Madras High Court In The High Court Of Judicature At ... vs State Of Tamil Nadu on 16 June, 2015

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED: 16..06..2015

Date of Reserving the Orders Date of Pronouncing the Orders 08.06.2015 16.06.2015

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THE HON'BLE Mr.SANJAY KISHAN KAUL, CHIEF JUSTICE and THE HON'BLE Mr.JUSTICE T.S.SIVAGNANAM

W.P. No.18373 of 2010

Aryagoundampatti, Oduvankurichi and Kadiranallur Ayacut Pasana Vivasayigal Nala Sangam, a registered society having Regn.No.107/2002, Rep., by its Secretary E.Krishnan, having office at Vakkilthotam, Door No.2/2, Aryagoundampatti Post, Namagiripettai Via, Rasipuram Taluk, Namakkal District 637 406

.. Petitioner

Versus

- 1.State of Tamil Nadu, Rep., by its Secretary, Public Works Department, Fort. St., George, Chennai -9.
- 2.The Secretary, Irrigation Dept., Fort St., George, Chennai 9.
- 3.The Chief Engineer, Water Resources Management, Trichy,

4. The District Collector, Namakkal.

5. The Tahsildhar, Rasipuram.

ORDER

T.S.SIVAGNANAM,J.

This Writ Petition, designed as a Public Interest Litigation, has been filed by a society consisting of members who are 'Ayacutdars'. The petitioner has prayed for issuance of a Writ of Certiorarified Mandamus to quash the Government Order in G.O.Ms.No.102, Public Works Department, dated 26.03.2010, in and by which the Government directed water for irrigation shall be shared by the 'Ayacutdars' in the ratio of 70:30 between the Ayacutdars of Aryagoundampatti and Oduvankurichi in Rasipuram Taluk and Kadiranallur in Namakkal Taluk. The dispute raised is between the Ayacutdars of three irrigation tanks at Oduvankurichi, Aryagoundapatti and Kadiranallur and the Ayacutdars of Thoppapatti tank.

2. Mr.R.Subramanian learned counsel appearing for the petitioner submitted that the Descriptive Memoir prepared during 1898 after survey of Thirumanimutharu basin mentions the details of the source of water for the tank as well as the discharge of excess water. It is submitted that the Aryagoundampatti tank has a Ayacut area of about 13 hectares and is fed by the Varattar river channel and total Ayacut area of 33.44.5 hectares. It is further submitted that as per the Descriptive Memoir, the source of water supply to Oduvankurichi tank is by a channel from Anicut across the Varattar a tributary of Thirumannimutharu and the feeder channel also serves as a source of irrigation for about 77 hectares on its path. Therefore, it is submitted that Aryagoundampatti tank irrigation system has a total ayacutdar area of 33.44.5 hectares. The total ayacut area of the three tanks namely, Aryagoundampatti, Oduvankurichi, Kadiranallur. Placing reliance on the Descriptive Memoir, it is submitted that the Thoppapatti tank has an Ayacut area of about 137.7 hectares and the source of supply is from No.59, Pallipatty tank and discharges into No.42, Kathiranallur tank. It is further submitted that the District Collector, Salem after considering the entries in the Descriptive Memoir as well as the report of the Revenue Divisional Officer, Namakkal, submitted a report to the Government, dated 31.05.1972, stating that the report of the Executive Engineer, dated 02.05.1972, with regard to the catchment areas of Thoppapatti and Aryagoundampatti tanks is incorrect, as

could be seen from the Descriptive Memoir and accordingly recommended for distribution of the water to be used by the Ayacutdars of Aryagoundampatti and Thoppapatti at the ratio of 1:2. It is further submitted that the Tahsildar, Rasipuram, submitted a report during February 1989, specifying the extent given for all the three villages namely, Aryagoundampatti, Oduvankurichi and Thoppapatti and recommended for equal share of the water. The Revenue Divisional Officer by report dated 07.06.1989, taking note of the representation made by the villages recommended for sharing of water in the ratio of 60:40 between the Aryagoundampatti, and Thoppapatti tanks by relying upon these reports. It is submitted that the authorities, who had submitted reports from the year 1971 have lost sight of the fact that the Descriptive Memoir is the basic document which shows the flow of water to the respective tanks and ignoring the findings in the Memoir, the authorities could not have recommended for lessor amount of share of water. It is submitted that in a Second Appeal before the Court in S.A.No.1784 of 1991 preferred by Ramasamy Goundan and others, which arose out of a Suit in O.S.No.29 of 1979, regarding the flow of water to Thoppapatti tank and the rights of the Ayacutdar, the District Collector took a stand that the petitioners therein had no right over the Palar river water, as the Palar River flows to the Thoppapatti tank directly ever since, the tank was formed prior to 1898 and Aryagoundampatti village is not a registered source from Kolli hills and the registered Ayacut of Thoppapatti tank is 343.11 acres whereas Aryagoundampatti tank is a minor irrigation pond with registered Ayacut of 32.43 acres only. Commenting upon the stand taken by the Collector, it is submitted that there was absolutely no basis for taking such a stand in the counter and the stand was unsubstantiated.

3. It is further submitted that the Ayacutdars of Kadiranallur filed a Public Interest Litigation before this Court in W.P.No.1413 of 2001, stating that they are also entitled to a share of water as claimed by Thoppapatti and Arvagoundampatti villagers and the said Writ Petition was disposed of by order dated 06.02.2001 to consider the representation made by the Ayacutdars of Kadiranallur within a time frame. Similarly the Ayacutdars of Oduvankurichi filed W.P.No.1414 of 2001, which was also disposed of by order dated 06.02.2001, to consider the representation on merits and in accordance with law. Therefore, it is submitted that the claims of the Ayacutdars of Aryagoundampatti, Oduvankurichi and Kadiranallur have to be considered. It is submitted that while the facts remain thus during 1991, the official respondents took a different stand, which is based on a wrong premise and based on the erroneous report submitted by the Collector, the Commissioner of Land Administration vide order dated 23.01.1992, recommended distribution of Palar water between the Thoppapatti and Aryagoundampatti tanks in the ratio of 2:1 and inspite of several representations and producing authenticated records, no action was taken and a Writ Petition was filed by the petitioner in W.P.No.39305 of 2005, as a Public Interest Litigation for issuance of a Writ of Mandamus to direct the official respondents to frame a scheme for apportionment of water in the ratio of 50:50 between the Ayacutdars of Aryagoundampatti and Oduvankurichi and Kadiranallur. The said Writ Petition was disposed of by order dated 07.12.2005, by which a direction was issued to hasten the process of constructing a permanent structure to ensure sharing of water on a permanent basis. Therefore, it is submitted that the order impugned in this Writ Petition has been passed without considering the essential documents and in particular the Descriptive Memoir and the report of the District Collector, dated 31.05.1972; the report of the Tahsildar, Rasipuram, dated 31.03.1989; the report of the Revenue Divisional Officer, Namakkal, dated 07.06.1989 and therefore, the impugned order calls for interference.

4. Mr.S.T.S.Murthy, learned Special Government Pleader submitted that the Government has passed the impugned order after considering all the aspects and after conducting repeated discussion with all the stakeholders and taking note of the total extent of the tank area, area of irrigation (Ayacut), the total number of wells situated in Ayacut area, source of water supply, village record, the total catchment area, water spread area and the storage capacity. After taking note all these technical aspects, it has been ordered that the water shall be shared on 2:1 basis between the Thoppapatti and Aryagoundampatti, since the area of irrigation is 343.10, acres and 32.43 acres respectively. Further, it is submitted that the Oduvankurichi and Kadiranallur having separate water supplies and they have got nothing to do with the Thoppapatti tank. By referring to the counter affidavit filed by the third respondent, it is submitted that in a Joint inspection conducted by the Revenue Divisional Officer along with the officials of the Public Works Department and Forest Department, over which no objection was raised by any of the villagers, it was found that the geographical location of odai having division of water from Palar river which originated from Bailnadu is sloping down in South West direction whereas the odai from Aryagoundampatti Eri is narrow and flow of water is from North West. Further, it has been stated that during the inspection it came to light that the natural flow of water to Thoppapatti bank has been obstructed from laying stone artificially. On the above submissions, the learned Government Pleader sought to sustain the impugned order.

5. Mrs.Chitra Sampath, learned Senior counsel assisted by Mr.T.S.Baskaran, learned counsel appearing for the seventh respondent submitted that the impugned order was passed pursuant to the directions issued in W.P.No.393305 of 2005 to consider the matter, all the villagers were aware of the same, the representatives of the petitioner and the seventh respondent participated in the joint inspection conducted by the officials on 05.03.2008. It is submitted that the members of the seventh respondent are owners of lands within the Ayacut of the Ponparappi lake situated in Thoppapatti village and lake is maintained by the Public Works Department. The source of water for the lake is only from river Palar which originates from Kolli Hills in Bailnadu Forest Reserve. The surplus from the tank drains to reach Karuvalaru. That the Ponparappi lake irrigates total extent of 343.10 acres. It is further submitted that the area fed by Aryagoundampatti tank is only 33.43 acres. During 1971, the villagers from Aryagoundampatti obstructed the free flow of river Palar by putting boulders and obstruction in the river, when it passes through the Reserve Forest, thereby preventing flow of water to Ponparappi tank. On complaint being made, the Tahsildar of Rasipuram conducted inspection along with the Forest officials and submitted a report dated 22.12.1971, confirming artificial means used for diversion of water. Based on such report, the Revenue Divisional Officer, Namakkal directed the removal of the obstruction and a report was submitted to the District Collector in this regard on 31.12.1971. It is submitted that the obstruction was immediately removed and the report in this regard was submitted to the District Collector by the District Forest Officer on 11.01.1972. It is further submitted that the report clearly says that the river has its natural course only to Thoppapatti village and only when it over flows it reaches Aryagoundampatti tank through small odaies. Therefore, it is submitted that ever since 1971, the river Palar has been taking its natural course. This factual position had been reported by the Tahsildar, Rasipuram vide report dated 21.03.1973. Thereafter, the Chief Engineer, Irrigation, recorded his findings pursuant to a personal inspection conducted on 23.01.1972 and submitted a report to the Government on 25.08.1973 stating that Aryagoundampatti is a minor irrigation source with an Ayacutt of 32.43

acres; Thoppapatti tank is a Public Works Department tank having an ayacutt area of 343.10 acres; Thoppapatti tank has not surplused since 1939, whereas Ariyagoundampatti tank had surplused in recent years; the Government of India map shows the Palar stream as a tributary to the Thoppapatti tank and not to Ariyagoundanpatti tank and the diversion of Palar to the Ariyagoundanpatti tank will affect the Thoppapatti tank and its area of irrigation. It is submitted that while the factual situation was thus, the Collector of Salem on 31.05.1972 recommended sharing of water in the ratio of 2:1 between the Thoppapatti and Ariyagoundanpatti by projecting a wrong picture about the fact situation and though this was accepted by the Board of Revenue, the Government called for reports independently and the matter was under consideration when the Collector of Salem passed an order for sharing of water on 50:50 basis by proceedings dated 16.09.1991. It is submitted that this order could not be implemented on account of the large scale protest and the Collector himself kept his order in abeyance by order dated 04.10.1991.

6. It is further submitted that the villagers of Thoppapatti filed a Suit in O.S.No.29 of 1979 on the file of the District Munsif Court, Rasipuram for declaration and injunction to restrain the villagers of Ariyagoundanpatti from anyway interfering with the accustomed free flow and water should not be diverted. The Suit was decreed as far as the relief of injunction and in other aspect, it was dismissed which decree was confirmed in appeal in A.S.No.54 of 1989 on the file of the Sub-Court, Namakkal with observation that it is open to the Government to decide the sharing of water without expressing any opinion as regards the ratio in which it is to be shared. The appeal to this Court in S.A.No.1784 of 1991 was also dismissed on 28.03.2003 with similar observations. It is submitted that during the pendency of the Second Appeal, the District Collector, Salem recommended from sharing of water in the ratio of 50:50. Taking advantage of this matter, the seventh respondent approached this Court and filed a Miscellaneous Petition in the Second Appeal in the C.M.P.No.16135 of 1991, challenging the order of the District Collector, dated 16.09.1991 and an order of status-quo was directed to be maintained. It is submitted that after taking note of all the facts, reports and materials, the Commissioner of Land Administration vide proceedings dated 23.10.1992, addressed the Government recommending apportionment of water in the ratio of 2:1 between the Thoppapatti and Ariyagoundanpatti respectively. It is submitted that with a view to increase the Ayacutt area, the other two villages, namely, Oduvankurichi and Kadiranallur have also joined Ariyagoundanpatti village and those two villages are not entitled to claim any right for water, as they have separate water source. It is further submitted that the earlier Writ Petition filed by the petitioners in W.P.No.39305 of 2005 for implementation of the ratio of 50:50 was disposed of without notice to the seventh respondent herein, though the association was a respondent in the said Writ Petition. Therefore, the seventh respondent filed Miscellaneous Petition in W.P.M.P.No.4751 of 2005, to recall the order dated 07.12.2005 in W.P.No.39305 of 2005. The Division Bench by order dated 07.01.2008, deleted the ratio of 50:50 leaving it open to the official respondents to conduct an enquiry and arrive at an appropriate decision over the sharing of water. Thereafter, the Revenue Divisional Officer recommended sharing in the ratio of 70:30. With regard to the report of the District Collector relied on by the petitioner dated 31.05.1972, it is submitted that the said proceedings does not give the correct details and it is contrary to all earlier proceedings and records. Similarly, the proceedings of the Tahsildar dated 31.03.1989, the proceedings of the District Collector, Salem, dated 05.08.1989 and 16.09.1991 were based on misconception of facts and records. The District Collector, Salem himself kept his order dated 16.07.1991, in abeyance by order

dated 04.10.1991. Thus, it is submitted that the impugned order has been passed after taking into consideration all the factors and records have been perused and the decision taken by the Government is just and proper.

7. Heard the learned counsels appearing for the parties and perused the materials placed on record.

8. Before we venture to consider the case as putforth by the respective parties, it has to be pointed out that the Government has taken a decision after considering the records and the reports of its officials who have inspected the area, so as to ascertain the actual course and flow of river Palar. Exercising jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution, this Court is not inclined to act as an Appellate Authority over the factual findings recorded by the Government, but the scope of enquiry and consideration could at best be restricted to the decision making process and not the decision itself.

9. The Tamil Nadu Irrigation Tanks (Improvement) Act, 1949, (hereinafter referred to as the 'Act') was enacted to improve efficiency of irrigation and in terms of power conferred under Section 3 of the Act, empowers the Government to take steps to increase capacity or efficiency of irrigation tanks. The words increasing its capacity or efficiency . Occurring in Section 3(1) of the Act has been interpreted to be of wider import not only restricting to deepening the tank bed or repairing the weir or sluice. Going by the power conferred under the Act, the Government is entitled to adopt any course, which would ensure better supply of water and thus enhance the utility of the tank. In fact, the Government took such a stand before the Division Bench of this Court in a Writ Petition filed by the Ayacutdars of Kadiranallur lake in W.P.No.1413 of 2001, stating that the Government has power to increase the capacity or efficiency of irrigation tanks as per Section 3 of the Act and in case the petitioners therein applies with the correct facts to the District Collector, the same will be considered. Thus, it is seen that the impugned order ineffect is an adjudication of the rights of the Ayacutdhars with regard to the irrigation source. The legal rights of an ayacutdar of wet lands in a ryotwari village to receive water from Government source has been considered in several decisions, some of which are Sankaravadivelu Pillai vs. Secretary of State for India in Council, 15 M.L.J., 32: (1905) I.L.R., 28 Mad., 72; Fisher vs. The Secretary of State for India, (1916) I.LR., 39 Mad., 141.,; and Secretary of State for India vs. Muthuveerama Reddi., 20 M.L.J., 869: 6 I.C.731: (1911) I.L.R.,34 Mad.82. The legal principle which could be culled out from these decisions is that (i) a ryot is assured of an adequate supply of water to meet his irrigational needs, provided the government have the necessary supply; (ii) the Government are the owners of water and in the matter of distribution of water to the ayacutdars of the wet areas, they have got the permanent right to regulate the supply of water to the ayacut; (iii) Courts refused to recognise the contention that ryot acquires the right by prescription for the required supply of water with reference to the wet lands possessed by him.

10. <u>In Lachunna Goundan vs. Pandiyappan</u> (1950) 2 M.L.J., 658, it was pointed out that the ryotwari proprietor has a claim against the Government only when the Government diverts, to his prejudice, water which is available in the channel so as to materially diminish the supply of water that has been accustomed to receive from the channel for the cultivation of his wet lands. In yet another decision in the case of Ponnu Thevar and Ors., vs. Arokia Nadar & Ors., in S.A.No.839 & 1864 of 1981, after considering the earlier decisions it was held that the ryotwari proprietor has no

right of property in the irrigation channels supplying water for his wet cultivation either in respect of the bed of the channel or in respect of the flow of water. It was further held that the ryotwari proprietor has no enforceable legal right to compel the Government to maintain the status quo in the matter of the source of distribution and supply of water and such right cannot be acquired by prescription. Further, it was pointed that there is no vested right in the ryotwari proprietor in the registered source or in the accustomed medium of supply, so as to prevent other ryots from interfering with them and his only right is to expect and be assured of the supply of water, which is essential and necessary for irrigating his wet ayacut, provided water is available and the Government is in a position to make the supply. The above decisions were relied on by this Court in Sunda Thevar vs. District Collector of Madurai and Anr., in (1984) 2 MLJ 457. It is noteworthy to mention to point out that the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Lakshmi Narayana vs. State of A.P., A.I.R., 1965 S.C., 580 held that as per Section 3(1) & (4) of the Act the Civil Court cannot grant an injunction from doing any act intended to improve the efficiency of the Government Irrigation from doing any act intended to improve the efficiency of the Government irrigation source. Bearing the above legal principles in mind and the scope and ambit of interference, we proceed to consider the case of the parties.

11. Elaborate submissions were made by the learned counsel for the petitioner from which we find that there is no serious allegation of violation of principles of natural justice. From the typed set of papers filed by the Government as well as the seventh respondent, we find that when inspection was conducted on 28.04.2008, pursuant to the earlier directions issued by this Court, the villagers were present and proof of their presence has also been recorded and their signatures obtained. This information has been obtained by the seventh respondent under the Right to Information Act and there is no denude to the same. The counter affidavit filed by the respondents 1 to 3, as adopted by the District Collector, Namakkal specifically states about the presence of the villagers, when the inspection was conducted in 2008 and that there was no objection. In the light of this factual position, we find that there is no error in the decision making process, the parties who are interested in the proceedings have been dealt with fairly and they had opportunity to putforth their grievance. Infact the Civil Court in O.S.No.27 of 1979, while decreeing the Suit left it open for the Government to take a decision with regard to the manner in which the sharing of water has to be done. While confirming this decree, this Court in S.A.No.1784 of 1991, pointed out that it is for the government to frame a scheme for distribution of water from a particular source. In fact, this is precisely what has been done by the Government while passing the impugned order.

12. The sheet anchor of the arguments advanced by the learned counsel for the petitioner rests upon the Descriptive Memoir. The learned counsel made elaborate reference to the observations in the report to substantiate the plea that Thoppapatti does not receive Palar river water, but receives the surplus water from Pallipatti tank. It was the endeavour of the learned counsel to impress upon us that this basic document has been ignored by the officials and for the first time, the District collector, who went into the entire details submitted a proper report to the government on 31.05.1972, stating that the report of the Executive Engineer submitted earlier in 1972 is incorrect. It is to be noted that the Collector prior to submitting their report dated 31.05.1972 has not conducted any inspection on his own. In fact, the District Collector refers to the report of the Executive Engineer, but rejects the report as incorrect based on the Descriptive Memoir. Subsequently, the Tahsildar, Rasipuram, addresses the Revenue Divisional Officer, Namakkal, during February 1989, recommending equal share of the water. The Revenue Divisional Officer by his report dated 07.06.1989, recommends a higher percentage of apportionment in the ratio of 60:40. Thus, it is seen that the reports of the District Collector, the Revenue Divisional Officer and the Tahsildar were only in the stage of recommendation and did not fructify into a final order passed by the Government. In the interregnum, the District Collector, Salem, passed an order dated 16.09.1991, directing that the water shall be shared in the ratio of 50:50. It appears that there were large scale protest and ultimately the District Collector himself vide proceedings dated 04.10.1991, kept in abeyance his earlier order dated 16.09.1991. Thus, neither the recommendation of then the District Collector dated 31.05.1972 nor 16.09.1991, were acted upon. From the materials placed before this Court, it is seen that problem arose during 1971, when a complaint was made that artificial means were adopted to obstruct the free flow of water to Ponparappi tank. A joint inspection was conducted by the Revenue officials, Forest officials and the officials of the Public Works Department and it came to light that there was obstruction caused to the free flow of water in the river Palar in the Forest area thereby preventing flow of water to the Ponparappi tank. Based on the reports submitted by the Forest Officer, dated 21.12.1971 and the report of the Tahsildar, Rasipuram, dated 21.12.1971, the Revenue Divisional Officer, Namakkal, ordered for removal of obstruction and restoring its original position by proceedings dated 21.12.1971. Thus records show that from 1971, the water has been flowing as per its normal course to Ponparappi tank in Thoppapatti village. The Executive Engineer of the Public Works Department in its report, dated 23.01.1978, goes to state that there is no surplus flow available in Palar for sharing to any other tank other than Thoppapatti tank and during the course of inspection, the villagers are also present. During 1973, the Chief Engineer of Irrigation, submitted a report to the Government, dated 25.08.1973, clearly setting out the Ayacutt area of Thoppapatti tank as 343.10 acres and Ariyagoundanpatti as 32.43 acres. Reference has also been made to the map prepared by the Government of India. These reports appear to have been submitted, as there was a proposal to put up a pond called Lachudayampalayam.

13. As noticed above, in the interregnum, the District Collector appears to have unilaterally passed an order for sharing of water in the ratio of 50:50 and subsequently, the same was kept in abeyance. All the above facts have been taken note of by the Commissioner of Land Administration while submitting his report to the Government, dated 23.10.1992. After referring to the various reports including the report of the District Collector referred to by the petitioners and after considering the materials it has been reported that the Ayacutt extent of Ariyagoundanpatti and Oduvankurichi is 137.70 hectares and Oduvankurichi tank has separate source of supply. On these facts, the Commissioner recommended distribution of water between Thoppapatti and Ariyagoundanpatti tanks in a ratio of 2:1. It is further seen that the Government did not straight away accept the report, but once again called for further reports from the District Collector, Namakkal, who submitted his report dated 14.08.2000. Prior to submitting his report, he has directed the Revenue Divisional Officer, Namakkal, to inspect the spot and submit a report. The report of the District Collector, dated 14.08.2000, is in consonance with the report of the Commissioner of Land Administration, dated 23.10.1992. Inspite of all these reports, it appears that the Government did not pass any orders and further report was called for and submitted by the District Collector (i/c), Namakkal, dated 06.06.2008. This report is also tune with the earlier reports. Subsequently, when a new

Collector took charge, further report was called for and the same was submitted on 01.08.2008, wherein additional particulars with regard to the Ayacutt, water spread area, source of water, total catchment area etc., were mentioned. With these facts, the Commissioner of Land Administration submitted a report to the Government on 19.08.2008. Once again, the Government called for further report from the District Collector, Namakkal, who submitted the same on 02.03.2010.

14. Thus, after due deliberation and consideration of the materials, the Government has taken a decision with regard to sharing of water in the concerned area. The case as projected by the petitioner by placing on the descriptive Memoir has also been taken note by the authorities and a decision has been taken.

15. For all the above reasons, we find no justifiable grounds to interfere with the impugned order and accordingly, the Writ Petition fails and the same is dismissed. No costs.

(S.K.K.,CJ.) (T.S.S., J.) Index :Yes Internet:Yes pbn То 1.State of Tamil Nadu, Rep., by its Secretary, Public Works Department, Fort. St., George, Chennai -9. 2. The Secretary, Irrigation Dept., Fort St., George, Chennai 9. 3. The Chief Engineer, Water Resources Management, Trichy, 4. The District Collector, Namakkal. 5. The Tahsildhar, Rasipuram. 6. The District Forest Officer, Namakkal. The Hon'ble The Chief Justice T.S.SIVAGNANAM, J. pbn

Pre-Delivery Order in

In The High Court Of Judicature At ... vs State Of Tamil Nadu on 16 June, 2015

16.06.2015