

## HISTORY OF KONGU REGION

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### Introduction

Kongu region, a part of ancient Tamil Nadu has a triangular boundary between 10.45° and 12.53° North Latitude and 76.50° and 78.53° East Longitude, bounded by Mysore on the north, North and South Arcot on the east, the core territory on the south, and Cochin, Malabar on the west. The Tamil literature of ancient and medieval periods, denotes the Kongu country as Kongu Nadu and Kongar Nadu, inscriptions refer to this region as Kongu Nadu. The Pulankurichi inscription points out this region *Konga Nadu*. The name Kongam is mentioned in stone inscriptions from the Sangam area. In referring to a place's name, they distinguish between literature and epigraphy. The existence of the Kongu state in ancient times is undeniable. This article aims to explore the origin of the Kongu region and its employs descriptive method.

### Kongu region

The total area of the traditional Kongu region, as just described, is about 7,500 square miles. Kongu Nadu includes the current districts of Coimbatore, Tirupur, Erode, Salem, The Nilgris, Karur, Dharmapuri, Namakkal, Krishnagiri, and parts of Dindigul in Tamil Nadu. It also includes areas of the Palakkad District and Chamrajanagar District in Kerala and Karnataka respectively. The Western Ghats mountain range runs throughout the region, with significant rivers like as the Kaveri, Bhavani, Amaravathi, and Noyyal flowing through it. The Palaghat Gap is a mountain pass that links the region to the neighboring state of Kerala. The Namakkal district's Kolli hills, Salem district's Shervarayan and Mettur hills, and the Coimbatore district's Palamalai travel through this region. The Chamrajanagar district's Biligiriranga hills are at the convergence of the Eastern and Western Ghats. The Cauvery River flows into Tamil Nadu from Karnataka through Dharmapuri, Salem, Erode, Namakkal, and Karur districts.

Since the ancient period, the territory has been considered as a separate geographical division. The region has been known under several names, including Adhiraja Mandalam, Chola-Kerala Mandalam, Ezhukarai Nadu, Kongu Mandalam, Onbathukarai Nadu, and Veera Chola Mandalam. The first mention of it may be found in traditional Tamil literature. It appears often in Medieval Tamil literature and epigraphic sources.

### The Rivers

Cauvery and its tributaries Noyyal, Bhavani, and Amaravathi are the main rivers that contribute to this region's fertility. The river Cauvery forms the majority of Coimbatore's eastern boundary after emerging from the Mettur reservoir in the Salem district and flowing southward all the way to Erode. After there, the river bends 25 miles south-easterly, forming the border between Coimbatore and Salem before flowing into

Tiruchirappalli. The Noyyal or Noyyil, also known by its Tamil name Kanchimaanadhi, is a significant river in the Coimbatore region. In the adjacent state of Kerala, the Bhavani rises in the Silent Valley forest in the Valluvanda taluk of the Malabar region. The Bhavani River meets the Siruvani River, which rises in the Attapadi Valley in Kerala, before it enters the city. It is essentially a perennial river that receives the majority of its water from the South West monsoon. Due to its origin in the Velliangiri Mountains, which are home to several rare medicinal plants, Siruvani water has certain unique properties associated with it that have medical values.

Between the Aanaimalai and Palani hills in Kerala State's Anjaanad valley, the Amaravathi River rises. After passing through the Udumalpet Taluk and the Erode area, it reaches the Tiruchirappalli district. In addition to these major rivers, the Aliyar, also known as the "Torakadavu River," which originates in the Peak Grass Hills of the Aanaimalai in the Pollachi Taluk, is another significant river.

### **Mountains**

The Kongu region is famous for many hills and mountains, which are famous for their ethnic beauties. This region is embedded with some forts, which is known for their historical credentials. In these hills Lord Muruga temple is mostly found and some Vainavite temples are also found and it has been noted in Thirupugazh songs of Tamil Literature.

### **Definition of Kongu**

Tamil Nadu, 800 years ago, was divided into six countries. Those divisions were Tulu Nadu, Chera Nadu, Pandya Nadu, Chola Nadu, Aruva Nadu and Kongu Nadu. Of these six countries, Tulu and Chera Nadu were on the West coast. Tulu Nadu is now known as Southern Kannada and Northern Kannada and is annexed to the kingdom of Mysore. The present Kerala is Chera Nadu in those days and has become a Malayalam speaking State. Pandya Nadu was a country surrounded by three seas on the southern tip of Tamil Nadu. Chola Nadu and Aruva Nadu (Thondai Nadu) are located on the East coast. Kongu Nadu is a landlocked country which is situated in the middle of Tamil Nadu.

The people, who were engaged in agriculture, used to wear a 'Konguda' on their heads to protect themselves during the rainy season. The word 'Kongoodai' is now known as 'Kongu'. The word Kongu (corner) was changed to Kongu. The name 'Kongu' was coined by the city of Kongu. The history of the Kongu region states that the name 'Kongu' was derived from the name 'Kongar' for Cheraman Perumal. Also, since the word 'Kongu' refers to gold, it was given the name 'Kongu Nadu' because of the large amount of gold taken by the Kongars from this land. Kongu is a highly resourceful country with mountains and forests. Pandya Nadu – it can be said that the Kongar ruled country may have been given the name Kongu Nadu.

Scholars have several ideas on what the term "Kongu" means. K.V. Subramania Aiyer claims that the word "Kongu" is derived from place. According to Subbarayalu, the name "Kongu" was given to the Konganivarmann, a Ganga king who presided over the Kongu kingdom. According to a different Kongu historian, the name comes from the phrase "Kongu Flower."

According to some academics, Kongu Nadu is flanked by the kingdoms of Cheras and Pandyas, which are located in 'Kangil' (meaning frontier), thus the name 'Kongu Nadu.' The monsoons are exclusively named in Tamil based on their direction. As they flow from Kudagu, Kizhakku, Therkkku, and Vadakku, they are known as 'Kodai,' 'Kondal,' 'Thendral,' and 'Vadai.' In vernacular Tamil, the word 'Kongu' is used to contrast with the word 'Kondal,' which refers to the monsoon from the east. Even now, Kodai Malai and Kondal Malai

are referred to as Kongan rain in Kongu Nadu. The Kongu kingdom is referred to as Kongu and Kongar Nadu in Tamil literature from the ancient and medieval periods. Inscriptions refer to this area as Kongu Nadu. The freshly unearthed Pulankurichi inscription refers to the region as 'Konga Nadu.' Scholars have voiced conflicting opinions on the name 'Kongu'. According to popular belief, a state is called for its ancient people, after natural gods, or after geographical features.

## **Historical background of Kongu country**

### **Literal meaning**

The name '**Kongu,**' literally, means honey and pollens. Kongu Nadu has a long stretch of mountains and so honey is collected in this region. The Sangam poem, *Patriruppattu*, provides direct explanation when it describes the Chera King as 'Narrari naravir Kongar-Ko' which means 'the king of the kongar famous for their honey'. It implies that the name 'Kongu' as applied to the country must have derived itself from the great quantity of honey for which it was famous. In this connection, it may be mentioned that the Kollimalai region (in modern Salem district) is mentioned in Sangam poems as having been famous for its honey. In this context, it would appear that all the meanings of the term 'Kongu' are applicable to the country it denoted, since flowers ought to have abounded where honey was in plenty as also fragrance since flowers were in plenty. The kongu country is filled with so many mountains big and small, that it is justly styled as a malanad or hill country and flowers and honey ought to have been in strikingly large quantity in such a country.

### **Kongu region through ages**

#### **Ancient times**

The ancient Tamils classified Tamil region into five different categories of lands, Kurinji, Mullai, Marudam, Neidal and Palai. The Kongu country is full of hilly ranges and other traits of hills. Large portions of the tract belongs to Kurinji type and the rest to Mullai type. Hence the Kongu country is a combination of Kurinji and Mullai facets. These facets continued till the tenth century A.D. The Kongu country is a complete block and elevated plateau amidst natural frontiers with series of mountain ranges such as Palani hills, Kolli hills, a part of Shervarays, the Anaimalai and the Nilgiris. To begin with the South, the Panrimalai or Varahagiri ranges start from the south Antanadu and extend towards the west and ends with the Kodai hills, and further west lay the Anaimalai.

The west of the Kongu is bounded a larger part of the western Ghats, starting with Anaimalai and extending upto the Palghat pass through which the Kongu and Kerala are linked. The ancient highway called Rajakesari Peruvai passes through Dharmalingamalai and Aiyaswamimlai. To the north of the western ghats lies the Nilgiri ranges, the junction of these two ranges providing a elegant nature scenery. The northern boundary of the Kongu commences from the Talaimalai hills ends in the Hasanur ghat.

With regard to rivers, though wild rivers like Cauvery were running, in ancient times, with little knowledge of water storage, people couldn't utilize it optimally. However, during Chola reign, forests were converted into cultivable lands and tanks were dug to store water which in turn actually increased the fertility of the land. The Kongu plains neither even nor regular but full of heaps and mounds. Hence, the lands were infertile. However, the soil has the capacity for preserving moisture for a long time. Hence, the green pastures needed for cattle breeding grew well. Besides the land had thick forests which green in rainy season and dry in summer season. Hence, cattle breeding was one of the major occupation.

### **Medieval times**

The Kongu country is a rain shadowed region. The western part of Kongu gets benefits from south west monsoon. The western ghats impede this rainfall. The north-east monsoon which brings rain mainly to hilly region becomes less active when it reach the Kongu country. Therefore, rain from the northeast monsoon to the Kongu region is meager. Owing to rain, famine affected the region. Medieval inscription reveal that villages decayed in a span of fifty years. Though the cause of such decay is not known, it is generally assumed that it might be due to inadequacy of rainfall. Hence, from the inscriptions, it can be incurred that Kongu region during medieval times faced heave famines.

The medieval Kongu country was mainly a forest tract. Wet cultivation was carried on the river banks and on water beds. But was very difficult owing to the uneven nature of its landscape. Lands under wet cultivation were of two categories. The lands under river irrigation was called Karaivali and those under well irrigation was tottam (garden). However, wet land was very rare in Kongu country. The temple inscriptions refer to the endowments of 'Kambu' to the temple in plenty. This proves the existence of large proportion of dry land fit for raising Kambu.

### **Man in Kongu region**

Man began his life in the hilly ranges of the Kongu country at the dawn of the Neolithic age. The Neolithic implements were discovered in these mountains. The implements of this period have been discovered in Kottai and Barukur mountain ranges. The Neolithic implements were also found in the Palghat pass. Microliths were collected from Anamalai hills. Besides Neolithic implements, prehistoric paintings were discovered in the Nilgiri and Vellingiri ranges. Prehistoric paintings were discovered near Munar at Maraiyur. The Neolithic implements founded at Salem and Dharmapuri districts was in proximity with the implements excavated at Salem. Hence, it is obvious that a part of Karnataka was considered Kongu region in the past.

The hunting scenes, dancing postures, portraits of elephants, deer, wild bear form the subject matter of paintings in the Nilgiris, the Villiangiri and the Tirumurthi hills. These paintings emphasize the natural life of the Vettuvass. The dancing scenes too depict the magical dances of the Vettuvass. For about three thousand years, the people of the hill ranges had an even tenor of life which went on unaffected till the advent of the British.

The ancient inhabitants of the hilly ranges had contacts with the people on the plains right from the Sangam age. But the civilization of the people of the plains had not at all affected them. The cattle of Vellalas were reared in these hills. The ancient tribes, Pulaiyas and Irulas looked after these cattle and devised cattle folds which were more than five hundred in number along the western ghats. The vellalas paid paddy and millets for pulaiyas as allowance for folding and guarding the cattle. The vellalas, the owner of the cattle folds, lived in villages some distance from such hills. The same practice is being continued even today.

The Neolithic cattle breeders lived on the banks of the rivers, rearing cattle and devising cattle folds. Ashmounds are found in plenty on the banks of the Kongu rivers. Proper excavation and scientific study about those ashmounds are not carried out so far and many ashmounds have been destroyed. Similar ashmounds in the Deccan have been scientifically studied. The ashmounds were formed as result of burning of dung hill. The Neolithic people burnt the dung heaps thus collected from the cattle. Before they left a particular place, the people and their cattle walked over these ashheaps believing that they would be free from diseases. The present day fire-walking during religious festival is a continuous of this belief.

The life of Kurinji style existed till the recent past. Plough was not used in the hilly agricultural operations which resembled the ancient agricultural operations. Mainly dry crops were raised by deforestation through fire. Majority of the hill tribes lived on natural products of the hills. Agriculture was secondary to the main profession of cattle breeding.

### Conclusion

Since the dawn of time, Kongu region, encompassing a significant portion of Tamil Nadu, had its mentions in various literatures and inscriptions including that of Sangam age. This region has a distinct ethnic character. 'Rome was not built in a day', likewise the region had its gradual development from forest lands to grazing lands and cultivable lands over the ages. Moreover, the river which were unutilized to the optimum was utilized with tanks constructed during Chola period.

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