CHAPTER-III

SETTING OF THE STUDY

Historical Background of Sivagangai District

Sivagangai District was a part of the erstwhile Ramanathapuram District, The old Ramanathapuram District played a dominant role in the history of South India. Ramanathapuram District formed a part of the Pandian Kingdom till the end of the 15th century. After the fall of the Nayak kings, two of their Palayakarars (agents), viz., Sethupathy of Ramanathapuram and the Raja of Sivagangai became prominent rulers of this region. Towards the middle of the 18th century Europeans—the French and the British—entered this part. The Sethupathy of Ramanathapuram lost his personal freedom and the British took control of the administration of Ramanathapuram in 1795. It was converted into a Zamindari in 1803 and Mangaleswari Natchiar became the first zamindar. During this period, the Raja of Sivagangai also revolted against the British.¹ Periya Marudhu and Chinna Marudhu assisted the Raja of Sivagangai in his revolts against the British. So, upon the death of the Raja of Sivagangai, Muthu Vaduganadhar, the queen, passed on the sovereignty to the Marudhu brothers, who ruled Sivagangai peacefully and devotedly on payment of regular revenue to the East India Company till 1801.²
The Marudhu brothers revolted against the British in collaboration with Kattabomman of Panchalankurichi. The two brothers were captured by the British and were hanged in Kalaiyarkoil on 1.10.1801. The British installed Gowri Vallaabh Periya Uday as Zamindar of Sivagangai. Finally a British Collector was appointed to administer the territory of Ramanathapuram District by carving out a new district from Madurai and Tirunelveli Districts. Madurai was the headquarters of this district till 1985, when it was trifurcated.³

Pasumpon Muthuramalingam District came into existence on 15.3.1985 consequent on the trifurcation of the composite Ramanathapuram District. It was later renamed Sivagangai District in 1975. This district is a backward region from the point of view of agriculture, industry and general economic conditions. Several parts of the district are frequently hit by drought. However, there has been a gradual improvement in this district in the sphere of industry. The district comprises the following six taluks: Sivagangai, Manamadurai, Ilayangudi, Devakottai, Karaikudi and Thiruppathur.⁴

The district is bounded on the north by Tiruchirappalli and Pudukkottai Districts, on the east and south by Ramanathapuram District and on the west by Virudhunagar District.⁵

Physical Features

Sivagangai District covers an extent of 4189 sqkm⁶ and consists of 521 revenue villages. Red sandy soil is generally found in most parts of the district, which is not congenial to agricultural purposes. As
this district lacks forest wealth, mineral resources, transport facilities etc., the industrial growth is not appreciable. The headquarters of this district, viz., Sivagangai and the adjacent Kalaiyarkoil revenue village are noted for their historical importance in as much as this area was ruled by the famous Marudhu brothers, who were also martyrs for independence in the early 19th century. Places like Kalaiyarkoil, Pillayar Patti, Kollangudi, Thirukostiyur, Thiruppuvanam and the Kavisakkaravarthi Kambar Samathi at Nattarasankottai are popular among religious devotees, since the shrines in these places find place in the songs of the Alwars and the Nayanmars.

Climate and Rainfall

Sivagangai District is frequently hit by drought. Hot and dry weather prevails for about 9 months in the year. During 2004 the district experienced 850.4 mm of rainfall as against 876.0 mm during the previous year. This rain helped the agriculturists to achieve self sufficiency in the production of cereals, particularly paddy, ragi and cholam.

Population and Density

According to the 2001 census, the total population of this district is 1,155,336 comprising 566,947 males and 588,409 females. This district is one among the five districts in the state with the female population having predominance over the male population. The sex ratio for this district works out to 952:1000. The density of population
is 275.81 persons per sqkm. Nearly 74% of the total population live in rural areas.\textsuperscript{12}

Irrigation

Sivagangai District is not blessed with any perennial source of river water supply. Rainfed tanks are the main source of irrigation. There are about 651 major tanks and about 4260 minor tanks in the district. Next to tanks, about 19607 irrigation wells help to irrigate crops to some extent.\textsuperscript{13}

Agriculture

The gross area under cultivation during the year 2004 was 111576 hectares, as against 109741 hectares in the previous year. Paddy was the main crop cultivated in the district. Millets, groundnut and sugarcane was also cultivated during 2004 to a considerable extent.\textsuperscript{14}

Industries

There are about 26 spinning and weaving mills in Sivagangai District. The Tamil Nadu Chemical Industries at Karaikudi, the Central Electro Chemical Research Institute at Karaikudi, the Sakthi Sugar Factory at Padamathur and the Madras Motors at Singampunari are the major industries in the district. Graphite is the only major mineral that is being excavated by the Tamil Nadu Minerals Limited (TAMIN). Handlooms, manufacturing of stainless steel at Karaikudi and Manamadurai, bricks, brick tiles and pot making centres at
Manamadurai and Thiruppuvanam and coir manufacturing industries (handmade) provide substantial employment to rural and urban women.\textsuperscript{15}

**Panchayati Raj Institutions in the District**

In Sivagangai district there are 12 Panchayat Unions and 445 Village Panchayats. Total number of habitations in the district are 2676. In the 12 Panchayat Unions there are 161 Wards in total. District Panchayat has 16 Wards.\textsuperscript{16}

**General District Profile - 2001**

1. **Geographical Position**

   North Latitude Between 9.43’ and 10.42’

   East Longitude Between 77.47’ and 78.49’

2. **Area and Population**

   **2001 Census**

   i. Area (sq.km) : 4189

   ii. Population : 1155356

   a. Male Population : 566947

   b. Female Population : 588409

   c. Rural Population : 829272

   d. Urban Population : 326084

   iii. Density : 275.81

   iv. Literates : 738000\textsuperscript{17}
4. Temperature (in Degree Centigrade)\textsuperscript{18}
   
   a. Plains
   
   i. Maximum \hspace{1cm} - There is no meteorological station
   
   ii. Minimum \hspace{1cm} in this district

5. Rainfall (in mm)
   
   i. Normal
   
   i. North-East Monsoon : 415.5
   
   ii. South-West Monsoon : 289.6

   
   i. North-East Monsoon : 256.3
   
   ii. South-West Monsoon : 395.0

6. Agriculture\textsuperscript{19}
   
   a. Total Cultivated Area (ha) : 111566

   b. Net Area Sown (ha) : 111566

7. Irrigation\textsuperscript{20}
   
   i. Net Area Irrigated by (in ha) : 73124
   
   a. Tanks : 4911
   
   b. Tube Wells
   
   c. Other Wells \hspace{1cm} : 19607
### Table 3.1

Area Irrigated and Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SI. No.</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Net</th>
<th>Gross</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Surface Water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. Large Tanks</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>4165</td>
<td>4165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Small Tanks</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>6133</td>
<td>6133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ground Water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Public tube wells</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Private tube wells</td>
<td>3272</td>
<td>2886</td>
<td>2886</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 3.2

Area Irrigated by Crops (in ha)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SI. No.</th>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Net Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Cereals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Paddy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kharif</td>
<td>11018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rabi</td>
<td>11018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Cholam (Jowar)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Ragi</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Pulses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Redgram</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Blackgram</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Greengram</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Others</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Oil Seeds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Groundnut</td>
<td>904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Gingili</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Coconut</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Fibres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Cotton (lint)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Other Crop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Sugarcane</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Chilies (dry)</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Turmeric</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Banana</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. Tapioca</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. Others</td>
<td>784</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NALLUKOTTAI

**Historical Background of Nallukottai**

Nallukottai is a Village Panchayat in Sivagangai Block of Sivagangai District. This village is located ten kilometers north-east of Sivagangai Town, near the historical place called Cholapuram. It has pucca road and transport facilities. The first ruler of Sivagangai, named Periya Udaiyana Thevar, was born in this village. The name Nallukottai has a history. During times of war, the soldiers of the kingdom created a fort around this village. This fort was built with big walls on all the four sides of the village to safeguard them. Around this Village Panchayat are situated several historical places, namely, Cholapuram, Thirukostiyur, Kollangudi, Pannangudi and Nattarasankottai.

**Ecological Profile**

The total area of Nallukottai Panchayat is 3.5 sq.km. Of the total area of land, 260 hectares are irrigated lands and 412 hectares are rainfed. There are 5 acres of poramboke land under various heads like oorani, grazing land, threshing floor and pathway. None of the above sites are under encroachment now. But, in 1996, a large number of families had encroached upon ten acres. The Oorsabhai met them and persuaded them to remove themselves. At the vacated site social forestry was undertaken after properly fencing the area. Tamarind tree
saplings were planted in that area. There are 2 community wells and 17 Jeevanthara irrigation wells (under the Million Wells scheme of the Government of India). Apart from these irrigation wells, there are 16 private irrigation wells owned by farmers in this area.

There are 10 ooranis (minor tanks) and 14 kanmois (major tanks). One kanmoi named Nallukottai Periyakanmoi (Nallukottai Major Tank) is used for drinking water purposes whereas all the other kanmois and ooranis are used for agricultural, bathing, washing purposes and for watering animals. There are 405 land owners in the village. Among them, 28 are big farmers, 43 medium farmers, 154 small farmers and 180 marginal farmers. The major crops cultivated are paddy, millets and groundnut.

**Socio-Economic Profile**

Nallukottai is a medium sized village. The village has a population of 3024 (male 1584 and female 1440), of whom 474 are SC people. Out of the total SC population 248 are male and 226 are female. In Nallukottai Village Panchayat, 192 SC males and 137 SC females are literate. This village is a mono religious village, with only Hindus living in it. The majority of the people in the village belong to Backward Class. The Thevars, the Kallars and the Pillaimars (Backward Class) have to mingle with the SC people of the village. The total number of households in the Panchayat is 460. Out of these,
266 families are Kallars, 42 families are Thevars and 46 families are Pillaimars. Kulalars are 14 families, 31 are Chettiar families, 5 families are Barbers, 2 families are Dhobis, 3 families are Carpenters, 2 families are Pandarams and 49 families are of the Scheduled Caste, Thevars and Kallars are farmers who were once warriors. Now 300 families depend on agriculture. Members of 12 families have gone abroad for work, the members of 6 families are employed outside the village in private and government sectors. This area is industrially backward and the village has no economic enterprise other than agriculture and allied work. There are 160 families who are landless. They work as agricultural coolies. They are paid at the rate of Rs.75/- for men and Rs.30/- for women.\textsuperscript{21}

The agricultural coolies do not get adequate work throughout the year. Their employment is seasonal. During the harvesting period, they can get employment continuously for about 20-25 days. They undertake all agricultural work such as harvesting, threshing and cleaning work on contract basis. They get wages in the form of paddy and such wages are relatively high: 20 kgs paddy for men and 15 kgs paddy for women. Putting these together, each family earns 400-500 kgs of paddy during the harvesting season. Among the total (460) households, 216 households come under the BPL category (Below Poverty Line).
There is one Anganwadi with toilets and urinals. One primary school and one middle school are located in the Panchayat. For high school and secondary school education, the village children have to travel to Sivagangai Town or Tirupathur Town. The middle school has a play ground and a science laboratory for practical classes. For drinking purposes, water tap connections are provided to the schools.

There is no caste discrimination between the caste groups. The SC community is now empowered. Earlier they called the upper caste land owners *Ejaman* (i.e., Lord), but nowadays they sit equally with other castes and fearlessly share their opinions. There is no practice of untouchability.

For instance, each and every year, in the month of September, the villagers, irrespective of caste, worship the village boundary god named *Lord Ayyanar*. At that time they arrange for a community dinner for all the villagers. Another significant instance of maintaining harmony in the Panchayat is the provision of a common burial ground (*samathuvamayanam*) for all caste groups. All the people, including the Scheduled Caste, bury their communal differences and come here to bury or burn the corpses.22
Community Cleaning of a Public Place

The role of women in maintaining clean environment and personal hygiene in the village is significant. The Oorsabhai and the Gram Sabha meetings motivate the women SHG members to maintain clean environment and personal hygiene. Thirty women SHGs are functioning in the village. One fair price shop is run by a Self Help Groups, viz., Tanlip Mahalir Mandram, very effectively and profitably also. A net profit of Rs.25,000/- is earned by them annually. One grocery shop is also run by the SHG with the help of subsidy linked credit. Well trained and service minded members of the SHGs involve themselves voluntarily in every aspect of the sanitation of the village. Most of them get subsidized loans from nationalized banks at the minimum rate of interest to carry on some small trades and small businesses in the village.
As for the marriage system, intercaste marriage is allowed and supported by the village elders. For instance, the son of the leader of the Oorsabhai, a Kallar, has married an Agamudaiyar girl. There are another three intercaste couples. They are still living in the same village without any problems. The practice of dowry does not prevail in this village. Widow remarriage is also accepted in this village.

There are three village temples, namely, Angalamman temple, Mariamman temple and Adikunda Ayyanar temple. Freedom is given to the SC people to worship and have celebrations in these temples. The Ayyanar temple of the village is also known as Grama Deivam. At the time of the festival the Oorsabhai members, youth group members, Panchayat Ward Members, women and SHG members are involved in the bandobust activities and render their services voluntarily. They conduct several competitions during the festival. In the rekla race (bullock cart race), villagers from the villages in and around Sivagangai District participate.24

Local Community Organisation (LCO)

Kudi System

The kudi system is the basis of the Oorsabhai (Village Assembly). It may be defined thus: those who are permanently settled in the village, own lands and use the irrigation tank water are considered kudi. Membership in the kudi is determined by the Oorsabhai. SC families owing land also have membership in the kudi. In earlier days women were not allowed to attend the Oorsabhai
meetings. In the case of woman headed families, instead of the woman, any one of the males was eligible to attend the Oorsabhai meeting. After the emergence of women SHGs, the Oorsabhai relaxed its rules and now allows women to participate in the meetings. Failure to attend the Oorsabhai meeting entails a fine.

The *kudi* system is mainly meant for celebrating village festivals collectively. Each and every *kudi* contributes money for these celebrations and the amount is fixed by themselves collectively. The leader of the Oorsabhai nominates two members from each major caste group to an Executive Committee. They have the responsibility to collect and spend for the festival expenses. They enroll new *kudis* in the month of September and submit the detailed accounts for the year in the month of April. The frequency of the Oorsabhai meeting depends upon the needs of the *kudis*. Normally, in a year, a minimum 10 meetings and a maximum of 30-40 meetings are conducted.25

**Nallukottai Oorsabhai**

The participants in the Oorsabhai meeting mandatorily doff their shirts before joining the assembly. The meeting of the Oorsabhai on September 1 specifically decides upon the date for the bullock-setting festival (a traditional festival). At the meeting on the first day of the Tamil month of Chitrai (Tamil New Year’s Day) the Oorsabhai decides upon the date for sowing paddy. Before a decision in taken in the meeting of the Oorsabhai, the opinions of all segments of the community are solicited and only with their unanimous approval the
Oorsabhai leader announces the decision. In case funding from the village is required, the Oorsabhai discusses and decides upon the quantum of monetary contribution from each household. For example, when it was decided to erect a drama stage, it was also decided to collect contributions from the people rather than obtain government assistance and, accordingly, Rs.3 lakhs was collected and a drama stage was erected.

The details of the income and the expenditure of the village are read out and presented to the Oorsabhai. If any member present needs any clarification, it is provided and then the accounts are approved. The balance amount is retained in the Oorsabhai account. Signatures are obtained from the members of the Oorsabhai.

The accounts relating to the festivals are also presented before the Oorsabhai and approved. During the celebration of the festival of the Ayyanar temple, the people contribute money. Besides, some people, in fulfillment of their vows, undertake responsibility for the expenditure on some part of the celebration, such as installing plantain trunks, pandal, electrical light decoration etc. The details of the money collected and the money spent are entered in the accounts book, presented to the Oorsabhai and approved with signatures.

On Tamil New Year’s day, special pujas are conducted in all the eighteen temples before commencing the sowing of paddy and the accounts relating to the same are also presented before the Oorsabhai and approved. The income from the auctioning of the fishing rights in
the Chetti Oorani is credited to the Oorsabhai account. Water for irrigation is provided from the two community wells. The income from this is also credited to the Oorsabhai account.26

The powers and functions of the Oorsabhai are as follows:

i. The Oorsabhai determines the membership of kudi.

ii. It nominates members from each caste to the Executive Committee.

iii. It fixes the contributions to the festival expenses.

iv. It frames the cropping calendar.

v. It fixes the dates for kudimaramathu, raising nursery, opening and closing of sluices and temple festivals.

vi. It auctions fisheries and grazing rights.

vii. It appoints common irrigators, watch and ward staff and fixes their salaries.

viii. It procures water for irrigation from various sources in times of inadequate storage in the irrigation tank of the village so as to save the standing crops.

ix. It decides upon the village code of conduct.

x. It sanctions expenditure from the common fund.

xi. It attends to the welfare and development activities of the village.
xii. It exercises general control over the common property resources.

xiii. It decides on support to Village Panchayat activities

xiv. It maintains harmony in the village.

xv. It maintains social justice in the village.

xvi. It regulates water for irrigation.\textsuperscript{27}

The Oorsabhai passes several resolutions relating to the village community. The following are the key areas covered by the Oorsabhai resolutions:

i. The venue, the time and the date for meetings.

ii. Selection of Executive Committee members.

iii. Disputes in the community and also at the family level.

iv. The Oorsabhai strictly orders the villagers not to rear goats. In order to protect the tree saplings planted on the village road sides and poramboke lands, the Oorsabhai insists that the villagers rear goats only after 4 years.

v. The Oorsabhai has decided that all the households should separate compostable and non-compostable waste in the house itself.
vi. The Oorsabhai passed a resolution to make the village a hut-less village (Now they have achieved it).

vii. The Oorsabhai has created awareness on the importance of Siddha medicine and introduced 17 varieties of herbal plants to be planted in the household yards.

viii. Strict ban on the use of plastics in the village.

ix. The Oorsabhai has passed a resolution for the creation of a regular weekly market in the village on every Saturday.

x. The Oorsabhai decided to get all government schemes and programmes to the village and motivated the *kudis* to participate in the government programmes.

xi. The Oorsabhai resolved to support a women SHG to get the fair price shop in the village.

xii. The *samathuvamayanan* was first resolved upon in the Oorsabhai. All caste groups supported this resolution.

xiii. Earlier a women sanitary complex was constructed. But the Oorsabhai asked the Village Panchayat to construct another sanitary complex for women in the village.

xiv. The beneficiaries of all government programmes are resolved upon in the Oorsabhai.
xv. The Oorsabhai plays a vital role in education, for instance, in school enrollment, in identifying dropouts and by providing suggestions to strengthen the education. The Oorsabhai gives suggestions to the PTA (Parents Teachers Association) to maintain the standard of education and personal hygiene of the students.

**Executive Committee**

The Oorsabhai constitutes an Executive Committee of six members headed by the Oorsabhai leader for a tenure of one year. If the Executive Committee wants to continue into the next year, it should get concurrence from the Oorsabhai. The Executive Committee members are changed by the Oorsabhai in the month of September. Normally there is no contest for the Executive Committee membership. The Executive Committee is constituted based on selection. The major functions of the Executive Committee are:

1. Convening Oorsabhai meetings.
2. Exercising control over the staff of the Oorsabhai.
3. Implementing the decisions taken by the Oorsabhai.
4. Operating the village common fund.
5. Collecting contributions from the members.
6. Maintaining the accounts of the Oorsabhai.
7. Receiving representations from the villagers.

8. Attending to emergency functions.

9. Looking after the general welfare of the village.

10. Representing the village to the government and other agencies.

11. Preparing yearly accounts statements and getting them approved in the Oorsabhai.

The leader of the present Oorsabhai Executive Committee is also the Village Panchayat President. Ramanathan, aged 67, belongs to the Kallar community and has studied up to SSLC. His family is a joint family. He has three sons who are all married. They help him in agricultural activities. They own four acres of dry land and four acres of wet land. There are two electric motor pumpsets in hand and so he cultivates cash crops like banana and sugarcane. He lives in his own pucca house with facilities like electricity, toilet and individual water tap connection. For the past 35 years he has been the leader of the Executive Committee of the Oorsabhai and also of the Village Panchayat. The Executive Committee members regularly interact among themselves and with the people of the village. Special meetings of the Oorsabhai are arranged in emergencies by the Executive Committee. All the kudis are informed through the Amman Kovil public address system and thandal (a person beating a drum and conveying the message in all the streets of the village).
Participation in Oorsabhai Meetings

All the *kudi* members are informed through public address system and tom-tom to attend the Oorsabhai meetings. The meeting are conducted in front of the Amman Kovil from 7.00 p.m. onwards and usually last 2.30 hours. The Oorsabhai admits only persons owning land in the village to the *kudi*. Punishment in the form of fine is levied from persons not attending the meetings.

Participation in Gram Sabha Meetings

The members of the Gram Sabha are informed through bit notice and tom-tom. The Village Panchayat President and the Ward Members also personally invite the members of the Gram Sabha to the meetings which are conducted from 10.00 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. in the Community Hall in the main village and last for 1.30 hours. Irrespective of land ownership all the eligible voters are eligible to attend the Gram Sabha meetings. There is no punishment for absence.

Decision Making Process—Oorsabhai

The Executive Committee and the leader of the Oorsabhai have the power to make decisions, but all decisions are taken collectively. All the decisions are taken in the meeting itself.\(^{31}\)

Decision Making Process—Gram Sabha

Based on the demands raised by the people, resolutions are passed and the action plan prepared for the year. The availability of Panchayat funds determines the activities of the Panchayat. In the Gram Sabha, the
Ramanathan got the prize money of Rs.5 lakhs from the President of India. Eight solar lamps have been installed in the streets. He has created awareness on the importance of Siddha medicine and 17 varieties of herbal plants have been planted in the campus of the Village Panchayat office and in household yards.

A weekly market has been established near the public distribution shop. About 10 vendors bring their commodities every Saturday. An average of Rs.100/- is collected every week as licence fees from the vendors. The Panchayat got the SGRY scheme of Food for Work (Rs. 10.83 lakhs). About 100 workers got regular employment for about 100 days under the scheme. Ramanathan arranged to get the running of the public distribution system shop to an SHG. He personally influenced the SHG members and the district officials to get the PDS shop. Now the SHG is successfully running the shop and earning Rs.2000/- as the monthly income, of which Rs.1000/- is the salary to the women staff who are looking after the PDS shop.

The Vice-President and the Ward Members support the Panchayat President in all matters. They never go against the will and wish of the Panchayat President because the Panchayat President always consults them. Only after consultation every activity is carried out in the Panchayat. Moreover, every activity of the Panchayat is first discussed in the Oorsabhai, of which the Panchayat President is himself the leader.
Relationship between Oorsabhai and Village Panchayat

Oorsabhai members regularly attend the Gram Sabha meetings organized by the Village Panchayat. Before attending the Gram Sabha meetings, the Oorsabhai members decide upon the items to be discussed in the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha gets quorum through these Oorsabhai members. The demands of the Oorsabhai are discussed and resolutions are passed thereon in the Gram Sabha. Then the resolutions are implemented.

The tamarind tree saplings planted are safeguarded by the nearby houses. This matter was discussed in the Oorsabhai and implemented through the Gram Sabha. Maintenance of minor and major tanks is discussed in the Oorsabhai. The matter is brought to the notice of the Gram Sabha, which implements the resolutions of the Oorsabhai. Fisheries development is carried out in ooranis and kanmois (minor and major tanks). It is decided upon in the Oorsabhai and implemented through the Gram Sabha.

The following activities are initiated and planned in the Oorsabhai and implemented through the Gram Sabha:

(1) Safeguarding tamarind tree saplings near households.

(2) Safeguarding the standing trees located in tank areas and preventing encroachment.

(3) Maintenance of major and minor tanks.
(4) Safeguarding the public properties, viz., street lights, public television, public taps, community toilets, community buildings, threshing floor, Panchayat buildings, drainage, compost pits.

(5) Contracting out of fishing rights.

(6) Regulation of water management.

(7) Identifying the BPL households in the village.

(8) Awareness programme on herbal plants and Siddha medicine.

(9) Employment generation for unemployed youth and women.

(10) Employment generation for SC people in the village.

(11) Contributions either in cash or kind.

(12) Transfer of money from Oorsabhai to Village Panchayat.

(13) Eradication of untouchability. In Oorsabhai meetings, equal treatment is meted out to SC people.

(14) Mobilization of money as well as labour.

(15) Looking after the welfare of school children through creating awareness on personal hygiene, clean environment and inculcating the habit of using toilets.
(16) Fixing and collecting taxes., viz, house tax, water tax, library tax, professional tax and land tax. They also fix the contribution to the Oorsabhai from the yields.

(17) Channelising the government funds for SHG members and determining the trades and small businesses for these groups.

(18) Procurement of quality (hybrid) seeds for agriculture, pesticides and manure is decided upon by the Oorsabhai collectively. They purchase seeds and fertilizers at subsidized rates.

(19) Selecting beneficiaries of the government programmes, viz., I AY (Indira Awas Yojana) colony houses for BPL families, SGSY (Sampoorna Grameen Samriti Yojana) etc.

(20) Welfare of women and children.34

Role of the Oorsabhai in Elections

The Oorsabhai plays a predominant role in elections at different levels of the government institutions such as Lok Sabha, State Assembly and local bodies. The Oorsabhai collectively makes decisions regarding the candidates to be supported in the Lok Sabha elections and State Assembly elections. They decide upon the candidates for the post of the Village Panchayat President and Village Panchayat Ward Members. They also fix the candidates for Panchayat
Union Councilor as well as District Panchayat Ward Member. In the selection of candidates for the Village Panchayat elections, they give equal treatment to the SC and women.

**Method of Election**

In the year 1996 the first elections to local body institutions was conducted in Tamil Nadu. Nallukottai Village Panchayat consists of 2 Wards. In these two Wards, 12 members contested and 6 members won in the election. Among the 6 members 2 were women and 4 were men. For the post of Village Panchayat President, two male candidates contested in the election. Ramanathan, the President of the local community organisation was one among the two. He appealed to the voters to cast their votes on the basis of their own conscience and not on party basis. Ramanathan won, winning the majority of the votes.

The next election to Panchayats was conducted in the year 2001. Ramanathan contested again. The people of Nallukottai Village Panchayat remembered his performance in the previous period. During that period, Nallukottai Panchayat won the Best Panchayat Award at the district level in the years 1998-1999 and 1999-2000. Each year the Panchayat got one lakh rupees as cash award. So the people of the Panchayat collectively decided to elect him as Village Panchayat President once again. Ramanathan was the only candidate and no one contested against him. Five Ward Members were also unanimously selected. Election was conducted for only one Ward.
Gram Sabha Meetings

In Nallukottai Village Panchayat, as per the provisions laid down in the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act 1994, Gram Sabha meetings are conducted four times every year on the following dates; January 26 - Republic Day, May 1 - May Day, August 15 - Independence Day, and, October 2 - Gandhiji’s Birthday.

The Gram Sabha plays a major role in finalizing the action plan for the village and also in sorting out the difficulties in the implementation of welfare activities in the village. People demand basic needs like drinking water, street lights, drainage and colony houses.

At the urging of the Oorsabhai, resolutions are passed on the following issues in the Gram Sabha:

1. Ban on using plastics
2. Cleaning houses and streets
3. Imposing penalty for open defecation.
4. 100% coverage of rainwater harvesting
5. 100% coverage of individual household latrines
6. Small savings
7. Solid waste management
The cooperation of the people in implementing the resolutions of the Gram Sabha is remarkably good because all these resolutions are first discussed and vetted in the Oorsabhai. 36

**Total Sanitation Campaign**

The Total Sanitation Campaign has been implemented in the Panchayat. A village level Committee headed by the President, involving the local headmaster, village health nurse, NGO, VAO and selected members of the public, SHG members, is functioning effectively. The message of the Total Sanitation Campaign is seen everywhere. Intensive programmes were conducted in the village and, as a result, the villagers are quite aware of the importance of personal hygiene, environmental cleanliness, health hazards of open defecation and the advantages of the use of toilets. The 100% construction and use of household toilets and effective maintenance of clean environment in the village testify to this.

The women sanitary complex constructed as per the new design is a boon to women and children who could not construct a toilet of their own for want of space. Nearly 300 women use the complex not only for toilet purposes but also for washing and bathing every day. The complex is maintained by an SHG. A vegetable garden is also maintained in the vicinity using the waste water, which is a value addition to the complex. The President is also planning to install a toilet linked biogas system to run the motor attached to the complex,
The Village Sanitation Committee monitors the sanitary conditions of the village closely by conducting periodical meetings and also ensures proper use of household toilets and other sanitary facilities. A training programme was organized on low cost toilet construction for the SHG members, local masons and the public.

School and Anganwadi Sanitation

The Panchayat has one middle school and one elementary school. Students’ Sanitation Clubs have been formed to look after school sanitation, water sanitation, environmental sanitation, school toilet monitoring and personal hygiene.
The Parents Teachers Association headed by the Panchayat President meets regularly and discusses issues. Members of the Total Sanitation Committee monitor sanitation activities in the village. Sanitation songs and the sanitation pledge are practised in the schools. The senior students teach health habits to the junior students.

**Anganwadi Sanitation**

A toilet has been provided at the Anganwadi Centre which has 20 children below three years. The children take the sanitation pledge and sing sanitation songs every day. A sanitation kit is available with nail cutter, soap, towel, etc. The Anganwadi worker tutors the children in the use of toilet as well as clean habits. There is a Children’s Park adjoining the Anganwadi Centre and the children play there happily with play materials.

**Water and Sanitation**

Protected drinking water supply is ensured in the Panchayat through proper maintenance of overhead tank and other water sources. The 13 hand pumps are operational and defects are rectified immediately. The President takes pride in asserting that no water borne disease has been reported in the village so far. The health statistics also confirms this. No stagnation of water is seen anywhere due to the effective drainage system. Frequently the people have been advised to drink boiled water and the practice is prevalent in the village.
Health and Sanitation

Awareness camps are periodically conducted on health aspects. The one Primary Health Centre and the two Health Sub Centres are doing yeoman service to the public. Immunization camps are regularly conducted. The number of cases of contagious disease is kept to the minimum. As a special measure, special care is taken by the President of the welfare of the pregnant women of the village. A card is maintained for each pregnant woman and nutrition requirements are met and the President monitors the same. Ante and post-natal care is ensured.

Rain Water Harvesting

Provision of rain water harvesting structure is made mandatory for all proposed buildings as per Government Order No.121, Rural Development Department, dated 13.11.2002 and the amended Sec.242(2) of the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act, 1994. All the 460 households in Nallukottai have installed rain water harvesting structures. All the Panchayat buildings are provided with RWH structures. Surface level RWH structures have been created wherever possible. All the three ooranis (tanks) have been deepened under the SGRY. The Kurunthoorani of Nallukottai has been renovated under a special component of SGRY 2002-2003 at a cost of Rs.0.92 lakhs. All channels from Indra Nagar Colony have been linked with this Oorani
by creating rain water harvesting structures. It is found that the ground water level has risen considerably. No hand pump has gone dry. This was made possible by the intensive efforts of the President for harvesting rain water.

**Drainage System**

Every street has been provided with drainage. The 960 mt. system is maintained properly. In addition, 20 soak pits have been installed to prevent water stagnation. Moreover, 75% of the interior streets are concrete streets and steps have been taken by the President to cover the remaining streets in future.

**Tree Plantation**

Totally 1250 tamarind trees were planted on both sides of the roads for a length of 5 kms within the Panchayat area. Further, 1010 trees were planted in the Panchayat’s poramboke. Due to this, the environmental sanitation has improved considerably. In fact, the President makes it a point to convert every public event and visit of dignitaries an occasion for tree plantation.38

**Solid Waste Management**

The President has taken effective steps towards enlightening and empowering the public on solid waste management. Resolutions have been passed in the Gram Sabha to keep the environment clean and also
to reduce the use of plastics. The waste collected from each household is stored in a dust bin kept in each Ward. The collected wastes are properly separated as bio-degradable and non-biodegradable waste.

Women Empowerment

The role of women in maintaining clean environment and personal hygiene in the village is vital. The President is proud of having 10 SHGs consisting of 190 women who are highly motivated towards sanitation. One Fair Price Shop is run by a Self Help Group, viz., Tanlip Self Help Groups, very effectively and profitably also. One grocery shop is also run by the SHG.

Other Innovative Efforts

All the details of the Village Panchayat have been fed into the computer installed in the Panchayat Office. This computer has Internet and e-mail facilities and is connected to the district headquarters. Voice mail facility to hear the grievances of the public has also been installed, which is a novel facility available in the village. Lot of press reporters and other visiting dignitaries have appreciated and articles have been published in newspapers and journals about this.

Bathing Ghat

A bathing ghat has been provided for the public to encourage personal hygiene.
Samathuvamayanam

The creation of a *Samathuvamayanam* (common burial ground for all communities) in the village can be considered a feather in the crown of the Panchayat President.

*Resting Place Constructed by Panchayat at the Common Burial Ground*

**Gym Cum Recreation Centre**

The President is wise enough to establish a Gym cum Recreation Centre in the Panchayat for the benefit of the youth, which is a rarity in a Village Panchayat.

**Drama Stage Constructed with 100% Public Contribution**

Under the Namakkum Naame Thittam (Self Sufficiency Scheme) a Kalai Arangam (drama stage) was constructed in the Village
Panchayat at a cost of Rs.3.00 lakhs. All the Panchayat functions are conducted on this stage.

Kalaiarangam Constructed with Community Contribution

- The Panchayat President has the distinction of being the leader for 7 periods continuously without any opposition (from 1965 to date).

- Due to the effective administration of the President, the Village Panchayat got the State Best Panchayat Award in 1998-99 and 1999-2000.

- The Panchayat President has equipped himself as a good resource person for conducting training for other Panchayat Presidents on various aspects of Panchayat administration and sanitation.
He has participated in various training programmes conducted at state and national levels.\footnote{40}

It concludes that Nallukottai is an ideal Panchayat in an arid district. This was the comment given by the daily \textit{The Hindu} dated 23.3.2003.\footnote{41} Thanks to the spontaneous participation by the villagers, Nallukottai has evolved into an exceptional Village Panchayat of rare accomplishment. Self sufficiency is achieved due to the synergy of the Oorsabhai and the Village Panchayat, which are both headed by Ramanathan. Apart from the physical infrastructure, the peace and harmony that prevails in the village makes the entire atmosphere positive and creative.

**MARAVAMANGALAM**

Historical \textbf{Background of Maravamangalam}

Maravamangalam is a Village Panchayat in Kalaiyarkoil Panchayat Union of Sivagangai District. This village is located 7 kms from Kalaiyarkoil Town near a historical place called Kalaiyarkoil Temple. The Kattaru river runs through this village from Nattarasankottai to Kachamputhur. Due to encroachments the Kattaru has become Nattaru, a mere channel. From this Nattaru, Maravamangalam Village gets its drinking water and water for agricultural purposes. During the rule of the king he appointed some
persons to collect taxes and maintain the peace in the village. They were known as the Ambalakarar, the Kattai Ambalam and the Mukkanthar.\textsuperscript{42}

**Ecological Profile**

Maravamangalam Village Panchayat has a total area of 4.5 sq.kms. Of the total area of land, 44.9 hectares are fertile lands and 444 hectares are non-fertile. There are 15 acres of village poramboke under various heads like threshing floor, grazing land and pathway. Two acres of land were encroached upon by the Pillai caste people near the Panchayat office fifteen years back. In the year 2002 the Village Panchayat President, through counseling, made the people vacate the encroachment and built a bus stand, a lorry park and a taxi stand there to get some income for the Village Panchayat. In one acre of land banana and neem have been planted. There are 12 ponds, 26 tanks, 3 irrigation channels, 12 private wells, 4 bore wells, and 3 open wells to meet the drinking water and irrigation needs. Maravamangalam Periyakanmoi is used for irrigation and for drinking water for animals and for bathing and washing clothes. Ayyanar Oorani and Palkulam are used for drinking water. There are 1578 land owners in this Village Panchayat. Among them 35 are big farmers, 580 medium farmers, 473 small farmers and 410 marginal farmers. The major crops are paddy, banana, cholam, red gram, green gram, groundnut and millets.
**Socio-Economic Profile**

The Village Panchayat has a population of 5046 (male 2407, female 2609), out of whom 1806 are SC people. Of the total SC population 901 are male and 905 female. Of these 286 SC males and 187 SC females are literate. The Mukkulathor (Thevar, Maravar and Servai) are the majority in the Village Panchayat. SCs come next in population. Vellala Christians and SC Christians also live in the Panchayat. Muslim families also live here. There are 1350 households in the Panchayat. Out of these, 535 families are Mukkalothor, SC families 421, Konar families 68, Vellala Christian families 8, Muslim families 192, Pillai families 17, Chettiar families 22, Asari families 8, Dhobi families 22, Barber families 17, Kuyavar families 3, Valluvar families 3, Vallayar families 8, Brahmin families 2, Kuravar families 3. People of all the castes and religions have land. The SC people have less land. The majority of the SC are agriculture labourers. Agriculture laborers are 575 families and agriculture families are 300. Totally 875 families depend on agriculture. Members from 27 families have gone abroad for work and members of 35 families are employed outside the village in private and government sectors. This area is industrially backward. Nearly 50 to 100 families go for building work, 20 families sell vegetables and fruits. 10 families are engaged in telecommunication business, 50 to 100 families are engaged in animal
rearing and 50 families are engaged in other businesses like selling rice, banana, millets, manure, fertilizer etc.\textsuperscript{43}

The agriculture coolies do not get adequate work throughout the year. Their employment is seasonal. During the harvesting time they can get employment continuously for about 30-40 days. They undertake all kinds of agricultural work, such as harvesting, threshing and cleaning on contract basis. They get wages in the form of paddy and such wages are relatively high. They get around 20 kgs of paddy for men and 15 kgs of paddy for women. Put together, each family earns 500 to 600 kgs of paddy during the harvesting season.\textsuperscript{44}

Outside the harvesting time the women SHGs pursue some trades like coir mat manufacture. It adds to their family income. In this Panchayat there are nearly 30 SHGs formed with the help of the NGO SHARP. They construct household latrines, get loans from nationalized banks, get trade training etc.\textsuperscript{45}

Among the total (1350) households 917 households come under the BPL category. Among the SC 387 families are below poverty line; of the 387 families, 157 families have household latrine; and 230 families do not have household latrines. Apart from the household latrines there are two women sanitary complexes in the village. In the Oorsabhai and the Gram Sabha meetings people are urged to use household latrines and the sanitary complexes.
In this Village Panchayat there are 1350 houses. Of these 750 are tilled houses, 227 are pucca houses and 373 are huts; 1056 houses have electric light facility. There is one Anganwadi with toilet and urinal facilities, 2 primary schools and one higher secondary school. In the primary and the higher secondary schools toilet and urinal facilities are available.\(^{46}\)

In the primary school there is a play ground and in the higher secondary school, there is a science laboratory. The Village Panchayat provides water facilities for drinking purposes and toilet use. Once in a month or two the Parents Teachers Association meets in the school and tries to provide infrastructure facilities and improve the standard of education, health and sanitation. After higher secondary education the children have to go for college education to Sivagangai or Madurai.\(^{47}\)

Before independence and till the 1980s there was caste discrimination and two tumbler practice. After 1980-85 the SC people became empowered through the Communist (Marxist) Party and became equal with the caste Hindus. The SC people now attend the Oorsabhai meetings. An SC person is a temple priest and the SC people contribute to the festival fund. Now there is no practice of untouchability in the village. SC people are members of the Executive Committee and collect money from the people. In the Ayyanar temple
all the people take food without any caste discrimination, i.e., Samapanthi.

There is one Primary Health Centre, a Sub Health Centre and one private clinic and one dispensary to fulfil the health needs of the people. There is a public telephone booth, 172 telephones, one post office and in the Panchayat Office Internet facility is available. The farmers get manure and pesticides in the village itself because there is a manure sales centre and five pesticide sales centres.

The Oorsabhai and the Gram Sabha insist on the women maintaining clean environment and personal hygiene in the village. SHG members, in their monthly meetings, discuss the health care in the family and personal hygiene. The Oorsabhai and Gram Sabha support the SHGs in getting loan from banks, encourage them to do small trades like making agarbathi, coir products, household materials. All the SHG members have opened savings accounts and none gets money from private money lenders. Of the 30 SHGs, 10 have got loans from banks and are doing small businesses like making coir products, chalk piece, soap and phenyle.

The Oorsabhai did not allow intercaste marriages in earlier times. Now the Oorsabhai allows intercaste marriages. Many intercaste couples are living in the village without any problems. The practice of dowry does not prevail in this village. Widow remarriage is also
accepted. There are three village temples, namely Ayyanar temple, Akkini Eswar temple (village god), and Mariamman temple. At the time of the temple festivals the Oorsabhai members, youth group members, Panchayat Ward Members, women Self Help Group members and the Panchayat President are involved in bandobust activities and render service voluntarily. Some people give donations in the form of pandal, electric lights, banana trunks, pandal decoration etc. After the festivals the remaining things are auctioned through the Oorsabhai and the proceeds is deposited in the Oorsabhai account. In the month of April, in the Oorsabhai meeting, the accounts are presented by the accountant member of the Oorsabhai. Anyone is free to raise doubts related to the festival expenses. After clarifying the doubts the Oorsabhai members affix their signature in the accounts notebook. Finally the Oorsabhai leader affixes his signature and the accounts are approved.

**Local Community Organisation (LCO)**

**Kudi System**

The Oorsabhai decides upon the work to be carried out with the consent of the *kudi* members. Those who own lands in the village and benefit from the village tanks or canals are considered members of the *kudi*. Membership in the *kudi* is determined by the Oorsabhai. SC families owning land are also members of the *kudi*. In earlier days
women were not allowed to attend the Oorsabhai meetings. In the case of woman headed families, instead of the woman any male from that family was allowed to attend. With the emergence of women SHGs, the Oorsabhai relaxed its rules and now allows women members to participate in the meetings.

The system of the *kudi* is mainly meant for celebrating village festivals collectively. The Oorsabhai consults the members, determines the festival contribution and every *kudi* contributes money for these celebrations which are fixed by themselves collectively. The leader of the Oorsabhai nominates 14 members from the major caste groups to an Executive Committee. They have the responsibility to collect and spend for the festival expenses and get approval from the Oorsabhai. They enroll new *kudis* in the month of September and submit the detailed accounts for the year in the month of April. The frequency of the Oorsabhai meetings depends upon the needs of the *kudis*. Normally, in a year, a minimum of 10 meetings and a maximum of 15 meetings are conducted.49

**Maravamangalam Oorsabhai**

Since 1920, for four generations, the Ambalakarars of Maravamangalam have been collecting taxes, administering the village and dispensing justice. Kittu Thevar of their lineage has been the head of the Oorsabhai of Maravamangalam for more than 50 years.
Nagasami Thevar and Vellaikannu Thevar have been assisting him in looking after the village work. The Village Accountant Krishna Pillai has been keeping the village accounts. The responsibility of the head of the Oorsabhai has been devolving in heredity from generation to generation. So has the responsibility of the Village Accountant. The Poojari is Karuppiah, a Velalar (Potter) and the bullock-setter (a traditional responsibility wherein a privileged/selected land holder harnesses his bullocks and ploughs a few furrows in the temple land to mark the commencement of the agricultural operations for the year) is a Yadhava named Koolu.

Because Maravamangalam has a large number of irrigation sources, there is a Village Irrigation Committee. Only those who own lands are members of the Village Irrigation Committee. The responsibilities of the Village Irrigation Committee include appointing the bullock-setter, the opener of the irrigation tank and sluices and the irrigation monitors to regulate cultivation according to the storage in the kanmoi, thereby making irrigation water duly available to all the land owners and, when water scarcity occurs, even borrowing water from nearby irrigation tanks and saving the crops. During village festivals the Executive Committee determines the quantum of the contribution to be made by every kudi and conducts the festivals. Those households who own no land are required to pay half the amount determined for each kudi. The Executive Committee of the
Oorsabhai, which consists of nominees from most of the communities in the village on a proportional basis, collects the contribution determined by the Village Irrigation Committee and ensures peace and security in the village during the festivals.

Notice of any proposed meeting of the Oorsabhai is given through the Thoti using a tom-tom, a week in advance. The Oorsabhai meets at a common spot. Landholders as well as landless householders, members of the Village Irrigation Committee as well as the Executive Committee participate in the meeting of the Oorsabhai.

A Oorsabhai Meeting in Maravamangalam

The meeting of the Oorsabhai is convened to determine cultivation in general, and, in particular, raising nurseries, repairing the irrigation channels and regulating the supply of water for irrigation
depending on the storage in the kanmoi and the individual landholdings.  

The Oorsabhai is also convened to decide upon matters such as punishing wrong-doers, selecting beneficiaries of government schemes, for deciding on providing facilities such as roads, medical treatment and educational institutions and to execute urgent work. When the Oorsabhai is convened to discuss matters relating to lands, all the landholders are required to attend the meetings. If anyone abstains from the Oorsabhai meeting without a satisfactory justification, he is fined by the Oorsabhai. The Village Accountant spots those who are absent from the meeting of the Oorsabhai.

When the members of the Village Irrigation Committee, the Executive Committee and the SHGs of the village are gathered together for the Oorsabhai meeting, the head of the Oorsabhai (Kittu Thevar), sitting in the centre of the assembly, spells out the importance of the meeting and the agenda and calls upon the members of the assembly to spell out the ways and means of handling the items on the agenda.

In the last four or five years, both men and women have been participating in the meetings of the Oorsabhai and pointing to developmental activities needed in the village. One topic discussed in the Oorsabhai, for example, was the freeing of those who had been arrested and jailed for resorting to a road blockade to prevent the construction of a check dam across the Nattar Channel. At the end of
the discussion it was resolved in the Oorsabhai that thereafter not only farmers but also traders should join any action undertaken to prevent the construction of the check dam on the Nattar Channel.

*Road Blockade Organised by the People of Maravamangalam to Demand Release of Water for Cultivation*

Work relating to basic facilities required by the people, namely, drinking water, street lights, road facility, drainage facility, educational facility, women’s welfare, children’s welfare, kanmoi maintenance and channel maintenance are also discussed in the Oorsabhai.

Generally all works relating to the development of the villages are discussed in the meeting of the Oorsabhai. Then it is resolved to carry out those works which can be executed with the people’s participation as such. It is also decided to carry out other works utilizing government grants that are available.53
An important topic for discussion in the Oorsabhai is irrigation water. Whenever water is available in abundance in the kanmoi, the people express their opinion on which parts of the cultivable land should be supplied irrigation water. Whenever the available water is less, the people express their opinion on what to do to get water and wherefrom to get water. After listening to the people, the leader of the Oorsabhai expresses his opinion. A common decision is then taken. The Village Accountant then explains how the decision can be implemented. All the people accept the decision and the method suggested to implement it.54

A contribution of Rs.200/- per kudi is collected during village festivals. The income and expenditure accounts for the same are presented in the Oorsabhai by the Village Accountant. Sometimes, in order to fulfil vows, during festivals, some people come forward to bear specific expenses like pandal, flower decoration and fireworks. Such contributions are also noted down by the Village Accountant and presented as annual festival accounts in the Oorsabhai, which approves of them.

The members of the festival committee of the village collect the levies in their respective areas and hand them over to the Village Accountant. The Village Accountant also advances money for specific expenses to individuals and notes them down and he presents the consolidated accounts at the Oorsabhai meeting.
If, when the accounts are presented in the Oorsabhai meeting, any member raises any question or questions why so much money was spent on a specific item, or demands an item-wise presentation of expenditure on each and every activity, the Village Accountant presents an item-wise expenditure statement. Consequently, the accounts of the Oorsabhai are transparent.

Besides, the Oorsabhai meeting is convened for deciding upon sowing seeds. At this meeting it is decided that, before the transplantation, a temple worship must be conducted and then only the seedlings should be uprooted. This is a custom followed for generations. The Oorsabhai undertakes the responsibility of implementing it.

The members of SHGs participate in the Oorsabhai and ask for details relating to basic facilities like drinking water, street cleaning, street lights, work sheds for women, employment opportunities, women’s education, equality and bank loans.\textsuperscript{55}

**The Oorsabhai Passes Resolutions**

The Oorsabhai passes resolutions relating to the village community. The following are the key areas covered by the Oorsabhai resolutions.

i. The venue, the time and the date for meetings.

ii. Disputes in the community and also at the family level.

iii. The selection of the Executive Committee members.
iv. Banning the use of plastics in the village.

v. Planting trees in the poramboke lands and on the bunds of the water bodies.

vi. All the households should separate compostable and non-compostable wastes in the house itself.

vii. Employment for SHG women, e.g., grocery shop.

viii. Getting all government schemes and programmes to the village and motivating the *kudis* to participate in the government programmes.

ix. Earlier one woman sanitary complex was constructed. The Oorsabhai asked the Village Panchayat to construct another sanitary complex for women in the village. The construction is going on.

x. Beneficiaries of all government programmes are decided in the Oorsabhai.

xi. In primary and secondary school education the Oorsabhai plays a vital role by providing drinking water facilities, toilet facilities, iron fencing, play ground increasing the school enrolment, identifying dropouts and providing suggestions to strengthen the education. The Oorsabhai gives suggestions to the PTA (Parent Teachers Association) to maintain the standard of education and personal hygiene of the students.
xii. The Oorsabhai decided against the construction of a check dam in the Nattar Channel, because already there was a check dam. The Oorsabhai engaged in *Salai Marial* (blocking the road) (involving males and females) and cautioned to the government. Yet the government constructed the check dam and gave more water to another village. The Oorsabhai decided to go to court. This was done and the court ruled in favour of Maravamangalam.

xiii. The Oorsabhai strictly warns the members not to create any caste or religious conflict in the village.56

**Executive Committee**

The Oorsabhai nominates 14 members and constitutes the Executive Committee headed by a leader for a tenure of two years. The same Committee may continue for another period with the consent of the Oorsabhai. The Committee members are changed by the Oorsabhai in the month of September. All the Committee members are selected by the Oorsabhai members.

The powers and functions of the Oorsabhai are as follows:

i. The membership of the *kudi* is decided by the Oorsabhai.

ii. It nominates members from the major castes and constitutes the Executive Committee.

iii. It determines the *kudi* contribution to the village festivals.
iv. It frames the cropping calendar.

v. It fixes the dates for *kudimaramattu*, raising nursery, opening and closing of sluices and temple festivals.

vi. It auctions fisheries and grazing rights.

vii. It appoints common irrigators, watch and ward staff and fixes their salaries.

viii. It decides on the welfare and development activities to be carried out.

ix. It controls the village common fund.

x. It sanctions expenditure from the village common fund.

xi. It exercises general control over the common property resources.

xii. It decides on support to the Panchayat activities

xiii. It maintains harmony in the village

xiv. It maintains social justice in the village.

xv. It regulates water for irrigation

xvi. It punishes people who misuse the tank water or commit other mistakes in the villages.

xvii. It procures water for irrigation from external sources in times of inadequate storage in the kanmois of the village so as to save the standing crops.57
Kittu Thevar, the Oorsabhai Leader

Kittu Thevar, the leader of the Maravamangalam Oorsabhai, is 65 years old, a Hindu of the Thevar caste and educated upto the V standard. He has five sons and two daughters. Four of the sons and both the daughters are married. He owns one acre of wet land and 5 acres of dry land. He lives in a pucca house with facilities like electricity and toilet.

Since Kittu Thevar took over from his father, Vellakannu Thevar, as Ambalakarar (leader of Oorsabhai) of Maravamangalam, there has been no communal conflicts based on caste or religion. He supports intercaste marriage because he believes in changing with the times. The population of Maravamangalam includes Hindus, Muslims and Christians and most of the castes in the district. He has popularized the concept of *samapandhi* (common community meals) and made all the communities eat together as equals. He has ensured the participation of all communities and both men and women on equal footing in the meetings of the Oorsabhai and in celebrating temple festivals. He has even made an SC person the Poojari of a temple in the Village.

In the dispute over the proposed additional check dam in the Nattar Channel, Kittu Thevar played the dominant role. It was he who motivated Annadurai to mobilise the people to agitate against the construction of an additional check dam. It was he who decided to make Annadurai the leader of the agitation. Interestingly, when
Annadurai wanted to contest for the post of Panchayat President in the first elections, Kittu Thevar refused to consent but did not prevent him from contesting. Annadurai contested, but lost, because the village knew that he did not have the blessings of Kittu Thevar and the Oorsabhai. But, when the first Panchayat President was silent and inactive in the face of the threat of an additional check dam, Kittu Thevar realized his error and his eyes fell on the dynamic Annadurai. When Annadurai proved his mettle in this endeavour, Kittu Thevar decided to favour Annadurai in the second elections. That is why, in the second elections, Annadurai won with an overwhelming majority.

The Oorsabhai led by Kittu Thevar and the Village Panchayat led by Annadurai rule Maravamangalam jointly. They work in tandem. Earlier, when fighting against the proposed additional check dam in the Nattar Channel, with the Village Panchayat and its President remaining inactive, it was the Oorsabhai that advanced the money required for the litigation. Today the Oorsabhai still gives the Village Panchayat money for activities not covered by government programmes. It is the Oorsabhai that discusses the pros and cons and not only decides but also collects the people’s contribution and gives it to the Village Panchayat. In return, the Village Panchayat gets the government funds but conforms to the decisions of the Oorsabhai in the implementation, as far as possible. As a result, it is not easy to draw a demarcation line between the Oorsabhai’s domain and the Village Panchayat’s.
The Oorsabhai, under the leadership of Kittu Thevar, has a great deal of concern for the weaker sections. Dhobis, Barbers, Aasaris (Carpenters) and Koravars (Basket Weavers) have been given livelihood security and dignity through assured employment. When a dhobi died, orphaning his spinster daughter, the Oorsabhai gave her a solatium of Rs.5000/- and enabled her to get married and settle in a nearby village.58

**Relationship Between Oorsabhai and Village Panchayat**

Before the convening of the Gram Sabha meeting, the activities to be discussed therein are discussed and decided upon in the Oorsabhai. All the Oorsabhai members should attend the Gram Sabha. So the Gram Sabha gets quorum through the Oorsabhai members. Based on the demands of the Oorsabhai, items are discussed and resolutions are passed and implemented by the Gram Sabha. For instance, at the time of the construction of the additional check dam across the Naatar Channel, the Oorsabhai decided to block the work immediately. The members (male and female) of the Oorsabhai decided to block traffic on the main road. This was discussed in the Gram Sabha and petitions were sent to the district higher officials for proper action.59 The Oorsabhai, meanwhile, filed a case against the Government and succeeded in getting nine-tenths of the water for Maravamangalam.60

The Oorsabhai decided to plant trees in the tank bed, oorani bunds, village poramboke areas, village streets and road sides. All the
tree saplings are safeguarded by the nearby households. The maintenance of minor and major tanks is discussed in the Oorsabhai and implemented through the Gram Sabha. Minor and major repair work, cleaning the bushes etc are discussed every year before the monsoon starts and, to do the work, every kudi deputes one member or meets one day’s expenses for a substitute. This matter is discussed in the Gram Sabha also. If any facilities are available from the government side they are also used for this work.61

The following activities are initiated and planned in Oorsabhai and resolved upon and implemented through the Gram Sabha:

1. Maintenance of major and minor tanks.
2. Contracting out of fishing rights.
3. Regulation of water management.
4. Safeguarding tree saplings near households.
5. Safeguarding the standing trees located in the tank area and preventing encroachment,
6. Safeguarding public properties, viz., street lights, public television, public taps, community toilet, community buildings, threshing floor, Panchayat buildings, drainage, compost pits.
7. Conducting awareness programme on herbal plantation and Siddha medicine.


10. Contribution either in cash or kind.

11. Transfer of money from Oorsabhai to Village Panchayat.

12. Eradication of untouchability. In Oorsabhai meetings, equal treatment is meted out to SC people.

13. Mobilization of money as well as labour.

14. Creating awareness among school children on personal hygiene, clean environment and inculcating the habit of using toilets.

15. Fixing and collecting taxes, viz., house tax, water tax, library tax, professional tax, and land tax.

16. Channelising the government funds for SHG members through Oorsabhai and deciding upon the trades and small businesses for these groups.

17. The procurement of quality (hybrid) seeds for agriculture, pesticides, and manure from the Agriculture Department is decided upon by the Oorsabhai collectively. They also fix the contribution to the Oorsabhai from the yields.

18. Identifying the BPL households.
19. Identifying the beneficiaries of government programmes like IAY (Indira Awas Yojana) colony houses for BPL families, SGSY (Sampoorna Grameen Samriti Yojana), women and child welfare.

20. The Oorsabhai Executive Committee members approach the MLA and the MP to get some programmes for the villages. This is done through the Gram Sabha.\textsuperscript{62}

**Role of the Oorsabhai in Elections**

The Oorsabhai plays a dominant role in elections at different levels of the government institutions such as Lok Sabha, State Assembly and local bodies. The Oorsabhai collectively makes decisions regarding the candidates to be supported in the Lok Sabha elections and State Assembly elections. They discuss and decide upon the candidate collectively and promise him their votes. In the local body elections the Oorsabhai determines the candidates. Sometimes if more number of persons want to compete in the elections they are allowed to contest. In the last local elections four persons contested for the Panchayat President’s post. People evaluate the performance of the individuals in terms of achievements for the welfare of the people and elect the person of their choice. However, the blessing of the Oorsabhai is the ultimate deciding factor.
Method of Election

In the year 1992 the Government of India passed the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. This Act gave constitutional status to the local self government institutions. Based on this constitutional Amendment, The Tamil Nadu State Government passed a conformity Act known as the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act 1994. In the year 1996, the first general elections to local body institutions were conducted in Tamil Nadu. The Maravamangalam Village Panchayat consists of 3 Wards, with 9 members to be elected for the three Wards. In the Oorsabhai, the members assembled and discussed the unanimous selection of Ward Members. In one ward some youngsters objected and the Oorsabhai consented to hold election. The President and the Executive Committee members selected the other Ward Members and the selection was implemented through the Village Panchayat (Gram Sabha).

The next Panchayat elections were conducted in the year 2001. Annadurai won by a difference of 467 votes. As for the Panchayat Ward Members, the 9 Members were unanimously selected in the Oorsabhai and it was implemented through the Gram Sabha.

The Oorsabhai played a vital role in deciding upon their Village Panchayat representatives through analysis of the performance of development activities, individual discipline and performance. After the performance assessment the Oorsabhai unanimously selected the candidates for the second term.
Gram Sabha Meetings

In Tamil Nadu, as per the provisions laid down in Section 3(2) of the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act 1994, the Gram Sabha meetings are conducted four times every year on the following dates: January 26^Republic Day, May 1 - May Day, August 15 - Independence Day, and, October 2 - Gandhiji’s Birthday.

This rule is strictly followed in Maravamangalam. The Gram Sabha plays a major role in finalizing the action plan for the village and also to sort out the difficulties in implementation of welfare activities in the village. People demand basic needs like drinking water, street light, drainage, colony houses and emphasize environment issues. The major issues addressed are: ban on using plastics, 100% coverage of rainwater harvesting, 100% coverage of individual household latrines, solid waste management, encouraging women and child health through medical camp, insisting upon the SHGs registering with the Village Panchayat and increasing the savings amount, and, cleaning houses, streets and wards and maintaining them neatly through SHGs. The above activities are carried out only through people’s participation. The President and the Ward Members support the welfare activities without any hesitation.64

Annadurai, the Village Panchayat President

Annadurai, aged 49 and belonging to the Yadava community, a backward class, is the President of Maravamangalam Village Panchayat studied upto SSLC. He lives with his wife and two sons. He
owns three acres of wet land. He has a motor pump set in his land and
so he cultivates paddy and millets. He lives in his own tiled house with
facilities like electricity and toilet. Earlier he was the President of the
Cooperative Society and he retrieved the society from total collapse
and made it vibrant. When he was the President of the Cooperative
Milk Society, he enabled the poor to get loans. He got 135 milch
animals for the poor.

Since he is the Milk Society President he is actively involved in
the purchase of milch animals without any corruption. For any work
carried out in the Panchayat, he first consults the Oorsabhai and the
Village Panchayat Ward Members. Then only he carries out the work.
In the last four years the Panchayat has provided a women sanitary
complex and a pucca drainage system in the villages. Cement roads are
provided to the villages. Solid waste is segregated in a yard.
Vermiculture is undertaken with the bio-degradable waste. He has
created awareness on the importance of Siddha medicine and 17
varieties of herbal plants have been planted in the women sanitary
complex area.

At the back of the Panchayat yard there was an encroachment by
some Pillai caste people. The President took steps to counsel the
encroachers and to evict the encroachers from that place. Now the
place has been made a bus stand, a lorry park and a taxi stand.
Moving with the People

When steps were taken to build a check dam across the Nattar Channel, Annadurai objected as this check dam would stop water flowing to his Panchayat areas. He mobilised the people and informed them about the implications of the new proposal. But the then Panchayat President kept quiet without taking any initiative. Motivated and supported by the Oorsabhai leader Kittu Thevar, Annadurai launched a series of agitations and went to jail. This gave him name. He has developed a strategy for mobilising the people for all public action. Though he belongs to a party, he is able to attract all political party leaders because he has influence with the people.
In the second Panchayat elections held in 2001, he contested against four candidates. All the other four lost their deposits. His untiring public work, with the participation of the public, brought him to the Panchayat as President. His predecessor demonstrated his inability by his non-performance. The other candidates spent money for canvassing. Annadurai was determined not to spend money for the election. He did not have money also. He printed a hand bill projecting his promise: water supply, nothing more; non-performance versus performance; corruption versus corruption-free administration; non-participatory governance versus participatory Panchayat management. He further printed a hand bill asking the people not to sell their votes as, by selling their votes, they would be selling their self respect. He conducted a voter awareness campaign also. Above all, he was the chosen candidate of the Oorsabhai.

**Plan for the People**

When he was elected President, he decided not to receive petitions from the people. Getting petition from the public would amount to reduction of citizens to the level of irresponsible dole receivers and petitioners. He did not want to do it. He wanted people to be responsible citizens and active participants in development. Every one should feel that they have the strength to change their destiny and that they can manage the government. He developed a vision for the total transformation of the village. It was only a wish list. He presented it in the Gram Sabha and got approval. He printed the
document with the contribution of shop owners. In the wish list he indicated the facilities the Panchayat needed, the services the Panchayat area needed. From the wish list he has developed a perspective plan for the development of his Panchayat.

Initially he prepared a vision document detailing only the activities to be carried out. After one year, he constituted a Planning Committee consisting of Panchayat Ward Members, NGO representatives, retired government officials, representatives from youth groups and representatives from SHGs. After having a thorough discussion with all segments of the society in the Panchayat area, he prepared a well developed plan in consultation with Government officials. The plan document provides the following details: different committees involved in plan preparation, methodology adopted to prepare the plan, basic details about the facilities available in Maravamangalam, conditions of the BPL people, sector-wise details about the needs of the community, financial details involved in implementing the plan activities, and, steps taken to improve the internal resource mobilization.

The total plan document in his creative idea. He first dreamt of it and later he started the consultation process. Finally he developed a plan, totally through a participatory process. A series of steps were taken to transform the plan into reality. The total outlay projected in the plan document is Rs.11 crores. He is taking earnest efforts to mobilise resources through various means. He printed the plan and
circulated it among all the government offices. It is a 42 page document full of activities. He has given the document to the MLA, the MP, the Block Panchayat Chairperson, the District Panchayat Chairperson and the Ward Members. His priorities are water supply and sanitation.

Dedicating Himself

The Nattar Channel water is the main source of irrigation water to Maravamangalam. Water comes through the channel and is being used for cultivating the lands in Maravamangalam. Water is being stored in a check dam at a distance of three kilometers. If another check dam was constructed before Maravamangalam, it would help the Kannankundu and Siramam water tanks to feed water to other areas. When the new proposal of constructing an additional check dam at a cost of Rs.51 lakhs was announced by the government, the people perceived that it would affect eleven villages in Maravamangalam area. It was forcefully resisted by the people under the leadership of Annadurai. Subsequently they went to the High Court. When the matter was sub-judice, the Public Works Department initiated the construction and it was forcefully resisted by the people: 500 people were arrested under the leadership of Annadurai. Of these arrested, the majority were women.

Finally the High Court of Madras delivered a judgment in which it stated that 90% of the water from the proposed check dam should be given to Maravamangalam area. It was a prolonged struggle for a
period of four years. Annadurai took the lead in the struggle even before he became President of the Village Panchayat. Only through this struggle he became popular among the people. He continued the struggle even after he became the Panchayat President and at last won a victory for Maravamangalam. The President involved all sections of the village in this struggle. In his opinion water will unite the masses. It is an instrument to integrate the people of different social categories.67

**Government Departments**

Annadurai periodically gives demand letters to the concerned government authorities to perform their roles properly. His persistent demand is to desilt all the tanks in the Panchayat area. He feels that if a Panchayat looks after its water bodies very effectively many issues can be tackled very easily. Water will solve many problems. Hence he is keen on managing common, and particularly natural resources. He consolidates the problems, demands and issues based on his personal visit to all areas and segments of the society and discussions with the Oorsabhai. He classifies all the issues and turns them into demands of the people and takes them to sectoral departments for proper redressal as government departments are having enough resources and authority to solve them. His periodical visits to departments have helped him to get many programmes implemented in his Panchayat area.

He is a good organiser and, as a result, he organised the Gram Panchayat leaders of his block and put up their administrative
problems to the officials for immediate redressal. He has contact with all the other 42 Village Panchayat leaders of Kalaiyarkoil Panchayat Union. In many areas the Panchayat Presidents find it very difficult to manage the officials. Officials want to control the elected representatives of the people by using their ignorance and incapacity. Moreover the Panchayat Presidents largely depend on the resources of the sectoral departments for Panchayat activities. To overcome the problems, Annadurai has developed a framework by which an association is formed at the block level. Whenever they face any problem in government offices, they jointly take decisions and organise protest meetings. By organizing such collective meetings, the Panchayat Presidents are now empowered. For many of the administrative problems created by the lower level officials, their federation has found solutions through collective action.

**True Democracy**

Annadurai’s Gram Sabha mobilization is totally different from that of other Village Panchayat Presidents. For each Gram Sabha meeting he invites either a higher level government official or elected representative. Further he keeps a number of issues of various strata of the people on the agenda of the Gram Sabha to attract the members of the Gram Sabha. He comes up with challenges in the Gram Sabha meetings. He allows people to speak and take decisions. For each decision he fixes the responsibility for the implementation of the decision. The special invitees used to give some promises also. To
follow up the promises, individuals are fixed. Literally he shares his burden with others.

He conducts the Gram Sabha meeting like a temple festival. According to the records, the Gram Sabha attendance reaches 15% and they are really active not only in articulating the problems of the people but also in evolving solutions to the problems. He has created a collective leadership. By conducting himself as a humble person and facing problems courageously he has given an image to the people that he is committed and honest in managing the Village Panchayat. Reaching the people is not problem for him as his Ward Members, Committee Members and SHG leaders act as instruments to mobilise members for the Gram Sabha. Further he has made it clear that only the Gram Sabha resolutions are realized through the Panchayat, which makes the people participate in the Gram Sabha. Above all, the Oorsabhai backs him wholeheartedly.68

**His Administrative Approach**

Annadurai uses two different designations: one is Village Panchayat President and the other is Panchayat Executive Officer. While taking decisions he acts as President. While implementing the decisions he acts as Executive Officer. He has a role clarity and, as a result, he performs his roles perfectly. In the case of problems created by antisocial elements, he strictly warns them by issuing notices. He has formed a committee at the Panchayat level to monitor the activities of the Panchayat. He has formed another committee to collect the
taxes. He does not involve himself in collecting taxes. He fixes the responsibility on a group and it is easy for him to collect the taxes. He engages the Ward Members in organising the medical camps sponsored by various agencies. By giving responsibility to the Ward Members and sharing with them all the details of accounts and decisions, he ensures that all the Ward Members are cooperative. They take responsibility in every activity.

He has created a Citizens Centre in his Panchayat office. It provides information to the public. He has created the Centre with the help of the Catalyst Trust. His idea of creating a Centre is to keep the people engaged. It not only provides information, but also provides opportunity to develop dialogue and discourse on development. With the help of the Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), he has provided needed skills to the women groups. He maintains a very good link with the higher level elected representatives, officials and local NGOs. In this respect he is a good social mobiliser. He has created another information centre which is called Chiraag. It provides computer education to children and youth. It helps the people to get application forms downloaded from the system. It sends all kinds of applications and letters to various types of institutions. In order to protect the common properties, a committee has been constituted in which all prominent members of the community have been made members. They have been given power to deal with the issues arising out of misusing the commons. He has made several such groups work as active participants. To cater to the needs of the people, a committee has
been constituted and the committee has to bring to the notice of the Panchayat the needs of the people.⁶⁹

**Rectitude**

There is yet another issue—corruption in administration. Local body leaders are finding it difficult to get schemes and submit accounts in the corrupt administrative system in Tamil Nadu. Annadurai makes it clear that the present administrative system is corrupt. But it is corrupt only to the corrupt people not to the non-corrupt leaders. At the same time, if the non-corrupt leaders work individually, they cannot do anything and they will also succumb to pressure. So he works with the people and mobilises the people for development activities. His Gram Sabha is not a for name’s sake formality. He has made it a discourse Sabha and a deliberation Sabha. He brings a lot of people’s issues for discussion. Moreover, to protest against any wrong, he mobilises the people. In all this he mobilises more women, Dalits and youth. It is a vibrant force. Even after he became Panchayat President, he has organised many protests and succeeded. He never considers the Panchayat President’s post an office. He considers it a space to mobilise the people for development action.

Further he has developed a control mechanism to minimize misdeeds in the villages. Villages are units of habitats with varying socio-cultural groups with different political backgrounds. To manage the communities, one has to have a strategy. A Panchayat President is not a policeman or an inspector. He is only a leader facilitating development work in the Panchayat. At the same time, he has to create a peaceful atmosphere in the village setting to enable development
work to be carried out. It can be done only through a committee consisting of members of various communities who have influence over the people of the respective communities. He has constituted such committees through which regulatory and supervisory activities are initiated.\textsuperscript{70}

**Clean Village Activities**

To sensitize the community on sanitation and environmental protection, Annadurai organised several cultural programmes in all the habitations. With the help of medical firms, he made arrangements for an eye camp in the village and eye surgical operations were conducted by St.Joseph’s Hospital, Trichy, to those who needed them. Further he has evolved successful solid waste management. The wastes are segregated into bio and non-bio wastes and from the bio-wastes, compost manure is produced. To transport the solid waste three bullock carts have been purchased from the donation given by a local NGO.
Annadurai has done an innovation in environmental sanitation. The area around the Village Panchayat office was used for open defecation by the public. He discussed with the public and they proposed a community toilet for both men and women. Immediately he cleared all the thorny bushes and leveled the ground. There was an encroachment in the place and the same was also removed. Separate toilets for men and women were constructed and they were put to use. Further, to augment the income to the Village Panchayat, banana saplings were planted in the cleared site. A bus shelter was constructed. In addition to that the Panchayat permitted public vehicle owners to make use of this site to park their vehicles. Now the area has become a clean business centre.

**Arrangement for Drinking Water**

Annadurai gives emphasis to the supply of clean drinking water to all the hamlets by extension of pipe lines and construction of new OHTs and regulation of water supply. Cleaning of OHTs and chlorination are done regularly. Through public contribution he has availed of the Swajalthara Scheme to ensure drinking water to all. Two OHTs with a capacity of 1,00,000 litres and 30,000 litres respectively have been constructed. Water supply connection is provided to all the schools in the Panchayat. To ensure cleanliness around the public water taps a Vigilance Committee has been formed in each habitation, involving SHG members. As adequate water supply is available in the Panchayat it has been proposed to give individual house tap
connections. In this regard the Village Panchayat administration has sought the technical guidance of the TWAD Board.

A *dhobi khana* has been constructed in the main village of Maravamangalam. To ensure regular supply of water for washing clothes a separate borewell has been sunk near the *dhobi khana*. It has been given electricity connection and so it is fully utilized by the community. 71

**Empowerment of the Community**

In Maravamangalam Panchayat a computer centre is functioning which is very useful to the community in gaining knowledge and information related to their socio-economic needs. Community members easily contact government officials through e-mail. Yet another centre known as the Citizens Centre sponsored by the Catalyst Trust is also serving the community for their information empowerment. Annadurai decided to establish a permanent library in his Village Panchayat. With the help of local enlightened and educated individuals, he has collected contributions from the public and a public Literacy Centre (library) has been established in Maravamangalam. It is functioning well. Mostly young men are making use of the library regularly. It is in a new building with sufficient infrastructure facility. The library building was constructed from the fund allotted for local area development activities by the Member of Parliament, Mr. Sudharsana Nachiappan of Sivaganga Constituency. 72
Development of Educational Activities

There are three schools in this Panchayat area, of which one is a High School, another a Panchayat Union Primary School and another an aided Primary School. Annadurai has immense faith in the efficacy of education in rural development. He has facilitated the active functioning of the Parents Teachers Association. Annual events like school day celebrations and sports day are used to distribute prizes to the academically bright students. Improving the infrastructure facilities in the schools was a major contribution of Annadurai. In the Panchayat Union Primary School he has arranged pucca fencing, leveled the site for the play ground, and constructed a toilet from the allocation under the TRSP scheme fund, SSA grant and also public contribution (Oorsabhai). In the high school, additional buildings and laboratory facilities have been provided from the MP local area development fund. For one teacher employed in the high school, the salary is paid from the Parents Teachers Association fund. 73

Management of Common Property Protection and Activities

Annadurai, being a farmer, has given importance to agriculture development. His rapport with the Oorsabhai has enabled him to undertake improvement and maintenance activities in respect of common property resources. There are twenty six irrigation tanks and three irrigation canals in his Panchayat area meant for agriculture. In association with the Oorsabhai he has formed a committee to look after the protection and maintenance of common property resources.
Periodical kudimaramathu activities have been successfully carried out to maintain the water bodies. Whenever funds are available in the Village Panchayat under schemes like Jawahar Sampoorna Gram Swarojkar Yojana (JGSY), Namakku Namme Thittam and Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), desilting and deepening works have been undertaken in the irrigation tanks. Illegal felling of trees has been strictly prohibited by social control (Oorsabhai). In the distribution of irrigation water to the ayacutdhars equity is maintained by the Village Irrigation Committee.

**Vocational Training to Youth and Self Help Group Members**

Annadurai evinces keen interest in human resource development. He encourages SHG activities and youth activities in the village. With the help of the Jan Sikshan Sansthan (JSS) he has secured vocational training programmes for his village youth and women. Training in mushroom cultivation, vermicomposting, tailoring, camphor production, candle, soap and coir production have been provided to village youth and SHG members free of cost. The women trained in coir production have started manufacturing mats, ropes and other coir based products.75

**Formation of Paddy Procuring Centre**

Farmers in and around Maravamangalam raise paddy if adequate irrigation water is available. During 2004 the majority of the farmers resorted to paddy cultivation and were fortunate enough to have a good yield. The Government of Tamil Nadu announced the list of places
where paddy procuring centres would be located. The farmers would get incentive money if they came forward to sell their paddy to the Food Corporation of Tamil Nadu. In Sivaganga District, when the Government announced the scheme, Maravamangalam was not on the list. Annadurai organised a farmers’ meeting of Maravamangalam and neighboring villages to discuss the issue. A representation was made to the Government in this regard and there was a decision to organise a demonstration if the request was refused. He lobbied with Government officials by providing various details like total extent of lands on which paddy was raised, estimated quantity of paddy crop available for sale to the Government and also the extent of benefits small and marginal farmers would gain in the villages. Further he came forward to earmark a site and a building for the proposed centre and agreed to take the moral responsibility for the successful and smooth running of the centre. At last the Government officials sanctioned a centre at Maravamangalam itself. The farmers benefited a lot. His achievements were possible because of the people who reposed faith and confidence in his leadership and extended their support whole heartedly to all his actions.

Annadurai’s strength is honesty and working with the people. His strong belief is that approaching issues and problems with people’s support will always bring positive results. He is known for his faith in collective leadership. According to him people are the real strength of the Village Panchayats. His identifying with the people for just causes has made the people repose confidence in him. Further his selfless and
dedicated work for the cause of the community has made the people listen to him. Though he is politically identified with a party, his activities are never perceived as political. His strength is his responsiveness. He believes people immensely as they are the real support base for all his activities.  

References


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.


5. Ibid.


9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.


14. op.cit.


18. Ibid.


20. Ibid.


22. Interview with the Nallukottai Traditional Panchayat Leader, March, 2004.

24. Interview with the Traditional Panchayat Elder Member, May 2004.

25. Local Community Organisation, Kudi Register, Nallukottai:
    Local Community Organisation, 2004, p.5.


27. Ibid, p.7.


30. Interview with Traditional Panchayat Leader, June 2004.

31. Local Community Organisation, Kudi Register, Nallukottai:

32. Ibid.

33. Information provided by Village Panchayat Clerk,

34. Interview with Vice-President, Village Panchayat,

35. Interview with Leader, Traditional Panchayat, Nallukottai,


42. Interview with Traditional Panchayat Leader, Maravamangalam, May, 2004.


44. Interview with Traditional Panchayat Elder Member, Maravamangalam, May, 2004.

45. Interview with Self Help Group Member, Maravamangalam, May, 2004.


49. Local Community Organisation, Kudi Register, Maravamangalam: Local Community Organisation, 2004. p.3.


52. Interview with Traditional Panchayat Members, Maravamangalam, May, 2004.


54. Interview with Village Irrigation Committee Member, Maravamangalam, May, 2004.

55. Information provided by Traditional Panchayat Leader, Maravamangalam, May, 2004.

56. Local Community Organisation, Oorsabhai Record, Maravamangalam: Local Community Organisation, May 2004, p.5.
57. Information provided by Traditional Panchayat Karnam (Accountant), Maravamangalam, May, 2004.

58. Information provided by the Traditional Panchayat Karnam (Accountant), Maravamangalam, June, 2004.


60. Information provided by the Village Panchayat Vice-President, Maravamangalam, June, 2004.

61. Information provided by Panchayat Clerk, Maravamangalam, June 2004.

62. Interview with Traditional Panchayat Leader, Karnam (Accountant) and Village Panchayat President, Maravamangalam, June 2004.

63. Interview with Traditional Panchayat Leader, Karnam (Accountant) and Village Panchayat President, Maravamangalam, June 2004.

64. Information provided by Village Panchayat Clerk, Maravamangalam, June 2004.

65. Interview with the Village Panchayat President, Maravamangalam, June 2004.


68. Interview with Village Panchayat President, Maravamangalam, June 2004.

69. Information provided by the Village Panchayat Clerk, Maravamangalam, June 2004.

70. Information provided by the Village Panchayat Ward Member, Maravamangalam, June 2004.


72. Information provided by the Village Panchayat Clerk, Maravamangalam, June 2004.

73. Interview with High School Head Master, Maravamangalam, June 2004.

74. Information provided by Traditional Panchayat Member, Maravamangalam, June 2004.

75. Information provided by the Youth Club Member and SHG Member, Maravamangalam, June 2004.

76. Interview with Village Panchayat President, Maravamangalam, June 2004.