

The Transmission of Local Knowledge: Salt-work in Thakhuttaw village, Welet Township, Sagaing Region

Abstract

This research paper examines the transmission of local knowledge, salt-making in Thakhuttaw village, Wetlet Township in Sagaing Region. The total households in Thakhuttaw village are about 360 and the population is about 1696. There are 50 households which are depending on salt-work. Salt-making is traditional one and some villagers continuously maintain that tradition. How they maintain the salt work, how they transmit the salt work to new generation, what difficulties are there in salt making are main problems in this research. Especially this research tries to point out the nature of local knowledge. Field work is done from 2.6.2010 to 10.12.2011. In this research interviewing method is applied with participant observation. For interviewing, 43 numbers of interviewee are applied.

Key words: Salt-making, local knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Salt is essential necessary thing for the people who live in the world. People need to digest and hydrochloride acid that get from salt. Salt can protect the human body from entering epidemic diseases. Thus, a person should eat enough salt. Salt is important not only for food but also to restore the food to last long. When meat and fish are mixed with salt, it can be protected from damage and restored more long time. Besides, people use salt in cosmetic work such as porcelain work, glass work, and soap and fertilizer. In some societies salt was very important in their religious beliefs. Hebrew believed that a newly born baby can get a good health by using and applying salt to his or her entire body. In additions, salt is frequently marked as a pure thing.

Salt is a necessary thing that is the main product of world in pioneer in the history firstly. The first trading ways were built by the salt makers who traded from one place to another place from the main sources of salt-well places. In India, salt-well was a splendid center of trading before King Alexander. For getting the salt, there broke out a war in human history. Long, long ago, salt was a rare thing and it was more valuable. At that time, Roman king, Caesar's soldiers had got piece of salt as the salary. In some African countries and the South Atlantic Ocean Islands, salt was made instrumental value instead of cash and it is still using in the present day. Nowadays, salt can be bought easily and the price of salt is not expensive.

In Myanmar, salt plays a vital role in diet. Most of Myanmar like many foods such as shrimp, dry-fish, shrimp sauce, dry-prawn and vegetables done to last long by using salt. This research paper tries to point out the creating, maintaining and transmitting of local knowledge in human society. Local knowledge or indigenous knowledge refers to the unique, traditional knowledge existing within and developed around the specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular geographic area.¹ Study site is salt work in Thakhuttaw village, Wetlet Township in Sagaing Region. The aim of this research is to examine how the local knowledge is created, maintained and transmitted. The objectives of the present research are to

¹ Louise Grenier, 1998, p-1

illustrate the salt-work and the environment, to know the local knowledge of salt-work and process of transmission.

The data collection method is qualitative method and it is used with participant observation and various interviewing to ensure the integrity of the data. Firstly, literature review is conducted and field work is done based on the literature knowledge. In doing field work, participant observation is conducted at making-salt, daily routine, making merit, wedding, funeral rite and so on. To know the history of village salt-making, political organization, cultures, traditions, customs and other association are asked from the elderly person of Thakhtaw village. By interviewing to the salt workers, making-salt, their feeling and daily life of their life-style are recorded. To understand the nature of young children and natural group discussions at well, their work sites are also conducted. To be a good research, the researcher takes out by using tape recorder, taking photos which are done by the permission of the villagers in Thakhuttaw village. Duration is from 1.12.2010 to 28.3.2011. In this paper the background history of Thakhuttaw village and salt work is firstly presented. Then the process of salt work and the structure of salt industry are explained. Finally it is discussed on the Transmission of Traditional Knowledge and concluded.

Background of Research Area and History of Thakhuttaw

Geographical Setting

Thakhuttaw village is situated in Wetlet Township in Sagaing Region. It is also 2 miles far from Wetlet Township and situated beside Mandalay-Myitkyina railway road. It is located in 22° 22' North Latitude 22° 25' and 85° 20' East Longitude 86° 90' West Longitude. In the east of Thakhuttaw village, it is Minkone village tract, Tagaung village tract in the west, Myintaw Village tract in the south, and Kyipinkan village tract in the north. Thakhuttaw area is 3698 acres wide. It is located in the lower part of Sagaing region, Upper Myanmar. Thus, the weather of Thakhuttaw is hot and dry. Annually, the average temperature is 102.6° F (38° C) and the lowest temperature is 78° F (26° C). Annually, the average rate of rainfall is 35.96".

Population

The population of Thakhuttaw village is about 1696 and the total of the families are about 360 houses and the families houses are about 369. The total number of women are 914 and the men are 782. The entire groups of Thakhuttaw village population are about 4241. Thus, the percentage of the population of Thakhuttaw is 40%. When population is compared to the whole Wetlet Township, the population of Wetlet Township is about 202944, the population of Thakhuttaw is 1696. Thus, the percentage of the population is 0.84%. The people living in Thakhuttaw village are Buddhist.

Table (1) The list population of Thakhuttaw in 2011

Village	Households	Families	Under 18 years		Over 18 years	
			Male	Female	Male	Female
Thakhuttaw	360	369	231	216	551	698

Transportation

Thakhuttaw village is located beside the railway road of Mandalay-Myitkyina. Thus, the villagers can easily communicate from one place to another. The people living in Thakhuttaw can go to Wetlet Township by bicycle, bullock cart and motor-bike. Salt from Thakhuttaw village can be transported to other villages or cities by bicycle, motor bike and bullock cart. If the villagers go to Wetlet Township, it takes 15 minutes for bicycle and 7 minutes for motor-bike. If they want to go with the train, they can take the train from Thakhuttaw to Wetlet Township.

Salt-making, Local knowledge

Thakhuttaw village was founded in 1809 by one group of tough people from Motesokhone village. The leader of that group, Moe Lone and his followers went to elope Ma Kwan Phyu who lived in Magyitone village and their group came by riding horses respectively. And then they briefly stopped to rest near bushes and trees. U Moe Lone and his followers made for a meal but there was no water to cook for meal. Thus, they dug a well to get water. When they had dug about 6 feet, they got water. Water that they obtained was so quite salty. One year later, from the group of U Moe Lone, one of his followers, U Lutaw and his young brother decided not to do evil acts

and the two families of the two brothers went towards the well that they dug last year. When they arrived there, they made huts and tents to live there. The two brothers, U Lutaw and U Lumaw thought to try to make salt from the salty water. They cleaned the ground 0.50 acre and prepared it like framing ground. Then they make irrigation canals and poured the salty water in the canals. After pouring salty water, they sunbathed the ground poured with salty water to get the ground was more salty. For getting sunbathed salty ground, it was watered and sun bathed again and again.

Between irrigations 3 feet far from each other and after the ground had been sunbathed for two or three days, the ground surface was higher than the primary surface of the ground. When the families saw and got grains of salt, they were very glad. U Lutaw said his younger brother U Lumaw to mix the ground and the salty-water and knead to make the salty ground. And to filter the salty-water they made the bamboo baskets. When they wove the baskets, they put the salt-ground into the baskets. After they put the salt-ground into the basket, they filtered with water. In the meantime, the filtered water changed the colour and the salty taste is more. And then, the young brother U Lumaw said, “The salty taste is hundred percent’, to his brother U Lutaw. And then U Lutaw made the salt by putting into the salt-making pan and boiling by fire. When they had cooked for a long time, water was evaporated and then the white grains of salt were got and little by little became pure salt. At that time, the young brother and sons and daughters were very surprised and glad for it.

When the people of far villages knew about the history of becoming salt, they learned how to make salt by U Lutaw, U Lutaw and their families. And then they extended the fields of salt to get more salt and to live there. For building houses they used Thakhut plants which were growing near their living place and they made Thakhut-wood to cook or make salt. Thus, U Lutaw thought to name their living place as “Thakhuttaw”. At that time, there were 20 households. One villager of Thakhuttaw said;

“The people living in Thakhuttaw are used to make in salt-work as a custom and tradition of their village. Salt made from Thakhuttaw is of high quality and its fame widespread. And qualities of the salt are different from those of other salts.”

From the above the story it can be known that local people can apply their environment for their subsistence. Thus salt-making is their local knowledge as well as their traditional and professional one. Besides, the knowledge of salt-making was

shared to other families. Why did they share? Why other people accepted this knowledge? It may be said that they were trying to maintain and transmit the knowledge of salt-making. In other words local knowledge cannot exist without society.

Economic Structure of Thakhuttaw in Salt-work

Although Thakhuttaw villagers make salt-work as a traditional work, since the village had established, nowadays a few families of Thakhuttaw village make in salt-work. How do the villagers depend on salt-work? What are the problems in this salt-making?

Salt-makers and salt-work

The main economy of Thakhuttaw village is agriculture. Among the total household of 369, there are 50 households doing salt-workers. Thus the percentage of salt-workers is 13.6%. According to the situation of salt work, salt workers can be divided into three groups.

1. Agriculture is mainly made but salt-making is done as extra income
2. Having a few farming acres and making mainly in salt-making
3. Doing mainly in salt-work.

The people of first group from the above are farmers. Their main economy is farming and salt-work is a minor business. The total number of farmers who make salt is about 32. One of them Daw Than Myint said,

“The income of salt work is not main for us, we sell salt when the price of salt is high, especially, we collect the salt-ground and make the salt in the rainy season because of the high price of salt”.

Doing farming is mainly and making salt as an aid work means the villagers possess many acres in land. The farmers can make the cash by selling their agricultural products as well as salt. Thus, this group of people is continuously making the salt.

The second group, mainly salt-workers who have the small farming are about eight. The cash getting from salt work can be supplied for the cost of the agriculture and also the cash getting from agriculture can be provided for the cost of salt making

vice versa. Having a few acres in farming and making mainly in salt work's worker said that

“Although economy is mainly depending on salt work, and we also depend on agriculture work that is why the cash getting from the agriculture is made as the cost for salt work and vice versa”.

From the above statement it can be understood that people cannot depend on the salt-work only. They also depend on the agriculture partly.

Third group is the people making mainly in salt work without making at all in agriculture. They are about ten. One of them from this group Daw Aye Yee said,

“We had farms and salt fields in the past. When we need the money, we sold the farms. Farms are easy to sell. But the salt fields cannot be sold. After selling the farms by little and little and at last we only remained the salt fields”.

The third group of people cannot stand only with making salt. Salt work is done only in hot season and when they don't have salt work they have to do odd jobs such as those growing the rice seedlings, pulling out the rice seedlings, harvesting the paddy fields.

Daw Aye Yee also said that

“We are only depending on salt work, when making salt time, others people are harvesting, we make and plough the salt fields more drier as we can and we plough the others fields in the rainy season as a hireling”.

The process of salt making

There are five steps in salt-making.

1. digging the underground well
2. preparing salt fields and plowing the ground
3. filtering the salt water
4. making salt and
5. scooping salt.

1. Digging the underground water

The salty ground - well is dug at the beginning of November. When a well has been dug, it can use about from four to five years. The well does not need to be enclosed by brick but bamboo and roofed by thatch so as not to drop earth into the well. If some well are damaged, they will dig a new well (See figure 5). In digging well, there needs about two or three men and the depth of well may be from 18' to 30' according to extent water. In enclosing the well there is needed a large number of bamboos from 100 to 150, the price of 100 of bamboo is (35000) kyats at present price. From the salted-well, if there need some water from the well, a pulley, rope and bucket are at hand. Digging salted well is mostly done by men. Thus in digging the salted-well, there is division of labor by sex.

2. Preparing salt fields and plowing the ground

They make the salt-fields step by step by using plough and harrow to get even ground. (See figure 6). A bread-winner or the eldest son has to plow the ground with a pair of bulls, the whole day. In a family there is no the eldest son, they urge son-in-law to plough. When there are no such men in a family, a worker is hired, (2000) kyats for a day. After plowing, salt-fields are laid bare about 10 or 15 days in sunbath. By doing this the salt fields get dryer, and more salty. And then in the dried salt-fields they placed the filtered ground in that was filtered last year and which is called (karsa) in accordance of the village's term. While they replace the salt-ground into the salt fields, the house keeper needs to hire 50 workers. By hiring this, the house-keeper has to pay the money about 2000 kyats for men and (1700) kyats for women. For the lunch, they are served with rice spilled with oil and plain tea or some snacks. While they replace the ground the boys or men have dug the ground with hoe, the girls or women carry the digging ground with basket in the salt field.

And then they pump the salted water from the well into the salt-field. When they sprinkle the water in the salt-field, they hire again workers again. Such salt-fields must be placed in sunbath for one week and the sunbath salt field is also prepared by using plough and harrow to get the ground plain. When they have prepared the salt-field, they make ground frame (See figure 7). While they make the ground frame, they hire two or three workers to make the frames. There may be 30 frames in 1 acre. After they have done the frames, all of family members strike with sticks to get the ground

plain from the frame. Young children also do the same. The salt-maker Daw Nyunt Yee Ho said that

"When we aske the children to hit the ground, we have to pay the money. At that time, the children are interested in work and they earn money, they spend when they buy the things which they want to get".

From the above statement it can be noted that the children can help the making salt and hitting the ground is the relationship between salt making and children. Then they put the water into the frames. After the water had been flown and in the frame, stops the water from flowing and then it is sunbath at the first day. It had been drying the ground frame, the water is passed again. By flowing two times, the ground frame becomes ready to filter the salt-water from the collection of salty water.

After they have collected the salty ground in the frame, they put them in one place which is under the roof. The ground taken from frame once is called "Ta Hlan Kya". The salt-workers make the salt 5 or 7 times in a year until the rainy season.

Preparing salt-field and sowing the ground works need a lot of workers. Some salt male workers make more difficult work and the female worker do easier job than male. Some children do the works as they are especially in crashing the ground solid and calling the workers who live in their village. Thus, the preparing of salt field in ThaKhutaw, there can be found the division of labor by sex and division of labor by age. Thus, the preparing and sowing salt-field gives to the children some money to buy foods in the summer holiday and the salt-field owner save the money.

3. Filtering salt step by step

After collecting the salt, it is the process of filtering. To filter the salt, the main things are bamboo funnel, clay pan, called as *kar*, 15 pots, 2 or 3 great jars. This filter is 1.5' in height and about 18' in circumference. In filtering the salt, it is needed ten sieves called *kars* . To make *kars*, there needs about 15 bamboos and they have to hire workers who can make the salt-kar. When they have matted the salt-kar, they put salt-kar on the embankments which is three feet height. Then salt-kars are bounded with the clay. After that the straw is coiled in the *kars* and make plane surface with clay. A bamboo tube or plastic pipe, 1.5' long is put into the salt kars for dropping salty water. Under the tube there must be placed the pots to catch the dropping salty water. The

pots from Myindung Village are the best to hold salt in Shwebo Township. They use to take the old pots rather than new pots because the old pots are more suitable to hold more salt and last long. Thus, if someone buys new pots, he or she changes with old pots in the village. The persons who changes the pots are happy because they get new pots. It is necessary to place 10 pots under the salt car and to carry 5 pots for salt-water. Thus the total number of the pot is 15 pots.

Filtering the salt-work is not hard work but needs to be patient, women and girls are making in this work. By filtering in this way, the children carry the salt-water as they can carry. The salty water fell into the pots through bamboo or plastic tube or pipe. Thus, there can be found in filtering which needs men-workers such as salt-kar makers, bounding the salt kar by ground.

4 Making salt

In making the salt, the house keepers store filtered salty-water between 19° and 22° in the pots. They purified filtered salt-water and put into the cauldron and cooked in salt cooking kiln. The fuel is husk. Husk can buy from the roller rice in their village and near village. The price of husk is about 15000 kyats for one bullock-cart. The salt-cooking kiln contains smokestack and to fire with husk. To make a cooking kiln about 12000 bricks need. Some built themselves but some do not. Thus, they hire to build the cooking kiln. There needed to make the hut for salt working systematically in a vacant place of their houses. In cooking salt one person has to stand by for adding the husk. If we make one caldron, there need six or eight baskets of husk and takes about from 3:50 to 4:00 hours. When we make a cauldron of salt, it is got about 12 or 13 viss, of salt called as salt *taswe*. There can be made three cauldrons in the whole day. Among getting the salt from wetlet Township, getting from Thakhuttaw village contains the iodine pasty per medium between 15 to 75. Thus, it can prevent (sore throat) by the experiments of scientific data. There are 7000 visses of salt can be got from salt-field one acre.

5. Scooping salt

After they have made the time is about 3:50, the cauldron of salt-water changes into the salt-grain. At that time, there is needed to reduce the fire to lessen the heat. The heat of the salt cannot suddenly stop, thus, there is necessary to give the salt to be cool by collecting the salt on the mat. After the salt have been cold, there need to collect with harrow. The salt harrow is made of wood and one inch in thickness, five inches in width and 18 inches in length.

Table (5) Salt (1) acre cost to making salt

Sr. No	Kinds of task	Frequency	Time	Rate	Cash Kyat	Remark
1	Plowing salt fields by bullock cart	9		3000	27000	
2	Cost for putting salt-ground from <i>kars</i> to the fields	50	10	2000	100000	
3	Pumping and tenderizing the ground	13	13	10000	130000	including Dissel
4	Cost for carrying salty ground from the field to the <i>kars</i>	time	5	15000	75000	
5	Fuel of husk	bullock cart	30	15000	450000	
6	Cost for filtering salt water	pot	1000	50	250000	Including cost for carrying salt
	Total				1032000	

Table (6) The benefits for salt one acre

The average price 300 kyats salt for 1 viss and salt for 7000 visses	2100000 kyats
The total cost of cash for salt one acre	1032000 kyats
The benefit for salt one acre	1068000 kyats

The above tables show the investment and profit of salt making.



Figure (5) The underground salty-well



Figure (6) Ploughing salt-field



Figure (7) Framing the salt-field



Figure (8) Filtering salt-water



Figure (9) Scooping Salt



Figure (10) Salt

Salt Distribution

In Thakhuttaw village, they commonly make salt-work in summer and winter seasons (November to April). Sometimes there is also found out salt-work in rainy. Thus, salt-work can be worked out in the whole year. So, salt can be obtained in the whole year. After they have made salt, the salt merchants buy the salt to distribute in the whole country. Concerning with buying and selling salt, one of salt-makers said that

“We don’t need to sell salt from hither to thither, we have permanent customers and after we have made salt for one day, customers buy salt that has made in one day”.

If the villagers only work in salt work, they sell salt from hither to thither and they do not work at all in agriculture work. Sometimes, if a customer wants to buy salt from their house, they sell salt. Salt merchants have bought salt by 350 kyats for one viss from salt-workers and they distribute and sell salt other village by 500 kyats for one viss. Salt-merchants distribute salt neighboring villages and Shwebo, Kawlin towns. In Thakhuttaw village, salt merchants distribute salt in the time of making salt and in non-making salt time, they also work pulling out the rice seedling, growing the rice seedling and harvesting the paddy and so on. When they distribute salt, they use motor-bike or bullock cart. Sometimes they exchange meat or vegetables or other things which they want with their salt.

Conclusion and discussion

There is found out three kinds of salt making depending on salt-work. Those families are traditionally doing salt work as their semi-subsistence pattern because they cannot depend on the salt work entirely. In salt work, men do heavy work such as digging the underground well, plowing the salt-field, framing the ground and women do putting the ground into the salt field, crashing the ground, scooping the ground and salt-making and so on. The children help and participate in salt work as they can do such as putting the ground into the field, carrying the salt-ground, crushing the ground etc. Digging the underground well, re-making the salt field, putting the ground into the salt-field are very tired works. Therefore it can be assumed that work cooperating needs in salt work. Because the neighboring towns can cheaply buy salt from the lower part of Myanmar in the market the demand of Thakuttaw salt became lower and lower. The climate of Thakhuttaw village is dry and hot; it is suitable to work salt-making. Besides, local knowledge and salt fields are ready to support for the subsistence pattern. Actually salt work gives the distribution in labor but the investment is higher and it is very hard work and people cannot maintain salt work properly.

In maintaining process of local knowledge there would be needed transmission from generation to generation. When the chance of application of local knowledge became smaller and smaller at present, it will be difficult to exist in future. Therefore we need to create the chances of application. In this case, if salt work cannot exist as their economy, how they can maintain this local knowledge developed from laborious process. All of us need to seriously consider about the local knowledge which is near to vanish.

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6. တင်ရီ၊ ဒေါ် 'ဝ' တိုင်းရင်းသားလူမျိုးများ၏ လူမှုစီးပွားရေးဘဝ (၁၉၉၉)၊ အမျိုးသားလူစွမ်းအားအရင်းအမြစ် ဖွံ့ဖြိုးမှုဌာန၊ ရန်ကုန်တက္ကသိုလ်
7. မြန်မာ့စွယ်စုံကျမ်းအတွဲ (၄) မြန်မာနိုင်ငံဘာသာပြန်စာပေအသင်း

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