

BOOST TO SPECIAL STEELS SALEM STEEL PLANT

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Abstract:

Iron and steel constitute in these days the very bones and sinews of a nation alike in times of war and peace. They are essential not only for making all kinds of armaments but also for starting all kinds of industries big as well as small. There is evidence to show that Salem was famous for its manufacture from the days of Alexander the Great to the days of Queen Victoria. There is evidence to show that for centuries together several other districts of our state also manufactured iron and steel of good quality.

Keywords: Iron & Steel, Salem, Manufacture, Industries, Centuries

INTRODUCTION

The State of Tamil Nadu had an indigenous iron and steel industry from time immemorial till the close of the last century. Tamil Nadu had also in the last century an iron and steel industry run on European lines by Porta Nova Steel and Iron Company and East India Iron Company. Both these industries have now disappeared but both of them have left behind strong hopes of revival under modern conditions in the light of modern knowledge. The chief raw material needed for the industry is of course iron ore. It is found in many places in our state. It occurs in North Arcot, South Arcot, Chengelpet, Coimbatore, the Nilgiris, Pudukottai, Salem and Tiruchirappalli. In North Arcot, beds of magnetite-quartzite are to be seen near Gudyattam, Katpadi and Vellore and in the Peria Malai near Polur. In South Arcot, numerous exposures of magnetite-quartzite are to be found in the northern and eastern parts of the Kalravanmalai and some important beds have been noticed near Sankarapuram. Chinna Tirupati and Madur Hill; in Coimbatore, Doddakombai forest, Satyamangalum taluk and also Hallagomalai and in the Chinnamalar near Erode. Some important ore bands are found near Karacholas one and a half miles west of Kotagiri and the spur of Doddabetta and a bed of Magnetic in gneiss occurs about one and half miles north east of Mallambatti.

But nowhere the iron ores occur more in abundance than in Salem & Tiruchirappalli. According to Mr. Bruce Foote who examined these beds along with Mr. William King in 1864, the ore which occurs in such abundance in the Salem district is the ore which has been used with success in the Scandinavian iron works. It was from this mineral, smelted with charcoal the most of the famous Dannemera iron was produced. The ore also contains little impurities like Phosphorus and Sulphur and it was from this ore that Arunachala Achari made such good hunting weapons etc. This remarkable picture of the Salem iron ores especially the Kanjamalai ores drawn by Bruce Foote and Sir Thomas Holland essence held that the

ores were high grade and rich magnetite and fit to be exploited. The magnetite quartzite ores of the Salem Trichinopoly - Arcot region constitute the most valuable group of iron ore deposits in our state. This indigenous iron and steel industry that was carried on for more than 2000 years came to an end towards the close of the last century.

The reasons for this are stated to be mainly 1) the increase in the price of Charcoal, and 2) the increasing facilities in obtaining English iron since the opening of the railways. Even when the industry was tottering that the famous iron smith Arunachala Achuri astonished the whole of India by making his celebrated hunting weapons out of indigenous steel produced in our state. But that was the last streak of its vanishing glory. Early in the last century, Mr. Heath, a civilian serving in our state went on furlough to England, got the samples of Salem ores tested and found that they contained a high percentage of iron. He came back to India, resigned the civil service and secured from the East India Company. Dannemora iron of Sweden was indeed famous for steel making but Madras iron ore which had been subjected to chemical analysis had been found as rich as Dannemora ore. He got the Indian (Madras) ore to England and had it made into pig iron and bar iron with the greatest care. Some have said that the Indian (Madras) steel is decidedly superior to any other description of steel. The 12000 tons of foreign iron annually imported into England could easily be supplied from Madras and at a cheaper rate.

Mr. Heath started the Porto Nova Company and erected iron works at Porto Nova in 1830 there is evidence to show that this new company succeeded in manufacturing iron of a very superior quality, which sold readily in England and India at higher prices. Wood fuel can be replaced by lignite and electricity. The geologists and experts have said about these ores. Sir Thomas Holland, in particular, it may be remarked went even a step further than others and recommended in 1893 the need for investigating the possibilities of starting an iron and steel industry in Salem. He got details concerning the supply of fuel from the Salem forests. Mr. Heath advised that in the existing circumstances commercial success could not be expected from attempts either to send Salem Ores in bulk to England or to make iron and steel on the spot in Salem with the charcoal from the neighbouring forests or with the coke from the Singarenior Barakar field. Salem iron could be profitably sold in England. Mr. Heath decided on starting an industry in Salem. The samples of ore selected and forty tons of coal were tested in Leasingthron colliery. The 2½ tons of Salem ore was carefully examined and found silica in the ore is in greater proportion than iron. Almost a hundred years, Dr. V.S. Dubey a Geologist had suggested a pig iron plant in the region. The Geological survey to develop the industries in Tamil Nadu and they approached more than once the Government of India to sanction the post of a Provincial Mineralogist who would be in a position to study of developing the iron as well as the industries in Tamil Nadu.

In 1936, the Director of Industries got some samples of the Salem ores and sent them to the Director Geological survey of India and the Travancore minerals company for magnetic separation. The Travancore minerals company doubted whether magnetic separation could be successful and reported that their commercial magnetic separators which were of high intensity.

Dr. V.S. Dubey, Professor of Economics University Geology of the Benares Hindu University was employed to examine the Salem ore deposits. He submitted two reports to the Government and saw great prospects in the development of an iron and steel industry in Salem. The proposal for pursuing the question of starting the iron and steel industry was therefore dropped in 1939. The detailed project report for the Salem plant was prepared by Dasturs Company in December 1974. The company was formed on 25 October 1972.

CONCLUSION

Salem lies 330 km south east of Madras on the mainline to Cochin. It has been set up at a cost of Rs.12.7 crore. Salem steel plant has been set up with French Collaboration utilizing the latest French technology in steel making. It was primarily a semi-urban area some ten years ago which now hums with industrial activity. After detailed examination of the project report, the Government accorded clearance for the construction of the plant in 1977 under the act of 1978. Salem plant became a subsidiary of SAIL on 1st May 1978. The plant meets the requirement of the domestic stainless steel and utensil industries.

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