**REIMAGINING THE GOOD CITY FROM ENNORE CREEK**

Interview Transcription

**Interview Information**

Interviewer/s: Bhavani Raman (BR), Durga Moorti (DM), Gajendran V. (GV) and

Saravanan K.(SK)

Place of interview: Ennore Salt Bungalow

Date of interview: 05.07.2023

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

R1: Only later, it’s been measured in kilograms, earlier the measure is called ‘madangu’. From Thoothukodi, it would arrive in ships. In a ship, some 4000 or 5000 sacks would come. It was not called Kappal (ships), it would be called ‘Thooni’. Thooni are the ships. Kappal are larger ones, this is relatively smaller, this is Thooni.

BR: What would come in Thooni?

R1: Salts. It would come from Thoothukodi to Chennai harbor. I have even unloaded the salt sacks in harbor. We had shops, we did business with that salt; we had our godown, we would unload the salts to our godown. You could have seen street vendors who used to take the salt with their vehicle (mostly cycles), such vendors would sell 4 sacks of salt in a day. If 4 vendors are there for us, we would be able to sell 16 to 20 sacks per day. What would we do? In front of our shop, we would install some tent-like structures. There we would stack the salt sacks, from Thoothukodi, the salt would arrive here in ‘Thooni’ to the Chennai harbour, from our harbor we would bring the salt to our godown in a bull cart. From the godown, we would bring the necessary sacks daily to the shop. Daily the hand vendors come to our shop and would take the sacks for selling on the streets. This is our business.

BR: When this Thooni stopped coming to Chennai?

R1: That was stopped when we started our production in Ennore salt pans. If required, the Thooni would come to the harbor.

BR: It would be by the time 1956 or 1957.

R1: Yes. In 1956, I unloaded the salt sacks from Thooni and brought those sacks to the godown in the wall tax road by handcart (kai vandi). After my education, when I came to this business as an office boy, that was the first duty given to me. Have to unload the salts from the harbor, have to check that and load it into the handcart and unload it in the godown. Then immediately (salt pan) license was received and I came to Ennore.

DM: Do any impacts arise because of the cyclone?

R1: Yes, If a cyclone comes we would be facing losses. Even if rain comes, we would be facing losses. You see, that is my house.

GV: Like that, have you faced any losses?

R1: Every year, we would face losses. Cyclones would come, floods would come, salts would be washed away with floods. That’s natural, we can’t avoid such losses. Only because of that, we would sell the salts that are in a very low region (pallathula irukaradha modhala sales panniduvom). By that time we would be stacking the salts from the salt pans that are relatively elevated regions. We would know how much the water level would elevate during flood time, based on that we would elevate the base using sand and stack the salt over that. Over that (sand) ridge, we would be stacking the salts. We would get those salts, when the salt price in the market is higher. Only the wealthy people would use that option, non-wealthy people (tenants) could not be using that. Because, they have to fetch those salts from the salt pans and only if the salts are sold, they can get some money to run their daily life and look after the family. Some wealthier tenants would be selling half the salt while producing and later they would be storing the remaining salts. Those stacked salts would be sold during the October, November, December months (rainy season) as salt price would have increased by then. So, the producer would get a good profit. There were wealthier tenants and non wealthier tenants, to them finances would be providing loans, I would be an agent for them to get finance. I would get them the finances, I would be recommending the tenants to the financiers. I would recommend and sign jaameen (surety) for the tenants, the tenants would produce the salt and they would be providing the salt produced to the financiers, who are also the merchants. My duty was to get the salts loaded in lorries or boats from the salt pans by getting permission and paying taxes to the government officer and sending the salt loads, that was my work. To every merchant and licensor (manufacturers), I was a responsible man; we can call it a middleman, I was there as bridge between the merchants and licensor.

DM: If rain comes in a place, would you cover the salts or any precautionary measure?

R1: Yes, we would be doing all that. Palm thatch would be coming from Andra, we would be covering the salts with all that. Then from mountain regions, we would be getting grass named ‘naanal’, some merchants would bring that to the salt pans. We would buy that and cover the salt pans, if we don’t cover the salts, it would melt. Over that we would be covering with palm thatch, it would be completely covered (pakkava moodivechiduvom). The salt sacks that were unloaded in the salt bungalow would be covered with tarpaulins.

DM: Were the cyclones not impacting you then?

R1: We would be directly impacted by the cyclones, but if a flood comes we would be definitely impacted. Suppose if the Puzhal lake is opened, all that water would only be coming here and then it would pass through the River mouth. At that time, if any salt is stored in the (relatively) low lying salt pans, definitely we would be impacted.

**00:05:14**

SK: There is Kuruvimedu canal, the larger canal would come from a higher place.

R1: There were no separate canals for Kuruvimedu (village); all the canals were related to the salt pans. But through that canal, we can get to that village.

SK: But that was a larger canal, which is next to the power plant now.

R1: Yes, that was a larger canal which was 60 ft across, it was used for boat movements. Even the government would dig the canals and provide salt producers. There is a platform there, and the government installed a platform at that time.

SK: Where was that?  
R1: You talked about the larger canal, right.

SK: Yes.

R1: A government platform existed there, it would have been ruined by now. At present, I can’t identify my salt pans and properties. I used to wander around 1300 acres of land here, but now I can’t able to identify those places. The large canal (Kuruvimedu canal) existed only next to the platform; other canals were just 20 ft width. That large canal would be at least 40 ft width. Those are for boat movement, 15 ft width is more than enough for the boat movement. We would also take that water (from canals) for the salt pans using the (diesel) oil motor pump.

DM: Do the salt pans laborers have health issues, just because they are working in the salt pan?

R1: There are no health impacts to the people working in the salt pans, it's a common thing. Right now I am talking in front of you just because, It’s my hard work in the salt pans. No one would get health issues. But there are 2 or 3 health issues were some of the laborers would be impacted. A skin infection comes in the leg (serangu), other issues like ‘moola soodu’, ‘vetta soodu’ comes for aged people. But while doing work, all would be healthier. Salt is a natural thing, 75% of people won’t be impacted with any diseases. Today the fishers are healthier because it’s a nature based livelihood, they live with salt wind (uppu kaathu). But people in the city would have more diseases, but the salt workers were healthier. But some would get a wound-like thing in their leg, because they continue working in the salt water. Some would wear shoes, some would work barefoot. People working barefoot would experience such wounds, then they would apply some coconut oil or sesame oil to it while bathing before work and after work in the evening. In the morning, they would be cured. It’s a natural thing, we can’t mention it as a disease.

**00:08:12**

\_\_\_+\_\_\_