CONCLUSIONS

In dry areas where rainfall is scanty, irrigation has developed as an important productive force. It becomes important in these areas to conserve and use, whatever little rain water is available, for irrigation purposes. As a result development of minor irrigation sources like tanks becomes essential for proper utilisation of scarce water resources.

Lack of continuous flow of water increases its value for irrigation purposes, which in turn necessitates continuous and sometimes immediate care of the irrigation works like tanks. This has to be undertaken by the people in the neighbourhood of these irrigation works. This sort of necessity had been very well recognised historically and led to the development of traditional community based institutions for the development of minor irrigation sources in dry regions like Rayalaseema. In these regions some of the indigenous institutions and through them public involvement in the construction and maintenance of minor irrigation works was once widely prevalent and was fully endorsed by the local rulers.

For centuries preceding the British rule, the native rulers had taken great interest in the construction and maintenance of various minor irrigation works especially tanks in dry regions. Besides directly undertaking the construction of larger tanks, the native rulers had encouraged the local initiatives for the construction as well as maintenance of minor irrigation works by encouraging local institutions like Dasabandam and Kudimaramat.

The institution of Dasabandam was in the form of an inam tenure. Most of the time construction of the Dasabandam tanks and Dasabandam wells was undertaken along with the establishment of new villages and settlements in
the early pre-British days, in return for Dasabandam grants. During the
medieval period also Dasabandam works were undertaken by people from
different sections of the society, primarily with the State initiative and
couragement. Kudimaramat, on the other hand, was an extensive native
organisation bringing together several people for the maintenance of minor
irrigation works, especially in those dry areas where river and spring
channels were the dominant sources of irrigation. Though it was the
initiative taken by the people that mattered ultimately for the successful
functioning of these institutions, there is hardly any doubt that the
system was nurtured and encouraged under the tutelage of the State
patronage.

Disintegration of the Indigenous Institutions

The imposition of the British colonial rule and the process of
incorporation of India into the imperial economy, had brought about certain
strong but gradual alterations in the tenurial relations, which had struck
at the very roots of the indigenous institutions. After annexation of the
region of Rayalaseema, the British East India Company had recognized the
existence of the Dasabandam tenure, though it didn't make any specific
efforts to further the practice in the form as it was under the native
rulers. This was mainly because of the overall changes brought about by
the colonial government in the revenue administration and also in the
policies relating to minor irrigation works. The process of incorporation
replaced the institutional interests of the periphery with those that
facilitated the subordination of the indigenous interests to that of the
metropolitan.

Under the British rule, the imperial government had very well
recognized the existence of thousands of the Dasabandam works and also
the institution of Kudimaramat. It formulated various policies, from time
to time, with regard to the maintenance of the Dasabandam works. However, the growing transactions in land, the emergence of a land market, the division of Dasabandam inam land by inheritance and sale, the slow but growing mobility of the people away from the rural areas brought about instability in the institution of Dasabandam. The result was the resumption of hundreds of the Dasabandam inams. Voluntary contribution of Kudimaramat labour (of the pre-British days) at the grassroots level was not forthcoming in the newly emerging bureaucratic and revenue oriented environment. Hence under the colonial rule, the work which was hitherto a voluntary contribution was made compulsory contribution through legislation, but still with little positive impact. Informal functioning of these institutions was made more formal and bureaucratic through the creation of formal bodies like the Irrigation Panchayats.

The changing property relations in land through inheritance and sale, the increasing mobility of the cultivators in search of better opportunities elsewhere, the increasing emphasis on the revenue settlement policy of the colonial government, the encouragement of private wells for irrigation, the excessive bureaucratization of local administration and an increasing dependence on rules to maintain the water resources had no place for indigenous institutions or people's initiatives on which they depended. What was perceptable was a process of transformation of the institutional arrangements from those shaped by predominantly indigenous needs ment by local initiatives to those dictated by the external interests.

Privatisation of Irrigation Sources

Prevalence of hundreds of Dasabandam wells was a significant feature of the pre-British days, explaining their community character. The preponderance of Dasabandam wells in the early British Rayalaseema and its
disappearance by the turn of the 19th century and the first few decades of
the present century, is an adequate reason to believe that with the land,
water also increasingly changed from being a public resource to a private
resource. After the incorporation of India into the emerging imperial
system, the British under the East India Company had initiated the process
of encouraging the construction of wells at private cost, which was later
intensified under the Crown. Private wells have come to be recognized as
a protective source of irrigation during famine. Several loans were
granted for this purpose. As a result thousands of wells were constructed
by the ryots.

During the initial years of the direct British regime, several ruined
tanks were made over to the ryots on special dry rates for private repairs.
Later, even tanks irrigating small ayacuts, though not in a ruined condition
were handed over to private individuals for repair since the government
thought that it was not profitable enough to maintain such small works at
government cost. Entrusting the construction of a major irrigation work
like the Kumool-Cuddapah Canal to a private enterprise was another big
venture in the direction of encouraging private initiatives in the
development of public sources like irrigation. The overseas private
company (MICC) had limited knowledge about the local agricultural and
irrigation practices of the region. This resulted in taking several wrong
decisions, including the choice of the tracts to be traversed by the Canal
and high initial water rates in the tracts where there was hardly any
demand for irrigation water. These fundamental and inherent mistakes could
not be reversed altogether even later after the government had taken over
the administration of the Canal. Hence, there was only a marginal
improvement in the performance of the Canal.
Imperial Irrigation Policy and the Neglect of Minor Irrigation Works

Maximization of land revenue was the guiding principle of the British colonial administration right from the East India Company days. Whenever the Company government had undertaken some repairs to tanks and watercourses in dry areas it was always the revenue surplus as a difference between the estimated cost and the expected revenue that decided the choice of works. The importance of irrigation, particularly of major works and their revenue fetching prospects were very well understood by the British towards the end of the Company rule itself. Under the Crown, a separate department of PWD was created with the objective of undertaking profitable irrigation development. The frequent recurrence of famines had necessitated the imperial government to look into the protective aspects of irrigation development. The imperial motive of extracting as much revenue as possible had led to the evolution of a separate water rate system which was altered from time to time on lines with the settlement and resettlement of land revenue.

The history of Tank Restoration Scheme is a classic example of the conflict between the local needs which can be sustained by institutions based on peoples initiatives on the one hand and the imperial profits which are driven by cost-return calculus. The Tank Restoration Scheme was one of the major policy outcomes of the Crown's regime. Under this Scheme, the amounts spent by the imperial government were meagre and the way they were spent were discriminatory. Tanks of profitable returns were only restored. Tanks irrigating small acres of land were either given to the ryots for private repair or abandoned altogether. The recommendations of various Famine Commissions and also the Irrigation Commission had brought about several changes in the imperial irrigation policy, but with little positive impact on the minor irrigation works in the dry areas like Rayalaseema.