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TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH ARCOT DISTRICT UNDER THE BRITISH RULE



R. Palkkannan

INTRODUCTION

The social mobility was gathering momentum under the British inspite of traditional restrictions and rigidity due to the development of the railways and road services which were originally laid down by the British for their own economic, political and military interest. As a result of the development of transport, the people of India were brought socially closer. The distance dividing them had been narrowed down. Motor buses brought the isolated villages into contact with the outer world.⁴ Trains and buses also helped the people to move from one place to another. The people travelled distance in order to get employment or to improve their future prospects which consequently enabled them to share their

ABSTRACT

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed radical changes in the social and political history of Tamil Nadu. These process which started at the beginning of the nineteenth century received and added impetus in the decades before the attainment of independence. A society faces challenges and responses.¹ Tribal conflicts and the pains that arise in wresting food from hostile and inhospitable nature necessarily bring about social interaction. There is the inevitable problem of socialization of the new generation and the handing down of beliefs, skills and techniques. But these changes are so limited and when we look at them from the larger perspective of social life, it looks as if society has remained static.² The changes which look place during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are not only more rapid but also more drastic. Social changes are not only the changes which the people are witnessing but also the changes in human society as a whole at all climates. Moreover, this district played a crucial role in the social and political changes which happed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³

KEYWORDS : Transport , Communication , political history, social.

Short Profile

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ideas. Thus the people became conscious of their national responsibility. The inter mixture of people of various provinces, castes, and creeds not only undermined the old local and provincial narrow outlook but also paved the way for national consciousness and co-operation to grow with the1 national politics.⁵

In South Arcot district, transport, especially the railways and road services, were developed under the British. There was no trunk road at all in the district in the beginning of the nineteenth century. By the dawn of the second half of the century, there began a gradual development in transport.⁶

The British administrators began to take much concern in improving the existing condition in

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transport. In 1850, the first trunk road was made through Tindivanam, Villupuram, Ulundurpet, and Toludur and also to Trichinopoly. Thereafter, extension works were carried on continuously. In 1852, the Government sanctioned the building of a road from the port of Cuddalore to Salem at the cost of Rs.66,300. The construction of this road was mainly for easier salt transportation from Cuddalore. Shortly afterwards, a branch was made from this road, beginning at Panruti and passing south over Sethiathope down to lower Anicut in Trichinopoly district.⁷

By 1854, 400 miles of road were under construction or improvement. The Government also planted trees on both sides of the road and took much care in maintaining them. During 1857-58, Rs.27,957 was spent on erecting new ones and repairing transport and communication works. It reached to Rs.70,567 in 1870-71.⁸ As the extension of transport was continuous and steady, more or less almost all the major towns of the district got connected with one another. The chief lines which connected the towns were trunk road No.8 which ran from Madras through Tindivanam, Villupuram, Ulundurpet, and Toludur to Trichinopoly; trunk road No.9 branching from the South of Vikravandi and passing south through Panruti and Sethiathope to Lower Anicut; the road from Cuddalore to Thiruvannamalai through Panruti and Thirukkoilur; that from Cuddalore to Salem through Panruti, Ulundurpet, Thiyyagadurgam, Kallakurichi, and Chinnasalem; from Porto Novo to the Salem frontier through Chidambaram and Vriddhachalam; from Marakkanam to Thiruvannamalai through Tindivanam and from Tindivanam, through Pondicherry and Cuddalore to Nagapattinam.⁹

About the close of the nineteenth century, the district had 1,218 miles of roads connecting 9 towns and 2,841 villages. Of the total miles, 1901 miles were metalled and 317 miles were unmetalled. They were maintained by the Public Works Department and the Local Boards.¹⁰ There were avenues of trees along 1,080

miles. There were many chattrams (traveller's bungalows) in the district. Local philanthropists as well as Local Boards maintained the chattrams. Hyde Chattram at Vriddhachalam and of the Sadasiva Reddi's at Thiruppapuliur were two among the famous chat trams in the district. There were also drinking water tanks in almost all the roads at frequent intervals. The people of South Arcot district availed these roads mainly for the purpose of transporting their agricultural produce to the markets and for visiting the places of pilgrimage and religious importance. Besides, journeys were made on the roads to attend social functions such as marriages and funerals of their relatives and neighbours. Though they continued their traditional bullock cart journey which became less tedious and ease on these new roads. The pedestrians also had their journey with easy and comfort. Transport of merchandise goods became less difficult. The people easily transported their produce such as rice, ragi, and combu to the nearby markets as well as distance ones. Thiruvannamalai and Panruti became the busiest marketing centres in the district. Besides, the salt and other goods were loaded through the roads from the salt-depots of the district to Salem, Pondicherry, and other places.¹¹

RAILWAYS

The district was well served with the railways. The Metre Gauge South Indian Railway traversed the district from north to south and from east to west. The main line of this system entered from Madras in the north of Tindivanam taluk and ran southwards to Panruti. Besides, the line connected the towns of Porto Novo, Chidambaram, and Tanjore. It was opened as far as Tindivanam in 1876, extended to Porto Novo in 1877, to Chidambaram in 1878, and to the Coleroon bridge in 1879.66 The line extended upto Pondicherry in 1888. The Villupuram - Madras line extended upto

Dharmapuri district in 1890. In the nineteenth century, the only taluk in the district which was not served by any railways were Kallakurichi and Vriddhachalam. However construction work at Thirchinopoly and Thirukkoilur chord line was commenced. Besides, it was proposed to lay a line between Panruti and Trichinopoly towards the end of the century.¹²

The development of the railways enabled the people of the district to have contact with the people of far off places throughout India. Its consequence was much better. Their local as well as provincial isolation began to decay with the arrival of rational outlook, which was essential for the growth of ideas like freedom and unity.¹³

Along with trade, exchange, of progressive ideas including national freedom gradually grew. The development of transport contributed to the growth of commerce. The commercial growth led to the development of towns, provided additional avenues of employment and brought the villages into contact with the outside world.¹⁴

Politically it helped the delegates from the district who attended the sessions of the Indian National Congress which were held in different places in India became possible for them only by the railways which offered them an easier mode of travel.¹⁵ It may be concluded here that the development of transport under British in South Arcot district might have been one of the factors which articulated national consciousness among the people of the district in one way or other.¹⁶

COMMUNICATION OF SOUTH ARCOT POST AND TELEGRAPH

The development of communication narrowed down the distance and quickened the process of urbanization.¹⁷ Before the establishment of Taluk to pal in the South Arcot district peons and Taliaries performed the task of the postman. Revision of Taluk Tapal and introduction of the new police in 1860 deprived the service of the old taluk revenue peons and Taliaries. However the government sanctioned a

further monthly expenditure of Rs.158 for entertaining some additional peons.¹⁸

We know that the expenditure on postal department in South Arcot in 1860 was meagre. This showed the limited number of staff working in Postal Department and also indicated that adequate awareness was not created among the people to utilise this department for communication. However, the post and telegraphic departments in Cuddalore were gradually developed since 1864 A.D.¹⁹

The telegraph department functioned in South Arcot from about 1864 A.D. By the middle of the 20th century, there was one head post and telegraph office at Cuddalore. There were 29 sub-post and telegraph offices and 19 non combined sub post offices and 413 branch (post offices in this district.²⁰ There were 5 sub-post and telegraph offices, 3 non-combined sub post offices, and 69 branch post offices in ii Cuddalore taluk²¹. Chidambaram, Cuddalore, Panruti, Tindivanam, and Villupuram were provided with telephone facilities. In Cuddalore, there were 180 lines and 224 subscribers. From the Cuddalore exchange, besides local connections, trunk connections were available to Nellikkupam, Ulundurpet, and Vriddhachalam.²² Thus the development of Postal and telecommunications in the South Arcot district facilitated the administrative functions of this district.²³ Cuddalore being the head quarters was immensely benefited by the development of communication.²⁴

To sum up, we find that the administrative measures taken by the British government during the 19th and the early 20th centuries brought about urbanization to Cuddalore. Among these, the development measures taken by the government in the field of revenue, public health, police, jail, judiciary, communication, and education provided a base for the urbanization of Cuddalore during the colonial rule. Hence it may be concluded that in the beginning of the 19th century, the administration and urbanization of South Arcot

District went hand in hand.²⁵

CONCLUSION:

The social mobility was gathering momentum under the British inspite of traditional restrictions and rigidity due to the development of the railway and communication services. In south Arcot district transport especially the railways and road services, were developed under the British. The district was well served with the railways. The metre guage south Indian Railway traversed the district from north to south and from east to west. The main line of this system entered it from Madras in the north of Tindivanam taluk and ran south wards to Panruti. Besides the line connected the towns of portnovo. Chidambaram and Thanjavur – The telegraph department functioned in south Arcot from about 1864 A.D. The post and telegraphic departments in cuddalore were graudaully developed since 1864 A.D.

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