the Iodine thing?  
R1: Yes, we also did produce Iodine salt.

SK: In a particular period of time, the government forced the salt manufacturers to produce the Iodised salt.

R1: From 1991, the government has been forcing the salt manufacturers; even today that law exists. In Rajasthan, the government has 3000 acres of salt pans, but for Tata company 6000 acres is provided by the government for the salt production. Today as a monopoly, only the Tata company is producing the salts across India. As the Iodised salt system is bought by the government, they are producing the salt in a civilized manner, the salts produced are very much whiter and iodine would be mixed with it, then it is packed and now one kg is sold for Rs.10. They are earning well with it.

GV: You talked about gypsum salt. If the gypsum salt is formed, to whom would you be selling it?

R1: People making explosives would buy those salts, but we would not give importance to those salts. Because, we should not produce that salt. Because our business is edible salts, it’s for people's consumption. Even a single crystal of gypsum salt could contaminate it (oru oosi kooda kalandhudum). If a small portion of that salt is mixed with the food, we would know that immediately. But we would be more careful and make sure that gypsum salt is not formed in the edible salt production; we would contain it if formed. Our salt would not be heated to that extent (andha alavukku karugaadhu). But such salt would be produced in Thoothukudi, because their temperature is higher, they have 11 months of salt production. But we only have salt production for 7 months. In Thoothukudi, only in the November month, there is no manufacturing; in other 11 months they experience hot sun shine (veyil), for all that 11 months they would be manufacturing the salts.

BR: Isn’t the sunshine (veyil) more in Ennore?

R1: In Ennore it’s less, only for 6 months we could work in salt production. Vedaranyam, Cheyyur, Marakkanam, Kovalam, Thiruporur, Ennore, Andhra and till Vijayawada, only for 6 months we have season to salt production. Only in Ramanad and Thoothukudi, they would be producing salts for 10 or 11 months; there is no rain in those regions. So, they were able to produce salts for a long time.

BR: You said that fishers community prodested for ashes, hot water and other things.

R1: Even now the transmission tower is erected in the River, the fishers are protesting to stop the tower erection.

BR: But naturally there has been a connection between the fishers and the salt pans.

R1: No, there is no connection between them and us. You have to understand that their livelihood is in the sea and in the backwater; there is no connection between the salt pans and the fishers community; no connection exists. Their livelihood is fishes production (in the River), that is impacted and their fishing work is also impacted.

BR: Where do the salt required for the fishers come from?

R1: They would get that from the bazaar (market); from retailers.

GV: I was informed that in saltpans, fishes used to be there.

R1: Nothing like that; but in some pans where the tenants hold 100 or 200 acres of salt pans land, the fishes would be there in their salt pans. Not in the small salt manufacturers, we would not store that much water in the salt pans. For the fishes to breed, need to create larger bunds; say 2.5 acres; 1 hectare of bunds should be built and a lot of water has to be poured. Have you seen shrimp aquaculture?

GV: yes.

R1: Only people who make such infrastructures can produce prawns. For us, it would not be produced in the salts. But quite a lot of prawn production would happen in the first (salt water) reservoir, where we would store quite a lot of water. Because the sea water first enters into the reservoir and only from that the salt water would be redirected to the saltpans. Due to sun shine and the wind, the temperature of the water would increase and when it flows to the last salt pans, it would have 18 or 19 degree (salinity measurements), apt for the salt formation. In the first stage of water storage, some prawns would be found. But we can’t make that as our livelihood and once the temperature increases, those prawns would also die. Some people would catch the prawns in that reservoir and cook it for their homes and consume it.

GV: Then this helps the laborers for their meals.

R1: For some (truck) drivers, it might be a meal once a week. We can’t say that as having any benefits or any impacts, usually we don’t bother about that. The (truck) driver used to stay days and nights in the same place, he would get some fishes and prawns (4 meen, 4 iraal kedaikkudhu naa enna pandradu). The salt pan owners (tenants) and managers would not be bothering about that.

GV: It has been a food for the laborers.

R1: Yes that’s it. People can't even make any income out of it. If they get any fishes, they can cook food for a night, that is it.

**00:35:18**

GV: Where was your office?

R1: It’s in the Sasthiri Bavan (Chennai), Deputy Salt Commissionerate office and Superintendent Office.

GV: I am asking about your association office?

R1: Nothing exists.

GV: In the past?

R1: On the Wall Tax road, we had our shop. There we had a small office-like setup. If there are any issues (in the salt business), people would gather together and discuss it. Even in a place like this, people used to discuss issues like the Labor Unions issues or labors issues or any issues among merchants and it would be sorted out.

GV: Were there any discussions that happened here?

R1: Yes, we have discussed. There is a place called Salt Bungalow, people used to visit that place. Earlier the place used to look very good, but it’s not very good. Then merchants used to come as most of the salt related working people were here, they used to call the merchants. Then they would be discussing the businesses.

GV: What kind of discussions would happen?

R1: Mostly business related discussions would be happening, the laborers would be demanding something from their side and that would be sorted out.

GV: Laborers means, are you saying about the wages?

R1: Yes, the wages.

GV: Then regarding the wage hikes, the laborer would be discussing?

R1: Yes. We would provide wage hikes, once in 3 years.

GV: Okay, once in 3 years you (manufacturers) would provide the hikes.

R1: Yes, we would be providing from our side; they also had their labor unions. Even now in Vallur, the labor union exists, a person named \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (R) and union president exists. You also said that only he shared my address with you. If you go and ask him, you can get to know more.

GV: Did your and their organization discuss together?

R1: No, we don’t have any relations with them. If there were any issues, they would be approaching us.

BR: You said that the salt office is in the Sasthri Bavan; Where is its head office? Is it in Jaipur?

R1: Yes, it’s in Jaipur. Salt commissionerate office is in Jaipur.

BR: If there were any impacts or complaints, you only have to contact the Chennai office.

R1: But, we had nothing of that sort (issues).

BR: No, I am asking about long time ago?

R1: Then we had our superintendent office in Thandaiyarpet (Tondiarpet); later it was shifted to Sasthiri Bavan, Chennai.

BR: Then, you have to visit the Sasthiri Bavan?

R1: yes, locally we had officers here. Each (salt) factory would have one Inspector and 2 Jawans. How a police station exists, they would also exist in the sameway. Initially, we should make any complaints only to them, only through them we had to get permission to load salts in trucks or in boats; for all that we had local officers.

BR: Who are the higher officers to them?  
R1: Higher to them, we had Factory Officer, Deputy Superintendent, Superintendent, then we had Assistant Salt Commissioner, Kaakainaada (Current Andhra), Deputy Salt Commissioner, Chennai and the Salt Commissioner, Jaipur. That’s the stage of ranking, it’s a separate department. Even now it exists.

GV: You said that, without paying taxes you can’t take any salt from the salt pans. To monitor that, what kind of security system did the government had?

R1: There was nothing like any security. If we are producing the salts from the salt pans and if we are loading some 100 sacks of salts for shipment, we have to pay the tax before that.

GV: couldn’t you take the salt without paying taxes?

R1: We couldn’t even take a pinch of salt. It's an offense.

GV: Have any people caught like that by taking the salt without the officer's concerns?

R1: In the early time people used to do that. But we would not take that as a big issue. If a person is coming to work in the salt pans, if he/she needs some salts for their home they would be taking some salts, we can’t be restricting those things. We would make sure that no illegalities happen in the business domain.

GV: Then you are fine with laborers taking some salts for their homes.

R1: Yes, laborers would be bringing food in tiffin boxes, while returning they would be fetching some handful of salts in the empty tiffin boxes. How could we say not to take those salts? If a licensed tenant forges the salt loading to boats or trucks without officers’ knowledge, it’s an offense.

GV: Taking salt for food is not wrong.

R1: Yes, it’s not wrong.

SK: Were there checking inspectors in here?

R1: Yes, there would be here; they were here. For him, there were two Javans, all that were in control at that time.

SK: Where do they reside?

R1: They have quarters here. Each (salt) Factory has a quarters, even the there were quarters for the Jawans to reside. They are like clerks (punes), it’s like a Police department; but they were called as jawans in the salt department. For an inspector, there would be two Jawans under him.

**00:40:00**

If we 4 people were filling the sacks with salts (moota pudikka porom), we would stack the salt sacks. They would come and check the number of salt sacks stacked. Once they had checked the salt sacks, we would be loading it to lorries or boats in the sight. If we say 100 sacks to be loaded and if we load and take 120 sacks outside, isn’t not a forge?

GV: It’s a forge.

R1: We are only paying tax for 100 sacks and how if we load 120 sacks? Then we are taking 20 sacks without duty (tax). If so, the licensed person is forging. To monitor and make sure that no wrongs happen, salt officers are employed. We wouldn’t be involved in such activities, if we do that our license would be canceled. Talking even one salt sack outside the salt pans without paying duty (tax) is the wrong thing to do.

GV: Have any instances of the license been cancelled?

R1: No, we would be doing any malpractices.

GV: You told about the Jawans and other officers, when did they leave from here?

R1: It’s all the government's responsibility. If there is no (salt) factory here, the officers would be transferred to some other places.

GV: Were they here till 1991?

R1: Our factory was functioning till 1994, then we were struggling with the government till 1997 (ipadi appadiyum 1997 varaikkum nadamaadinu irudhom). I completely disengaged with the salt works from 1997.

GV: Till then, the salt officers were here in Ennore?

R1: Yes, they were here. You can see their quarters even while returning along the compound wall side. Those sheds were built for the laborers, then once the salt factories were closed. Later some only minimal salt was traded, we moved our office here; I stayed there in that room for some and later all were closed. We have handed over the land to the state government (?) and all the officers who were working here were transferred to some other places.

GV: What do you mean labor shed? Who would stay there?

R1: The Laborers are the ones who used to load and unload the salts in the boats. Once the salts arrive in the boats, the laborers used to unload the salts in our office and again they would be loading the salts to lorries and again to the wagons. In the every salt mandi (storage yard), there would some 4 laborers do loading and unloading, if 4 merchants come here, their laborers 4 \* 4, 16 laborers would be coming to load and unload the salts; they would be staying in the labor sheds here.

BR: Where would they come from ?

R1: They would come from Chennai, from the Basin Bridge region; all their houses are in there.

SK: Were the sack stitchers also there?

R1: Yes, there were separate sack merchants and also there were separate sack stitchers.

SK: I am asking while loading the salts.

R1: Yes, while loading the salts, there would be two people who would only be stitching the sacks after filling the salts in the sacks. Women would be holding the sacks (while filling) (mootai pidikiradhu ladies nga), then men would be stitching it and other men would be loading the sacks.

BR: You said that local people would be doing agriculture and the same people would also be working in the salt pans; how would that work?

R1: Salts would be produced and it would be heaped on the banks of the salt pans by the Thoothukudi (Tuticorin) people. All that salt would be gathered and heaped separately by the local laborers using baskets. Those heaping places would be chosen in a way accessible for lorries or boats to load that salts. If we are producing the salts here, the boat docking (padagu thurai) in the canal would be quite far from the production site. So, from here we would be storing the salts next to the boat docking place. Sometimes, salts need to be dried. If required people would be drying the salt next to the canal. Labors would dry the salts, fill the salts in the sacks, pack it and load it to either boat or lorry.

BR: Who would be doing the sack work?

R1: We would purchase it from merchants.

BR: Would it come from Chennai?

R1: Yes sacks would come from Chennai, there are separate merchants for the sacks.

BR: Then the laborers from Thoothukudi would be harvesting the salts and locals from here were doing the salt drying and other miscellaneous jobs. Then people who would load salt sacks are from Chennai.

R1:They are not even from Chennai, they are all locals.

BR: Then what about the loading laborers from Chennai?  
R1: Only the merchants from Chennai would be coming here. The salt merchants are from Chennai, their people (laborers) were also from Chennai. They (laborers) would come here along the lorry to load the salt; once the salt arrives here in Ennore (salt Bungalow), they would be loading the salt into the lorries. Lorries would come to a place called Rolls Royce, this place is next to the Wall Tax road Police station. That’s the shed for lorries, all those people would be only staying there. If you go to a bazar (market), all the construction workers would be gathered there as a cluster. All the Sithaal (women helper), Periyal (Male helper), Kothanaar (Mason) would be gathered there, the mesthri (the coordinator) would go there to get the labor for particular work to be done. In the same way, there are/were gatherings for certain work groups, they would be available there and people who need their help would go there and get them.

BR: You said about farming, what were they cultivating?

R1: Paddy, it’s only paddy, nothing else. That’s the primary thing here.

GV: You told me about the River mouth, if the River mouth is blocked, you won’t get enough water for salt cultivation.

R1: Yes, till 1972 we had that issue. After that, since the commission of the Ennore Thermal Power Station, for cooling purposes they required regular sea water flow into the back water. So, the government decided to have regular water flow in the River mouth and commissioned a separate department called ‘sand bar’, for continued dredging of the River mouth, they installed dredgers and they would make sure that sand is not blocking the River mouth. That was always done.

**00:45:20**

BR: Is it done even today?

R1: Yes, it would be happening there (factually stopped when ETPS was decommissioned during 2016)

BR: Is it for the North Chennai Thermal Power Plant?

R1: It’s for North Chennai TPP and also for ETPS). It was started for ETPS. Now water is transported through pipelines to Vallur TPP and other TPP. Water is drawn from the backwater, it is directly taken from the sea through the pipeline; even in Kalpakkam the same procedure is followed. Now the latest technology is used, North Madras (Chennai) TTP is drawing water directly from the pipelines and Vallur TPP is also drawing water only from River through the pipeline. Now you went that way, you could have seen that bridge (blue bridge), over that bridge conveyor belt (for coal) runs on one side and on the other side (water) pipelines runs to Vallur TPP).

GV: Since after the ETPS commissioning, there are no blocking issues in the River mouth.

R1: Yes, there is no issue with River getting blocked; the dredger was running continuously. Even now you can see the dredger (factuly to lay the training wall under CRRT project).

GV: That infrastructure was benefiting you.

R1: Yes, that was benefiting us.

GV: Before 1972, if the River mouth got blocked. What would you do then?

R1: Then, the water that was available in the River/backwater was enough for us. We used to produce salts with the water available. In the downer regions and from the backwater, we would be getting and selling the salts with boats. We would stop sales from those salt pans where the boats wouldn’t enter. If it rains, the water would rise in the backwater and the boats would be able to pass such less deeper backwater, then we would start the sales from those places. Like that we would alter the work (sales).

BR: Was the pipe installed only after the River mouth got blocked?

R1: No, while they were constructing (NCTPS) they were dredging a site to draw water from the backwater, that place is called ‘intake’, that place would be a 20ft deeper intake (site). From the sea, the water would enter the backwater through the Rivermouth and from the ‘intake’ (site) in the backwater, the water was drawn for North Madras (NCTPS). That was how it started. But after the commission of the Vallur thermal power plant, they installed a bridge across the River to draw water from the sea (and coal conveyor). After that the NCTPS management also decided to do the same.

GV: From 1956 to 1972, you said that the River mouth would be blocked (naturally) and you have seen that as an issue. At that time, have you ever suffered by not getting enough water from the sea?

R1: No, the available water was enough for us for the salt production. Because the (salt) water would be stagnated in the canals and backwaters. We would draw required water through motor pumps, even after the drawing water there would be much water remaining there. Water available in the backwater would naturally be heated with the sunshine and wind. The sea water would have 2.5 degree (a measure of salinity), but here (in canal and backwater) we would get the water with 5 degree (salinity).

GV: As there is no exchange of water, the salinity would be higher.

R1: Yes, other than our usage, there is no other intervention with this water. That was an advantage for the salt pans; the river mouth getting blocked. But the only thing is we could not bring the salts from relatively higher salt pans (hindrance in the boat movement). At that time, we would be selling salts from the salt pans in the lower area and in the backwater side. In whole, wherever the boat movement was possible, where there were good water resources (depth) and accessible canals, we would access those places and sell those salts parallelly during the production time. But in the elevated places, canal water would not reach as the water level would be lower, the boats could not enter those places. There all the salt would be stocked, after June month, naturally there would be a rain shower. Once the rain comes, the water level would rise, those canals would have water then. Even in the place where the RIver mouth was blocked, the water level would rise. In October November months Poondi, Puzhal lake would be opened by the government, all those water would be discharged only through this way. Then with the help from PWD people, the River mouth would be dredged and opened. Laborers from the Fisheries department, PWD and village people would be working together to dredge open the River mouth for the free flow of water. Automatically the water from Pooni lake, Puzhal lake and other flood water would flow into the sea. There would be no issues and there are no impacts to our production because of flooding. We got ruined because of the Railway department, there is no other reason; it’s only because of the Railway department. They restricted our export (shipment) through railways. Since then we haven't been able to do the business. That’s the reason. Because the salt vanished, the laborers went from here. Even I got very much impacted because of that.

SK: Where all the salt goods would be exported (shipped) through the train?

R1: To Andhra state, the salts would be shipped through lorries and to other states, salt would be shipped only through railway.

**00:50:00**

SK: There is a shed here, salts from the salt pans would be unloaded here.

R1: Yes.

SK: From Ennore, where salts would be shipped through rail?

R1: In Ennore railway station, we have a yard. A separate railway platform and railway line was constructed to handle and load salt to the train. There is a union bank in Ennore, next to it you see a sand heap even now; it was me who made it happen by bringing sand in lorries to elevate it and make a platform for the separate railway line created for salt handling.

SK: What about the Minjur railway station?

R1: No we weren’t using that station; most of us were only using the Ennore railway station. But we got the order to load salt in the Minjur railway station to load the salt from Voyalur salt pans. But we weren't exporting the salts from Voyalur, the salt from Voyalur would be very powdery. So, those salts would be merchandised locally and it would not be exported anywhere. Most of the salt would be loaded from here only (Ennore). From here the salts would be shipped to Saltkotta.

SK: Have you not bought any railway line in Minjur railway station from the Railway department?  
R1: No. But there was one (track) that was already there. If it’s required the track would be used.

SK: Was the track existed especially for you (salt merchandise)?

R1: It already existed, it was a convenience for us. But we did buy one separately in Minjur railway station, we only bought a separate rail track in Ennore for shipment of salt. Government was helping us at that time and the Railway department was helping us. You know how it works, the goods train used to get goods for EID Parry company and Kothari company. Another iron industry was existing here before, to all those companies the goods would be carried to Ennore by train. Once the goods are unloaded, the empty train would be handed over to us (salt merchants). We would be loading salts to those empty coaches. It was necessary for the trains to come from Chennai, the train that comes to unload the goods to Parry company would be handed over to us after unloading their goods.

GV: Were there any other salt production associations ? or was this the only association?

R1: We were 14 merchants and licensed people, all joined together and we had this association. There is nothing else.

GV: Was there any separate salt manufacturing association?  
R1: No. We formed the association together, because the manufacturers were also merchants and merchants were also doing salt manufacturing, so associated together. Only the labor union is separate.

GV: But when we went to Athipattu, we heard that there were salt manufacturers in Athipattu.

R1: In Athipattu, only the salt manufacturers existed but they were not having separate associations. There was one labor Union association, another ‘Salt lifter association’ existed. We manufacturers and merchants jointly formed an association, that is, nothing else. If there is demand or issues, we would discuss and sort it out. The association was not just for sorting issues, moreover we had it for cooperation within ourselves; we would determine the price of the salt, we would discuss the salt quality and ask the manufacturers to produce good whiter salts. The association existed for improvement for ourselves (manufacturers and merchants).

GV: You said that salts are good in other places. Would you know about what is happening in other regions?

R1: Yes, from Marakkanam the salt produced would be very much wither. But we cannot produce such salts, because our land is of that kind. Their land is different; Vedharanyam, Thoothukudi and Marakannam, they produce good quality of salts and their salts would be very powdery. Our salt crystals would be larger in size, there the crystals would be very granular. Marakkanam salts are only shipped for food use (consumption), it would be shipped to the Bangalore market. Vedaranyam salt is also similar. We would be exporting to Chittoor Zilla (district) and Andra border. Based on the availability of the market for our salts, we would be shipping the salts.

GV: Why in this land, salt produced is not of good quality?

R1: It’s a land characteristic, nothing else.

GV: Then the quality of the salts here in Ennore is lower.

R1: Yes, it would be sold at a relatively lesser price. The price is also low and also the whitishness of the salt is low. We were able to bring that whiteishness in this salt.

GV: If the price is lower, how would you market those salts?

R1: Whiter the salt, higher the price. If it’s less whiter, then we have to sell it only for a lesser price. We would be supplying based on that. Even in Andhra state, only some places, people (may be retailers) would be asking for whitest salt, but in some places they would accept the less whiter salts. In Madhya Pradesh, if the color of the salt is more blackish (blackishness in what white salt), they would be ready to accept that. Our Iodine salt would only go to Madhya Pradesh (MP), we would be exporting from here; we caught that market. Our salts are more savory, the whiter salts are less savory (here it feels like he states the salinity of the salt). So, because of that they (MP) were interested in our salts. If we are using white salt of some quantity in our food, but if we are using this salt (Ennore salt), we could just use half the quantity of white salt used in that instance.

**00:55:00**

GV: How did you go to Madhya Pradesh from here?

R1: We didn’t go there, people came from MP. They would give orders, we have to send the salt to their region.

BR: You told me about the goods coming to the EID Parry company on the train, where did those goods come from?

R1: It’s Parry company, they would also get goods.

R2: Where does it come from?

R1: I don't know about that, but they would be getting their goods. They would be getting yellow Suluphur in Wagons and it would be unloaded in their premises and they would also supply that wagons to us (for shipment from Salt Bungalow to Ennore Station).

BR: What else would they import for their industry?

R1: They would only get that yellow coloured shulphur; it’s also a kind of sand right (ore). They would be manufacturing ‘Super phosphate’, urea and all those things. Even now those goods are handled by them.

GV: You told about the new channel dug to draw water for ETPS. They would also be discharging the effluents to the same River. Were the effluents not impacting the salt production?

R1: Yes, that was not impacting us in any way. As the effluents (may be ashes) were discharged in the canal, salt production was not impacted.

GV: Were the effluents also discharged in the canal?

R1: Yes, it was discharged in the backwater and it would come to the backwater. But the effluents were not impacting us. Because most of us had a borewell to draw water, because of that we escaped from such impacts. Because we were all holding only less than 10 acres of land. Only the tenants holding more than 50 acres, were in need of the sea water. Fro others, the borewell water was enough for them.

BR: For smaller salt pans, bore water was enough.

R1: yes.

BR: Since when borewells were used in the salt pans?

R1: Borewells were always used.

BR: Always means?

R1: If electricity is available, the borewell would be always running.

GV: But wasn’t the electricity connection only provided after the 1960s?

R1: We received electricity connection by 1957. While I was cultivating the 67 acres of saltpans, I bought the electricity connection to the salt pans. W

GV: Were you the one who dug the borewell?

R1: Yes. Then we tried to get the electricity connection. We received it, then everyone started doing the same.

BR: But it was you who did it first.

R1: yes, it was me. We believed that underground water existed and bored the well, then we found the water. Then everyone started following it.

BR: But for larger salt pans, it would not work. Right?

R1: Yes, the bore water wouldn’t be enough for the larger saltpans. Those pipes would only be of 2.5 inch hole pipes; the water from that pipeline was less, it would not be sufficient for large salt pans. For such salt pans, it required 6 inch hole pipes; it’s 6 \* 5 cross-sectional pipe line, suction should be 6 inch and delivery should be 5 inch pipelines. It might have required such pipes. For the pipes to be installed in borewell, we could get it done by 2\*2.5 inches pipelines (suction pipe 2.25 size and delivery pipe 2 inch hole size).

BR: Then for larger salt pans, they would use canals.

R1: Yes, every salt pans would have canal access.

BR: Were the larger salt pans used canals especially for water?

R1: Nope, it was used both for boat movement and also for water movement. For the movement of boats, for the water to reach the canals and also to clean the canal, the government would be very much helping us. Once in 3 years, the government would award tenders to clean/desilt the canals. 2/3 rd expenses would be covered by the government and 1/3 rd of the expenses would be taken by the tenants holding the license.

SK: Was the Thillaiaalam, the largest salt pan in this region?  
R1: Thillai aalam is 600 acres of salt pans. That is the largest in this region.

GV: For the large salt pan tenants, wouldn’t the effluent discharged in the backwater impact their production?   
R1: That is what I am saying, before that (effluent) impact reaches us, our salt business was closed.

GV (to BR): This ETPS would be commissioned in the year 1967, their effluents were also discharged in the backwater.

R1: ETPS was commissioned in 1974. The effluents were discharged but we were not impacted by it.

GV: I am asking about impacts in larger salt pans.

R1: They were also not experiencing impacts, they did not know about that.

BR: They were not talking much about that.

R1: Yes, we were not impacted and we were not protesting about it.

SK: Actually there was an issue with ETPS effluent discharge. Only when the River mouth is opened, the water would rise into the back water. If the sea water rises, they would be getting the water for the industry. They had a suction inlet to draw water, like how the other TPPs have pipelines from the Sea. Later on, the River became like a football play ground, as there was no water in the River. This is one kind of issue. Once they also blocked the 10 eye bridge (10 Kannu bridge) to stop the effluents in Buckingham canal. After that, ETPS started to discharge the effluents into the sea directly.

BR: When did this happen?

R1: If we ask S \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, we could know the timeline.

BR: Which village does he belong to?

R1: Kattukuppam’s Chettiyar (the highest ranking in closed fishing village/community, one position that leads the community)

BR: You aren’t sure of what happened there.

R1: That information is there in another interview. All their (R1) salt pans are majorly in the Kuruvimedu village side (Vallur TTP reside on those salt pans). We have Kurivumedu, Athipattu, then we have Thillai and we have Voyalore.

GV: You had only a limited extent of salt pans?

R1: We had only 67 acres of salt pans in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (not clear) village. But I was managing some 200 acres of salt pans which includes other salt pans.

GV: Were these 67 acres only managed with borewell water?

R1: We also used the bore water and also sea water (in backwater).

GV: But you were not impacted by using the sea water?

R1: We were not impacted.

**01:01:06**

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