



SOCIO-CULTURAL INTIMIDATION ON THE EMERGING IRRIGATION INSTITUTIONS

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India is predominantly an agrarian society; access to water for irrigation is an influencing factor of the status of a landed individual. Technological development provided opportunity to individual access to ground water through mechanised wells and hence the once popular tank water irrigation lost its importance in many places and so the traditional irrigation institutions managing them. The State had full control over irrigation tanks. The last decades of the 20th century witnessed a pervasive policy consensus spear headed by World Bank to transfer state management of natural resource by and large to community of users. Resulting in a blanket approach of Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) components in all irrigation-related activities nationwide (Hooja *et al.* 2002). Thus through projects and through legislations the States started the formation of WUA in villages

The fundamental features of an Indian village social structure are the constitution of various castes in the village (Srinivas 1976; Béteille 1996). The interactions and relationship of individuals between local institutions of social, religious, economic and political nature underlies the functioning of village social system. An individual has different types of roles to play. The inter-relation between individuals belonging to different institutions is one of the factors that explains their role, relationship of power and social status. The power in an Indian village is spread wider in different levels of the social structure resulting in emergence of different types of elites. The elites' intervening factors play a significant role in all sets of action pattern involving individuals from different institutions.

The elites of the dominant castes held various positions in the villages' traditional institutions like the temple management and maintenance, caste organization, traditional irrigation institutions. In regard to the traditional irrigation institutions in the state of Tamil Nadu, a system of management had been in practice for several centuries called *Kudimarath*, where the farmers were involved in the maintenance of the tank for themselves. In most of the cases during the 18th and early 19th centuries due to various reasons such as local wars, appropriation of tanks by the British government, etc. the farmers slowly lost their interest in *Kudimarath*. Nevertheless, in many places farmers

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continue to participate, at least through voluntary labour not under any formal discipline. (Palanisamy et al, 2003).

The competitiveness between caste groups though prevails, the entities within castes like the kin groups and lineage patronization is emerging. Another major factor that is contributing substantially in the present day village affairs is the intrusion of the popular political parties. This is manifested in various forms, like the disputes and conflicts between the families, kin groups and lineages is nourished by the rival political parties taking their either of the sides, resulting in fractious situations. The creation of WUA and TA is not an exception in the villages that has provided ample space to exercise the fuel the differences that prevails.

The state has stereotype guidelines for forming these new associations. In many instances the farmers find it difficult in adapting to the implemented association, as it does not suit their already existing system thus causing disinterest among the irrigators. As a result the formed WUAs remain non-functional. This is well explained by Mollinga (2001) in the case of WUA in Andhra Pradesh (AP), where no further action has been taken to shape processes within the WUAs apart from the organisation of the elections, and also he criticises how these newly formed associations are captured by the local elites. This viewpoint is also shared by Reddy (2005) who recently had undertaken an extensive study in AP and argue for a restructuring and reforming of the State irrigation department and the bureaucracy that is critical for effective and sustainable irrigation institutions. And Mosse (1999) in mentioning about the Tamil society he says “social dominance does not remain unchallenged by new institutions which also provide the means to advance externally defined development objectives such as equity democracy and social justice. ... the point is that these social changes intersect with local caste conflicts or factional affiliation and with strategies to challenge as well as retain caste power.”

In this paper I present two cases of one each from the states of Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu. In the first case I will be describing the functioning of the Tank Association of Vadanur Tank in Pondicherry, where the context is one association, one tank and two villages. The case in Tamil Nadu is about the Tank water users association of Thiruvannainallur and Saravanapakkam under the context of one association, two tanks and two villages. From these two cases an attempt is made to analyse the socio-cultural factors, such as the existing polity in the caste groups and kin groups that are intimidating the functioning of the WUA /TA and the role of the state.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY REGIONS

Tamil Nadu with a geographical area of 13 million hectares is ranked eleventh in size among the Indian States. The net area irrigated rose from 21.11 lakh hectare in 1950's to 27.75 lakh hectare in the 1990s and is reported to have come down to 21.48 lakh hectare during 2004-05. The State is dependent on the ground water resources for providing irrigation to additional acreage and to stabilize the existing area under irrigation. The three main sources of irrigation in the State are rivers, tanks and wells. There are 39,202 tanks, 2,322 irrigation main canals & 18,26,906 irrigation wells in the State. There are 79 reservoirs with a total capacity of about 6895 MCM (243 TMC) (15% of the annual

water potential) (SPC, annual plan, 2005-06). The Public Works Department of Tamil Nadu have the control over the tanks that has a command area of more than 40 ha that is 8,903 in numbers. There are 20, 413 tanks that have a command area of 40 ha and less fall under the control of Panchayat Union¹. There are 9,886 tanks called the Ex-zamin tank. Individual local chiefs called Zamindars once controlled these tanks. With period government orders, the PWD are entrusted to undertake repair works in these tanks.

Pondicherry is a small state with a geographical area of 480 sq kms that has the status of the Union Territory. Pondicherry has four regions (or districts), Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam. Pondicherry and Karaikal are situated within the state of Tamil Nadu, whereas Mahe and Yanam are situated within the states of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh respectively. The net area irrigation in the state of Pondicherry is 16.73 thousand hectare in 2003-04². Two rivers that originate in Tamil Nadu – the Gingee and the Pennaiyar – pass through the region of Pondicherry that flows into the Bay of Bengal. There are also 84 tanks that have the capacity to store water for irrigation. The region has substantial quantities of groundwater of fairly good quality. In Pondicherry, unlike Tamil Nadu, all the tanks – whatever their sizes – are under the control of PWD. There are 59 system tanks and 25 non system tanks in Pondicherry region that irrigated a command area of 6592 ha.

The study tanks are situated in Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu. In Pondicherry it is Vadanur tank and in Tamil Nadu there are two study tanks - Thiruvannainallur tank and Saravanapakkam tank - situated in the district of Villupuram. All the three study tanks receive water from the same source of pennaiyar river through two different systems. this river runs to a length of 432 km, that originates from Karnataka state that is situated to the north east of Tamil Nadu. The length of 320 km is in Tamil Nadu. The tirukoilur anaicut is situated across river pennaiyar in Villupuram district of Tamil nadu. There are four canals taking from right bank of the anaicut and one canal from left bank. the Vadanur tank situated in Pondicherry is the last tank that receives water from the only canal situated at the left bank of the anaicut called the Pambai canal, whose length is 32.4km and supplies water for 26 tanks. And the tanks of tiruvannainallur and saravanapakkam receive from one of the four canals situated at the right bank of the anaicut called Ragavan canal with a length of 36.4 km. These two tanks are the 16th and 17th tanks of the 46 tanks that receives water from this canal.

The Tamil Nadu farmers' management of irrigations systems act – 2000 of the Tamil Nadu Legislative assembly received the assent of the President on the 25th February 2001. The act is to provide for farmers' participation in the management of irrigations systems. And since then the government through the PWD is forming WUA in a phased manner through out the states. Even prior to this intervention from the government during mid-1990s there were projects of tank development and rehabilitation sponsored by European Commission, that introduced WUA in selected villages in the state. The Tank Rehabilitation Project of Pondicherry (TRPP) was launched in August 1999; the Pondicherry public works department (PWD) implemented this project with the assistance of the Agriculture Department. The European Commission provided

1- Panchayat Union is an administration division below the district. This panchayat union comprises of few village panchayat (see foot note no. 2)

2- <http://www.pon.nic.in/stategovt/ecostat/ecostat2/ecostat.htm>

consultancy to assist the implementation of the project. The monetary support for the project was 81% from European Commission, 13% from PWD and 6% from the contributions of the Local community. NGOs were involved to mobilize the community and form TAs.

CASE I – TANK ASSOCIATION OF VADANUR TANK

The two hamlet villages of Purana Singu Palayam (PSP) and Vadanur (VAD) constitute the administrative unit of Vadanur village panchayat¹. These two villages share one irrigation tank – Vadanur tank (VAD tank). Farmers from both the villages have their lands in the command area of the tank. In VAD there is a colony inhabited by the *Parayar* who are SC² community, majority of them are landless agricultural labourers and only few family own land. Majority of the inhabitants in VAD are from the caste of *Vanniar* (initially agricultural labourer and now farmers) who are also called *Gounder*, they hold the maximum of the lands. There are *Chettiar* (merchants by tradition, but also own lands and practice agriculture) and other castes like *Reddiar* (agriculturists and big land owners), *Yegali* (washer-man), *Pillai* (accountants) but fewer in numbers and few Muslim families. PSP also has a SC colony inhabited by *Parayar* with similar occupational pattern of that of VAD. There are few families of the dominant caste of *Reddiar*, most of them are big land owners in PSP. The majority of the inhabitants of the village are the *Vanniars* who own lands. There are other castes, *Yegali* (washer-man), *Achari* (carpenter, black smiths), *Yadava* (sheep/cattle herders) and only one *Pillai* family who were once the only big landlord in PSP.

The tank of VAD is the last tank of a system that receives water from a canal connecting the *Penniyar* river through diversion barrage controlled by the PWD of Tamil Nadu. The command area (*ayacut*) of the Tank is 165 hectares, until early 1970 the only *Pillai* family in PSP who owned nearly half of the command area. The tank has five sluices, of which through four sluices water will be distributed to the lands in PSP and through one sluice to VAD lands. The major crops that are cultivated in the command area are paddy and sugarcane. Paddy is cultivated for three *bogums* (cropping season), one is a long term crop for 5-6 months and the other two are short term crops of three months.

In hamlet village of VAD, there are ten village leaders who are called *natamai*, the preponderant caste are the *Vanniar*. The main function of this institution is to organize village temple festival. In the SC colony there are three *natamais*. In PSP again the *Vanniar* who are the majority is divided into four lineages or *kothu*. Each *kothu* has a leader called *kothukarar*. The function of this institution is also to organize village temple festival. Of the four *kothu* the families belonging to one of the *kothu* called the *kumalamuttar* draw respect from other *kothus*, as they were traditional leading the other three *kothus*, moreover they were one who were holding land in PSP amongst the *Vanniars* for many generations though not equal with the big land lords of *Reddiar*.

1- Village panchayat is the lowest elected governing body, administrative boundaries of a village panchayat will comprise of one or many hamlet villages or revenue villages.

2- Schedule Caste (SC) is the constitutional category given to dalits who are at the lower level of the Hindu caste hierarchy, who were also called harijans or untouchables.

In PSP rivalry between two *kothus* prevails for more than five generation. There is said to be opposition from *sanasimuttar* (one of the *kothu*) against any decisions taken in the village by leaders of *kumalamuttar*. This rivalry in many cases has resulted in clashes in the village. In the present day situation, the village panchayat president, office bearers in the TA, belong to the *kothu* of *kumalamuttar*. The leading persons of *kumalamuttar* are also member of the regional political parties and also those leading persons of *sanasimuttar* are also active members of the regional parties those opposes the political parties to which the *kumalamuttar* are affiliated.

The leading persons of *kumalamuttar* and *Reddiars* who are big land lords have good relationship with each other. Moreover, these families hold most of the land in the *ayacut* of the tank than others in PSP. Few of the leading person of *kumalamuttar* along with few interested *Reddiars* of PSP and few interested farmers from VAD took the initiatives every year to march in the supply canal upstream to see to it there is free flow of water to VAD when water is released in the system. This activity is said to be a very old practice and is termed as 'bringing water to the tank'. Due to the proportion of land holding between the farmers of VAD and PSP in the *ayacut*, the people of PSP outnumber those of VAD in participating in bringing water to the tank. The expense for this activity is met by the funds with the *kothukarrars* of PSP that are collected for the temple festivals. The revenue that is generated out of the resources from the tank like the fish is shared in the proportion of 2:1 between PSP and VAD. This is justified as one share each for the PSP and VAD; and the other share is for the water that is brought also goes to PSP because the expenses are borne by them.

An association was started during 1995 for VAD tank, under guidance of the PWD. But the association did not become active rather it remained only in paper. The only activity done collectively by the likeminded and interested farmers of PSP and VAD is bringing water to the tank when the water is released in the system, that was claimed as the most important activity. This was not done under the aegis of the association formed.

The leading person of PSP and VAD on knowing the inception of a Tank Rehabilitation Project of Pondicherry (TRPP) during 1999 voluntarily represented themselves to the project management unit and invited them to implement the project. TRPP had guidelines and procedures drafted for the formation of the TA. An NGO was entrusted with the assignment of social mobilisation and formation of TA. The NGO undertook household survey and based on it a category of members to be appointed in the Executive Committee (EC) was prepared beforehand. *Ayacut* farmers, (60%), agricultural labourers/landless (30%), other groups (washer (wo)men, shepherds, fisher (wo)men, etc) (10%). In the group of *ayacut* farmers, different categories like marginal, small and big farmer; and those with and without well had to be represented. Also women should have at least one-third representation in the EC.

The process of formation of the VAD TA was said to be difficult both for the NGO and for the leading people of PSP and VAD who had interest in the irrigation tank. The main opposition had come from the encroachers who were cultivating inside the tank. This issue was taken up rigorously by leading persons of the *saniathanmodu* of PSP to oppose the eviction of the encroachment. The representative of the NGO was manhandled, and four of the people involved with the TA were tied up inside a temple

in VAD. The political and social status of those leading persons of PSP and their approach in dealing with the agitation is said to be a vital factor in the formation of the TA.

In 2001 March the Vadanur tank association was formed. It has 25 executive member of all the categories specified in the guidelines. Fourteen of them are from PSP of them four are *Reddiars* and nine are *Vanniars* mostly belonging to *kumalamuttarmodu*, nine out of ten of them from the VAD are *Vanniars* and one from another neighbouring village, who has land in the command area of the tank. One SC and two women from VAD; and one SC and one woman from PSP also comprise the EC. The president and secretary of the TA are from the *kumalamuttarmodu* and the secretary is a *Reddiar*, all three from PSP. The vice president, and joint secretaries are from VAD. The Office bearers from PSP are still continuing office, whereas from VAD changes had occurred; on formation of the TA, a Muslim was the vice-president and a *Vanniar* was the joint secretary, on due course, as their participation in the meeting and other activities was not effective, a land owning *Chettiar* and another *Vanniar* were replaced respectively.

The treasurer of the TA is a wealthy *Reddiar* and is called by the villagers as auditor; moreover he owns the biggest rice mill in the region. He has good connection with the political leaders of the state. He is an influential person and have undertaken many activities in the common interest of PSP, like, providing rice to landless at times of natural calamities, conducting health camps in the village and provided nourishments to the school children. The president of the TA is also the village panchayat president, who has been in this post for nearly fifteen years. The secretary also a local leader of the regional political party, and has served as president of the agricultural co-operative society in the village. The vice president a *Chettiar* from VAD is a big landowner; he is one of the ten *natamais* in VAD and a local leader of a regional political party. The Join secretary is also an active member of a political party.

The influential status of the Office bearers of the VAD TA has facilitated the association to undertake rehabilitation activities in the tank. They have been regularly de-silting the tank; they have laid farm roads in the *ayacut*, and riverbanks. They have also taken initiatives and planted trees in the tank bed.

Prior to the formation of TA, the resources in the VAD tank, fishes and the trees in the tank bund were shared between the villages of VAD and PSP. There is a physical demarcation in the tank that divides the tank for VAD and PSP. The revenue generated from fallen trees and from the yield of the trees in the tank bund under respective boundaries would be managed by the respective village institutions of *natamai* and *kothukarar*. In regard to the fish harvest, traditionally there was pre-defined share allocation amongst the *ayacut* farmers and as well few days of free catch for all the villagers. After the formation of TA, the TA took the control over these resources. The revenue generated from these resources went to the TA. The fish was cultured by the TA and was auctioned. This happened twice after the formation of TA, thereby depriving the earlier shares and free catch. The TA appropriates the revenue to their account that is generated from the resources in the tank that went to the village institutions earlier. This has created a frigid situation between VAD and PSP. The contention of the VAD people is that the revenue that used to come to their village

institution has stopped. The people of VAD view that the revenue goes to PSP due to the domination of the office bearers of TA who are from PSP.

Ever since the formation of TA there are cold differences between the encroachers who were evicted from the tank bed and the TA. Most of the encroachers were land less SCs. The contention of the leading people of TA is that the rival *saniathanmodu* had made the good use of the cold difference of the people both in VAD and PSP to rise against the TA. Even in the recently held panchayat election, the election promises of those contesting the elections from the faction backed by rival individuals of *saniathanmodu* was that if they are elected to power they would allow the landless to cultivate inside the tank.

The contention of the *saniathamodu*, is that they do not accept the formation of TA, as they feel those who all are represented in the EC are those who would support and do not question the decisions taken by the Office Bearers (OB) which is dominated by persons from *kumalamuttarmodu*.

The TA auctioned fish in the VAD tank for two years after their formation. During the first year, the TA decided that fish would be cultured and sold by them. They appointed guards to safe guard the fishes that were grown in the tank. They harvested the fishes and used a transport to sell it in other villages. During this process, it was only the office bearers who got involved in it and many of EC members did not get involved. As the Office bearers were from the land owning category, the labourer who used to work in their field were utilised to under take physical work in the process of selling the fishes. Owing to the non-compliance of the EC members, the following year, a public auction was called for, during when people from far off places participated in the auction¹. This time, the collective bidding by few members of the TA won the auction. And after the harvest of the fishes, the accounts were submitted to the TA explaining an incurrance of loses. TA association decided to compensate the loss, by returning the money collected in the auction. This aroused anger amongst many even from the EC of TA against the compensation given. But it was said that the domination of the TA officer bearers silenced the under current that was rising against them.

In both the cases the leading people of the TA blame the rival group for incurring loss. Their contention is that, it was the rival group that encouraged the landless and other to enter the tank and catch fish.

The EC meeting of VAD TA takes place once a month during the evenings of full moon day at the residence of the treasurer of the TA in PSP. During the first year this meeting was held during daytime at the third sluice² of the tank. The monthly meeting of the EC is intimated through post to the EC members. This meeting commences by 6 pm and goes upto 9 pm. During which the NGO representative designated as Community

1- The TA made announcement of the auction in local new papers.

2- The third sluice of the VAD tank is also called the middle sluice. All activities pertaining to the tank matter, like fish auction, tree auction and redressal of disputes pertaining to the tank will be held in a space near the third sluice, moreover this place is situated in location that is at the middle of the two hamlet villages of VAD and PSP.

Organiser (CO) responsible for this TA moderates the meeting on the works carried out in the previous month and works that has to be undertaken in the coming month. In order to encourage the EC member to attend this monthly meeting the Office Bearers of the TA had introduced thrift and saving programme, where the members have to save hundred rupees every month, on requirement the saved money will be lent to one individual, who would pay back it with an interest. This change of venue of the meeting and the introduction of the thrift and saving scheme has caused considerable impact on the participation of the EC member like women, SC, and even others in the meeting. Two women members from after the change of venue have not attended the meeting as the timing and the distance did not suit their convenience. Three men members also from VAD do not attend the meeting as they do not have a cycle or a motor bike to reach the meeting venue, they also attribute that the timing also does not suits them. In regard to the introduction of the thrift and saving, few EC members who are unable to part take in it due to their financial problem abstain from attending the meetings. Moreover, this thrift and savings has attracted few other non-EC members who have their interest in it alone. On an average only eleven EC member of the TA participate in the monthly meetings.

Those people who were opposing the formation of the TA for VAD tank, on due course after witnessing the physical work undertaken by the TA in the tank have become eager to associate themselves with the tank association. The explanation given by the OB of TA on the reason for this eagerness is the money that was involved in the works undertaken. There are two issues that arise, the OB of TA complain that the new found interest by those who were antagonistic initially is that they feel that they could make some money out of the works undertaken. The other who wanted to associate themselves feel that the money is not being utilised properly by the OB of the TA. And again here, those who wanted to enter the TA are also the traditional rivals belonging to *saniathanmodu* in PSP. And also there are few from VAD also who wanted to join the TA.

In the EC of the VAD TA, according to the guidelines of the TRPP, people from all categories like the SC, landless, women; and small, large and marginal landholding farmer comprise the 25 members from VAD and PSP. After five years of the VAD TA, the expressions of the SCs, women and few members of the EC do not reflect the cohesiveness of the association. When talking about the TA, they exclude themselves and address the OB as TA. Many of them were co-opted in the TA by the leading people who had their interest in the TA to fill the required number of 25.

The VAD tank water has not been used for irrigation for the past 30 years. There is a substantial number of bores in the command area. The farmers without bore well in the command area are denied the privilege of using the water for irritation when there is water in the tank. In this regard the farmers without bore express their unhappiness. Moreover, their contention is that, if the water is stored in tank to augment the ground water (according to the bore well owners), when there is water in the tank, the price of water that is sold by the bore owners should be reduced, but the fact is that the same price is levied. The other fact is due to the inconsistency of the supply of water in the tank due to frequent failure of rain, the farmers without bore well are dependent on the bore owners. Therefore the upper hand of the bore owners on the decision of the non-

usage of the tank water for irrigation remains unchallenged by the farmers without bore in the command area. After the formation of TA, this practice continues, as the OB of TA are also borewell owners in the command area. There is a general acceptance that on irrigating the tank water the yield of the crop would be better than when irrigated with ground water.

CASE II - TANK WATER USERS ASSOCIATION OF THIRUVENNAIALLUR AND SARAVANAPAKKAM

TVN is a big village that has a status of the Town panchayat under administrative classification. According to 2001 census the total population of the TVN is 8582 nearly one fourth (26.46%) are Scheduled Castes.

TVN has a command area of 267 ha for its tank. The tank has three sluices named as *merku vali madugu*, *kizhaku vali madugu* and *therku vali madugu* i.e. east way sluice, west way sluice and south way sluice. The villagers select by consensus the *Vaikal Maniyam*¹ for the sluices. The *Vaikal Maniyam* had specific responsibilities to be carried out pertaining to the distribution canals from the sluices. In order to manage and maintain the canals one had to use his ability and had to adapt strategies to pool human resources to clean and repair the canals. The resources could be either by contribution through physical work or through cash. The *Vaikal Maniyams* usually are elites, respectable persons who have a command over other farmers in that specific distribution canal. In TVN this post of *Vaikal Maniyam* was hereditary in nature. One of them was from the *Vanniar* caste and two were from the *Udayar* caste

In TVN *Udayar* or *Tulu Velalar* caste are numerically preponderant followed by *Vanniar* or *Gounder* and a substantial number of Muslims. The *Rediyar* caste, though only one family, held most of the land in the village, they are said to be migrants to this village and are not natives. Due to their influence with the then politically influential personalities in the region, it is said by others that they took possession of the *porambokku*² lands into their hand and had obtained legal documents for it. Thus assuming power over the other castes in the village. But after the death of the eldest *Rediyar* i.e. after 1962, most of their lands were sold by his sons that was bought by other castes in the village. And their dominance over the other castes also reduced considerably.

The members of the WUA recount that the *vaikal maniyam* is a prestigious position in the village and those in this position had high respect and their words were taken as a command and accomplished with abidance and esteem. The *Rediyar* had a command over the village due to his land holding capacity and his relationship with the officialdom of the state. He controlled all affairs of the village including the irrigation tank, moreover it is said that he would also give directions to the *vailkal maniyam*.

1- *Vaikal Maniyam* literally means canal manager

2- *Porambokku* lands are the lands that are not privately owned

In the year 1976 there was the introduction of *vathu kuthagai* (duck auction) i.e. immediately after the harvest of the paddy in the command area of the tank. It is said that the offspring of the dominant rediyar initiated this *vathu kuthagai*. The bidder who wins the auction could graze their ducks in the command area after the harvest of the paddy for a period of one year. The amount generated by this *vathu kuthagai* was deposited in the bank under the name of a responsible person, the first was the son of the dominant rediyar, then the village panchayat president and then the president of Farmers Organisation. And the money will be utilized to repair the distribution canals. From then onwards the contribution of the respective command area farmers diminished due to availability of this fund from the *vathu kuthagai*. After this advent of this *vathu kuthagai* there had been incidences where this post was contested under prestige issues between individuals. This has occurred within a caste and also between castes.

Under the Command Area Development scheme, the PWD organized Farmers organization (FO). In which a president of FO was appointed since 1996. This appointment is said to be under political party grounds. This was mentored by the regional representative of the legislative assembly who is called the MLA – Member of the legislative Assembly. The individuals those who were closely associated with the MLA used their influence to become the president of FO, with the consecutive changes in the ruling party of the state and the MLA the leaders of the FO also changed. This president of the FO was later given the responsibility of the *vathu kuthagai* and the maintenance of the distribution canals of the tank. The main reason for the contestation for this position is the authority to manage the *vathu kuthagai* funds. Moreover, the president of the FO also owned lands in the command area of the tank. For the past two years due to a dispute between present WUA president and the then FO president the money remains unutilised.

The tank is said to receive water from the system twice a year according to the irrigation inspector of the Tirukoilur anaicut (barrage) in the Pennaiyar river from where the water is deviated through vents to the canals that takes water to the tank. During January 2007, the water was released through the vents that reached the TVN tank, in addition to the water that was there in the tank due to rains that occurred the previous year. In the command area there is a substantial quantum of bore wells, so the dependency on the tank water by the command area farmers is not eminent. Moreover, the distribution of water from the sluice is not controlled through any sort of allocation strategies amongst them. Individual farmers let out water on requirement through the sluices. During this season, except for one sluice the in other two sluices water is distributed to the command area. The allocation of water is said to be on negotiation between individual farmers on their requirement. The distribution canal of the west-facing sluice that passes through the residential area of TVN remains damaged for nearly a year. The farmers under this canal manage their irrigation through ground water, few of them are not happy, as they are not able to use the tank water for irrigation.

The neighbouring tank to TVN tank is Saravanapakam (SVP) tank. These tanks are contiguous to each other with only a bund dividing the two tanks. The command area of this tank is 126 ha. This tank also has three sluices. The preponderant caste in this village are *Vanniars* or *gounders*, the dominant caste in this village are *Naidu* caste. The command area of SVP tank extends to the neighbouring village of Gokulapuram.

Mudaliar, traditionally weaving community is the only caste that lives in Gokulapuram. Unlike TVN, there were no *vaikal maniyam* for SVP tank.

In SVP, there was a tradition of *pass vari* – which means water distribution tax. Few of the families who had lands in the command area paid this tax. These families had the right over the fish and other resources of the tank. The *vanniars* who constitute the majority in the village have seven divisions or lineage called *Kothus*. Each *kothu* was headed by a *natamai*. This village institution of *natami* managed the resources of the tank. These persons would take the initiatives to make requests to the PWD officials to release water for their tank. The revenue generated from the resources of the tank was managed by one of *natami* or the panchayat president and was utilized for the general welfare of the village, like organizing feasts during festival times, temple related activities, meeting the needs for the infrastructure in the village. The command area farmers maintain the distribution canal from the sluices by themselves on requirement; the initiatives are taken by the *natamais* who have the land in the command area.

In SVP, similar to that of TVN politically influential persons holding land in the command area were presidents of the FO.

During March 2004, the elections for the managing committee of the water users association of TVN and SVP tanks were held. In this case, one WUA for the both the tank is said to have designed by the PWD and order were passed to conduct the elections. The command area of both the tanks were divided into four governing division each. And the divisions were numbered from one to eight. Nominations were invited by the PWD for the post of president of the WUA and for the members of the managing committee representing the respective divisions. The main eligibility to file their nomination for any of the posts is one should be a command area farmer holding *patta* (legal documents for the land) in their name. Voter list¹ were made, the eligible voters were the holders of the *patta*.

The elections process had been vigorous in TVN. There was contestation for the post of president and for the members of the managing committee (MC). There were two candidates from TVN contesting for the post of president, both from the same *Udayar* caste and as well from the same political party affiliation. The reason for the contestation was personal differences between the two candidates. Both of them deployed their respective candidates for post of members of the managing committee. The opposing candidates spent money during the election campaign. The candidate who won the president post spent one lakh rupees (2127 US \$). He expresses that it would have been a prestige issue if he had been defeated in the election. Of the four members of the MC who won in TVN, one of them hails from the hereditary of the *vaikal maniyam* of west way sluice of the tank, belonging to the *Udayar* caste. Of the four member of MC three are *Udayar* and one from the *Vanniar* caste. The four members of MC and the president are active members of the political parties at the local level¹⁰. Whereas in SVP four members of the MC were unanimously elected for the respective

1- According the list prepared by the village administrative officer during November 2003, TVN had 629 voters and SVP had 400 voters.

governing divisions of the command area. Three of them are the *natamais* of SVP and the fourth is a politically influential person from Goukulapuram.

The PWD in addition to the conduct of the elections for the president and MC of the WUA, they also formed sub-committee for finance, work, water-management and monitoring. The local officials of the PWD express that under the government orders the WUA and the sub-committees were formed. According to them as there are no funds that are provided for the WUA, it is difficult for the WUA to become active. Moreover, they feel after the conduct of the elections and formation of WUA, there has not been any substantial activities that has happened pertaining to the functioning of the WUA.

In the case of Tank WUA of TVN and SVP, prior to this formation, the respective villagers managed the tanks and its resources. The resources such as grass inside the tank that is used for thatching the roofs of the huts, fishes in the tank, trees inside and in the tank bund. In the first year after the formation of the WUA, the president of the WUA, under his authority auctioned the grass of SVP Tank, the villagers of SVP also auctioned the grass of their tank. This created a conflicting situation between the villagers of the SVP and the president of the WUA who is from TVN. More over the MC members of SVP were in the favour of their villages, as the MC members of SVP are the supporters of the opponent who contested for the post of president and lost. As the result the WUA president lost the race in regard to the grass auction. This year again, the villagers of SVP auctioned themselves the trees in the tank bund and paid an amount to the PWD that was transferred to WUA account. This amount was utilised by the WUA president to pay back the pending amount on the previous years grass auction. The other issue that is concerning the MC members of SVP is the non-compliance of the WUA president regarding the repair of the sluices of SVP tank. When they approach the PWD regarding this, they express that the PWD officials wanted the request to come through the WUA president.

On the other hand, the WUA president is petitioning the district administration, the PWD, the state administration regarding the repair of the canal that distributes water from the west-side sluice of the TVN tank. He also expresses his inability to utilise the *vathu kuthagai* funds for this purpose due to the factional dispute within TVN. Owing to the confrontation of the earlier village panchayat president the *vathu kuthagai* was not held for past five years. The new panchayat president has taken initiatives to hold the *vathu kuthagai*, but ambiguity prevails over the authority and access to utilise the funds generated out of it.

The contention of the farmers of the command area of TVN is that the traditional *vaikal maniyam* were dedicated, their main priority rendered benefits to the villagers; like clearing the distribution canals from the tank for the benefit of the command area farmers, judicial utilisation of resources like fish, grass, fire wood from the trees for the direct benefit of villagers in general. The villagers respected the *vaikal maniyams*; for clearing the distribution canal, all the command farmers would render physical labour when an announcement is made. And in regard to clearing the supply canal, representation will be made from all the households in the village. In SVP, though there were no *vaikal maniyam* but it is said that a similar trend prevailed by the initiatives

taken by the *natamais* of the village. But neither the farmers nor the villagers are satisfied with their approaches, as they feel that are not able to see the commitment that was there with the *vaikal maniyams* in the president and the members of the WUA.

TO CONCLUDE..

The state's interventions remain very peripheral that is indeed not enough to shape the processes of the WUAs in the study tanks, as expressed by Mollinga as in the case of AP, which was the pioneering state in regard to PIM implementation in India. Be it the case in AP; the Act that is adopted in TN is similar to that of AP, so from the experience of AP, TN has to make early correction in the process so that the defects that has occurred in AP could be avoided.

The surface water irrigation in the case of study tanks though not considered the important source of irrigation due to availability of ground water; however, there is substantial number of bore wells in the command area. So the WUA and the TA that are formed do not attempt to regulate or control the irrigation aspects (both surface and ground water), rather their interest is more on the other resources that could generate revenue, and thus the competition for positions in the MC and EC in the associations. There is an inherent exemplification of caste, kinship and political party issues that are entangled in all possible combinations under the aegis of the newly introduced irrigation institutions. There are many obvious cases of political indictments exercised by the those in positions in WUA and TA, that affects the

The farmers of the command area themselves take care of the issues regarding water distribution from the tanks. There are spontaneous collective initiatives taken by the farmers who do not have own bore wells, for cleaning the distribution canal from the tank without depending the WUA. The representatives of the WUA of the study tank in TN do not give priority unlike the traditional representation for the canal that existed earlier.

Moreover in the study tanks, the cropping pattern and farming practices are also not in the agenda of the WUA. The reason for this is again the prevalence of independent access to ground water.

With the existing approaches that is witnessed amongst the TA and WUA in the study areas, I envisage that both the TA and WUA would exist, but they would remain only in the state's administrative records. There has to be a revitalisation in the social orientation and mobilisation to be undertaken, to create awareness and the importance of these associations amongst the water users. Reminisces of the Traditional Irrigation institution should be imbibed amongst the water users. Only then these associations would become institutions in the future.

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