



# Evolution and growth of inland navigation in travancore

■ P. Anilkumar

P.G. Department of History, Iqbal College, Peringammala, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM (KERALA) INDIA

## ARTICLE INFO :

Received : 15.12.2016  
Accepted : 29.05.2017

## KEY WORDS :

Evolution, Growth of inland, Transport, AVM canal

## HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE :

Anilkumar, P. (2017). Evolution and growth of inland navigation in travancore. *Adv. Res. J. Soc. Sci.*, 8 (1) : 137-139, DOI: 10.15740/HAS/ARJSS/8.1/137-139.

Transport plays a vital role in the economic development by providing access to jobs, education, leisure travel and other amenities essential for quality of life. Once the steam power was applied for purposes of transport, it brought about significant changes first in the political and social spheres of the western world and their colonies around the world. Transportation industry merely undertakes the movement of people and goods from one place to another but in doing so it has been one of the most important activities of man in every stage of human civilization. Transport generates growth by facilitating trade both nationally internationally and by increasing access to livelihoods education facilities as well as local and national amenities.

Anantha Victoria Marthanda varman Canal is popularly known as AVM Canal. It was running from Kochi in Kerala to Mandaikadu in Tamil Nadu. In This canal got this name from the Highness Maharaja of Travancore Sri Utram Tirunal Marthandavarma and his most respected British Queen Victoria of England. The etymological meaning of the term 'Anantha' simply indicates snake which always used by Padmanabha, the family deity of the Travancore kings. Even though, Padmanabha alias Lord Vishnu used the snake as his sleeping bed (Menon, 1994). It is popularly known as "Anantha Sayanam". Thus the name of AVM Canal coined from the names of Lord Vishnu's favorite reptile

Anantha, Queen Victoria of England the then Maharaja of Travancore Sri Utram Tirunal Marthandavarma. The Travancore government under Sri Utram Tirunal Marthandavarma had various aims and objectives behind the construction of AVM Canal. His government should much emphasis to the material prosperity and welfare of the people (Report on the Administration of Travancore 1038). It had played a significant role in the socio-economic, political and marine history of Travancore.

In that period Kanyakimari district was under the control of Travancore Kingdom. The Travancore Government inaugurated its construction work in 1860 with the help of the British Resident and Engineers, intended to connect two prominent places namely Trivandrum and Kanyakumari. Unfortunately in 1860 itself Utram Tirunal Marthandavarma died and so in his place Ayilyam Tirunal ascended the throne of Travancore. He continued the construction works of his predecessor. So the construction of AVM Canal also continued systematically. In 1863 he appointed Barton as the chief engineer of the PWD in Travancore. It marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of PWD in Travancore (Directorate of Archives, TVM Cover File No. 16136).

In 1867 the construction work of the AVM Canal, in the beach between Poovar and Manavalakurichi, south east of Colachel, was partly finished of this, the portion

from Poovar to Thengapattanam (Traffic Survey Report on the Inland Navigation in Kerala, 1959). In India, as in the case of other countries, the most important means of transport and communication system was inland waterways. Waterways are one of the earliest and less expensive transport systems in spite of rail and road transport.

The main aim of the AVM Canal scheme was to extend the water communication to the extreme south of the country, through that the government had a plan to make close contact with the Malayalam speaking people of northern Travancore and Tamil speaking people of southern Travancore. There was a possibility of cultural integration among these two sections of people. This transportation was mainly with an aspect of products to be transported to south Indian markets departed from Colachel harbour (Directorate of Archives, TVM Cover File No. 65). These things like rice, wheat etc were transported to various parts in the Travancore kingdom due to the A.V.M canal. After the end of Travancore kingdom this canal transport was wind up.

At present the AVM Canal is encroached in some parts especially the coastal areas. The canal has lost its bright structure due to the construction of houses and buildings on the canal. In some places the local panchayats were constructed a small bridges crossed by the canal (Thinakaran, News Paper Daily, April 7, 2013). These encroachments can be visualized places like Mullurthurai, Ramanthurai, Inayam, Midalam and so on which the southern regions of the canal from Thengapattanam. The canal again continues from Kurumpanai towards the south and flows through Vaniyakudi, Kodimanai, Colachel, Manavalakurichi and ends at kadiapattanam. The originality of the canal has gone and the naturalist is chaos due to the above reasons. But at the same time, a little bit of the water flows here and there makes a domestic help for the inhabitants of Thoothoor and nearby villages (Directorate of Archives, Cover File No. 3353).

People have made their own fate in bringing up the terrible diseases like *Chickungunia*, *Dengu* fever by polluting the canal under various circumstances. In present Kerala, especially at Poovar, it is a centre of mosquitoes. Present history has changed the geographical status where the canal looks for a reconstruction in which the dreams of predecessors to be fulfilled for the aspect of socio-cultural and political developments which will

uplift the rural economy. Now the district collector says that the Tamilnadu Govt. allotted 920 crore for cleaning this canal (Thinakaran, op. cit., p. 16).

Transport and communication are indispensable to our society. They are the elements which bind all economic systems together. Without networks and communication all social and economic life will be reduced to isolated phenomena. Therefore, transportation can't be assessed in the same way as other services. A smoothly functioning system of communications is also a requirement for social and economic integration between separate geographical regions. The modernization of the infrastructure is therefore, an urgent task and a precondition for carrying out the whole of Europe's ambitions political, economic and social agenda. Since the need for communication and transportation does not know any national borders, the functioning of the networks needs to be adopted to this new economic and political geography.

Inland water transport has been regarded as the first transportation system in the world from time immemorial (Velupillai). It is also the cheapest mode known ever since ancient times. The development of rail, road and air transports led to the decay of inland navigation system. But in many advanced countries it continues to play a major role due to careful planning. In India, inland water transport which had once played a dominant role has been pushed to the stage of extinction because roads and railways have superseded the waterways. The peculiar physical features of erstwhile Travancore led to the evolution and growth of inland navigation in the state.

Travancore history gives excessively greater importance to dynastic history and other related aspects, ignoring the field of transport and communication, especially the problem of canal navigation. Trade, both inland and foreign flourished all through the ages mainly because of the availability of inland water transport facilities. All major commercial Centers were linked by navigational routes. Many villages and towns arose on the banks of rivers. Several types of 'Vallams' were in use (Menon, 1996). Even though water transport was the cheapest means of transport in Travancore from very early period onwards, there had never been a planned department of the system till the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Report on the Administration of Travancore 1038). The geographical, revenue and military surveys under taken by professionals appointed by the British

Government led to the increase of topographical and geographical knowledge of Travancore regions. This helped the Government of Travancore to construct a network of canals. Thus the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a turning point in the history of canal navigation in Travancore.

Inland waterways have played an important role in the Indian transport system since ancient times. However, in the decades after independence, the importance of this mode of transport has declined considerably with the expansion of road and rail transport (Aiyar, 1923). Nevertheless there is a growing realization that inland water transport has to be an integral component of the overall transport system of any region since it is one of the most advantageous transport modes, having the least impact on environment, the lowest cost for domestic and international transport enormous capacity reserves and the least energy consumption. The potential of inland water transport to encourage and support increased economic and social development is enormous especially in a developing country where resources are limited. There was a large traffic along the waterways which accounted for a high proportion of inland trade.

Transport and communication are closely related infrastructural elements in our society. They are used to intensify and facilitate exchange in national and international economies (Sriraman, 2002). Today waterways have lost their importance mainly because of the emergence of the roads and railways. Suppose the Tamil Nadu and Kerala State governments joint together for its renovation work that will improve tourism, transportation of goods etc. No doubt, if the AVM Canal reconstruct, the real center of the growth and

development of coastal area will begin from the banks of AVM Canal.

## REFERENCES

- Aiyar Ramanatha (1923). *Progressive Travancore*, Thiruvananthapuram. p.10.
- Cover File No. 16136, Bundle No. 40, Sl. No. 621, 1865, PWD – new form of Cheque – reg., Directorate of Archives, TVM.
- Cover File No. 65, Bundle -67, Sl. No. 1053, 1875, canals and backwaters and boats using these, certain information relating to them, Directorate of Archives, TVM.
- Cover File No. 3353, Bundle No. 57, Sl. No. 857, 1871, British works in Travancore - to be attended by the PWD, Directorate of Archives, TVM.
- Menon, A. Sreedhara (1996). *A Survey of Kerala History*, Viswanathan Publishers, 1996, p. 341.
- Menon, P. Shangoony (1994). *History of Travancore (Mal.)*, Kerala Bhasha Institute, 1994 Trivandrum, p.414.
- Report on the Administration of Travancore 1038 Malayalam Era (ME), 1862-63, p.51.
- Sriraman, S. (2002). *Perspective of Inland Water Transport in India*, Mumbai, 2002, p.3.
- Traffic Survey Report on the Inland Navigation in Kerala, 1959, TVM, pp. 15-16.
- Thinakaran, News Paper Daily, April 7, 2013, p.16.
- Thinakaran, op.cit., p.16.
- Velupillai, T.K. *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. III, Gazetteer Department, p. 161.

8<sup>th</sup>  
Year  
★★★★★ of Excellence ★★★★★