Original Article

RICH IRRIGATION SYSTEM FLOURISHED AGRICULTURE AS GLEANED FROM EPIGRAPHS

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Abstract

The agricultural prosperity of a country depends upon the sound irrigation system which it builds. Early civilization flourished on the river banks, where water was available in plenty. Inscriptions of the later Pallava Kings state that a separate committee called *eri-variyam* came into being to look after the tanks, lakes, etc. An inscription of Kampavarman from Uttiramerur reveals that the great people constituting the *eri-variyam* (the tank committee) had to spend a certain sum from the capital towards keeping the tanks in condition. *Padikaval* tax was collected by the local police authority to give protection to the cultivable land. *Padikaval* system became very popular since it had determined the political status of the *Padikaval* authorities. The *Padikkaval* authority was very popular in *Tondaimandalam* and it became immense in number from the heyday of the Cholas down to the decline of the Chola Empire.This paper mainly concentrated on various irrigation system and agriculture how to flourish in ancient times in detailed manner.

Keywords: *Eri-variyam, Padikaval, Iraiyili, Kani, Irai, Neerkatti, Neerpaichi* and *Kambakkaram.*

Introduction

Methodology

By employing both primary and secondary sources this paper has been attempted. Lithic records are the major and authentic source materials for writing this paper and it is supplemented by various books written by various authors. The methodology adopted in this study is descriptive and analytical.

A nation's ability to flourish agriculturally depends on the quality of the irrigation system it constructs. On the banks of rivers, where water was abundant, early civilization thrived. According to inscriptions, the building of tanks was seen as an honourable endeavour in subsequent times. The legendary Chola King Karikala, according to Tamil history (Kalingathupparani), built embankments on both banks of the river Kaveri and converted its delta into a fruitful region. He was the first south Indian king to recognise the need to provide infrastructure for irrigation. It is also said that he gave the command to use the labour of his opponents who were captured on the battlefield to complete this massive project. A special committee named eri-variyam was established to take care of the tanks, lakes, etc., according to inscriptions of the later Pallava rulers. According to an inscription of Kampavarman from Uttiramerur, the great people who made up the eri-variyam (the tank committee) were

required to use a specific amount of the wealth to maintain the tanks. This essay largely focused on the numerous irrigation systems and the precise methods used by ancient agriculture to prosper.

Eri-Amanji

At addition to the *eri-ayam* tax, the *eri-amanji* tax was also collected in Tribhuvanaimahadevi Chaturvedimangalam. Users using *eri* water for agriculture were required to physically desilt the tank on a regular basis.[1] Therefore, in addition to providing the actual service—known as *Eri-amanji*—the user of *eri*-water had to pay the tax, or *eri-ayam*. The aforementioned levies also applied to Vidyaboga's donated property. In addition to the *eri-ayam*, the tax *eri-amanji* was also collected in Tribhuvanaimahadevi Chaturvedimangalam1 and realised in terms of land due.[2] Users using *eri* water for agriculture were required to physically desilt the tank on a regular basis. Therefore, in addition to providing the actual service—known as Eri-amanji—the user of eri-water had to pay the tax, or eri-ayam. The aforementioned levies also applied to Vidyaboga's donated property.[3]

Padikkaval

In order to safeguard the arable land, the local police authority collected the *padikaval* tax. Since it had established the *Padikaval* authorities' political legitimacy, the Padikaval system gained a lot of popularity.[4] The popularity of the *Padikkaval* authority grew dramatically in Tondaimandalam from the height of the Chola Empire till its fall. The presence of the local chieftains is demonstrated by the prominence of the Padikkaval authority in Tondaimandalam. The amount of the Padikkaval tax and the authority are stated clearly in an inscription[5] from the year 1120 AD that was discovered in the Siva Temple in Tiruvakkarai, Villupuram taluk, South Arcot district. This inscription runs as follows:

Oymanada Vijaya Rajendra Valanattu MannUru Chudippalli Sengeni Ammaiyappan Pandyan nara Viralogapper ariyan MattUrnattu Tiruvakkaraiudaiyar devadanam Nirnilamum punjayum narpalellaiyum

Padikkaval

Nirnilammattalirukalanellum Punjaynilammatialirukkalavaragum Padikkaval peru

It validates the aforementioned reality. The inscription clearly states that the per-Araiyan, also known as Vijaya Rajendra Valanadu, was the Mattur-nadu Padikkaval authority responsible for levying the Padikkaval tax on Tiruvakkarai Udaiyadevadanam. The inscription makes it quite evident that the required *Padikkaval* was paid in kind (paddy of wet land, millet incase dry land). At the Siva temple in Tiruppapuliyur, Cuddalore taluk, South Arcot district, lithic artefacts engraved in the thirty-first regional year of Kulottunga I (1070– 1120 A.D.) mention a private Kani landowner and his power to transfer the property to anyone he wished to grant it.[6] The translation of inscription is given below:

Svastisri Kulotunga Chola devarkku vantunuppadu Nadakanccitarkku Palaiyuril Irupuvilaiyumparil Oruma nanilam lraiyili ena Oraithanai, Marapperunselvi Puvamar kaniyinir Pumpuliyur natagamsei navalan Pera nilam

The abstract of the inscription is given below:

The thespian, a resident of Umpuliyur, was given a ma of cultivable wet land (nirnilam) in (Irrupuvilaiyum par) by Marapperunselvi of Palaiyur. This land may be farmed twice a year of the *kani* land. The inscription states that this area was excused from paying the tax "*irai*," and that it may be referred to as the *iraiyili* land (tax free land). The words "Irrupuvilaiyum Paril our ma nannilam" may be found in the inscription Irrupuvilaiyum Paril our *ma nannilam*. Therefore, it is evident that the wetland's traditional name was *nannilam*. Puvamar kaniyinir indicates that this area was *nannilam*, or wet land, because it was situated in *kani* land. [7] It is clear from the expression *iraiyili Uraitanai* that the donor excused the donee from paying the tax. The donor was required to pay the tax, or

irai, to the authorities in charge of collecting revenue in place of donee. The *kani* land was not excluded from paying the tax *irai*, it may be inferred. We may deduce from the inscription that the terms "*kani* land," "*nannilam*," and "irupuvilaiyum par" are all synonymous with "wetland" (*nirnilam*). Additionally, the private landowner who possessed the *kani* property had the authority to grant it to whoever he chose. 8 According to Noboru Karashima, *kani* lands made up the majority of the overall area used for agricultural production and were particularly fruitful wetland (nanjaynilam) compared to other wetland in the same village. He also believes that *kani* fields were liable for paying *kadamai* and *kani* taxes. The inscription states that the tax *ulvari* was imposed by the revenue officials on *kani* land and *puravuvariyar* in our research as well.[8] Because it is specified in the inscription that the revenue account of that land was to be maintained in accordance with the account of the Udaiyan of Olukadai, it is presumed that *ulvari* is synonymous with the *kadamai* to be delivered to the local body. It demonstrates that Udaiyan was the regional administrative authority and dominant personality who was given permission to manage the revenue account. As a result, the *ulvari* was gathered and sent to the Matturnadu Nadu Assembly. According to Burton Stein, kadamai was taken from the *kani* lands in reference to Melvaram. [9] Irrigation was crucial since agriculture represented the majority of the population's occupations. Maintenance of irrigation systems was seen as being of utmost importance. Paddy was distributed in order to maintain the lake and tanks. Lakes and tanks were the main sources of irrigation, which provided water for agriculture and occasionally also functioned as drinking water (Uruni). Their preservation was one of the key responsibilities of local government.[10] In essence, it entails conservation and preservation efforts including elevating tank bunds, removing silt, preventing damage to irrigation systems, and restoring those that have already been harmed. Any intentional attempt to harm irrigational tanks was regarded as illegal. Tank-damaging or destroying individuals are cursed in inscriptions. The fact that lakes, rivers, ponds, sources of drinking water, and other features were always located in locations where land borders were described helps us to understand the presence of lakes, streams, and other features. [11] The *urar* of Marudur in Malathukurukkai-kurram and Iraiyan kudi Kilavan came to an agreement, according to an intriguing inscription from Siddhalingamadam, South Arcot district, where the *urar* were paid 75 *kalanju* of gold by the above person in order to draw water (5 Vz capacity) that flowed through the big sluice in the channel of their village to irrigate a temple land designated as bal Additionally, the *urar* decided to just collect the already-agreed-upon levy for the water (niramanji). Additionally, it is reported that the *urar* committed to pay a fee of two *kalanju* of gold in the event that the flow of water was stopped. As a result, the right to access water was fiercely protected. The local government was careful about supplying water to any lands that were not permitted to do so and were being charged fees. Information on the irrigation practises used in the Chola nation's major rivers is lacking. Inscriptions from the time, however, focus mainly on little irrigation projects.[12]

Water Management

The village, which was the smallest Chola administrative division, had a local self-governing body known as the "village *sabha*." All of the male residents of the region made up the village *sabha*. They were in total charge of the rural government and made decisions on their own initiative without waiting for orders from Kings. "Committees" were established by the *sabha* for administrative purposes. A group named "Erivariyam" was given charge of tank administration, and if regular maintenance wasn't done, the assembly members were subject to fines and other sanctions. Farmers held the positions of power in the village. They thus understood the significance of irrigation projects and gave water management a lot of thought. [13] In the past, the building of local diversion weirs and central networks was done by the community of water consumers, along with all other essential water management tasks. In the case of centrally irrigated villages, these water user communities were referred to as "Samudhayam," whereas tank and dry villages were referred to as "Nadu." They did work hard throughout construction and upkeep to earn the water rights that the town now enjoys. Traditional water institutions used a two-tiered organisational structure to carry out their duties. The first is a supervisory figure by the names of *Kavaimanyam, Nattamai*, or *Karaikarar* who was responsible for implementing laws and norms pertaining to water management. The second post, which was more of a menial character and was locally known as *Neerkatti*, *Neerpaichi*, or Kambakkaram, is an honorary one. At the conclusion of each season or year, the community made a nice payment to the latter. These roles were often hereditary in various regions of the nation. [14] According to the aforementioned article, Tamil Nadu's ancient irrigation systems accurately represented the rights that village groups held over water and other natural resources. The community had full access to and control over all water

resources that were within its purview. [15] The system was operating effectively, and there were clearly defined rules and regulations in place to carry out all important aspects of water management, including system upkeep, water sharing, particularly in times of scarcity, conflict, and the collection of fines for non-participation in maintenance work.

To carry out all these tasks, a system of bureaucrats was in place. The caste system was essential in maintaining and dividing up duties among various authorities. For instance, only members of lower castes could hold the role of irrigation workers (menials), which was typically held by a farmer from a higher caste. However, the old irrigation institution had a means for enforcing it, which made the water control system run more efficiently.

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