

DEVELOPMENT OF ROAD TRANSPORT: A TRAVANCORE EXPERIENCE

Wilfred A

Research Scholar in History
Alagappa University

Abstract: Travancore, the erstwhile native State had only traditional mode of conveyance prior to the coming of the British. With the advent of British colonialism, Travancore became a Subsidiary ally. Production centers and commercial canterers were interconnected with ports. The establishment of Public Works Department in 1860 ushered a new era in transportation history. After that definite scheme, proposals were prepared by British engineers to extract the resources of the State. Development of trade necessitated better means of transportation facilities. Net result was the impoverishment of Travancore treasury.

Keywords: Colonialism, Subsidiary ally, extraction of resources.

Transfer of people from one location to another denotes Transport. It is regarded as core of economic development. Historically transportation provided the base for trade and commerce, economic integration and even the safety and security of a kingdom. Growth in population and activities has resulted in increased demand for better mobility visible since the dawn of cultures. As years went by it became a daily rhythm of human life and it helps to knit together the entire world into a single unit. A striking feature of transportation history reveals the fact that from primitive times, means of transport incorporates production units and market canterers. Remote areas were well knit to the core territories by effective movement of people and it induces economic activities. Transmission of culture, diffusion of ideas all owed its indebtedness to transportation facilities. It acts as a catalyst for overall development of human species from the uncivilized stage to the civilized. It is instrumental in determining the settlement pattern, population shift and evolution of cultures. Man has evolved different modes of transport adapted to environmental implications. Each mode has its own advantage, well suited to social, economic and environmental requirements. Among the various modes of transport, water transport acted as the cheapest and oldest mode of transport.

In primitive times waterways assist humans largely to move from one place to another. The exchange of goods and other needs ancient man depend on rivers, seas and other water bodies as only source to assist. They crossed hundreds and thousands of miles to each the far off regions through the medium of water there by led to the diffusion of culture; various traditions etc. In the absence of waterways to pass over mountainous regions or mountain ranges, narrow pathways were the only source of dependence in those days. Along with water transport, land transport gradually evolved. As human civilisation advanced farther, better means of transport, roads and railways as new innovations entered. Among the various means of transport, road transport plays a prominent role.

Modern means of transport and its history dates not much backed to 19th century. The same was the case of India and that of erstwhile native State of Travancore. Travancore, a land of perennial water was well supported by natural drainage system. In this stretch of land, water transport was largely practiced by the people. At the same time, traders as well as foreign travellers utilised the cart roads as well as pathways to travel along the mountainous regions. The erstwhile Princely State of Travancore possessed an uninterrupted line of natural communications. Coastal ports and hinterland spice pockets were connected with a broad network of roads.

In Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States, a detailed description of the roadways existed in the kingdom are available. The estimation of longer distances by time and smaller distances by sound is vividly described in it, the terms like Naly (something less than half an hour), Vilippad (or Call) to mention about a quarter of a mile. Modern means of transport in Travancore had its beginning in the second half of the 18th century. Primitive form of conveyance like tomojans and palanquins were used for land transport. Cart traffic did not exist in the region due to the absence of definite means of transport. The feudal lords and elite group travelled only on horseback or palanquins. Bullocks and donkeys were used to carry goods on rough roads. The system of untouchability existed in the society prohibited depressed classes to use public paths.

Marthanda Varma initiated the development of modern system of transport for the purpose of enhancing trade and commerce. He constructed many roads stretching one end to the other end. He constructed the public road leading from the eastern gate of Trivandrum was constructed. Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma completed the construction of road from Cape Comerin to Kodungallur. Thanneerpanthal or watersheds and satroms or inns were constructed to provide comfort to traders and travellers.

Towards the beginning of the 19th century Travancore entered into agreement or treaty with British Government. The Treaty of Perpetual Alliance and Friendship signed with the British in 1805 A D led to the complete subordination of Travancore sovereignty to the British. By the terms of the agreement Travancore became a subsidiary ally. The lucrative trade interests as well as territorial ambitions indirectly led to the development of public works in the country. They wanted to loot the resources of the State that could be possible with better means of transportation facilities. By that time, three major routes were in usage, the route

from Pangudy to Trivandrum, the route from Quilon to Schencottah and the route from Quilon to Cochin. Under the Dewanship of Veluthampi, for the smooth marching of Travancore forces, in 1802, he constructed a Rajapatha between Quilon and Schencottah. All roads constructed in early periods were known as Rajapatha, it meant either for travel by king or elite or for the march of army.

During the reign of Swathy Thirunal, Maramath Department was established in 1835 A D. Its prime target was the development of public works in the State. Reign of Ayilyam Thirunal witnessed a glorious epoch in the history of road development in Travancore. The major among the developments was the establishment of Public Works Department in Travancore in 1860 A D. The appointment of Barton as the Chief Engineer of Travancore heralded a new epoch in the history of public works. A clear cut estimation of the present status of roads was undertaken by Barton and his assistants. Several alterations and deviations were made to some existing roads at a considerable cost. To connect North Travancore with Madurai district, Peermed Ghat road was constructed in 1863 A D. Another road from Kottayam to Peerumed was completed in the same year. For smooth motor traffic from Thinnevelly to Quilon, Quilon Scencottah road was completed. Its prime target was to tranship the bulk mountainous products from Western Ghats region to Coastal area. Spices from forest tracts and cotton fabrics from Thinnevelly region had great demand in western markets. Along with that the sketch of a new road from Trivandrum to Thenmala via Nedumangad passes through Aryankavu Pass was outlined. The total distance from Trivandrum to Schencottah was reduced to forty miles with the construction of this new road. It was considered as more profitable to the British that they get maximum advantage at the expense of the Native ruler.

With regard to these developments, road from Trivandrum to Quilon also started. By interlinking coastal towns and market places it passes through the nerve regions of Attingal, Kottiyam and other places. But the notable deployment in the period was the construction of Main Central Road from Trivandrum to Ankamali, started in 1878 A D. Its total length was estimated at 156 miles. Besides these major roads numerous secondary roads were also constructed to interlink main roads with hinterland regions. Most of the roads were gravelled and bridges were constructed over rivers that cross the roads. The total length of the roads neatly maintained in the State in 1878-79 was approximately about 950 miles. The vigorous plan to initiate new roads with strategic visions was indebted to Barton. His successor A H Jacob continues the vision of his predecessor. By 1894, the total length of the public roads maintained by the Public Works department amounted to 1773 miles and in it Trivandrum and Quilon division ranks first.

By 1880 Trivandrum rose to more prominence and a large number of secondary roads intersecting Trivandrum town with its outskirts. As the administrative capital of the Travancore kingdom, most of the roads were gravelled; 93 miles of new roads were completed. As the spice pockets were already in the minds of the colonial rulers and naturally High Ranges get adequate attention. With the introduction of commercialisation of agriculture and large scale exploitation of resources, modern means of transport was of high necessity. Plantations of tea, coffee and other products inspired the Britishers to invest more and more capital at the expense of the native treasury. The net result was the completion of Kottayam - Kumily road.

The reign of Sree Moolam Thirunal witnessed great progress to the development of transport and communication. Main Central Road as well as Kotayam Kumily road etc was improved. Large sum of money was spent for constructing bridges and interconnecting hinterland areas of the state. The total length of transport network rose to 2224 miles in 1906 A D. In 1908, bridge across Kottayam- Kumily road was completed. Heavy expenditure for the construction of roads and bridges bear on the Travancore treasury itself and to balance with that toll gates were established at different places. By 1928, there were 21 toll gates throughout the State. By 1930, in order to advice the Government in Transport development, a Central Board and six District Boards came into existence. Later at the initiative of Sir C. P Ramaswami Iyer, State Transport Department established in 1937. In the next year regular bus services commences from Trivandrum. In 1947, the total length of transportation maintained during the year was 5566 miles consisting of 1345 miles of metalled roads, 2325 miles of unmetalled roads and 1001 miles of village roads.

Conclusion

Travancore, the native model State of Travancore experienced modern means of transport and communication with the advent of the British. Numerous roads in crisscross were constructed at their instigation. All roads were constructed at the expense of the Travancore treasury. At the same time the maximum benefit from the constructions goes to the Britishers. Most of the roads were planned to interconnect appropriate centres of production of raw materials and spices. Through easy access benefited by better roads, products easily flowed to transshipment points. Net result was the impoverishment of Travancore treasury and economy.

Notes and References.

1. A. Sreedhara Menon, Kerala Charithram (mal.) DC Books, Kottayam, 1967.
2. A. Sreedhara Menon (ed.), Trivandrum District Gazetteer, National Book Trust, Trivandrum, 1978.
3. Charles Dias (ed.), Kerala Spectrum, Aspects of Cultural Inheritance, Indo-Portuguese Cultural Institute, Cochin, 2006.
4. Cover File No.331 of 1906, Public Works Department, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.
5. Cover File No.1645 of 1930, Public Works Department, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.
6. Cover File No.1685 of 1907, Public Works Department, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.

7. Cover File No.335 of 1944, Public Works Department, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.
8. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, Kerala Charitham Prasnangal (mal.) Vol. IV, Valsala Printers, Trivandrum, 1972.
9. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, Studies in Kerala History, Valsala Printers, Trivandrum. 1943
10. Krishna Chaithanya, Kerala, National Book Trust, New Delhi,1981.
11. K.N Ganesh, Keralathinte Innalekal (mal.), Department of Cultural Publications, Trivandrum, 2006.
12. K.K. Kusuman. A History of Trade and commerce in Travancore, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1987.
13. Kattakkada Divakaran, Ethrayethra Sthalangal, Ehtrayethra Sambhavangal (mal.),National book Stall, Kottayam,1983.
14. K Sivasankaran Nair, Ananthapuri Nootandukalilude (mal.) Current books, 1998.
15. Leena More, English East India Company and the Local Rulers in Kerala, A Case Study of Attingal and Travancore, IRISH, Tellichery, 2003.
16. L.A. Ananta Krishnan Iyer, The Tribes and Castes of Cochin, Vol. I, Calicut, 1923.
17. M.G.S Narayan, Cultural symbiosis in Kerala, Mathrubhumi Books, Kozhikode, 1998.
18. M.A Oommen, Rethinking Development, Kerala's Development experience Vol.11, Institute of Social Sciences, Concept publishing company, 1998.
19. Naduvattom Gopala Krishnan, Kerala Charithra Dharakal (mal.), Maluben Publications, Kozhikkode, 2002.
20. N.K.A Laitif, Kachavadhinte Nanaethargal (mal.), State Institute of Lanugages, Thiruvananthapuram, 2015.
21. Pattam G Ramachandran Nair, Thiruvananthapurathinte Ithihasam(Mal), Department of Cultural Publication, Governement of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 2003.
22. Rajan Gurukkal & Raghava Varrier, Cultural History of Kerala, Department of Cultural Publication, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 2009.
23. R. Narayana Panicker, Adi Keraleeya Charitam (mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, V.V. Books, 1935.
24. P. T Sreenivasa Iyengar, History of the Tamils, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1982.
25. H Sarkar, An Archaeological Survey of Temples of Kerala, Madras, 2006.
26. Travancore Administration Reports for the years, 1860, 1865, 1873, 1879, 1901, 1907, 1908, 1024, 1936, 1945, Government Press, Trivandrum.
27. Travancore Information and Listener, Vol.V, No.4, 1945, Government Press, Trivandrum, 1945.
28. T.A Gopinatha. Rao., Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol-1, Government of Kerala, 2001.
29. T.K Velu Pillai, The Travancore State Manual, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1906.
30. Vasudeva Poduwal and Keamrisch S, The Arts and Crafts of Travancore, Department of Cultural Publications, Trivandrum. 1999.
31. V. Nagam Aiya, The Travancore State Manual, Vol 1, Kerala State Gazetteers Department, Thiruvananthapuram, 1998.
32. Ward and Conner, Memoirs of the Survey of Travancore and Cochin States, Vol.I, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1991.