

Golden Research Thoughts



Abstract:-

Tirunelveli District situated in the south-eastern extremity of the Indian Peninsula was roughly triangular in shape. The district was surrounded by the gulf of Mannar on the East and south, by the Travancore State on the West and by the Ramanathapuram District on the North. It is situated between 8.450 and 9.450 of the northern latitude and 77.200 and 78.200 of the eastern longitude. It is 80 kilometers long from North of South and 110 kilometers wide from East to West near the Madurai frontier. The word Tiru-Nel-Veli (the sacred paddy hedge) therefore appropriately refers to the paddy fields which surround this district.

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INTRODUCTION OF RAILWAYS, ITS IMPACT ON ECOLOGY IN TIRUNELVELI REGION

Keywords:

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INTRODUCTION

Attempt to the introduction of railway

Historical circumstances made the British who came to India as traders into its rulers¹. The railway mania soon overflowed the shores of Britain and turned to India, where British capital was already yielding rich returns. The need for railways in India was felt by the English East India Company by the middle of the 18th century for general administrative purposes². The Government of Madras convinced the Home Government of the need for laying the railway lines in the state³.

In 1831, they took measures to lay railway lines but it met with failure. Again in 1844, with the efforts of R.M. Stephenson the East India Company presented a proposal to the Court of Directors. The proposal was submitted to the railway Promoters for their approval.

By the end of 1849, the Court of Directors and the railway Promoters came to an agreement to implement the project. Accordingly, they signed an agreement with the Great Indian Peninsula Railway Company (G.I.P.R.C.). However, it is well -known that the company could not lay the lines all alone. During 1849 to 1860, private companies laid the railway lines with the Government's Guarantee system.

Karl Marx wrote in 1853 "I know that the English sultocracy intends to endow India with railways with the exclusive view of extracting at diminished expense the cotton and other raw materials for their manufacturers"⁴. In two very able minutes which he recorded on 4th July 1850 and 20th April 1853, Lord Dalhousie fully supported such projects⁵. The hectic trading activities of the 19th century in Madras led to the formation of Madras Chamber of Commerce in 18366. The chamber opined that the roads in the southern side of Madras was unsafe.⁷ Complaints were also received from Tirunelveli that the road was negligible to travel.⁸

The Madras administration was mainly responsible for the construction of the District Board Railways in Tirunelveli. It was considered as "Devil's invention". Cotton, timber, pepper and salt were exported to European countries through the introduction of railways.

Introduction of railways in the Madras Presidency in general and Tirunelveli region in particular imported a colonial character to the local economy. The outbreak of the great revolt of 1857 was suppressed by the railways.⁹ Further the Indians realized the exploitations by the British government. In the Madras Presidency there were two major companies that managed guaranteed Railways - the Madras Railway and the south Indian Railway.¹⁰ There was a famine feeder South Maharatta Railway formed in 1882 that was in the Northern Part of the Madras Presidency.

In 1859, the South Indian Railway Company (S.I.R.C.) was started. The first railway line was laid from Madras to Arcot on 1st July 1851. The Government's money was insufficient to lay railway lines, therefore the government introduced guarantee system. The private company's capital was more than the company's capital. So, the company fixed 5 percent rate for the private's capital. During the period, the private contribution was more than the company's contribution. Through this guarantee system, the government lost heavy capital. But, at the same time, profits went to company's and the losses met with the Government. So, this system was abandoned in 1869.

Between 1869-1870, the government wanted to lay a small extension in the Presidency. After 1870, Railways were constructed by the government on it's own accord. In 1880, extension of railway was needed as a famine protection. After 1880, the state railway system came into existence. It was more successful than the guarantee system and the state railway line was laid by the state on it's own money. Later on, this system had to face the problem of insufficient capital. In 1896, the British Raj held a conference at Simla. In the end of the conference, the government realized the importance of branch lines and which were laid in the Madras Presidency by the District Board Railways (D.B.R.). Under this, 420 Kilometres of railway line had been constructed.

Tirunelveli railway line was laid under the District Board Railways. The Railways were also intended to strengthen the alien political grip over India. The railway was one of the protected monopolies sponsored by the British, mostly to provide scope for the fruitful investment of their capital in India.

The survey of the southern position of the extension between Madurai and Tuticorin was made on 1862 by Carr, the Chief Engineer of the Great Southern Indian Railway Company¹¹. Captain Lindsay the consulting engineer received a letter from the Collector of Tirunelveli Buckles on the desirability of railways in the extreme south of Tamil Nadu.¹² In his letter dated 14th April 1868, the Collector gave a positive nod for railway extension.

In 1872, the construction of the line, 215.75 miles in length, on the metre gauge from Madurai to Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi was accorded sanction.¹³ Again the Collector suggested that the rice from Tambaraparani region and timber from the Western Ghats would be carried if the line passed the line of Trunk road from Madurai, Virudhunagar, Sattur, Kovilpatti and Kayatar, the areas which enjoyed considerable trade in Cotton, grain, chillies, tobacco, cloth and sugar.²⁷

From Tirunelveli the line should go through the rich villages of Pettai, Suttamalli, Kodaganallur, Cheranmahadevi, Karukurichi, Kallidaikurichi, Ambasamudram, Ambur, Alwarkurichi, Kadayam and the places were considered the emporium of grains and cloth.

The South Indian Railway entered Tirunelveli from the north near Virudhunagar, and ran south straight to Maniyachi through Sattur and Kovilpatti. From Maniyachi, the line ran east on the coast

completing the communication between Madras and the Chief Southern part of the presidency namely Tuticorin.¹⁴ From Maniyachi, the railway branched off to Tirunelveli and on to Shenkottah on the eastern frontier of Travancore through the fertile taluks of Ambasamudram and Tenkasi. The Tirunelveli, Shenkottah line was opened and later extended to Western Ghats through the gap in the Ghats near Courtallam. Tirunelveli region attracted pilgrim traffic also. The traveling public from Madras, South Arcot, Thanjavur, Tiruchirapalli and Madurai were going to Papanasam, Tenkasi and Courtallam. The Waterfalls of Papanasam and Courtallam earned much tourist traffic.

IMPACT ON ECOLOGY

The most important forest of the Madras Presidency were the West and Western Ghats and its connected ranges of their distribution coinciding with the zones of heavy rainfall. The evergreen forests occur on areas of high rainfall and are now confined to comparatively inaccessible places. The forests contain a variety of trees reaching extra - ordinary sizes. Leeward of the main ridge of the western ghats lie the important timber forest. On account of biotic factors is now the home of the valuable teak plantations raised in them. East of the Western ghats, the less wooded jungles occur.

In the Tirunelveli district there are many hills, which are tracts of light rainfall¹⁵. These forests do not contain large timber, but non the less they are valuable as they contain the best sandalwood. Outside these principal forests areas, forests are now to be seen only wherever the men have left them. Even in the heavily cultivated district of Tirunelveli, there is an abundant shrub jungle both persistent and invading. This growth however becomes less hardy and luxuriant as the zone of lighter rainfall is reached in the hinterland.

FACTORS FOR DEFORESTATION

☒ Transfer of some forests in the to village forest panchayats and retransfer of the same to forest department after 25 years in an almost denuded state.

☒ The development of industries made very heavy on forest resources and the state had to bear more than its due share of supplies, for defence needs, regardless of the dictates of scientific forestry. The end of the war inevitably saw much of wasted and depleted forest lands.

☒ The Zamindars, land lords and most private owners exploited their forests by prior to the date of the abolition of Zamindari System. The result was that considerable areas of barren lands, devoid of vegetation have come to be vested in the Forest department.

The Forest Department had to make the best of a bad bargain and embark on various schemes of deforestation as the administration was in duty bound to preserve, protect and improve what was entrusted to its care¹⁶. In the second plan, besides continuing the earlier schemes, the department had launched various development schemes on a really large - scale with a view to develop and augment the meager forest resources of the state rapidly.

The English acquired land free of cost for railway construction. Later for additional occupation of land they gave minimum compensation. Usually the collector was the authority for the transfer of land¹⁷. Usually agricultural labourers in group worked except during harvest season. Sometimes work was disrupted due to caste equations. Sometimes operation had been much retarded due to heavy rains as the officials had to be away from duty because of fever which raged the district like Tirunelveli.¹⁸

The British constructed railways in the Madras Presidency in general and Tirunelveli in particular and acquired land for the purpose. The government followed certain norms and regulations in paying compensation for the acquired land. The British policy of land acquisition came in the way of spoiled forest growth.

The land acquired was classified into two categories. One was permanent land which would be required permanently for construction and the other was temporary land which should be relinquished after the work was over.¹⁹ By the land Acquisition Act of 1870, the government occupied the lands mostly cultivable which were under private holders. While doing construction, the agencies used more lands than what actually required. Through the introduction of Tirunelveli - Tiruchendur railway line, a significant change occurred ie. a remarkable increase in the export level. 20 d105 Fire wood Odai tree of this district worked at 1 ton per acre per year for 21,640 acres was 21,640/- Kalakad and its mountain produce was let on lease every year by the Government for about Rs. 25000/- Fire wood, Paddy, Jaggery, Coconuts and Mangoes were chiefly exported from Kalakkad.

The introduction of railway in Tirunelveli region, led to the deforestation and reduced the rainfall. It converted the cultivable agricultural lands into unfortified drought lands. The process of cultivation in the uncultivable lands witnessed a standstill and the net result was thousands of hectares of acres of landed properties in the area under study failed to get cultivation.

ENDNOTES

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