



EARLY TRANSPORT SYSTEM IN COIMBATORE

S. Jayashree

Ph.D Research Scholar, PG Research Department of History, Government Arts College
(Autonomous), Coimbatore, Tamilnadu

Cite This Article: S. Jayashree, "Early Transport System in Coimbatore", International Journal of Current Research and Modern Education, Volume 3, Issue 1, Page Number 579-581, 2018.

Copy Right: © IJCRME, 2018 (All Rights Reserved). This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Early Transport System in Coimbatore:

Coimbatore also known as Kovai, is one of the major industrial cities in South India. In the early period Salem, Trichy, Erode and Coimbatore area were called as the Kongu Region and later Coimbatore became a separate city and was administered by the Coimbatore Municipality. It is the second largest city in Tamilnadu after Chennai. Coimbatore is well known for its textile, industrial, commercial, educational, information technology, healthcare and manufacturing hub of Tamilnadu. It is called by another name called the Manchester of South India for its extensive cotton industry fed by the surrounding Cotton fields. Coimbatore is located on the banks of the Noyyal river and surrounded by the Western Ghats. The transport sector is one of the core sectors of the economy, since it supports the infrastructure needs of all developments¹.

In the prehistoric period man travelled on foot with loads on his back and head. Thus the inter village paths created. Later he learnt to transfer the loads by the domesticated animals by packing on the back of the animals. Horses, oxen, donkeys, Camels were some of the animals domesticated for the transport of goods and persons². Even today the usage of such animals is not diminished in many countries of the world. Sledges made of several tree branches used to drag the loads placing the load on it. The next step of development was the usage of wooden carts with roller wheels which could transfer the loads more quickly and easily³.

The Mode of travel and transport in the early period was through bullock carts and horse driven Hackneys. The people utilised the bullock carts as a quick means of transport for the long distance travel. Horses were also used by the travelers for the quick journey. The goods were carried safely in the bullock carts to the market places for sales. The people visited the pilgrims either by walk or by the Bullock carts and horses. They travelled mostly in daytime and stayed in Chatrams at nights for the safety and security in their journey. The commodities for external trade were carried by bullock carts to reach the sea-ports of ancient Tamilagham. Hence the chief means of transport in ancient Kongu region for travellers was Bullock carts and horses⁴.

During the British period, the British discovered Udhagamandalam as a hill resort in the later part of 19th century. They constructed the rail routes in Coimbatore and a special rail route was constructed to the summer resort of ootacmand⁵. A Swiss Engineer named N. Rigggenbach, who invented Rigi⁶ system of Mountain Railway, guided to construct the Nilgiri Railway. The Rail route proved a comfortable and adventurous journey for the British community. The British contributed pioneer work in the transport and Communication development throughout India.

Road Transport:

Cattles and horses were used for moving from place to place since from the ancient days. Horses were used by individuals and warriors to move faster than cattle. Later they were used in the chariots and small carts for transport. Mostly Bullock carts driven by one ox and two oxen were in usage to transport people and luggage. The carts were designed for carrying goods and for carrying people accordingly to the necessity. Coimbatore city if full of Hills, Forests and grazing land and naturally it was suitable for the cattle rearing⁷. Alampadi, Madeswaran malai, Burgur, Kangeyam are some of the cattle varieties which were in use since few centuries. Carts were designed in Dharapuram as they are the pioneers in designing carts. Hill stations like Nilgiri and Anaimalai areas were also under the use of bullock carts for a long time. Till 1950 the Bullock cart transport remained in use for temple festivals, market and business transport in use⁸. Some of the places where the bullock carts and horses could not pass, donkeys were used on such occasions. Small quantity of loads were transported by the donkeys and in the cities donkeys are mostly used to carry laundry material. Water sheds were made available on the road sides for the passengers and cattle⁹.

High Ways:

Inscriptions reveal that since Chera, Chola and Pandiya rulers, all the cities are connected with highways. The details of the highways are scripted in some of the tamil literatures like Perumbanattu Padai, Paripadal, Mullai tinai, Agananuru, Silapadhigharam and Periya puranam. There were twenty highways which linked Kongu with other places. In Coimbatore towards east Chola Dynasty, south Pandiya Dynasty and north connected with Mysore roads. The main Kongu road connecting Perur, Coimbatore, Sular, Palladam, Kangeyam and Karur reaches Uraiyur. Avinashi was linked with Perur in the western side of Kongu by a Chola Highway called the Rajakesari Peruvali¹⁰ which was referred in the inscription. Roads which are connecting eastern and western sea shore are passing through the south west mountain region. Further to reach Mysore there are so

many routes like Gajalatti, thalaimalai and via Sathyamangalam and Hasanur through Kollegal and the inscriptions say there were lot of safety measures were also provided. Merchants passing through the roads can stay in the safety places with their goods for the night and continue their journey for their destinations. Very few places like Velanthavalam, Vandithavalam still exist in the southern part of Coimbatore. The details of the merchant's donations were also inscribed there.

Palanquins and Chariots:

Palanquins and Chariots were also in the use for transport in olden days. These types of transport were in use only for the higher class and the prominent people as it was expensive. The structure of the Palanquins was a small cabin built on two long poles to accommodate one or two persons like royal family and chief of the trust and it was carried by the people on shoulders. Palanquin was in use till 1940. Palanquin was used in the temples also. A saint named Thirupathiri puliyur was travelled in Palanquin to reach Perur of Coimbatore. In the beginning of 19th century, William Garo who was appointed as the Collector of Salem gifted an Ivory Palanquin to the Goddess Vedanayaki Amman as a token of Gratitude¹¹. Chariots were exclusively used for the Royal family and some of the open chariots were also used during war period by the warriors to lead the Battalion. The usage of chariots in Coimbatore region was very limited when compared to other region.

Boats on Lakes and Rivers:

Another mode of transport was boats on river and lakes in and around Coimbatore region. These types of boats were built by bamboos in round shape like a bow and it can accommodate eight to ten persons. The boat was driven with long poles. This type of transport does not pollute the environment as there is no requirement of fuel to drive them. In Coimbatore villages around the rivers Amaravathi, Noyyal and Bhavani were using this type of transport to cross the river for quite a long time. These boats were operated from a particular place and they were named as ports. These ports came under the control of British empire and all the ports were managed by the British government and taxes were also collected for carrying goods by boats. The taxes were collected by agents appointed by the British Government. For centuries in Erode the boat system was in usage and the area was viable for the boat transport. Moreover Gobi, Bhavani, Dharapuram, Udumalai and Pollachi are some of the major places used the boat transport system considerably¹².

In the mid of the 20th century many bridges were built across the rivers and the usage of boats were minimized and today the boat ports are not in use but few boats are used for the purpose of fishing and for the tourists. Only in two places called Kodiveri and Tengumrahada which were located in Bhavani Sagar area the boat transport is in use as there was no access of road to the area because of the dense forest which allotted for the wild life sanctuary.

Ropeway and Its Usage:

During the British rule, the forests of Anaimalai hill area were destroyed and converted into tea and coffee estates. The estates ranged up to the slopes of the estates from where the produces were to be transported from the top of the hill to the foothills where bullock carts and other types of transports were not possible and thus the ropeways came into use. In 1928 the Anaimalai Rope way company was established¹³. The ropeways were formed by raising pillars at distances from the top of the hill to bottom of the hill connected with steel ropes across the pillars to carry the materials to the top of the estate Iyerpadi. The names of the stages were Vannanthurai, Villoni, Attakatti, Waterpal, Iyerpadi etc., the administrative office of the ropeway transport company was located in Waterpal. The workshop, and power generating house also were there. The total extension of the ropeway was 9.04 miles. Later road was built up to the top of the estate and motorized vehicles came into use for the transport of material and produce of the estate. Slowly the usage of ropeway was faded because of its technical problems often occurred. The ropeway played an important role in the transport system over the hill area.

Tramway:

On the Western ghat, Pollachi area which is otherwise called Anaimalai area was planted with tea and coffee during the British period. At the same time the trees cut at the top of the hills had to be brought down to the foot hills with the help of cows and elephants. In 1890s a company called Mount Stuart tramway company was formed by which the trees were brought down from the Topslip area to the foot hills. The tramway was so steep and there was lot of difficulties in transporting heavy logs and trees and the company was running in loss due to unrectifiable technical problems. Hence around 1920s the tramway was closed due to heavy loss as the company could not overcome the technical problems¹⁴.

Podanur Railways:

In the early stages rail transport came to the suburban area of Podanur. The railway line was constructed in connecting eastern and western shore. The First train came to Podanur in 1860s and later extended to Pattambi (which is now in Kerala) the track was opened. A month later another connection via Erode up to Sangagiri was opened. Gradually to places like Trichy, Karur, Kodumudi and Erode were connected with the Chennai line¹⁵. People had to go to Podanur to board the train and there was no train from the city. Later it was planned to construct a track up to Mettupalayam via Coimbatore and it was completed in six months. After ten years the Mountain Railway was constructed up to Ooty and only the Nilgiri Express and few

Passenger trains were passing through Coimbatore City. Other trains were passing through Erugur and reached Podanur station¹⁶. In 1950s a new track was constructed via Peelamedu up to Coimbatore and many other trains passed through Coimbatore.

Air Transport:

In 1930 Air service came into operation in Coimbatore and it was the first experience of an aero plane flying over the city for the public use on payment. Later Airport, flying club and aero planes were owned by the private companies and the city developed spectacularly. There is one Airport station at Sular and one Civil Aerodrome at Peelamedu was built separately for the public use. It is situated six miles north-east of the town on the Avinashi Road¹⁷. In 1940 Sular Air force station was exclusively used for the British Royal Navy and became the service station for the South East Asian fleet during the Second World War. In August 1942, this Air force station was set to fire because of the riot during the world war. From 1943 to 1949 this station was under the possession of Indian Royal Air force then later it was used for the Indian navy base also. In 1984 onwards this became a part of the Indian Air force. Peelamedu airport has grown up considerably and fleets like Indian Airlines, Jet Airways, Spice jet, King Fisher were also in operation from Coimbatore to National and International level. Some of the companies like LMW and few other companies were also using aero planes for their own purpose. Textile goods, machineries, Engineering products, vegetables, fruits and jewelry are the products exported from Coimbatore. Information Technology is also an important aspect improve rapidly with the help of Air port services.

Conclusion:

The transport development plays vital role for the development of the Coimbatore and its surrounding areas. The city and its suburban were connected by road during the early period of 1930. Rail transport also plays a major role in the industrial development of Coimbatore. The South Indian Railway which was in use before independence helped in transporting Coal, Iron and Chemicals in large scale as a raw and finished products from Coimbatore. Mostly coal and steel were brought to Coimbatore and finished Cotton goods to other Parts of the country were sent. For transporting perishables, medicines, jewellery items and some of the IT products mostly used the Airways as the products need to be delivered at an appropriate time and condition.

References:

1. C. G. Banford, et al, Geography of Transport, C. Macdonald and Evans, London, 1978, P.8.
2. A. Das Gupta, Economic and Commercial Geography, A. Mukherjee and Co., Calcutta, 1966, pp.295-296.,
3. K. S. Ramaswami, Transport in India, Amudha Nilayam Private Ltd., Madras, 1957, P.7.
4. Transport in India, Lok Sabha Secretariat, Government of India, New Delhi, 1986. P.2.
5. Guide to the Records of the Nilgiris District from 1827- 1835, Printed by the Superintendent, Government Press, Madras, 1934, pp. 1, 2.
6. Rigi system uses a ladder type or central rail with toothed wheel engaging the runs of the ladder, the Abt system has two adjacent rails in the center of the track with the teeth on the top out of step with each other.
7. C. R. Elangovan, Kovaiyum Pokuvarathum, Shrikanth Publications, Coimbatore, 2012, p.13.
8. Ibid.
9. V. Ramamurthy, History of Kongu, Madras, 1986, pp.20-21.
10. Vaidhyathan, K. S, The Ancient Geography of the Kongu Country, Coimbatore, 1983, p.77.
11. Rajagopalan M, Sixteen Saiva Temples in Tamilnadu, Madras, 1955, p.44.
12. C.R. Elangovan, Koyambatur Oru Varalaru, Shrikanth Publications, Coimbatore, 2008, p.86.
13. G.O.Ms.No.1282, Development, dated 27th July 1929, Gazetteer of the Coimbatore District, Volume II, 1933, pp.141-142.
14. C. R. Elangovan, op. cit., p.14.
15. S. Subrananyan, Marvels of the South Indian Railway (1859-1951), Divisional Railway Manager, Tiruchirapally Division, Southern Railway, 2010.
16. Provincial Gazetteers of India, Madras, Volume II, North Arcot District, p.94.
17. Dr. B. S Baliga, Madras District Gazetteers, Madras, 1966, p.407.