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THE ROLE OF SETHUPATHIS FOR THE PROTECTION OF WATER BODIES IN RAMANATHAPURAM DISTRICT- A STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

Water itself is a source of food for living creatures and also prime ingredient for food production by the living organisms. Water is a source of life one can live without food for a long time, But he cannot live without water even single day of life. Water is a tool for all the development, a place for civilization, a land for cultural nourishment and a habitation for flora and fauna. Water the universal asset is being fast depleted. Ramanathapuram district is one the water scarce district in Tamil Nadu. An average Tamizhagam living outside Ramanathapuram district always think that the district is a cursed one. The people who lived in the parts of the country which were under the control Sethupathis depended mainly upon the rainfall for carrying out all the agricultural activities. The great people of Ramanathapuram have identified Kanmois and Ooranis as their source water to make their history of habitations. Now a days, water is expensive than Milk, fresh water is becoming a saleable commodity in many parts of the state including cities.



KEYWORDS: Water, Scarcity, Fresh Water, Civilization. Ramanathapuram, Sethupathis.

INTRODUCTION :

Water is a tool for all the development, a place for civilization, a land for cultural nourishment and a habitation for flora and fauna. Water the universal asset is being fast depleted. Ramanathapuram district is one the water scarce district in Tamil Nadu. During the administration of Sethupathis more efforts were taken for protection of water bodies in Ramanathapuram. The

important water bodies of Sethupathi Nadu were the river, water tank, Kanmai, and Lakes of all the rivers. Vaigai is mostly irrigating the majority part of Sethu Nadu the other bodies of Sethu Nadu are the rivers such as Kundalaaru, Sevalperiyaru, kiruthumalaaru, Manimuthuaaru, Bambaaru, Thenaaru, Vellaaru for the free flow of water they constructed canals to carry out water which were called water inlet or neervangi and inflow canal known as varathukka; for the water flowing from the river and

for storing the rain water during the floods they constructed bigger water tanks for the releasing of water directly, they formed and the ways called Kalungu in them which had bigger out let and smaller out let called madai for the smaller tanks. They were called Yeinthals they also constructed small water bodies called kulam, Urani for the purpose of bathing and drinking. "Water is elixir of life fundamental ingredient of life in the planet." Water itself is a source of food for living creatures and also prime

ingredient for food production by the living organisms. Water is a source of life one can live without food for a long time, But he cannot live without water even single day of life.¹ An average Tamizhagam living outside Ramanathapuram district always think that the district is a cursed one. The great people of Ramanathapuram have identified Kanmois and ooranis as their source water to make their history of habitations. Now a days, water is expensive than Milk, fresh water is becoming a saleable commodity in many parts of the state including cities.²

WATER AND TRADITION IN RAMANATHAPURAM

The Historical civilization have mostly flourished on the banks of perennial rivers and their glory is identified with the water. But in Ramanathapuram district, people have created a history of more than 2000 years old without any river of importance flowing on their landscape but they cherished their culture by creating water on their own. The Aryan epics of Ramayana has many poems to narrate the glory of this water starved country.

The Great people of Ramanathapuram have identified Kanmois and ooranis as their source of water to make their history of habitations. Kanmois are called as tanks, they are earthen bonded reservoirs constructed across the slop. These kanmois are constructed before a period of centuries and is still the main stay of agriculture in the district. Ooranis called as ponds.³

IRRIGATION IN RAMANATHAPURAM DISTRICT

Water is the most important prerequisite for agricultural development, since Indian agriculture continues to be a gamble in the hands at monsoon. Irrigation has always been a decisive factor affecting millions of formers of this country, whose economic character is predominantly agriculture.⁴ The main stay of Indian economy being agriculture, a proper system if irrigation is essential to ensure its success. The district has no perennial source of water – supply either by way of supplies from rivers or from big storage reservoirs. The chief irrigation sources are the Vaigai, the Vaippar and the Arjunanadhi, besides a few hill streams and a large number of rain –fed tanks. Wells are also to a considerable extent used for irrigation. The major source of irrigation in the district, and the next source in order of importance are wells.

The Protection of the Water Bodies

The people who lived in the parts of the country which were under the control Sethupathis depended mainly upon the rainfall for carrying out all the agricultural activities. All the Sethupathis preserved and reserved the excessive floodwater which were available in the rivers such as Kundaru, Kiruthumalaaru, Vaigaiyaru, Manimuthu and Virisala during the rainy seasons. The Sethupathi who ruled during the period in 1621-1635 was called Kilavan Sethupathi. He tried to carry the water of Vaigai in to the dry of Muthukulathur through the town called Kamuthakudi in the south directions by constructing along a canal which was called as Koothakal which is still in use.⁵

Dalavoy Sethupathi alias Sadaikka Thevar, on the northern side of Vaigai called Mudhaloor nearer to the Kulathoor dug a Kanmai in which he constructed a Kalungu and also two madais Muthalooore inscription, Sevvirukkai Nadu, Kalungu is a kind of construction both the Kalungu and the madais were of much use during the heavy floods for the sake of irrigation. Not only water was saved but also the excessive water was preserved from getting wasted and mixed with the sea. Later Raghunatha Sethupathi called Kilavan Sethupathi who ruled in the period between 1674-1710 built a fort made a stones at Ramnad and with the result Sethupathi Rajas' capital was changed to Ramnad. To satisfy the needs of drinking water he got a pond to be dug near the western wall of the palace. As he had executed the deed of digging an Oorani, he was called by all Mukavai Oorani Ayya and it was named as Mukavai Oorani.⁶ It was during the period of Chellamuthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1749-1763), a Kanmai was constructed at the western part of Ramnad to get usefully the water of Vaigai River. The Kanmai was named after Lord Rama and called by all as Raghunatha Samuthiram. As a result the agriculture carried on was very flourishing and as per this plan the king prevented the river from

getting wasted and mixed the sea. Likewise the king devised a plan to change the dry east and the west parts of Muthukulathur in to the most fertile parts.

The king constructed a canal in the west to the Kamuthi Kottai which was situated on the northern bank of the river Kundaru which was passing through the east to the west with which he got certain parts of Muthukulathur and Ramnad benefitted. This canal would end at the east with the Kalari Kanmai which was named as Raghunathakaveri. Likewise it was during the regin of Muthuramalinga Sethupathi 1782-1795 one of the pradhanis called Muthu Irulappa Pillai devised methods to convert the drought hit parts Sethunadu in to the most fertile land so he devised a plan not to allow the flow the river Periyaru, originating from the western Ghats in to the west to get wasted and he mixed with the sea for which he draw upon a plan to turn the current of water in to the east to get it joined with Vaigai so as to get the parts of Madurai and enriched Ramnad. After having drawn the plan he gave it to Sethupathis on receiving it Raja Sethupathi gave his approved, later under the leadership of Muthu Irulappa pillai, a team of soldiers moved towards the western Ghats and stayed there.⁷

The team destroyed the trees and the poisonous insects and selected the site and evaluated for the construction of the dam but the plan was dropped because of the lack of sufficient fund in 1789 A.D. later on because of the good influence that Muthu Irullappa pillai had with the British it had been taken for reconsideration against all the obstacles by the British Government engineer Fenny Cook. It was of because of his own efforts, after hundred years in 1895 it had been implemented. Now due to the implementation of the scheme called the Mullai Periyar project scheme agriculture flourish in the districts like Madurai, Dindugal, Theni, Sivagangai, and Ramnad. The Sethupathis rendered their services to the society by reserving the water resources and made beneficial.⁸

AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As long as the farmers continue to feed and clothe the world, agriculture will continue to assume the role of basic industry in some degree or other in every country. Agriculture as a prime industry plays a significant role in the process of economic development of a country.⁹ Since time immemorial, agriculture has been a major source of living and employment to a vast majority of people in India. Therefore, the economy of the Ramathapuram district is no exception to that of the state and country as whole. It is predominantly agricultural. According to the census of 1951, nearly 63.7 percent of the total populations of the district were dependent on agricultural occupations. The census of 1961 also shows that about 67.4 percent of the total working population of the district was cultivators and agricultural laborers.

AGRARIAN STRUCTURE

The position of agriculture in the Ramanathapuram district has to be appraised in the light of its tenorial history. The district was largely Zamindri, until that tenure was abolished in 1948. Seven out nine taluks of the district in Ramanathapuram were under the zamindari system of revenue administration characterized by oppressive rents.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

The prosperity of an agricultural country depends to a large extent on the facilities provided for irrigation. In south India, from time immemorial Hindu kings had evinced keen interest in affording irrigational works for the development of agriculture. Ramnad district during Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century A.D, Sethupathi kings were appointed as leaders of 72 bailiffs. Ramalingam Pillai, Dhamodharan Pillai, Pitchai Pillai, Velayutham Pillai, Sankaram Pillai and Muthirulappa Pillai were the representatives of the king Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi AD 1763-1795 of all Muthirulappa Pillai is considered to be the most significant one. He brought many social reforms to their kingdom. He is the pioneer of Mullaiperiyar dam. Now Theni, Dindigul, Madurai, Sivagangai and Ranmanathapuram districts are benefitted because of this dam which was the effort of Sethupathi's Chief Minister Muthuirulappa Pillai.¹¹

END NOTES

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