

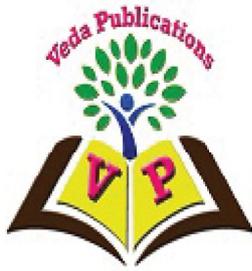


## THOUGHTS AND IDEAS OF DR. AMBEDKAR ON THE ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF WATER RESOURCES : AN ANALYSIS OF MAJOR VILLAGE TANKS IN KOLLIDAM BLOCK, NAGAPATNAM DISTRICT, TAMILNADU

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### ABSTRACT

In developing countries like India, our villages are the useful platform to catch and store the water by using local water management techniques as the traditional system of water resource management. Mostly in villages there exist more than four tanks on the basis of the caste and family. Majority of the villages does not have such water bodies for the families of socially advantaged sections. It is viewed that the people from the certain exclusive segments are being practiced walking to other neighbor villages to obtain the water for their use. With a view of this issue, the present paper aimed to analyse the accessibility and availability of water to the scheduled caste people in select villages, in the context of thoughts and ideas of Dr. Ambedkar.

**Key Words:** Village Tanks- Accessibility- Availability



## 1. INTRODUCTION & CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK

In developing countries like India, our villages are the useful platform to catch and store the water by using local water management techniques as the traditional system of water resource management. Tanks are the very smallest water pool originated by our fore fathers in villages for the purpose multiple of the village public. Such as, maintaining, drinking water, local sanitation, animals' maintenance and for favourable climate. Since the long long years back, there were communal and caste conflicts in accessing and availing water from such tanks and the same are being continued still now. In this context, the present paper is an attempt to analyse the accessibility and availability of water to the scheduled caste people in select villages, in the context of thoughts and ideas of Dr. Ambedkar.

To view this it is inevitable to understand the ideas and thoughts on water accessibility to all the village people as promulgated by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar the great personality and eminent Architect of Indian Constitution having highest educational attainments and titles from foreign Universities to fight with Indian evils like the devil people of higher caste. As a social philanthropist Dr. Ambedkar wrote and spoke extensively on the basis of his social emancipated thought on village resources like land, water, community development based agriculture, industry, technology, science, development and modernization. He has been neglected and excluded in the field of environment by the government, civil society and leading environmental writers and movements.

Significantly, Dr. Ambedkar viewed that water aspects had many strands. Sukhadeo Thorat<sup>1</sup>, an economist and author of several books on Dalits and on the economic-social thought of Ambedkar, has underlined that as a Cabinet minister who was in charge of the labour, irrigation and power portfolio during 1942-'46, Ambedkar was directly involved in framing the objectives and strategy of economic planning, water and electricity policy. During 1942-'47, his efforts were pioneering in the development of a national policy for water and electricity in the country. It was Ambedkar who sowed the seeds for several new

ideas and projects. For example, forming a River Valley Authority to oversee Centre-state issues on irrigation and hydro power; the need for an administrative infrastructure and technical know-how, like the present day Central Water Commission and Central Electricity Authority, to facilitate the development of irrigation and power projects in the Centre and the states; the concept of regional and multipurpose development of water resources.

Dr. BR Ambedkar perceptively expressed social and cultural aspects of water, and how and why the people from the socially disadvantaged sections had to be liberated from the caste of water. He inevitable mentioned that water was a deeply contentious issue that intersected with caste in critical ways, producing complex cultural meanings and social hierarchies. Water has been a traditional medium for the exclusion of SC people in overt and covert ways. For instance, neglecting the people of dalits the right over, and access to, water; asserting the monopoly of upper castes over water bodies, including tanks and their taps in villages due to constructing casteist water structures in cultural and religious domains; obscuring Dalit narratives and knowledge of water; and rendering thinking and speaking about caste, water and Dalits together as peripheral to discourses on water. Water for Dalits, has not been a pinnacle of life, but a source of constant pain and segregation.

Brahmanical scriptures have deeply coloured water with caste. Ideas of ritual purity and pollution, and daily practices and habits of drinking, bathing, fishing and transportation have been profoundly affected by caste, sanctifying the social order of water. Further, dominant environmental narratives in India are often infused with nostalgic and romantic accounts of traditional knowledge of water management, emphasising its community-based systems and methods. However, they overlook the fact that traditional water management systems have not been equal regarding water culture. Rather they are embedded in deeply structured hierarchies of caste, based on control, power and dominant religious rituals,

Prof. Sukhadeo Thorat\* is an eminent professor and awful personality to secure the educational attainments of the downtrodden of the disadvantaged sections. He has fought for empowerment of the dalit people in the country through opportunity of career development given to them

which are intermeshed in an invisible line of caste pre-suppositions. Ambedkar was time and again confronted with such beliefs and practices around water. We read a painful and touching account through his biographer Dhananjay Keer: "From the evening till midnight the boys travelled with their mouths parched with thirst; but nowhere could they get drinking water on the way. Every time people either pointed to the filthy water or asked them to go away. This was the first rude and shattering shock to the budding mind of Bhim. That day he knew that he belonged to a family that was untouchable, degraded to drink and eat filthy things." The Mahad satyagraha of 1927 was emblematic of Dalits' and Ambedkar's struggles with water. At the core of the movement was the assertion of Dalit rights to take water from public water sources. It was one of the defining moments in Ambedkar's political thought and action. The centrality of water for so-called untouchables, and the abuse and misuse of public water bodies became a converging point for divergent traditions, putting forward a humane theory of democratic agrarianism, combining issues of access and democratic rights, to water, land and common space.

However, Dr. Ambedkar has declared April 14 as Water Day and the the Union government has emphasised the need to reform water resource management and to restructure flood management. Yet, Ambedkar's legacy can prepare the ground for a different water perspective – where water cannot be disentangled from the ugliness of caste injustice, where development of waterscapes cannot be disconnected from social relations and structures of power, and where ecology has to confront transitions to democracy. Other than engineering, planning and management issues, Ambedkar's ideas and interventions on water can be brought together to form a collage of water reforms from peoples' perspectives.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

2.1. To analyse the present livelihood status of marginalized people in the study villages;

- 2.2. To study about the reasons behind for not accessibility and availability of water from the village public tanks;
- 2.3. To identify the problems and issues faced by the dalit people in accessing water the public tanks in villages; and
- 2.4. To suggest policy measures to clear and solve the issues in accessing and availing water resources in villages.

## 3. THE HYPOTHESIS

*There exists a difference between the locations of the tank water users, in respect of the reasons behind not accessibility the tanks by marginalized people.*

## 4. METHODOLOGY, STUDY AREA & SAMPLE FRAME

The present study has been conducted on the basis of both primary and secondary sources of data, which have been collected in the study area of Nagapattinam district of Tamilnadu. A Multi stage sampling method has been employed by using simple random sampling techniques as detailed below.

**Table 1. Details on Sampling Techniques for the Present Research**

District	01	Nagapattinam
Block Selected for Present Investigation	04	Kollidam
Villages selected	08	Mathiravelur, Elathur, Kappiyakudi, Patchai Perumal Nallur, Vettagudi, Panerkottagam, Thandvankulam & Valluvakkudi
Tanks' Location & Total Samples Covered	Tank Head Reach Area (THA): 10 Tank Tail End Area (TEV): 10	20 Samples consist 10 from each location
Sample Size	80	20 Tanks covered for Data Collection & Analysis

Source: Compiled from Various Sources.

## 1. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The resources of rural tanks consist the tank bunds, water standing area, foreshore area, the feeder channel, water spread area, sluice outlets, command area, field distributaries (water courses) and surplus weir. While the South and East Indian tanks are known for their antiquity and are created essentially as a source for providing supplementary irrigation during monsoon season, innumerable small water holding structures called ponds have been in existence in many North Indian states and some were constructed even after Independence for multiple uses including irrigated agriculture. Although many of these ponds are primarily meant for inland fresh water aquaculture, they have also been livestock and other domestic uses.

Tank irrigation has thus a rich heritage on account of long historical antecedents and dominations of higher caste people in various regions of India. Over centuries, village tanks constituted an important supplementary source of water to the distressed poor and they are water saving and livelihoods mechanisms for the poor people in villages. There are encouraging points propounded by Dr. Ambedkar for effective institutional frameworks to manage and assist water management at local level. In agriculture and growing concerns for global food security, rural poverty, regional inequality, and the resilience and climate compatibility of agricultural development and to strengthen the governance of rural development processes so as to guarantee positive impacts and new opportunities for socially disadvantaged sections.

### 1.1. PRESENT LIVELIHOOD STATUS OF MARGINALIZED PEOPLE IN THE STUDY VILLAGERS

Looking forward to concentrate the livelihood status of the marginalized people in tank based villages. Rural tanks are the most diverse and productive ecosystems on Earth and they are important from conservation and sustainable management because of their rich diversity of flora and fauna. Tangible and intangible diverse resources and products of tanks' functions such as fodder, fishing, fuel wood, non timber forest products, ecotourism, and flood control have

historically provided a source of income and livelihood for human beings. However, population growth and traditional type of life style leads to domination and social discrimination as not allowed the lower caste people in accessing water from public tanks. Income and employment opportunities to those people are restricted and almost all the people are living with simple hut houses situated at the village margins.

### 5.2. REASONS BEHIND FOR NOT ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF WATER FROM THE VILLAGE PUBLIC TANKS

Village tanks are the common property resources and every villager must have social rights to get the benefits as crop processing and support farm community for development of land water resources.

**Table 2. Reasons behind for not Accessibility and Availability of Water from the Village Public Tanks**

S. No.	Ways and Means	Respondents		Total
		THA	TEA	
1.	Water Usage Restricted to Higher Caste	38	39	077
2.	Tank Protection from Lower Caste	34	33	067
3.	Lessons of Improper maintenance by Water Controllers from Lower Caste	31	26	057
4.	Disintegrity of Lower Caste people	28	26	054
5.	Misusing of the Tanks system by Cheap sanitation	32	33	065
6.	Fears on Encroachments by local lower caste People	23	24	047
7.	Follow the traditional type of Rules and law	19	19	038
8.	Old Tank Institutions Dominated by Higher Caste people	21	20	41
9.	Ownership Pattern	24	21	45
10.	Water Availability	32	30	062
<b>Value of Chi-Square Test</b>				
		Calculated Value		03.69
		Degrees of Freedom		9
		Level of Significance		0.05 %
		Table Value		16.97

Source: Computed from Field Data

Table 2 shows that various reasons behind for not allowed the lower caste people by higher caste to receive the water benefits from the village tanks. The reasons include water usage restricted to higher caste, tank protection from lower caste these ways are the determinants of the sustainable development in villages, lessons of improper maintenance by water controllers from lower caste, old tank institutions dominated by higher caste people, old tank institutions dominated by higher caste people. The reasons are only issues which attributed by the higher caste people to hesitate to get the benefits from the village tanks.

On the basis personal observation in the sample villages it is felt that the people of both levels of castes live in villages maintain a cordial relationship and having mutual understanding, But it is noted that almost all the people from lower caste people live with the what the rules and life pattern insisted by senior citizens of the higher caste people. There are not any big social classes already made in the villages.

In this connection, the hypothesis is "*There exists a difference between the locations of the tank water users, in respect of the reasons behind not accessibility the tanks by marginalized people.*" has been formulated and a Chi-square Test has been calculated. The result of the test ( $X^2$ ) shows that the calculated value is much less than the table value. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted. It is therefore concluded that there is no differences between the location of the tank water users on the basis the traditional pattern of rules and regulations practiced in the sample villages. In almost all villages there are same type of reasons that inhibit the lower caste people are not entitled to get the tank benefits from the tanks situated in the villages.

### 1. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Village tanks are pioneer to avail benefits to the village public, in terms of irrigation for crop cultivation, drinking water purpose, animals' breeding and local sanitation. The water users of the rural tanks from both levels of caste are entitled to access the tanks and its resources. Unfortunately there are not possibilities to access all the tanks in a village to fulfill their water requirements. At this juncture, the present study was a pilot level exercise which conducted in certain select villages of Nagapattinam district, on the basis of face to face contact and observation methods. The present research has proved that there is not permissible rights entitled by the marginalized people from both locations of the village tanks to access and avail the water from village tanks. However there are available separate tanks with less and dilapidated conditions for those people from lower caste people. On the basis of the ideas and thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar, these types of social discriminations exist damage the human basic rights and they have waived by severe punishments. All identified persons

of the social discrimination in the context of water sharing issues and water disputes between the lower and higher caste people are entitled to take in the court of law and make it clear by legal decisions on the basis of Indian Penal code. The water standing duration of such tanks in almost all villages are 75 days to 150 days. It is observed that in the majority of the sample villages, during the summer season the people from the dominated caste are not allowed even for animals from the marginalized households. It is splendor mistake made by the people in such village should be given severe punishment and jail imprisonment. On the basis of the the Dr Ambedkar's thoughts an individual must be punished and penalty may be collected from the people those had alleged for this social discrimination.

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