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## COLONIAL REMINISCENCES OF COCHIN FOREST STEAM TRAMWAY-A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** *With the introduction of organized forestry, the British on the one hand promoted extension of agriculture consequent upon the growth of population, but on the other access to forests was restricted, so as to ensure commercial exploitation and promote rapid growth of the railway network especially Trams in the last decade of the nineteenth century in India. As a part of British Empire, the natural resources were exploited from India and exported to Britain. In this context Gramsci's theory of hegemony was to be applied. In the nineteenth century, hegemony (rule) indicated the geopolitical and social prevalence of one nation upon different nations, as in the European imperialism forced upon the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia. The main objective of the study was to explore the different dimensions of colonial exploitation using the rapid transportation facilities like Tramway in Cochin. The Cochin Forest Steam Tramway was constructed as a symbol of colonial exploitation in 1905, for transporting timber and other resources from the forests of Malabar to Cochin. Teak and rosewood that were conveyed to Chalakudy were sent crosswise over mainlands from the Cochin port and was utilized for ship-working in the U.K and sleepers in numerous railroads over the world.*

**Key words:** Hegemony, Forestry, Trailers, Conservator, Rolling Stock

### Introduction

Trams in India were set up in the late-nineteenth century. Horse drawn cable trams were introduced in Kolkata in 1873; it started in Chennai in 1895, and Trams were later setup in Mumbai, Nashik, Kanpur, Kochi, Patna and Bhavnagar. They were ended in every Indian city somewhere in the range of 1930 and 1970, with the exception of Kolkata. The State Tramway (Cochin) was developed in 1905, at an expense of 20 lakhs of rupees, for transporting timber from the thick Parambikulam woods. The country over which the line passes is very hilly run over by the low and high ridges in all directions.

### Materials and Methods

The article, prepared on the basis of both primary and secondary sources written as per the method of scientific Historical Research. The general methodology adopted for the study is narrative –cum-analytical descriptive and argumentative in nature.

In evergreen forests zones the trees regularly develop to huge sizes. It involves four distinct parts. The West Coast zone, The Burma zone, including the Andamans, The Sub-Himalayan zone, The Carnatic zone. The first three are inside the impact of the south-west monsoon; the latter is because of the north-east monsoon. The West Coast evergreen timberland zone possesses the coast locale of the Konkan, Kanara, Malabar, and Travancore, and the westerns scarps of the incredible mountain runs behind them in the Mahratta nation, Coorg, Nilgiri, Anamalai, Cochin, and Travancore slopes.<sup>1</sup>

Amid the very beginning of British occupation, the Teak timberlands of Malabar were viewed as private property. Teak was depicted as a substantial and

attractive tree with spreading crown, broadly dispersed, through Travancore and Malabar between ocean level and 4000 ft. It was related with evergreen trees.<sup>2</sup>

Tipu sahib in his dominion, had regarded the Teak as a royal tree; and as the same royal right in these trees existed in the neighbouring States of Cochin and Travancore, this view of the case was adopted. The first step towards forest conservancy was an order issued by the Bengal-Bombay Joint Commission, appointed to enquire into the internal circumstances of Malabar and to make regulations prohibiting the felling of Teak below 21 inches in growth. Nothing further happened till 1805, when a despatch was received from the Court of Directors, enquiring to what extent the King's Navy might, in view of the growing deficiency of Oak in England, depend on a permanent supply of Teak timber from Malabar. This enquiry resulted in the immediate appointment of a forest committee, charged with a very comprehensive programme of enquiry regarding not merely the forests but the status of the proprietary rights in them. The reports submitted showed that the capacity of the forests in mature timber had been over-rated, that the nearer forests had been almost cut out.<sup>3</sup>

The rail and construction of costly roads forced them to exploit the more distant parts; but that protection would result in the gradual formation of a valuable property. The immediate result was a general proclamation, declaring that the royalty right in Teak trees claimed by former Governments was vested in the Company, and prohibiting all further unauthorised felling of such trees. Under further pressure of the Home Government, and with regard to future strength of the King's Navy, it was decided to appoint a special officer acquainted with the language and habits of the people and having knowledge of forests, with a view to the preservation and improved production of Teak and other timbers suitable for ship-building.

Thus, Captain Watson on the 10th November 1806 appointed the first Conservator of Forests in India. He had great powers given to him under the proclamation of April 1807, which was, to say the least, somewhat vague both as regards scope and extent of interference contemplated, and he used them with great energy and less discretion. Within a couple of years he had succeeded in establishing a timber monopoly throughout Malabar-Travancore, and practically annihilated more or less all private rights in the forests by assuming their non-existence. The Government had a plentiful and cheap timber supply during his reign and that of his immediate successors, and matters were allowed to drift. However, the general discontent excited amongst proprietors as well as traders rose to such a pitch that on the recommendation of the then Governor of Madras (Sir Thomas Munro), and after consideration by the Supreme Government, the Conservatorship was abolished in 1823. From 1806 to 1823, though apparently nothing was done for their regeneration, the Malabar forests had received some sort of protection by means of this probably unjustifiable monopoly, but subsequently a terrible reaction set in, and the benefits which had accrued in the forests were annihilated.<sup>4</sup>

When Mr. Conolly, became the Collector of Malabar, 1842, in order to provide timber for his district when the forest which he saw rapidly disappearing should be exhausted, he laid the foundation of the now famous and valuable Nilambur plantation.<sup>5</sup> Later professional Engineers to the Forest Department, was appointed whose chief duty was to study the effect which the protection of the forests His services will also be available for the construction, of forest roads, bridges, rest-houses, the establishment of saw-mills and the construction of slides and tramways, which must be built to, facilitate the carriage of timber and railway fuel.<sup>6</sup>

The Cochin State Forest Tramway was a meter gauge line that kept running from the Parambikulam in Palakkad to Chalakudy in Thrissur. Forest

Tramway operated from 1907 to 1963; it served the State of Cochin. Cochin situated on the North of Travancore. <sup>7</sup>The possibility of a forest tramway was advanced by J.C. Kolhoff, first Conservator of Forests of the city of Cochin, and was actualized by V. Alwar Chetty, a forest officer, who was trained by the Madras Presidency. <sup>8</sup>

The English officers Haldwell and Floukes played out initial survey and route. R.E. Haffield was the main tramway engineer who cleared the backwoods and set out the lines. The tramway was operated during the reign of Rama Varma XV, Maharaja of Cochin (1895 to 1914). Governor of Madras Sir Oliver Russell, second Baron Amptill, inaugurated it on October 3, 1905. The tramway started working in 1907. <sup>9</sup>

The tramway was separated into three areas: the first began from Chalakudy and finished at Anapantham, covering a length of 21 miles; the second kept running from Kavalai to Pothupara, covering six miles; and the third kept running from Komalapara to Chinnar, covering 22.5 miles. The all out length of tramway was 49.5 miles (79.5 km). <sup>10</sup>

The trains, moving stock and apparatus for the tramway were provided by Orenstein and Koppel of Germany. P&W MacLennan of the U.K. provided the extensions and ducts. K.R. Menon was the last tramway engineer. The tramway framework had twofold lines and chipped away at rollers and links. <sup>11</sup>

At mile 21, there are three r slants, the longest of them being the greater part a mile and the aggregate over a mile. The steepest has a slope of one of every three. From the highest point of these slopes, the line slips by methods for 10 tons turning around stations to mile 24, and afterward on a slight up-evaluation to mile 261. Here are two rope slopes of a length of a mile and a half. The rope slants are worked by gravity, a plunging load drawing up the unfilled trucks. The wire rope, one inch in breadth, passes twice cycle a flat wheel over every grade, this wheel being braked by two free ruin brakes. There were 254 extensions and ducts along the line. The Tramway Department was amalgamated with Forest Department in 1113. <sup>3</sup> The tramway of course, kept on filling in as a part of the Forest Department, under the immediate supervision of the Tramway Engineer, as an Assistant to the Conservator of Forests in issues of organization of the Tramway. Motors and Trucks.- Only six trains were being used in 1124, against eight in the earlier year. The complete expense brought about under support and recharging of loco-motors was Rs. 7,653 against Rs. 6,276 out of 1123.

#### **Details of traffic**

There were 29 sets of trucks, one cantina, 4 trailers, one brake-van, two baggage wagon and six intruders. Under moving stock, the complete use for the year added up to Rs. 23,339. The Division of Tramway into three segments for traffic reasons for existing was kept up. The principal segment is up to 21st mile, the second segment is from 21 to 273 and the third area is from 273 to 50. The all out number of trains keep running in all areas together was 2, in the earlier year. 76 against 2,102 Workshop.- The wood workshop was isolated from the loco segment amid the year and two separate officers were named to be in selective charge of both the areas. This gives careful consideration on the works in these areas and circulated a lot to the general enhancement in the working of the segments. The absolute net expense of the works turned out amid the year was Rs. 1,36,591 against 22,351 of the earlier year. The wood workshop earned a net benefit of Rs. 24,300-6-9 empowered them to amid the year, against Rs. 13,302 of every 1123. Different.- There were 31 crashes amid the year against 43 of the earlier year, and every one of the crashes were pretty much of a minor sort. There was no mishap amid the year as against one in the earlier year. <sup>12</sup>

## Receipts and Expenditure

Amid the year under report, the income acknowledged Tramway Section added up to Rs. 2,10,585 as against Rs. 2,49,841 out of 1123. The consumption amid the year added up to Rs. 2,31,239 as against Rs. 2,30,597 in 1123. The net aftereffect of the working for it was a shortfall of Rs. 20,654 as against an overflow of Rs. 19,244 in the year 1123. The decline was for the most part because of the poor limit of haulage of the hardware which is exhausted by wear and tare just as the deficiency of kindling for transport. There is no tramway in Travancore relating to the one in Cochin regal state.<sup>13</sup>

On June 26, 1907, the Maharaja of Cochin passed the Cochin Forest Steam Tramway Act, which provided for the protection and management of the tramway.<sup>14</sup> It make better provision for the protection and management of the Forest Steam Tramway in the Cochin State, It come into force on the 1st day of Chingom 1083. The Act clears up "Tramway" implies the backwoods tramway previously built or from now on to be developed or any part of it and incorporates (an) all terrains inside the wall or other limit marks demonstrating the points of confinement of the land, appurtenant to the tramway;(b) all lines of rails, sidings, feeders or branches developed for the motivations behind, or regarding tramway; and(c) all scaffolds, brief or perpetual, stations, workplaces, workshops, produces, settled plant and hardware and different works built for the reasons for, or regarding, the tramway.(2) "Tramway Officer" signifies any individual utilized by the State regarding the administration of the tramway.(3) "Forest Engineer" signifies the officer put responsible for the building, loco or traffic parts of the tramway and incorporates an acting or administering Forest Officer.(4) "Moving Stock" incorporates train motors tenders, carriages, trailers, Wagons, trucks and trolleys of all kinds.(5) The words "Diwan", "Conservator", "Judge" and " Forest Officer" have indistinguishable implications from in the Forest Act III of 1080.<sup>15</sup> The Trams brought prosperity by enabling the transport of teak and rosewood from the forest into town.<sup>16</sup>

Trams were operated by an Engineer-officer of some outstanding and experience was essential. His position will be analogous to that of the Superintendent.<sup>17</sup> Teak and rosewood that were conveyed to Chalakudy were delivered crosswise over landmasses from the Cochin port and was utilized for ship-working in the U.K and sleepers in numerous railroads over the world. There was even a 'brand' called 'Cochin Teak'<sup>18</sup> The timber was sent to Britain to fabricate boats and railroad sleepers and the salary bankrolled Cochin's advancement into a seaport.<sup>19</sup>

In 1926, the special fund advisory committee suggested the nullification of the tramway, however was rejected by the Government in 1928. Another unique board of trustees was set up in 1950 under the chairmanship of the Chief Conservator of Forests, which suggested stopping of the tramway. In 1953, another commission was named however given the report that tramway ought to be restored at any expense. At last in 1963, subsequent to serving 56 years and making current Cochin Port a present-day business harbour and Cochin City, the financial center point, the Cochin State Forest Tramway was cancelled based special finance committee report.<sup>20</sup>

Riches from the clearance of timber bolstered the State coffers, catalyzing Cochin's change into a well-to-do regal state. After the reign of the Maharaja, the expense of keeping up the tramway turned into a weight. Following Independence, Cochin and Travancore were blended and in 1956, in the wake of consolidating Malabar, the State of Kerala was formed.<sup>21</sup>

## Result

It guaranteed a spot for present day Cochin on the history of trade and commerce. It was set up with certain ulterior thought processes like the supply of

timber for the British Navy, the Railways and fares to London which were in the hands of English organizations like the Aspinwall.

### Discussion

It prompted vast size of the deforestation and reinforced the development of plantation economy in the high ranges.

### Conclusion

Inside a limited capacity to focus 15 years, the tramways turned into a monetary lose for the local state because of support costs. The budgetary weight made by the working of the tramway was unravelled by broadening the zone of timber extraction. This caused serious deforestation and during the 1920s itself, individuals from the Cochin Legislative Council indicated the sporadic atmosphere in Cochin. Close by this, we see the opening of a few ranches by the Europeans in Cochin in the wake of clearing the timberlands. It additionally finds that the tramway turned into a gainful endeavour again amid the two world wars when a wide range of timber was persistently provided to the war front. As an outcome, amid the World War Two the local state presented proportioning of kindling in Cochin for the subjects when kindling was uninterruptedly provided for the war. This more likely than not brought about the abuse of the rest of the timberlands accessible to locals and radical decrease of the backwoods bolster base for agribusiness on unit zone premise. It made a general feeling of instability and disdain among the general population.

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