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Kongu Highways and Economy

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Abstract

Highways are indispensable for the emergence of Urban centers. Medieval Kongu Highway System were conducive not only for the trade activities but also for the migration of various people. Proliferation of Highways with its root cause and its implication on Society and Politics are discussed. Along with this, houses (Rest houses) and cantonments are listed. Scholars working in South Indian history are not interested in studying Highways and Highway Systems. This article deals the emergence and its popularity.

Keywords: Kongu Highways, Economy, Urban.

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Introduction

Highways are indispensable for the emergence of Urban centers. Medieval Kongu Highway System were conducive not only for the trade activities but also for the migration of various people. Proliferation of Highways with its root cause and its implication on Society and Politics are discussed. Along with this, houses (Rest houses) and cantonments are listed. Scholars working in South Indian history are not interested in studying Highways and Highway Systems. Only passing references have been made by the eminent historians like NilakandaSastri. Modichandra had studied highway systems of ancient period with the help of Sanskrit and north Indian Literature. He also had focused on North Indian Highways. Only stray references have been made in his work about South Indian Highways. Recently Kongu Geography had been discussed about by a scholar. It is only a descriptive study and the social implications of ancient highway system were not dealt in it. This necessitated the author to discuss about the highways of Kongu.

Sangam Literature mentions highways as "Peruvazhi". Most of the references about highways are in "MullaiThinai" (forest Region) populated with cattle breeders. Cattle breeders were way makers or "High way makers". For their occupation they shifted their settlements. In course of time, periodically these cattle breeders had acted as good traffickers. In pre-historic Baluchistan cattle breeders were used for trade good traffickers between Indus cities. They travelled for several miles to exchange the goods in periodical market.

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The Route in which they travelled was emerged as Highways in Baluchistan. We can compare this situation with Kongu Highways. Trade route was the root cause for low profile Agricultural Economy. RamilaThaper says that: "Where in a particular region, the agrarian economy is not very highly developed because essentially it is in area with Trade-Routes passing through it. The mountains were the barriers and are inaccessible. The passes were responsible for alien connections".

Ancient Highway

In ancient period three highways that branched off the Palaghat pass and ran through the Kongu province. Even today they are very important ones. The Highway runs from Coimbatore to Kanchi, via through Avinashi, Erode, Salem, Kallakuruchi, Vilupuram and Thindivanam. Another Highway connects Coimbatore with kaviripumpattinam via, Suler, Palladam, Kangeyam, Karur, Kulithalai and Trichy. The third highway runs through Aanamalai, Pollachi, Udumalpet, Palani, Dindigul, Madurai and reaches Kodikarai. Further hoards of Roman coins belonging to the time bracket from 1st century B.C. to the 4th century A.D. were collected from the places dotted near these highways. The punch marked coins were also unearthed near these highways.

Medieval Highways

In Early Medieval and Medieval Kongu period, the people used different category of Highways and trade Routes. Kongu literature mentions about Kattuperuvazhi (forest highways) and Nattuperuvazhi (country highway), Gajalathipass, Kaviripuram pass emerged as strategic passes in the early medieval period and probilitated in the period under study. A Ganga king by

name Durvinathan had made expedition through Allathur, Andevi and Pennedam and these places are located in Kongu and there is a highway which passes through these places. This highway must have passed through gajalathipass and acted as a link between Karnataka and Kongu. To control this highway Durvineethan took predatory expedition as it was a strategic one. And the highway that passed through Kaviripuram was the root cause of Adithya's expedition into the Ganga country. He also annexed the whole of Kongu for her Route-character, and there is a Highway near Coimbatore at Kerala border named "Rajakesari Highway". Rajakesari Peruvazhi is found in between Ayyamimalai and Dharmalingamalai. For the study of highway system in ancient and medieval India it is the only specimen. Some scholars opined that it was named after Gondaraditya and others are of the opinion that "Raja Raja-I" was the builder of this Highway. We have already disproved these arguments elsewhere. It belonged to the Adithya-I period. It is about 30 feet in breadth and linked Kongu with Malaimandalam (Kerala country).

Communication Network

Medieval Kongu inscriptions mention about twenty Highways acted as a trade route networks. The "Kongu-peru-vazhi" Thuraiyur Peru-Vazhi, Vanai Peru-Vazhi, Adan-Peru-Vazhi, Asuramalai Peru-Vazhi, RajarajaMahendra Peru-Vazhi, Veeranarayana Peruvazhi, Chonaimerkonda chozhaPeruvazhi, Sozhamadevi Peruvazhi, Pidarikoil Peruvazhi, Chozhamadevi Peruvazhi, NattuPeruvazhi, MalaiPeruvazhi and AdhigamanPeruvazhi. The highway from Perur to Kovaiputhur (Coimbatore) lay inside Vada-paricara-nadu and ran through Manniyur (Annur), Nallur, Ukkannur, Vinampalli and reached Sathiamangalam from where it preceded northwards into the Ganga Region. The grand trunk road that led Kongu was called KonguPeruvazhi and this passed near Thiruvannaikaval and Srirangam in the Chozha country. This was mentioned a record of the early Chozha King Paranthaka-I. Many of the strategic places like Karur, Uraiyyur and Thanjavur were on this highway. Veeranarayana-peruvazhi is mentioned a record from Aanaimalai which is modern Anaimalaipalani road.

NattuPeruvazhi was located in the Karur region. RajamahendraPeruvazhi was linked up Karur with South (Pandya country). MolaPeruvazhi was preceded fromKongunadu connecting Pandya Country passing through Dharapuram alias KonguVanchiKiranur and Palani. Kozhumamperuvazhi starting from Palani passed through Kiranur and Kozhumam. AsuramalaiPeruvazhi was referred to in Kozhumam inscriptions which passed through Irattym-pappam-pattiKalaiyamuthur and reached Palani. This name must have originated with Iyerimalai (now as Iyarmalai) near Pappampatti, Ancient Tamizh name "Iyrai" might have been changed as Acirai and Acira. Hence this name Acuramalai, Solamadevi Peruvazhi is the name of the highway linked Karaithozhu and Komaralingam. The Highway from Dharapuram and

Kolinjivadi proceeding eastwards was called Palaipperuvazhi.

Adam Peruvazhi which passing through manapparai, Thogaimalainagaram Siltalachi and manavasi reached Karur. CirruPeruvazhi was laid for linking Kollihillswith Mala Kongu (Modern Salom). Cheranimakonda chozhanperuvazhi was laid between Kozhumam and Anaimalai. Highways with place names like Solamadevi Peruvazhi were local highways that linked villages and towns within the Kongu country. These Highways must have maintained by 'nadu' assembly of particular micro region. Traders of local region must have also maintained Kongu local Highways. State maintained Kongu local highways, and major highways that linked Kongu country with in South India. They are named after monarch like Rajakesari and Adiyaman.

Mile Stone

Adigamanperuvazhi was mentioned in two milestone inscriptions. These are the first references about milestone. These belong to 13th – 14th century A.D. This shows that the people of ancient period know about the importance and use of milestones. In one Adigaman Peruvazhi inscription it is written as "navalathavalathirukukatham" and another mile stone of same highway is written as 'navarathalathirukakatham'. Nalalthavalam is 29 Katham from here. Archeologists calculated the distance between these stones as 8 kilometers; hence one 'Katham' is equal to 8 kilometers. Kootham is inscribed in number as 29 Katham. Also it is shown by carving two big holes and nine small holes for 29. This carving must have been for illiterate people. This depicts the importance of milestone that preserved in the mind of our ancient people.

Rest Houses

Sarcarperiyapalayam inscriptions mention about the Thavalams in Tamizh country. It also refers them as "KadigaiThavalam". According to K.V.Subramanialyer, Kadigaithavala represented the residence of another class or group of people. In a Malavalli inscription Kadigasthana takes on place of Kadigathavalam. As such thavalam is only a variant of Sthama. It may be noted here that 'Sthan' was used by mean (in Ch.VIII. p.56) Commentator Kulhayabhatta takes it to refer to what constitutes the principal strength of a dominion, it consists of Dnada (any) paramerchandise quarters or naganur and hashtra. This interpretation is correct one. Thavalam was full of traders army (Chettveeras) and traders (hettis) as attested by SarcurPeriapalayam inscriptions.

In Kongu three Thavalam are located by scholars. Mancipulithavalam (Perur-Inscription). Vempathithavalam in Salem District and Thavalakarai in Periyar District. In Pollachi Taluk Vendithavalam, Thavalam are located near Kerala border. Velanthavalam is located in ChithoorTaluk near Tamil Nadu border. It is to be stressed that these Tavalams were named after

trees. According to some scholars these were periodical market places.

Contonments

Medieval Kongu inscriptions mentioned about Adi-Kazh-thalam and Eriveerapattanam. Sarcaperiyapalayam inscriptions refer to nattu-chetti-thalam. In medieval Tamil 'talam' means conformant. All these Adi-Keezh-talams were located in trade centers. We can safely argue that they might have been traders army cantonments. 'Eriveera' means Highways guards (Eriveera way guard or highways guard). In Kongu there Adikeezh-talam are mentioned in inscription. They were 'RajaRajapuranaAdi-Kazh-talam', 'KarayanaAdi-Kuz-thalam' and manniyurAdi-Koz-thalam. They were located at Dharapuram, Thurumuruganpoondi and Annur respectively. Some of the Eriveerapathna were also located at Peruvazhi (highway). Adi-Keezh-thalam had been enjoying political importance in Medieval Kongu. Kings had given the higher status to the Adi-Keezh-talams in administration King's order for tax remission in north Kongu addressed to various assemblies in north Kongu. Among them RajarajapuramAdi-Keezh-thalam was firstly mentioned. This shows the political importance land grant that donated by SoliyanagaratharVanigamadigai, Pommander-in-Chief and Manniyuradi-Keezh-thalam.

All these evidences show the political importance of Adi-Keezh-thalam during medieval period. Kongu had an impact of highway robbers in Medieval period. Sundarum refers about highway Robbers in Kongu. To check this Highway-Robbery, Highway-guards were posted. Inscriptional and Literary evidences has attested to this effect.

Highway and Jain Centers

Most of the Jain caves and monuments have been located on ancient highway. I-varmalai, AthaliammanKoil, Thirumurthimalai and Jain centers which are located at nannanoor – Palani highway. Also Sangam age jain centers like Pugalur, Iyyarmalai, Nagamalai and Chennukunur are on highways. The religious and economic aspects as well Caravan traders had travelled along these highways. They had used Jain centers as their shelters. All Jain centers had a place near them called as "AncinanPugalidam" (Shelter for trader). Here Ancinan (Anjenan) means Caravan trader. Traders must have taken shelter in these shelter house. For this traders also must have paid charges. Some traders had created a "EncinanPugalidam" in "Palamegalam".

Comparison can be given to this trait with that of Western Deccan. There Karle, Kondane, Baja, Khanari and Nosik are located on highways. These highways were ancient one as attested by archeological sites. With these evidences D.D.Kosambi argued that those BuddhistViharas must have acted as shelter places for Traders. The Viharas ground plan and shelter rooms have confirmed this. Foregoing discussions emphasizes

the Route character of Kongu country in medieval period. Kings and ethics had took much interest in the development of Highways. They laid highways and named there after themselves. Well defined Highway system had prevalent in the period under study. Rest houses and cantonments had proliferated. Kongu Highways had long history. Their origins went into the hoary past. Even in pre-Christian era well defined Highway system had existed. This tradition helped for proliferation of Highways in medieval Kongu.

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