

Channelling through annals of history

STRETCHING ACROSS nearly 56 miles, this is the only canal that irrigates three wet crops every year. Built by a royal representative of the Pandian dynasty of Madurai, work on the Kalingarayan canal, commenced with the transportation of materials from Urachikottai hills in 1253 A.D.

The canal as it stands today is a product of the foresight of Nanjaiya Gounder, popularly known as 'Kalingarayar'. The construction of a canal came into conception soon after Nanjaiya Gounder set foot in Erode.

Legend has it that the Pandian king, impressed with his brilliance in the battlefield, honoured Nanjaiya Gounder, a warrior and native of Vellore, by bestowing the title 'Kalingarayar' and granting executive powers to rule the areas in Erode, on his behalf.

However, once Kalingarayar reached his destination, he was appalled by the prevailing drought conditions. Hailing from an affluent family, he resolved to make use of all available financial resources to find a

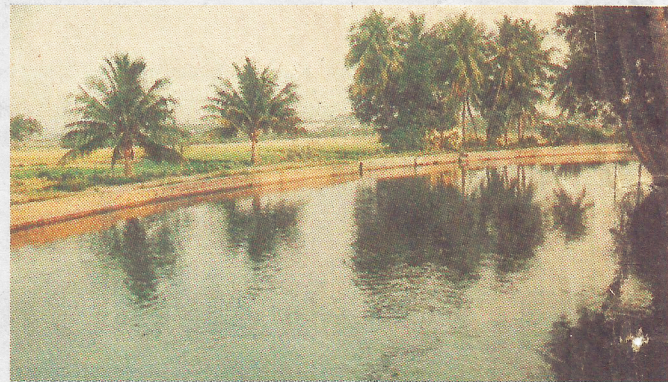
permanent solution to the problem.

With the view to alleviate the suffering of the people in Erode, Kalingarayar proceeded towards the present day Thalavamalai, (which was then called Thalavu Moolai) and chalked out a blueprint to dig a canal from Bhavani to Kodumudi.

Kalingarayar's mother also contributed a huge sum towards the work. The original plan was to commence excavation work right from the Bhavani River.

However, owing to opposition, the river was diverted near Kalingarayanpalayam, and from thereon by constructing a canal to Aavudaiyarpalai near Kodumudi, for a distance of 56.5 miles.

According to the Kongu Research Centre founder and descendant of the great Kalingarayar, Pulavar S. Rasu, says most of the funds towards the purchase and transportation of construction materials, from Urachikottai hill, nearly five kilometres from Bhavani, was done at personal expense. The construction work was fi-



Turning the land green and prosperous

nally completed in 1265. The canal was originally designed to irrigate 14,000 acres on the left bank. However, over the years, farmlands on the right bank have also benefited from this 13th century scheme, albeit some of them illegally.

It is said that Kalingarayar spent most of his time personally supervising the construction activity of the mammoth canal.

However, the magnificence of this scheme is the magnanimity shown by Kalingarayar. He is

said to have directed his family members not to purchase any land around the ayacut. What's more till date none of his descendants own a land in the Kalingarayan ayacut.

To supplement the capital, the Pandian king also granted a sizeable amount for the scheme.

In all, Kalingarayar is reported to have personally borne more than thirty percent of the cost of the work. Comprehending the benefits of inter-linking rivers in 1265 A.D, he began work to connect the Bhavani, Noyyal and Amaravathy rivers.

As a part of the plans, water from Bhavani was released into the canal where it flowed into the Noyyal near Aavudaiyarpalai. From thereon, Kalingarayar had planned to link the canal with Amaravathy by extending the canal.

But, owing to a financial crunch and opposition from the public, the plan fizzled out.

Today, this lifeline is polluted with the release of effluents from nearby industrial units. Worse, farmers have also begun to feel its impact on their crops. Though several steps have been taken to put an end to the problem, they have largely remained ineffective.

A sad remainder of how industrialisation can sometimes wipe out significant pieces of history into oblivion.



A boon to Erode farmers

By R. Sundaram in Erode