

TAMIRABARANI RIVER SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter has dealt with Tamirabarani river system. It has brought out all the tributary rivers. There are number of anaicuts across the tributary rivers. These anaicuts and rivers are great born to the people who live along the Tamirabarani river. Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli are the two districts being benefited by the tributary rivers and the anaicuts. The farmers are benefitted much because of the water flowing from these water bodies. There are a number channels in the Tamirabarani river. The villages which utilize the Tamirabarani river are fertile. They are know for paddy and banana cultivation. Coconut and Palmyra growes are also in abundance in these areas. The water is not only beneficial to the famous, but when it the river confluences into the sea, the marine products also increases in the estuary at punnaikayal. There are a number of forest areas along the course of the river. The animals take shelter in these forests. So in many ways the Tamirabarani river is beneficial to the nature, animals and the people. The much talked about Tamirabarani maha pushkaram is taking place after 144 years along the course of Tamirabarani river in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts from October 11 to 23.

Keywords – Tamirabarani river, Pothigai, Tributary, Anaicuts, Pushkaram festival, cut-stone, Western Ghats, Paddy, fertility, cultivation, benefited.

Introduction

In this chapter describes about the Tamirabarani river system. The origin of the river and its tributaries are explained in the chapter. There are a number of sub anaicuts apart from the main dam Srivaikuntam. The different channels connected with the sub anaicuts are also brought out in the chapter. The Pushkaram festival takes places on twelve major holy rivers corresponding to the Hindu Zodiac signs during the transit of Guru Bhagavan from one Rasi to another. Accordingly Guru Bhagavan moves from Tula to Vrichika Rasi during October 12 and dwell in the same rasi for 12 days until October 23. Lakhs of devotees from across the state would take part in the event.

Meaning and Origin of the Name Tamirabarani

In Sanskrit 'tamra' means either "copper" or "red", and the second half of the word is identified variously with parna, "a leaf" or "a tree" and varna, "colour". Hence it is called as "The copper coloured river" or "the river of the red leaves".

Tamirabarani river originates from the peak of the Periya Pothigai hills of the Western Ghats above Papanasam in the Ambasamudram taluk. Prior to the bifurcation of the Tirunelveli district Tamirabarani was the only major river in Tamil Nadu which had its source and end in the same district. After bifurcation, the river traverses the two districts Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi before joining the Gulf of Mannar in the Bay of Bengal at Punnaikayal near Thoothukudi.

These rivers join the Tamirabarani and enrich its course before it reaches the plains. The first tributary which enriches the water of the Tamirabarani in the plains on the right side is the Manimutharu. Then comes the Gadanathi, which joins the Tamirabarani at Tiruppudaimaruthur. Before the Gadanathi's entry into the Tamirabarani, the Gadanathi is joined by the rivers Kallar, Karunaiyar and Veeranathi or Varahanathi which joins the river Gadanathi about 1.5 km north east of Kila Ambur. The river Pachaiyar is another tributary which joins the Tamirabarani near Tharuvai village in Palayamkottai Taluk. One of the important and affluent tributaries of the Tamirabarani is the Chitrathi which arises in the Courtalam hills and receives supply from the rivers Gundar, Hanumanathi and Karuppanathi. The Chithar empties itself into the Tamirabarani in Sivalapperi village.

The Tamirabarani rises on a noble conical mountain called Pothigai, more commonly called Pothiyam or Pothiya-ma-malai, the meaning of which is probably "a place of concealment", as will be explained below. Locally it is called Periya Pothigai or the great Pothigai, to distinguish it from a smaller mountain adjoining it called Aindu-talai Pothigai, the Pothigai with the five heads. This mountain is the highest in the Tirunelveli range of ghats, being 6,800 feet in height, and is regarded by native poets as the distinguishing mountain of the Pandyas, one of the titles of the Pandya King being "Lord of Pothiyam". This mountain stands back nearly ten miles from the rest of the mountains of the range, so that the Tamirabarani which takes its rise upon it drains a considerable extent of mountain country before it emerges into the plains.

Course of Tamirabarani River

It is in the Western Ghats that all the rivers of the district take their rise. Tamirabarani, the chief river of the district, drains an area of about 1,750 miles and from its source in the Periya Pothigai to its mouth in the Gulf of Mannar is 715 miles long. Possessing in the ghats alone a catchment area of 200 miles, it enjoys the full benefit of both the monsoons, and its bed is never dry. For some miles the stream flows with a rapid current through a densely wooded valley, till it precipitates itself over a ledge of rock about 100 feet high, thence, by a succession of rapid falls, amounting in the aggregate to 100 feet it reaches, after receiving

the Peyar and Ullar on its left, over which the water falls in the magnificent cascade. At the foot of this fall the river is joined on the right by the Pambar, which rises in the Singampatti Zamindari, and a mile and a half further down, at the lowest end of the Kattalaimalai estate, the Karaiyar flows in on the left.

From Papanasam eastward to its mouth at Punnaikayal on the Gulf of Mannar, a course of about 60 miles, the fall of the river gradually decreases from an average of about six feet a mile, in the Ambasamudram taluk, to less than half that figure after the Srivaikuntam taluk is reached. Its general depth, in times of normal flood, diminishes from 15 feet, in Ambasamudram, to 6 feet, below the Srivaikuntam anaicut, as the breadth of its bed increases from about 300 feet, in the Ambasamudram taluk, to more than a quarter of a mile, below Alwarthirunagari, some 12 miles from the sea.

Tamirabarani System

Tamirabarani would be an important river in any district and in Tirunelveli its importance is enhanced by the contrast presented by the lands it irrigates to those situated near it but beyond its influence. Of all the rivers south of Madras that have their source in the Western Ghats, the Tamirabarani and the Cauvery alone obtain the full benefit of the south-west monsoon; and, though insignificant as regards its length and the area of its catchment basin, the Tamirabarani is for its size probably the most valuable river in the presidency.

On 94 percent of the area which it irrigates two crops are raised in all good years, and the richest lands, for instance, those lying on the upper reaches of the Kannadiyan, Kodagan and Palaiyan channels, produce annually over two tons of rice on acre. Many of them bear a double crop assessment of Rs. 2280 an acre, a rate unknown elsewhere in the presidency. Under the seven upper anaicuts remissions are very rare, and even during the famine of 1876-1877 the Tamirabarani gave a bountiful supply.

As paddy growing land the valley derives much of its fertility from its subsoil of stiff yellow clay, which effectually preventing all soakage, keeps the water, vegetable matter and manure in suspension near the surface. The surface soil is mostly a light black loam, the exceptions being chiefly in eastern parts of the Tiruchendur and Srivaikuntam taluks, where sand predominates.

Eight anaicuts span the river, all of which, except the lowest, at Srivaikuntam, are ancient works; but as to when and by whom they were built, nothing unfortunately is known.

The "Tamirabarani system" is as a rule included in the irrigation supplied by a number of tributaries, chiefly the Ramanadhi, Gatananadhi, Koraiyar and Jambunadhi, which join the main river within the Ambasamudram taluk.

From the eight anaicuts named above water is conveyed to the fields, either by the direct means of channels or through tanks. Under the first two anaicuts almost all the irrigation is direct, and under the middle anaicuts, the fourth to the sixth, small tanks, most of which require several fillings in a season, are used to irrigate about an equal extent with channels. In the Marudur and Srivaikuntam areas channels account for only one-third of the irrigation; tanks become more capacious, and a few of them, if once filled, can hold enough water to bring a crop to maturity.

Anaicuts on Tamirabarani

There are eight anaicuts on the Tamirabarani, seven of which were constructed before the arrival of the English in Tirunelveli. They are :

1. The Kodaimelalagiyan Anaicut or Talaiyanai Anaicut and channels north and south sides.
2. The Nadhiyunni Anaicut and channel or north side.
3. The Kannadiyan Anaicut and channel or south side.
4. The Ariyanayakapuram Anaicut and channel or north side.
5. The Palavur Anaicut and channel or south side.
6. The Suttamalli Anaicut and channel or north side.
7. The Marudur Anaicut with channel, on both sides of the river.

There are also four channels without anaicuts for supplying tanks in high freshes, all below Marudur.

Kodaimelalagiyan Anaicut or Talaiyanai Anaicut

The highest of these is rather a dam than an anaicut. It is called, however, by the natives as Talaiyanai, the head or first anaicut. The river after descending the Papanasam falls passes through a narrow gorge, which is partially blocked up by huge boulders and a reef of rock. In the rock holes have been cut in which posts, for the most part of palmyra trees, have been inserted, and against these cross bars with brushwood have been placed. Water is thus supplied for the channels. It has, however, two good channels, one on the north ten miles long, and the other to the south, six miles, ending in tanks.

Nadhiyunni Anaicut

A few miles above Ambasamudram is the next anaicut called, the Nadhiyunni, which raises the level of the river. Like most ancient works of its class, it stands, as do the next six anaicuts below it, at an oblique angle to the course of the river. Built on rock, it gives off one channel only, on the left bank of the river, which irrigates the villages of Kila Ambasamudram, Mela Ambasamudram, Brahmadesam, Urkad and Sattapattu. The length of the anaicut proper is 468 feet, though it is difficult to distinguish where the anaicut ends. The channel is about twelve miles long, and revenue derived from it about Rs. 12,968 from 1,119 acres of land.

Kannadiyan Anaicut

The next barrier, about a mile and a half away is the Kannadiyan Anaicut, just below the junction of the Manimutharuu with the Tamirabarani. It was rebuilt by Captain Horsley in 1842 and has lately undergone extensive repair. It is a carefully built cut-stone work, nine feet high with a top width of six feet and is supported on a foundation of solid rock, The channel takes off from the right or southern bank of the river.

Its length is twenty-two miles, and the land so good under it that at Cheranmahadevi, the residence of the Sub-Collector, the land sells at Rs. 2,500 to Rs. 3,000 an acre. Revenue on 9,574 acres is Rs. 1,79,812.

Ariyanayakapuram Anaicut

The Ariyanayakapuram anaicut situated six miles below, supplies the Kodagan channel to the north of the river. Its name, which is also that of the village in which it is situated, suggests a Nayakkan origin. Its head-sluiice was built in 1877. Length of Anaicut 2,289 feet. The channel is about ten miles long, and the revenue is on 1,131 acres, Rs. 18,043 or Rs. 16 (nearly) per acre, in the Sub-Collectorate, and 4,302 acres under the Collector, Rs. 10 per acre, which would be Rs. 43,020 or a total of Rs. 61,063.

Palavur Anaicut

Seven miles below, anaicut is formed with several different sections of cut-stone, the original section having a perpendicular drop on the apron. The length of the anaicut is 2,532 feet. It has a very fine large channel twenty-six miles long, and supplies water to fifty-four tanks, terminating below Palayamkottai. The cultivation consists of 2,865 acres, with a revenue of Rs. 54,688.

Suttamalli Anaicut

This Anaicut is in two portions divided by a rock, and has one channel on the northern side. The southern portion, as may be seen from the plan, has quite a different section from the northern. A very large breach was repaired in 1855, at a cost of Rs. 2,527 in the southern portion. The channel is fourteen miles long; it then branches into two, one flowing for two miles further, the other supplying several tanks. This channel runs into the town of Tirunelveli. The acreage under the channels is about 1,806 acres, with a revenue of Rs. 32,995.

Marudur Anaicut

Eighteen miles below and twenty-seven from the sea, is the last and the largest anaicut on the river is Marudur Anaicut. It is of a curious horse-shoe shape, with curve up the river, and is of several quite different sections, swing to repairs being made at different times. There is an east as well as a west channel, and the former one has a head sluice to it. At the head of the south channel is a very large calingulah of beautifully cut-stone work.

The whole length of the anaicut is 4,028 feet. There are nine sand sluices on the body of the work. The channels can hardly be counted by length, as they run in and out of several of the largest tanks in the collectorate, both on the north and south side. The last tank on the south side being the Kadamba, and on the north the Peruncollum. The total number of acres under cultivation on both sides is 14,400, giving a Revenue Rs. 1,77,000.

Keelpadagay Channel

Keelpadagay channel on the north side has a head-sluiice in position where the head sluice of the Srivaikuntam north channel will be, and the new channel follows the same course for about two and a half miles. It supplies the large tank of Arumugamangalam, and has a cultivation of about 1,347 acres, and a revenue of Rs.16,611.

Korkai Channel

The head-sluiice of Korkai channel is nearly opposite to Yeral. The channel supplies the tank at Korkai. The revenue is about Rs. 10,856 and has a cultivation of about 1,064 acres.

Tentirupperai Channel

This channel has 115 acres and a revenue of about Rs.1,860.

Athur Channel

The head-sluice is six miles below Srivaikuntam on the southern bank, and the channel supplies the Athur tank. The revenue is Rs. 20,429 and 1,854 acres. When the Srivaikuntam project is carried out, these channels will all be supplied from the anaicut.

The revenue under the anaicuts and channels is as follows amounting in a total to Rs. 5,68,282. It shows the revenue for one year.

Pushkaram Festival

The much talked about Thamirabarani Maha Pushkaram is taking place after 144 years along the course of Thamirabarani river in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts from October 11 to 23. The Pushkaram festival takes places on twelve major holy rivers corresponding to the Hindu Zodiac signs during the transit of Guru Bhagavan from one Rasi to another. Accordingly Guru Bhagavan moves from Tula to Vrichika Rasi during October 12 and dwell in the same rasi for 12 days until October 23. Lakhs of devotees from across the state would take part in the event. As many as 18 places in Tirunelveli and 6 places in Thoothukudi district has been identified as safe for devotees to offer worship during the festival.

Conclusion

In this chapter has explained the birth of Tamirabarani at Pothigai hills. The river is considered saved by the Hindus. The formers and the people who live along the river have great regard for this river. The sweetness of the river is true and these who are used to drink this water would not find the save with that of Couvery or Vaigai river water. The prepared chapter has brought out the details of varioius falls and tributary rivers also among the falls, courtallam falls are very important. Thousands of people through to Courtallam every year to have holy bath in the falls. There are good number of anaicuts also mentioned in this chapter. So this chapter gives a full picture of river Tamirabarani.

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