

SRIVAIKUNTAM ANICUT – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Tamil Nadu is gifted with several perennial rivers like Cavery, Palar, Pannar, Vaigai, Kodaiyar and Tamirabarani. Among these, the Tamirabarani is the chief source of irrigation and generation in Tirunelveli district. Highly advanced civilisation is said to have flourished in Tirunelveli district on the bank of Tamirabarani river. Archaeological excavation at Adichanallur, situated on the bank of Tamirabarani River near Karunkulam village in Srivaikuntam taluk.

Keywords

Tamirabarani, Adichanallur, Anicut, Archaeological Excavation, Sepoy Mutiny.

Introduction

The first step taken by the British administration for irrigation in Tirunelveli district was the construction of Srivaikuntam anicut. The project was suggested in 1885 by W.H. Horsely who prepared the first estimate for this project. The scheme provided for building an anicut over the Tamirabarani river at Srivaikuntam with main channels designed both for irrigation to Tuticorin on the north and Kulasekarapatnam on the south and with same branch channels to feed numerous chain of tanks.

In 1842 to 1848, Mr. E.B. Thomas was the collector of Tirunelveli who assured the government that the lands, which were poorly irrigated, on the support of Marudur anicut would surely give a good yield in the event of constructing an anicut near Srivaikuntam and a large tract of land would be benefited by direct irrigation. This led to the implementation of the Srivaikuntam anicut scheme. The estimate amounted to Rs. 3,80,000 and included a bridge over the anicut as well as a provision of a supply of fresh drinking water to the town of Tuticorin. Though the money was sanctioned, the work did not commence until May 1862, owing to the outbreak of the Sepoy mutiny in 1857 and the British government's concentration in the political problem. The mutiny interrupted the execution of the Srivaikuntam project. After the mutiny of 1857, peace prevailed and work for the construction of this anicut resumed.

As soon as the mutiny was over, the British government in India came under the direct supervision of the crown Lord Canning, the first viceroy of India wanted to secure the goodwill of the Indians. Therefore, he concentrated in the development of agriculture, irrigation and other land reforms.

As such, many parts of India began to develop in Srivaikuntam also; the construction of this work was then going gradually. In 1823, the Madras government submitted the final and fifth revised estimate amounting to Rs. 14,96,809.

Mr. Grant, esq. Dist. Engineer, Tirunelveli referred the compensation for land procurement. The construction of the anicut was particularly gaining momentum during 1870-71.

The construction of the Srivaikuntam anicut took more or less twenty years to complete as many obstacles were on the way. The work began properly in 1868 from the very commencement of the work repeated damages occurred owing to heavy floods. In November and December 1869 due to heavy floods, much damage was caused to the anicut works. They were repaired at a cost of Rs. 31,974. During the Northeast monsoon of 1869, the works then progress suffered serious damage. The embankment of river

breached. Not only natural disaster but also political cause. The construction of the anicut was completed in 1889. It irrigates more than 12,000 acres of land in Srivaikuntam and Tiruchendur taluks. This anicut is situated 16 miles from the sea. The river rises in the Western Ghats and though comparatively a small stream drives its importance from the fact that it receives a supply from both monsoons. The seven anicuts in Tamirabarani above Shreevaikootam are of old native construction.

The height of the anicut crest above mean sea level is 37.40 feet while the sills of head sluices of the main canals are 6 feet. The length of the anicut is 1,380 feet. The water of Tambraparni river meet at gulf of Mannar near the ancient port of Korkai in Srivaikuntam taluk.

Srivaikuntam taluk as at present constituted dates from 1911. In that year the southern, half of the areas, which had borne this name, were made separate taluk. Tiruchendur the remainder with the addition from the old Ottapitaram taluk. Tuticorin formed the new taluk of Srivaikuntam. It comprises the usual variety of soil, cultivation and scenery, nearly one fifth of the total cultivatable area is under cultivator, most of which is supplied by the Tambraparani. The rain fed tanks, numbering 133 and commanding an average area of less than 40 areas each, are found in the north and in the south west of the taluk. Palmyras are abound in all the dry lands and are most plentiful in the eastern parts. The existing bridge was built in 1890 by the district board.

The water in the kadamba tank standing 3 ½ feet on the puriur sluiced floor the delta superintendent was directed to fill upto Ammanpuram and lower tanks but he was prevented from doing so by the villages at Tentiruperi holding lands under kadamba tank Who collected the Maravers and help sluice against all comers.

Mr. Hughes proceeded the puriur to open the sluice where Mr.Hutchings was mobbed housed, and prevented from letting down water, the villagers taking away the sluice hurdes. The Tashildar and police were set for and the villagers consented to let the sluice be opened. In 1842 to 1848, Mr. E.B. Thomas was the collector of Tirunelveli.

As the prevailing condition necessitated revision of the estimate, an officer was deputed in 1866 to assess the revised estimate. He observed that the average quantity passing waste to the sea over Srivaikundam anicut the last anicut on the river, during the proceeding twenty years amounted 47,274 millions of the cubic feet or sufficient to irrigate 236,000 acres and that this fact indicated the need for large reservoirs the government concurred in his opinion and directed that arrangements be made for the necessary investigation.

In the year 1867, Puckle the collector of Tirunelveli District urged very strongly for the immediate execution of the work. In September 1867 the revised estimate for the project, Captain H.L. Pendergost R.E. prepared amounting to Rs 75,000.

Since Tamirabarani is a major river of Tirunelveli it irrigates lands in Ambasamudram, Tirunelveli, Srivaikundam and Tiruchendur talks in a favourable year the south west monsoon generally commences at the end of May and continues till August. This is called Saral or Kar season in this district generally there will be good shower in the hills, which will bring in moderate freshes in rivers paddy is raised on lands irrigated by those rivers in June and July and harvested to some extend in November. Sometimes scarcity of water is felt in August. Dry crops are also raised from May to August with the aid of rain. If the showers are good and timely, the cultivation of day crops is beneficial and profitable.

The northeast monsoon commences in October and continues till December. This is called the Pishanam the plentiful season. It is during this seasons has rainfed tanks should receive a good supply. The lands under riverfed sources are cultivated with paddy from October and December and harvested from February and April. Dry crops are raised in almost all the arable dry lands as soon as the first rains set in. A

short-term paddy known as Kar, Samba, Kuruvai is chiefly shown in Kar season. A long-term paddy known as anaikomban, Ikkisamba, Sembuli etc is shown in pishanam season.

A third wet crop of short duration is attempted in some places on wet lands relying on the supply in the irrigation sources and moderate showers in March and April.

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