

City street founded by Kongu warrior is now a shopping hub

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Coimbatore: Parallel to the busy 100-ft Road, dotted with a few grocery stores, hardware outlets and a few swanky tile showrooms, the usual apartments and a few old houses, Kalingarayan Street in Ramnagar hardly reflects its rich legacy.

Not many of the street's residents, including some senior citizens, know that it was named after Kalingarayar, a Kongu warrior chief in the Pandya dynasty. He worked under emperor Veerapandian himself. Tamil history suggests that Kalingarayar was the father of interlinking rivers. He is the man behind the Kalingarayar canal in Erode. "They used to stay in a dry region called Nasuvanpalayam, where only the *samai* millet used to grow," says historian Perur K Jayaraman. "He is known to have vowed to make it a region where *samba* or rice could be grown," says Jayaraman. "So way back in the 13th century, they constructed the 96-km long canal called the Kalingarayar Canal which was built in a zig-zag pattern, to connect the Bhavani, Noyyal and Cauvery Rivers," added Jayaraman.

So what is Kalingarayan's connection to Coim-



Kalingarayan Street in Ramnagar

batores you may wonder? Historians say, once the canal was completed, Kalingarayar sold all their family property and moved West to a part of Coimbatore. "He did not want to be accused, by the kingdom's people, of constructing the canal for his personal benefit. So once the dry regions turned into wetlands, he sold his property and moved out of town," says Jayaraman. History suggests that the family moved to Coimbatore and began farming here. "Kalingarayar's extended family sold their property again a few decades ago and moved to Oothukuzhi near Pollachi," says Jayaraman.

Many residents of the

street named after him believe that Kalingarayar is the name of a municipal chairman who was also a well-known philanthropist. The road known to be one of the oldest in Ramnagar, used to actually border a maize field till the mid-60s.

While the area became a commercial hub in the late 80s and 90s

due to its proximity to Gandhipuram, it still maintained a residential façade being a part of Ramnagar. "That's when the shops came up too," says Manickam. "Now they have also started replacing large individual houses surrounded by trees," says Thamizharasi Melarathinam.

STREET TALK