

Old Water - Works on the Eastern Part of the Mysore Plateau**

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(Received 24 September 2013)

Abstract

Until recently, before the highways were widened, cube-shaped water-reservoirs (resting) on pillars were found along the main roads of the eastern part of the Mysore Plateau, to the south-east of Karnataka and north-west of Tamilnadu. Called *taṇṇīrtotṭi* in Tamil, *jalandhara* in Kannada, they were made of granite slabs with joints solidly filled with mortar, put together as a carpentry work with mortice and tenon joints at the top. They were usually supported by four, or three and even two pillars or they rested on a brick or stone platform and they had a removable cover so that water could be poured inside. Considered as charity-water (*dharmā-udaka*), they were meant for all road users, irrespective of caste, as could be seen recently in the *taṇṇīrpandal* of the Tamil country at the time of festivals. Evidently, these facilities could be attributed to philanthropists of the past, princes and wealthy merchants; may be also to more humble individuals. Most of these water-works have been abandoned.

Key words: Charity water, Reservoir, Water supply.

1. Introduction

In India where journeys were undertaken mainly during the dry season, travel was only feasible on those routes along which an abundance of water was to be found at regular intervals, enabling the wayfarer to slake his thirst, refresh himself, bathe, cook and water the animals. For which reason Indian roads were punctuated with reservoirs and wells (Deloche 1993, vol. I, pp. 184-190).

In South India the most simple facilities to provide water for thirsty travellers were water-sheds constructed of four posts bearing a palm-leave roof; basic and provisional structures where shelter from the sun was found and drinkable water obtained in pots; whence the name *taṇṇīrpandal* given to them in Tamil country. They were usually located near temples, in market-places and by the

road-side. These water-sheds are well-documented and a lot of inscriptions collected in Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, from the Chola period (c 850-1276 AD), throw light on this ancient building tradition (Srinivasan 1991, pp. 77-82).

Now, another type of water management was seen while travelling throughout the length and breadth of the eastern part of the Mysore Plateau, between 1979 to 1986: a type of cube-shaped water reservoir on pillars (Figs. 1 & 2).

Until recently, before the highways were widened, these cubical reservoirs were found along the main roads south-east of Karnataka in Kolar district, the eastern part of Bengaluru district and Hosuru taluk in Tamilnadu, about hundred km from north to south from Cikkaballapura to Denkanikote and, from west to east, from Bengaluru to Mulabagalu. They were

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**Revised version of my article published in French in *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 75 (1986), pp. 42-46, plates IV-VII.

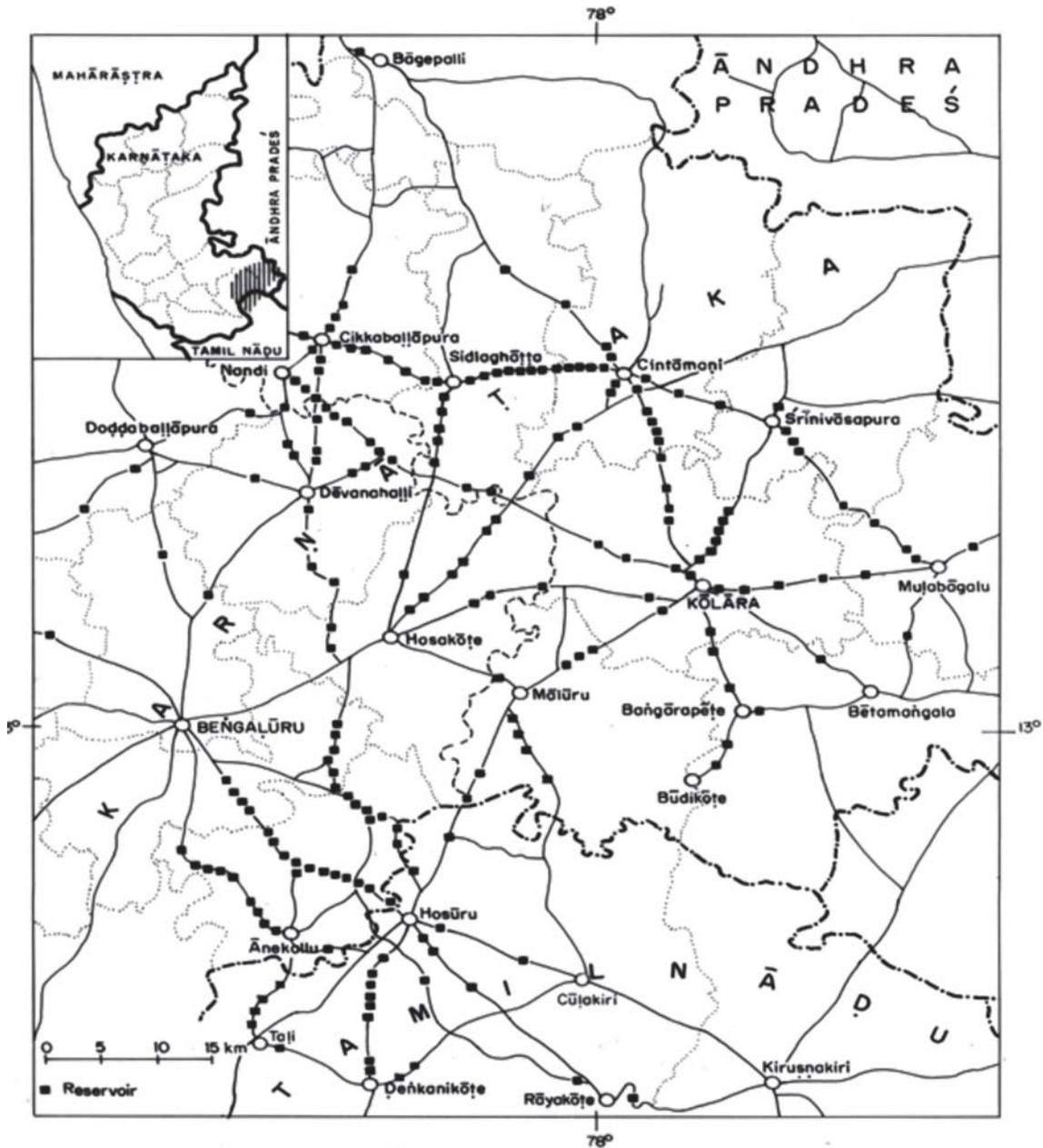


Fig. 1. Map showing the distribution of the reservoirs

usually situated near a watering place (well, tank), often at the edge of villages, at irregular intervals: between Cintamani and Sidlaghatta and on the roads radiating from Hosuru for instance, they are in quick succession (1 to 3 km); but to the south of Kolar, they are much more remote.

In the Tamil Country these water-works are called *tannirtotti*; in Karnataka they are

designated as *salendra*, *śailendra*, *jailendra*, *calindra*, which are distortions of *jalandhara* (Kan), *jalamdhara* (Skt).

2. Construction

They are made of 7 cm thick granite slabs, with joints solidly filled with mortar, put together as a carpentry work with mortice and tenon joint

at the top. They look like cube or rectangular parallelepipeds. Their height varies from 70 to 100 cm, their width, from 70 to 90 cm and their length from 80 to 140 cm (Figs. 2 & 3).

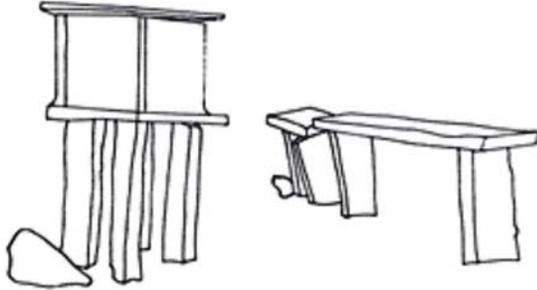


Fig. 2. Reservoir and load rest



Fig. 3. Reservoir on four pillars: granite slabs, 5 km S of Bangarapeta

They are usually supported by four, or three and even two pillars or they rest on a brick or stone platform (Figs. 4-6). The height of these supports varies from 90 to 180 cm, but generally it is about 140 cm which allows people to collect water in their hands or in a container.

They are provided with a removable cover so that water can be poured inside (however at two places it is cemented, with a circular or square hole in the middle). At the base in one of the side slabs there is an outlet for the water flow, often lined with a small iron pipe which can be plugged with a piece of wood. Most of these structures are not decorated, but, on some of them, the pillars



Fig. 4. Reservoir on three pillars, 11 km NW of Mulabagalu



Fig. 5. Reservoir on two pillars, 15 km S of Doddaballapura



Fig. 6. Reservoir on a brick platform, 20 km W of Hosuru

are carved and the side slabs, adorned with bas-reliefs or paintings representing Ganesha (Hosuru and Anekallu taluks) or Hanuman (Kolar district) (Figs. 7-8).

To reach them and easily fill them up with water, in several villages, they are provided with a narrow ramp made of a narrow and long slab

connecting the ground with the cistern, or a brick staircase with stone steps (Figs. 9-11).



Fig. 7. Carving on a slab: Ganesha, 8.6 km S of Hosuru



Fig. 8. Painting on a slab: Hanuman, W edge of Kolar



Fig. 9. Ramp connecting the ground to the reservoir, 0.5 km W of Cintamani



Fig. 10. Staircase connecting the ground to the reservoir, 29 km W of Kolar



Fig. 11. Reservoir and benches, of Nandidurga

Close to most of these works are found long slabs posed upon two upright stones, at a man's height, so as to permit travellers to unload and retrieve their burden, called *cumaitanki* in Tamil and *ettugallu* in Kannada (Figs. 11-12).



Fig. 12. Reservoir and benches, at the foot 16 km N of Anekallu

Sometimes there is along the road an entire ensemble of installations intended for travellers, comprising a load rest, a bench; a water tank and a shelter (Fig. 12).

3. Functions

This reservoir is a place where water is collected and stored for use beyond reach of animals which does not require any close watch. Considered charity-water (*dharma-udaka*), it was meant for all the road users, irrespective of caste, as could be seen recently in the *taṅṅīrpandal* of the Tamil country at the time of festivals. When we made the survey, it was the responsibility of individuals or local communities. Water was carried from neighbouring wells or tanks, either throughout the year at certain places or during the hot season, between March and July only at others, or during festivals, pilgrimages and weekly meetings such as markets or fairs.

At Bangarapete the *jalandhara* was filled up every day by two devotees of the Tirupati God; at Sarjapura, to the north-west of Hosuru, all the families of the village shared the work: daily a

woman in each house had to carry a bucket of water to the reservoir. Very often the rich landowners paid coolies to do the job as at Hindiganal, between Cintamani and Hosakote. Most of these water-works have been abandoned. In 1986, however, to the north of Anekallu at Jangalapalya, villagers were still filling their reservoir daily and, at Bannirghatta, they were doing it only at the time of festival in March-April.

To whom are these facilities to be attributed? Evidently to philanthropists of the past, princes and wealthy merchants; may be also to more humble individuals. It is strange that no lithic records have been found on these structures, since water-sheds in South India are marked with several inscriptions stating that private endowments were liberally made for their maintenance, gifts of land supplied for the caretakers who supplied water and donations in the form of gold or paddy were made for the same purpose (Srinivasan 1991, pp. 77-82.).

4. Conclusion

This type of cubical water-work on pillars was found only along the roads of the eastern part of the Mysore plateau, not in the surrounding taluks, though they enjoy the same physical conditions: an undulating granite plateau, 700 to 1000 m high, with a semi-arid climate.

Even if it is a characteristic feature of the landscape, nobody has ever mentioned these reservoirs, either in the local Gazetteers or in newspapers. Moreover, we could not get any information from local erudite persons on this aspect of the road management in this area situated between the high land of the Deccan and the Eastern plains.

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