Islam took root in South India well before the waves of invasions from Central Asia which gave rise to Medieval Muslim Sultanate in North India. The early spread of Islam was associated with the expansion of South India's wide ranging maritime trade network. Arab Muslim traders and navigators settled along the east coast of the peninsula - Coromandel - as early as eighth century A.D. and their number increased as the region began to play a central role in the international trade which linked South India to the enterpots of West Asia and international archipelago. 

A chain of Muslim trading settlements grew up along the east coast from Pulicat to Colochal in Kanniyakumari. Many of these richest settlements were located in the coastal towns of Thanjavur, Ramanathapuram, and Thirunelveli districts. They had links with wider trading world of Arabian peninsula and the Indian ocean. The port towns of Coromandel coast came to be identified as centres of formal Islam in South India by 12-13th centuries. The localities such as Pulicat, Nagapattanam, Kilakkarai and Kayalpattanam contained significant number of Tamil speaking Muslims who could be classed as permanently professing Islam and were actually recognised as such within the wider society.

The beginning of the Muslim contact with South India was not an accident but a continuation of the ancient commercial intercourse between the Arabs and the people of South India. From the days of Joseph to that of Marcopolo and Vasco da gama, the Arabs were the captains of Indian commerce. Much of the Indian trade was in their hands. Because of the proximity of Southern Arabia to the sea and it's strategic location on the Indian route, rare and highly priced products of India, China, and Ethiopia found their way here in transit to the western marts. Here were produced spices, and other aromata for seasoning food or for burning in the ceremonies of the courts and rituals, the foremost among them was incense, the most precious commodity of ancient trade. Arab writer, Ibn Fadbullah-ul- Omari (circa 1348 A.D.) the author of Masalik - kul - alzar, while writing about India says that it's seas are pearls, it's mountains are rubies and it's trees are perfumes.

The Arabs, being the great traffickers had access to both Indian and western ports. After third century B.C. vast of the Indian commerce fell at the hands of the Arabs. It is also possible to assume that the South Indian Parava fishermen cum merchants took the South Indian articles in their vessels to the Persian gulf. The Arab took such goods to the coasts of Africa. From there it was taken via upper Nile to Egypt.
The flowing trade of the Arabs in Indian and Chinese articles enabled them to establish their colonies in Southeast Africa and South India and capture the monopoly of trade in the ports of these region. It is generally believed that from very ancient times, the Greeks and Romans were trading in Indian ocean ports. It may be noted that the Greek writers of second and first century B.C. do not allude to Egyptian and Greek merchants sailing to and from India. While Pliny (79 A.D.) and Periplus (88 A.D.) have copious reference to Arab trade in the first century A.D., but they have only casual reference about the Roman ships moving across the Indian ocean.

According to Pliny the Romans used to purchase Indian articles from Arabs in about 77 A.D. in Southeast Arabian marts. Periplus mentions about Greek ships along with abundant Arab ships in the port of Muziris. Even for such a traffic the Romans had to keep the Arabs in good humour and the Romans were able to send their cargoes to India only with the help of such Arab mariners which can be seen from the fact that the Romans were sending presents very often to the rulers of Arabia. The Greeks did not enjoy much favour from Indians. Aden was occupied with a colony of Egyptians and Greeks and the monsoon was discovered for Romans by Hippalus an Egyptian pilot. Because of this a large number of ships left for the East from Aden. Ptolemy who wrote his treatise on geography in the middle of the second century A.D. does not mention the Greek or the Romans as sailing to the South Indian ports though he gives a detailed account of Tamil Country. On the other hand he mentions Mokha (Mocha) in Southern Arabia as the great emporium of trade for South Indian luxuries.

Thus the Arabs had commercial intercourse with South India from remote antiquity till the birth of Islam, unhampered by any power though with varying degree of intensity. There was no scope for Greeks and Romans to develop their maritime trade in Indian Ocean except for a brief span in the middle of the first century A.D. when the Romans took Egypt. Even that may not be called direct trade as they had to depend upon the Arab mariners for guidance in their voyages and they purchased most of the Indian goods from Arab traders. Geographically the Greeks had no direct and short sea route to India and they had to cross the Arab countries by land to reach India.

The Sangam literatures of the ancient Tamil country which are assigned to the second century A.D. speak much about a class of people called 'Yavanas'. The Yavanas are mentioned as traders, soldiers and artisans, in literature like Ahananuru,
Mullaippattu, Nedunalvadai, Perumpanarruppadi, Manimekalai, Madurai kanchi, Perungathal, seevagasinthamani and Silappadhikaram.

Scholars usually interpret the word 'Yavanas' as Greeks and Romans. Some scholars extend its application to all those who came from the west whether as intruders or as traders. It is also said that the word Yavana originates from Ionian, the People Ionian seas meaning the Greeks. It seems to be a very hard derivation for the purpose identifying the Yavanas with Greeks. Shahibul Qamus the well known lexinographer of Arabic language defines the word Yavana as a place name in Yaman in South Arabia.

Yunan is a place near Ballaback, in Syria. The Yavan which stood as a place name must have been the stronghold of Yavanas. A Muslim tribe in south west province of China, was known as Yunnan Chinese writers called the Khalifa of Bagdad as the King of Yunnan. According to Ceylonese tradition people who frequented the silk route, before the Arabs, were known as Yonas, a sibling of Semitic ethnicity. In some old Tamil poems, Yavanam is said to be one of the fiftysix countries around India and it denotes Arabia. The well known medical system of Arabia is "Unani" and it is prevalent in the same name even to this day.

The horse trade of Arabs in the early centuries of Christian era is well known. No Greek writer has mentioned that the Greeks and Romans exported horses to South India. The list of Periplus on the goods exported from Egypt, does not include horses. Whereas Arabs were pioneers in horse trade, and the Arab breed of horses were rated best.

The principal imports of the Arabs were cloth, gold, emerald, coral, wine, silk, furs, swords, Rose water, date and horses and exports were precious stones, pearls, crystals, odiferpus wood, cotton, silk, elephants, pepper, lead, camphor, cardamum, clove, nutmeg, orange, lemon and betel leaf.

The Roman trade with South India is evinced by the find of Roman coins in many parts of south India. These coins range from the time of Augustus to Antonius (27 B.C. to 161 A.D.). But is it correct to suppose that these coins came to India only as a result of the direct contact of the Romans? The only inference that we can draw from these finds is that the south Indian articles passed on to the Roman occupied territories. We know that for centuries, the Arabs were the middlemen of south seas and they used foreign gold coins as medium of exchange. It is also known that from Pliny and Periplus that the Romans even in the prime of their power were not able to exert their influence over Indian trade which
remained mostly in the hands of the Arabs. Hence there is good ground to suppose that the Roman coins found in South India were brought by the Arabs who planted their colonies here as early as second century B.C. and not exclusively by Roman as commonly held. Further it may be noted that the Himayarite Arabs were found to have minted coins on the Roman model and these coins imitate the Roman coins found in South India. It is therefore possible to assume that most of the Roman coins found in South India were perhaps minted at by the South Arabian themselves.

Some Tamil terms of South Indian articles of trade such as Arisi (rice) Inchi (ginger) pipeli (pepper) etc., were freely borrowed by the Greeks. But it will be seen that these words have their traces in Arabic language since they passed on through this medium.

From the foregoing discussions we can draw an inference that the word Yavana may denote the Arabs. The "Yavanacheri" (Yavana colony) of Perumgathai, the Tamil classic, can be said to be Agartharsida's Arab colonies of South India. These colonies were situated in the port towns. The Arabic form of port town is Bandar. (Mohamed Bandar, Shahidu Bandar) we find this word in Sangam Tamil literature to describe the ports like Kodumanal, as it was named and called by the Arabs. Hence we are lead to a safe conclusion that the Yavanas of Sangam literatures were the Arabs.

The Arabs came as traders and not as conquerers and they accommodated readily to the condition of the localities where profitable trade could be pursued. They settled under the protection of the authorities and acquired a privileged position. The Arabs were versatile in many skills and knowledge in many spheres of learning - as traders, manufacturers, navigators, warriors, geographers and as a scholars. The navigator Ibn Majid who conducted Vasco da gama from the east coast of Africa to Calicut, was a mariner, a merchant and a geographer who had compiled his own star atlas. The Arab settlements in South India after the birth of Islam, were conglomerate of Persians, Arabs, and Abyssinians, all Islamised, speaking Arab tongue, have for the sake of convenience been designated as Arabs who dominated the Indian region silk route.

The Arab merchants who came to the coastal region of peninsular India for the purpose of trade either contracted marriage or settled in their places of adoption and married local woman temporarily or permanently. The Arab mariners must have practised a sort of Mutā Marriage (temporary marriage with a woman for a stipulated period) while they were in the ports of South India. They usually married a local woman and stayed with her for a few weeks or months. Thus the advantage was two fold; they secured not only a
wife but also a place for board and lodge. The children born out of such marriages belonged to mother’s stock and remained with the mother\textsuperscript{22}. Thus the Arab colonies swelled in the coastal towns.

The Arab seafarers redoubled their efforts at oceanic commerce after the advent of Islam in the 7th century A.D. These traders Islamised, continuing the contacts of the pre-Islamic days settled in many ports of the western and eastern coasts. Thus large muslim communities came into existence through the marriage of local women to Arab Muslim sailors and merchants and grew further through local conversions made by these merchant missionaries. The women they consorted with and the people whom they converted belonged to different cultures but as Muslims they developed into a distinct community.

Owing to the link of the Arab merchants between Arabia and India and Ceylon, from very early times "the Mohamedan influence in Southern India and Ceylon dates back almost to the very inception of Islam" \textsuperscript{23}. The companions of Prophet Mohamed, Thamimul Ansari (Rali) and Mohamed Ukassa (Rali) migrated to the Indian coasts as zealous missionaries and settled in the eastern coast. Their tombs are at Kovalam and PorotNovo respectively. The tombs of the other earliest missionaries such as that of Kassim (Wali) A.H. 4/624 A.D., and Abdul Rahiman (Wali) A.H. 8/628 A.D. are found in Kottaru (Kanniyakumari District) and Kottharisa Hills (Thirunelveli District) respectively. Islam slowly penetrated in to the hinterland also. At the Chola capital Uraiyr, (modern Tiruchirappalli) the earliest mosque in Tamil Nadu can be seen. It is near the Kottai Railway Station in Tiruchirappalli town in the form of a small mandapam and the Arabic inscription here informs us that it was built by one Abdulla Bin Mohamed Anwar in A.H. 116/734 A.D.. So Islam got a firm footing on the Coromandel Coast and it’s hinterland even in the early years of Hijira\textsuperscript{24}.

The native Hindu rulers of South India like Rashtrakutas, Kakathias, Hoysalas, Pandyas and Zamorines encouraged settlements of the Muslim traders in their dominions offering special concessions and inducements because of the profitable foreign trade. Further, the Arabs were favoured because they supplied to the South Indian states, horse for their cavalry and men for manning their ships. In return the rulers assured safety to their merchandise and person. The Zamorine even gave them freedom to convert his subjects to Islam. He issued an edict that in order to get sufficient number of Muslims to man his navy, one or more male members of the Hindu fishermen should be brought up as Muslims\textsuperscript{25}. The Governments at the eastern coast also pursued similar enlightened policy towards the Arabs, and the port towns became welcome places to them\textsuperscript{26}. Because of the Arab Muslim intercourse, the ports of Coromandel commanded an extensive coastal and seaborne trade\textsuperscript{27}. 
As the Arab Muslim merchants settlements multiplied, in the course of time, they became an integral part of the population. They added a new pattern for culture and a new channel for intellectual commerce. The Arab merchants enjoyed the liberty of preaching their faith, to the natives. In this with a dual role in mind they moved close to the lowest classes to whom Islam symbolised emancipation, equality and prosperity. To the efforts of these merchant missionaries are to be ascribed the formation of the earliest community of Indian Muslims. Thus these traders cum preachers did much for the spread of Islam. They also brought with them Mallas, Sufis, Mystics and other religious teachers.

These Missionaries flourished on the evils of the Hindu society. The rigid caste system inflicted inequality, injustice and inequity on the low caste people. They were untouchables, never to rise in economic and social status and often harassed by the high caste people. With conversion, they entered the brotherhood of Islam, free from bondage and harassment with opportunity for uplift. Hence the preachings of Islam drew blocks of native people to it’s fold and thus the Arab Muslim colonies on the coasts of South India swelled both by increase in the number of Arab immigrants in pursuit of trade and by the inter related process of inter marriage and conversion. Ram Gopal has rightly pointed out “As a knife goes into a melon without much effort, so did Islam, penetrate in to South Indian castes.” Thus the Arab migrants of the early centuries of Hijira, stand as the progenetors of early Islamic communities of South India.

The Muslim population which integrated in the local society were influenced by Tamil culture. The early name "Yavana" disappeared from common usage and the Muslims of the east coast were known better, as Sonakar, or Jonakar (also in the same name in Malabar), Thurukkar or Thulukkan (in Coromandel). Epigraphs and literatures of the period from 8-9th centuries have innumerable reference on the community.

SONAKAR

The early Tamil name of the Muslims was Sonakar or Sonakan or Jonakan. Thivakaranigandu (treatise on synonyms and meaning of Tamil words) of 8th century calls the Yavanas as Sonakar. Pingalanthai Nigandu of a little later period also confirms this. The commentator Nachinarkinlyar of Pathupattu, the Sangam poetry, uses the word Sonagan wherever the word Yavana occurs.

In Sinhalise tradition, the Yavanas were called Yonakas based on Pali Yonna, meaning Arabs. Later the word Yonakar corrupted in to Sonakar and the Sonakars were recognised as the descendents of the Arabs. So Yonakar and the Sonakar were used to denote the same people. In ceylon Sonakar street is also known as
Yonakar street or Yon street even to this day. The official records of Ceylon called the Muslims population in Ceylon, as Sonakar. The earliest settlers among the Muslims of Ceylon are called as Ceylon Sonakar and the recent South Indian Muslim migrants are known as Indian sonakar. In Malayalam tradition also Yonaka stands for Sonaka. Sonakam in Tamil stands for Arabia.

An inscription of Raja Raja I in Thanjavur Big Temple mentions a Muslim merchant by name Sonakan Samur Paramch~thi. Another inscription of the same temple gives the name of an ornament as "Sonakan Siddukku". An inscription of Maravarman Sundara Pandia (1238 - 1257) mentions a mosque as Sonaka Palli (Palli-Mosque). We find ample references about Sonakars in Tamil literatures. A folk dance of Tamil Nadu was called as Sonaka Manjari. The Arabs, later the early Muslims, were considered to be foreigners and a tax was collected from them known as "Sonaka Vari". Many other inscriptions also mention Sonakars.

Thus the Muslim population of Coromandel, from eighth century, came to be called as Sonakars. It is also interesting to note that the Mapilla’s of Malabar were known as Sonaka Mapillas. Francis while writing about the Muslims of South Arcot district says that the term Sonagan applied (to both Labbais and Marakkayars) in the district. The Marakkayars of Ramanathapuram coast were known by the name Sonakar even in the last quarter of the nineteenth century according to a family document of the year 1881. (document No.535/1881 registered Ramanathapuram Registration office).

The remnants of the word Sonakar can be seen even to this day in the Muslim society of Coromandel. Muslims who are engaged in fishing activities go by the name Sonakan in many coastal villages and their habitation settlement is called Sonakavadi. They are considered to be in the lower strata of the present day Muslim society. There are place names such as Sonakan Vilai (Thirunelveli district) Sonakan Patti (Ramanathapuram district). The old name of Kayalpattanam was Sonagapattanam. There are Sonakan streets in Cuddalore, Tuticorin, Kayalpattanam, PortoNovo, Thondi, Manadapam, Vedalai and Kilakkarai. The long association of the Sonakars in the seafaring activities is suggested by the name of the fish like Sonakan Thirukkai (String ray) Sonakan Valai (Trichiurus maticus) and Sonagankezhuthi (Macronus punctatus).
THULUKKAR

The Muslims of Coromandel were also called as Thulukkar, along with Sonakar. Thulukkar, means the native of Turkey. Though all the Muslims who frequented Coromandel Coast had not come from Turkey, this term is very commonly and popularly applied to all the Muslims by the fellow Hindus. While the word Sonagan is very sparcely used, Tulukkan is in popular use even to this day.

Adiyarkkunallar the commentator of Silappadhikaram translates the word "Yavana" as Yavanathurukkar. Several Tamil literatures of later period also refer to the Muslims as Thulukkar. According to some scholars the word Thurushka came into use right from second century A.D since emperor Kanishka was Thurushka by ethnicity as mentioned in Kalphana's Rajatharangini. Sanskrit and Telugu literatures give the term Thurushka for Thurukkar. The Prasasthis of Vijayanagar kings include titles like Thulukka moham thavirhithan, Thulukka thalavipadan etc., (i.e those who defeated Muslims.) The Sultanate of Madurai in (14th century) was called Thulukkaniam and Thulukka avanam. Thulukkar settlements were called Thulukkanam.

Thulukkar and Thulukkan are very well rooted words in the Coromandel society to call Muslims, and this influence can be seen in all the spheres of life. Thulukkappoo (flower) Thulukkasamanthi (African Merigold) Thulukkamalligai, Thulukkappasali (Besella green) Thulukkappayar (Kidney Bean) Thulukka Kathazhai. There are place names like Thulukkanpatti (Virdunagar Tk) Thulukkankulam (Aruppakkottai Tk) Thulukkankurichi (Mudukulathur Tk) Thulukka Muthu (Avinasi Tk), Thulukkathandalam (Kanchipuram Tk).

ANJUVANNAM

In earlier times, the Muslim settlements of the coastal towns functioned as a guild for themselves, like the merchant guilds of the Hindus like Ainoorravar, and Valanjiar. The name Anjuvannam found in some copper plates and inscriptions of 12-13th century A.D. along with the names of other merchant guilds is considered
to be the merchant guild of the Muslims. Anjuvannam is a Persian word meaning assembly or congregation. An old mosque in Thenkasi (Thirunelveli Dt) is called "Anjuvannam Pallivasal" (mosque) even to this day. Scholars like Burnel believed it to be the guild of Jews or Christians. But we find the name Anjuvannam in the earliest Islamic Tamil literature, Palsandamalai (15th century A.D.) which makes it clear that it denotes the Muslim merchant guild. Such merchant guilds functioned from Kottayam, Thirthandathanapuram and Nagapattanam. So the Muslim merchants of the early settlements functioned as a guild for the promotion of their trading activities.

The Social Segments of the Muslims of Coromandel

The Muslims of Coromandel coast are socially organised themselves into segments or sub-divisions. They are Rawthar, Labbai, Marakkayar and Deccani. Mattison Mines includes Kayalar to this list. The Marakkayars who migrated from Kayalpattanam area are called as Kayalar in other places for easy recognition. It is essentially a territorial identification. When compared with the meaning and titles of other sub-divisions, the Kayalar sub-division seems to be superfluous. In the census report of 1891 of Madras Presidency some more peculiar sub-divisions among the Muslims are also given such as Puliankudiyar, Elayankudiyar, Musiriar, Vaigaikaraiyar, all denoting the place name from where they hail. These territorial identifications cannot be construed as social segments since such territorial identification is very common even among the Hindu castes and tribes. Hence Mattison Mine’s inclusion of the Kayalar as the social segment of the Muslims of Tamil Nadu needs a correction.

The social segments of the Muslims such as Rawthar, Labbai, Marakkayar and Deccani cannot be called as castes nor are they classes. (Caste is a distinctive feature of Hinduism and has no place in Islam). Social incompatibility with regard to either to intermarriage or interdining whether due to difference in race, occupation or geographical position is one of the most essential attributes of caste). No such characteristic elements are met with among these segments of the Muslims
since there is no bar for interdining and intermarriage. Further they are not hierarchically ranked like castes as all subdivisions are equal. But it is extremely difficult to distinguish one from another as they merge with each other. Despite distinctions of the sub divisions or segments the profession of Islam is a single distinctive religion to all of them.

The names of these sub divisions are rather occupational titles. It is behaviorally difficult to distinguish the sub divisions on the basis of the occupational distinctions. The facts relating to their origin indicate their occupational factors. The above social segments are in vogue for a very long time. These occupational titles are intermingled with one another. For example, the Labbai boatmen call themselves Marakkayars. Each segment or subdivision has a very fascinating derivations to the origin of the name. An attempt is made in the following pages to trace the etymology and sequence of these occupational titles of the Coromandel Muslim society.

RAWTHAR

A subdivision of the Tamil speaking Muslim society are called as Rawthar because of their association with horse trade, horse riding and training.

The flourishing horse trade between Arabia and east coast is referred to in the Sangam Literatures. During the medieval ages, the ports of Kilakkarai, Devipattanam and Kayalpattanam were busy centres for trade in horses. Marcopolo, Ibn Batuta, Wassaf and Rashiduddin give detailed accounts of horse trade in the Coromandel ports. The traders on horse were called "Kudirai Chettis" in inscriptions, irrespective of their religion.

Rawthar is generally stood for horsemen. Even Hindu rulers and soldiers were adorned with the title Rawthar. The Sanskritised form of horseman is "Rahootha" as found in epigraphs. Some of the Telugu rulers bore the title Rahootha Rayan. One of the titles of Raja Raja was Rahoothamindan. In an inscription of 1510 the name of one of the rulers of Kongu country is given as Paravatha Rawthar. Some mirasdars in Thanjavur district in 17-18th century had the title Rawthar and they are said to be expert horse riders. Some of the Telugu speaking people in Tamil Nadu are called "Ravuth".
which is considered to be a subcaste of Balija. It is also the title of some Kannadigas. These people might be the descendants of the soldiers employed in the military of Vijayanagar as horsemen or associated with horse riding or trade. It is interesting to note that the women folk of the Ravuth families follow some customs similar to that of Rawthar (Muslim) women.

The well known legend of the Siva Saint Manikkavasagar of the eighth century A.D. is connected with the purchase of horses for the Pandya king. In that the Lord Siva who appeared in disguise as a horseman to protect Manickavasagar and he is called by the name Rawthar. Lord Muruga is praised as Rawthar by saint Arunagiri. Thus the term Rawthar was also being used as a title of respect and honour.

Anyhow, "Rabithu" in Arabic, 'Ravuth" in Telugu "Rawthar" in Tamil, "Rahootha" in Sanskrit - all terms are titles connected with horse traders, cavalry soldiers, horse riding or training and this title was applied to all those who were connected with these activities; later it came to be retained by a section of Tamil speaking Muslims only. Thurston says that it was the title of Jonaga Muslims. When the horse trade was brisk, some of the Arabs and Persians might have been employed in the service of the local rulers to train the horses and for their unkeep. Those who stayed in Coromandel Coast and the hinterland courts of the rulers, chieftains and Zamindars, for this purpose, might have contracted matrimonial alliances with native women and their descendants came to be called as Ravuthar or Rawthar. Mattison Mine's averment that the Rawthar and Labbai "do not claim any Arab ancestry" is not correct.

Though the present day Rawthar Muslims are without horses and activities connected with it, the title Rawthar stayed among them and was faithfully followed to this day. There are many place names like Rawtharnatham (Kallakurichi Tk) Rawthanpatti (Kulithalai Tk) Rawthan Vayal (Pudukkottai Dt) Rawthananpayam (Thirunelveli Tk). These places might have been their early settlements or their stronghold. They remember their ancient trade and heroic valour in their marriage ceremonies and the bridegroom is conducted in procession on a horse. But this practice is fast disappearing.

At present there are many wealthy Rawthar Muslims engaged in different trades in the coastal towns and as well as in the hinterland.
LABBAI

Labbai is another general term used to denote the Tamil speaking Muslims. The census report of 1881, says that "the Labbais are known as Coromandel Moplas, with slight admixture of Arab blood and also native converts, they are thrifty, industrious and enterprising, plucky mariners and expert traders and they are distinct from Marakkayars. They are also called as merchant Mohamedans. The census report of 1891 describes them as a mixed class of people consisting partly compulsory converts to Islam made by the early Muslim invaders and Tippu Sultan. It is a fact that vast majority of Indian Muslims are converts. It is said that force was used on several occasions but the existing historical evidences does not enable us to estimate either the scale or the effectiveness of such conversions. The myth that Islam was spread by force with sword in one hand and the Quran on the other have no substance with regard to Coromandel Coast. Here the propagation of Islam was the achievement of peaceful traders and pious sufi missionaries.

The word Labbai seems to be of recent origin, for, in Tamil Lexicon this segment of the Muslims is denoted as Sonagan. The Labbais were textiles and mat weavers in inland, and ship crews, traders in marine products and expert, divers of pearl and chank fishery in the coastal belt. Even at present, both Labbai men and women in some areas earn their living by weaving korai mat. The Manual of Administration of Madras Presidency points out "The Lubbys are exceedingly industrious and enterprising in their habits and pursuits there being no trade or calling which they do not succeed. They are fishermen and boatmen. They are lapidaries, weavers, dyers, jewellers, bazaarmen, boatmakers, shop owners and merchants. Tamil is their mother tongue. In religion they are orthodox Muslims. Thurston says that their title is Rawthar and Marakkayar". But the Marakkayars consider themselves better than Labbais.

Col. Wilks derives the word Labbai from Arabic "Labbaik" (here I am) in the sense of a servant or a slave. However, in the strict Islamic sense, the term denotes a religious teacher or a priest or Khazi and it accords with the Hebrew word "Levai" meaning, a priest. The Labbai-Priests, mullas and Khazis are popularly known among the
Muslims of Tamil Nadu as Labbai. It is correct to infer it in this sense. It is also used in the same sense by the Indonesian Muslims\(^2\). However, in due course of time, this term stayed as the title of a subdivision of Tamil speaking Muslims alone.

But the term Labbai is very liberally used by European writers to denote most of the Muslims of Coromandel Coast. Prosperous traders and shipowners among the Marakkayars are also mentioned as Labbai in the European trading company records, as will be described in detail in the subsequent chapters.

"Labbai" is considered to be a class name for the purpose of educational concessions, in Tamil Nadu at present.

**MARAKKAYARS**

The Marakkayars are the dominant group of Muslims in the Coastal town of Coromandel in numerical strength and wealth. Their settlements are essentially urban in character. Most of the Marakkayars are associated with seafaring and maritime activities. The European company records contain a lot of informations about them.

The origin and meaning of the term Marakkayar has been obscured and confused because scholars associate it indiscriminately with other subdivisions of the Muslims. Thurston the authority on Castes and Tribes of southern India has contradicated himself while giving definitions of various subdivisions of Muslims of Coromandel "Ravuthar or Rowthar" according to him "is a title used by Labbai and Marakkayar\(^3\). In the account on Labbai he says that "their titles are Marakkayar (Marakkalam) and Rawthar (a horsemen)\(^4\). The gazetteer of Ramanathapuram known as Marakayars or Rawthar\(^5\).

Different scholars derive the word Marakkayar from different languages and give various interpretations. Francis derives the word Marakkayar from Arabic "Markab". The story goes that when the first batch of Muslim migrants landed ashore they were naturally asked who they were and whence they came. In answer, they pointed their boat and pronounced the word "Markab" and they in consequence came to be known to the Hindus
as Marakkayars or the people of Markab. We are not sure how the word Markab could corrupt as Marakkayar. The forefathers of other Muslim subdivisions also came in boats or marakkalams or Markab. Quadir Hussain Khan says the word should be taken from the Arabic word Markab or Tamil word Marakkalam.

Thurston again says "there is some confusion concerning the exact application of the name Jonagan but I gather that it is applied to sea fisherman and boatmen while prosperous traders are called Marakkayars." The Glossary of Madras Presidency traces the word Marakkar, in Malayalam, Marakkalam, Mara=boat + Kar the plural termination showing possession. Some ingenious Marakkayars trace the term, to Egyptian Quohira or Cairo and the Tamil word "Marai" and attribute it to their knowledge of Koran and Egyptian origin (Maraikkahiriyor). Plausible as both these derivations are, they indicate the desire of the Marakkayars to rise themselves in popular estimation. Their ancestors did not come from Cairo nor could their learning have been so well known among the Tamil as to win for them the name with such a significance.

Strange and funny derivations of the term from the shape of the cap of Muslims like Marakkal, a devise to measure grain and from their assumption that they were so rich that they measured their wealth in marakkal, is also given. To some Marakkayars it is a corruption of Moraccar, or Moraccoyar, i.e. settlers from Morocco. To Logon, the term Marakkar is an abrivation of Margakaran (follower of law) and it was applied as a title to persons of christianity and Islam. Another Common and popular later derivation is from Marakkala Rayar ; the leader or owner of marakkalam or boat (Marakkalam + Rayar = Marakkalarayar) like other Araiys like Vanatharaiyar, Vallatharaiyar, Kalingatharaiyar. Most of the writers who follow this derivation, say that the Marakkayars (Muslims) were the lords of marakkalam. Almost all the writers on Muslims use this derivation.

Noboru Karashima while citing the word Marakkalanayan found in a Tamil inscription of eleventh century, in Sumatra (now in Jakarta Museum) would argue that the word seems to relate to the term Marakkayar used to denote the seafaring muslim merchants of Tamil Nadu and Kerala coasts in later period. Some other writers also have referred to this
inscription and said the term marakkalanayan is the old form of the term Marakkayar the ship owning Muslims 84. But the term nayan or nayakan will generally mean as leader, captain or owner. So, marakkalanayan will denote a ship owner, ship captain or a ship commander. Kambararamayanam would call Guhan as the leader or owner of a thousand boats. Thirukkaranapuranam, the Islamic Tamil literature of nineteenth century mentions the owner of a ship as Marakkalarayan. It is our argument here that the word Marakkalanayan, Marakkalanayakan, Marakkalarayan etc., are general terms to denote seafaring people including the Muslims and it does not show any relevance only to Marakkayars, the Muslims as printed out by the above scholars and the origin has to be traced elsewhere85.

The present day Marakkayars consider a copper plate believed to have been granted by Jayaveera Rajaguru Nayani, during nineteenth century, A.D., as their birth certificate, since the word "Marakkalarayar" appears in that plate, as the title conferred upon Mohamed Khalji, the leader of the fugitives from Kaitrun (Cairo) who settled at Kaithrunpattanam or Kayalpattanam84. On this basis, perhaps the Marakkayars claim their descent from Egypt. The historicity and authenticity of this copper plate is doubtful 87.

Khan Sahib Mohideen Kadarsha Marakkayar of Tuticorin Marakkayar Mahal, had circulated a phamplet on 7.1.1919, purportedly to be the true copy of the above copper plate.

According to the copper plate, fearing the tyranny of the Arab rulers of Misru, some 228 members, men and women and slaves under the leadership of one Mohamed Khalji, sailed in a ship and reached Sembinadu ruled by Abirama Adiveera Raja Jayaveera Rajaguru Nayani. Khalji, appealed to the ruler for a copper plate grant which was issued. Since the settlers migrated from Kaitrun, the ruler in the copper plate named the place of their settlement as Kaitrunpattanam and the settlers were given the name Marakkalarayar, since they came in a Marakkalam. The date of the copper plate is given as Keelaga, 798. The new settlers were conferred with liberal land grants, tax concessions, and right in pearl fishery in the region.

According to the explanatory note for the copper plate as given in the phamplet that the geneology of the families of the settlers is traced to those of Prophet Mohamed and the
khaliphs Abubakkar, Umar, Farook and Uduman. Jayaveera Raja Garu is identified as the Chola who ruled from Madurai as the 74th Pandya king. The terms Marakkayar and Ravuthar are derived from Marakkalarayar and Ranuvayukthar respectively. Kaitrunpattanam is said to be the present Kayalpattanam. The date has been calculated as April 875 A.D. We have no information about the whereabouts of the original copper plate. The Marakkayars and Rawthars quote this copper plate in discussions about their origin and antiquity. (Text given in the annexure).

Even a superficial scrutiny of the text of the copper plate exposes several anachronisms, inaccuracies and paleographical errors. In the entire genealogy of the Pandyas there is no reference to any Chola or Pandya by the name Jayaveera Raja Garu, which denotes a Telugu chieftain. The date 875 AD is untenable. There is no possibility of any part of Tamil Nadu being ruled by a Telugu chieftain more or less from Madurai in the ninth century AD. The name of the ruler and the terms like Nayakkar and Thalavai, Urkkaval, Nattukkaval, Palayakkaval and Palayathar are paleographic anachronisms and are inconsistent with the antiquity claimed for the copper plate. If at all this copper plate is a genuine one, if not spurious, it should be assigned to the period of Nayak rule and could not be dated before the sixteenth century.

The Marakkayars quote this copper plate as their birth certificate and also for claiming antiquity of their origin, titles, higher status among the fellow Muslims, political validation for their claims and their rights in maritime activities in this soil. It is a fact that among the Muslims of Coromandel the population of Marakkayars was much higher. They were also economically strong. Sociologically, a segment or a subsegment of a particular group or community which is numerically and economically strong, will project before the fellowmen, their status, by associating some myths and eulogy to justify their status in the society and thereby establishing their rights in every field of human activities.

In the similar way this copper plate might have been invented by the Markkayars in a period when their claims were in question. According to the copper plate, they claim a direct line of descendance from the Prophet Mohamed and the first four Khaliphs.
No doubt this is to enhance their ethnological superiority over other segments of Islamic society. They have tried to quote political recognitions given to them by a ruler to the territory. They also trace the term Marakkayar from nineth century. Above all the copper plate contemplates their professional right in pearl fishing, salt manufacture etc., as granted by the rulers of the territory from a very long time. Thus a critical analysis of this copper plate, will go to show the intention of the Marakkayars in focusing it for claiming a higher status over the other segments, besides, to establish their professional rights in maritime activities which was threatened by the Paravas and the advent of the Europeans. Hence this copper plate can be said to be a sociological (folk) charter than a historical document, and it is clearly doubtful to assign an early date i.e. 9th century, to the term Marakkayar, as given therein.

The Sinhalese called the Arab traders as "Marakkala Mininsu" meaning a mariner or a boatmen. Marakkala Mininsu is a corruption of Markar mininsu. In Ceylonese coasts the prosperous Malabaris (Sonagars) were called Markar. In the 15-16th centuries all the prosperous Sonaga Malabaris were known under the title Markar. Markar came to be spelt as Marakar, Marikar and Maricar at later periods. In the old family documents of the Muslims of Ceylon their ancestors are noted as only Marican.(not Marakar). But this term is not in use in Ceylon at present. It is interesting to note that at present many of the Marakkayars of Karaikkal region style themselves only as "Marikan".

We have seen that the Malabaris were called in Ceylon as Marakars, and it is commonly held to denote the people from Malabar, the Malayalam speaking region or west coast of peninsular of India. But linguistic studies reveal a very interesting information on this point that the Malabaris are none else than the Tamil speaking Sonagars. Two books, Thambiran Vanakkam (1578) and Adiyar Vanakam (1586) were printed and published in Kottayam. It was said to have been printed in Malabari language and the script was believed to be in Malayalam. But when the originals were made available recently, it was found to have been printed in Tamil and that the script is mentioned in the book itself as Malabari. With this we come to know that Tamil language was also called as Malabari and the Tamils as Malabaris from sixteenth century. Ananda Rangapillai the famous Dubash of Dupleux, in Pondicherry was called as, "les chef des Malabaris", (the chief of Tamils) by the French and the natives. So the Malabaris who bore the title Markar later Marakar are the Coromandel Muslims.
From the indigenous records available at our disposal as at present, the authentic reference to the word Marakkayar is found only in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. The early reference to the name Marakkayar is found in the sixteenth century Islamic Tamil literary work, Mihuraj Malai. It is the Portuguese records of sixteenth century which mention very often the title of some prominent Muslim shipowners and maritime traders as "Maracar". It is variously written in those records, as Marccar, Marcar, Mercar, Merquar, Marcoy, Markar and Marakar. The first reference to this term in the Portuguese record is in the year 1504.

When the Portuguese arrived in Malabar coast, they found here some people similar to their old enemies, the Muslim (Moor) conquerors of Spain. The Portuguese called them Moors, as named by the Spanish chronicles which is synonymous with Arabs or Seraceans. In general the Muslims were known only as Moors to the Portuguese. Their records also mention the Muslims only as "Moors". The other early European records too mention the Muslims of east coast as Coromandel Moors. But the prosperous and influential shipowners and maritime traders were referred to under the title "Marcar" in the early Portuguese records, such as Ismale Merquar (1504), Cherina Marcar (1512), Mamale mercar (1512), Pate Mercar (1557), Mouro Mayane Mercar (1553) and Cunhale Mercare. These references lead us to a satisfactory clue about the etymology of the term Marakkayar.

The Muslims of west coast who were engaged in the seafaring activities were generally called as "Marakan" in Malayalam, meaning a sailor, steamerman, a commander, a rank among the fishermen and Mapillas and a title given to the Mapillas. Dalgoda says that the term Maracar and Marcar (similar to Ceylonese usage) originates from Marakan, meaning a ship commander and the title of the Muslims of Malabar. The Tamil Lexicon traces the word Marakkayar from the root word "Marakan" in Malayalam. The Palli fishermen of Telugu country are called as Marakkallu which is equivalent to the term Marakan. It will be seen that the early Sonaga Muslims who were active in seafaring activities in west coast were called as Marakan and the prosperous among them alone were called with respect as "Maracar" or Marakar (Maracan - singular, Maracar - honorific plural).
The Portuguese used this plural honofiric form to address the leading Muslim traders and ship owners, as recorded in their early records. Since the Tamil Muslims - also known as the Malabaris - were having free trade contact with the west coast, the title Marakkar would have been applied to them also. According to Mapilla tradition, the Marakkayars were originally the maritime merchants of Cochin. The Diaries of Malabar second commission 1789 and the Matilakam records contain instances where the title Marakkar was conferred on distinguished Mapillas by the rulers as late as 18th century\textsuperscript{106}. The boat owning Muslims of Cochin are still called as Marakar and their women are called Marakkathi\textsuperscript{107}. Thus in the long course of time, only the term Maracan (from Malayalam) came to be spelt as Marakar, Maricar, Marican, Maraikkayar, Marakkarayar and Marakkayar, which in our view, seems to be the correct etymological derivation.

Since it was the practice to call the most prosperous traders among the Jonagan or Sonagan sea fishermen and boatman as Maracar. Infact, those in the other subdivision who have touched the great heights in wealth and status aspire for the badge of Maracar or Marakkayar and got admitted into the Marakkayar fold. Indeed the title was conferred on the chosen few and not on all and sundry. Hence the Marakkayars represented the cream, the elite of all the subdivisions or segments in the areas where they predominate. But in the course of time the term was more generously applied to all the coastal Muslims, irrespective of their social standing.

Among the Marakkayars of the Coromandel Coast, we find some more sub-groupings with titles like Thandaiyar, Nagudha, Malumi, Sukkani etc.. They suffix these appellations also with their names (like Marakkayar). For example, Ismail Marakkayar, Abdulkadar Nakhuda, Abubakar Malumi, Farook Thandaiyar or Thandel, Sulaiman Sukkani etc.. All these titles are connected with seafaring and shipping occupation. Aini - I - Akbari of Abul Fazal gives the following classes of personnel in the management of the ships. \textit{Nakhuda or Nakhoda} : - the owner or captain of the ship who fixes the course of the ship. \textit{Maulim or Malumin} : - the navigator, he must be acquainted with the depth and shallow of the sea, know astronomy and guide the direction of the ship. \textit{Tundel (Thandal, Thandel, Thandayar)} : - the chief sailor or buffer.
Shirang: for superintending and landing the ship, the yardmaster, Bandari: Accountant Sukkanger or Sukkani: helmsman who steers the ship according to the advice of the malumis. Panjari: Who looks out from the top of the mast, gives notice when sea, land or ship or storm, are sighted. Gumti, Toppaales, Kharava are other common sailors or Kalasis. Almost all these sub titles can be seen among the Muslims of the coastal towns who call themselves Marakkayars. There are Malumiar and Sherang streets in Nagore and other places.

A section of Muslim Marakkayars engaged in fishing activities are also known as Sammatis. The vessel used for fishing is called Samban, and it’s captain Sambanoti, which had corrupted to Sammatti. The Marakkayar fisherman of Ramanathapuram coast are called by the title Sammati also. They are known as Sammankanar in Ceylon.

There are also some other interesting occupational titles among the Muslims of Coromandel. Kodikkal Karan (Betal vein growers) Achukkatti (Makers of weaving device) Panju Katti (Cotton labourers) Kuthiraikatti Rawthar (Horsemens) Yanikatti Rawthar (Elephant mahout).

Thus the Muslims of Coromandel Coast (Tamil Nadu) are divisible into main subdivisions (social segments) like Marakkayars, Rawthar and Labbai and these subdivisions are not caste names but only titles, which are occupation oriented. There is no religious bar for intermarriage and interdining, among these subdivisions. The only difference is that Marakkayars are Shafis, and Labbais and Rawthars are Hanafis of the Sunnite Muslim sect.

The Muslims of present generation do not affix their age old titles and appellations like Rawthar, Labbai and Marakkayar with their names, except for limited purposes like marriage and educational concessions. Majority of the Marakayar businessmen who are affluent in the society suffix "Sahib" with their names instead of Marakkayar. Following their ancient traditions, the Marakkayars of Kayalpattanam, Kilakkarai, Devipattanam, Nagapattanam, Adirampattanam and other coastal towns own business concerns in various countries.
CHOLIAS

The Records of the Dutch, English and Danish trading companies refer to the Coromandel Muslims as Chullias, Cholias or Choolias in general. Almost all the travellers in the medieval and modern India call the Muslims of the Coromandel as Chullias or Choolias. The term Cholia was originally a territorial name, meaning an inhabitant of Chola country. It applied to the people of all castes and religions. But in due course of time, the Muslims alone were called by this term in Ceylon, Burma and Southeast Asian Countries, since mostly Muslims went to these countries for trade. There are Cholias streets in Singapore and Burma. There are Cholia Muslim Associations in Burma, Malaya and Singapore.

DECCANIS

The Deccanis or Dakhnis or Pattanis are the Urdu speaking people in the hinterland of Tamil country.

After the invasion of Mohamed Bin Kasim into India in 712 A.D., the families of Gazini, the slaves, Khilji, Tuglaque and Mughal dynasties and the Deccani Sultans established their authority and ruled India from twelfth century A.D. After the invasion of Malik Kafur in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, Muslim rule extended beyond the Vindhyas and the soldiers of the Muslim army and administrators had to stay in the Carnatic region for political purposes. Their descendants came to be called as Dakhinis (Deccanis= From Deccan) and Pattani (from Pathan) by the fellow Muslims. Their mother tongue is Urdu. Urdu language is the combination of Arabic, Persian and Hindustani languages, which was in use among the soldiers of Muslim army and later became an independent language. The Deccanis also learnt Tamil which they call "Arvil".

After the decay of the Sultanates of Deccan, there was a large scale migration of these people to the Arcot Subedari. They got the patronage of the Nawabs. Their descendants settled in North Arcot, South Arcot and Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, Madurai and Rammad districts. After the fall of the Nawabs of Arcot they resorted to various trades and professions such as tannery, cigar making, manufacture of decorative wares and ornamental cloth.

The major muslim communities such as Marakkayar, Labbai and Rawthar are the descendants of the Arabs, where as the Deccanis are of Turkish or Mangoloid descent. They are all orthodox Sunnites and profess Hanfi faith. However, they are part of the present day minority Muslim community. They are also declared as educationally backward in Tamil Nadu.
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