

# Traditional Tank Irrigation Institution: Case of Tamil Nadu, India

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### Introduction

The traditional irrigational institution have functioned effectively in all the tank villages in Tamil Nadu, India until the early 1970s. There were two layers of irrigation functionaries at village level. One is to enforce the rule and regulation for sharing and caring of tank water resources and another one to execute the work based on deemed direction of rules in force. While upper caste large farmers invariably constituted in the first category, the scheduled caste farmers and labourers were employed for second type of employment like sluice operation, field water management and others. In this second type of employment the water man traditionally called as "Neerkatti" has an important role to play since the quantity of irrigation water is become very scarce. The Neerkatties are critical for ensuring inflow of water to the tank and its equal distribution among the field in tank command. This paper proposed to capture contemporary condition of traditional irrigation institution and its efficiency and in particular the role of the Neerkatti on tank water management. This paper provides empirical evidence about different type of irrigation functionaries existed and their perceived roles and performance.

### Objectives

1. To study existing traditional irrigation Institution in Tamil Nadu, India
2. To study functioning style of institution and role of Neerkatti in tank water management
3. To study remuneration pattern for irrigation functionaries and its current status
4. To study existing rules, regulation and sanctioning system in traditional institution.

### Methodology

1. Seven tank villages in Peraiyur taluk of Madurai district (Tamil Nadu) were randomly selected
2. 31 irrigation functionary's families were selected as respondents
3. Data has been collected through structured interview schedule and focus group interaction

### Role of Neerkatti (water manager)

1. Sluice operation and maintenance
2. Announcer and emergency informer
3. Mobilize village labour
4. Water management and field irrigation
5. Watch and ward of tank assets
6. Dispute moderator

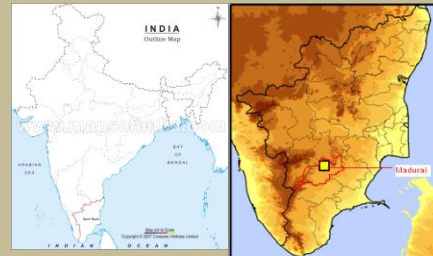
Tank components



Sluice operation



Arial view of study area



Village	Command area (acre)	Caste groups	Neerkatti families	Functionality of institution
Koovalapuram	155	5	5	No
Kadanneri	104	9	3	Yes
Meenachipuram	35	2	2	Yes
Silaimalaiipatti	70	9	4	No
Paraipatti	87.5	5	5	Yes
Sittuloti	109	5	8	Yes
Jariusilampatti	85	3	4	yes

### Traditional irrigation functionaries

Position	Remuneration
Maniyam / Nattamai ( Informal Leader)	Honorary position
Kaladi/ kanakku (accountant/ secretary)	Rs 250- 500/ yr
Neerkatti/ madyan (Water man(ager))	8 Padies or 4 marakal per acre per season
Thotti (Assistant to waterman)	4 Padies or 2 marakal (1 padi – 1.25 kg; 1 Marakkal- 4.5 Kg)

### Important findings

1. Traditional institution existed in the all the study village. but functioning only in 5 villages. Institution role is limited to water distribution and some extent for water augmentation.
2. Two layer of functionaries, upper layer held by upper caste and lower layer by lower caste
3. Efficiency of institution is mainly based on the relationship between different caste group in the village
4. Lower level irrigation functionaries were performing their duties relatively better under traditional institution
5. Neerkatti is prime most important functionary shows increasingly reluctant to do his work
6. Changing social structure and continued caste based discrimination is the main reason for reluctance of Neerkatti.
7. Rules, regulation and sanction system is existed but not as effective as in 10 years ago
8. Government institution do not have ground level staff, but traditional institution has lower level functionary but not recognized by Govt.
9. In the absence of traditional institution there is no rules and regulation to share the water among the farmers.
10. Design principles for sustainability of institution provided by the Ostrom (1990) is suited for traditional tank institution and being practiced though intensity is reduced.

Field channel maintenance



Filed irrigation by Neerkatti



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