

Artificial Irrigation works in Rayalaseema from 1300 to 1900 A.D.

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ABSTRACT

Irrigation received great attention in ancient and medieval Andhradesa. Artificial irrigation system was started in South India to promote agriculture, because it was the primary source of revenue. Rayalaseema was a low rainfall area being the rain shadow region and devoid of perennial rivers. So, there was a need for artificial irrigation in Rayalaseema. The districts of Anantapur, Bellary, Kadapa and Kurnool, which were donated by Nizam Alikhan to British, were called these districts under a single name Rayalaseema. It was once part of Vijayanagar Empire, though came under the Sultan of Golkonda after the Battle of Tallikota (Rakshasa Tangadi- 1565 A.D.). As a result of which the local rulers i.e., Palegars rose to prominence and kept the areas under their control. Vijayanagar Rulers provided water facilities in Rayalaseema region. The construction of irrigation works not only to satisfy the desire of the ruler, but also to increase the economic conditions of the State. One of the reasons for the flourishing economic conditions of Vijayanagar Empire in the early fifteenth century lay in the construction of irrigation works, which brought new areas under cultivation. After the downfall of Vijayanagar Empire the ceded districts (Rayalaseema) came under the control of Qutubshahis of Golkonda. They had not taken interest to construct the irrigation works in Rayalaseema. In 1800 A.D. it came under the control of East India Company. It also did not pay any attention in irrigations works. The important irrigation works undertaken by the Company were the construction of the anicuts over the rivers of Godavari and Krishna in 1847 and 1853. Sir Thomas Munro, then the Collector repaired the eroded tanks and channels due to floods.

Key words: *Dattamandalās, nadu-bāvi, nūti-mānya, chēruvu, agrahārās, prabhu-mānya, sarva-mānya, daśavandha, dēva-brāhmana, vrittis, mādās, puttis, rēkhadandās, sādhanās, dōśās, tūmūs, nāyamkara, simgauyas, rāyasam, martar, nagari-madis, kattu-mānya, calivēndra, kattu-kōdagi, kattiga, damda.*

This paper takes up a study of artificial irrigation works in Rayalaseema consisting of the districts of Anantapur, Chittoor, Kadapa and Kurnool districts, the southern part of Andhra Pradesh.

Royalaseema was a low rainfall area being the rain shadow region and devoid of perennial rivers. So, there was a need for artificial irrigation in Royalaseema. The districts of Anantapur, Bellary, Kadapa and Kurnool which were donated by Nizam Ali Khan to British were called these districts under a single name Royalaseema. Royalaseema was once part of Vijayanagara Empire, though came under the Sultan of Golconda after the battle of Tallikōta Rakshasa Tangadi, 1565A.D. As a result of which the local rulers i.e. *Pālēgārs* rose to prominence and kept the areas under their control. These *Pālēgārs* were in the defence service of Vijayanagara Empire.

In and around 1680 A.D. taking the political and economic conditions of Royalaseema as an advantage, they captured the power and declared themselves as local chiefs. *Chatrapati* Shivaji, the Maharashtra king led wars on Royalaseema in 1667-68 A.D. and occupied the forts of Gurramkonda, Gutty, Panduru, Pēnugōnda, etc., and collected the tax called *chaut* from the neighbouring states. Moreover, there were revolts of the Adoni, Kadapa and Kurnool. Hyder Ali of Mysore invaded and occupied Bellary, Gurramkonda, Rayadurgam and Siddhavatam forts. Tippu sultan, the son of Hyder Ali occupied the forts like Adoni. With the third and fourth Mysore wars the total Royalaseema came under the control of Nizam. At that time Arthur Wellesley became the Governor of South India. The Nizam signed an agreement of Subsidiary Alliance system of Wellesley in 1800 A.D. As a result of this agreement, the East India Company was maintaining some army at Hyderabad for the protection of Hyderabad, in reciprocation of this; Nizam gave the area of Anantapur, Bellary, Kadapa and Kurnool for the maintenance of expenditure of the armies at Hyderabad. So, these districts were further called as Ceded districts (*Dattamandalas*).

The Vijayanagara inscriptions are spread over a vast period of time from 1351 to 1696 A.D. Large number of inscriptions speaks about the donations of money which were received by the temple treasury diverted for the improvement of temple lands and irrigational channels. The economic function of the Tirumala Tirupati temple was mainly based on this activity as nearly seventy five percent of the inscriptions of this temple reveal how money was diverted for the upkeep of irrigation facilities to the temple villages.¹

The kingdom of Vijayanagara takes its name, *City of Victory*, from its capital on the Tungabhadra river. They ruled from c.1336-1630 A.D. The Kingdom had its rule in both Andhra and Karnataka from the very beginning. Harihara was holding the districts as the Commander of Kampili before founding the independent kingdom. The four dynasties (Sangam, Sāluva, Tuluva, and Āraviti) of Vijayanagar ruled over the entire South India and a large part of Āndhradēśa. The Vijayanagara rulers had taken care to provide water facilities like tanks, wells, reservoirs, and canals for the development of agriculture. The irrigation works were particularly taken up in the plains where natural water resources were meagre.

Irrigation works may be classified into two types, natural and artificial. The natural sources of water have been through the rivers, and rainfall. Whereas artificial irrigation works were of three types. 1. Wells (including *daruvu* wells on river banks) 2. River-channels, rivulets, tanks, reservoir or dams (*sētūs*) formed by building embankments across two hills and 3. Canals. Among these, tank irrigation plays an important role in the growth of agrarian economy. It may be traced back to the megalithic times in South India. A number of megalithic and neolithic sites were found in Andhra region and major irrigation systems were in practice by the megalithic people in early Āndhradēśa. Irrigation received great attention in ancient and medieval Āndhradēśa. Artificial irrigation system was started in South India to promote agriculture, because, it was the primary source of revenue.

The construction of irrigation works was not only to satisfy the desire of the ruler, but also to increase the economic conditions of the state. One of the reasons for the flourishing economic conditions of Vijayanagara Empire lay in the construction of irrigation works, which brought new areas under cultivation. Several inscriptions refer to the rulers, nobles and officials built several tanks or reservoirs, wells, and canals. Before the rule of Vijayanagara kings, there was no water supply in Rayalaseema region. During the Vijayanagara period, it was well developed. Every district had a *chēruvu* named after either the ruler or the donor of the irrigation work. Before, the rule of Vijayanagara kings, there was no water supply in Rayalaseema region. During the Vijayanagara period artificial irrigation works were well developed in this area.

A record from Pōrumāmilla in Badvel taluk of Kadapa district of Śrī Krishnadēvarāya, dated, 1526 A.D. mentioned the digging of a well.² According to Kadireddikunta³ record a *nūtimānya* i.e. the gift of land as remuneration for maintaining a well to certaining Annamarāju, in Maddipādu of Nuvsulapādu village. Kadirēddikunta is a hamlet of Katteragandla, in Badvel taluk of Kadapa district. The record belonged to Śrī Krishnadēvarāya. An undated record from Sunkēsula, Pulivendala taluk of Kadapa district, mentioned a grant of one *iddumn* of land to Kōndōju Timmayya digging a well. The record didn't mention the ruler at that time.⁴ The construction of a *nadu-bāvi* (stepped well) mentioned in the *Telugu* record Kannēlūru, Jammalamadugu taluk of Kadapa district, dated, 1539 A.D. during the reign of Achyutadēvamahārāya.⁵

The Vijayanagara kings gave much preference to build artificial tanks in Rayalaseema. The terms *chēruvu*, *kōlanu*, *madugu*, *tatāka*, *kēre* and *ēri* mean a tank. In some places, due to their enormous size they were called *ambudhi*, *sāgara*, *samudra*, *mahāpayōdhi*, *vardhi*, *pemjeruvu*, *sarovara* and because of sanctity, *tīrtha*. The construction of tanks was looked upon one of the seven meritorious acts which a man ought to perform during his life time. A son (the procreation of), a poem (the composition of), a treasure (a hoarding of), a grove (the planting of) a girl to a Brāhmin (the marriage of), a temple (the consecration of), and a tank (the construction of), are considered as sacred acts. Every district had a *chēruvu* or a tank named after either the ruler or the donor of the irrigation work. An important inscription is incised on two slabs, one smaller than the other, set up in front of the ruined Bhairava temple at Pōrumāmilla, dated, 1369 A.D.⁶ during the reign of Bukkarāya I. It describes the construction of the tank at Pōrumāmilla located in the Sākalisīma by Bhāskara alias Bhavadura, son of king Bukkarāya I, who was then the Governor of Udayagiri. This inscription gave valuable information about the construction of tanks. The grant commences with invocatory and preliminary verses, the succeeding stanzas give the genealogy of the donor, Bhāskara Bhavadura, the next few verses narrate the merit attaching to the building of a tank, then are given the details of a tank construction and the specification of the site of the tank, date of its construction, etc., then the usual imprecatory and benedictory stanzas, and lastly the specification of the *adhikārin* (Dēvarrajan, son of the minister (probably of Bhāskara) Kumāragirinātha) of the

tank, and the composer (Limgayao-Machanaryya i.e. Machana son of Limgaya) of the record.

The tank, which is situated about two miles to the east of the village called Pōrumāmilla. It was also called Anantarāja-*sāgara*. The bund consists of four natural hills connected by three short earthen dams, riveted with Kadapa slabs. The western flank thus, consists of practically the range of hills which runs north and south between Pōrumāmilla and Badvel. The total length of the artificial bund is about 4,500 ft. The total length including the hills is about 14,000 ft. At the deepest section the bund is about 12 ft. wide at the top and 150 ft. at the bottom, and about 33 ft. deep. The tank has two sources of water supply, one natural and the other artificial. The natural feeder is a stream called the Maldēvi river. The reservoir is provided with four sluices, two of which have been repaired and provided with screw-gear and there are five weirs.

The Pōrumāmilla record also stated that for two years 1,000 labourers were working daily on the tank and the dam; and 100 carts were engaged in getting stones for walls which formed a part of the masonry work. The dam was 5,000 *rēkha-dandās* long, including the hills, 8 *rēkha-dandās* wide, and 7 high. The record also mentioned twelve *sādhanās* of the tank and six *dōśās* of tanks in general. The cost of construction was met with enormous cash and grain.

The Vijayanagara rulers, their subordinates, and officials took much care not only to provide water facilities, but also maintain them properly. *Daśavandha-mānyās* were provided to maintain and repairs these artificial irrigation works. The maintenance of irrigation works was done by a single person or a group of people as seen from the records, who were given the *daśabandha inām*, which means a grant of land as remuneration for the service rendered by individuals to irrigation facilities. It was also known as *daśavandha* or *daśavandha-mānya*.⁷ A record from Mōpūru in Pulivendala taluk of Kadapa district of Harihararāya I dated, 1351 A.D. records the gift of the village Nāgūru in Pulivēndala and two *khās* of *madi* (wet land) under the tank of Cadupurēla in Mulkinādu to the god Bhairavadēva of Mōmpūru by Sāvemna-odēya who was ruling in Udayagiri.⁸ The Indukūru *Telugu* inscription (Kamalapuram taluk, Kadapa district) of Harihararāya II dated, 1386 A.D. states that Irugamareddi-Māramareddi built a tank. It also mentioned that he gave one *putti* of land as

prabhumānya, *daśavamdha* and some more lands, it seems, was given *dēva-brāhmana-vrittis*. The rate of *daśavandha* or payment used for the maintenance of the tank is stated to be two *tūmūs* of grain per *putti* of land irrigated under the tank.⁹ Another *Telugu* inscription from Mudivēdu, Madanapalli taluk of Chittoor district of same king dated, 1397 A.D. mentioned a tank at Ballegam *cheruvu* in Mangumali *sthala* in Penugōnda *Marjavāda*. Mahānāyamkācārya Mōtta Dōrapanāyaka had given certain lands as *daśavamda* under this tank.¹⁰ According to Pemdmarri *Telugu* record (Kadapa) of Dēvarāya I dated 1413A.D., the grant of *daśavamdha-mānya* to Aubhalōjhyalu, Dēvamna, Tippanna, Manccanōjhyalu and some others of the village Pendimari by Malanāyinmgaru who was holding *nāyamkara* of the village Pendlamari in Mulkināti-sīma (from Kamalapūram to Siddhavatam). The said granters were to maintain in good condition the bund of the big tank on the west of the village for, a remuneration of 300 *simgauyas* (*mādās*) in lieu of which they were granted wet land measuring three *puttis*.¹¹

The record from Rāvulakōlanu in Pulivendala taluk of Kadapa district, dated 1494 A.D. of Narasimha II stated the construction of a tank by Narasanāyaka. Further, the record didn't give any information. For irrigation and water supply to the new city of Nāgalāpura, Krishnadēvarāya employed fifteen to twenty thousand workers and put them under different sub-chiefs. The place under work looked like a sheet of people covering the ground. The tank has three large pillars, beautifully carved.¹²

During the reign of Krishnadēvarāya, a tank was built named as Timmasamudram, in the name of Śāluva Timmarusāya.¹³ Krishnadēvarāya built a dam and channel at Korragal and the Baśavanna channel which are still in use.¹⁴ An inscription from Nāgēnahalli in the Hospet taluk of Bellary district, dated 1516 A.D. refers to Ranganātha Dikshita built a tank called Nāgasamudra after the name of Nāgāladēvi, the mother of Krishnadēvarāya.¹⁵ Another inscription from Vānipemta in Prodduturu taluk of Kadapa district dated 1521 A.D. refers to the king Krishnadēvarāya who granted Ganjikumtasīma as *nāyamkara* to Śrīman-mahāmandalēśvara Bukkarāju Timmarāju. A certain *Rāyasam* Gangarusu, son of Mancikamti Kāmarāju is stated to have made an arrangement for the repairs and up-keep of the tank of Vanipemta village by granting a remuneration of one *tūmu* of grain for each (*martar*) *madi* of the land irrigated under the tank including

all the king's lands (*nagari-madis*).¹⁶ A record record from Kōnakōnda of Gooty taluk in Anantapur district, dated 1521 A.D. refers to under the orders of Krishnadēvarāya, Kottanara Rāmarāju made a gift of land to certain persons of Kōndakundi for constructing a tank and for its supervision.¹⁷ Another record from Havinahallu-vīrapura, Bellary taluk dated 1529 A.D. refers to the people of Dōndavati village made a gift land to Malēsāni, son of Gundapa for repairing the tank at the village during the reign of Krishnadēvarāya. The income of the gift land was used for repairing the tank. Matla Ananta Bhupala built Siddhavatam tank in Kadapa district during the reign of Krishnadēvarāya.¹⁸ Bayakara Rāmappayya built the tank Hiriyalakkasamudra in the name of his mother Hiriyalakkasamma. He was also responsible for the construction of the tanks (Nearly sixteen) like Achytōmmasamudra, Bāchasamudra, Ammasamudra, Rāmasamudra, Akkasamudra, Kāmasamudra Vīrasamudra, Achytēndrasamudra, Venkatēndrasamudra, Pinalakkasamudra, Chinnatippasamudra, Achutasamudra, Peddalakkasamudra, Lingālayatatāka, Venkatāyyatatāka, Pedatimmasamudra and Chinnabāchasamudra.¹⁹ Varadarājamma, the wife of Krishnadēvarāya dug Kambam *cheruvu* at Kambam.²⁰ Krishnadēvarāya, his subordinates and other officials not only constructed tanks but also granted lands for the maintenance and repairs of the tanks.

An epigraph at Budili in Hindupur taluk of Anantapur district dated 1539A.D. refers to Chikka Narasappayya alias of Anantayya purchased some land for the repairs of the tank at Budili. Another epigraph at Bagināyakanahalli in Rayadurg taluk of Bellary district dated, 1546 A.D. mentioned that Vīranāyaka, an agent to *mahāmadalēśvara* Rāmarājavithālayadēva-mahā-arasu, made a *kattu-mānya* grant of fields to five persons for constructing the ruined tank at Bagina, (Yakanahalli).²¹ A water-shed (*calivendra*) near Kōtulakuntapāya on the way to Tirumala mentioned in the record from Dēvuni Kadapa, Kadapa taluk, Kadapa district dated 1551 A.D. The record does not refer to the King. The chief who issued this record was a subordinate of Sadāśivarāya as known from the records. The record also mentioned the gift of some land as *sarvamānya* to Sūrpa Aubhalēśvara by Nandyāla Aubhala *mahārāja* for maintaining a watershed and grant of some lands as *sarvamānya* to the suppliers of water.²² A tank near the Narsimhadēva on the bank of Pinākini mentioned in an inscription from Yerragudipādu in Kamalapuram taluk of Kadapa district dated 1551 A.D. during the reign of Sadāśivarāya.²³ Another tank at Doddagatta

in Nidugalnādu repaired and made a *kattu-kōdagi* gift of land to Mali-Gauda and Parusa-Gauda during the reign of same king.²⁴ A record from Rayadurg, Anantapur district dated 1556 A.D. records, the fines collected in the *agrahārās* as gifts to the temples and for repair of the tank and channels in the respective *agrahārās* in which they were collected. Another record from Śrīrangāpuram in Hindupuram taluk of Anantapur district dated 1584 A.D. Śrīrangarāya built a tank and canal connecting the tank with river for the supply of water.²⁵

The Vijayanagara rulers were also took interest for digging canals and granted lands for construction, maintenance and repairs. The digging of a canal from the river Henna (Pēnnā) to Penukōnda, a dam on the Haridra for supply of water through canal to Harihara and a dam on the Kāvēri from where a canal dug to Sītapura and further to Hērūr at the request of the people of the latter place. These served the purpose of irrigation and added to the resources of the cultivators, temples and rulers. The Mādireddipalli (Hindupur taluk of Anantapur district) *Telugu* inscription dated 1388 A.D. of Harihararāya II states that Pōlināyakaya, son of Mahānāyamcarya Harigila Kitināyaka ruling at Mēdirēddipalli caused to dig feeder channel to the tank from the river Cireru. It also records the grant of some land as *daśavandam* to Peda-Bayirapōju and Cina-Bayirapōju.²⁶ Vīrananāyaka, the brother of Virūpannaya, the chief of Penukonde, dug a canal called *nūtana-Tungabhadra* by tapping the underground water and brought it to the village Modeya (alias Acyutarāyapura) for irrigation. The land irrigated by the canal was assigned to the Mahalaksmi of Haruhe Lakhmapura. Breaches in tank bund were repaired. Such instances are noted at Paliganahalli. Another *Telugu* inscription of Dēvarāya dated 1426 A.D. from Ulimella in Pulivendala taluk of Kadapa district mentions a canal near the village Ulimella. A record from Rāvulakōlanu, Pulivendala taluk of Kadapa district dated 1494 A.D. of Narasimha II records the construction of a canal named as *Katu Kāluva* by Narasanāyaka, son of Kasavināyaka, who was the *kattiga* (official) of Kathāri Śāluva Immadi Narasimha *mahārāja*, named after his (donor's) mother Kēveramma. The word *kattiga* may mean body guard who bears a *damda* (stick)²⁷ Another record from Kūccupāpa in Proddutur taluk of Kadapa district dated 1530 A.D. refers to the king Acyutadēvarāya. It records the grant of *daśavandhamānya* to certain persons of the village Kūcipāpa for digging a canal, probably in the stream (*antara-ganga-kāluva*). The canal was named after the donor's son Cāri Ayyaparusu.²⁸

Charitable persons gifted land and cash for deepening or desilting tanks. Temples also encouraged such deeds. A record from Tirupati dated 1475 A.D. records that a private person gifted 150 *panam* for food offerings to Udaiyavar (Rāmānujachārya). This sum was used for improving an existing tank in Udaiyavarkalvay-pattadai in Vikramāditya-mangalam. Apart of income accruing from river tolls, toll revenue, fines and other cesses was also used to maintain tanks.

According to Śrīsailam (Nandikotkur taluk of Kurnool district) inscription dated 1574 A.D., the bund across (the stream) Bhōgavati was repaired during the reign of Tirumalarāya. The digging of the irrigational canal at Cidipurāla mentioned in the record from Cidipirāla in Kamalapuram taluk of Kadapa district, dated 1578 A.D. during the reign of Śrīrangarāya. It also records some gifts in the form of paddy levied on the land irrigated by these canals.²⁹ Like this, the Vijayanagara rulers and their officials took interest not only to build tanks, digging wells and canals but also granted lands for maintenance and repairs of irrigation works. Irrigation was considered a work of religious merit.

The kings and chiefs reclaimed great stretches of land and increased the extent of arable land. Vijayanagara rulers also took interest not only reclaimed the forests but also provide water facilities in reclaimed areas. These reclaimed areas were exempted from the payment of taxes for specific periods, and to fix a graded rate of assessment on them thereafter. Krishnadēvarāya built a huge reservoir near capital for irrigation and water supply to the new city of Nāgalāpura. In order to make this tank Krishnadēvarāya demolished a hill and turned it into plain ground. He had dug a lake at Nāgalāpura and exempted from paying taxes for nine years. As a result of which, the field was improved with revenue of about 20.000 *pardaos*.³⁰ The evidence shows that incentives were offered by the Government to the people who settled down in particular areas to improve the lands for agricultural production. The temple as owner of landed estates and cattle farms encouraged agriculture. It helped in the reclamation of lands and the extension of cultivation. The records from Tirumala Tirupati, and Kalahasti refer to huge donations to the improvement of tanks, channels and reclamation of waste lands belonging to the temples. These irrigation developments, digging channels, renovation of the tanks, reclamation of lands for

cultivation with the expenses of huge money through deposits in the temples endowments, eventually, resulted in the growth of agricultural activities which in turn raised both temple economy as well as the state economy. The monetary endowments were fully utilised for the purpose of irrigation facilities by the temple authorities is the major feature of the agrarian development in the country during fifteenth century A.D. An inscription from Tirumala the Chandragiri taluk of Chittoor district dated 1457 A.D. mentioned that Venkata Valliyar, one of the *Emperuman adiyars* temple of Narasimhadevar at Tirupati donated a sum of 1000 *panam* to Tiruvenkatamudaiyan. The *sthanattars* of Tirumal temple arranged for the investment of this amount in the digging of *periya-ēri* in Tirupati. The irrigational improvements were looked after by the temple authorities and the local authorities in the village level with the temple money which reduced the burden of state investment in the agrarian activities. Both the state and the local bodies were relieved from the expenditure towards irrigation facilities and reclamation of lands. The king did not involve in the matter of monetary contacts of the temple and their activities on the improvement of channels, tanks and other agrarian activities in the temple villages. In other words the king did not provide additional fund for the state irrigational scheme which was carried out by the temple authorities.³¹ In this way the religious benefactions of the devotees met the secular needs.

After the downfall of Vijayanagara Empire the ceded districts came under the control of Qutub Shahis of Golconda. They had not taken interest to construct the tanks and other irrigation works in ceded districts of Āndhradēśa.

In 1800 A.D. the Rayalaseema region came under the control of East India Company. The Company also did not pay attention on irrigation works. Tanks and canals were not maintained properly. In 1802 A.D. ceded districts suffered from severe drought and famines. There was agitation for further irrigation works as a protection against drought and failure of crops. Several schemes were suggested but not taken seriously.³² 400 old tanks in Kurnool catered to the needs of irrigation, but they were not improved in any way. In 1803 A.D. there were heavy rains which breached 1000 tanks and 800 channels in Kadapa district. Sir Thomas Munro, then the collector, without waiting for the Government's permission, repaired the eroded tanks and channels. As a result of this action the

crop production was plenty in 1805 A.D. He introduced Ryotwari system. Among the British officers who extended their services to Rayalaseema, Munro was the foremost. The Company gave occasional loans for repairing old works, only in case of payment of land revenue without arrears. In ceded districts the farmers themselves in this way built up irrigation works. Repairs were carried out by the renters who had to keep a deposit with the Company. The important irrigation works undertaken by the Company were the construction of the anicuts over the rivers of Godavari and Krishna in 1847 A.D. and 1853 A.D. These works brought prosperity to the delta regions only. The rest of the Andhra, the irrigational works were not undertaken.

In 1858 A.D. when the crown took over the administration, it also did not pay much interest for the development of irrigation works. The only important work it undertook, in this area was the construction of the Kurnool-Kadapa canal linking the Tungabhadra and Pennar rivers extending further south was but one step further in the same direction. It was constructed by private English Company in 1875. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the representatives of central power and local officials are more often seen as the organising of constructing tanks, canals and sluices than before.

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