

**Trade and Commerce of South Kongu with Special Reference to Udumalpet: Networks, Guilds and Regional Integration (c. 300 BCE–1300 CE)****J. ANGEL ROSE****Ph.D Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of History  
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Nirmala college for women, Coimbatore -18.****Abstract**

This paper analyses the trade and business structure of the South Kongu region and specifically the Udumalpet area placing the region in the network of exchange of the peninsular India. Despite the numerous studies of the centres of ancient Tamilagam on the coastline, inland centres like Udumalpet are rather a neglected topic in the economic-historical literature. The area of the early historic to Medieval period (c. 300 BCE-1300 CE) is covered by the study, which claims that South Kongu was an inland commercial area to integrate the Palghat Gap, Amaravathi basin, and the Kaveri plains. The work is based on the epigraphical documentation of Kolumam and other nadu divisions, Sangam literature, Roman numismatic record and archeological records of Kodumanal and Boluvampatti. With the help of historical-spatial reconstruction, the paper discovers trade routes, organization of merchant guilds, taxation systems, financial regulation, and industrial production patterns. The results reveal that South Kongu was marked with organized peruvalli roads, institutionalized guild structures, the diversification of trading in the form of textiles, agricultural products and dairy and the regulatory functions of temples. Udumalpet became an even more central inland exchange point between maritime imports and agrarian zones of interior and the structural importance of interior routes to support long-distance exchange remains considerable.

**Keywords:** South Kongu, Udumalpet, Merchant Guilds, Peruvalli Highways, Inland Trade Networks

**1. Introduction****1.1 Geographical Setting of Udumalpet**

Udumalpet was formerly Udumalaipettai in the Tiruppur, previously Coimbatore district (which acquired this name upon the announcement of the administrative reorganization contained by G.O.Ms. Nos. 617 and 618, Revenue Department, 24 October 2008). The central position of the town in the eastern foothills of the Western Ghats is also a reflection of the natural route between the coast of Kerala and the interior of Tamils. The Palghat (Palakkad) Gap of the Western Ghats was an important trans-peninsular trade route in commodities, people and ideas between the Kongu region and the Malabar Coast. The economic viability was enhanced by the Amaravathi River basin. Amaravathi was a Kaveri tributary, and supplied a source of irrigation, fertile alluvial strips, and fluvial access to Kolumam, Kumaralingam, Karatholuva and Kadathuva. The riverine basin agrarian surplus and trade centres in early historic South India favoured commercial development on an ecological level (Champakalakshmi, 1996; Gurukkal, 2016). The main source of rainfall in the region is South-West monsoon, therefore agricultural rhythms are also associated with the seasonal trade patterns. People carried trade through the monsoon winds (Purananuru 9:8-11), and land roads had to follow the monsoon winds (Nilakanta Sastri, 1955).

**1.2 Archaeological Background**

The archeological portrait boosts the Udumalpet and adjacent history. The evidence of early occupancy and high-order funerary rituals is shown in Megalithic dolmens and burial sites called Pandavar Kulis. Megalithic indicators are numerous on the South Indian Iron Age-Early Historic transition (Rajesh and Selvakumar, 2012). The coins found in the area that are punched suggest that they were used in bigger trading systems. Monetisation exists even in the early-historic coins, outside of barter (Gurukkal, 2016). The Indo-Roman inland trade intrusion was also demonstrated by Roman coin hoards that were discovered in Karur, Kodumanal, and the Amaravathi basin. Kodumanal has also exhibited bead-making, iron smelting and Novella cloth which demonstrates Kongu-specific artisan production (Sundara, 1994; Rajan, 2015). This river basin consists of K. villages of Kolumam, Kumaralingam, Karatholuva, Kadathuva and Kolinjivadi in the Udumalpet and Dharapuram taluks. They were a group of economic villages, indicating that they were often mentioned in inscriptions and archeological publications.

**1.3 Kongu in the Sangam Age**

Kongu Nadu The political system of the ancient Tamilagam is included in the Sangam literature. Subsequent literary and inscriptional sources identify Kongu Nadu as an independent territorial entity although early Tamilagam is often grouped as the Chera, Chola, and Pandya kingdoms. The existence of a single branch of Chera can be used to suggest political integration in early historic political systems. Trade, Market Street, merchant protection, and organized commercial organisations (sathu) are some of the information that Pattinapalai, Purananuru, Ahananuru, and Pathirrupathu give (Champakalakshmi, 1996; Gurukkal, 2016). Trade caravans were safeguarded by institutional systems, which are referred to as vayavar, the protectors of traders (Ahananuru v.149).

**1.4 Political Geography of South Kongu**

Political geography was established through administrative reforms in Kongu Nadu. Inscriptions helped Vaidyanatha appreciate that the River Kaveri was the geographical mark of Kongu (Kongu was split into North and South blocks) (Vaidyanathan, 1983). There is a scholarly debate on the composition of South Kongu. According to certain traditions, Nadu is divided into 5 parts namely Vaigai, Karaivali, Kavadiikka, Vira Kerala Valanadu and Perur. Kolumam temple slabs enumerate seven divisions, two of them being new to them: Vayaraikka and Nallurkka. In further epigraphs of Kongu Virachola III South Kongu has Karaivalinadu (Kolumam area), Kavadiikka Nadu (Udumalpet-Pollachi), Nallurkka Nadu, Perur Nadu, Rajavalanadu, Vaikaur Nadu (Palani), and Virakerala Valan. The existence of differences between the Cholas and Pandyas shows political supremacy and restructuring of the administration (Nilakanta Sastri, 1955). This multiplicity suggests the dynamism of the territory administration, rather than unsteadiness in terms of agricultural income collection and commerce support. The fact that Udumalpet is located in Kavadiikka Nadu in close proximity to Kolumam and Dharapuram is indicative of the fact that Udumalpet is a constituent of these shifting administrative geographies.

**2. Review of Literature****2.1. Historic Trade and Indo-Roman Exchange**

Historiography of South Indian trade developed in the studies of Indo-Roman trade and maritime exchange. The interpretation of the absorption of Tamilagam into the Indian Ocean system of commerce using classical Greco-Roman texts such as the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea and the Pattinapalai was first discovered by Nilakanta Sastri (1955). The seaports of the Chera, Chola and Pandya politics were affluent and the sea trade spurred a pre-historic economy, as stated by Sastri. This view was widened in archaeological studies in the late 20th century. Arikamedu, Alagankulam and Kodumanal excavations showed long distance exchange network sites of craft production in inland areas (Ray, 2003; Rajan, 2015). Kodumanal and Kongu had bead, iron and textile industry, which meant that the inland communities were not agrarian back-country villages but quite on the contrary, trade oriented. Himanshu Prabha Ray (2003) redefined Indo-Roman trade as a net-based

system having many nodes, linking marine and inland through rivers and highways. Other interpretations of colonization by the New Romans have also disapproved past interpretations. According to Roman coin hoards in peninsular India, Roman coin hoards indicate commercial penetration and trades and not permanent habitation (Rajan Gurukkal 2016). These concepts are key to the explanation of the currency in inner Kongu areas such as Karur and Amaravathi basin that depict organized world barter.

## **2.2 Trade, Urbanization, and Institutional Structures**

R. Champakalakshmi (1996) has the most comprehensive theory of trade and urbanization in early and medieval South India. She states that the development of commerce between 300 BCE and 1300 CE gave rise to urbanism, financing of religion, and change of ideas. Champakalakshmi focuses more on macro-regions such as the Kaveri delta and coastal Tamil Nadu than Kongu. The segmentary state model by Burton Stein (1980) was also keen on incorporation of peripheral regions in Chola political systems. Merchant guilds are another research topic. Noboru Karashima (2009) and Y. Subbarayalu (2012) demonstrated the corporate aspect of medieval commercial groupings such as Ainnurruvar (Five Hundred), Manigramam and Anjuvannam. Guilds that were regional formed protection teams and negotiated protection with the temple and state authorities. Champakalakshmi (1996) perceives guilds as people who propagate commercial ideology whereas Ray (2003) focuses on cosmopolitan ideology of the Anjuvannam. Interior network guild structure, particularly of the Amaravathi basin and the Kolumam area has never been raised in economic institutionalization discourse.

## **2.3 Regional Histories of Kongu Nadu**

Regional studies have provided descriptive bases. Such discussions of political boundaries between North and South Kongu and significance of the Amaravathi river basin and emergence of Kolumam as a commercial centre are documented by M. Arockiaswamy (1956), V. Manickam (2001) and B. S. Chandrababu (2003). Nevertheless, these are very much narrative pieces that are more or less local. They have no systematic engagement with larger Indian Ocean trade, network theory, and institutional economic history. Kongu Nadu, in its turn, introduces itself as a local historical entity and is not a component of the exchange systems of the inter-regional scope. The economic vibrancy of the Kongu region has been established by recent archeological findings in Kodumanal (Rajan, 2015) and has not been explored analytically by the South Kongu-Udumalpet corridor.

## **2.4 Research Gap**

The existing literature leads to three broad propositions, viz., that the South India was actively engaged in Indo-Roman and Indo-Pacific trade, that trade was an important corporate institution, and that urbanization and temple-based economic systems were the result of trade. Though even the coin hoards, Peruvai highways, Nadu divisions and guild inscriptions in the Kongu area are documented independently, none of them has been synthesized to give a consistent framework on the status of South Kongu as an organized inland trading intermediary. The location of Amaravathi basin, Kolumam inscriptions and strategic location of Udumalpet in-between Palghat Gap and Kaveri interior are indicators of the existence of a networked transit economy but this has been theorised in the literature without systematic theory. The gap is filled in this work by rebranding the South Kongu as a kind of inland port which links both west-coast sea routes to the interior of the Tamils. Collecting epigraphical, literary, numismatic, and archaeological information, the provided analysis will be oriented to correlating with the broader discourses in terms of regional integration, institutional organization of trade, and inland-seafarer connectivity in early and medieval South India.

## **3. Sources and Methodology**

The present research paper will adhere to the multi-source historical approach, the data on the epigraphical, literary, numismatic and archeological will be united in such a way that they will help to reconstruct the trading environment of South Kongu and Udumalpet in particular.

### **3.1 Epigraphical Sources**

The major sources of this study are epigraphy. The Kolumam temple complex has inscriptions that give much data on the divisions of Nadu, merchant guilds, tax, road networks (Peruvai) and economic dealings. These texts are a record of guild activities, such as the Ainnurruvar and Manigramam, and groups of Erusathu (export) and Irangu Sathu (import) give first-hand information of well-organized trade in the Amaravathi basin. These sources are supported by the archives such as the South Indian Inscriptions (S.I.I.) and Annual Reports on Epigraphy (A.R.E.). The reorganization of the administration, temple endowment and trade-based fiscal system can be seen by inscriptions of emperors such as Aditya I and Kongu Virachola III. The contextual reading, paleographic dating, and inscription cross-referencing have been employed in the analysis of epigraphs in this work. Terms of institutional and spatial commerce, Nagaram, Peruvai, Valanadu, and Adikiltalam are brought into the limelight.

### **3.2 Literary Sources**

The classical Tamil literature compliments the earliest historic trade. All these in works such as Pattinapalai, Ahananuru, Purananuru and Pathirrupathu are said to organize trade associations (sathu), merchant protection associations (vayavar), seasonal navigation by the monsoon winds and maritime traffic. Pattinapalai mentions also busy port towns and horse reception, Ahananuru (v.149) mentions an institutionalized protection of trade, which implies that there existed a structured commercial organization. These are literary sources though they are not regarded as historical texts of historical facts but rather texts of socio-cultural analysis of the economic facts. The poetic exaggeration is then constituted as an ordinary procedure of historiography as the verifiable economic reference is warranted to an inscriptional and archaeological data.

### **3.3 Numismatic Evidence**

The evidence of early trade networks is good with Roman coin hoards. Roman coinage at Karur, Kodumanal and the Amaravathi basin suggests that there was an Indo-Roman trade beyond the ports. The circulation of coins denotes developed inland trading routes. The paper views coin distribution in respect with space, following the distribution of the coins according to the river basins, and also the trade routes which were operational by then. Following the cautions of modern scholarship that one should not equate the discovery of coins with the establishment of colonial settlements, these hoards are interpreted as evidence of the intensity and degree of connection of transactions. Numismatic data are measures in quantitative terms of trade areas and determine locations of nodal points within a bigger exchange system like Udumalpet.

### **3.4 Archaeological Evidence**

With archeological digs, economical specialization and action can be actualized. In Kongu, Kodumanal made carnelian and quartz beads, smelted iron and textiles. The implications of conclusions suggest local and long-distance production of trade. There was also inter-regional trade in that Boluvampatti also produced aquamarine and beryl gemstones. Amaravathi basin has megalithic remains, dolmens and coins of punch marks, which means the long-term settlement and establishment of socio economic order. The study employs archaeological evidence to put the medieval guild system in a broader chronological framework by demonstrating continuity between Iron Age patterns of habitation and early historic types of commercial activities.

## **Methodological Approach**

### **3.5 Historical-Spatial Reconstruction**

The analysis focuses on historical-spatial reconstruction as a method to understand social spaces and places (Mitchell, 2005). Historical-Spatial Reconstruction In this analysis, historical-spatial reconstruction as a way of comprehending social spaces and places is discussed (Mitchell, 2005).

Historical-spatial reconstruction has been used in this paper. It does not show events chronologically but employs textual and material information in order to track trade paths, administrative regions and institutional networks. The triangulation of inscriptional sources, distribution of coins, and archaeological findings re-creates such trade routes as the Palghat Gap, Kolumam, Dharapuram, and Udumalpet. South Kongu may be regarded as a commercial agent and political unit between the Tamil hinterland and the West coast. It goes beyond descriptive regional history and rather add to networked economies and regional integration in early and medieval South India using epigraphy, literature, numismatics, archaeology, and a spatial analytical framework.

**4. Initial Historic Trade Networks**

It was the merging of the formal commercial formations between rural hinterlands, interior craft centres and seaports that took place in the first historic century of South India (c. 300 BCE-300 CE). In between these growing networks the Palghat Gap, Kaveri basin and South Kongu was well placed. All the evidence presented above by literary, numismatic and archaeological record all point to the evidence that the area was not a periphery or an isolated area, but it was instead actively involved in internal as well as trans-regional exchange routes.

**4.1 Sathu Internal Trade Organization**

Prior to the expansion of sea trade, Kongu trade between regions depended on small agricultural and artisan trade routes. The Sangam literature has obtained accounts of the early organized economic activities. Ahananuru (v.149) refers to vayavar who watched over caravan traffic of merchants, suggesting sathu trade groups. These sources indicate that trade was not limited to informal trading. The rural trading was still conducted by barter, especially cattle, agricultural products and crafts. Literary descriptions in Pattinapalai and Purananuru however present market districts, congested roads and high value commodities pointing towards market based trade growing barter connections. The consideration of pastoral societies such as Ayar and Kovalar in trading systems highlights the connection between agrarian surplus and trading. The internal trade was achieved by overland routes which connected river basins with uplands across Kongu. The other rivers formed villages and trade routes and the Amaravathi and Noyyal Rivers were swords and source of irrigation. These basins had megalithic communities and punch-marked coins, which point to Iron Age commerce network persisting into early medieval commercial structure. Therefore, the systems of internal trade in South Kongu were the institutional and infrastructural background of the long-distance trade.

**4.2 Roman Trade and Inland Penetration**

The early historic era saw the expansion of Indo-Roman maritime trade the most in the South Indian trade. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea and Natural History by Pliny state that Tamils exported pepper, pearls, ivory, textiles and precious stones to the Mediterranean. The evidence of archaeological and numismatic study indicates that this trade inland was diffused out of the seaports along the coast, such as Muziris and Kaveripattinam. Imported bullion was distributed inland as indicated by Roman coin hoards, particularly in Kongu. Karur, a centre of Chera in ancient times made large Roman coins. Similar finds had been made in the Amaravathi basin, indicating the distribution of imported goods by inland routes. Finds of coins suggest that one can find regular networks of transactions out of ports and into the interior rather than permanent Roman settlement. This trade was enhanced through Monsoon sailing. Sangam literature records winds seasonal to maritime navigation, which is in line with Greco-Roman descriptions of navigation by monsoons. Merchants could have been using the Palghat Gap to move goods along the western coast to the interior. Another theory holds that Arab middlemen might have facilitated trade between the Mediterranean and South Indian traders. This is a transit-commercial area which leads to Amaravathi basin. It was close to the river systems and land routes to redistribute the goods of incoming bullion and luxury items. Accordingly, Udumalpet and other communities along the coast were the middlemen between sea ports and centres of consumption in the interiors.

**Table 1: Roman Coin Hoards in Kongu Region**

Location	River Basin / Route	Period (Approx.)	Source Reference
Karur	Amaravathi / Kaveri	1st-3rd CE	Archaeological Reports; S.I.I. references
Kodumanal	Noyyal Corridor	1st-2nd CE	Excavation Reports
Amaravathi Basin (various sites)	Amaravathi Route	1st-3rd CE	Numismatic Studies
Pollachi Region	Palghat-Interior Corridor	Early Historic	Regional Archaeological Reports
Udumalpet (nearby finds)	Amaravathi Corridor	Early Historic	Local Survey Records

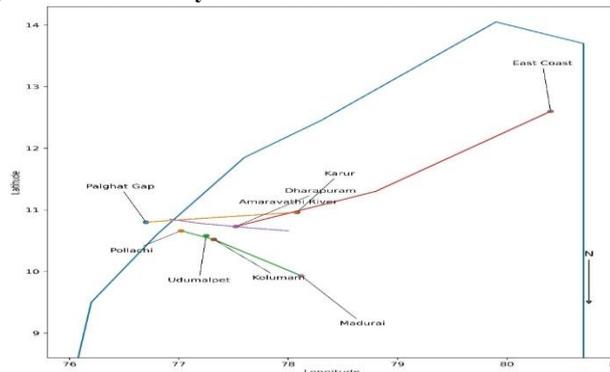
Sources: Compiled based on Turner (1989); Ray (2003); Gurukkal (2016); Rajan (2015); South Indian Inscriptions (different volumes) of the Archaeological Survey of India.

**4.3 Trade Routes of South Kongu**

South Kongu because of its location enjoys numerous trade routes. Three major routes can be reconstructed on the basis of literary, inscriptional and archeological evidence:

Rte 1: It goes through Palghat Gap, Noyyal River and Karur. This line was a west- east row linking the Malabar Coast with the Kaveri basin. Products could be brought to an early historic centre, Karur, by the Palghat Gap, through the river systems of Noyyal and Amaravathi. Pollachi - Kolumam - Madurai is a route passing through Tamil Nadu and Madurai. This south-western highway was linking upland settlements to Pandyan. The strategic middle node of this network seems to be Kolumam. This connects Dharapuram with Coromandel Coast. As communities of interior Kongu had links to coastal markets, the path was able to aid in transportation to eastern maritime destinations. These pathways preempted the Peruvali highways of the middle ages and exhibit space-commerce organization. Udumalpet is the more important nodal point in a broader system of trade by being in these corridors.

**Figure 1: Rebuilt Early and Medieval Trade Routes of South Kongu**



Reconstruction: This has been reconstructed in inscriptional references, geography of the rivers, and the distributions pattern of the archaeological products.

**This figure illustrate:**

1. Palghat Gap corridor
2. Above all, the river basins of Amaravathi and Noyyal.
3. Kolumam, Udumalpet, Dharapuram, Pollachi.
4. West-East connectivity
5. Peruvian continuation to medieval Peruvai.
6. Udumalpet as a nodal junction.

**4.4 Commodities of Early Trade**

Ecological diversity and specialization of craft is observed in early historic trade goods. The Tamils exported the luxury goods that had a high demand such as pepper, sandalwood, pearls, ivory, textiles, and precious stones. There are classical descriptions of coconut oil and gold. They were manufactured in different ecological areas and had to be systematically extracted and redistributed.

Imports were dominated by bullion and premium goods. According to literary and classical sources, coral, wine, tin, lead, and horses were some of the gold coins used by Romans. Moneyed exchange, temple endowment and guild purchases and sales later centuries relied on bullion flow.

**Table 2: Export and Import Commodities of Kongu Region**

Category	Commodities	Source Reference
Exports	Pepper, Sandal, Pearls, Ivory, Textiles, Coconut oil, Gold	Periplus; Pliny; Pattinapalai; Epigraphy
Imports	Gold coins, Coral, Wine, Horses, Tin, Lead	Periplus; Classical Accounts; Literary References

Source: The compilation of Periplus Maritima Erythraei (Casson 1989); Pliny, Natural History (Rackham 1952); Champakalakshmi (1996); Ray (2003); Gurukkal (2016).

**5. The Medieval Trade Developments**

The medieval period (c. 9 th -13 th centuries CE) signifies a development in institutionalization of the trade relations in South Kongu. Though the first historic trade was characterized as the maritime transaction and redistribution on the land, the medieval period was characterized by the administrative integration and the integration of infrastructures and the establishment of the trading paths. The epigraphical documents of Kolumam, Dharapuram and Perur and other settlements of the Amaravathi basin testify to the fact that South Kongu was included in the Chola political force, and at the same time it became an organized trading centre in the interiors.

**5.1 Chola Reorganization of the Administrations**

The growth of the Imperial Cholas led by Aditya I (c. 871-907 CE), Parantaka I (c. 907-955 CE) and others influenced the politics and the economics of Kongu. The inscriptions of Aditya I refer to conquests of Kongu by Chola. Commercial regulation and agrarian extraction were changed by temples endowment, political annexation, and reorganization of administration. Parantaka I raised the government of Nadu and Valanadu. To organize agrarian assessment and mobilization of resources, the area was broken into revenue units. South Kongu Karaivalnadu (Kolumam), Kavadiikka Nadu (Udumalpet-Pollachi), Nallurkka, Perur and Virakerala Valanadu are referred to as inscription. Taxation, patronage of temples and markets were handled by geographic, fiscal and administrative departments. In Brahmin dominated chaturvedimangalam, agriculture and institutionalization were enhanced. These Kolumam villages depict agrarian landscape change aggrandized by Chola. Brahmadeya villages enhanced irrigation, agriculture and market places. The products of the cash were redistributed and exchanged with the settlement temples and fruit and long distance trade products. The political-economic restructuring of Nadu division was concerned. Becoming a member of the Chola administrative grid, South Kongu might expand formal trade, support the guild of merchants, and obtain the trade routes between the western coast and the Tamil interior.

**5.2 Peruvai Highway System**

Inscriptional recordkeeping and Peruvai (great roadways) were part of the Medieval South Kongu trade. These highways united the communities within the interiors, temple hubs, trading cities, and institutions located along the shore, creating a long-lasting system of commercial mobility. The Peruvai roadways are referred to in inscriptions as legitimate roads, not informal.

The Melai Peruvai connected the western Uplands, Palghat and the interior lowlands. The settlements of the Palghat Gap to Amaravathi and Kaveri basins were probably supplied with commodities through this route. The Karithurai Peruvai used to connect Dharapuram with other trading centers indicating an eastern trade tendency towards Coromandel stores. This network was centred with nodal redistribution at Dharapuram on Dharapuri River. The connection between lowland markets and hill people is reflected in Aivaramalai Peruvai, which is written in Vaikavur Nadu (Palani region) inscriptions. Inscriptions on the temples show that it was an important place economically as well as ceremonial. Kolumathirkku Pokkira Peruvai identified Kolumam as the companion of Palani and Kalayamuthur. This road demonstrates the role of Kolumam as an exchange center of South Kongu. The Palaperuvai enhanced the west east connection to Dharapuram and Karur to Kaveri basin. The Konda Cholan Peruvai is the imperialist of chola on the regional infrastructure by symbolically relating commercial routes to royal power. Each of these paths exhibited a spatially organised commercial regime where South Kongu was an intermediary commercial location. The texts frequently refer to Peruvai, which means that the school maintained, defended, and recognized these paths. These passageways were probably maintained by local administrative bodies, commercial guilds, and temples. The presence of highways signifies that there was no occasionality and marginality in the traffic of the roadways in South Kongu. Building was made in administrative regions, country growth, temple patronage, and activity of the guilds, which reinforced the nodal junction status of Udumalpet.

**Table 3: Identified Peruvai Highways of South Kongu**

Name of Peruvai	Connected Regions	Mentioned In (Inscription Source)	Functional Role
Melai Peruvai	Palghat region- Amaravathi basin - Interior Tamil region	Kolumam inscriptions; regional epigraphy	West-East trade corridor linking coast to interior
Karithurai Peruvai	Dharapuram - Eastern plains	Amaravathi basin inscriptions	Redistribution route toward eastern markets
Aivaramalai Peruvai	Vaikavur (Palani region) - Kolumam	Temple inscriptions of Kolumam	Hill-plain commercial linkage
Kolumathirkku Peruvai	Kolumam - Palani - Kalayamuthur	Kolumam epigraphs	Nodal junction route for regional trade
Palaperuvai	Dharapuram - Karur	Amaravathi-Kaveri basin inscriptions	Link between South Kongu and Kaveri system
Konda Cholan Peruvai	Kolumam - Udumalpet - Pollachi region	Chola-period inscriptions	Imperial highway consolidating regional control

Source: the compilation of the author on the basis of the inscriptions in the Kolumam temple; South Indian Inscriptions (Archaeological Survey of India); the epigraphical records in the regions.

**6. City Commercial Centres and the Nagaram System**

Like the medieval South Kongu trade routes, Nagaram, Managaram, Perunagaram, Pattinam, Velapuram, Kadigai and Tavalam write of organized trading centers. These shapes demonstrate different parameters and purposes of urban-merchandise structure, rather than strict municipal hierarchies. Epigraphical documents by Kolumam and related Amaravathi basin villages indicate that South Kongu possessed an ecological urban-commercial mix associated with guild activity, temple institution and Peruvai roadways.

### 6.1. Types of Commercial Settlement:

Pattinam was commonly an allusion to marine cities, or cities where important trade was conducted. Even though South Kongu was not coastal, its trading centers were also linked to coastal pattinams through predetermined trade routes. According to the Tamil literature, there were inland redistribution centres who depended on the sea ports to earn income. Velapuram inscriptions described an organized trading society. Agro-artisan production was less dominant and redistributed by velapurams who were less than nagaram. Kadigai frequently mentioned special centres, occasionally associated with guild meetings or trade inspection. Control and organized trading meetings are a part of a kadigai settlement. The homes of traveling merchants were referred to as tavalam. Tavalam towns were also located strategically in highways as caravan stations to trade at a distance. Their existence highlights South Kongu commercial infrastructure in the Middle Ages. Perunagaram were big communities, economically active, and with endowments of temples and institutionalized markets. In such communities, guild meetings, collection of taxes and mass transactions have to have taken place. Managaram was a symbol of the developed administrative systems in strategic mercantile towns. Inscriptions can enumerate settlements as high as the level of managaram indicating commercial significance.

These settlements demonstrate that urbanization in South Kongu was neither geographic nor functional, but trade-related, guilds, and geographical. Lexis signifies specialization of businesses in Nadu divisions and temple based government.

### 6.2 Major Nagarams

Kolumam is an eminent commercial center. The walls of the temple at Kolumam refer to trading guilds, tolls and Peruvai roads and it was the business and administrative hub of Karaivalinadu. The river Amaravathi was channeled to the South Kongu, Kaveri basin and eastern plains at Dharapuram. Its references of highway and commercial levies indicate its status of transportation-business hub. Palani who was affiliated to the Peruvai correlated Vaikavur Nadu with the lowland and hill markets. Transporting agricultural and forest products required location. In the Palghat Gap, Pollachi related the Malabar Coast to Kongu. Its use in Peruvai itineraries suggests that it was significant in the west-east trade. Boluvampatti was a center of craft-production and exchange as revealed by the remains of beryl and aquamarine. The language demonstrates that it was subjected to interregional connections. Muttam (Amarabhuyanganallur, in medieval epigraphs) is described as a commercial center in inscriptions, which implies an institutionalized market behavior.

These settlements created a networked trading system founded on the river basins, roads, lands and administration units. They formed a local exchange system of goods, crafts and monetary cohesion as an alternative to towns.

**Table 4: Nagarams and Their Economic Functions**

Name	Type (Managar / Perunagaram / Tavalam etc.)	Economic Activity	Epigraphical Source
Kolumam	Managaram / Perunagaram	Guild activity, levy collection, transit trade	Kolumam temple inscriptions; S.I.I.
Dharapuram	Nagaram	Redistribution centre, highway linkage	Amaravathi basin inscriptions
Palani	Linked via Peruvai (Managaram context)	Hill–plain trade, agrarian exchange	Vaikavur Nadu inscriptions
Pollachi	Trade gateway settlement	West–East transit trade	Regional Chola inscriptions
Boluvampatti	Commercial craft centre	Gemstone production and exchange	Archaeological excavation reports
Muttam	Nagaram	Market settlement, temple-linked trade	Medieval epigraphs (S.I.I.)

Sources: Author compilation on the basis of inscriptions on Kolumam; South Indian Inscriptions (Archaeological Survey of India); local epigraphical and archaeological reports.

### 7. The Guild Organization of Merchants

Merchant guilds are the constituted, institutional support of the medieval trade in South Kongu. The epigraphical evidences of Kolumam, Dharapuram and Amaravathi-Noyyal basins show that trade was not practised by individual personalities but it was practised by those corporate bodies which had some jurisdiction, fiscal and protection systems. These guilds joined local agrarian society, temple institutions and long distance trade networks with one another and in the process of doing so, assimilated South Kongu to wider patterns of South Indian commerce.

#### 7.1 Ainnurruvar

A strong Medieval South Indian commercial company was the Ainnurruvar (The Five Hundred). The Ainnurruvar are described in inscriptions at Tamil Nadu and Karnataka as a trans-regional guild that traded locally and abroad. In South Kongu, Kolumam inscriptions describe active participation in Erusathu (export trade) and Irangu Sathu (import trade), indicating inter-regional exchange organized. The river basins of Amaravathi and Noyyal that linked Palghat to Kaveri could have been utilized as guild activity. The Ainnurruvar connected market towns, Peruvai routes and temples. They are independent of the corporates and refined their institutions by their capacity to raise levies, fund temples, and purchase trade routes. They organized production, redistribution and protection rather than commerce.

#### 7.2 Manigramam

South Indian merchant guilds such as Manigramam were probably a collection of temple customs and trades. Epigraphical evidence suggests that they were involved in the Kongu tax on product collections to use in temples. Manigramam could have been in local fiscal government. Manigramam was smaller in base but had inter-regional relations compared to the Ainnurruvar which occupied a large area. They engaged in temple taxes, which incorporated trade and ritual. The guilds came into contact with each other via temple complexes in the Kolumam and the Nadu divisions and records were maintained.

#### 7.3 Anjuvannam

Anjuvannam were a multi-lingual trading people with a variety of ethnies based on medieval inscription. The term means the incorporation of foreign merchants, especially the sea trade routes. South Kongu was an inland area, however the Palghat Gap and Peruvai streets enabled the coastal businessmen to access the interiors. This plays a key role in the horse trade of Anjuvannam. West Asian horses were appreciated by peninsular polities. They required distribution inland and guilds such as the Anjuvannam could be of assistance. The fact that there is a guild in or around Kongu implies that trans-regional exchange systems have been integrated in South Kongu.

**7.4 Other Guilds**

These great guilds are supplemented by a number of smaller groups of merchants mentioned in inscriptions:

- **Saliyanagarathar:** This is associated with the textile production and trade, that is, cotton weaving.
- **Vaisya Vaniya Nagarathar:** This is usually related to oil trade and other related merchandise.
- **Peranagarathar :**International Business.
- Going through trade routes with mobile, trading groups.
- **Nanadesi:** It is simply a name that translates to belonging to a large number of countries i.e. dealers who trade across territorial borders.
- **Akkasalikal:** This may be applied in reference to metal work and mint activity.
- **Padinenvisayathur:** This word suggests a group type of organization which suggests the mercantile organization of different divisions.

The net effect of these guilds is a representation of diversification of the economic specialization in South Kongu. The region itself was favouring a stratified mercantile ecology, consisting of local craft guilds and trans-regional trading companies, rather than one large merchant institution.

**7.5. The protection of Merchant and Adikiltalam**

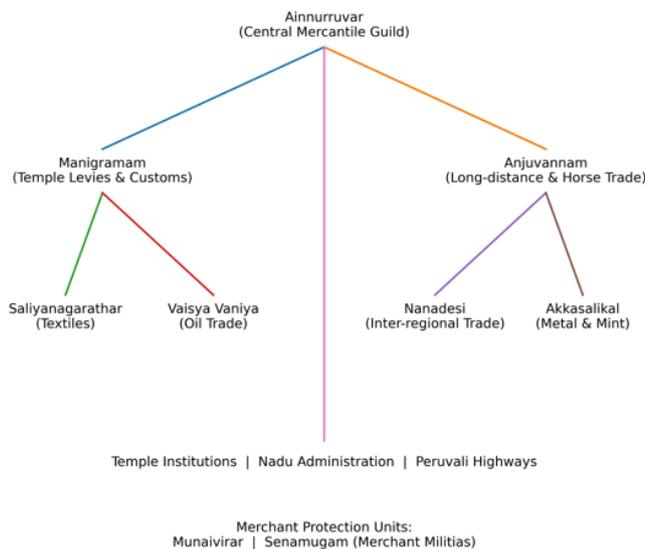
Adikiltalam are also marked as settlements of merchant groups or road rest stations. The settlements enhanced the infrastructure of trade as centres of logistics. Merchant militias such as Munaivirar and Munaivira Kodyar were used to guard merchant caravans. Senamugam can also mean military forces which serve to protect merchants. In these agreements, it is stressed that trade needs protection, in particular long-distance routes. Merchant militia is a good example to show that guilds were corporate entities and could arrange defense, not merely spectators of their trade. This security institutionalization signifies excess and superior goods in the South Kongu trade route.

**Table 5: Merchant Guilds of South Kongu**

Guild Name	Primary Trade	Area of Operation	Linked Institutions	Source
Ainnurruvar	Export-Import trade	Amaravathi & Noyyal basins	Temple, Nadu, Peruvai	Kolumam inscriptions; S.I.I.
Manigramam	Customs, temple levies	Regional Nadu divisions	Temple institutions	Regional epigraphy
Anjuvannam	Horse trade, long-distance trade	Coastal-Inland corridors	Maritime & inland markets	Medieval inscriptions
Saliyanagarathar	Textile trade	Amaravathi basin	Temple markets	Epigraphical records
Vaisya Vaniya Nagarathar	Oil and commodity trade	Kongu region	Nadu administration	Inscriptional evidence
Nanadesi	Inter-regional trade	Multi-regional	Trade corridors	South Indian inscriptions

Source: Author’s compilation based on Kolumam inscriptions; South Indian Inscriptions (ASI); regional epigraphical records.

**Figure 2: Institutional Structure of Merchant Organization**



This figure visually represents:

1. Ainnurruvar (central corporate guild)
2. Manigramam (regional levy & temple link)
3. Anjuvannam (long-distance / maritime link)
4. Specialized guilds (textile, oil, metal)
5. Connection to Nadu administration
6. Temple institutions
7. Peruvai highways
8. Merchant militias (Munaivirar / Senamugam)

It gives us a network image of institutional interrelations as opposed to linear sequence in which, South Kongu forms one node within a larger business context.

**8. Sectoral Economy of Trade and Cattle**

The medieval economy of South Kongu was characterised by market institutions, textiles, agricultural surplus, and animal commerce. Local industries and seasonal markets in Nadu state and temple-based financial institutions drove trade locally, although the trade across distances linked the region with other exchange cultures. The local economy depended on fabrics. Cotton was cultivated as a crop at Udumalpet and in black cotton soils close to it. There is organized textile production and distribution in the Saliyanagarathar epigraphy. South Kongu used

Nagaram hubs and Peruvalli corridors to connect inland and coastal markets to cotton, yarn, and other goods. Agriculture was another major trade. There are pepper, turmeric, sesame (gingelly), paddy, and other crops etched on Amaravathi basin. Amaravathi river system enabled formal crop exchange that was supported by irrigation. These products were commonly found in temple inscriptions suggesting that there was a system of commerce and not simply barter. Kongu region which was a pastoral area played a major role in animal trade. Cows, goats and sheep were agricultural and trading animals. Elite and military horses were imported by the coastal routes as diaspora. The middle system of cattle trading indicates that merchants guilds and local governments controlled it. There were weekly institutionalized livestock fairs. North and South Kongu shoppers were attracted by Kannapuram and Pattali. It was more important in the Palghat Gap, that turned the traffic of the West coast and interior. In addition to animals these fairs sold farm and craft items. Businesses are organized using taxation. Taxes on pepper, textile, livestock and grain fall within the realm of epigraphical records. It seems that the logical systems worked in the Nadu government and temple gathered revenue on market connections, such as the sector commerce of fiscal products. Thus, the sectoral economy of South Kongu revealed the interaction of textiles, agriculture, and cattle in monitored market. The reasons why it could not be commercially viable were that it demanded domestically controlled, frequent, and taxed exchange operations in local institutions.

**Table 6 Sectoral Components of Trade in South Kongu**

Sector	Major Commodities	Market Centres	Institutional Linkage
Textile Production	Cotton, yarn, woven cloth	Kolumam, Udumalpet	Guilds; temple levies
Agricultural Produce	Pepper, turmeric, sesame, paddy	Amaravathi basin markets	Nadu administration; temple records
Animal Trade	Cattle, sheep, goats, horses	Kannapuram, Pattali, Pollachi	Guild supervision; market taxation
Periodic Fairs	Livestock and mixed commodities	Weekly cattle fairs	Regulated revenue collection

Source: Author's compilation based on Kolumam inscriptions; South Indian Inscriptions (ASI); regional epigraphical records.

### 9. Udumalpet inland Trade junction

There are indications that Udumalpet was a crossroads of inland multi-level commercial and not a rural settlement. It was a key economic place because it was located around the Amaravathi basin and was near Kolumam, Dharapuram and Pollachi. Amaravathi river basin linked the inland redistribution canals and fields under irrigation. There were cross routes between Palghat Gap and Kaveri basin by Udumalpet, Kavadiikka Nadu. Kolumam was an inscriptionally documented guild center, Dharapuram bridged both lowlands and Kaveri highways and Pollachi linked Malabar sea-links. Goods were moved across natural areas as a result of the transitory nature of Udumalpet. This is anticipated at the institutional level. Merchant companies such as Ainnurruvar and Manigramam were created by Nadu divisions and fiscal organizations based on temples. Taxes on fabrics, calves and farm produce put up as epigraphic taxes show no trade. Temple-guild nexus was a system of trade and routes. Udumalpet arranges redistribution in these overlapping networks. Numismatic evidence enhances space awareness. Bullion trading is represented in inland Roman hoards of coins and cash circulation in Amaravathi-Noyyal. Redistributable diffusing nodes required. The location of the city of Udumalpet between the agricultural backlands and the seaside makes it the right place to construct this structure. Udumalpet is a landmark in terms of its complex inland-maritime system. The exchange networks, guild-based institutions and riverine output increased peninsular South Kongu commerce.

### Conclusion

Epigraphical, literary, numismatic, and archeological evidence is used in the researches of South Kongu trade and commerce in Udumalpet. South Kongu was not an isolated agricultural country, rather it was a commercial space, along with river basins, administrative regions, merchant guilds, and roads. It linked the routes along the coast to the west to market places in the interiors at Udumalpet in the Amaravathi basin through Peruvalli routes. Trade taxes is depicted in Kolumam and other Nadu epigraph inscriptions. Clothing, pepper, beasts, and grain taxes bring in an income, not in irrelevant commerce. The government and religion had an impact on trade through conventions, duties, and endowments in temple inscriptions. Nadu was a fiscally-managed trade. It was governed by the merchant guilds Ainnurruvar, Manigramam and Anjuvannam. The production, redistribution, and protection of their business system can be seen in exports and imports, custom duties, and caravan organization. The infrastructure and markets of South Kongu were streamlined through guild-temple nexus. The statistics prove the economic superiority of South Kongu in trading communities in the peninsula. Inland-maritime connections were provided between Palghat Gap, Amaravathi basin and Kaveri plains. There is an implication of a large commercial system beyond the coastal ports as indicated by roads, coined money, and movement of goods. Pollachi and Kannapuram cattle exhibitions are industrial. Medieval regional fairs. The economy of South Kongu is influenced by the rulers of South Kongu, and Udumalpet was a typical interior trading center.

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