



LAND PROTOTYPE AND FARMING SETTING IN THE PRINCELY STATE OF PUDUKKOTTAI

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to highlight the land pattern and forming scenario in the erstwhile Princely State of Pudukkottai. The Pudukkottai State Manual speaks of two seasons for cultivation – the **koodai** and the **kaalam**. The concept of two seasons of cultivation spread over the months as specified in the Pudukkottai State Manual was not of modern origin. This is shown by the use of expressions such as **koodai bhogam** and **kaala bhogam** in the medieval inscriptions of the State. The popular method of ploughing **Er** or the **plough**, was mentioned in the inscriptions. The **Erram**, the **pickaxe** and the **arrival**, (sickle) were also mentioned in the inscriptions. The principal crop cultivated on Wet Lands was **nel**



(paddy). Paddy Cultivation was not a novelty. It was practised even during the Sangam Period. The traditional Dry Crops cultivated in the region were **Soolam**, **Varagu**, **Kelvaragu**, **Paruthi** (Cotton) and **Kadalai** (Groundnut). **Tharisu** means lands lying waste for long. The Pudukkottai Kingdom under Tondaimans was prone to water scarcity and hence irrigation tanks played a vital role to play. The Tamil language has many names for the tank. They are **kulam**, **eri**, **pereri**, **samuthiram**, **embal**, **eenthal**, **thangal**, etc. The term **“kaaniyaalan”** was

used with reference to the Tax – Paying Land Holder. The **uur Podhu** essentially consisted of the **“tharisu”** or Waste Land, the **“natham”** or unoccupied house sites, etc., in the immediate vicinity of the village.

KEYWORDS

Puncei – Nancei – koodai & kaalam – bhogam – Er – kolu- Nel – kuruvai & Sambha – Tharisu – kulam – Eri

INTRODUCTION

The paper attempts to highlight the land pattern and forming scenario in the erstwhile Princely State of Pudukkottai. The principal classification

of Lands was into Wet and Dry Lands in the jurisdiction of Princely State of Pudukkottai. This twofold classification was very relevant in connection with Revenue Administration, since the demand on the Wet Lands was greater than that on Dry Lands. The Wet Lands were popularly known as **nancei**¹, while the Dry Lands were called **puncei**². The other names for Wet Lands were **nirnilam**, **nannilam** and **nanpulam**³. **Nirnilam** was contrasted with **nirililam**⁴ – Lands which were starved of water. **Punpulam** and **Vanpulam**⁵ were other names for Dry Lands. The basis of this classification was mainly availability of water for irrigation. The Dry Lands, which subsequently came to benefit by irrigation water from the newly created tanks or canals, were deemed Wet Lands. Conversely, if the Wet Lands came to lose the benefits of irrigation water which they once enjoyed, for

reasons such as the permanent destruction of the sources, they would be downgraded. Given the fact that the rainfall in this region was rather meager, the total extent of Lands classified as Wet was comparatively small. The expressions, *vayal*,⁶ *vantal nilam* (open fields), *thottam*,⁷ *manal nilam*, *kollai*⁸ and *thoppu*⁹ were very common.

CULTIVATION SEASONS

The Pudukkottai State Manual speaks of two seasons for cultivation – the *koodai* and the *kaalam*. It says, “The *koodai Velamai* or Summer Cultivation commences in February – March and ends in July – August. The *kaala velamai* which is more extensive, begins under normal conditions, in July – August and extends over five to six months”¹⁰. The *koodai* or Summer Cultivation normally starts some three months earlier than the onset of the South West Monsoon, which normally sets in the middle of June. There were some considerations behind this earlier start. One of it was the prospect of taking advantage of the storage still left in the tanks after the *kaala velamai* was completed. Another was that during February and March, the soil and the air would be comparatively moist and humid respectively. The concept of two seasons of cultivation spread over the months as specified in the Pudukkottai State Manual was not of modern origin. On the contrary, the idea was centuries old. This is shown by the use of expressions such as *koodai bhogam* and *kaala bhogam* in the medieval inscriptions of the State¹¹. *Bhogam* here means Agricultural Season. The cultivation seasons were also referred to in the inscriptions as Kuruvai Bhogam or Perumpu and Pasana Bhogam or Perumpu¹². Pasanam was the prime season of cultivation in the Pudukkottai Region. Kuruvai Season was secondary. The natural phenomena like Seasons made or marred their material well being. This sensitivity induced them to equate the farming season with the calendar year itself in the inscription.

CULTIVATION METHODS

The important operations involved in the cultivation of plants were: ploughing the fields, sowing the seeds, raising nurseries, transplanting the seedlings, wetting and weeding the fields and harvesting the crops. Advanced mechanization of agricultural operations is a very recent phenomenon. In these operations, animal power and human labour were replaced. Besides the plough and the pickaxe, simple implements like the spade (for digging the ground) and the sickle (for cutting the grass, plants, etc.) were slowly reduced.

The popular method of ploughing *Er* or the *plough*, was mentioned in the inscriptions.¹³ It has many parts, made of wood and iron, of which the most important is the *Kolu* or the ploughshare, which causes the earth to be furrowed. The thickness of the *kolu* varied according to the land to be ploughed was wet or dry. The plough was a simple device which was made locally by the village carpenter and blacksmith. The *Erram*, the *pickaxe* and the *arrival*, (sickle) were also mentioned in the inscriptions.¹⁴ The *Erram* is a simple wooden device by operating on whose lever the water down in the well was being lifted up through a bucket for irrigating the fields. The manvetti or the spade, was widely used by the farmer.

WET CROPS

The principal crop cultivated on Wet Lands was *nel* (paddy). Paddy Cultivation was not a novelty. It was practised even during the Sangam Period. This is shown by references to *kuppainel* – a variety of paddy - in the ancient classics.¹⁵ The paddy cultivated in this region was of two varieties – Kuruvai¹⁶ (of short duration) and Sambha (of long duration). The particular variety that was selected for cultivation depended on the season.

Incidentally, all the varieties of paddy cultivation for the past hundreds of years have become now almost extinct with the introduction of high yielding varieties under the Grow More Food Campaign so that terms like *kuruvai* and *sambha* now properly fit in with cultivation seasons rather than with the species of

paddy. The harvests of *kuruvai* paddy and *sambha* paddy were referred to in inscriptions as Kuruvai Bhogam and Sambha Bhogam respectively.¹⁷

Dry Crops

The traditional Dry Crops cultivated in the region were *Soolam*, *Varagu*¹⁸, *Kelvaragu*¹⁹, *Paruthi*²⁰ (Cotton) and *Kadalai* (Groundnut). The leguminous crops grown were *Ellu*²¹, *Kollu*²², *Thuvarai*²³ (Red Gram) and *Payaru*²⁴ (Green Gram, Black Gram). There is mention of *Karumbu*²⁵ (Sugarcane) and *Vaalai*²⁶ (Bananas) also Vegetables like *Kaththaranka*, (Cluster Beans) Venttakka, (Lady's Finger), Awaraka, (saber Bean), Pusani (Gourd)²⁷, Mullanki, (Radish) and Murunkaka (Drumstick) were also cultivated. Trees like *Maa* (Mango), *Pala* (Jack Fruit), *Thennai* (Coconut Palm), *Panai* (Palmyrah), *Puli* (Tamarind), *Vembu* (Neem) and *Karuvai* were planted.

Barren Land or Tharisu

Tharisu means lands lying waste for long. Many other words were also used in the inscriptions to refer to lands of this type. "*Udumboodi Aamai Thavalntha Nilam*" means Lands infested with monitor lizards and over which tortoises crawled.²⁸ "*Kadai Tharisu* means lands lying waste for long. Many other words were also used in the inscriptions to refer to lands of this type. "*Udumboodi Aamai Thavalntha Nilam*" means Lands infested with monitor lizards and over which tortoises crawled.²⁸ "*Kadai Nilam*" refers to Lands of the lowest grade in terms of fertility. In a different context, it refers to Cultivated Lands at the tail end of the Ayacut. "*Vilaya Nilam*" denotes Lands Uncultivable.

Animal Husbandry

The importance of the role played by livestock in the rural economy was obvious. It was more so in the medieval agronomy. The cows met the home demand for milk and milk products. The bullocks were useful to the farmers in ploughing the soil. They were also used in carting inputs to the fields and outputs from the fields. Their services in this respect were valuable because mechanized means of transportation were still unheard of in the rural area. The droppings of cattle and sheep were valuable manures for the soil. The utility of the livestock in this respect came into bold relief when it was realized that the cost of the chemical fertilizers now-a-days accounts for a considerable part of the cultivation budget of the modern farmer.

Tank Type Irrigation

Irrigation was the backbone of the agrarian economy. Rivers, rivulets and lakes were the major water reservoirs which provided irrigation facilities to the lands.²⁹ In Pudukkottai Kingdom, the irrigation sources were grouped under three classes according to the number of months they provided water for irrigation to the Ayacuts. They were 1) Nachanavayal Eri, 2) Mankulam, and 3) Pudukkulam.

The Pudukkottai Kingdom under Tondaimans was prone to water scarcity and hence irrigation tanks played a vital role to play. Apart from receiving the rain water direct, they collected the water from the feeder channels and from catchments area. By collecting the water when available and storing it, they released it for irrigation when it was needed most by the crops. When the tank water percolates, the water table in the surrounding areas also goes up. When this happens, the level of water in the irrigation wells nearby also goes up. In effect, they are thus indirectly contributing to the irrigation of crops by wells also. They were the chief source of inland fishing. They also served some other human needs. They, therefore, were described as the linchpin of the irrigation system in the Pudukkottai Kingdom.

The Tamil language has many names for the tank. They are *kulam*, *eri*, *pereri*, *samuthiram*, *embal*, *eenthal*, *thangal*, etc. Of these, *pereri* and *samuthiram* are reserved for use when tanks of relatively big size are to be referred to. *Uruni* generally denotes tanks whose water is potable.³⁰ However, only the names, *eri*, *pereri*, *kulam* and *embal* were referred to in the inscriptions of the Pudukkottai State in connection with irrigation matters.

The term used in the inscriptions to refer to the construction of an irrigation tank is “*kalli*”. This is seen in the expressions, “*Kulamum Kalli, Vayalum Thiruthi*”³¹ and “*Kalamum Kalli, Kadum Vetti, Kattiyum Parithu, Pallamum medum Odukkiddu*”³². In informal language, the term “*vetti*” was also used in the same sense as “*kalli*”. But the term “*kalli*” also had a restricted sense given to it, when it was used to refer to the paving of stones at appropriate places in the tank and removing of stones that obstructs the flow of water at other places.

The structure and functions of irrigation tank and its physical features did not differ much from District to District in the Tamil Country. What marked out an irrigation tank from the rest of the rural scene were its bunds, *karai or kulakarai*³³ as it was called. A tank has usually three bunds. The three bunds sometimes gave the tank the crescent shape spoken of in a *Purananurru* verse.³⁴ The tank bed, *kulapparappu* or *kulappadugai*³⁵ stood on a ground which was elevated a little above the fields, the Ayacut, which the Tank was intended to serve.

Every Tank was provided with a vent or *madai*³⁶ through which water was let out for irrigation. It was also provided with a sluice, called *kumili*³⁷ to control and regulate the flow of water through the vent. Every Tank had a main distribution channel that took off irrigation water from the outer side of the vent, called *pura madai*. Every Tank was provided with an opening on one of its banks, called *kalingu*³⁸ through which the Tank overflows were diverted during times of floods.

Well Type Irrigation

There were a large number of irrigation wells. The wells sometimes constituted one of the boundaries to the plot of land under sale.³⁹ When a piece of land was sold, its right to draw water from the well was also sold. But if the land in question was entitled to only a share of the total supply from the well, care was taken to specify that share in terms of fractions. The irrigation water supply by the well, along with the transfer of the lands, was sold. It was common that some areas, along with wells, were being auctioned for sale.⁴⁰ It is noted from an inscription that a well was sold along with a *tadi* (piece) of land which stood on an area of one Ma.⁴¹ Well irrigation has been largely relied upon for crops cultivated in gardens. One inscription speaks of “*Vayalkalil Kinaru Malaikalil Kinaru*” which means wells on the fields as well as on the hills.⁴² Water was being lifted out of the wells by a simple wooden device called “*ethu maram*”.⁴³ The equitable distribution of tank water was regulated by the Local Bodies. The role of wells in irrigation was no less important, for it was the wells with their unfailing supply through the year that imparted an element of stability to the rural agricultural system.

Proprietorship of Land

Land in its pristine state was a gift of Nature. But it was unfit for cultivation of crops in the natural state because it was thickly covered with wild vegetation. It was only after the land was cleared of overgrowth that cultivation could begin. The supply of virgin lands was so copious in the beginning that anyone who wanted to reclaim them could do so without let or hindrance. The only limiting factor was one’s own physical ability to do it. This meant that those who carried out the reclamation in the first instance also began to possess the reclaimed land. In other words, reclamation and possession went together. This seems to be the way the institution of landed property in its very crude form began to originate. It is wrong to suppose that with it there also arose simultaneously the various concomitants of the notion of private property, such as ownership sale, gift and mortgage. The reason was that social and economic conditions were still primitive and the scope for the free play of the instinct of self interest was very limited. It took time for all the related aspects of private ownership to evolve. Until that stage was reached, land was being held communally.

*Kaani*⁴⁴ means ownership. Originally this term only meant land but it came to be used as a synonym for ownership of anything, including land⁴⁵. Another term used was “*kaniyaatchi*”, which signifies title and possession.⁴⁶ “*En Kaani*”⁴⁷ stood for ‘My Lands’, while *kaani Paruru*⁴⁸ stood for “number or extent of lands held by us”. The term “*kaaniyaalan*”⁴⁹ was used with reference to the Tax – Paying Land Holder. The deed

witnessing the sale of *kaani* was referred to as “*Kaani Vilai Piramaanam*”,⁵⁰ while the deed witnessing the grant of *kaani* goes by the name of “*kaaniyaatchi pidipaadu*” or “*kaniaanmai piramaanam*”⁵¹. These various terms were the verbal manifestations of the reality of private ownership in land.

Village Community Ownership

The term Communal Ownership is self explanatory. It refers to ownership of lands by the local community, as distinct from individuals. Scholars are unanimous that Communal Ownership of Lands existed in India right from the very ancient times. As the centuries rolled on, it progressively yielded place to individual ownership. According to Stoke, vestiges of this form of ownership were discernible in certain parts of Tanjore even as late as nineteenth century.⁵² Communal Ownership implies that when it comes to the question of alienating the property under Communal Ownership, it calls for the consensus of the people constituting the community.

There were particularly two types of property which invariably fell under Common Ownership – (a) the “*uur Podhu*” (the Village Common). The *uur Podhu* essentially consisted of the “*tharisu*” or Waste Land, the “*natham*” or unoccupied house sites, etc., in the immediate vicinity of the village. The expropriated lands of tax defaulters were also brought under *uur podhu*.⁵³

The *uur podhu* was reclaimed and transferred in favor of the Temple.⁵⁴ The reclamation of the Waste Lands of the village was, in a way, a boost to the agrarian economy. In the Pudukkottai Kingdom, the *uur Podhu Nilam* was utilized for village common purposes.

(b) Secondly, *uur, naadu, nagaram and sabha* held lands in common as a result of the Grants in the form of Brahmadeya. Hamlets were held in common by a particular group of people under Communal Ownership. Thus “*aharapparru*” stands for a hamlet jointly occupied by the Brahmanas, “*kallapparru*” by the Kallars, “*vellaalan Parru*” by the Vellalas, “*vanniapparru*” by the Vannias and “*ilammakkal Parru*” by the Ilayars.⁵⁵ Thus Communal Ownership of Lands existed side by side with Private Ownership of Lands. Communal Ownership began to decline from the fifteenth century onwards.⁵⁶

Trade and Fair

Traditionally more people were engaged in farming. By and large, those who took to trading, emerged out of the peasant community in the first instance. The terms *kadai, angadi*⁵⁷ and *santhai* were being used to refer to places where sale or exchange of goods took place. *Kadai* and *Angadi* were shops and rows of shops respectively, doing business from a covered structure. On the other hand, *santhai* was the term for Fairs held in an open centre on a particular day of the week. In these regular and periodical markets, locally produced agricultural goods were exchanged with locally produced goods like edible oil, cloth, etc., as well as with products like species, etc. brought from outside. These transactions in the local village markets were on a small scale and they were of the nature of retail business.⁵⁸

Salt, paddy, rice, green gram, beans, dhal, castor seed, areca nuts, pepper, turmeric, dry ginger, onion, mustard, cummin seeds, *kadukka* (Cherabul), *nelli* (Embellic Myrobalan), *tendri* (Bedric Myrobalan), iron, cotton, yarn, thick cloth, thin cloth, wax, honey, seas mum, gunny, sandal, silk, rose water, *savary mayir*, camphor oil, perfumes like *santhu* and *punuhu* were the notable commercial items which were exchanged in the *santhai*. The articles were subjected to the levy of tolls. These articles generally traded in this region, included essential as well as luxury items.

END NOTES

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