

# Showcasing History – Architectural Annales of Punalur with Special Reference to Suspension Bridge and Railway

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## ABSTRACT

Public constructions of anything are of utilitarian importance. But if it is in the colonial context then that should get economic rather strategic importance. So in the case of the construction of suspension bridge and railway it is quite sure that these are colonial designs and that too was cunningly cooperating the native ruler i.e the Travancore king. In the first instance these constructions are perceived in romanticized way, its engineering skill and similar other matters. When historically analyzing reasons behind these constructions we should understand colonial undercurrents lies in it. It was in this context 'Showcasing History- Architectural Annals of Punalur with special reference to suspension bridge and railway' get significance.

**Keywords:** Annales, Suspension Bridge, Geographical position, Punalur

## 1. INTRODUCTION

History is the result of the result of the interplay of man with his environment and with his fellow men. Man has always expressed in terms of certain basic needs such as food clothing shelter and social and political organization. When this expression got a wider context of economic and commercial ambition then it should be part of domination. In the present context this socio-economic and political milieu is expressed in the backdrop of colonialism and this has been done by an alien to a native society. Then the nature and its interaction became intricate and formed the shape of an imperialist one. It was in this context the architectural annals of Punalur get significance. History is simply the record of past events and developments. It keeps its remains in varied forms. The architectural structures are one among remains of the past. These are not mere a human endeavour rather political decisions and mostly rooted in economic interest. In the present case the construction of suspension bridge in 1877 and the inauguration of railway in 1904 is a pursuit of that end. This paper tries to perceive these constructions in the colonial interests of British in this part of India.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the geographical position of Punalur to expose its economic potentialities.
- To analyze the economic ambition of both British and Travancore.

## 3. ANALYSIS AND TERPRETATION

The geographical location of Punalur itself provides great interest among the colonial officials. The forest resources which Punalur enjoys attract the Britishers in this part of India. Moreover, one version of place name associated with Punalur is by the travelers from Tamil Nadu, call this region 'Punar-Uru' means only inhabited area after the forest regions of Aryankavu. The place name Punalur, might come in this way that they referred as next i.e 'punar' and inhabited place i.e. 'uru'. Punalur is a city on a mountain path which had good socioeconomic and cultural contacts with the tamil region through ages. It is a place where we have traces of pre-historic people mainly around Thenmala. The British Raj established a notable hold over this part of India due to its forest proximity. Moreover the study become significant since Punalur lay between Quilon, (then known as and now Kollam) and Madras. Kollam is a flourishing port city then and of course Madras is one of Britishers stronghold Presidencies. Punalur's flora and fauna attracted both Travancore and British alike.

Beyond the forest resources, which is one among the reasons prompted the British to think of developing infrastructural facilities that comes in the form of suspension bridge and railway. This economic interest is so associated with political reasons since Punalur was part of Travancore and it had friendly relation with British. The British appointed a resident and thus intervening in the administration of Travancore. The colonial ambition is to exploit the abundance of natural resources to redeem their industrial needs and profit. For this aim the principal secretary of Madras government paid a visit to Travancore in 1872. During that time T Madhava Rao was the Diwan of Travancore. The Madras governor demanded to Diwan the necessity of the construction of a bridge across the Kallada river. Initially the Diwan neglected the Governors proposal. But later Albert Henry the Scottish Engineer explained to Travancore King the details of the bridge. Finally the king gave his consent. Thus Albert Henry prepared a plan for the construction of bridge and British administrators drafted a plan for their colonial ambitions. The construction of bridge took 2212 days and 250 employees. A general story relates with the bridge is that the people hesitate to walk through the bridge and the engineer and his family passed under the bridge in a country boat with six elephant were walking through the bridge. Apparently the hesitation of people had nothing unusual that it shows people's ignorance to this advancement. So the completion of suspension bridge was the beginning of rapid exploitation of forest resources of Travancore kingdom and that accelerated further by the introduction of railway. The very establishment of railway itself is designed to cater colonial interest of the British. The first railway line in Travancore is

Kollam-Tirunelveli line. Kollam was not only the trading capital of Travancore but also an important port of Malabar coast, and the idea of rail line was first conceived in 1873. In 1886 Sree Moolam Tirunal and British government together had discussion about this line and in 1899 started the construction. The railway line inaugurated on 26 november 1904. Sree Moolam Tirunal inaugurated the railway line which connects the Travancore kingdom with Madras Presidency. Has a length of 108 miles it crosses five passes in this forest region which lies between Punalur and Chenkotta. Thus as part of hegemony British introduced a new way of exploitation and imposed it to the people. Even if for an argument, both the suspension bridge and railway is primarily perceived as modernization process of Travancore but ultimately it manifested in economic exploitation in the form of plundering the forest resources of in this part of India. Also, if argued that the imperialist ambition of British is not clearly understood by the Travancore king then it should be a matter of concern for those who have opposed colonial domination. It means that after the realization of the project they also enjoyed the fruits of this new development. Thus the British augmented the rich forest resources like teakwood honey and put a little alms to the begging bowl of Travancore. So a little in share, Travancore kings were also the stakeholders of this new development. More than that the British also aims by rail-road connectivity to keep in touch with their army for necessary help when time comes. By capitalizing the potentialities of geography and at the same time tackling with difficult terrain British had redrawn the course of the history of the period.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

To sum up it is quite interesting that the very title ie showcasing history both suspension bridge and railway get significance. All through in history the rulers who built huge monuments are the ones who are remembered and this remembrance is irrespective of economic importance. But the memory of these colonial constructions is also rests in people's mind in a romanticized one that is the engineering skill and certain fancied stories. Along with romantic pictures we need a proper understanding of historical currents which paved the way for these constructions. By showcasing such monuments we must use suitable decorations in the body of history so that a proper look can see.

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