CHAPTER V

CASE STUDY IN IRRIGATION MANAGEMENT
BY PANCHAYAT INSTITUTIONS
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TAMILNADU

Under the provisions of the Tamilnadu Village Panchayat Act of 1958, the Panchayat Unions in Tamilnadu have been vested with functions of maintenance and repair of minor irrigation works irrigating an ayacut below 100 acres. In order to study the implementation of this provision of law in Tamilnadu, a case study was conducted of the Sriperumbudur Panchayat Union in the Chengai - Anna District of Tamilnadu. This district was chosen for several reasons:

1. tank irrigated area in this district accounts for a relatively large proportion of total irrigated area (63.80%);
2. the district also accounts for highest proportion of total tanks irrigated area in the State (22.22%);
3. its proximity to Madras city facilitated the study.

Sriperumbudur, about 40 km west of Madras City is also the Taluk headquarters of the Sriperumbudur Taluk. Two villages - Ekanapuram and Chellampattidai - in the Ekanapuram and Chellampattidai Village panchayats, at a distance of about 20-26 kms from Sriperumbudur were visited to study the role of the Village Panchayat and the farmers in irrigation management, as well as to observe tank irrigation.

For the case study, interviews were conducted with farmers in the two villages, traditional informal village leaders or elders, former taliaris, panchayat Presidents of both the village panchayats officials at the panchayat Union - the Union Engineer, the Assistant Seeds Officer and the Extension Officers for Social Forestry and Panchayats; the Tahsildar and Deputy Tahsildar at the Taluk Officer; the Assistant Engineer of the Public Works Department at the Taluk level, and the Assistant Director Agriculture at Beemanthangal.

Relevant records at the Taluk office and Panchayat Union as well as village registers were studied.

The information gathered from these sources is presented below to give a representative view of the situation on the ground.

Ekanapuram Village

This small village is situated about 10 miles north east of Kanchipuram in Chinglepet (now Chengai-Anna) District, Sriperumbudur Taluk and Panchayat Union, Tamilnadu. The nearest railway station is seven miles away, the nearest metalled road three miles away. It is the main village of Ekanapuram panchayat, with a population of 1715, constituting of 365 households.

The village has a middle school and a post office; there is no panchayat building even though the Panchayat President (a young man in his early thirties) lives here. The village has drinking water facilities - one hand pump, seven wells with one of them having an overhead tank, with piped water
supply. The nearest market is five kilometers away. The villagers feel the lack of a library in their village. The village also has three temples. All the residents of the village belong to the Hindu Community, and one from only two castes - Vanniyars, and Harijans.

According to the villagers' calculation, there were 300 households of the former and 200 households of the latter caste, making a total of 500 families, whereas the village register shows that in 1987, there were 365 households, comprising 200 belonging to the Vanniyar caste and 165 belonging to the Harijan caste.

Agriculture and Irrigation

The village is composed mostly of small and marginal farmers. The largest holding is 12 acres. The total area available for cultivation in the village is 441.31 acres, of which 402.53 acres are under wet cultivation, and 38.78 acres are under dry cultivation. The villagers state that except for 20 households, all families in the village have some land, under one or the other irrigation source. There are a total of 583 holdings - of which 500 are single holdings; of this group, the smallest holding is 3.4 cents (100 cents = 1 acre) while the largest holding is 12 acres. There are 83 joint holdings, of which the smallest is 3 cents and the largest is 2.10 acres. Thus almost the whole village is engaged in cultivation.

Paddy is the major crop. Groundnut, chillies and some vegetables are also grown. Eucalyptus has also been planted on a small scale. While almost 80% of the land cultivated under the tanks is capable of raising two crops, the villagers state that during the last five years only a single crop was taken because of water shortage. However the village register shows double cropping to this extent up to 1986. Judging by the condition of the tanks, the villagers' claim may not be baseless. It is also widely accepted that the data in revenue records leaves much room for accuracy.

Irrigation sources

There are five irrigation sources in this village. All are tanks. The village records state that there are two irrigation wells in the village. However the villagers report that there are none, as it is not possible to dig wells in this locality, since there is rock formation to a depth of 125-130 feet. (According to information given by the Agricultural Extension Department attached to the Panchayat Union, only one of 13 Firkas in the Sriperumbudur Taluk have well irrigation. This is an almost totally tank fed area)

Three of the five tanks in the village are the major sources - Kalieri, Kaddappanthangal, and Vaiyaleri. The other two are Sadithangal and Kanakkanthangal, which are totally rainfed tanks together irrigating 66.84 acres (48.24 + 18.60 respectively). Kalieri irrigates 111.26 acres, Kaddappanthangal 69.7 acres and Vaiyaleri 149.8 acres. Since all tanks up to 50 acres ayacut have been transferred (since six years ago) to the PWD, all these tanks are with the PWD. According to the farmers, the area irrigated by these tanks is slightly different - 125, 75 and 155 acres respectively.
The Kalieri has as its source an inlet channel coming from an anicut constructed across the Palar River in North Arcot District. The inlet channel is 1 km away from the village. The surplus from this tank flows into Kadappanthangal which also receives rainfall from its catchment area. The surplus water from Kaddapanthangal flows into a stream which feeds the Kuvam Tank, which is a ‘stop tank’ receiving the surplus waters (in times of flood) from all the tanks in the vicinity.

**Condition of the Tanks and Repairs**

All the farmers interviewed, expressed much concern about the condition of the tanks. A personal investigation by this researcher confirmed the need for concern. While the Kalieri is near the habitation, the Vaiyaleri is 1 km away from the village and the Kadappanthangal 1 1/2 kms away.

The bunds of the tanks were thickly overgrown with shrub and trees, so that the sluices could hardly be located at first sight. (The trees however are a source of revenue to the Panchayat Union). Two of the three sluices of Vaiyaleri were damaged, and the villagers had constructed make shift sluices of mud and hay packed tightly. Because of silting, the inlet side of the tank had become high ground and water flowed in only from one side. The farmers regretted that many of their petitions to the Collector to desilt the tank at least at the inflow side, went unanswered. As a result of this condition, water which ought to flow into the tanks was escaping outside. However, the farmers had made their own arrangements to dam this water (makeshift earth dam remade every year at a cost of Rs. 200 ) and were, with remarkable cooperation, irrigating all the lands under the tank.

Because of this situation, farmers were only able to raise one crop—navarai, (which was a short term crop commencing in December/January). If the breach was closed, and tank improved, they could easily get two crops.

On the day of the visit, the farmers had a meeting at which they decided that paddy would be raised, not by transplantation, which requires standing water for the seedlings, but by sowing in furrows, which fill with rainwater after a few showers during the month. The meagre supply of water in the tank would be reserved for critical period watering. If there is not enough water for even a single crop, the water is left for the cattle. This has occurred four times in the last 10 years.

The Kadappanthangal according to the farmers has been almost totally dry in the last 10 years, except some rainfall catchment. This was because Kalieri, its source had not filled up even once in the last 20 years. When full, it provided irrigation for 3 months.

The Kalieri has been reduced to a pond; its bunds are also in a bad condition, and sluices, needing repair. The inlet channels of all three tanks need to be cleared. While the farmers assert that no repairs have been done by the PWD or any of the tanks for the last 8 years, (8 years ago, desilting and bund improvement was done to Kalieri) the registers maintained by the Assistant Executive Engineer’s office at Sriperumbudur Taluk record that a single sluice (No.3) of Vaiyaleri was repaired in 1985/86 at a cost
of Rs. 40,862, while two sluices and Flood Damage Repairs were executed for Kalieri at a total cost of Rs. 42,424.

The farmers on the other hand, were by common contributions at Rs. 10 per acre, raising at least Rs. 2000 per year to have channels cleared; about 50 people worked twice a year to complete this work and were paid wages by the farmer's committee. Besides this, they were spending Rs. 200 minimum for remaking their earth dam at Vaiyaleri.

**Distribution of Water**

Farmers were also cooperating in the distribution of water, and in deciding the cropping pattern. There was a committee of 6 members. The membership on this committee was hereditary; and they represented 6 'groups' in the village - that is, family groupings. The committee met at least once a month, more often during the sowing seasons; the committee members would personally assess the level of water in the tank, and decide how much total area can be irrigated, as well as how much of this land each farmer can irrigate. These decisions were arrived at by consensus, and were followed implicitly by all the farmers, even if their own areas were to be restricted, because the allocations were made with strict fairness. (When the fish in the tank was auctioned, all the villagers contributed money and bid at the auction. The fish was then distributed in proportion to the contributions. The catch was never sold outside, but was only used for local consumption).

The Village Panchayat as a statutory body has no role in these arrangements. The members there (11 in number) are also all farmers and form part of the farmers body and follow the same regulations. No matters relating to agriculture or irrigation have ever been discussed in the village panchayat, according to its current President.

The panchayat only takes up civic works such as provision of drinking water, lighting, roads etc.

**Encroachments**

The farmers were well aware of the reasons why the tanks have deteriorated, and what needs to be done. They pointed out the extent of encroachment on catchment area of tanks as well as, more importantly, on inlet channels, and also the identity of encroachers - who are not from their own village. (Since the tanks themselves are distant their inlet channels are also distant, bordering on villages above them). The farmers group has no power to deal with this problem, except send complaints to the Revenue Authorities. The Village Panchayat also has no powers to take any action against encroachment. The farmers spelt out the works to be done for each tank as well as an estimate of how much each work would cost.

**Disputes**

Disputes relating to water, which were normally rare, arose sometimes at times of water shortage. These were settled by the committee. The farmers
group (practically, the village) engages *thotties* to manage each sluice, and distribute water. Once authority is given to them, it is rarely questioned. The *thotties* are selected from a group of 10 families belonging to the Scheduled Caste; as many *thotties* as there are sluices are selected. These water distributors are important functionaries for maintenance of discipline. Their rules are unanimously followed. 'Stealing' of water in this village, the farmers claimed, was rare because, the offence would become instantly evident, when any field is seen to be 'wet' out of turn, and the certainty of immediate public exposure (even if done at night, the next morning will 'reveal all') curtails the offence. This is possible because of the strict and practical order of irrigation followed, executed by the *thotti*.

If the Village Panchayat was given legal powers to protect the tanks and catchment areas, and funds to repair and renovate, it would enable the farmers to make the best possible use of this resource. All the skills, all the interest and all the cooperation that is necessary, is available right here at this level.

Chellampattidai Village

This village, along with its hamlet Elimayinkottur is also situated in the Sriperumbudur Taluk of Chengai - Anna District. Chellampattidai was originally part of Kottur village, but was bifurcated in 1958. Chellampattidai has the majority of the population, and also raises the major part of the revenue, all of which still goes to Kottur Panchayat. This is because even though the village was officially bifurcated, the revenue and village records were not maintained separately for this village during the period of panchayat supercession (1977 - 86). The current Panchayat President has been trying since 1986 to trace the records, and establish the income of the village, but without success. The long period of lack of funds has adversely affected all developmental activities in the village, while at the same time all the revenue and tax proceeds from this village have been going to Kottur.

While there is a bore well and overhead tank since 1976, for the last two and a half years, it has not been functioning because the room which housed the motor collapsed and there are no funds to rebuild it. There have been grants for this village under the rural water supply scheme for the last 3 years; the panchayat building is in a bad condition; the roads are in a bad condition. So are most of the other village amenities.

Population

The village consists of 210 families (1983) while its hamlet Elimiyankottur has 113 families. The population is predominantly Christian. There are several castes such as Harijan, Reddiar and Pillai.

Agriculture and Irrigation

Chellampattidai used to be a flourishing village. Agricultural production was reputed to be high, with the village producing surplus, supplying all the nearby markets with rice, ragi, groundnut, sugarcane and chillies. The village
had a tradition of raising three crops in a year, with water from the village tank as well as 16 small irrigation ponds. These ponds were filled by rainfall from a good catchment which included a hillock. The situation has greatly deteriorated over the last three decades. The village tank - called Kottur Eri - which is filled by the overflow from another tank Konneri two kilometers above it, hardly receives enough inflow now for one crop. The main reason is that the inlet channel originally 20 feet wide, was encroached upon thirteen years ago when the land was divided up into plots for housing. Inflow into the tank is greatly reduced now. Twenty years ago, the village Talaiyari along with two or three farmers went regularly every year to Kuppam, about 3 kms away where the inlet channel commence and spent three to four nights guarding the inflow, when after and during the monsoon, most of the water to the tank used to flow in. If it was not thus protected, some other villagers would divert the water to their own tank. Now however this practice of protecting the inflows is not followed anymore. (The Talaiyari regretted that his son, who should have taken up his duties, is not at all interested; he goes to town to work and does not know anything about the lay of the land). The villagers have protested against the encroachment but were unable to achieve anything as the local political leaders were involved in the giving away of pattas (house sites) to the landless. The villagers claim that it was not only to the landless that the pattas went.

The tank now is more dependent on rainfall; if there is good rain, there would be enough for two crops. But as a rule, now only a single crop is being raised under the tank. The field channels which used to be five feet wide are hardly half the size now. Motor pumpsets started being used seven years ago in the village. Earlier, only lift irrigation was practised from ponds, shallow wells, and channels. However, well irrigation is also very precarious here. No well is deeper than 25-35 feet, because water is not available below that level, since it is rocky. The wells used to receive seepage water from the tank, and with lift irrigation earlier, it was sufficient for supplemental irrigation. Now however, with the tank mostly dry, wells have scarce supply. In the dry season, the motor pumpsets, which number 60 now can be used only for 10-15 minutes at a time. The level of water is so low.

The farmers have thought of some solutions to the problem, but have received no support from the Government so far to their requests. One was to provide another inlet channel to the tank from the Edyarpakkam Eri, the overflow from which was going waste. This tank, with no villages above it, gets a very good supply. If a small madagu (diversion-structure) could be built, and a channel two furlongs long could be dug, there would be good inflow into the village tank. The villagers attempted this in 1972, but had to give it up because of the protest from landholders under that tank. But the farmers believe that with some discussion, and help from the Government, this could be done.

Another alternative proposed by the farmers is the construction of a single massive well, which could be used to feed the tank. Though this idea may seem questionable, it reflects certain realities on the ground. The farmers have
realised that the tank is the only reliable source of irrigation; that individual wells are dependent on the tank for seepage; that well irrigation alone is not sufficient, nor feasible with the rocky terrain as well as the unreliable supply of electricity; that the benefit of motor pumpsets is also curtailed if the tank fails; that filling the tank is of paramount importance for cultivation of the land in the village; that they have been unable to protect the inflows into the tank; the farmers are also considering the possibility of having five or six common wells in one area where water is available. On the whole, however, the plan to divert water from the Edayarapakkam Eri is the one most favoured by the farmers.

*Condition of the Tank and Irrigation Ponds*

The tank was observed to be impressive in structural design and size. There are three sluices to the tank, of which one needed repair. There was an overgrowth of thorn trees on the bund, and the water in the tank was reduced to a pond. The first field under a sluice had been converted into a brick kiln. The distributory channels, though much reduced in size allegedly, were kept clear of weeds and silt. The irrigation ponds dotting the village were being shared by ten or fifteen families each. Around each there was a very thick growth of thorn and other shrubs making passage difficult. The families were cooperating to keep the ponds clear of silt; they spend Rs. 500 to 1000 every year for the purpose. They received no assistance from the Government. On the contrary, every year, about Rs. 3000 was paid as revenue by the pond cultivators alone to Government.

Prior to 1982, the village tank was an “ex-zamin tank” under the control of revenue authorities. In 1982 it was taken over by the PWD, and since then only twice have some repairs been done to the tank bund and sluices.

*Distribution of Water*

As in every village with a tank, this village too has its own informal arrangements for distribution of water. Every year, two vettiyan (traditional village general-purpose functionaries) out of a group of ten families who traditionally take turns for the work, are chosen for the job of distribution of water. A function used to be organised in the village for the handing over the charge to the new vettiyan by the previous year’s vettiyan. They would go in a procession with pipes and drums, stopping at every household (with land under the tank) and at homes of village elders to receive good wishes as well as promises of cooperation in water sharing. The procession would then reach the church compound. Here the old and new vettiyan would exchange betel leaves as a token of handing over charge. New clothes would also be presented to them, purchased with money contributed from all the landed villagers.

The function would be celebrated on an auspicious day. From that day, water distribution would be strictly implemented by the vettiyan; the farmers subject themselves to this discipline, as this is an institution created by themselves for their own benefit. The farmers claimed that no major disputes
arose regarding water; the smaller disputes would be referred by the vettiyan to the village elders who would settle them.

This cooperation is much eroded today, as a result of the deterioration of the water level in the tank. Where there was round-the-year (three crops) cultivation, the internal arrangements were a necessity. Now with water hardly sufficient for a single crop, farmers have lost the cooperation they once had, having to seek independent means such as well irrigation - for cultivation. Since even that was not successful, more and more villagers were seeking means of livelihood outside the village. The President of the village panchayat reported that nearly every family in the village had at least one person going to work outside the village.

The vettiyans now are occupied with other work in the village - such as beating drums on festival days; applying fertilisers and pesticides for each cultivator, removing dead cattle from the village, and other odd jobs.

Irrigation responsibilities also continue such as closing the sluices during rains, and regulating water supply when available in the tank.

Conclusion

Chellampattidai is ideally placed naturally to be a prosperous village. It is fully dependent on tank irrigation, from which there had been enough supply to raise three crops a year thirty years ago. Being a zamindari tank it seems to have had a better record earlier of good maintenance and upkeep. Since that patronage was abolished, no alternative support has been given to the village community to maintain the tank. The villagers have no power to control encroachments and the inflow into the tank is severely limited. Well irrigation is not reliable; electricity supply is erratic, and the wells receive no seepage. Agriculture has dwindled. Cooperation among farmers has become eroded. Most of the villagers are seeking employment outside the village. The village is also starved of funds for other developmental activities because of official negligence in completing the bifurcation of records from Kottur from which it separated in 1958. The village seems to have a hopeless future.

Sriperumbudur Panchayat Union - Irrigation Functions

There are 65 village panchayats in this Panchayat Union, including Ekanapuram and Chellampattidai. The village Panchayat Presidents are members of the Union, the chairman being elected directly on party basis by the total electorate in the Block. The Union also has six nominated members, of which two are women.

Irrigation Functions

The Panchayat Union is in charge of all minor irrigation works and ex-zamin sources. Before Independence, all tanks in this Union were under zamindari tenure. After 1958, the Panchayat Development section was created at the Block level; all tanks irrigating an ayacut upto 100 acres were transferred to Panchayat Unions, while those above that size were taken over by the PWD; of the tanks below 100 acres, several were held by single
pattadars. These were the marginal tanks irrigating between 50 to 100 acres. After land reforms, holding were lessened, the number of holders increased, and these sources were also transferred to Panchayat Unions, to be classed as 'Ex-zamin sources'.

At present, the Panchayat Union has under its charge 93 Minor Irrigation Tanks with a total ayacut of 3405.15 acres and 44 ex-zamin tanks irrigating 3060.15 acres. The Public Works Department on the other hand has under its control 94 tanks irrigating 16905.71 acres.

Table 4 - Irrigation Tanks Under Sriperumbudur Panchayat Union

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor Irrigation Tanks Nos</th>
<th>Ayacut (Acres)</th>
<th>Ex-Zamin Tanks Ayacut (Acres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50-100</td>
<td>Upto 50 Acres</td>
<td>Above 100 Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>3405.15</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>3060.24</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Panchayat Union Records, Sriperumbudur.

Tanks under the Public Works Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Ayacut</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>16905.71 acres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tank Administration by the Panchayat Union

According to the Union Engineer, the officer in charge of the administration of tanks, the management of tanks by the Union is no different from the Public Works Department. The work done by the Union is preparation of estimates and execution of works only; the regulation of water supply and distribution of water, maintenance of channels, and supervision of bunds during rains is unconnected with the Panchayat Union; and is done by pattadars as they have always done.

There has been no transfer of irrigation works to panchayats. Generally only those works for which panchayats also contribute are given over to them. Irrigation however, is fully supported by Government, through the Minor Irrigation Grant and Excess Kudimaramath Grant given to Panchayat Unions. The role of Village Panchayats in irrigation is limited to giving suggestions to the BDO (Block Development Officer) or Panchayat Union Chairman for selection of works or for speeding up execution of repair works.

The Panchayat Union adopts the Cycle System of selection of works of repair. The total number of tanks is divided by five, to give the number to be taken up in a year. The next year, the next lot of tanks will be taken up, and so on. Not all the tanks in the year’s quota will actually have repairs executed. The extent of funds available determine the number ultimately selected, and the pressure applied by individual contractors, local political leaders or Panchayat Presidents determine the location of works.
Works costing more than Rs. 10,000 are ‘Major Works’ and are undertaken by the Public Works Department irrespective of the class of tanks. The Union Engineer is authorised to sanction works up to Rs. 7500 only; his immediate superior is the Assistant Divisional Engineer of the Highways Department whose technical sanction is necessary for works costing above Rs. 7500. All works are done through contractors. No work has so far been given to ayacutdars.

The ‘establishment’ at the Union level consists of the Union Engineer and two Union Overseers. There has been no change in this since 1947. The financial limits to sanction of works by the Union Engineer has also remained unchanged; as a result, because of the tremendous increases in cost of materials since 1947 (about 15 times) many works fall out of the jurisdiction of the Union establishment, and are given to the Public Works or other departments.

In substance, the Union as far as irrigation is concerned, functions only as a subordinate department of the Public Works Department. The presence or absence of village panchayats make very little difference to its functioning. The period of panchayat supersession between 1977 and 1986 made no difference to the pattern of functioning. The source of funds to the Panchayat Union for irrigation works are the Minor Irrigation Grant from Government at the rate of Rs. 2.50 per acre, (The Union receives only Rs. 11,000 per annum from this source), the N.R.E.P. and the R.L.E.G.P, and the special Minor Irrigation Programme under which land is levelled, and surplus weirs are built or repaired for small tanks and ponds to prevent soil erosion.

Records

The Panchayat Union is required by the Rules under the Tamil Nadu Village Panchayat Act 1958 to maintain the Kudimaramath Register and the Tanks Register. The Union does have a Tanks Register - the Minor Irrigation Register which contains a list of the Tanks under its jurisdiction, with their ayacut indicated. The Kudimaramath Register is not maintained at all, as it is not considered ‘necessary’ now. By Government definition, kudimaramath implies a sharing of expenses by Government and farmers, whereby farmers contribute labour or money to works initiated by Government. Now, however, as irrigation works are fully financed by Government, kudimaramath is not considered to be in existence. The work done by farmers in clearing channels, repairing works, keeping watch on bund, etc., which goes on regularly at least for one season every year at the farmer’s expense is not officially recognised as kudimarmath.

Problems associated with Minor Irrigation Works

The Union Engineer pointed out that encroachments on channels and foreshore of tanks is the one major cause of deterioration of not only tank irrigation but also well irrigation. It is the responsibility of the Revenue Department to remove the encroachments and protect the tanks, but this duty is neglected. Whenever such encroachments come to the notice of the Union
Engineer, he informs the Divisional Revenue Officer; according to the Union Engineer, siltation is not the first or main cause for tank decline, but encroachments. Foreshore of tanks is vastly encroached; ayacuts are being converted into plots. Inlet channels are encroached to a great extent; so also are catchment areas. As a result, rainfall is scattered and fields are eroded; the capacity of tanks would be greatly improved if encroachments are removed. The revenue authorities have taken no action in this regard in this Block.

Irrigation Disputes—(Panchayat Union Role)

The Panchayat Union has no role in irrigation disputes.

Revenue Department - Role in Irrigation

The Sriperumbudur Taluk, in which the Sriperumbudur Panchayat Union is included, consists of 217 Revenue villages in 113 village panchayats, 6 Town Panchayats and 2 townships. The Tahsildar’s officer forms the taluk level administrative unit of the Revenue Department.

The Revenue Department’s historical association with irrigation works still continues; collection of land revenue continues to be made with a colonial apparatus which has undergone only one change i.e. hereditary village karnams and munsiffs (village accountant and headman) have been replaced now with Village Administrative Officers - VAOs - who are in charge of three or four villages.

While earlier the Revenue Department shared with the PWD the privileges of maintaining irrigation sources, now the Panchayat Union has been vested with those works which were under the control of the Revenue Department. However, the Revenue Department has to be referred to by departments for information on the tanks, ayacuts, extent of cultivation, current and previous and details regarding assessment in order to draw up estimates for work.

The Revenue Department is involved in irrigation matters in several other ways - all of them related to the basic function of collection of land revenue, much the same way as under the administration of the East India Company and the British Government.

1. Collection of Government Dues/Granting of Remission. Collection of land revenue, and repayments of loans and advances given to agriculturists is the main function of the Department. Remissions of land revenue are granted in cases of general drought or in cases where wet land which has a right to get water from irrigation sources is deprived of water. In such cases, T.K. Remission or Teervai Kammi Remission is granted. In cases of drought, remission to the extent of the difference between wet and dry assessment is granted. Ryots are expected to apply to the Tahsildar in writing, but they generally do not do so, as they are not aware of the provisions. The Revenue Inspector should also send a proposal to the Tahsildar, giving details from records. According to the Tahsildar, no such remissions have been given in this Taluk, even though tanks are known to have become completely dry. Besides land revenue, the
Revenue Department also collects various panchayat taxes, as well as all miscellaneous dues to Government. Betterment levy is also levied and collected by this Department; that is, if an irrigation source is improved at a cost more than Rs. 2.5 lakhs, ryots benefitting from the source are liable to pay betterment levy. The work is executed, the improvement assessed and reported to Government which thereafter orders the levy.

Village Registers are maintained by the VAOs (Village Administrative Officers) in which all information on land - Wet, Dry, Rainfed, Assessed/ Unassessed Waste, poramboke - is updated annually.
Information on land holdings - survey number, assessment payable, identity of Pattadar, crop raised (nature of harvesting, yield etc.) source of irrigation, classification of source - is also recorded. The Government reserves the right to transfer the land from one classification to another.
In administration of land revenue, requests for improving irrigation sources from ryots come up often before revenue authorities. At the annual jamabandis held for every village, representations relating to irrigation works are received, particularly on the last day of the jamabandi, when ryots' conferences are held. Officers from the Public Works Department, Panchayat Union, Harijan Welfare Department etc. are expected to be present at these meetings. If they are, the representations are handed over to them. If not, the Revenue authorities forward such representations to the respective departments.

3. Irrigation Disputes.
Inter-village disputes relating to irrigation are occasionally brought to the notice of the Revenue Inspector and the VAOs, who report to the Tahsildar. The latter settles the dispute on the spot. This authority to settle such disputes is derived from the Board's Standing Orders. No registers are maintained by the Taluk office on disputes. The files are disposed of then and there.

4. At times of floods, when tanks are breached, the Tahsildar's office organizes flood relief measures; the Revenue authorities at the taluk level are responsible for various other functions also - such as administration of the Public Distribution System; disbursement of Old Age Pensions (five categories of pensions); transfer of pattas; Grant of Community, Income and solvency certificates; maintenance of law and order by the Tahsildar in his capacity of Taluk Executive Magistrate; elections; land acquisition for public purposes; dealing with natural calamities, assignment of public land, and taking action against encroachments. Among these multifarious duties, irrigation does not get much attention; yet, by reason of its control over land,
the Revenue Department’s function affects the condition and functioning of irrigation works.

Agriculture Department

The agriculture department functions without any realistic coordination with the Panchayat Union, Revenue or the Public Works Department. At the Taluk level, is the office of the Assistant Director (Agriculture) (Training and Visit). The office is located at Beemanthangal, a village some 4-5 kilometers distant from the Taluk headquarters and the Panchayat Union office. The Asst. Director (Agriculture) has nine agricultural officers working under him - six for Training and Visit; one each for Agronomy, Plant Protection and Information and Training; the function of this Department is to formulate the agricultural scheme for the Block. The production target for paddy and pulses is given to this office which then attempts to achieve the target. The divisional production target is divided between the Blocks based on area and extent of cultivation, and productivity determined by crop experiments. To achieve the target, the office identifies the technologies to the adopted by farmers, which is then transferred to the farmers through the Agricultural Officers and Assistant Agricultural Officers. Various subsidies are offered to attract farmers - subsidized seeds and pesticides; free fertilizers for demonstration; credit for crops, tractors, well deepening; electricity connections for pumpsets; agricultural implements subsidy; subsidy for fertilizers, etc.

The Assistant Agricultural Officers prepare microlevel plans indicating area, crop, seed, pesticide and fertilizer requirements, which are then apportioned to the villages. In this process, information on the condition of tanks which comes to the notice of the officers is conveyed to the Public Works Department. In 1988/89, 21 tanks needing attention were identified and referred to the Public Works Department of which 16 were taken up for repairs.

The Department on the whole directs its programmes to individual farmers. The protection or nurture of village institutions or farmers groups for the management of common irrigation works does not form part of its concern. The decision on cropping patterns is still on the whole taken by farmers without reference to the agriculture department, particularly where cultivation is fully dependent on tanks. Farmers with wells - i.e., independent sources of irrigation - are more receptive to the schemes promoted by the Agriculture Department.

The Agriculture Department has an assistant seeds officer posted at the Panchayat Union, for coordination. The task of this officer is to bring the ‘target’ area under cultivation for production of seeds, by creating seed farms.

The cropping pattern in the district usually consists of three crops - samba (July-September), swarnavari (April-May) and navarai (Dec/Jan.). This tank intensive district is capable of raising these three paddy crops traditionally; however, in this Block, only samba crop is raised now, and navarai in five
or six villages only, because of the great deterioration in water supply in tanks. The seed farms however, produce seeds - for all the three seasons, from the 58 hectares cultivated for the purpose. This is because the seeds are produced not for local consumption alone. It is sent to the processing unit at Kancheepuram or at Kunrathur. Therefore the seeds may be allocated to this Block, or elsewhere. There is no connection, as the Assistant Seeds Officer pointed out, between targets in production and distribution. If the production targets could not be achieved by the ASO, for any reason, (lack of sufficient water supply being one) representation is made through the Agriculture Department to the Collector who responds by reducing the target. *Improvement of irrigation sources is not an intrinsic part of the programme for seeds production.*

**Irrigation Administration at District and State Level**

The role played by panchayat institutions in irrigation can be assessed at the macro-level by the following facts:

1. There has been a decline in tank irrigated area on the whole from the Sixties to the Eighties (See Table 5).
2. The budgetary allocation for the tank sub-sector is only 10 per cent of the total irrigation sector.
3. The more important tank systems and tanks are under the control of the Public Works Department; developmental works with respect to these tanks are generally more conspicuous and regular; though the Panchayat Unions have numerically more tanks under their charge (See Table 6) the official attention given to them is relatively less.

Thus on the whole, tanks under the Panchayat Unions form a disadvantaged group of irrigation sources in the irrigation sector as a whole.

**TABLE 5 : Net Area Irrigated in Tamil Nadu**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Canals</th>
<th>Tanks</th>
<th>Wells</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(37.57)</td>
<td>(36.78)</td>
<td>(23.48)</td>
<td>(2.17)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(35.62)</td>
<td>(36.79)</td>
<td>(26.02)</td>
<td>(91.57)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>894</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(33.16)</td>
<td>(931.49)</td>
<td>(34.050)</td>
<td>(1.30)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>848</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>1006</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(33.27)</td>
<td>(26.40)</td>
<td>(39.47)</td>
<td>(0.86)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Average for 1980-81 to 1985-86)

Note: Figures in brackets represent percentage of Total.

TABLE 6 : Total Number of Tanks in Tamil Nadu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. of Tanks</th>
<th>% of Total Tanks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>P.W.D.</strong></td>
<td>8903</td>
<td>22.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems Tanks</td>
<td>3627</td>
<td>9.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-System Tanks</td>
<td>5276</td>
<td>13.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panchayat Union Tanks</strong></td>
<td>20413</td>
<td>52.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanks with ayacut less than 50 acres</td>
<td>16477</td>
<td>42.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanks with ayacut 50-100 acres</td>
<td>3936</td>
<td>10.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ex-Zamin Tanks</strong> (Under Panchayat Unions)</td>
<td>9886</td>
<td>25.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the Chief Engineer (Minor Irrigation) P.W.D., Tamil Nadu.

The total registered ayacut under the PWD tanks however is higher than under Panchayat Union Tanks.

About 80 per cent of the total number of tanks have an ayacut of less than 100 acres each, and on an average, a tank in Tamil Nadu irrigates an area of about 54 acres. However, about 30 per cent of area under tank irrigation is accounted for by 564 large tanks, each with an ayacut of 500 acres or more.3

Governmental efforts towards maintaining and increasing, tank irrigation potential cover the following activities:3

1. Attending to normal maintenance and repairs in order to keep the tanks in a state of good repair.
2. Carrying out improvement to existing sources with a view to achieving optimum utilisation of tank ayacuts.
4. Modernisation of tank irrigation system.

Since Independence, these activities are being undertaken through a few schemes.

1. The Special Minor Irrigation Programme (SMIP) was started in 1951-52. The focus of this programme is on carrying out small works which are capable of yielding quick results by way of additional food production. These include restoration of breached or abandoned tanks; providing diversion works like anicuts and check dams; excavation of supply channels with a view to augmenting supplies to irrigation tanks; formation of new tanks, formation of ponds in order to increase the water table in the wells situated in their zone of influence, river pumping schemes etc. Generally, all new works are taken up under this programme.

2. The Accelerated Minor Irrigation Programme (AMIP) from 1974-75 onwards. This scheme involves standardisation of tanks by desilting, providing surplus arrangements and sluices, and excavating supply channels wherever necessary.

3. The Desilting-cum-Reclamation Programme (DCR) is being implemented by the Public Works Department from the Second Five Year Plan onwards. Its objective is to regain partly or fully the lost capacity of tanks due to heavy siltation by raising the Full Tank
Role of Panchayat Institutions in Irrigation Management

Level, desilting the tank bed and reclaiming the foreshore land. The scheme applies to ex-zamin tanks.

Of these three programmes only the AMIP provides for normal maintenance and repairs of tanks which is the most essential work for the hundreds and thousands of panchayat union tanks. However while the AMIP in recent years has itself claimed only one-fourth of total expenditure on tank irrigation, the proportion spent on normal maintenance and repairs is only 3% of the AMIP budget, of which the PWD takes the larger share. The SMIP and the DCR constitute 40 per cent of the total expenditure on tank irrigation and are mostly utilised by the PWD.

Tank Modernisation Scheme from 1984-85

Modernisation of select non-system tanks having ayacut less than 500 acres in seven districts were taken up with EEC aid for better water management and achieving higher productivity per unit of water. This programme is implemented by the Public Works Department.

The relative share of AMIP - and in consequence the role of Panchayat Unions - in total tank irrigation has come down with the commencement of this programme.

Besides these four schemes - the SMIP, AMIP, DCR and Tank Modernisation Scheme - irrigation works are also taken up under certain Central Schemes such as the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, Integrated Rural Development Programme, Integrated Tribal Development Programme and Hill Area Development Programme. However, works under these programmes are mostly for creating new potential, and as such, executed under the supervision of the Public Works Department.

Panchayat unions depend on the AMIP and grants from Government under the head “Irrigation Grants to Local Bodies” for funds for irrigation development.

Thus, the various ‘Programmes’ for irrigation development under the aegis of the Central Government since the fifties set the pattern for financial allocations which favour bureaucratic administration of irrigation development at the State level. Starved of funds, Panchayat Unions’ autonomy in the matter of irrigation has never had a start in Tamil Nadu and have functioned on handouts totally incommensurate with their requirements.

KARNATAKA

The State of Karnataka offers special interest to the study of the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions since the enactment of the Karnataka Zilla Parishads Taluk Panchayat Samities, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act of 1983. This Act, which came into force only in 1987, for the first time in the State provides for political as much as administrative
decentralisation at the district and mandal level and thereby makes a departure from previous panchayat legislation.

Formulation of plans at district and mandal level on the basis of a lumpsum allocation indicated to each district forms the most important aspect of decentralisation. The independent functioning of mandals in planning and allocation is protected in respect of specific sectors earmarked for mandals. Specific guidelines have been laid down for distribution of outlay to each Mandal to ensure equity. The allocations for various sectors by zilla parishads are still influenced by Government priorities, exigencies and past practices. However, this is being relaxed further every year. The zilla parishads were able to submit their plans for the first time only in 1988-89. In 1987-88, when they were constituted, state plans had already been drawn up by state Heads of Departments and approved by Government.

The 1989-90 plans were prepared with a greater extent of reference to Mandals which were asked to prepare their own plans for mandal schemes against indicated outlay. The State Government (during the tenure of Shri Ramakrishna Hegde) had initiated a review of the functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions to identify areas where greater decentralisation is called for as well as suggest modalities to achieve it.

The extent of decentralisation provided so far has resulted in a changed political climate in the rural areas. Within a short span of two years, villagers reported many more developmental activities than in decades together previously.

Irrigation however, does not seem to have had the beneficial influence of decentralisation as much as other developmental works have had; the relinquishment of state control over water resources has not been so forthcoming.

To study the situation on the ground, two districts - Bangalore Rural and Dakshin Kannada - were chosen. These districts represent the two regions characteristic to the state - Malnad hill districts and the Plains. Dakshin Kannada is on the West Coast of Karnataka, with the Western Ghats running through the district. Bangalore Rural on the other hand, physically surrounding Bangalore Urban District is in the south eastern corner of Karnataka in the plains. To conduct the study, the leadership of the zilla parishads as well as officials, the Pradhans (Presidents) and members of the respective mandal panchayats, the officers of the Revenue Department and Public Works Department at the taluk level, and farmers in the village were interviewed. Relevant records at the various offices mentioned above were perused. At the state level, Secretaries in the Panchayati Raj and Rural Development and the Irrigation Department were interviewed on the Governments' point of view.

The villages chosen for field study were Yelachahalli village in Tavarakere mandal panchayat in Hoskote taluk in Bangalore Rural zilla parishad; Amaramudnoor village in Amaramudnoor mandal panchayat and Thodikana Village in Aranthodu mandal panchayat, both of which are in Sullia Taluk in Dakshin Kannada zilla parishad.
The results of the study are presented below.

Yelachahalli Village, Hoskote taluk, Bangalore Rural Zilla Parishad

Yelachahalli is a small village of about 120 households, situated at a distance of 16 kms from Hoskote, the Taluk Headquarters. Hoskote, which is part of the Bangalore Rural zilla parishad has 12 mandals. Yelachahalli belongs to Tavarekere mandal. According to a group of farmers who courteously and willingly took a morning off to give an interview to the author on 22 December 1989, the village has a population of about 1500 persons. Records at the Taluk Office in Hoskote show that according to the 1981 Census, there were 890 persons, 447 male and 443 female, of which 66 belonged to Scheduled Caste (36 male and 30 female). According to the farmers about 100 of the 120 households have land. (This seems to be an underestimation of the number of households) There is one tank in the village for irrigation, which is the only “Government Source” irrigation. Well irrigation supplements tank irrigation.

Conflicting data on extent of cultivation under the tank

While the farmers estimate that 100 acres are being irrigated under the tank, and further 100 acres are under dry land cultivation, the taluk office records for the village give the following information for 1974-75.

Table 7: Cultivation in Yelachahalli Village 1974-75

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DRY</th>
<th>WET</th>
<th>GARDEN</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area (in acres)/</td>
<td>Govt Water Source/Area</td>
<td>Other water source/Area</td>
<td>Govt water source/Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Rs)</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>341.31</td>
<td>551.65</td>
<td>46.20</td>
<td>98.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hoskote Taluk Office

Thus the total extent of wet cultivation in this village was only 46.20 acres under a government source. However, the registered atchkat (command area) of the tank is 25 acres, according to the Irrigation Department Records.

Cultivation

The farmers stated that traditionally, they used to take two crops from the tank land; if the rainfall in any year was only 50-70%, only one crop was possible; if there was not enough water to irrigate all the land under the tank, for the one crop also, by unanimous decision, all the farmers would give up the crop and rely on their dry land cultivation. This was what had happened this particular year; almost all the households which had land under the tank also had some dry land, so they could manage. For the last three years, they could not raise a second crop. If the tank became full in December, a second crop would be started in January. Only paddy is cultivated under the tank. Some of the crops cultivated in the village are ragi, eucalyptus and
mulberry (which is traditionally grown here) and vegetables such as carrot, beetroot, cabbage, chillies, maize and beans.

Responsibility over Tank and Catchment Area

The farmers identified the tank as a "PWD" Tank even though it is now vested in the zilla parishad. They stated that they had no responsibility for the maintenance of the tank, and that it was too big a job for them; in reply to questions, they revealed that their tank had a catchment area of about 1000 acres, and that encroachment upon this area by individuals was greatly affecting the inflow into the tank. For example, eucalyptus trees are being raised by certain individuals over 300 acres adjacent to the tank and village. The practice of bunding or contour bunding for the eucalyptus plantation was obstructing the rainfall flowing into the tank; similar encroachment is also made into the tank bed and all along one approach to the tank for cultivation. This was verified by the author. The farmers said they felt powerless to object because this was done by powerful individuals with the support of the officials of the Revenue Department. They also said that any farmer if he had a chance would do the same because of need; if they could all be united over the issue, their protest would be effective.

Well Irrigation

The farmers reported that bore well irrigation was started only about 10 years ago. Now there are four pumpsets in the tank command itself, which was illegal. At least 25% of the tank water was pumped into their 'wells', or open temporary pits by getting 'temporary' electricity connection and about 15-20 farmers were using this arrangement. The farmers felt this was breaking their unity; at the same time, the fact that the tank level was so low, was worrying all of them, and they were forced to think of alternatives.

Condition of the Tank

The bund, waste weirs and sluices of the tank were in bad condition. The inflow channel was overgrown with weeds, and had caved in, in certain places. The nearly 3 1/2 to 4 feet-wide channel had become reduced to a narrow bed. Cultivation had encroached upon it on either side; the only repair work done to the tank in the experience of the farmers spoken to, was five years ago, when only the sluices were repaired by the PWD.

The tank had silted up to an average of 3 feet; in the estimation of the farmers, the kind of improvement works that in their opinion were necessary were deepening of the tank, bund improvement, sluice and waste weir repair and encroachment removal; three years ago, they had sent a petition to the zilla parishad requesting repairs to the tank, but nothing has come of it so far.
Water Distribution

The farmers had their system of distribution of water. Every year, before starting the crop, a ‘Committee’ of farmers would meet and assess the level of water in the tank, and decide accordingly, what crop to raise, and the term of the crop. The posts of Toti, Taliari, and Neerganti (traditional village functionaries) who used to be employed by the Revenue Department were abolished on 1 February 1963. Prior to that there used to be one Toti and one Taliari for each crop for the distribution of water. Now these functionaries are being paid an honorarium.

They no longer command any respect from the farmers. However, the Neerganti was still functioning by informal arrangement among the farmers, to distribute the water. If any farmer had any complaints about water not flowing into his aitchkat, he would report to the Neerganti who would see to the matter.

Role of Mandal Panchayat

The establishment of the mandal panchayat, since 1987, had in the opinion of the villagers, made a difference to this village. There were 20 villages altogether in the mandal; there was one mandal panchayat member for every 500 voters; this village having 700 voters, and a nearby hamlet having 300, they both together elected 2 members to the Tavarekere mandal panchayat (which is currently a ‘Janata Dal’ mandal). The villagers say that generally the situation is much better now than under the earlier village panchayat. Whatever has been requested so far, has been done. The roads in the village have been remade, with stormwater drains of stone. Fifty-six ‘Janata’ sites for poor farmers have been allotted, a bridge or causeway has been built; where there were only four tubelight units in the village before, now there were twelve. The primary school had been renovated at a cost of Rs. 15,000; about 25 families have got electricity connection to their homes under the Bhagyajothi scheme; five public bore-wells have been dug of which 3 were working now and two under repair. A mini water tank had been sanctioned. Eight IRDP loans had been arranged through the mandal panchayat for the village for purchase of cows and buffaloes. A road was being laid to the Janata House site area by NSS students from a city college. The list seemed impressive for 2 1/2 years. There was a palpable air of hope and achievement in the village. However, no works relating to the irrigation had been taken up through the Mandal Panchayat. This was one area left completely untouched in this village, so far. An interview was held with the Tavarekere mandal panchayat Pradhan, on the subject. Tavarekere was situated 2 Kms away from Yelachahalli. According to the pradhan of this mandal, issues related to irrigation were continuously discussed in the mandal panchayat; while various issues relating to irrigation came up before them, agriculture as a subject for planning does not come up before the mandal. The Pradhan felt that the Agriculture Department was not cooperating enough with the mandal to make its concerns part of the mandal’s.
Regarding irrigation however, there were 10 tanks in this mandal; there were representatives from five villages for repair works to their tanks. Of these, two were taken up. The representations are forwarded to the Taluk Panchayat Samiti (which consists of the mandal Pradhan in the taluk, the Member of the Legislative Assembly, and the Block Development Officer as Secretary) and thence to the zilla parishad. Even though this is time consuming, the present record according to the pradhan was much better. However, 50% of the tanks were in bad condition and needed to be renovated.

**Encroachment**

The Revenue Department, in its functioning, was found to be the biggest hurdle in the matter of tackling encroachment. The mandal panchayats are strongly opposing the practice of the department levying penalty for encroachment for a period of time, after which it becomes very difficult to remove the encroachment. Two months earlier a discussion was held on this subject in the mandal panchayat regarding Kolathur, another village in the mandal. The power of the Tahsildar to levy penalty was questioned and a resolution sent requesting the Tahsildar to survey the tank areas and fix boundaries. The member felt that once the boundaries are fixed, the mandal panchayat would be better placed to identify the extent of encroachment and 'move the matter'. The Pradhan felt that if official support was forthcoming, to fix the boundaries, then police help can be taken to evict encroachers. Unfortunately, however, the Revenue Department was not cooperating in the matter. There were 'no surveyors', or not 'enough surveyors', and various other reasons were given which caused much delay. If the Revenue Department gave its support, the mandal panchayats were ready to take up developmental works with regard to tanks.

For instance, the Forest Department’s Social Forestry Scheme were useful to the mandal. Once the Scheme was handed over to the mandal, it became a good source of income as well as helped to prevent acquisition of tank bed for cultivation, since trees can be raised on tank beds. Financial allocations are already available with the mandal for such schemes under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana.

**Jurisdiction over Tanks**

The Mandal Pradhan strongly felt that the tanks should vest in the mandals and not in the zilla parishad as under the Act. The zilla parishad was felt to be ‘too far away’ and that these small tanks were not ‘important’ to it, whereas they were crucial to the villages. The tanks should be handed over to the mandal panchayats for improvements, watch and ward, and development works. The Pradhan was of the opinion that the ‘technical capacity’ of the mandal panchayats was being questioned, which was baseless. He said the technical aspect was not so important as to overweigh all other considerations, and that the technicalities were within their knowledge and experience; besides, wherever any engineering assistance is required, they could get it
from the zilla parishad Engineering sub-division at taluk level. Already, Junior Engineers from that department were deputed to mandals and functioned under the supervision of and in coordination with mandal panchayats for all developments works.

It was found that there were no 'Tank Panchayats' in this area, no one remembering any being formed, even though the Irrigation Act of 1965 provided for their constitution. The Pradhan felt that it would be a good idea to constitute Tank Panchayats to look after the affairs of the tanks, and that the mandal panchayat members could not only help in their constitution but also serve on them in an advisory capacity. Neither the villages nor the mandal panchayat office maintain tank maps or registers; the Pradhan was of the opinion that they should be doing so, as it was very important to them. They had not been referred to for a very long time.

Disputes Settlement

It was found that the mandal panchayat had settled water disputes arising out of unjust water use in two villages - Yelachahalli and Tavarekere. Illegal withdrawal of water was stopped and the pipes and motor pumpsets were removed, in both instances. There were no inter-village disputes regarding irrigation during the last 25 years. If there are any mis-understandings or disagreements, the elders in the village settle it among themselves.

The Administrative View point

The administrative systems at the taluk level which have a bearing on irrigation are the Revenue Department and the Zilla Parishad Engineering Sub-division; the latter, after the coming into force of the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act, 1983, has taken up all developmental activities which used to be under the jurisdiction of the PWD and the Block Development Office.

From discussions with the Assistant Executive Engineer heading the Zilla Parishad Engineering subdivision at Hoskote, and officials at the Taluk office, Hoskote, the following details regarding their role and function in the matter of irrigation, and the condition of irrigation works generally were gathered.

Jurisdiction of the Departments

As far as public works are concerned, this taluk forms the jurisdiction of the Zilla Parishad sub-division under the charge of Assistant Executive Engineer; this office has jurisdiction over 143 irrigation tanks in the taluk, with atchkats ranging from 10 acres up to 500 acres; there are two major tanks with atchkat above 500 acres; after the Act of 1983 they are under the control of zilla parishad. Even though the Act provides that all Minor Irrigation Works within the district are within the jurisdiction of the zilla parishad, administrative devolution has been made only with respect to tanks irrigating up to 500 acres; 'Minor Irrigation Works' are defined as those with command areas up to 2000 hectares.
A notable feature in this tank is a large tank fed by the South Pennar River. It is more than 300 years old, and has a command area of 3500 acres, though only about 2500 acres are being irrigated now.

The responsibilities of this office in the matter of irrigation are repairs of channels, waste weirs and bunds and fixing of water rates depending on the crop, which is mostly paddy.

Procedure Regarding Selection of Works

Each year, the zilla parishad allot an amount to mandal panchayats in proportion to their population. Based on this allocation, works are decided by mandal panchayats at their meetings every month. These meetings are attended by Junior Engineers from the zilla parishad Engineering sub-division. Budgets are prepared by mandal pradhans in consultation with members.

Regarding Irrigation Works, once the mandal decides which village will have works for the year, the Junior Engineer intimates his office, which prepares the estimates. The A.E.E can sanction works upto Rs. 10,000. The zilla parishad Engineering Division sanctions estimates above this amount. The mandal panchayat members supervise and check the quality of the work. In the case of the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, the funds and foodgrains are transferred directly to village societies.

Conditions of Tanks

More than 50% of the tanks are silted upto a level of 1-2 feet. No desilting works have been taken up so far. If this work were to be taken up, about Rs. 50,000 would be required for each tank. Bulldozers would have to be used. Also, the question of silt disposal has not been thought out seriously. The total allocation now available for the sub-division is only Rs. 1 - 1 1/2 lakhs, which is sufficient only for minor repairs of channels, waste weirs or bunds. Even so, more works have been taken up now, under the new arrangement than before. There is a lot of demand from mandal panchayats for irrigation works.

On the whole, there has not been any development in the area of irrigation and agriculture. There has been a decrease in cultivated area rather than increase. Under many tanks, the water spread area is more than the atchkat.

The Revenue Department

The taluk is divided into 5 “hoblies” comprising 7 village accountant circles to 10 village accountant circles. Each village accountant has 1-15 villages under his charge. The Revenue Department hierarchy consists, from bottom to top, of the village accountant, one Revenue Inspector for each hobli and one Deputy Tahsildar in respect of 2 hoblies, with the Tahsildar at the Taluk level.
Functions

The Revenue Department has no relationship with the mandal panchayat. Regarding irrigation, its main function is collection of water rates along with land revenue and taking action to evict encroachers on tank land, under Section 194 of the Land Revenue Act, on receipt of request from the Irrigation Department (earlier from PWD) according to the provisions of the Irrigation Act.

Water Rates

Prior to the Irrigation Act of 1965, the power of levying water rates was exercised by the Revenue Department, but is now with the Irrigation Department. The Revenue Department collects all the details such as survey number, extent of cultivation, irrigation details etc. and hands them over to the Irrigation Department which then fixes the water rates. The collection however is done by the Revenue Department. The Irrigation Department has the power also to levy penal water rates in the atchkat.

Since 1988-89, no water rate is being levied for tanks with an atchkat of up to 100 acres.

Upto 1965, an irrigation cess was being levied for cultivation under Government source of irrigation; after the Irrigation Act of 1965 was passed, this charge was changed to a 'Water rate' which was much higher than the earlier cess. At present, while the Revenue Department states that no water rate is being charged (for tanks below 100 acres atchkat) farmers in Yelachahalli reported they are paying Rs. 8 per acre as 'water charge'. While this could be the maintenance cess that is being levied, the official charge for maintenance is Rs. 4 per acre and not Rs. 8; there seems to be no explanation for this discrepancy.

The water rate and maintenance charges that are collected are transferred at Government level to the irrigation department. The charges are collected along with the land revenues, as a common demand, with a common receipt issued. In this whole process, neither mandal panchayat nor the zilla parishad are in any way involved.

Tank Irrigation Committee

A tank irrigation committee used to function with the Assistant Commissioner as Chairman and Tahsildar as Convenor. After the Irrigation Act of 1965, the Executive Engineer of that department was made Chairman, with the Assistant Executive Engineer as a Convenor. The Tahsildar, Assistant Director (Agriculture), farmers' representatives nominated by the AEE, the agricultural officer in charge of soil conservation were all members of the committee. The function of this committee was to discuss the cropping pattern, after assessing the sufficiency of water in the tanks for the entire command area. The Assistant Commissioner gave the proposals to fix the cropping pattern for every village, suggesting the amount of water necessary and its
distribution pattern (in other words, exercise the functions normally done by farmers).

The committee has not met for the last four years. This is not surprising: considering the fact that there are 145 tanks in the taluk, the task of assessing the water levels in all these tanks, and fixing cropping pattern for every village for each season, and also to persuade the farmers to adopt the proposals would have been a task beyond the capacity of a single committee at the taluk level, however high powered.

**Bangalore Rural Zilla Parishad**

Hoskote forms one of the eight taluks of Bangalore Rural District. This district was carved out of the erstwhile Bangalore District, as of 1 August 1986. It is located in the southeastern corner of Karnataka. The new district which almost physically surrounds Bangalore (urban) District forms a part of the Deccan plateau, has an average elevation of 600 to 900 metres from mean sea level and has ranges of hills which are actually spikes of the Eastern Ghats.

The Arkavati, the Kanva and the Dakshina Pinakini are the tributary rivers which flow through the district.

*Agriculture and Irrigation*

The principal crops of the district are ragi, paddy, groundnut, oil seeds, sugarcane and mulberry. Canals, tanks and wells are the important sources of irrigation in the district; about 19% of the net area sown is irrigated according to the annual season and crop report of 1985-86; the area irrigated through canals is 1921 hectares and through tanks 16,857 hectares. The area irrigated from wells is 23,605 hectares and from other sources 856 hectares.

The Bangalore Rural *zilla parishad* was established on 1 April 1987, with 39 directly elected representatives and 17 ex-officio members. A total of 18 departments come under the direct control of the *zilla parishad* - Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries, Animal Husbandry, Forest, Rural Development, Public Works, Education, Adult Education, Sericulture, Health and Family Welfare, Social Welfare, Backward Classes and Minorities, Women and Children Welfare, Youth Service, Village and Small Scale Industries, Food, Mines and Ecology. These 18 departments in total have 27 sectors. The parent heads of the Departments do not have any control over the above departments transferred to the *zilla parishad* except that they could inspect the schemes technically and submit a report to *zilla parishad*.

The various schemes of the departments are broadly divided into two viz. (1) *Zilla Parishad* and (2) *Mandal Panchayat* schemes. *Zilla Parishad* schemes are those whose benefits spread over more than one Mandal viz. Hostels, High Schools, Primary Health Centres, other District roads, major bridges etc. *Mandal Panchayat* schemes are those whose benefits are confirmed to the *Mandals* themselves - such as the IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) National Rural Employment Programme, Housing,
Drinking water, Social Forestry, Irrigation wells, Special Component Programme etc. The Mandal Panchayat schemes are further divided into two categories. Mandal Panchayat category I has only a few schemes which are formulated and implemented by them. For implementation of these schemes, the *mandal panchayats* get funds from the *zilla parishad*. These schemes include maintenance of drinking water facilities, rural sanitation, distribution of house sites, maintenance of Women’s Welfare Centres for scheduled castes, etc. The Mandal Panchayat category II has got about 67 schemes like the IRDP, NREP, RLEGP, Irrigation borewells, social forestry schemes, family welfare schemes, etc. In relation to these, the *mandal panchayats* are responsible for identification of beneficiaries and location specific works for implementation. The actual implementation is done by the *Zilla parishad*, “as there is no proper machinery” at *mandal panchayat* level.

The Bangalore Rural District has 103 *mandals*, each with a population ranging from 8000 to 12000.

**Control over Water Resources**

The change brought about by the Act of 1983 is that all minor irrigation sources within the district are legally vested in the *zilla parishads*. However, only those sources irrigating up to 200 hectares (by definition, minor sources are those with command areas up to 2000 hectares) have been administratively delegated so far. While this change does not seem to have made much of an impact on irrigation (which calls for further decentralisation), fishery has proved to be a lucrative proposition for *zilla parishads*, since they now enjoy the liberty of taking steps to raise additional funds. The Bangalore Rural *Zilla Parishad* has developed tanks and auctioned them for fisheries earning from a mere Rs. 70,000 in 1986-87 to about Rs. 15-20 lakhs in 1987-88. In 1988-89, the *Zilla Parishad* had launched a programme to develop 200 tanks by stocking 25 lakh fingerlings, expecting to net a revenue of Rs. one crore. The *mandal panchayats* are involved in supervision of the tanks by appointing ‘watch and ward’. Fifty percent of the fishery revenue goes to them.

The *zilla parishad* has taken steps to construct a fishery farm at a cost of Rs. 20 lakhs to produce the required fingerlings for internal consumption.

The *zilla parishad* however does not have control over all fishery programmes. It has to share power with the FFDA. The FFDA is in charge of tanks with water spread less than 25 acres. The FFDA follows the method of leasing tanks to persons who are given training in fishery and loans to develop the trade.

*This partial retention of control by the State Government over water sources for irrigation and fisheries negates the principle of decentralisation and the inherent right to local bodies in their natural resources.*

**Dakshin Kannada District**

Dakshin Kannada is one of the two coastal districts of Karnataka and is located in the western belt. This area is separated from the rest of the south
Indian peninsula by the western ghats which form the natural boundary of the district on the east. On the west, the Arabian sea forms a natural boundary. The district comprises a long strip of territory running south by south east and is broader in the south, where its western border does not touch the coast. The district which is about 177 km in length has a coast line of 140 km. The breadth varies between 10 km. at the narrowest northernmost tip and about 80 km. at the broadest portion. The coastline is low and sandy and indented by numerous bays and creeks which have been formed by river estuaries. The land space forms a broken low plateau spreading out from the foot of the western ghats towards the Arabian sea and is characterised by several water courses and numerous valleys containing rich alluvial soils.

Nethravati, Gurpur, Gangolli, Sitanandi and the Swarna are the principal rivers of the district. Besides these rivers there are numerous small streams which though small, from the point of view of distance covered, carry large quantities of water drained from the mountain ranges.

The district has an abundance of rainfall which seldom fails to materialise. As a result, famines and scarcity conditions are rare. On the other hand, the district is known to suffer from occasional floods; agriculture and horticulture together constitute the backbone of the rural economy of the district.

The abundance of rainfall has in a way obviated the necessity for artificial irrigation involving any network of canals; there are however small irrigation tanks which provide water for irrigation. The district has 1001 minor irrigation sources, which constitute 3.76 per cent of the minor irrigation sources in the state. The area irrigated by these sources is 17,469 hectares. All the minor irrigation sources belong to the category of Zilla Parishad works. Besides tanks, there are also barrages built across certain streams and the stored water thereof is made use of for irrigation purposes. The district does not have any major irrigation or hydel power project.

Dakshin Kannada Zilla Parishad at Mangalore

In an interview, the Adhyaksha (President) of the Zilla Parishad Mr. Sankapparai pointed out that financial allocations to the district from the State Government based on a per capita of Rs. 7.50 was quite insufficient for development financing. The zilla parishad was also hampered by the state dividing the allocations among the various sectors. He was of the opinion that the powers of taxation of zilla parishads should be increased or reserved for them in order to raise sufficient funds.

Regarding irrigation works, the Adyaksha stated that there was a lot of scope for construction of vented dams or barrages and tanks; seventy per cent of the existing works were “not functioning” (at the optimum level) the zilla parishad did not have enough funds to bring them all to standard. For instance in 1989/90, Rs. 28 lakhs had been requested by the zilla parishad for Minor Irrigation, but only Rs. 13 lakhs had been received as Minor Irrigation Grant from the State. The allocations for irrigation is the same now after the Act as before, sometimes even less. Whatever works are repaired are being handed
Role of Panchayat Institutions in Irrigation Management

over to mandal panchayats after repairs. However, on the whole, among the various public works, roads and drinking water receive higher priority than irrigation. The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, for which the mandal panchayats receive funds directly, is not, in the Adyaksha's opinion, fully successful because of the lack of sufficient technical support to the mandal panchayat. Each mandal is in charge of implementing 30-40 developmental programmes; however, there is only one Junior Engineer for four to five mandals in this district. In answer to a question the Adhyaksha stated that there is no change in the practice of giving out works to contractors; however, because of the higher level of activity of mandal panchayats, there is a greater level of watchfulness among the people. The district is reputed to have the most successful Zilla Parishad in the state; this was noteworthy considering that 52 out of its 59 members belonged to the Congress-I Party, the then opposition party in the state. This was possible because, the Adhyaksha explained, there was a very high level of cooperation among all members irrespective of party affiliations, and that this was not a new phenomenon, but that it was a tradition in the district to be found at all levels, not just the zilla parishad. In such a context, the Zilla Parishad may function much better if it had adequate financial resources with greater decentralisation of financial powers.

Sulya Taluk

This is one of the eight taluks in the district and is situated in the Western Ghats about 85 kms from Mangalore. Two villages - Amaramudnoor in Amaramudoo Mandal Panchayat and Aranthodu in Aranthodu Mandal Panchayat - were chosen to study the involvement of mandal panchayats in irrigation in this district. This is a hilly taluk. Irrigation for agriculture - rice, wheat, ragi, arecanut, coconut, rubber and cocoa being grown here - is from streams, wells and tanks. Vented dams across small rivers and tributary streams divert water into field channels; they are mostly small, fed by streams or springs and are found in individual farms on hill slopes in villages, or used by joint families or groups of farmers. In several places small tanks are dug from which water is lifted by motor pumpsets and can be described as well irrigation more than tank irrigation.

Amaramudnoor

This is a small village, one of only two villages in the mandal panchayat - Amaramudnoor and Uparadakamithur. It has 626 households and a population of 3523 according to the 1981 census, while the other village has 490 households with a population of 2837, making a total population of 6360 in 1116 households. The mandal panchayat however estimates the population in the two villages to be 8000 in about 1000 households, of which 1500 belong to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

Impact of Mandal Panchayat

The constitution of a mandal panchayat has certainly made a difference to this sleepy little village on the hills. The village school which had been
needing repairs for more than a couple of decades, has been renovated and extended; a playground has been cleared out and a miniwater supply scheme to supply drinking water to the school as well as the village has been built; collections have been made from the villagers also for this purpose. Sanitation facilities for the school are being planned.

The Pradhan of the mandal panchayat stated that villagers are taking more interest in development works now. The office bearers also were able to keep a close scrutiny over the building works and ensure quality. When villagers have any problems or petitions, they are no more forced to run from pillar to post for redressal, but go to the mandal panchayat.

**Agriculture**

The principal crops in the mandal are rice, arecanut, coconut, rubber and cocoa. A discrepancy exists between data on cultivation and irrigation supplied by the mandal panchayat and the district census records; the total area cultivated in the mandal is 1626.4 hectares according to the former (35.94 percent of the geographical area of 4524.79 hectares) while according to the latter the cultivated area is 1215.64 hectares (26.54 percent of the geographical area of 4524.79 hectares). The total irrigated area is 760 hectares (46.72 percent of the cultivated area) according to the mandal panchayat records whereas official figures place it at a mere 241.54 hectares. While the mandal panchayat identifies one river, 6 tributaries and 432 tanks from which water is lifted by electric and oil engine pumpsets, the district statistics record only well irrigation. Land holdings in this mandal are mostly small; 876 households (78.5 per cent of the total households) are cultivators, holding an equal number of land holdings; 514 or 58.7 per cent of the holdings are below one hectare; 271 or 30.9 per cent of holdings are between 1-2 hectares; 91 holdings are above 2 hectares in extent.

The mandal panchayat, in its short period of existence of 2 years has under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana advanced loans for 15 pumpsets with subsidy and extended financial assistance for digging 10 tanks, each costing Rs. 14,000 (individual or joint tanks). The zilla parishad however has not so far taken up any irrigation schemes in the mandal, even though all the works are under its control.

Even though the mandal panchayat has provided for construction of irrigation works through loans and grants, it was found that irrigation as a subject has never been discussed at any of the mandal panchayat meetings (36 held so far) nor at the gram sabha meetings (12 held so far). The Pradhan felt that there was no scope for further development in irrigation and agriculture in the mandal. However, according to district records, 22 percent of the geographical area of the mandal is culturable waste; with more directed planning, extension of irrigation could be achieved. The mandal panchayat however is hampered by prescribed sectoral targets in the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana which is the source of most of its funds for development, amounting to about Rs. 1,10,000 every year. The income of the mandal panchayat from its own taxes is about Rs. 50,000 (house tax, shop tax etc.). Extending the
mandal panchayat's range of taxation to include agriculture, and industry within its jurisdiction would greatly enhance its financial strength as well as its autonomous functioning.

**Aranthodu Mandal Panchayat**

Aranthodu is situated at a distance of 11 kms. from Sulya. The mandal panchayat includes three villages - Aranthodu, Thodikana and Sampaje. The mandal consists of 1687 households of which 181 belong to the scheduled castes and 56 to the Scheduled Tribes; this is according to the mandal panchayat records.

In these villages too, the constitution of the mandal panchayat has resulted in the execution of several developmental works mainly concerned with the provision of basic infrastructure such as street lights (42 in 3 villages), dustbins, culverts, repairs to anganwadi (nursery school) repairs to panchayat buildings, cleansing and renovation of overhead tank for drinking water supply, repair to 3 panchayat roads, annual repairs to footbridge, three new school rooms, and a mini water supply scheme, besides 18 bore wells.

For irrigation, two vented dams were constructed. One had been required for fifteen years, while the other had been requested for, nearly 25 years ago. In these places the farmers had been managing by constructing earth dams every year, for which they raised a contribution. Two other dams were also repaired by the mandal panchayat. Thus while legally, the mandal panchayats have no authority to construct repair or maintain irrigation works of any category, they were still doing so in response to the demands of farmers, utilising the powers given under Central Schemes and Mandal-I schemes to decide on the developmental works that they wished to execute.

The mandal panchayat had in the last three years received about Rs 34½ lakhs as Central and State grants, and raised about Rs. 63,876 through its own taxes. The mandal has seen remarkable activity under the Presidentship of an educated, and energetic young man, Mr. Diwakar Rai. All the 17 Members of the mandal panchayat including four women are literate.

One of the vented dams constructed by the mandal panchayat in Thodikana village was visited by the author. This dam was originally constructed in concrete on the Paishwini River in the 1950’s. Before that time, it was an earth dam. By the 1960’s, the dam had deteriorated. Several requests from the farmers for repairs evinced no response from the authorities; about six years ago, the dam broke down completely. Since then the farmers had been putting up earth dams during the rainy season every year, spending not less than Rs. 3000 annually. The money was raised as contributions and utilised for the dam as well as cleaning the channel which leads the river water to the fields; the dam acts as a diversion structure, to feed the channel. About thirty farmers irrigate their lands from the river via the channel which is nearly a kilometer and a half long; channel duty is also fixed for the farmers. The channel runs through forest land; a tax is being paid by the farmers to the Forest Department for digging the channel running through its territory.
This tax is distributed among the farmers in proportion to land revenue paid by them, and collected by the village accountant.

The farmers had their own arrangements for distribution of water among themselves, as well as with a neighbouring habitation which also utilises the water upstream, from another channel leading from the same dam. According to their agreement, farmers in the upper side irrigate for three days, while farmers downstream irrigate for four days at a time.

The farmers are experiencing shortage of water supply for irrigating their fields nowadays because of the proliferation of motor pumps. This trend began after the Forest Department began leasing forest areas for cocoa plantations to Campeo, a company producing cocoa products. For cocoa plantations, 20-30 horsepower pumps are being used on the river, thus depleting water supply to farmers and forcing them to take recourse to pumps, to protect their cultivation. This practice is contributing to the break-down of the traditional cooperation among farmers.

**Zilla Parishad Engineering Sub-Division, Sulya**

This office in Sulya is technically in charge of irrigation work in the 15 mandals in this taluk, besides other public works such as bridges, roads, buildings, overhead tanks for water supplies and bore wells.

Regarding irrigation, the functions of this division are constructing and maintaining vented dams on streams (which are mostly less than 30 metres wide in this area) and maintaining old tanks. The division authorizes the atchkatdar (farmers in the command area) near the dam to manage the distribution, as the staff strength in this office is not adequate to look after all the works.

In this taluk there are 26 vented dams and seven tanks; of the 26 dams, 16 were in working condition and 10 nonfunctioning; of the seven tanks, four were functioning, and three needed repairs. These were community tanks. Most of the farms had individual tanks fed by springs.

An Assistant Engineer and a Junior Engineer attached to this division in an interview, explained the impact of change of authority from the Public Works Department to the Zilla Parishad.

Earlier, the Superintending Engineer and Executive Engineer at the District level exercised supervisory authority over works at taluk level. Now, Mandal Pradhans (Presidents of Mandal Panchayats), Up-Pradhans (Vice-President) and Members of Mandal Panchayats question the officers on quality and progress of works, and exercise effective supervision. The Junior Engineers and Assistant Engineers have to attend mandal panchayat meetings twice a month; beneficiaries of various schemes find it very easy now to approach the officers of this sub-division through their Pradhans, or directly at Mandal meetings.

There has been a notable change in the last two years. The demand for construction and repairs to irrigation works had increased and more works have been taken up as a result.
The funds utilised by this sub-division are of two types - annual maintenance funds for ordinary repairs (such as removing or placing planks, tarring, store sheds etc.) and special repairs grant for repair to damages to piers, aprons, rivetments etc. and providing new planks. The second category of funds was the irrigation allocation under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, the Western Ghat Development Scheme, and the Ganga Kalyana Scheme.

In the last two years, more funds are available for special repairs. Two tanks and 3 vented dams have been taken up in 2 years. The Block Development Office, Taluk Panchayat Samiti and Public Works Department also cooperate with this division by seeking advice or giving suggestions. The licensing authority for individual water pumpsets continued to be the Minor Irrigation Department at Mangalore.

Regarding water disputes or distribution this sub-division exercises no advisory role; no disputes are referred to this office.

Transfer of irrigation works to mandal panchayats, in the opinion of the sub-division officials may not be feasible. Only public bore wells constructed by the public health engineering department are with mandal panchayats. The officers interviewed, however, felt that under the present arrangement, they felt themselves to be part of the mandal panchayat almost under their control because of the close interest taken by mandal members.

Bangalore, Karnataka - State Level Perceptions

Interviews were held with Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, and with the Secretary, Irrigation Department Government of Karnataka, to elicit the views and approach of Government relating to the role of Panchayat Raj institutions in irrigation.

The Secretary (RD and PR) stated that irrigation programmes and projects are mostly implemented by Government through the Irrigation Department. It is perceived as Government work and not yet participated in by people. The Government does not see the mandal panchayats as the primary bodies to be involved in irrigation works. The approach that is adopted in tank 'rehabilitation' is to first involve voluntary organisations in the task with finance from CAPART and contributions from ayacutdars. Here the mandal panchayat takes only a supportive role. No objection or opposition is considered likely from these bodies. The second approach is to involve international funding organisations such as World Bank. Works which are taken up under these schemes are kept out of the purview of elected local bodies at district as well as mandal level. Zilla Parishads in the State have no control or authority over tanks taken up under World Bank projects, whatever their size. The Irrigation Department retains control over such works. Under these projects, farmers' organisations to manage distribution of water are made mandatory, thereby restricting the potential of local bodies in arranging for the management of this function. The command area development projects also restrict Panchayat Raj institutions.
The mandal panchayats are perceived as incompetent to take responsibility over irrigation works as they are “too small”; or “too small to be given staff”. The mandals are considered “incapable of selecting works for development.”

It is acknowledged by the Government that there is an ever present conflict between the Irrigation Department and Panchayat Raj Institutions. Under the new scheme of decentralisation, only developmental activities are handed over to Panchayat Raj bodies, but not regulatory activities, such as Law and Order, Excise and Revenue. Some regulatory functions are also necessary in order to protect and develop irrigation works and Panchayat Raj bodies are not empowered for the purpose.

However, transfer of certain works to Zilla Parishad’s control is seen as a positive move which “may work in the long run”. The execution of works is observed by people on the spot; the presence of elected members of Parishads and Mandal induced a sense of accountability among government officials. Even in respect of those works which have been so transferred, the zilla parishad need the Government sanction of plans; Government’s control of water bodies is retained, essentially in the matter of finances of irrigation works. The Minor Irrigation budget of the government provides for works under zilla parishad which have not undertaken any new activity in resource mobilisation for irrigation.

The main concern of the Government is with regard to ensuring potential of major and medium projects. While minor irrigation is also considered as important, the former are relied upon more for protection of agricultural production in times of drought.

An interview with Dr. B.K. Chandrasekhar, of the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, an authority on the process of decentralisation in Karnataka as an observer and participant revealed that Mandal Panchayats’ representatives have been expressing a demand since 1988, at official and party fora at State, Divisional and District levels for irrigation works to be vested in mandal panchayats. However, the demand could not be accepted by Government as it was the first time that these bodies have been set up; it had taken almost a year for various functionaries to be appointed to mandal panchayats, and post them at their respective places. Initially, it was a slow process of their establishment; now they may be ready for such decentralisation. The opposition to this move is seen to come more from politicians than from the bureaucracy.

Regarding agriculture, as a subject, it features a lot in mandal panchayat discussions, but nothing much is done; though the agriculture department may have its plans for cropping pattern, etc., such plans are not dovetailed with mandal panchayat agricultural plans.

The mandal panchayat could not as yet be described as “a self - governing unit”; it functions only as an executive committee of the zilla parishad, which exercises its discretion over mandal panchayat plans.

The extent of taxation by mandal panchayats is nowhere near adequate to its needs. Taxation is a function “historically inherited” by the State Government. The district Government, which is the zilla parishad should have
taxing powers. But this kind of decentralisation is not possible without a change in Centre-State relations. Only with such a change could effective jurisdiction over taxation be passed on to zilla parishads.

The problem associated with decentralisation of irrigation works is that the value of tank irrigation and management has been superseded by capitalistic type of irrigation, and therefore control of local bodies over irrigation works is much reduced. Further, local bodies lack regulatory powers relating to law and order, revenue and land acquisition functions. These should be transferred to zilla parishads. The establishment of Nyaya Panchayats are also essential for supportive judicial functions for effective decentralisation.

Notes

1. Demographic data and data on agriculture and irrigation are drawn from the village Adangal or Statistical Registers for both the villages.
3. From conversation with officials of PWD (Minor Irrigation) Govt. of Tamilnadu.
5. Ibid.