**REIMAGINING THE GOOD CITY FROM ENNORE CREEK**

Interview Transcription

**Interview Information**

Interviewer/s: Raju K. (RK)

Place of interview: Kurivumedu Village

Geo Coordinates: 13.225565 N, 80.300199 E

Date of interview: 21.12.2023

Transcription by: RK

Audio: [221221\_Salt\_Kurivumedu\_Interview\_1.1\_RK.aac](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AiS5pVuwf-Y9gb4CNkqqspOvWNrNtN1p/view?usp=sharing)

  [221221\_Salt\_Kurivumedu\_Interview\_1.2\_RK.aac](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PE6TqKNkCqPPs_nF0DmfKGNERr1JlNVi/view?usp=sharing)

**Interviewee Information**

Pseudonym: R1, R2 & R3

**Interview note:**

Interviewed and discussed about the salt pan works in the past and their struggles in the isolated village surrounded by polluting industries, ash pond and coal yard of NTECL

Audio 1 - [221221\_Salt\_Kurivumedu\_Interview\_1.1\_RK.aac](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AiS5pVuwf-Y9gb4CNkqqspOvWNrNtN1p/view?usp=sharing)

**00:00:00**

R1: We have been salt pan tenants since the British Era, even my grandfather was salt tenants.

**Q: SInce when you are working in the salt pans?**

**R2**: I started working in saltpans since I had the childhood memory, I would go with my father and do some miscellaneous work in the pans. Once we are grown, we would engage in salt pan production.

**Q: What kind of work do you have in salt pans?**

**R2:** We would have worked like digging the soil and forming bunds for the salt pans; would make pitch for salt pans by passing the water. We have ‘Male’ Pans and ‘Female’ pans. In Male pans water would be left for 2-3 days to evaporate and on the 4th day the salt water would let into the female salt pans and salts would be harvested from the ‘female pans’ and salts would be piled up. Again on the next 4th day salt would be produced, this is the continuous process. This process would continue for 7-8 months. At the start of the season, the expenses would be higher to pay the laborers as we have to set the salt pans. We have to start after the rainy season. We would usually start at the end of December and it would take 2 months to harvest the processed salts from the pans. Since then we can produce salts till the end of the season.

**Q: What is the cycle of salt production?**

R2: Usually we would harvest salts twice in a week; every 4th day salts would be harvested. The salts would be piled over the edges of the salt pans and other laborers would be shipping the salts to the storage area called ‘Ambaram’. One ‘Ottam’ would account for 15 to 20 ‘paathi’ (smaller salt producing pans). In one ‘Ottam’ 3 to 4 laborers would work. Based on the number of ‘Ottam’, they would be employed. We have to pay the wages weekly on every Saturday. A week's wages would account for 50-60 labor hours. We would be paying the wages for that week, it would account for some 10 to 15 thousand rupees.

**Q: How did you hire salt pans from salt departments?**

R2: People used to have their own salt pans and also there would be salt pan tenants. Like paying taxes to our residential lands, we have hired the salt pans for 20 years with a license, it’s a kind of lease agreement. We have renewed the salt pans after 20 years. But we (tenants) have to pay yearly tax to the salt department. But if the salt department wants the salt pans immediately they would notice us prior and take their land. We have been doing salt works for the last 3 generations, in 2007 it was informed of a company coming over salt pans. Over all the Vallur salt pans had 4000+ acres of salt pans. Earlier it was called as ‘Valllur-Madhura’; ‘Madhura’ means land boundaries like a district/taluk in which 7-8-10 villages would be a part. The Vallur ‘madhura’ had Vallur1, Vallur2, Vallur3 and Vallur4. ‘Vallur madhura’ is kind of district, taluka, like an administrative boundary. Vallur Madhura includes Melur, Pallipuram, Sevva reddy Paalayam, Gounder paalayam, Pallipaalayam, Subbareddy paalayam, Konda kora, Kurivumendu and Vallur. Some would also lease the salt pans owned by others if they have more pans; like owners would lease 10 acres to others. License would be given to tenants; license would be on our name, we would lease it to others in a yearly cycle. This is something like renting a house to others.

Q: Who would take the land for rent?

R1: Any one can take; I can take from him, even you can take from him.

R1: Salt department would only provide a license for 20 years by renewal; the tenant has to pay the tax every year.

**00:06:08**

**Q: Does it have any documents?**

R1: Yes we would be having the documents.

**Q: Do you have land documents or a contract agreement?**

R1: It’s the land document; the land document would have stated that the tenant should not sell the land. If you have a license for 50 acres of salt pans and if you lease the 20 acres of salt pans to someone else. It would only be accounted that the tenant has licensed the salt pans; he has to internally lease with any person.

**Q: What are the works you do in salt pans?**

R2: We would do all the work.

Q: Would you also work? Not just managing?

R1: We would harvest salt, load the salt and stamp the salt pans along with the salt laborers.

R2: If only the laborers do the work, we can’t get a good profit. If not it would be hard to manage the finances. Only if a person is a big owner who can produce salts in 50 or 100 acres of land, then the person can employ only the laborer to work in the salt pan and make profit; such people are capable of providing salary to the laborers. But we are small salt pan owners, we would be holding some 4 acres, 5 acres or 3 acres; in such small salt pans only if we also work with other laborers we could get some profit by reducing the labor charge. We can’t manage our debts then if we just employ the laborers without us working in the field.

Q: Who would be labored in the salt pans?

R1: Laborers would be coming on their own from Napaalayam and from surrounding regions. One day, one day 5 people would come, the next day 10 people would come and on any day 50 people could also come to the field.

R2: We have to inform them about the number of people required for the employment. If we say the number of laborers required for the next day, some particular person would bring them to our salt pans. They are daily wage workers (annaada kooli). They would come in the morning and we have to pay wages to them by evening 4 pm while they return home.

Q: Do you know about the canals in these regions?

R1: Large River flows from the River, from that sea; there would be canals from that River having width for the boats to travel.

Q: Is that the Kurivumedu canal?

R1: Yes. The salt would only be transported in boats from the salt pans; there would be no roads for lorries (trucks) transportations.

R2: There were more boats, there were at least some 20 to 30 canals in this area.

Q: Were there 20 to 30 canals in this region?>

R1: Yes, that much was needed here to transport the salts.

R2: Boats would get into the different salt pans in every corner of this region.

R1: If there are salt pans on both sides, the canal would be in the center of those two saltpans. Sometimes, small canals would be dredged between the saltpans to carry the salts. Later, the salts were transported in the Lorries (trucks).

Q: What exists in the place where the salt pan existed in the past?

R1: Company exists

R3: Ash pond exists

Q: Which was first established?

R1: First company was established over half the salt pans and later, Ash pond was established in the remaining salt pan lands.

Q: What about the ETPS ash pond?

R1: It’s completely different; it’s opposite to Ernavur, it’s quite distant from here.

R2: For 6 months, coal dust would be flying towards our village and causing pollution. Based on the wind direction for this 6 months (North-East monsoon season), our door entrance would be black in color due the coal dust.

Q: For which 6 months you would be experiencing this?

R1: From Margazhi month (mid-Dec).

R2: Now it has started, it will extend till may month. From June when the wind from this direction (south) blows, we would experience dust. From the ash pond we would not be experiencing any dust pollution as the ash pond is filled with water, the dust would not be flying. But when the ashes are taken from the ash pond and transported in the truck, it only takes the ashes without any water in it, then the ash dust would be blowing from the trucks to our village. It’s just a powder substance, the ash of the coals. While the trucks are moving, there would be dust in the air, also the dust would spread on the trucks path; all the plants in the surrounding area would not be green in color, the leaves would be looking black in color.

Q: When was the last time you worked in the salt pans?

R1: In 2007.

Q: After that?

R1: This company has started their construction.

Q: What did the bureaucrats inform you then?

R1: They got our license document back with them and they provided us 35,000 rupees per acre as compensation.

R2: As we are harvesting the salt pans for ages, we were provided with compensation.

Q: Weren’t there any conversations on employment?

R2: It was informed at the initial times, now 4 to 5 consecutive officials have changed from that position. At the initial time, the bureaucrats had informed us that they would be providing employment only to people in the Kurivumedu village.

Q: Was it informed to you orally or in written documents?

R2: It was informed to us orally, no written statements were provided.

Q: How many families existed by the year 2007?

R2: There were some 100 families.

Q: What is the status at present?

R2: Now there are 50 families in the village.

R1: People couldn't tolerate the pollution, so they chose to exit the village and stay outside.

R3: People got scared of the pollution and left the village; There were at least some 150 families exited, people moved out slowly, now only some 50 families exist here.

R1: If a person is sick here, they have to spend at least 3 to 4 lakh rupees, because they are impacted by the coal dusts and ash dusts. These dusts would get into the stomach, many have spent such large amounts on their medication.

R2: Even the person who just crossed this place has spent 3 lakh last year for his medication. He wasn’t able to work. People had the fear of getting their children to be hospitalized and spending huge money, thus they left the village.

Q: What kind of impacts are they facing?

R2: Diseases are coming?

Q: What kind of diseases are they experiencing?

R2: The dust gets into the stomach and resides in the stomach; people face stomach ache, hip pains and they aren't able to work; sick limbs are shivering and also suffocating due to breathlessness. Like that, different sicknesses are experienced by the people here. There are some 50 families here with this suffering.

R1: We don’t have regular income, so we couldn't leave our village. Thus, we are residing here. Without income, what can we do? How we can provide rent charges if we leave our village.

R3: People who are working at the company were able to get out of their village.

R1: We get the Government ration shop provisions: Rice, pulses and other groceries and we are living with that.

Q: Did you have income throughout the year from the salt pans?

R1: We would have income for 7 months from salt pans and for 6 months we would be involved in agriculture; the farming is done based on the rain spell (vaanam paatha Bhoomi).

Q: Where would you do farming?

R1: All the places where the companies are built over the agricultural land (West of the village).

Q: Did you have agricultural land here?

R1: yes!

Q: Did you own the land?

R1: Yes.

Q: Does that land still exist?

R1: All that land has been brought from us and companies were built. We sold the land for just 10,000 rupees or 20,000 rupees.

Q: In which year do you sell the land?

R1: We sold the farm land in the 1980s or 1970s.

R2: Some companies came asking for our land.

R1: There was no good rain at that time; the crops were not growing well. So we sold that land for 10,000 rupees to 20,000 rupees.

Q: To whom did you sell?

R1: We sold it to a private party; not to a single person, many people were buying those lands individually.

Q: Were houses built on those lands?
R1: It was used to establish companies (/industries).

R2: Entirely, companies were built over the land.

R1: From here till Kondakarai, both the sides of the road have only companies.

Q: Would women work in the salt pans?

R1: Both men and women would be working.

Q: What work women would be doing the salt pans?

R1: Women would be lifting salts from one place to other places, sometimes women would also carry harvest salts, prepare bunds for the small salt pans (paathi kattuvaanga) along with men; like men, women would also be working in the salt pans.

R2: Yes, like men women would also be working. Both men and women would be mixed and working in the salt pans.

Q: Were the laborers coming only from the surrounding village or were there any labores coming from a long distance?

R1: Yes, even salt workers from Thoothukudi used to come here and stay here.

R2: They would come here to work temporarily and they would leave once the job is done.

R1: If a tenant is having 100 acres of salt pan lands; the tenant could not get required laborers here for their salt pans. In Thoothukodi, they do the same salt works, so people from there would be brought here to work.

R3: People from Thoothukodi, Marakanam would come here to work.

R1: All our salt pans were very small ones, for all of our salt pans some 200 laborers from the surrounding village would be enough and the number would get equated. For tenants having 100 or 50 acres of salt pan lands, they require laborers.

R2: The tenants would bring the laborers from the other places and they would be residing here for some 6 months.

R3: Once the season is over, they would be leaving the palace.

R2: In June month once the Rain starts, they would have to leave from here. Even after, once they left, if some salt could be harvested, it would be produced using the local laborers; it would be a limited salt production.

**00:15:28**

Q: Did your parents and grandparents work in the salt pans?

R1: Yes, all were doing salt pan works.

R2: The whole village was doing only salt work.

Q: Don’t you have any salt pan documents?

R1: While they acquired the salt pans, they got those documents from us.

Q: Don’t you possess any of the evidence that you were owning (leasing) the salt pans?

R1: No, we don’t have any.

Q: Don’t you have any association asking for your rights?

R1: We didn’t have anything like that. But when the company came here for salt pan acquisition, we filed a case, we were engaged in that case for some 2 years. But it seemed like nothing was benefiting from that case.

R3: In ‘Shastri Bhavan’ (regional salt commissionerate) informed us that they would be providing us employment.

Q: What case did you file?

R1: We filed a case asking for 2 lakh or 3 lakh rupees per acre of salt pans and we also asked them for employment. But they informed us that they would be providing us a job, it was only an oral communication.Then they gave us 35,000 rupees, we got that, we kept silent after that.

Q: How was that surrounding when the salt pans existed here and how is the surrounding environment being now?

R1: What else? We only had salt everywhere. The company (NTECL) and ash pond were completely salt pans. We see stocked salt of 1000 sacks, 2000 sacks and 3000 sacks everywhere here; here and there you see the stocked salts.

R2: It would be stocked as ‘Ambaram’.

R3: The tenants would be stocking in their own salt pans.

Q: Is the company (NTECL) the only reason for the loss of salt pans or do you also state the pollution as the reason for the loss of the salt pan land here?

R1: It was only after the company was established here. Before that there was no pollution in this region.

Q: Don’t you get the pollution from the North Chennai Thermal Power Plant?

R2: No, we don’t get that pollution here.
R3: It was only NTECL that was the reason for the loss of our salt pans here.

R1: At that time of acquisition we were working in the salt pan. Even when the NCTPS was commissioned, we were offered employment, but we didn’t accept the offer; we were enough with this.

Q: You were enough with this?

R1: Agriculture and salt production were enough for us.

R2: 10 people were working under us in our salt pans.

R1: “If we have salt pans, laborers would be employed”, that was our thought. The laborers would be working in the salt pans and also in the farm fields.

R2: Many people survived because of our land; but at last stopped in that (livelihood) path. There is no future in that.

Q: The salt tenants and the salt laborers, both of them are doing what kind of job right now?

R1: They are working as temporary contract workers.

R2: If they have to get employed, they have to do only the daily wage works (would be paid based on the daily work basis) or else there is no job.

R3: If they go daily they get the salary or else they would not get any wages.

R2: Not just salt works, many people from different regions are working here.

R1: Even people coming from Andhra and working here.
R2: Yearly they would notice for the tender; the contractor has to once in every year.

R3: It would be the same laborers working in that company, only the contractor would change every year.

R2: If a contractor continuously employs laborers for 3 or 4 years, it would be like a permanent job. Thus, they are changing the contractor every year; the new contractor would employ the same laborers in the same company for the same salary.

Q: Here what kind of salt was produced in these salt pans?

R1: The salt produced here was not pure white in color; it would be a mixture of two colors, it would be a little brownish in color due the sand of that place; the color would be based on the place.

R2: Even pure salt was produced here.

R1: If the sand is in good condition; the salt produced would be white in color and if the bunds’ sand/soil is muddy in nature, then the salt would be a little brown in color, like the one produced in Marakkanam.

Q: What would be the use of those salt?

R1: All would be taken by the businessmen.

Q: I am asking if there is specific use of those salt like industrial use or any other use?

R1: Businessmen would take the whitest salt for cooking salt trade; they would add Iodine, pack the salt and send it for sales. These (brown colored) salts are used for fertilizer manufacturing,

R3: for ice, with salt ice can’t be made.

R1: It’s the ice mostly the fishers would be using. We would segregate the salt based on it’s quality and send it different uses; white salt would be traded for cooking purposes.

**00:20:00**

Q: Would you be preparing the salt pans for any specific production? Or would you trade the salts based on the output quality of the salt?

R1: yes, based on the quality it would be decided; there would be 1 rupees difference in the trade (not sure if it per sack)

Q: Who would decide the rate?

R3: It’s the traders who would be fixing the rate.

Q: Would you be producing the salt for a specific purpose?

R1: We would be using the salts for cooking, which we have produced. People who come from surrounding villages for the salt loaders, they would be carrying these salt for cooking purposes; they would take some 10 ‘Padi’, 2 ‘padi’, based on their need. We would not question them taking the salts from here.

R2: Because they are the ones who are working hard here.

R1: Once the salt is collected and stocked together, the trader would send a boat to collect the salt; they would be taking the salts in the sacks.

R3: What is the relationship you had with the fishers?

R1: In boats from Kattukuppam village, we used to commute for Ennore and back; we had good relationships with them (konjo nalla pazhakkam thaan). We don’t have any relationships with Naattukuppam.

Q: Are you talking about the Nettukuppam village?

R1: The fishers village on the seashore.

R2: Yes the Nettukuppam, Thalankuppam villages.

R1: But we have good relationships with Kattukuppam; even the salt carrying boats would only be docked next to the Kattukuppam village; while we were commuting in their boat, we used to buy them coffee or something or we used to give some 1 or 2 rupees; that a fair amount that time. Like that we had good relationships with Kattukuppam village.

Q: Would you get fish from Kattukuppam village?

R1: For fishes we would go to the Ennore market and we would buy from there.

R2: Yes, we would go to the market.

R1: In the market, fishes would be auctioned, there other fisherwomen would be buying the auctioned fishes and they would be selling it in the same market; from them we would be buying those fishes.

Q: Then if you have to commute to that side, you only have to travel via boat.

R1: Yes, we need boats to travel.

Q: From here how would you be boarding the boat?

R3: Boats would be coming to load salts in the canals, from there we would be boarding and traveling in the boat.

Q: How much would you be paying at that time?

R1: Some, 4 ‘anna’ (25 paise rupees) or 8 ‘anna’ (50 paise rupees)

R2: But mostly we would not be paying them with money. Yearly, we would be providing some rice, we would be cultivating ‘green gram’ (pacha pairu). So, they would be helping us with their boat. We would be giving simply some of it to them.

Q: What are the things you would be cultivating here?

R2: It’s the green gram and paddy; that’s it. Nothing else.

Q: When I visited the saltpans in Kattur, they were wearing socks on their feet. Were there any such practices here?

R2: No, nothing like that.

R1: We can’t wear that.

R2: We have to be in salt water and mud all the time; if we wear any slippers, we have to leave on the corner and work barefoot.

Q: Are there any particular diseases the laborers of saltpans are impacted to?

R1: Nothing like diseases; but their eyesight would diminish over time.

R3: They would be losing their eyesight because of the white color salt pans.; because of that we have poor eyesight.

R2: The white salts, would be lighting as diamonds; lighting of salts due to sunlight would be reflected in our eyes. We have to work seeing those salts. In our village everyone has operated on both of their eyes. Then our feet would scratch in the salt pans; if any stone hit us in that foot, we would feel pain like that is killing us. We have to be carefull, if we are leaving home from the salt pans we have to wear slippers on the way. If we are walking barefoot, we can’t walk in the sands and stones. Only if we don’t get into the salt pans for at least 3 months, our feet return to normal. When we work in the farm fields, our feet would be normal.

Q: What is the salary of laborers working in the salt pans?

R2: Minimum they would be paid 4000 or 3000 rupees per month.

Q: I am asking in the year 2007.

R2: Yes, labor would be paid 40 rupees/50 rupees/30 rupees. Three different laborers were working. Laborers who are working well would be given extra 10 rupees, if the laborer is new the laborer would be paid 5 rupees less. But we are working from the time laborers were paid 8 ‘anna’ (50 paise).

Q: In which year the wages for the laborers was 50 paise?

R1: I was just 15 years old by then (In 1965).

R2: We can’t be idle at that time.

R1: We would be asked to join while we would be playing in the salt pans. The salt water in the saLt pans used to get heated in the sun; it would change its degree; it’s called ‘degree’. Only if the water changes the degrees, the salt would be produced faster; elders would be polishing the salts.

R3: But during that time we would not be working much, we would just stamp the salt pans; that it. But by the time we were 20 years older, we used to do all the salt harvesting work in the salt pans.

R2: In our teenage time, while the elders were harvesting the salts we used to get food for them from our houses. By then we would be spectating their salt cultivating works, then they would be slowly teaching us the salt cultivation.

R1: That we continued and worked with salts

Audio 2: [221221\_Salt\_Kurivumedu\_Interview\_1.2\_RK.aac](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PE6TqKNkCqPPs_nF0DmfKGNERr1JlNVi/view?usp=sharing)

**00:00:00**

Q: What are the tools that would be used in the salt pans?

R1: Uppu plagaga (salt planks), Mullu kambi ( barbed wire) to dig out the salts from the pans; R2: -the salts would be harder to just draw from the salt pans, so we would be using the ‘mullu kambi’

R1: Baskets.

Q: What would the baskets be made of?
R3: You know ‘Eecha maram’ (a kind of palm);

Q: Yes.

R2: the baskets would be made from ‘Eecha maram’ leaves. If we order some 20 baskets they would be making these things.

Q: Who would make the baskets for you?

R2: There are specific people for this; they would come here and get the work done; they would be coming from voyalore.

R1: We have to get it from their place; they would also bring those to our place. We would be paying them based on the number of baskets.

R3: Only the people in voyalore would be making the salt carrying baskets; no one else would be doing that; we also only know them.

R1: We only know that place, we used to buy it twice a year. The baskets would be worn and torn by the 3rd month; we would be buying another then by then; this set would be used for another 3 months. Then the season would also ends for salt production.

**00:01:00**

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