

# EARLY IRRIGATION SYSTEMS IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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**ABSTRACT:** The study has been under taken to analyse the early irrigation systems in kanyakumari district. Ay kings who ruled between 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D showed interests in developing the irrigation systems. The ancient Tamils found a good system of distribution management of Water.The Rivers are the back bones of irrigation in kanyakumari district. During early period tanks were created with a clear idea to meet the needs of the people The earlier irrigation systems were well planned aiming at the welfare and benefit of the people . The irrigation system that was developed during the early period in kanyakumari district is still continuing and helping the people.

*Key words - irrigation system, rivers, tanks, welfare and benefit.*

## 1.INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari district differs from the rest of Tamil Nadu with regard to its physical features and all other aspects, such as people and culture. The normal rainfall is more than forty inches a year. Kanyakumari District presents a striking contrast to the neighbouring Tirunelveli and Kerala state in point of physical features and agricultural conditions. The North eastern part of the district is filled with hills and mountains. The Aralvaimozhi hills and the Aralvaimozhi pass are historically important (Gopalakrishnan, 1995.). The fort at the top of the hill was built by the ancient kings to defend the Ay kingdom. Marunthuvalmalai or the medicinal hill is referred in the epic of Ramayana. Rare medicinal plants and herbs are found here. According to the recent survey the extent of cultivable land is 63,315,87 acres.The chief source of water supply is the Paraliyar, a tributary of the Kuzhithuri River, Paraliyar and Palayar. Apart from these rivers there are hundreds of streams which are highly useful for cultivation ( Sastri, 1934).The present study was designed with an objective to light the sources of irrigation in kanyakumari district.

## 2.SOURCES

The sources for writing the history of irrigation in Kanyakumari District can be divided into primary and secondary. The representations and Memorandums constitute the primary sources. All published documents; published books constitute the secondary sources. The Government Orders, the reports of the Executive Engineers, Assistant Engineers, the inscriptions of the Kings and the local subdivision officers, the letters of correspondences of the various officers, the reports of the joint Director Agriculture, Proceedings of the Government of Travancore, Report of the Water Resource Management, Technical Report, Petitions from the people of Kanyakumari District constitute the primary sources. These sources both primary and secondary, yield facts for the present study. The construction of Pechipparai dam, the Chittar Pattanankal scheme, the Kothaiyar Irrigation Scheme are aimed at the welfare of the people ( John, 1994).

## 3. RIVERS

Big rivers like Vaigai, Cauvery, Krishna and Kothavari are present in kanyakumari District The existing small rivers are considered to be 'rivers' from time immemorial. As the rivers in the district are running on lowbeds, artificial irrigation was practised for centuries (Sathyanesan,1993 ).

### 3.1 PALAYAR

River Pazhayar was called Pahruliyar in ancient times. Silapathikaram, the Tamil epic confirms the statement. The word Palayar in Tamil means 'old river' ( Gurumoorthi , 2008) . Tradition states that when Lord Indra built the temple at Suchindrum, the elephant Iravatam dug a river especially for the temple with its tusk. Hence this river is called Dandanati. The other name of the river is Vadaseri river. Palayar was about hundred-yard width during the early period and provided with a series of anicuts otherwise called the check-dams, from them and the supplementary channels water is distributed to a number of tanks and streams in Nanchilnad. The streams and small canals serve the district well so that water supply in the district remains satisfactory Palayar was formed by the flow of a number of streams from the secondary range of Sahyadri. Paraliyar Irrigation System receives water from Pechipparai dam through the left bank channel before it reaches the weir called Puthen dam. It was built of massive square stones across the Paraliyar and cut a channel through solid rock for a distance of about two miles or three kilometers through the saddle forming the extreme water shed (Gopalakrishnan,1995) .

### 3.2 .THAMBRAPARANI

Thambraparni is the other name of Kuzhithurai river. It is formed near Thiruvattar by the merger of the Paraliyar and the Kothaiyar(Sivaraman ,1952). Two streams, one from Mathavan Pothai and the other from the Thacchamalai hills join together and called Thambraparni. After a course of 32 kilometers at Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks, river Kothaiyar joins with Paraliyar at Movattumuham to form Western Thambraparni. River Thambraparni takes a south western direction and joins the sea at Thengapattanam. Thiruvattar, Kuzhithurai and Munchirai are important places on its banks. On its confluence at a sea, a large lagoon is formed which attracts many tourists. Thambraparni is a rainfed river. During the Southwest and Northeast monsoons, it overflows and causes much damage to the lives and properties of those who live on the banks of the river especially at certain portions of Vilavancode taluk.

### 3.4 MULLAIYAR

The Mullaiyar in Vilavancode taluk is a stream. It flows a course of about 11 kms through Kalia, Edaicode and Pacode. It joins the Western Thambraparni at Thikurichy near Marthandam (Caldwell, 1982, ).

### 3.5 VALLIYAR

River Valliyar is comparatively a small river. It is 16 kms. long. It rises in the Velimalai hills of Kalkulam taluk. On its course, thuvallar, which originates from other parts of Velimalai joins Velliyar at Thuckalay. On its course it feeds a tank called Periakulam. It passes through Kothanallur, Kalkulam, Eraniel, Thalakulam, Manavalakurichy and at its confluence at Kadiapattanam with sea a small lagoon is formed ( Palanivelu,1997,). On its both sides, paddy fields, coconut groves are found and enrich the rural economy of the area it passes. Valliyar comes under the category of irrigation canal. It is one of the old types of canals which carry the surplus water of river during rainy season and flood times only. It irrigates only a small area.

### 4. THE A.V.M. CANAL

The canal between Chennankara and Trivandrum was the first of its kind in the erstwhile Travancore state. It was constructed during the period of Dewan Venkitarao (1821-1839). However, the Ananthan Victoria Marthandavarma Canal, popularly known as the A.V.M. Canal, was the only work of its kind in the whole of South Travancore. Of the title, A.V.M., 'A' stands for the Travancore deity Ananthapadmanabha Swamy, 'V' stands for the British Queen Victoria whose representative was there in Travancore and 'M' stands for the maker of modern Travancore king Marthandavarma ( Variethiah, 1994). The construction of A.V.M. Canal was completed in July 1860 during the reign of Uthiram Thirunal Marthandavarma (1846-1860). By 1860 the canal between Poovar and Colachel was completed. The actual length of the completed canal was 17½ miles including 1½ miles of natural lakes or reservoirs. However, the A.V.M. Canal work has to be suspended due to the commencement of the Varkala Canal work at Travancore

### 5.STREAMS

There are small streams which originate from the mountains. One such stream was Ulakkaiaruvi near Azhakiapandiapuram ( Dinamalar, 2006). It helps the agriculturists for cultivation. The Ulakkaiaruvi stream runs through the nearby villages. This river is yet to be fully harnessed and utilized for the drinking purposes.

### 6.TANKS

Apart from rivers, tanks are a source of irrigation. There are different kinds of tanks. They are manmade and natural. The man made tanks are those tanks which are made out of necessity either by the villagers or by the village Panchayat or by Panchayat Unions. While they were digging the tanks always they took into consideration the storing capacity of the tanks. In the early period, tanks were created with a clear idea to meet the needs of the people (Gomathinayagam,1995). There are more than 5000 tanks and ponds of different categories. Tanks are divided into natural tanks, river fed tanks and rainfed tanks. The natural tanks are commonly found throughout the district. At Agastheeswaram taluk of Kanyakumari District there are three major tanks. They are the Prakkaikulam, Putheri Kulam and Therur Kulam. In Thovalai taluk also there are two tanks, and the Erachakulam, the Kadukkarai kulam.

### 7.PONDS

The rainfed ponds always depend on the monsoon. The rainfall is regular and steady because Kanyakumari district is situated on the western coast ( Aiya, 1996 ). There are many natural ponds, such as Parakkai kulam, Putheri kulam, Thathaiar kulam, Kaniya kulam, Veerani kulam in Agastheeswaram taluk. Peria kulam, Nalli kulam, Eraniel kulam, Vellimalai kulam, Thalakkulam, Kurunthenkottu kulam, Attoor kulam and many in kalkulam taluk, so also in Thovalai taluk there are many ponds. the irrigation system that was developed during the early period in Kanyakumari district is still continuing and helping the people (Gopalakrishnan 1995).

## 8.LAKES

Besides these, the Manakudy kayal, the Thengapattanam lake, and the Mukkudal lake are some of the important lakes that cater to the needs of the people. The Mukkudal Dam is used for the drinking water to the people of Nagercoil. The water is brought from Mukkudal to filter the house in Nagercoil (Velupillai,1940).

## 9. CONCLUSION

Irrigation is one of the important factors for the existence of human life in any part of the country. Knowing this the rulers of the ancient past built dams, excavated canals and created ponds or tanks wherever necessary, apart from the natural and river red tanks. But in course of time, the population of the country increased. This made them think of arranging irrigation facilities to improve food production and to improve drinking water facilities.

The irrigation system of the Kanyakumari District consists of natural and manmade. There are many streams and rivulets, flowing from the hills and forests. But many such streams and torrents were harnessed wherever necessary and arrangements were perpetuated for the proper use of water. The first designed manmade dam was the Kakachel dam, then followed Pandyan dam and Pandyan kal. The irrigation system in Kanyakumari district is not without problem. Mostly the problems are manmade and due to negligence on the side of both local authorities and Government.

## 10. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

They are sub-divided into the rivulets, streams, lakes and rained or manmade ponds. The manmade irrigation systems are dams, canals, aqueducts, check dams and tanks. These irrigational systems supply sufficient water for irrigation. But the frequent invasions of the Pandyas, the Cholas and Nayaks destroyed the water courses and they caused problems to the peasants and the people. By rivers one should not compare the rivers of Kanyakumari district with big rivers like Vaigai, Cauvery, Krishna and Kothavari. The existing small rivers are considered to be 'rivers' from time immemorial. Further for the existing geographical situation calling them as rivers is correct and hence it is justified.

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