

PRESERVATION AND PROTECTION OF AGRARIAN PURSUITS DURING THE SANGAM AGE IN TAMILNADU – A STUDY

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Introduction

The entire Tamil landscape was divided as kurinji (hilly region), mullai (forest), marudam (plough land), neidal (littoral) and palai. Among them, it was believed that, when the first four divisions lost their fertility the result will be a useless land called palai. Though the four regions were having their own natural yields, marudam land alone was suitable for agricultural operations in a conventional manner. In this regard it will be proper to have an estimate of the facts about the land because it will enliven the study of the agrarian life. The land, due to its economic value, was utilized for multifarious purposes such as donations, grants, tenancy, transfer, endowment etc. So the possession and occupational rights of lands too met with transitions from time to time. The Tamils were wise enough to call the lands by different names, such as payal nilam, kalar, uvar etc. Such facts indicate the role of the farmers in them. Indirectly they expose the agrarian life. So it is necessary to have the nomenclature and the meanings prompted by them. It should also worth to note here that such an analysis will widen the scope of understanding the complexities of the agrarian life of the then Tamils.

The Catalogue of Lands

Marudam region was a renowned and remarkable one for its paddy fields called Vayal. The Vayal denoting agricultural fields was of different types. The land where the shady trees grew was known as Solai. For obtaining a lengthy and permanent yield from the mango, tamarind trees etc., available in the solai much efforts were undertaken. To maintain the cattle they had a specific type of land viz., vanpulam, which was used as pasture land.¹ In the same way the pastureland was also known as kanru meipal. The flower garden was named as solai. The land of the grooves of coconut was maintained in the name of tengusolal. Such to facts also reveal that the Tamils attached stress to such things mainly on economic grounds. They to grow gardens of flowers used the pretty old land, which had lost its fertility. This too supports the economic background of the agrarian life. The flowers collected from *ka* and Pundansolai might have been sold for making garlands to be used in temples or festive occasions during auspicious times. Thus making garland was also a subsidiary industry.²

The Agrarian Pursuits' Preservation and Protection

The ancient Tamils were well aware of the fact that preservation and protection of agrarian pursuits at different stages will enhance the yield, which in turn will assign

prosperity. They knew full well that if proper care is not given to every activity in agriculture they will have to bear with the loss of prosperity as well as income. Further to make the ploughing operation a prosperous one, it was realized that necessary importance should be assigned to the protection.

For protecting the lands they used thorny fences. Thorny heaps were utilised as a protective fence to avoid trespassing by horses of the army. Fences protected the ripened plantains.³ The thorny plant called *nirmulli*, the *talai* shrub, and the thorny plants of neidal region were all known as *kandai* and they were utilised for protecting the cultivated fields.⁴ Thus the use of fence served as a significant factor of preservation and protection. Further such factors such as fencing help us to note that the Tamil farmers were fascinated to have good yield by all possible ways.⁵

Likewise preservation of agricultural implements was also treated as an important aspect of agrarian life. The maintenance of the ploughs will attest the fact. As the agriculture was a leading and venerable profession, the Tamils preserved it in all possible ways with at most care. No stone was left unturned in promoting agrarian activities.

The preservation and protection of the ripened grains and harvested grains was yet another aspect of agricultural life. The ancient Tamils commonly used the slings as an offensive weapon to protect grains from birds. It was a customary practice among women to be engaged in protection of the fields by frightening away the birds.⁶

They adopted separate measure for preserving the harvested grains. Generally, the grains were preserved in huge urns made of baked clay. *Sal* or *kudir* is the term used now for the urn used for preservation of grains. The farmers preserved the white variety of paddy usually for different purposes. They were preserved in the rooms specifically constructed for the purpose of preserving the grains.⁷ The farmers were used to preserve paddy in particular common places; and their names and quantity preserved by them in their account were all recorded. Such facts stand to prove that steps were taken at all stages by the farmers for the proper up keep and continuation of their profession in a genuine efforts and effective manner. The constant and continuous efforts exhibit the sincerity and earnestness of the agrarian mass in the Tamil country during the early period of its history. Eight types of grains viz., *Nel* (paddy), *Varahu* (common millet), *el* (sesame), *Payaru* (green gram), *Ulundu* (black gram), *mochchai* (double beans), *solam* (maize) and *kambu* (millet) were preserved in separate places. The harvested paddy was stored in bags and retained in granaries, which were encircled by fences. The reference about granaries attests the fact that storage facilities were commonly available then. *Kudir* was another place set apart for preserving grains.⁸ Thus preservation of grains for future use also reiterates the mentality of saving of the people. Further the preservation was also helpful for them to be utilised at times of natural calamities such as droughts and famines.

Proper care was assigned to the preservation and maintenance of the irrigation facilities because they were aware of the fact that without the proper up-keep and maintenance of irrigation facilities, agricultural activities would never be a thriving or

prosperous one. The following facts will attest the significance assigned to the concentration and devotion shown towards irrigation measures. A specific amount of gold was kept in reserve with specific individuals and the interest accrued was utilised for the keeping up of the irrigation tanks in good conditions.⁹ A special *cess* known as *eriyam* was collected from the *ryots* of the respective villages at the rate of one *padakku* of grain per *ma* of cultivable land for carrying out the repairs in the irrigation tanks annually. The donation offered by the philanthropists from the income of their lands was also beneficial for the preservation of the irrigation tanks at all times.¹⁰ Paddy was treated as the major and main source of income with which the dredging up of tanks was carried out annually and regularly. The *erivariyam* too had the right to spend a specified sum along with the support of the private individuals at the interest rate of 15% per annum. The income obtained from the interest was utilised for the regular maintenance of tanks. The village assemblies or the *Giana sabas* maintained a specified deposit amount of money collected by way of fines from the public. Endowments were also created for the clearance of the tanks during every month.¹¹ From the income of the lands gifted to public activities, the *sabas* dug pits in the tanks and deepened them for enhancing the water-capacity. Thus the different deposits collected from various sources helped for raising the bunds. Even boats were employed to collect the silts in big tanks and the sand collection was utilised to raise the lands of the tanks. Thus the *Sabah* with the assistance of *variya perumakkal* and the village public showed an evincing interest in maintaining and preserving the irrigation tanks, which was the basic pre-requisite of agricultural activities. Thus to achieve a prosperous yield from the lands, much care was bestowed on the protection, preservation and maintenance of landed possessions.¹²

Conclusion

Above all, the customary practice of the tenancy rights offered to private individuals at specific rates compelled them to concentrate on the maintenance and upkeep of lands. If the land was kept unused or fallow for a long term they will become barren and useless. To preserve the normal condition of the agricultural land tenancy concession were assigned on lands. Thus the farmers of the Tamil country of the ancient period were so keen on maintenance and upkeep of their cultivable lands. It will also testify to the calibre of the agriculturists of the Tamil country. Thus the agricultural pursuits of the Tamils attained a significant place in the economic activities of the Tamils.

End Notes

1. Cilappatikaram: Vlil: 3:8 X: 77.
2. Purananuru: 338:3.
3. Purarianuru: 301:3, 306:1.
4. Ahananuru: 260:3
5. Navukkarasar Devaram: 6:226: 8:3.
6. Aharianum: 292:11, 309:13.
7. Paditruattu: VII: 5: 5-6

8. Maduraikanchi: 169
9. Penimbanarrupadai: 186.
10. S.I.I., Vol. VI, Nos. 294 and 325.
11. E.I., Vol. XI, p.225 and Vol. V, p. 52.
12. A.R.S.I.E., 1926-27, p. 20.