



## ABOARD ON KOLLAM- SCHENKOTTAH EXPRESS; A VOYAGE TO IMPERIAL DIMENSIONS OF TERRITORIAL RESHAPING

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### ABSTRACT

*Transport has been regarded as an indicator of progress and modes of transport as corridors of development. Wagner has rightly pointed out in 1960 that, 'the routes along which men, materials and messengers move to bind a society together'. Dynamic movement of men and materials since the evolution of man evolved ideas and conceptions about transport. The meeting of demand and supply at the modest level was given minimum guaranty by any modes of transport was a general conception from early times. Otherwise it did not take shape. Basic forms of transport are roads and railways. Among these two, rapid movements of large number of people as well as bulk commodities were offered by railways.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Dynamic movement of men and materials , Industrial Revolution.*

### INTRODUCTION:

History of railways goes back to more than a century. Being a product of the Industrial Revolution, railways joins two limbs of single economic activity and advantages goes to Great Britain as the nerve centre of Industrial Revolution that revolutionized human history. Discovery of Steam Engine by George Stevenson enabled the first train to travel from Darlington to Stockton in 1825 in England. The opening of Public Transport on September 27, 1825 between Stockton and Darlington Railway heralded a new epoch in the transportation history. Railway stations gradually developed as nerve centers of commercial activity. Railway acted as a nodal agency for connecting cultures and people. Goods transportation in those days having more than 80% was through the railways.

In early days route selection depended on specific matters like shortest length, maximum efficiency and focus on path problem. At that time, distance was decided by time and cost. Selection of a route means ability to offer cheapest trip. Electric Street Cars of Trams were developed from horse buses in 1880 with other paces of development. With expansion of the British Empire background by the innovations of Industrial Revolution and development in science, the colonial agenda was successfully implemented. An earnest effort was made to incorporate the existing peripheral colonies to the metropolitan nerve centers tightly. It was inevitable to attach the peripheral colonial possessions to the core for optimum working of Capitalist enterprises. As a keen observer of prevailing circumstances Karl Marx wrote in August 8, 1853, in Newyork Daily Tribune that before the railways were introduced aristocracy tried to conquer, to undersell it. But when railways were introduced, the millinery identified the reproductive country of India became vital importance to them.

In India a revolution took place in transport and communication with the colonial takeover of the Indian Subcontinent. The 'drain of wealth' also demanded introduction of new means of transport. Through bulk transportation of raw materials railways revolutionized the arena of transport and communication and it added comparatively cheaper and faster ways and means. Naturally, the innovations in the transport and

communication structure, led to the 'demise' of the conformist inland navigation system. Colonial extraction of resource mobilization took place in three stages. They are development of waterways, construction of roads and the introduction of railway. Under the British auspices, rail road construction began in 1850's. In the initial times Railway lines were undoubtedly used for military operations. Along with that commercial railways attach centers of commerce and industry situated within British India. Though it was used for military operations, the construction of railways was undertaken preeminently with the objective of obtaining raw materials for British Industry and finding bazaar for British goods. It was between 1889 and 1914 most of the railway network had been established. With the development of the railways, inland navigation and even roads received little attention.

The physical terrain of India as well as the unpredictable Monsoon stood as the biggest obstacles before colonial railway builders. In the beginning organization models, plans, managers, engineers, skilled labourers and workmen everything came down to India from Britain. The first priority was to connect the three principal centers of Colonial power Bombay, Calcutta and Madras through an efficient railroad network. It was the necessity of the British Raj to connect the three major port centers to numerous minor ports to whom the bulk hilly as well as other indigenous raw material flowed. They found the three major port circles as future centers of effective use of colonial power in Indian Subcontinent. Strategic locations as well as the initial knowledge of the settlement pattern of the indigenous inhabitants, all were obtained through the advancement in science and technology.

Paper works regarding the construction of a railway line out of Bombay was in operation since 1843. A committee was entrusted with this task. The Great Indian Peninsular Railway Company was incorporated by an Act of British Parliament in 1849. By the end of the year, a Chief engineer was appointed. Subsequently the first passenger train from Bori Bandar to Thane travelled on April 16, 1853. Railways changed the typical outline of life in the State and first Railway line was from Bombay to Thane covering 21 miles in 1853. The first narrow gauge railway in India started from Dabhoi to Miagam in Gujarath with wagons hauled by bullock in 1860 AD. By 1861, 5000 miles of railway construction were completed. A *railway mania* spread throughout the British Empire in India with an increasing desire to loot the resources of every nook and corner of the country. By about 1861, 1587 route miles of track was in operation and an additional 1295 under construction. By 1871, the length of railway line increased to 5000 miles. Quickly Railway construction started in different parts of British India. The rulers of the areas were compelled to supply land and timber and other materials accessible in their territories free of cost for the construction of railway lines.

In the initial years many serious challenges blocked the construction activities. The spreading of epidemics like Cholera appeared as a mass killer and also attack of wild beast in forests threatened the construction activities. Cholera had killed 25% of the Europeans at work on the Bhor Ghat incline in April and May of 1860 AD. Cotton became the first material tapped by the colonial power from Indian soil. As a result initial route surveys were targeted to shipping cotton bulkily.

Reshaping the landscapes, embankments, formation of line, necessary blasting clearing of forests all were the challenges before them. Route surveys were conducted in such a way to minimize the cost and maximize the extractions. In 1905, Railway Boars was created for better management of railroad construction. Throughout the areas under Colonial route surveys were made to assess the scope and benefit of rail construction.

Extreme South India, especially the Western Ghats region offered a different picture as far as the railway constructions were made. Western and Eastern Ghats were the two broad subdivisions of South Indian terrain. These two mountain ranges determine the characteristics of entire coastal belt of *Dakshina Bharath*. The Western Ghats which form a solid unremitting mountain wall seem to dominate the landscape of Kerala. The Western Ghats run parallel to India's west coast appears as a hurdle to the British for smooth transportation of products from Tamil Nadu region to Kerala. The first attempt to understand the physical terrain of South India or constructing pathways, either road or railway came when the British fought against Tippu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore. In order to win the Mysore wars, a practical knowledge of the topography

of the region appears to be a hurdle before them. With the help of the knowledge of science and technology, they successfully overcome all the hurdles before them.

The British took control of the Nilgiri Hills, the home of the Pastoral Toda tribal community, after they defeated Tippu sultan in 1799 AD. Later in 1818, these hilly regions were incorporated into the Madras Presidency. The investigation team under Collector of Coimbatore discovered the picturesque green plateau, later developed as Ootty or Oottacamund. In 1891, the first sword of the railway line to Ootty was cut by Lord Wentlock, the Governor of Madras. The land stretch from Mettuppalayam to Coonoor was completed in 1899 AD. In 1903, the Government took over the line and made under the supervision of the engineers, C.F Sykes and H. Gales, subsequently, 12 mile station from Coonoor to Ootty was finally completed in five years later.

In the meanwhile discussions were carried on in the erstwhile native State of Travancore and Cochin to introduce railway in these respective areas. Travancore Kingdom created by King Marthanda Varma in 1729 AD, from the beginning itself showed a lenient attitude to the British. He fully utilised the existing political situation. In the trade with eastern countries, pepper was the chief attraction to all European powers. It was at the valleys of the Western Ghats, most of the pepper orchards were situated. Meenachil, Kottayam, Muvattupuzha, Chirayinkizh, Kottarakkara, Pathanapuram Taluks of Travancore had produced enormous quantity of pepper. Travancore sold pepper produced in the country to British. To give an idea about the conditions and volume of this trade on 22 August, 1744 AD, Marthanda Varma termed the British East India Company exchanged one musket for every candy of pepper. In the following years pepper contract was signed by both the parties. Besides these timber products were essential for ship building industry, for that forest regions were spotted. Paper industry also needed wood cellulose for paper making.

The introduction of plantations on the hilly terrains of Travancore heralded another episode in the extraction of resources. Large number of coffee and tea plantations was started in the High Ranges. In the hilly terrains of Travancore, to start cultivation of tea, coffee, rubber and cardamom, the British planters secured the necessary land asset at cheaper rates. Dewan Madhava Rao provided enough land for such activities, of Rs. 2 per acre. To meet the growing need of the transportation facilities PWD Department was established in 1860 AD. Numerous roads were constructed connecting the Plantation districts. In 1923, Government opened a pepper farm at Kumpazha *Pakuthy* of Pathanamthitta. The main aim was to experiment and demonstrate scientific methods of cultivation.

Regarding the introduction of railway in Travancore, Cochin regions, British authorities were in a state of total confusion. By that time, they fully understood the geographical landscape of entire South India, the possibilities of extraction of resources and their nucleus centers. The incidence of hills, lakes and innumerable rivers confused the authorities about the cost of construction as it needs bridges to interconnect. On the other side the building of Mullaperiyar Dam enriched the cultivation in Madura and Tinnevely regions. As a result a straight communication from Tinnevely to the western parts of Kerala was of first preference. With this intension their calculation was based on two routes, northern and southern. They were interested in the northern route because of the advantage that the proposed path passes through the direct British rule areas connecting the British Port of Cochin. More over total freedom had vested with the British in these areas for smooth transportation of bulk articles. Preliminary discussions regarding railway introduction to Travancore were done as early as 1873 AD. Madras Government took keen interest in the matter because the spice pockets and timber reserve centre of Western Ghats always fascinated the colonial minds. Dewan T Madhava Rao, suggested a proposal to Madras Government, it contained request for a line from Shornur. South Indian Railway Company conducted the route surveys and Travancore also had to pay the necessary capital as the line passes through about 18 miles through the Travancore territories. The railway was opened for goods interchange on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1902 and for all kinds of traffic on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 1902. A direct railway communication from Trivandrum to Cochin targeted to Cochin port was highly profitable to British.

At the same time Dewan Reminengar suggested a new route from Quilon through Schenkottah, as he had found great advantages in it. He was successful in convincing the Collector of Tinnevely, Madras

Government also took keen interest as it promised Crores of yields. In the initial planning's the idea formed was that of a line from Kovilpatti through Chittar valley, entering Travancore territory near Shenkotta. The main reason for selecting such a route laid the fact that Quilon Port and its access offered great scope for export. Being an open roadstead on the Arabian Sea, the Port has a signal station and a flag- staff at the Port for transmitting signals to the ships. The main export from this port is cashew kernels and after its processing it was exported to USA and North Atlantic ports. Quilon Port acted as the chief commercial centre well supported by inland water bodies offered high scope for maritime business. Certain place names of Quilon, Chinnakkada even resembles its prestige as an emporium of trade in early times. Towards the close of 1881, Mr. Logan, the Chief engineer issued instruction to the line Tinnevely via Thenkasi to Quilon and to Trivandrum. In 1882, survey was completed and issued its preliminary report. The Quilon Schenkottah line crosses the precipitous Western Ghats from Schenkottah to Punalur for a distance of 30 miles entering the district at Aryankavu, and then traverses to Quilon through the West Coast area. It runs through heavy banks and high cuttings in certain parts. The total length of the proposed plan stated that from Quilon to Tinnevely, total 140 miles, to Schenkottah, 38 miles and to Madras, total 522 miles. The congested mountainous area of Western Ghats was the great hurdle before the authorities. At five places hard labour blasting and drilling were necessary. Among it the biggest effort is to be made at Aryankavu. The biggest tunnel constructed in this line is on the easternmost area at Aryankavu has total 2800 feet length. The line stretch from Punalur to Schenkottah is called *Khattakhandam*. Direct communication from Quilon to Tinnevely was opened in November 26, 1904 AD. Kollam Schenkottah railway line coasts about 2 Crores of rupees. Railway line from Schenkottah to Quilon- loan raised by Secretary of State for India with an assurance of Travancore Government to pay 2.5 to 5% interest on the amount spends. Quilon- Trivandrum extension- financed partly by Travancore and partly the surplus revenue to the State. To meet the expenses in the form of debt to be paid, Travancore Government developed a Sinking Fund. There were 13 railway stations in the Quilon Schenkottah section. Later in 1913, Secretary of State for India gave permission to extend the line up to Thiruvananthapuram. The work was completed and the first train passes from Quilon to Chakai on 1 January 1918. For the construction of the railway line the labourers from Madurai and other region were deployed.

**Kollam-Schenkottah Railway Bridge near Aryankavu, Kerala.**





### CONCLUSION

Transport innovations of Colonial regime always targeted to fulfill European commercial, military and political gains. It not all generated from natural necessity. Through the constructions they cleared the pathway to unquestionable territorial empire. The selection of the mode of transport as well as the route surveys all indicated clear cut feasibility and analysis in colonial economic perspective. In the beginning they aimed to interconnect water bodies for the smooth transportation of goods. But they later turned to roads and further to railways and air transport. For all these constructions Travancore and other native States had to pay huge amount as cost of edifice. With the introduction of railways the hill products and spices were transported bulkily to shipping areas. Towns and trading centers developed near the railway stations. With the development of railways inland navigation and even road transport received a setback.

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