

Tracing the Tracks: Road, Road Culture, and Romance in the Sangam Tamilnadu

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Abstract

Microhistory in a sense, captures the life of ordinary people during extraordinary circumstances or during macro-historical events. The purpose of this paper is to bring out the life style of the Sangam Tamils through the study of road culture. Tracing the roads and alleyways of a period would tell us a different story, the story of commoners who travelled by it, the purpose of their travel, their experiences en route, their expectation on the people they met during the journey, their disappointments, happiness, and the social values of the contemporary period. Sangam period stretched from 3rd Century B.C to 3rd Century A.D. Contemporaneous to this period were the rule of the Mauryas and later the Satavahanas in Deccan. The mercenary soldiers of Tamilnadu traversed through these roads to participate in the wars happening in north. The merchant groups crisscrossed the Western Ghats to reach western seashore to participate in trade. Many Sangam literary works have captured the life of these travelers: Young men who passed through tribal communities invariably were attracted towards the girls they met on the way. Forgetting the purpose of their journey they would agonizingly wait near the alleyways to have a glimpse of the girl they had fallen in love with. If lucky, they got into a clandestine relationship and continued with the journey at the end of it. It was then the turn of the girl to wait for the man she had fallen for. Sometimes, in all naivety, the girls would elope with their lovers looking for a better life in faraway cities. It was then the turn of the mother to experience the searing pain at the loss of the daughter. Roads which connected the cities with tribal areas were a mute witness to these ecstasies and agonies.

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