Chapter VI

MARITIME ACTIVITIES OF MUSLIMS

Part I

The land division of the coastal region according to the Tamil tradition is called, Neithal. Naturally people living in Neithal land had to depend on the sea and its products for their livelihood. Their occupations were centered round the sea. An old Tamil poem describes the occupation and activities of the people of Neithal as follows: boating, chank and pearl fishing, swimming, in search of marine products, fishing, guiding about the rocks under the sea and the sea currents, selling fish, manufacture of salt, predicting astronomical data and weather conditions, to sail in ships and undertaking voyages to other countries for trade. From very ancient times all these maritime occupations were undertaken by low castes among the native Hindus who were called Parathavars (later known as Paravas). For, the upper Hindu castes, i.e. dwija or twice born castes crossing the sea was prohibited by custom. Therefore generally the upper caste Hindus did not take up maritime activities involving seafaring. During the middle ages a sizable population of the coastal region was Islamised and they followed all these maritime activities particularly the Marakkayars and Labbais. For the voyages on the sea and across the seas the people of the Neithal used various kinds of vessels. The names of such vessels used by the ancient Tamils are found in the Tamil literatures down from Sangam Age. A few of them are vangam, umpi, nawai, dhoney, kalam, madhalai, pathai, punai, thonnai, paru, podam, panri, thimil, pattihai, paduvai, midavai and odam. The word Kappal seems to be a very late derivation, by about 17th century. The parts of these vessels are also described in detail in these literatures.

The maritime activities of the early Muslim traders of the Coromandel Coast was closely linked with the spread of Islam and Muslim settlements. There were powerful incentives for the Muslims to pursue commercial activities. Prophet Mohamed himself was a trader and what was done by him was a sunnat (tradition) for the Muslims. Further, Quaran declares that Allah has allowed trading. (Quaran : 2 : 275). At the time of rise of Islam in the seventh century A.D. the Persians and the Arabs from West Asia and the Malays from Southeast Asia shared the trade of the Indian ocean via Coromandel ports to the great centres of Malacca, Ceylon and Cambay. As summed up by Toussaint " with the advent of Islam..."
in the seventh century A.D., the Arabs conquered Persia, controlled the persian Gulf. Under the Abbasid kaliphs - Islamic sea power was at it’s height. With the decline of the Abbasids in the tenth century A.D. and the rise of Fatimides in Egypt, the centre of Islamic sea power shifted from Persian Gulf to Red Sea, while Muslim colonies developed in east Africa and peninsular India.10.

The spread of Islam paved the way for the emergence of powerful Muslim trading communities in peninsular India. Peninsular India occupies a central position in this region and it’s vital role in trade is undeniable. With the rise of Islamic power in West Asia, the Muslims lost no time in spreading their influence in the ports of peninsular India. Among the Hindu communities along the coast with whom they had already established friendly and close trade relations they also tried to spread their new faith, Islam. In the course of time, Arab settlements grew into powerful native Muslim trade settlements.

Malabar was a vital link in Muslim trade in the Indian ocean. The Chola sea power was a serious obstruction in the eleventh century to the growth of Muslim influence. One of the first important measure taken by Chola Raja Raja I towards the end of the tenth century A.D., was to secure Malabar coast in an engagement off Kandalur Chalai and to conquer the Lacdives and Maldives islands. This was intended to curb the Arab influence in Indian ocean trade. After the decline of the Chola power in the twelfth century the Muslim influence increased, and they enjoyed a dominant role in the sea borne trade of the region11.

The Coromandel ports became the favourable settlements of the Muslim traders. Kayal was the principal port, in the thirteenth century where Muslims were principle traders. It was also the chief port of trade with Ceylon, Malacca and Persian gulf. Kilakkarai, Devippattanam, Tondi and Nagapattanam also became busy ports, and important Muslim centres of trade. These maritime towns played a crucial economic role in the pre-colonial Coromandel Coast. The import of war horses was one of the earliest specialities. By the early fourteenth century, the armies of Pandya rulers were supplied with west Asian horses, shipped in by the Muslim traders to Kayal, Periapattanam and Kilakkarai from the great international entrepots of the Persian gulf.

In this, an important agency had been established here by an Arab Chief who is described by Muslim historians as Malikul Islam Jamalludin the ruler of Kis. He was very influential in Pandyan Kingdom. The establishment of this agency was necessiated by the growth of horse trade. According to the account of Wassaf,
as many as 10,000 horses were imported into the Coromandel ports of which Jamaludin's own breed was considerable. The most important item of trade from Arabian ports were indeed horses. Marco Polo who visited Kayal at the end of thirteenth century has left detailed record about the horse trade at Kayal. Kayal was also an important link in horse trade to Ceylon. The diverse Muslim communities of peninsular India had a significant role to play in the Indian ocean trade in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries until they were ousted by the European powers. By the end of twelfth century, the naval power of the Cholas and the Sylendras completely declined and many mercantile communities of peninsular India began to claim a major role in Indo-Ceylon trade and as well as trans oceanic trade. Soon they were able to secure a dominant role in the maritime trade of India and an enviable share of the seaborne trade in Malacca, Indonesian islands, Java, Aden and Maldives. The Muslims controlled much of the region's trade in gem stones and pearls. Many Muslim port centres also served as outlet for the international trade in cotton piece goods. After the destruction of Bagdad in the middle thirteenth century by Mongoles, the Arab activities in the East became restricted. In fact at the end of fifteenth century the Arabs had lost their supreme position in the seaborne trade. The Gujarathi Muslims and Tamil Muslims had taken over from the Arabs the dominant role in the Indian ocean trade.

The fifteenth century Chinese sea farers comment on the commercial link of Nagapattanam with Sumatra, Java and Burmese coasts. In the sixteenth century Adirampattanam, Kilakkarai Nagapattanam, PortoNovo and Pulicat were among the region's most active textile export centres: Muslim sea going men from Pulicat and Nagapattanam carried Coromandel piece goods to Mocha, Malacca and Burma. Even in the late nineteenth century, these Muslim ports still had links with great international exchange centres of Indonesian archipelago and Malay Peninsula.

The Gujarathi Muslims handled much of the trade to Aden, Malacca, Sumatra and in Bay of Bengal. Around the same time, Tamil Muslim traders played an influential role in the Southeast Asian trade though not perhaps to the same extent as the Gujarathis. Pearson says that details are unfortunately not available but it is clear from the evidence we have in the Malay annals regarding the affluence and political influence enjoyed by the Tamil Muslims in the Kingdoms of Malacca, Java, in the fifteenth century, and the significant role they played in the trade of the Malay world. The Gujarathi Muslim ships might have freighted for the Coromandel Muslims, when they touched the coast.
The religious ties and associations of the converts, with foreign Muslims gave them a new field of service in the mercantile towns. The increase in the number of ships in trading activities necessitated more personnel to man them. Thus sailors and labourers for the shipping activities increased. They took such jobs in the ships and were ready to travel for a long distance. They also entered into trade in a variety of subsidiary roles such as brokers, jobbers and retailers. The poorest among them became porters and packers. The native Muslims were the channel through which foreign goods were distributed either on barter or for money among the people. There were many others who were in the upper strata of the society and they enjoyed a better position. It is possible that such people were mainly the traditional trading communities who were converted to Islam and the growing influence of Islam facilitated their uplift. Along with the Muslims, the Chettiars were profitably engaged in ocean trade. Their economic power was bigger and not comparable to that of the Muslims.

The men who took Islam across the Bay of Bengal were the members of mercantile communities. Tamil Muslim merchants had done a lot in this direction. The Gujarathi Muslims also had served for this cause but the Tamil influence was found deep rooted. It was principally the efforts of these small groups of scribes, mystics, missionaries to a lesser degree their mercantile patrons coupled with political and economic ambitions of the local rulers that set Islam on the march across the Malay world. Marco Polo who visited Sumatra in 1292 mentions about the Muslim traders who influenced the natives of the place to embrace Islam. Most of these merchants may be from Coromandel since the Muslims of many islands of the Southeast Asian region had adapted as their own the prefixes like Labbai.

The influence of Tamil Muslims was so tremendous that it had an impact on the political course of Malacca from fifteenth century. They played a significant role in the political life of these countries. Through diplomatic ties, marriages, presents and general goodwill, these Muslims became great favourites with the kings and obtained many concessions. They became not only prominent in commerce of the ports but gradually became powerful force in the Royal court intrigues of Malacca and were in a position to make kings and ministers.

The third ruler of Malacca, Raja Ibrahim was dethroned and murdered in a coup, by a Tamil Muslim, led by his elder brother Raja Kasim, in the year 1446. Raja Kasim’s mother was the daughter of a rich Tamil merchant from Pase. The Tamil uncle Tun Perak was
instrumental in placing Raja Kasim on the throne. After this, Malacca became a Muslim political power of first rank. Tun Perak was also responsible for the territorial expansion of Malacca and for the defeat of the Siamese. Thus he extended his influence over the commercial and foreign policies of Malacca. Tun Perak and his successors were very powerful and were the real rulers; the rulers on the throne were only figure heads. Tamil Tun Ali was one of the Shabandar. Malacca was the most important commercial centre in Southeast Asia during this period as well as a main diffusion centre of Islam. Malacca’s greatest achievement in propagating Islam was the conversion of Java.

It was at this stage that the role of Muslims was seriously affected by the intrusion of the Portuguese in Indian waters. The Muslims were subordinated and ruthlessly attacked, and eventually Muslim trade began to decline. The effect of Portuguese presence was more in Malabar coast and less in Coromandel. Hence Muslims of Coromandel were continuing their trade ventures with the Southeast Asian countries. The Portuguese appeared in Malacca waters as early in 1510 as the rivals of the Tamil Muslims in trade and politics. The Portuguese were hostile to the Muslims where ever they found them, in their homeland as well as in the far off lands where they traded. The Tamil Muslims persuaded the Sultan of Malacca to take stringent action against the Portuguese. However Malacca was captured by Portuguese in 1511 and the Sultan escaped to the island of Bentang in the straits of Singapore. Thereafter the Tamil Muslim traders avoided Malacca and transferred their trade interest to Brunei, Johore, Perak, Ache and other trade emporias in Southeast Asia, which became new centres of Islam and they became the allies of the rulers of the respective countries. It can be said here that the Coromandel trade and Islamisation went hand in hand in the region in that we find a striking similarity with the activities of the Portuguese though the methods were different.

However the failure of the Sultan to thwart the portuguese at Malacca appears to have given added stimulus to the spread of Islam over much of the Malay world. In this the Tamil Muslim merchants enjoyed the great advantages in Malaccan Muslim ports, than the Hindus. In due course of time, they emerged as the sole shippers in Malacca. Thus the Muslim merchants kept up their trade alive because of the active support of royal courts in Southeast Asia and also by some native rulers like Sethupathis in Coromandel.

The Portuguese favoured the Chettiar merchants to keep the Malacca trade going on. Similarly they gave preferential treatment to the Paravas in maritime trade of Coromandel. But the Hindu merchants
found it extremely difficult to compete with their Muslim colleagues and were compelled to sell or rent their remaining shipping or otherwise port to port conveyance of goods in Muslim vessels and confined themselves to the transactions on money lending and brokage. The same sort of changeover took place among the Tamil Hindu merchants of Coromandel Coast also\textsuperscript{23}.

Textiles constituted the major portion of exports during fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. Cotton piece goods with gold thread were exported from Pulicat, Mylapore, PortoNovo, Nagapattanam and Nagore, to Malacca, Sumatra, Borneo, Siam, Tennaserim, Pegu, Persia, South Arabia and other Red Sea ports. Animal skins were sent to Batavia for being sent to Japan. Indigo was exported from PortoNovo. Slaves were exported to Ceylon and other Eastern countries from Pulicat, PortoNovo, Nagapattanam and Tuticorin. The Muslim traders vigorously took part in these trading activities.

The major category of import was pepper and spices. They were imported into Coromandel from Malabar both by land and sea, and also from the Southeast Asian ports, particularly Ache. This shows pepper was cheap in Sumatra and transport cost was not very high. Nutmeg, cloves and cardamom came from Southeast Asian ports and cinnamon came from Ceylon. Elephants, horses, tin, copper and dyes were other items of import. Tin, a commodity of demand in Coromandel was imported from Ache, Malacca, Perak, Kedah, Ayuthya, Tennaserim and Ujang-Salang, Copper came from Ayuthaya and Tennaserim and lead from Burma. Camphor and incense, the major items in South Indian rituals came from Japan and Southeast Asia.

The neighbouring island of Ceylon supplied a variety of goods like pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, pulmyrah, coconut, coir products and areca to Coromandel. An important item of import was the elephants, the speciality, of the merchants of Coromandel Coast. The elephants came from Ache, Kedah, Perak, Tennaserim, Pegu, Thailand and Ceylon to the ports of PortoNovo and Nagapattanam. Muslim rulers and Nayaks purchased them for their army. Palayakkars and chieftains of the region purchased them to keep up their dignity and prestige. Horse trade was not so attractive in the Coromandel from seventeenth century. A few imports only were reported from Persia and later from Ache. The merchants brought silver and precious stones from various centres to Coromandel in return for their goods. The Coromandel Muslims utilised the patronage of the Sultans of the Southeast Asian countries and also worked together with the traders of those countries and carried on a flourishing trade\textsuperscript{24}. 
In Malacca, the Tamil Muslims were active businessmen and the Coromandel goods were sold at a profit of 50 to 100% after deducting 18% freight charges and other duties. The role played by these klings, as they were called, was very important. But they were generally known as Cholias in many towns of Malacca. The habitation of these Muslims was called Cholia street. Tamil was prevalent well and it was the language for trade in Malacca. Well to do families in Malacca made their children to learn Tamil.

The Cholia Muslims were in dominant status in Ayutha and Pegu. They held high offices in the Island of Ujang Salang and in the neighbouring Bengari and one of the Cholia Muslims was its governor during the last quarter of the seventeenth century. The Coromandel Muslims were so rich that they purchased ships built in Kedah, and Johore and one such trader is identified as a Marakkayar from PortoNovo. The rulers of Kedah and Johore sent their ships to the Coromandel ports where the Cholia merchants negotiated goods for them. Thus the Coromandel trade was initiated both ways. A Coromandel Labbai was a prominent alley of the Sultan of Jahore and he was the economic advisor of the region.

However, the establishment of the trading companies by the Dutch, English, Danes, and the French and the residual trade of Portuguese, was a stiff competition to the Tamil Muslim merchants, in the Southeast Asian ports. When the Dutch took over Malacca in 1641, the Coromandel Muslims traded with the passes issued by the Dutch. The Dutch had no violent religious feud with the Muslims but considered them as their main trade rivals.

From the third quarter of seventeenth century, the Cholia Muslims of PortoNovo, Devanampattanam, Nagore, Nagapattanam and Tranquebar undertook vast trade to Bantam. In this they utilised the help of the Danes in Tranquebar. The Danes had six large ships which were set apart solely for freight to Bantam. The Coromandel Muslims well utilised this freight service. About 150 merchants could sail in a ship with their merchandise. The main commodity of export was textiles and the merchants returned with a variety of goods but mainly with gold and silver bullions. The Coramandel Muslim traders entered into partnership with the merchants of Java, Malaya and Borneo who were trading in Bantam ports. The Sultan of Bantam himself was a trader prince and he was the chief trader in his ports.
His ships sailed to Pulicat, PortoNovo and Nagapattanam. The Coromandel Muslims acted as his agents in these ports. The Sultan of Bantam bought vessels from Coromandel, probably from Nagapattanam and PortoNovo Muslim ship builders. The Coromandel Muslims undertook southward trade to Ceylon, Malabar and Maldives. The volume of trade in this direction was great. About 250 vessels plied between Jaffna and Coromandel ports, most of them belonged to the Coromandel Muslims. The Muslims of PortoNovo, Nagore, Nagapattanam, Adirampattanam, Muthupettai, Tondi, Kilakkarai, Kulasekarapattanam, Kayalpattanam and other minors ports, were in trade with Ceylon. Many of the Tamil Muslims in the coastal towns of Ceylon had their original home in their homeland. Thus they had a dual domicile. Apart from this, Tamil maritime Muslim merchants particularly Marakkayars and Labbais, who had lesser capital were engaged in areca trade with Ceylon or smaller dhonies and sold them in the nearest Coromandel ports.

The English freighted their ships from the Coromandel, to eastward to Syriam, Mergui, Kedah, Ache, Macassar and Bantam, mostly from Madras. These ships touched PortoNovo to pickup more goods. The Muslim traders of PortoNovo freighted their goods in such English vessels.

In the homeland, the Coromandel Muslims had the support of some native rulers. The Sethupathis of Ramanathapuram extended their support to the Muslim traders. The Muslim traders, Marakkayars and Labbais also preferred to settle in the Sethupathi’s ports because of the overwhelming Parava influence in the Madura ports. Many small Muslim merchants plied their vessels from the Sethupathi’s ports to Ceylon, Malabar and in interportal trade. The Dutch were favouring the Paravas against the Muslims whom the Sethupathi supported. When the Dutch secured the Madura ports from the Madurai Nayaks, Muslim traders migrated in large numbers to the Sethupathi’s ports. The restrictive policy of the Dutch adversely affected the Coromandel Muslim traders. The restriction on the transport of merchandise through Pamban canal and the monopoly in chank dealt a severe blow to their trade. The power of the Sethupathi was also at stake. The influential Periathambi Marakkayar family that was prominent in the trade of the area got close to the Sethupathi and had great influence in his policies. The family played multiple role as merchants, brokers, revenue farmers and intermediaries to the Sethupathi.
Periathambl is a title of the family of Sheik Abdul Quadir Marakkayar of Kilakkarai. Between 1682-1715, we find in the Dutch records atleast three Periathambis. The first reference to the old Periathambl occurs in 1682 in Dutch and English records and he is mentioned as "Pedda Thambe Marcar". When Kilevan Sethupathi had pushed down the Madurai Nayaks from the fishery coasts, he appointed this Periathambl Marakkayar to collect taxes from the coastal communities newly brought under his control. This Periathambl, Syed Abdul Quadir Marakkayar, is identified as the father of the celebrated, Seethakkathi alias Syed Abdul Quadir, the patron of poets and literary figure and philanthropist in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. So, Seethakkathi is to be identified as the second Periathambl of Dutch records. Arasaratanam calls him as the commercial magnate of seventeenth century. Sanjay Subramaniam calls him as the "Prince of ports". This Periathambl also enjoyed the confidence of the Sethupathi and he was appointed to high offices in the state. He was the chief architect in flouting the Dutch monopoly in the Coromandel Coast. The Dutch termed him to be the evil genius behind the anti Dutch policy of the Sethupathi. The Dutch dreaded him and had compelled the Sethupathi to remove him, his sons, his brothers, and his relatives from all state positions.

The Sethupathi incorporated this Muslim community leader, Periathambl - Seethakkathi, in the state policies and designated him "Vijaya Raghunatha Periathambl ", Vijaya Raghunatha, being the name of Sethupathi. According to Dutch records, he is said to have controlled everything in Kilakkarai region and was the second most powerful man in the Ramnad State after the Sethupathi. Thomas Van Rhees, Governor of Ceylon (1692-7) points out in his memoir that the market price of textiles was raised or lowered according to the pleasure of Periathambl who had the entire management of the business in the Coromandel and as well as Ceylonese coasts. The Sethupathi in collaboration with Periathambl sent his ships to Persian gulf and Bengal. The trade of Seethakkathi is extrolled by poets in Islamic Tamil literatures. He is called as "Vallal" (great Philonthropist) in these literary works. He is said to be the founder builder of the great Jumma Masjid in Kilakkarai, one of the Dravidian architectural marvel. By 1698 the Dutch realised that they could not carry their trade without the help of Periathambl Marakkayar and concluded a friendship treaty with him. Then the Marakkayar became the intermediary to the Dutch. He also permitted the Dutch to build a factory at Kilakkarai.
The English records from 1686 mention Periathambi Marakkayar. He was owning a ship building yard and repaired the ships of the East India Company which traded in the region. He supplied rice and pepper to the English. The English had requested the Marakkayar's help to trade in his region, most probably via Pamban canal.

Since the Dutch records of 1709, mention one young Periathambi, we have to conclude that (Seethakkathi) Periathambi might have died by this time or relieved himself from active trade. After the year 1715, the name of the family of Syed Abdul Quadir do not find prominent place in Dutch records. But the successors of his family continued to play a dominant role in the maritime trade of this region, had vast business and big factories, at Kilakkarai and Bengal. They were proud of the Royal patronage enjoyed by their forefathers. In 1862 one of the descendants of Seethakkathi styled himself as Syed Mohamad S/O Melapandagasalai Maha Shri Shri Ravikula Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sultan Abdul Kadir Marakkayar of Kilakkarai.

Adam Labbai, Naina Labbai are some other powerful maritime traders of Kilakkarai who were having trade contacts with the Dutch. Another contemporary of Vallal Seethakkathi was Abdul Kasim Marakkayar, a trader of repute. He was the patron of poet Umaru the author of Seerapuranam, the extrolled history of Prophet Mohamed. It is generally believed that Seethakkathi-Periathambi Marakkayar was a patron of poet Umaru and was instrumental to write Seerapuranam. But his name does not find place in the text of Seerapuranam. Since poet Umaru was the contemporary of Seethakkathi, who was also patronised by him like many other poets, it is probable that Abdul Kasim Marakkayar might have continued the work initiated by Seethakkathi, since his name is mentioned in twentytwo stanzas in Seerapuranam.

The vessels of Muslim merchants of the region were in a brisk trade from Madras Roads, at the end of the seventeenth century. We find many muslim names of ships and their captains in the list of vessels that plied to and from Pegu, Ache, Kedah, Malacca and in coastal trade. Elephant trade was an important one from Kedah. Many names of the Coromandel Muslim traders, particularly from PortoNovo and Nagapattanam find place in this list. It is evident that by the close of the seventeenth century, the Coromandel Muslims had their settlements in Perak, Pegu, Malacca, Kedah, Ache and Ceylon.
The Tamil Muslims penetrated in large numbers into Kedah from Nagapattanam and PortoNovo. In Perak, one Siddhi Labbai was a popular royal merchant (Soudagar Raja) who was a Tamil Muslim and the entire trade of Perak was in his hands. He had factories at Perak. Siddhi Labbai had contact with the powerful Labbai and Marayakkayar Maritime traders in Nagapattanam, Cuddalore and PortoNovo. A large part of tin of Perak found its way into these ports in the vessels of Tamil Muslims or was freighted in English vessels for the Tamil Muslims.

The Tamil Muslims settled in Johore were trading in tin. They stocked large quantities of tin in their factories for shipment. The Danish vessels from Tranquebar freighted their vessels for the Cholia Muslims to Johore. There was considerable English private trade in Johore. Some of the English private merchants had partnership with Cholia Muslim shippers. The Dutch liberally issued passes to Cholia Muslim to trade in the ports of this country. Ache had a strong life line in Coromandel trade. There was regular traffic from PortoNovo and Nagapattanam to Ache. The English freighted in their ships the goods of Tamil Muslims, from PortoNovo and Cuddalore to Ache. Thus PortoNovo withstood the European competition and successfully conducted the Asian trade against such competitions.

The Muslims of Madura and Ramnad coasts continued their trade with Ceylon because of the affinal ties there, in spite of the hostilities by the Dutch. At times they had to resort to clandestine methods and smuggling. In this they had the blessings of the Kandyan king and the Sethupathi. As already seen Periathambi Marakkayar family was the prime activist in this regard. The Dutch were unable to control such activities of the Marakkayars. When the Dutch vigorously tried to eliminate the Coromandel Muslims from the trading activities in Ceylonese Coast, the trade balance of the Dutch was affected. There was shortage of food and cloth in Ceylon. The poor peasant could neither purchase food or cloth at cheaper rate nor sell his agricultural products at a higher price since both ends were enchroached by the Dutch monopolistic policy. Thus the commercial economy of Ceylon was closely tied with that of Coromandel in which the Muslims played a vital role. At the close of seventeenth century, the Dutch adamantly reduced the passes to the Marakkayars of Nagapattanam to Malacca, Maccassar, Bantam, Johore and Ache ports. Permission was denied to trade with Ceylon. Trade to these ports was the main source of overseas trade to the Coromandel Muslims. The maritime Muslim traders had to move to Nagore, Karaikkal and PortoNovo for the continuances of their trade. They also utilised the goodwill of the Danes in Tranquebar. Thus by the end of the seventeenth century the maritime trade of the Coromandel Muslims met with serious setbacks and their economic condition began to crumble.
At the beginning of the period of our study - from 1750 - the political uncertainties in Coromandel hinterland brought down the native maritime trade to decline. The conflicts between the ruling powers large and small or major and minor eroded the economy of the region. The English were gaining the upper hand against their European rivals. The Dutch power was waning. The production of textiles, the staple commodity of export, was affected in the weaving centres. The maritime traders could not procure goods for Southeast Asian markets. Consequently exports from ports got reduced. Native people connected with maritime activities were naturally affected. Many of the ports decayed. Moreover the rise of European companies in Asian trade was another serious challenge, in which the traditional markets were shut down to the Coromandel merchants in general and Muslims in particular.

In these adverse conditions, the Muslims owned shipping began to decline in number. The trading activities were limited to the ports of Ache, Johore, Perak Pegu, Arakan, Malay Peninsula and Ceylon. PortoNovo, Nagapattanam, Nagore, Karaikkal, Adirampattanam Tondi, Kilakkari, Kayalpattanam and Kulasekarapattanam were busy ports.

The records of Coromandel shipping for early eighteenth century are not consistent with the shipping that entered and left from the ports. The ships that entered and left from Madras port is randomly listed in the consultations of the Fort St. George council. Information on some ship owners and records of their voyages, appear in the litigations that came before the Mayor’s court. The evidence thus is by no means exhaustive and extensive but there is enough to provide a picture of the ownership and the routes popularly sailed by the native traders. In the eighteenth century, Madras emerged as the seat of Coromandel trade. From Madras, there was regular trade to Arakan, Ujang Salong, Kedah, Malacca and Ache, to the South of Madras long distance trade to Ceylon, Maldives and Malabar. There was short distance traffic between Madras, Kovalam, Fort. St. David, Cuddalore, Tranquebar, Pondichery PortoNovo Karaikkal, Nagore and Nagapattanam in which the Tamil Muslims participated.
During this period the Hindu merchants were very powerful. They had the favour of the English settlers in Madras. The Komatti, Beri, and Ballja Telugu speaking Chettiar were the influential traders and shipowners in large numbers. The vast resources with them brought them close to the emerging English power.

But the shipping south of Cuddalore was in the hands of the Muslims. To help the Muslim shipping, the Nawab of Arcot wanted to develop some of the ports like Kovalam, Alambram and Santhom in their dominion. But it did not yield the desired result.

The Cholia Muslims picked up all the guantlets and operated their vessels with available resources and merchandise, from PortoNovo, Cuddalore, Nagore, and Nagapattanam to Malay Peninsula and Ceylon and Ache, from Adirampattanam, Tondi, Kilakkarai, Kayalpattanam, Kulasekarapattanam to Ceylon and Malabar and Lackdives. There was regular traffic to Bengal from Coromandel for the import of edible oil and food grains. Rice and textiles were exported to Ceylon and in return elephants, areca, pepper, spices, coconut, coir products, pulmyrah timber were imported in to Coromandel.

There was a greater concentration of Cholia Muslims in Kedah, in the eighteenth century. They were in the forefront of maritime commerce in Kedah ports. When the English were trying to establish a factory at Kedah coast in 1772, the Coromandel Muslims were well knitted in trade of the coast and also in politics. The English representative of Kedah, Monkton writing to the Fort St. George on the 22nd April 1772 stated that the Cholia Muslims were dominant merchants in the coast and influential in the court. The king Sultan Mohamed was hesitant to contract with the English to the detriment of the Cholia Muslims, since he was getting good income from their trade contacts. Elephant trade was very attractive and the Cholia Muslims were engaged in this. Since the Muslim ships had their own security measures, the English representative had requested strong guns in the vessels of the English as a protection to the ship. A report of 1789 says that the Cholia Muslims were well settled in the capital of Kedah and along the stretches of the coast. The cholis had risen to the positions of influence and power in the state. They were the harbour masters and Soudagar Rajas (Royal merchants) In 1770, one Cholia Muslim called Jamal had risen to become the most influential minister in the state and was conferred the title Datu seri Raja. In this capacity he handled the king’s negotiations with Francis Light over British settlement in the state of Kedah. The Nagore and Nagapattanam Cholia families continued their connection with Kedah, which expanded later in the 19th century.
Similarly the Cholia Muslim were well settled in the coast of Ache and influential with the rulers. In the effort to promote their own trade, the English were trying to establish a factory at Ache. The English resident at Ache, Charles Desvœux writing to Fort St. George in 1772, says that the Cholia Muslims were very influential with the King of Ache. Among them one Cholia Muslim Mohamed Kasim was prime merchant, probably a native of Nagapattanam. The English representative could meet the Sultan only with the help of Mohamed Kasim. The English had to negotiate with Mohamed Kasim to get trade concessions from the Sultan of Ache. The Cholia Muslims stiffly opposed the entry of the English but later they compromised with them and the English were permitted to trade in the coast of Ache.

When English settlement was founded in Penang in 1789, the Cholia Muslims were the first traders to arrive there. Early trade statistics show a large scale trade between PortoNovo, Nagore, Nagapattanam and Penang. The early censuses of population show the Cholias as the third largest community. Among the first inhabitants were family clans of the Labbais and Marakkayars. Some of whom were known as people of affluence living in some of the best dwellings in the urban settlement. But there were many cholias of lower social orders engaged in a variety of occupations: shopkeeping, peddling, poultry rearing, coolie labour on the water front and crew on ships. It was noted that the vessels from Coromandel would bring annually about 2000 men who would settle for short periods, earn some money and return with their savings. Penang had captured the imagination of the Cholia Muslims as a place with future. The English encouraged this perception. When Stamford Raffles founded Singapore in 1824, the Cholia Muslim inhabitants were there in large numbers. The Cholia Muslims were mobile. Some members of the merchants family would live semipermanently in the main lands of Southeast Asian ports to conduct their business.

The Tamil Muslim merchants from Nagore and PortoNovo in the eighteenth century, carried paddy and ready money to the Jaffna Peninsula. Their agents made advances to the local tobacco cultivators and shipped the cargoes from Ceylon directly to Malabar coast and Panang.

Native vessels from Coromandel, majority of them belonging to Muslims, plied to Malabar in the eighteenth century from Manapad, Tuticorin, Kilakkarai, Kayalpattanam, Tegnapattanam, Nagapattanam and Colochal. They brought cotton piece goods such as spreads, chintzes, frocks, stokkings, cambaya (a cheap cloth) kerchief, calljas (Manapad white cloth) tupatti, roomals, tobacco, salt, onion, writing ola and karupatti (the native palmyrah sugar). In return they took areca, coir, timber, copra, coconut, sandal wood
pulinjica (scap berry), dry ginger, turmeric, wild jack tree and commodities brought by Mascat Bambaras (one masted ship) such as dates, incense, asafotida, kismis, almonds, pista, rose water, glass beads, Persian carpets, Ormuz salt (Rock salt) medicinal tubers, gum resin zinc oxide, pearls, Turkey red cloth, blue stone, gum Arabica, pepper, wollen cloth, Persian silk cloth, wheat, coffee and sea products from Arabian countries. The trade was mostly on barter system47.

Most of the regions cotton textiles were woven in the specialised weaving centres in the coastal villages of Thanjavur, Ramanatahpuram and Thirunelveli and transported to the nearest ports for export. Large quantity of textiles were imported from Nagore and Karaikkal ports to Sumatra and Malay countries. Some of these consignments were shipped through the ports of Bengal where Marakkayars had chavadis. Mauritius too was a port of call of the Tamil Muslim textile traders48.

The Thirunelveli Muslim artisans were specialised in carpet weaving and the products had good market in export trade. Most of them were Tamil Labbais. The commercial life of these Muslim weavers was controlled by big Muslim traders. In the villages of Ramanathapuram also there were a large number of Tamil Muslim weavers who produced materials for export. Ramanathapuram, Kilakkarai, Panaikulam, Kamudhi, Abiramanam, Madukulathur and Paramakkudi, were the settlements of Muslim weavers and dye makers. A statistics at the close of eighteenth century reveal that there were about 980 looms in Ramanathapuram villages alone owned by Muslim weavers49. These multifarious activities of the Tamil Muslims shows the part played by them in the economic development of the region.

The diary and consultation books of Madras Council contain records relating to the arrivals and departures of vessels from Madras port and also from other Coromandel ports via Madras enroute to Bengal and Southeast Asian countries. These records give the name of captains (Nagudha) of the respective ships, type of ships etc., Mohamed Bux, Alle Bux, Rahiman Bux, Cadar Bux were a few names of ships as found in these records and invariably the Nagudhas were all Muslims. Even the ships owned by the Hindu merchants were manned by Muslim crew members. The East India Company employed a large number of Muslims in their factories. They appointed only Muslim crews in their ships in the early years. There was regular Muslim shipping to Malacca from Portonovo51. Santhom was an important port of export and considerable number of Muslim traders were settled in that port town52.
Some of the Muslim traders were so rich that they lent money to the East India Company. Mohamed Ali Baig, a merchant and ship owner in Cuddalore, was a financier to the company. The company was not financially sound to repay the debt to him and the company discharged the loan in instalments. Tamil Muslim merchants settled in Ceylon coasts regularly visited Madras port for trade. The trade in metal was an important item from Southeast Asian countries. Mohamed Sahib, a Coromandel Muslim, was virtually a monopolist in metal trade and he lifted large quantities of lead and tin.

The merchants of PortoNovo like Shaik Sunda Marakkayar and Shaik Ismail Marakkayar plied their ships in interportal trade from Pulpicat to Kovalam and they had considerable trade with Tennaserim. Peer Marakkayar of Portonovo was a trader of considerable repute. He had business connections in Pondicherry. He acted as an agent of Ananda Ranga Pillai, the merchant and Dubash of Duplex. Mohamed Meera Labbe was a shipowner and prominent merchant in Cuddalore having good relationship with the East India Company.

After the year 1753, we find only a few reference to the arrivals and departures of vessels from Madras port in the Madras Council Consultations. Even in these few references we find only the names of the ships of the Company, Company merchants, Chettiar merchants and English private traders and very rarely Muslim ship names. The ship crews of the company vessels were all English. By this time, we understand that the Chettiar merchants came too close to the East India Company, mainly due to their sound financial condition. They made even investments on behalf of the Company. One Nalla Chetty made huge investments for the Company in Cuddalore. Lingi Chetty, Pigu Nalla Chetty, Perumal Chetty were other important merchants and intermediates to the company. Thus by the third quarter of eighteenth century the Muslim merchants lost ground and voice in the company trade in Madras. With the investments of the Chettiar merchants the company merchants plied their ships to England, Batavia, Surat, Culcutta and St. David (Cuddalore). The Tamil Muslim merchants sent their merchandise in such ships of the Company. The Chettiar merchants bought the commodities from the company and afforded space for the storage of company goods and the goods of English private traders.

Some of the native rulers were themselves engaged in overseas trade, inspite of the political troubles. Muthuramalinga Sethupathi of Ramanathapuram (1772-1795) was a trader prince and he had trade contact with Bengal and Malabar. He had also commercial relations with various European companies.
such as Dutch, French and the English. He entered into joint ventures with some Marakkayars in overseas trade. Sekuna Labbai of Kayalpattanam and Sheik Abdul Kadar of Kilakkarai were his allies in maritime trade. The Sethupathi granted many concessions to Marakkayar traders and encouraged them in their enterprises. The Marathas of Thanjavur also encouraged some extent the native traders. Sarabendrarajapattanam (Saluvanayakkanpattanam) was an important port in Thanjavur coast during nineteenth century. The Marathas had their own trade ships. In 1838, the ship Brihadisvara belonging to the Maratha king was utilised by English private traders. Ships were built in Sarabendrarajapattanam. Fresh water was supplied from this port to the passing vessels. There was wide trade from this port to Ceylon. The Modi records of the Marathas give the name of some Marakkayar maritime traders in Thanjavur coast along with others. The ship of Sheik Mian Kadar exported pearls to Malacca from Nagore in 1806. Naina Rawthar was a ship owner not substantial to withstand the competition of the European Companies and European private merchants.

The pleadings in the Mayor’s Court reveal some interesting features about the Muslim ship owners of Coromandel. Details of financing, rate of interest, litigation settlement procedures and trade practices are gleaned in these records. Ismail Labbe a merchant from Madras was having trade connection at Pegu. He was a ship owner and a financier. He advanced a loan at the rate of 9% interest for a joint venture by Moottamar Chetty, Cassim Labbe and Naina Ahamed Labbe. The latter two were the joint owners of a ship Fatheeraheem, which was trading in Southeast Asian ports. When they were unable to repay the loan, they sold their ship to settle the account of Ismail Labbe. Adam Labbe and Syed Marakkayar were financiers in Madras port town and they advanced money to the ship owners and traders in overseas trade with an agreement for the repayment of the loan amount along with a percentage in the net profit.

All the Muslim maritime merchants did not sail in the ships that were on trade to the ports of other countries. They would just load their cargoes in the ship of a particular Marakkayar. They will pay the freight charges to the owner, of the ship and a commission on the value of the merchandise to the Nagudha of the ship for selling and bringing the money due to them. The cargoes on the ships were insured and loans were obtained on this from moneylenders, which is called respondantia. During the second quarter of eighteenth century the insurance premium for the cargoes was 16% the freight charge was 14% and the commission of the Nagudha was 7 1/2% of the total value of the cargoes.
When the amount due to the merchants was not settled by the nagudha concerned they approached the court for redressal. Chettiar merchants also sent their cargoes in Muslim ships. Many of the insurance companies were run by Chettiar.

Most of the Hindu ship owners appointed Muslim Nagudhas and the ship was given in his charge to freight the cargoes of the Muslim merchants in interportal trade and also for trade with other countries. The nagudha took loan on his own accord for his trade prospects, during this business voyage. The ship Mundala Veeraragava, belonged to a chettiar merchant. He appointed Meera Mohamed Labbe as Nagudha of the ship, who was an independent timber merchant and a shipowner. Meera Mohamed Labbe took loan for his business voyage to Southeast Asian countries, from John Straton an English private merchant. The English private merchants also utilised such ship for transporting their own cargoes.

The Cholia Muslim were able to survive in the highly competitive environment because of their cost-effective modes of operation. There was no short distinction between the exporters and importers of commodities and ship owners and navigators. Owners of ships and many of the crew had an interest in the cargo carried. The entire operation of equipping a ship, launching it, sailing it to its destination and back was a communal operation with most persons involved belong to a clan network. Many of those who sailed in a ship would be linked in this way, others in any case were members of the broader Coromandel Muslim community. The crew and laskars employed on the ship were paid less in wages and permitted to engage in small ventures of their own. When a vessel was at anchor in a port, these people were engaged as labourers and artisans who worked as carpenters, caulkers, riggers and so on. In this way the outfitting of a ship was considerably less expensive to owner or to the Nagudha who contracted it. Consequently the Cholias were known for their ability to operate with small profit margins. But they could not compete with the growing European capitalism in this way of operation during the later half of nineteenth century.

From the beginning of nineteenth century, Madras, Pondicherry and Tuticorin were the important major ports. PortoNovo, Nagapattanam, Kilakkarai and Kayalpattanam were also in the main stream of oceanic trade. But not to the same extent as in previous centuries. Further, many new minor ports sprang up for coastal trade.
The Muslim merchants of Nagore, Nagapattanam, and PortoNovo continued their trade with Pegu, Ache, Penang, Malacca, Malay, Ceylon, Malabar Coast and Bengal. The trading activity from Kilakkarai and Kayalpattanam was mostly confined to Ceylon, Malabar, Bengal and other Coromandel ports. Due to the wars in Europe among the nation who had interest in Indian ocean trade, there was unrest in the Indian ocean region. The native merchants were afraid of sending their ships on voyage because they were captured by the enemy nations. The French privateers mercilessly captured such ships of the enemy's territories - with their flags and colours - in large numbers and confiscated the vessels and cargoes. This resulted in the loss of ship and cargoes in many cases.

In such troubled circumstance during the last decade of the eighteenth century and in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Danes helped the Muslim merchants of Nagore, Nagapattanam, Karaikkal, and Tranquebar. We find informations about such shipping activities, in the archival records where the names of ships, their owners and the cargoes freighted.

The merchants in Nagore used to despatch their ships to the ports of Colombo, Ache, Penang, Malacca, Malay, Bengal, and Malabar with Danish flag to escape the depredation of the French privateers since the Danes were neutral in the war. During the course of war in the first quarter of nineteenth century, when the Danes were no longer neutral, the vessels of native merchant sent with Danish colours were in danger. The merchants who had despatched their ships in such circumstances requested the East India Company to give protection to their ships by using the British fleet. Thus the native merchants, ship owners had to depend on one or other European power to continue their trade, and the colonial rivalry was additional challenge to their shipping activities.

The names of the ship owners as found in the records, reveal that the Muslim merchants of Nagore were very brisk in the Coromandel coast. In one instance, out of seventeen signatories in a memorial to the English authorities in 1808, requesting their protection for their ships, only four were Chettiar merchants and the rest were Muslims. The names of these ship owners (signatures in the memorial) were, Mohamed Marakkayar, Mohamed Syed Marakkayar, Ali Sahib Nagudha, Habib Mohamed Malumi, Peer Sahib Nagudha, Muthumeera Sahib, Syed Ismail Labbai, Mohamed Rafeek Marakkayar, Mohideen Sahib Nagudha, Syed Mohideen Nagudha, Sulaiman Malumi, Fakir Mohamed Nagudha,
Siddi Mohamed, and Ibrahim Nagudha. The Nagore Marakkayar merchants had stated in the memorial that were happy since they constantly experienced the justice, indulgence and protection of the English authorities in all their mercantile transactions. Whenever they experienced hurdles in their trading activities they approached the Commercial Resident at Nagore for redressal.

Many ships of the Marakkayars found with the Danish colours and even with the colours of other nations were caught by the English fleet and as well as the French privateers. The vessel of Mohamed Ackel of Nagapattanam which sailed under Achenese colours was captured by the French privateer. The vessels of Leve Vappa Malumi and Mydeen Kundoo Maricar, the merchants of Nagore, while returning from Malacca and Penang were caught by the English fleet in Tranquebar waters. According to the accounts maintained by the Nagudha of the above ships, the merchandise in the ships belonged to Mohamed Ali Marakkayar, Mohamed Syed Marakkayar, Ali Sahib Nagudha, Habeeb Mohamed Malumi, Peer sahib Naguda, Muthumeeran Sahib, Syed Ismail Labbai, Mohamed Rafeek Markkayar, Madan Sahib Nagudha, Syed Mohamed Nagudha, Sulaiman Malim, Fakir Mohamed Nagudha and Siddhi Mohamed, Ibrahim Nagudha of Nagore; Mohamed Sahib Marakkayar, Habib Mohamed, Abdul Gani and Syed Ahamed Marakkayar of Nagapattanam; Mohamed Ali Marakkayar, Shaik Mohamed Nagudha and Vappa Chinna vava Marakkayar of Thirumalairajanpattanam; Mohideen Kundoo and Mohamed Thambi Marakkayar of Karaikkal. All the above merchants requested the company authorities to release their merchandise and the ships which were sent to Penang and Malacca. The Company authorities conceded their demands. From this we understand the trade practices in the Nagapattanam belt. There were only a few ship owners and a large number of maritime traders. All of them did not travel in the ships. They entrusted their cargoes to the Nagudha of the respective ship for being sold and the Nagudha maintained proper accounts and the Nagudha of the ship was given proportionate percentage in the profit.

A list of new vessels registered by the Muslims in the year 1808 in Nagore and Nagapattanam shows that it was only seven in number. All of them were engaged in overseas trade. This register contains the names of the ships (Kadar Bux, Mohideen Bux, Mohamed Bux, etc.) type of the vessel and tonnage, the names of the owners, commodities freighted name of Nagudha, country to which the vessels plied and the licence and pass particulars. Most of the vessels were two masted. The owner of the ship and the licencee for taking out voyage differ in most of the vessels. For example
the two masted vessel, Kadar Bux, was owned by Peersa Magdoom Marakkayar but the ship had a Danish pass in the name of Abusali Marican, who is the Nagudha of the ship. Another two masted vessel, Mohideen Bux, was owned by Kadar Mohideen Kappalar, the pass was in the name of Saidoo Pillai Marican, the Nagudha. Since the pass for the voyage was in the name of the Nagudhas, the owner may or may not sail in the ship. We are able to note only rare instance of joint ownership of vessels among the Muslim traders in Coromandel.

The Muslim merchants of Cuddalore and PortoNovo traded with Penang, Kedah and Ache. When their vessels on voyage were in trouble, they used to approach the East India Company authorities for protection. In a memorandum to the company authorities the merchants of Cuddalore such as Kadar Mohamed Ali, Hussain Marakkayar, Adam Sahib, Kadir Mohideen Malumi, Esa Levai, John Sahib, Sevatha Marakkayar and Madaka Sahib, the merchants of PortoNovo such as Mian Mohamed, Bade Mian, Vavoo Mariccar, Meera Mariccar, Umar Naina Aulia Labbai, Mahaboob Sahib, Magudum Sha, and Kabeer Sahib, salute the English administration as benevolent and equitable and requested the continuance of the patronage and protection in Indian waters. Thus the Muslim merchants of Coromandel coast were at the favour of the East India Company authorities during this period.

The Marakkayar traders of Nagapattanam region continued their trade with the eastern countries even in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Some of the merchants acquired new ships and passes were issued to such vessels by the English. But the number of vessels in use were lesser than that of the previous quarter. Further the vessels were smaller and the tonnage capacity was also less. A reference to the records of registry of ships in Nagapattanam region shows only a few names of Muslim vessels such as Barakath. Mohideen Bux, Meera Mydeen, Meera Madar, Mohideen bux, Hydroos, Sydoo Hydroos, Kadar Bux, Mohamed Ali. Thus the Marakkayar, merchants cum shipowners were declining in the region, and their economic condition show a downward trend from this period onwards.

The conquest of India and Malay by the English robbed the Coromandel Muslim Maritime enterprise of any significance in the eastern seas. As a result, the influence of Coromandel Muslim traders declined in Malay. Except for a few South Indians, who continued to feature in the Malay states the export and import trade fell into the hands of the English traders.
The decline of opportunities in shipping along the coast of Coromandel forced the maritime people, the Marakkayars to shift their activities to inland trade. Many migrated to the Southeast Asian countries in search of better jobs and business. Large scale migration from Coromandel began from the foundation of Penang in 1786. Earlier immigrants were prominent traders and financiers and got firm footing there. Later immigrations were by arranged movement, induced by governmental action and persuasion of prospective employers and their agents. This was because of the political and economic changes in the homeland and abroad. Immigrations became easier because by the middle of the nineteenth century, India and most of the Southeast Asian countries became politically and economically the vassal State of Britain.

Right from 1790 the vessels from Coromandel took annually about 2000 men to Penang. Many of them went as shop keepers and coolies. When they returned home they were succeeded by others. English acquisition of Malacca in 1824, and foundation of Singapore in 1819 demanded more labourers. There was a constant copious flow of labour from South India. The ship fare from Nagapattanam to Malaya was reduced from Rupees 15 to 8 in 1887. The South Indian Muslim emigrants were treated well. Malaya withdrew all restrictions in 1897 and the free flow emigration was allowed. All the main ports of Coromandel had facilities for handling passenger traffic to Straits. Vessels from Cuddalore, PortoNovo, Nagore, Pondicherry, Nagapattanam, Madras, Karaikkal, Kayalpattanam, Kulasekarapattanam, Kilakkarai and Tuticorin, took migrants in great number. Many of these people were previously engaged in maritime enterprises. Vast majority of the commercial immigrants, the Cholia Marakkayars, became salesmen, peddlers, petty entrepreneurs, shop keepers, street side vendors, medicine men, stall holders, merchants, financiers and contractors of substantial means.

The shipowners of Coromandel utilised the opportunity in immigration. They undertook more trips to Southeast Asian countries. Virtually many of the cargo ships became passenger ships and the merchandise became secondary. At times the ships were found overloaded and engaged in passenger service without a proper pass or licence. Such ships were taken to task by the English authorities in India. When Brig. Mohideen Bux was found with overload of passengers and also without a valid pass on its way to Tennaserim, she was subjected to legal action. Alison another vessel with captain Abdul Kadar Malumi from Nagapattanam to Malay coast which had capacity for only 35 passengers was found with
351 passengers, and also merchandise of different descriptions, was penalised. Brig. Shree Jaganath Rasathi, commanded by Chinnathambi Marakkayar was on regular passenger service to Malaya from Nagapattanam. Brig. Mohamedd Bux of Nagore took passengers from Nagore and Karaikkal to Southeast Asian countries. There was a large scale migration to Burma also during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. About twelve ships owned by the Marakkayars manned by Muslim Nagudhas were on this activity from Coromandel. The passengers mostly Muslims, were taken from the ports of Thanjavur coast and PortoNovo. Muslim women also emigrated along with their men.

Similarly there was a large scale emigration to Penag and Malaya also. Ships owned by Marakkayar traders of Karaikkal, Nagore and Nagapattanam, were in this route. In 1848 alone about 23 ships freighted passengers from Nagapattanam, Nagore, Karaikkal, and PortoNovo. Many of the migrants from Karaikkal went to France. But the ships on these voyages could not fulfill the norms prescribed by the English authorities and they were penalised on many occasions. Most of the migrants to Ceylon were from Ramanathapuram and Thirunelveli coasts. Along with the regular trade regular passenger service was also encouraged to Ceylon. The migrant coolies returning from Ceylon were given concessions to bring certain goods without duties, which fetched them good profit in Coromandel.

The emigrants to Ceylon were from the ports of Tuticorin, Kayalpattanam, Kulasekarapattanam, Vaipur, Kilakkarai and Pamban. Majority of them were Muslim Marakkayar and Labbai traders. When compared with other northern ports of the coast the shipping activities in the above ports were less. We find only few names of vessels in passenger traffic to Ceylon from these ports such as Mohideen Bux, Rahmaniya, Allasamy Hameed, Hameed Latchumi, Abu Sali Hameed etc. The ships which carried passengers were always overcrowded and the authorities in both the coasts were worried about taking suitable action on the erring vessels. But apart from the licenced ships, many small dhoneys are said to have engaged in taking passengers clandestinely to Ceylon through the shallow waters.
Even in the last decade of the nineteenth century, there was large scale migration of Muslims to Burma, Strait Settlements, Ceylon, France and Ache, from Nagapattanam, Karaikkal, Pamban, Kilakkarai and Kulasekarapattanam. There was constant and regular passenger traffic as regulated under Act XXV of 1859 from the ports of Thanjavur, Ramanathapuram, Thirunelveli coasts to Ceylon, from Pamban to Bengal and Strait, from Nagapattanam to Rangoon straits and Bengal.

At the close of nineteenth century the maritime trading activities of the Muslims were not appreciable. Materials and evidences at our disposal for the study of their activities are also very meagre. We hear only a few names of shipowners and traders engaged in overseas and coastal trade at Nagapattanam, Porto Novo, Kilakkarai, Kayalpattanam and Kulasekarapattanam. The traders with lesser capital shifted over to other occupations and migrated to inland. Many emigrated other countries in search of favourable positions.

In the Ramanathapuram coast, Kasim Mohamed Marakkayar of Mandapam was a wealthy maritime trader and shipowner during this period. For many generations his family was engaged in commercial enterprises of many kinds. He was the owner of seven villages around Mandapam. The Raja of Ramanathapuram had given him the Hare Island in the Gulf of Manaar. The loading and unloading of cargoes at Mandapam and Pamban ports was under his control. A fleet of thirty boats of his own were engaged in this service and about 1000 persons were employed by him in his maritime activities, throughout the year. The British Indian Steam Navigation Company was represented by his family at Pamban port. He helped the English in all their enterprises and chank and pearl fishery. He was later honoured with title "Khan Bahadur" and was also extended other honours and concessions by the British government. He had vast trade connections in Ceylon. He was a philanthropist and was respected by people of all sections and affectionately called as "Mandapam Marakkayar". He contributed the entire amount for laying a road of 8.k.m. for the benefit of the pilgrims from Ramanathapuram to Devipattanam temple. The Hare Island which was in the possession of the descendants of Mohamed Kasim Marakkayar was acquired by the Government of Tamil Nadu recently for the creation of the Marine National Park.
Kilakkarai had a concentration of considerable number of maritime traders and ship owners. The descendants of Periathambi Marakkayar (Seethakkathi) continued the traditional sea faring activities. One such descendant of Periathambi Marakkayar was Habib Marakkayar in the first quarter of nineteenth century popularly known as Habib Arasar (Arasar - king). He was also known as merchant prince. He was a trader in gemstones and owner of many ships and had trade contacts in Ceylon and Bengal. For many years he was also the rentor of pearl fishery in the Gulf of Manaar. He was in the good books of the British. In 1809, he was permitted by the English authorities in Ceylon to pass through the main gates of the fort in a palanquin. His son Sheik Sadakkathulla Marakkayar was permitted to use the same honours and separate insignias, by the Ceylon Government in 1823. Habib Marakkayar’s brother, Abdul kadar Sahib Marakkayar was a trader of repute and was well respected by the Ceylon Government. In 1821, when he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca all the allies of the English were asked to extend their help to him since he had fair and honest transactions in Ceylon. Habib Marakkayar built the Cholia mosque in Culcutta (which is known by the same name even to this day) and the Odakkarai Mosque at Kilakkarai. He also built many chavadis for the convenience of gem traders at Culcutta and Rameswaram. He was a great philanthropist and patronised many Muslim Tamil poets and was instrumental to publish many Islamic Tamil literary works. Cubby Mohamed Marakkayar was another noted business man and a survey report of the English says that " Kilakkarai was the residence of Cubby Mohamed Marakkayar, a wealthy merchant and the chief of the town. " Ahamed Jalaludeen Marakkayar owned seven mercantile ships and he had extensive trade connections with other Coromandel ports and Ceylon. Sultan Abdul Kadar Marakkayar was another shipowner in Kilakkarai, Rajanayagam, one of the Islamic Tamil epics of 1807, extoll his trading activities and philanthropy. Mapillai Labbai Alim (1816-1896) was a prominent gemstone trader, philanthropist, poet and mystic of Kadiria tharikka. He was so influential and powerful in Coromandel Coast and Ceylon, that he could collect one rupee on every boat in Ceylonese coast for his Aroosia Thalikka (Arabic learning centre) at Kilakkarai. He had rendered significant religious service in Ceylon. His son Syed Abdul Kadir Marakkayar (1846 - 1912) was a maritime trader and mystic of Kadiria Tharikka.

Vappu Naina Pillai Marakkayar was a ship owner and trader in Kilakkarai. His sons Syed Kasim Marakkayar, Muthu Ibrahim Marakkayar, Kirudu Naina Marakkayar, Mohideen Abdul Kadar Marakkayar and Syed Mohamed Marakkayar were also prominent maritime traders. They were trading with Ceylon,
Malabar and Bengal ports. This family had two ships. They had big godowns in the seashore at Kilakkarai which stand even to this day. This family is also said to be the descendent of Periazhambi Marakkayar. We come to understand from the documents maintained by the members of this family, that the value of a two masted ship in their possession was about Rs.4000/- in 1881.

Pamban Canal itself was a private property for some time which was granted by the ruler of Ramanathapuram, to a Marakkayar family at Pamban. Neither people nor vessels could cross the Pamban Canal. The family of Aboobakar Marakkayar was given the right of taking the people across the bar of the Pamban on payment of a fees. Later the members of the family became pilots and they collected fees from all the vessels for piloting them across the canal and divided amongst themselves the income. When difference of opinion arose among the descendants of the family in dividing the fees collected, Abdul Naina Ambalam, Peer Tamby Marakkayar Muthu Ahamed and Chinna Meera levey Marakkayar represented the matter to the Collector of Ramanathapuram. Retention of their hereditary rights to collect fees, a fixed salary to those who actually piloted the vessels across the Pamban Canal was ordered by the Collector. The descendants of the family of Aboobakkar Marakkayar are appointed as pilots at Pamban port-for piloting vessels across the Pamban—even to this day.

The trading activities in the ports of Thanjavur coast were in the hands of Marakkayars of this region. Realising the importance of Nagapattanam port and the other minor feeder ports, in the coast, the English company proposed to improve them for the development of trade. A statistics of the company shows that there were about seventy maritime traders in Nagore and Nagapattanam alone in the beginning of nineteenth century and they had a total capital resources of two lakhs pagodas. They entered into the nineteenth century with the support of the English East India Company, and were honoured well. The East India Company engaged the Cholia vessels for their coastal trade in the Coromandel ports. The Resident at Nagore wrote to the Board of Trade in 1812 that "the trade with the east was conducted chiefly by the Cholia merchants resident in Nagore and Nagapattanam ports, and they used vessels built there itself the burthen of which ranged from one hundred to four hundred tones". The list furnished by the British resident at Nagore about the ships and their owners exporting salt to Bengal contained only Muslim names. Mohamed Kasim Marakkayar was the principle and respectable merchant of Nagore who got his ships made at Pegu. It is said that he lived in a palacial house. Merchants like Kadar Mohideen Sahib of Nagapattanam owned a fleet of ships providing employment to a large number of coolies both Muslims and non Muslims.
The influential shipowner and maritime trader at Nagapattanam during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was Ahamed Thambi Marakkayar. Later he became the member of Madras Legislative Council and was honoured with the title Khan Bahadur. He had trade contacts in Straits, Burma and Ceylon. He had a fleet of ships and also a large number of small boats for loading and unloading cargoes at Nagapattanam port. He was the agent of British India Steam Navigation Company at Nagapattanam. Mohamed Gouse Marakkayar and Gulam Mohideen Marakkayar were other shipowning merchants at Nagapattanam during this period.

The shipowners and traders with lesser capital could not carry their activities against the growing economic competitions. Asan Kuthoos Sahib Marakkayar, a ship owner of Nagore obtained a sum of Rs. 10,000/- in 1890 to repair his ship from one Ramanathan Chettiar and the ship was hypothecated to the Chettiar. The Marakkayar could not repay the loan and authorised the Chettiar to utilise the ship to undertake voyages and return back the ship after the credit amount was realised. This shows the financial resources of Marakkayars and Chettiar merchants.

In Adirampattanam there were many Marakkayar shipowners and maritime traders. Elavapillai Marakkayar was the owner of many dhoneys. His vessels regularly plded to Masulipattanam and Nagore. Mohamed Thambi Marakkayar was ship owner and maritime trader, popularly known as Kapalkarar (owner of ships) of the town. He owned two ships by name Mohideen Samdani and Sultan Hydroos which plied to Ceylon and Kakinada. He was a close associate of Mandapam Marakkayar, referred to above. Thangavappa Marakkayar, Mohamed Mohideen Marakkayar, Sheik Thambi Marakkayar and Hussain Marakkayar were other important ship owners and maritime traders in Adirampattanam.

Sultan Marakkayar of Thirumaullaivasal a ship owner, who was a grain trader with ceylon.

Though Karaikkal was a centre of Marakkayars, there were only a few shipowners and maritime traders at the close of nineteenth century. Since the adjoining Nagore and Nagapatanam ports were advantageous the Marakkayars of Karaikkal based their shipping activities in these ports. Export of grain continued from Karaikkal to other ports of Coromandel and Ceylon. Many of the prosperous maritime traders from here emigrated to Singapore, Penang and France and Indonesia. The houses of the descendants of the shipowning families are called "Kappal Kara Veedu" (house of ship owners) even to this day. Kadar Sultan Marakkayar was a prominent maritime trader and shipowner.
He had business connection in Singapore. Mammana Pillai Marakkayar was the owner of many ships. He had factories at Kakinada and Karaikkal. His ships plied to Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Ceylon. This Marakkayar had a sound knowledge of astronomy who could predict monsoon and cyclonic effects which won the appreciation of the English.

There were also many small traders engaged in coastal trade and in the transport of salt, timber, grain and fish from one minor port to another in Thanjavur coast. Many of the Marakkayars were engaged in various other maritime activities like fishing, chank, diving and dryfish trade. There were a number of Marakkayar traders with small capital operating their dhoneys and boats between the minor ports in the coast of the district such as Topputhurai, Point Calimere, Muthupet, Krishnajipattanam, Kattumavadi, Ammapattanam, Kottaipattanam, Pasipattanam, Gopalapattanam and Soundarapandianpattanam and they supplied the commodities to the big traders.

Islamic Tamil literature is one of the prime sources for the study of the prosperous merchants of Kayalpattanam. But most of them were dealing only in precious stones. They had business connections in various overseas countries. They also imported uncut new precious stones into Coromandel.

A reference to the available records on shipping in Ramanathapuram and Thirunelveli districts in the third and last quarter of nineteenth century give occasional reference about the trading activities of Muslims of the region. Tuticorine was the major port, Kayalpattanam, Kulasekarapattanam, Vaipar and Kilakkarai were the other minor ports of importance. Many of the ships from these ports during this period bear Muslim names such as Mohideen Hydroos Bux, Mohideen Baghyalakshmi Bux, Mohideen Bux, Mohamed Sulaiman Bux, Kadar Bux etc., The captains (Nagudha) of these vessels were also Muslims. Ships from these ports carried on interportal trade and foreign trade with Ceylon. No bigger vessels plied from these ports. All vessels that operated from these ports were schooners, brigantines, boats, vallam and dhoneys and were lesser than 90 tons burthen. Kayalpattanam and Kulasekarapattanam were very busy ports. Large number of vessels operated only from these ports during this period. Along with the cargoes, passengers were also taken to Ceylon and Cochin from Kilakkarai, Kayalpattanam and Kulasekarapattanam. While three-fourth of the crafts which plied from these ports belonged to the
Muslim maritime traders of this region, one fourth belonged to the Parava Christians. Vaipar was the Parava port which was a Christian centre. The Paravas were also traders competing with the Muslims of the region and had the support of the Company and their vessels also plied to other ports in Coromandel and Malabar. From the ports of Kilakkarai, Kayalpattanam and Kulasekarapattanam and Vaipar merchandise were sent to other ports like Nagapattanam, Adirampattanam, Muthupet, Madras, Cuddalore, and Pondicherry.

At the fag end of nineteenth century the sea traffic from Kayalpattanam was minimum and Kulasekarapattanam continued to be a busy port. The commodities of export from these ports were mats, oilcake, chille, dryfish, yarn, tobacco, condiments, ghee, animals, teakwood, porcelain, medicinal herbs, cotton, sandalwood, palm, sugar, textiles etc., Areca, Coconut, jute, wheat, blackgram, metals, coconut oil, liquors, palm and coconut trunks, bullions, spices, yarn and cane were imported from ceylon into these ports. Food grains, areca, coconut, dryfish, timber, palm sugar, animals, spices, tobacco, cotton and chank were the commodities in interport trade.

There were only a few prosperous maritime trading families at the close of the nineteenth century at Kayalpattanam area. The families of Ahamed Hussain Marakkayar and Mohideen Meera Marakkayar were the leading maritime traders in Kayalpattanam during this period. They had extensive business connections in Ceylon and were running a cargo company at Colombo by name "Colombo Cargo Boat Company". They were having more than fifty boats for clearing cargoes at both the coasts. Their cargo company had connections with British Steam Navigation Company. They owned salt pans at Kayalpattanam and exported the salt to Colombo and other ports. They were having boat building yard at Kayalpattanam and manufactured and sold boats to the English Company. Cholukar Marakkayar family and Maniya Marakkayar family were the other important ship owning families at Kayalpattanam. All the above maritime traders had palacial buildings near the sea shore at Kayalpattanam, the remnants of which can be seen even to this day. The small traders who survived the economic storm, had to depend on the facilities afforded by the above shipowning families for their overseas trading and interportal activities.
At Kulasekarapuram, Hassankhan Sirajudeen Marakkayar, Kadar Batch Marakkayar, Gulam Mohideen Marakkayar, Vappu Naina Marakkayar, Syadulla Marakkayar and Abusali Marakkayar were the prosperous maritime traders and ship owners. Their vessels were engaged in interportal trade and foreign trade with Ceylon. Mohamed Kadarsha Marakkayar was a prominent shipowner and trader in Tuticorin. He had extensive business connections with English company and English private merchants and in Ceylon. He represented British India Steam Navigation company at Tuticorin. Later he was conferred with the title Khan Bahadur by the British Government.

The shipowners and traders referred to above employed a large contingent of Muslim maritime workers. They were philanthropists and were responsible for the development of Arabic educational and religious institutions in the coastal towns, of Coromandel and patronised Tamil poets and many Islamic Tamil literary works emerged because of their liberal gifts. Further during 18-19th centuries, Kayalpattanam became more a Islamic philosophical centre than a trading centre. Many Sufi philosophers who lived here attracted people to this town from various parts of the country and Ceylon. At a later period Kilakkarai also followed suit. The Marakkayar traders of Kilakkarai and Kayalpattanam freighted in their ships passengers, for pilgrimage to Mecca.

The archival records reveal instances where many Muslims of Coromandel indulged in smuggling and clandestine activities as occasion demanded, chank, pearl, pepper, spices, areca and textiles were the commodities involved in smuggling. The watchful English customs authorities could not detect or control such activities so easily. But whenever caught, they were punished. In an instant, Fakur Marakkayar, a merchant in Muthupet brought large quantity of areca from Ceylon to Muthupet. He paid the duty for a portion of the goods and carried away the remainder without the knowledge of the authorities, which was found out and the nuts were confiscated. Baboo Mohamed Marakkayar of Nagore was a prominent merchant and owner of three ships namely Meera Mohideen Bux, Kadar Bux, Kadar Mohideen Bux. He also owned many small boats. He had trade contact with Bengal and Ceylon. He was said to be a a notorious smuggler in chank. His ships with the contrabands were caught many times and the goods confiscated by the English authorities. Once the crew members of his ships were detained and fined for smuggling chank off Velanganni port to Bengal. His ships brought large quantity of chank from ceylon
without paying customs duties. Baboo Mohamed Marakkayar’s clandestine activities are referred to in many records of the English. A letter to the board of trade from the Master Attendant of Rayapuram (near Madras) about the clandestine activities of the Labbai boatmen says that, "they conclude that no punishment can reach them and becoming more and more daring in consequences." A superintendent of Police in Madras alerts the government on their clandestine activities. The smuggling activities of Muslims in Kanyakumari district with the connivance of the local native officials is referred to in another record. The Labbai and Marakkayar residents of Triplicane in Madras were found smuggling textiles and the attempt of the authorities to stop it was not fruitful. The residential area of such merchants was known among the British officials as "Thieving Bazaar."

**Manufacture and trade in salt** was one of the activities of many Muslim families of Coromandel Coast for a very long time. The introduction of monopoly on salt by the English Government, deprived many Muslims of the Ramanathapuram and Thirunelveli coast from the manufacturing activity of salt. Prior to this, the salt pans of Ramanathapuram coast were rented by the Marakkayar of Kilakkarai. When salt monopoly was introduced a proclamation was issued directing the native manufacturers to hand over all the stocks of salt to the Government. Accordingly the Marakkayars of Kilakkarai stopped manufacture of salt and also handed over the stocks to the authorities. But those who possessed some quantity of salt clandestively were penalised and the monopoly prize of salt was collected for the quantity in their possession. Alla Pitchai Marakkayar, Meera Sahib Marakkayar, Sheik Sadakathullah Marakkayar and Abdulkadar Marakkayar were some salt manufacturers and rentiers in Kilakkarai. Habib Marakkayar of Kilakkarai collected the earth salt in the nearby islands like Anaipar and exported it.

The ships and dhonies of Muslims were engaged in the transport of salt, in the region. Henry Damer, a private English merchant in Tuticorin, rented the ship of Sura Madali Marakkayar to transport salt to Colombo. The dhonies and Vallams transported salt from one port to another and bigger vessels carried the salt from the minor ports to the major ports like Tuticorin and Nagapattanam. Hasan Marakkayar of PortoNovo transported salt in his ship to Marakanam. Mohamed Ali beg was engaged in the shipment of salt in his ships to Alambaram. A statement of capitalists in salt trade in the coastal region in 1887 shows that it was dominated by Chettiar and English private merchants,
and there were no Marakkayar traders in Nagapattanam region. In Adirampattanam, Kadar Mohideen Marakkayar was in salt trade. In Thirunelveli coast Mohamed Aliar, Muthuvava Mohamed, Mohamed Mohideen, Mohamed Abdul Kadar Marakkayar and Ahamed Ihasan Marakkayar were leading salt merchants.

There is no strong evidence that in the first half of the nineteenth century Muslims were engaged in tannery industry. There was prevailing notion among the people that it was infralding for a person to have anything to do with hides and skins. Mattison Mines is right in pointing out that the prejudice against the dealers in hides and skin seems to survive among the Muslims even now in certain areas. Tanning was the domain of the caste Chuckler. Europeans entered in to this trade during nineteenth century and they introduced new methods in tanning in Madras presidency. Towards the end of nineteenth century, we find the names of some Muslims as owners of tanneries. This might be due to the lucrative and monopolistic nature of the business. Labbai and Deccanis were mostly in this industry. But Marakkayars were engaged in the shipment of raw and tanned skins. Mohamed Meeran Rawthar established tanneries in Tiruchirappalli in 1883 and he was an exporter of hides to England and other European countries. Bangi Hayat Basha established an export oriented tannery in 1874 at Madras. 76% of the hides from Madras Presidency were exported to England.

The professional expertise of the Coromandel Muslims in shipping and connected activities made the English to seek their help on many occasions. Since the muslims boatmen were well trained in salvaging ships, the English company entrusted such works to them. Labbai Mohamed Thambi and his team was engaged by the English East India Company to salvage ships that wrecked off the shore of Manaar. His large dhoney was suitable for this purpose and was in operation to salvage the properties that may be saved. The divers in the team were Ahamed Labbai, and Uduman Labbai who were experts in salvaging wrecked ships. The English paid 1/5 of the value of the valuables that were retrieved from the wreckage. During the earlier days of the ascendency of the English East India Company they appointed only Muslim crews in their ships. Later, important positions of crewship were denied to natives. However the Company appointed native pilots at Kilakkarai and Pamban to handle their vessels. Of the thirteen pilots appointed by the English at Pamban, eleven were Muslims. These pilots were men of proven ability and technical knowledge and held licence to pilot vessels of any kind. The English East India Company preferred the ships built by the native Muslims. They purchased the ships of tonnage capacity of 100 tons to 500 tons built by the Muslims of Nagapattanam. Though the vessels owned by the company were manned by Muslim pilots they were paid less than the Europeans.
The East India Company granted concessions and afforded every encouragement to the Muslims for the development of their trade, in the early years. Considerations were shown to the persons who had rendered special services to the Company. Towards the end of eighteenth century when the British East India Company took over Nagore, they imposed certain duties on exports and imports. The local Muslim Merchants claimed concessions from such duties, on the ground that the king of Thanjavur had issued certain cowlies granting tax concessions and that was the reason why they had come and settled down at Nagore as traders and made Nagore a flourishing commercial town. Their request was looked into. The Company extended concessions to the Muslims who rendered service to the Company. Mohamed Kasim Marakkayar the principle merchant of Nagore had helped the Company in their trading activities. A cowle had been granted to him by the English with a concession of 50% in customs duties and other taxes. After his death his son Mohamed Ackel claimed the same concessions. The ancestors of Abdul Kadar Sahib Marakkayar of Tondi was so influential that they owned cannons which they fired on festive occasions in their family. The English Government granted special permission to Abdul Kadar to retain the cannons. Chinna Marakkayar Malumiar a ship merchant of Nagore was appointed as the member of the landing and shipping committee at Nagapattanam. As a special gesture English colours were given to the ships of Mohamed Ali Marakkayar of Nagapattanam and Naina Malumi of Cuddalore.

But the claim of the residents of Kayalpattanam for the exemption of certain taxes was rejected by the English administration. In a memorial to the company in 1820, the Muslims of Kayalpattanam had represented that "they came from Arabistan and purchased the village of Kayalpattanam, where they had created sixtyfour mosques and brought up pulmyrah and coconut topes to defray the expenses of the mosques. They had been the inhabitants of the place for the past 900 years, during which period their honour was preserved by the favour of the Rajas and the Nawabs with special concessions. They were enjoying those concessions till the tenure of the previous Collector. But the new Collector demands to remit the taxes for the pulmyrah and coconut topes." They prayed for the continuance of the concessions hitherto enjoyed by them. Their request was considered in detail and finally it was rejected by the English Government on the ground that they were all prosperous at that time. However the English were liberal to some extent towards the maritime activities of the Muslims when compared with the Portuguese and the Dutch.
Thus it will be seen that there was a slow and steady decline in the maritime trade of the Muslims of Coromandel. The decline in trade started right at the emergence of the Portuguese in sixteenth century, and came to the point of liquidation by the end of nineteenth century. The economic compulsions due to the presence of many European companies, pushed back the coastal Muslims. The lesser resources at the disposal of the coastal Muslims made them to retreat from active direct trade. Instead they became the agents of bigger and wholesale Muslim traders, and English private merchants and procured textiles, food grains, condiments, and other commodities suitable for export and interportal trade and sold them to the waiting bigger merchants on the shore. Muslims owning small dhoneys, vallams and boats moved along the shallow waters of the coast and procured the available commodities and brought them to bigger ports. Thus the chain of trading activities of the Muslims was kept up though the quantum was very less. The Muslim maritime community which once dominated trading fields in the maritime commerce on the Coromandel coast was vanishing devoid of any significance or glory at the end of nineteenth century.

PEARL AND CHANK FISHERY

The antiquity of pearl fishery and pearl trade in Tamilnadu goes to the Sangam period. Sangam Tamil literatures like Pathupattu, Ahananuru, Purananuru, Kalithogai, Narrinai, Silappathikaram, and Manimekalai refer to the pearl of Pandya country and the connected matters. Tamil Bakthi literatures like Thevaram, Nalayirathivyaprabandam, Seevakasinthamani etc. describe various ornaments made of pearl. Inscriptions and copper plate grants of various rulers of Tamil country refer to the pearl and pearl fishery. The Thanjavur inscriptions of Raja Raja speak of numerous grants of pearl ornaments endowed to the temple. But we get splendid account on pearl fishery from 13-14th centuries starting from the account of Marco Polo.

The Arabs were the principal traders in pearls. Arab writers, traders and geographers of tenth century, like Suliman and Abuzaid refer to the pearls of Tamil Country and pearl trade. The documents of the Portuguese, the Dutch the English and the accounts of European travellers give very valuable informations about pearl fishery. The people who were the fishers of the pearl oysters were the Parathavars (Paravas) who were the traditional fishermen in the coastal area. Pearl oysters were rich in Ramanathapuram and Thirunelveli coasts and in the Gulf of Manaar. In fact the Portuguese called the Thirunelveli coast as "Piscaria" or Fishery Coast in view of abundance of pearl oysters and chank.
Korkai of Sangam period gave way to Kayal. From thirteenth century, Kayal became the headquarters of pearl fishery. The Muslims by this time had captured the pearl fishery as rentors and traders in pearl. The Pandya kings successfully conducted the pearl trade by extending great favours to the merchants, the main traders among them being the Arabs. They exchanged the imported horses for pearls. Some of the Muslims held high offices in the court of the Pandyas. The ports of Kayal, Vedalai, Devipattanam, Kilakkarai Tondi and Pasipattanam were the pearl exporting centers. A considerable part of the Tamil maritime population had embraced Islam by fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and they began to take pearl fishing as an occupation. The Muslims of Kilakkarai and Kayal were known for their specialised diving skill. The Muslims attempted to outreach the Paravas.\(^{143}\) The wealthy Muslims of Kayal and Kilakkarai managed to keep pearl fishing in their hands. The Paravas had practically been their hired hands and were feeling oppressed. However many of the Muslims in the coastal towns moved into shipping and gem trade from the more humble beginning from the diving profession. Some others moved up the ladder by establishing themselves as pearl and chank traders and boat owners controlling large population of low ranking Muslims divers in the lower strata of the society.\(^{144}\) This shows the occupational and status mobility among the Muslims of Coromandel.

After the arrival of the Portuguese in the Coromandel coast, the Missionary Manual D'fries in 1525, baptised a considerable number of Paravas. Joa Froles, the Portuguese captain and factor of the pearl fishery seized the pearl fishery and extracted rent from the Muslim headman and a force was kept to superintend the fishery.\(^{145}\) From then the Portuguese became the masters of pearl fishery in Coromandel coast and Manaar. The Pattamkattis (head man of Paravas) became the local authorities of pearl fishery. The Portuguese levied toll and taxes from the Paravas also which was very high. They levied such taxes on the Paravas since they were obliged to protect them from the Malabaris (Tamil Muslims) who used to come with armed boats to capture Parava fishers.\(^{146}\) The Portuguese rivalry forced the Muslims of Kayal to move to a nearby place and improve the new town of Kayalpattanam. The Paravas made Pinnakayal as their main settlement. Later Tuticorin became the headquarters of pearl fishery.

The Muslim Mudaliars of Kayalpattanam became the lease holders of the pearl and chank fishery during the second quarter of the sixteenth century, paying tributes to the Portuguese.\(^{147}\) Mudaliar means superintendent or headman.\(^{148}\) (The title Mudaliar is born by affluent Marakkayar merchants of Thirunelveli district, even to this day).
The traditional pearl market shifted from Kayal (Palayakayal) to Kilakkarai by 1531, where the Marakkayar pearl merchants were concentrated. During sixteenth century the pearl merchants had to pay 1/2 panam for every 100 pearls sold and it was used for the Ninaiithathai Mudithan Vinayakar temple at Kilakkarai, according to an inscription in the temple\textsuperscript{149}.

Ceasar Frederick, the Venetian merchant who visited the Thirunelvelli coast by about 1563, says that the divers engaged by the Portuguese in pearl fishery were christian Paravas. It will be seen that the Muslim divers were left out with aversion\textsuperscript{150}.

Arunachalam goes to the extent of putting it that the Muslim Labbai and Marakkayar divers who were not encouraged in their lawful persuit in pearl fishing became discontented and might have joined the pirates\textsuperscript{151}. However, the Muslim divers of Kayalpattanam, Kilakkarai, Periapattanam, Soundarapandiapattanam, Karaikkal, and Adiramapattanam participated in the fisheries conducted in the respective regions, of course in lesser number\textsuperscript{152}. Thus the Portuguese were enjoying mastery over this maritime industry (till they were ousted by the Dutch) to the detriment of the Muslim traders and divers.

The Nayaks of Madurai were content with the free stones and privileges in pearl fishery given to them by the Portuguese. But later at a point of time the Nayaks supported the Muslims against the Paravas, in pearl fishery. Thirumalai Nayak who came to power in 1623 entered into an agreement with the headman of Muslim community at Kayalpattanam and extended them concessions in pearl fishery. He diverted the free stones given to his account to the Muslim community leader Mudali Pillai Marakkayar and he was authorised to superintend the activity as the agent of the Nayak\textsuperscript{153}. The Sethupathis also established similar connections with Kilakkarai Marakkayars. They encouraged the Marakkayar pearl merchants and established pearl trading centres at Rameswaram and Periapattanam\textsuperscript{154}. These pearl trading centres were called "Muthupettai" and "Muthuchavadi". The street at Rameswaram where the pearl market was situated is called Muthuchavadi street even to this day. The Sethupathis donated the free stones allowed to them to the temples of Rameswaram and Thiruppalani. Fishing for the above free stones was entrusted to the Marakkayars of the region. Fishing for Rameswaram temple was entrusted to the family of one Sultan Marakkayar of Rameswaram\textsuperscript{155}.
The Dutch took over the pearl fishery from the Portuguese in 1658. During the first fishery conducted by the Dutch in 1663, they allowed the headman of Muslim community of Kayalpattanam to have the accustomed number of boats free of tax as under the Portuguese\textsuperscript{156}. But with regard to the taxes on unexempted boats, the Dutch levied more taxes from the Muslims than from the Paravas. These are the few examples of patronage and considerations shown by the Tamil Hindu rulers to their Muslim subjects without any religious bias. Thus the cordial relationship between the Hindu rulers and Muslim trading community helped them in their economic activities.

The Muslim boat owners also had to give one day's collections of pearl oysters to the Dutch, the particular day being left to the choice of the Dutch authorities\textsuperscript{157}. Prominent operators in pearl fishery in Kilakkarai during this period include Adam Labbai, Chinna Marakkayar and Periathambi Marakkayar. Periathambi Marakkayar owned the largest number of fleet with twenty one fishing boats. Hussain Marakkayar dominated in the Thanjavur coast and he was the owner of six boats and an employer of thirtynine divers. During the 1691 fishery, the Dutch allowed the headman of the Muslim community of Kayalpattanam nine free stones. Earlier under the Portuguese, the Nayaks of Madurai allowed only ten free stones from the privileged stones granted to them. But the Dutch themselves directly allowed nine freestones, to the Muslim Mudaliar. However this was very low when compared to the free stones allowed to the Parava Pattamkattis.

From the year 1746 the Dutch abolished all types of free stones. Arunachalam says, 'By stone a diver is meant ', but the Thirunelveli District Gazetteer mentions 'By stone, one diving for each diver\textsuperscript{159}. But the former seems to be correct, in our view. By this time the Nawabs of Arcot became the political masters in Carnatic. The Dutch had confrontation with the Nawabs in sharing the profits of pearl fishery. This made the Dutch to suspend the pearl fishery from 1749 to 1784, resulting in hardship to the Muslim divers since they were thrown out of the expertised profession. The Muslim pearl merchants had to resort to some other trade\textsuperscript{160}.

The economic impact of non conduct of pearl and chank fisheries was felt by the Dutch colonial authorities and the Nawab. By a treaty the Nawab ceded the chank fishery to Dutch, in 1758. By another treaty in 1788, the produce of the pearl and Chank fishery was divided equally by the Nawab and the Dutch. Practically there was no fishery in Tuticorin after 1796 and the Dutch lost their monopoly and hold in pearl fishery.
The English took over the Thirunelveli coast in 1782 and began to conduct pearl fishery. The entire coast of Carnatic came under the English in 1796 and all the Dutch possessions were taken over in 1825. The pearl fishery suffered from 1796 to 1825, since the English were interested in the consolidation of their power. When the English took over the Thirunelveli coast in again in 1801, the privileged stones in pearl fishery were abolished except in the case of Pattambattis, the Parava jathithalaivan. Only he was favoured by the Government. However in the fisheries conducted in Ramanathapuram coast maniam boats were given to the Muslim merchants (Marakkayar) of Kilakkarai as a special privilege.

The English conducted the pearl fishery in the Coromandel coast at irregular intervals. For instance after the fishery of 1830 there was no fishery for thirty years till 1860. After 1862 fishery was conducted only in 1889. No fishery was conducted between 1889-1900. By 1900, the Coromandel pearl fishery deteriorated completely. But some of the Muslim divers took up pearl and chank fishery of their own individually in Ramanathapuram coast during the last quarter of nineteenth century. Marakkayar pearl merchants advanced money to them liberally on the condition that it should be settled in the ensuing fishing season. This shows that the English were not very serious about pearl and chank fishery.

The Marathi Modi records in Thanjavur Saraswathi Mahal library give some details about pearl fishing activities in Thanjavur coast. The Maratha kings received considerable income from pearl fishery. Pearl and pearl oysters were exported to Malacca in the ships of Marakkayars from Nagore port. Pearl and chank divers were permitted to participate in the fisheries conducted in Ceylon coast. The pearl fishery was conducted in Nagapattanam, Tranquebar, Tirumullaivasal but it was meagre when compared with Ramanathapuram and Thirunelveli coasts. The Muslim divers (Labbias, Sonakars) dominated the pearl fishery activities in Thanjavur coast.

Chank fishery was an associated trade with pearling and was a lucrative maritime trade and brought good revenue to the precolonial rulers of Coromandel. The conch shells had been prized by the Hindus since ancient times and chank bangle making was an important industry in Bengal. Chank diving often served as a cover for illicit pearling operations. Along the coast of Coromandel chank...
was fished in the coastal belt of Thirunelveli, Ramanathapuram, Thanjavur and South Arcot. The Chank fishery of Thirunelveli and Ramanathapuram coasts was very prosperous when compared to Thanjavur and South Arcot coast\textsuperscript{171}. Chank were exported to Bengal and it was sold with good profit.

The Chank fishery also shared the fate of the pearl fishery. It suffered many ups and downs in the hands of the colonial European powers and the native rulers. The Muslim in the Coastal towns engaged in Chank fishery were affected by this.

After 1796, the Dutch gave up chank fishing by themselves and rented it to the highest bidder. Most of such rentors were Muslims. Though the pearl fishery became irregular, at the hands of the English from 1801, chank fishery was conducted from Tuticorin from October to May every year. The divers had to move about to collect the scattered shells. The chank collected was sold by auction. Labbai divers of Kilakkarai were more in the chank fishery in Ramanathapuram coast.

The English also rented the chank fishery to the highest bidder till 1876 when it was taken over under direct government management. The English government encouraged the divers by giving the same coolie rate as given by the private contractors, i.e. Rupee 20.00 per 1000 chank. The chank fishery yielded a large revenue to the English.

The Rajas of Ramanathapuram and Sivaganga enjoyed the chank fishery rights in Ramanathapuram coast\textsuperscript{172}. But the chank fishery of Thirunelveli coast alone was in the hands of the English administration. The Sethupathi exported the chank to Bengal in his own vessels and in the vessels of the Marakkayars of the region. It brought good revenue to the Sethupathi's treasury. The Sethupathi Raja sent in 1794 alone about 11,20,000 chank to Bengal from Devipattanam port in the ship of a Marakkayar of Kilakkarai. Meera Naina Marakkayar of Ramanathapuram acted as the agent of the Sethupathi in Calcutta\textsuperscript{173}. The Sethupathis encouraged the Marakkayar and Labbai divers and traders in chank fishery activities in their coast.

In Thanjavur coast the fishermen of Nagapattanam, Tranquebar, Thirumullaivasal and Adirampattanam collected the shells. Here the chanks were collected with net and not by diving\textsuperscript{174}. The chank fishery of Thanjavur coast was enjoyed by the Thanjavur Maratha rulers. The Modi records of the
Marathas speak about chank fishery in the coast and coolie charges to the divers. It was 14 chakrams, per 1000 chank. Further the English permitted the chank divers (Muslims) in the coastal areas to go to Ceylon for fishing chank. Shells were sent to Malacca from Nagore port.

In the south Arcot coast the chank shells were collected by rentors and also by individual fishermen. The collection of the shells was done with net as in the case of Thanjavur. Chank shells were smuggled from South Arcot coast to Pondicherry where it fetched a higher price.

The Coromandel chank shells had a good market in Bengal and hence exported there in large quantities. From there they were sent to Tibet and Butan. In Bengal the chank was in wider use as ornaments live bangles and earlets, it was also used in many social functions. We find references to the export of chank to Bengal from Coromandel in the writing of the Arabian and European travellers. The Muslims of Coromandel were the wholesale merchants in chank in Calcutta. Kilakkarai was an important centre of chank export to Bengal.

A large number of Muslims of Coromandel were engaged in pearl and chank fishing and trade, from very early times. Pearling and diving for chank were regarded as low and ritually polluting occupations, but this did not stop these Muslims from using their specialities as a bridge to this more prestigious and lucrative maritime activity. Persons in the lower strata of the society were engaged in diving and collecting activities while the affluent were in trade and export. From the early times, the Arab pearl divers were considered to be better than the Tamils. Since Thirunelveli and Ramanathapuram coasts were rich in pearl and chank, the majority of the coastal population among the Muslims took to diving as a profession. The writings of the Europeans praise the superiority of the Coromandel Muslim divers. The Kilakkarai Muslim divers were very industrious and liked by English also. They specially designed the boats suitable for chank and pearl fishery and these boats differ from every other in the world. Great majority of the divers in Kilakkarai were Labbais, of course there were also Marakkayars and Sonakars. The superiority of the Labbais over Paravas in the number of seconds they remained under water, collecting greater number of oysters per dive made the work of the former more productive and powerful. The stones under the Muslims fetched more. Hence the Muslim divers were paid higher than the Paravas and the Karaiyars.
At Kilakkarai a certain contribution of the catch was also generally allowed to be set aside by the divers for the benefit of their mosque. The English recruited Muslim divers of Kilakkarai and Periapattanam for chank and pearl fishing in Ceylon coast. Similarly the Muslim divers of Thirunelveli coast also were of proven ability. The English authorities sent the Muslim divers from Thirunelveli coast to Tennaserim for fishing pearl. In view of the attractive income in chank trade many of the Muslim shipowners and divers resorted to smuggling.

The Marakkayars of Kilakkarai were continuing to flourish in pearl and chank trade during eighteenth, nineteenth centuries. Syed Abdul Kadar Marakkayar figures very often as the rentor and merchant in pearl and chank since 1789 in Ramanathapuram and Thirunelveli coasts. He was having factories at Kilakkarai and Bengal. He enjoyed the patronage of the Sethupathi Vijaya Raghunatha Muthuramalingam (1762-1795). English records speak about the trade standing of Abdul Kadar Marakkayar who could transport chank shells along with other merchandise to Bengal, in his own ships, could afford a higher rent for fishing than any other person and his security was unquestionable. The English East India Company authorities preferred him over other competitors and had conferred renting rights to him in pearl and chank fishery, in Thirunelveli and Ramanathapuram coasts on many occasions. He was carrying on a vast trade from the ports of Kayalpattanam, Kulasekarapattanam, Vembar, Kilakkarai and Tondi. The Sethupathi had given him the privilege to trade in his ports on payment of a reduced duty i.e., instead of the usual duty. When the concession was curtailed later by the English authorities, (the Collector of Madurai) in 1802, the Board of Revenue, intervened and afforded adequate remedy to him. The company sold the grains collected from the people in the region to Abdul Kadar Marakkayar. The Nawab of Arcot also had granted him some concessions. Many of the European private merchants were jealous of reputation and concessions enjoyed by this Marakkayar among the English authorities. His son-in-law Haneefa Lavai Marakkayar was also a prominent trader and exporter in chank and pearl.

Syed Mohamed Marakkayar of Kilakkarai was the rentor of chank fishery in 1825. Varisai Ibrahim Marakkayar was the rentor of pearl fishery in Madurai coast in 1833-34. Quadir Meera Pillai Marakkayar was another trader and rentor in chank fishery in Kilakkarai.

Levey Mohamed Marakkayar was the chank and pearl fishery rentor in Thirunelveli coast in 1810-11. Kaleel Mohamed Marakkayar was a prominent rentor of fisheries during the second quarter
of nineteenth century and he had factory at Bengal\textsuperscript{190}. Marakkayar Tambi Marakkayar, Sali Naina Marakkayar of Kilakkarai were exporters of chank to Bengal and they had trading centres in Thirunelveli coast \textsuperscript{191}. Mohamed Kasim Labbe Marakkayar of Kilakkarai was the rentor of chank and fishery in Thirunelveli coast in 1819. He was also the chank fishery rentor for South Arcot coast during this period\textsuperscript{192}.

The system of renting chank fishery was discontinued by the English from 1876. The English government looked upon the chank fishery as their prerogative and conducted it annually in Thirunelveli coast. The shells collected were sold in one lot, in the month of July, to the highest bidder. In Thanjavur coast, the individual fishermen collected the shells and they were purchased by the customs department at a fixed price. In South Arcot it was farmed out to the rentors on yearly basis. At the close of nineteenth century, the Muslim Labbaies in the coastal villages continued as chank divers and there were many Muslims in chank trade and they exported them in their native crafts to Bengal. The Muslim divers of Kilakkarai, Periapattanam Kayalpattanam participated in the pearl fishery in the ceylon coasts where they got good remuneration\textsuperscript{193}.

The pearl and chank fisheries were an important a source for the economic development of the region during eighteenth nineteenth centuries. A detailed account of profit from pearl and chank fishery in Thirunelveli coast from 1801 to 1900 will show the part played by these fisheries in the economic life of the people of the region\textsuperscript{194}. By their active participation in this sphere of activity, the Marakkayars of Ramanathapuram and Thirunelveli coasts, particularly of Kilakkarai and Kayalpattanam, contributed much for the economic development of the region and for the livelihood of a large contingent of people in the lower strata of society.

The name "Pearl" is very closely associated in the Islamic society in Coromandel. Muslim women loved ornaments made of pearl. Muslims in the coastal towns prefixed Muthu (Tamil word for pearl) to their names. Muthu Ibrahim, Muthu Mohhamed, Muthu Nainar, Muthu Hussain are a few such very common names. The Marakkayars call the paternal grand father as Muthuvappa (vappa - father). The habitations of the Muslims in the coastal towns were called Muthupattanam. Muthu Mahal, is very commonly used to name the Muslims' house. No doubt that the long association of the Muslims of Coromandel in pearling activities have brought such an effect in their social life.
A considerable population of Muslims in coastal areas were fishermen, from a very long time. Like pearling and chank diving, fishing was also regarded as a low occupation. But the fishermen who were poor among the Muslims had to depend on those who were in the upper strata. Rich Marakkayars owning vessels controlled groups of such people under them. The inhabitations of these fishermen were separated from others. They were grouped along with Muslim weavers. It is apparent that a large part of Tamil maritime population who were specialised in pearling, chank diving and fishing embraced Islam. All of them could not have come out of their earlier occupation and continued them.

A large number of Muslims (Labbai, Sonakars, Marakkayars) were engaged in sea fishing in places like Kovalam, PortoNovo, Thirumullivasal, Nagore, Tranquebar, Velamkanni, Karaikkal, Topputurai, Point Calimer, Muthupet, Adirampattanam, Ammapattanam, Tondi, Kilakkarai, Kayalpattanam, Kulasekarapattanam and in many other small villages along the stretch of the east coast. Many of the Muslims were selling fish and dry fish. Dry fish was one of the important commodities in coastal trade. The Muslim fishermen used champan or sampan, catamarans, dhoneys and boats for fishing. About fortyfive types of fishing nets were in use in Coromandel. In Nagore and Karaikkal the Muslim fishermen were numerous and were experts in deep sea fishing. Since pearl fishery was seasonal, during the rest of the season fishing might have been their main occupation. When the pearl fishery became irregular, the Muslims engaged in this activity had to resort to sea fishing which was an easy job for them. From the third quarter of nineteenth century, many of the minor ports decayed, and trading activities were abandoned. The Muslim labourers who were in sea faring activities were thrown out of employment and many such minor ports naturally turned into fishing villages. When fishing was leased out by the English, the Marakkayar and Labbai traders became the rentors and a large contingent of Muslim labour class worked under them.

The fishermen among the Muslims were the people in the lower strata of the society. This is the condition even to this day, though they are called Labbai, Sonakar, or Marakkayars they are segregated from other Marakkayars and Labbai in social and economic status. The long association of the Muslims with fishing is evident from the names of some fish like Sonakan Thirukkai, Sonakan Valai, Sonakan Kezhuthi.
The Labbai and Marakkayar fishermen also had good knowledge in astronomical data, weather conditions, and oceanography, like those who were engaged in high sea fishing. The knowledge on these maritime subjects have been handed down to generations by tradition verbally and they are being followed and practised even to this day in the coastal villages of Tamil Nadu. The past glory of this maritime community is seen only in such vanishing vestiges.

SHIP AND BOAT BUILDING

The talent of the ancient Tamils in sea craft and navigational technologies are attested by the occurrence of many terms about sea, crafts and trading activities in the Sangam Tamil classics and in the later Tamil literary works. We find about twenty terms for various kinds of ships and boat and also names of the parts of the vessels and the building techniques.

The vessels were built in various sizes and shapes. Their length varied from 10 feet to 176 feet. For example the front face of the vessel by name ampi was in the shape of elephant or buffalo or lion. Some others were built in the shape of peacock, alligator, serpent and tiger. Vessels like navoy, vankam and Kalam were used for overseas and long distance voyages and trade. Toni, otam, pataku and similar vessels were in use for short distance and coastal voyages and trade.

The boat builders followed astrological and astronomical data for favourable time for boat building. The timber used in boat building were Vembu, Neem, Ilupai, Punai, Naval, Sirutekku, Sirunangu, Aini, Kongu, Karumardu, teak and venteak. The ships were propelled by wind and had sails for this purpose. The ship after completion set on sail in an auspicious time. The use of iron was said to be taboo in yuktikalpataru, the sanskrit text on seacraft technology. It was the tradition to build boats by hull of planks joined together by ropes and wooden pegs.

The Arab ships appeared in the Indian waters as early as second century A.D. The Persian and Arab ships were also built of wooden plank held together with coir ropes. They were capacious and lightly built and swift before the wind, but were not really able to
withstand the strong monsoon winds and long voyages. Marco Polo writing in the later part of fourteenth century mentions about the risky nature of Arab ships\textsuperscript{204}. The ancient Tamil maritime communities coming in contact with the Arabs used to adopt the best features of their construction techniques in ship building for their mutual advantages. With the Arab patronage, the ancient Tamils built ships of high quality. The Arab merchants might have brought their own carpenters in their vessels for their maintenance. Some of them might have also permanently stationed in the ports of Tamil country, for attending such works in Arab ships. So the Arab colonies in the eastern coast included their carpenters also. Manimekalai the Tamil epic of second century A.D. mentions about the Yavana (Arab) carpenters\textsuperscript{205}.

With this expertise in navigation, the rulers of Tamil country in the medieval period patronised ship building and maintained large fleets of vessels. Their naval expeditions and colonial conquests across the sea to Ceylon, Lakshadweep, Maldives, Andaman, and Nicobar, Burma, Malaya, Java and Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries attest their naval powers\textsuperscript{206}. Inscriptions and copper plates of the Pallavas, Pandyas and the Cholas right from the seventh century to fourteenth century speak about their naval strength and victories. The vessels were not only used for warfare but also for overseas trade\textsuperscript{207}.

Indian shipping industry developed remarkably by the end of fifteenth century. By European standards fairly large ships were built in South India. The ships as they have been recorded were between 350 to 800 tons burthen. Some of them were bigger than the Portuguese ships in Indian ocean. The Navayaeth Muslim merchants of Gujarat built very beautiful ships. The Muslim communities of peninsular India had contributed much for the development of shipping in Indian ocean\textsuperscript{208}. The ships of Bay of Bengal region were generally built in sturdier fashion to withstand the occasional cyclones in the area but they were slower to sail and they had to sail in time of favourable wind and weather\textsuperscript{209}. Thomas Bowray who visited the Coromandel Coast in 1670 mentions about the superior crafts of the coast.

The Muslims of Coromandel owned many types of vessels for their sea faring activities. The labour and technical skill to operate them also came from them. the Portuguese records speak about the carpentry occupation of the Muslims of peninsular India and Ceylon. No doubt many of them were mainly boat builders\textsuperscript{210}. 
When the English appeared in Indian waters in the seventeenth century, they found the Coromandel ships were better than their ships. The English ships were built of oak tree, fastened with iron nails, the corrosion of which consumed the very metal which is supposed to unite the planks. Hence the English turned to the South Indian technology and began to build crafts with teak wood engaging local craftsmen. In 1821, timber was declared as state monopoly and small boat builders were not able to get teak wood for boat building.

The archival records of the English shed some light on the ship building activities of the Muslims of Coromandel. Periathambi Marakkayar the seventeenth century commercial magnate of Coromandel owned many vessels of various descriptions and he built those vessels in his ship building yard at Kilakkarai. The English East India Company utilised the yard of the Marakkayar to repair their ships. Many other merchants of Kilakkarai also built ships of their own for their maritime activities engaging local carpenters, among whom there were many Muslims. As trial run they freighted passengers in their vessels to Mecca. The Muslim merchants in Nagapattanam and Nagore also built ships of considerable burthen up to 500 tons, in the port itself, not only for their use but also for the merchants of western coast. The English also purchased such vessels from the local Marakkayar merchants and the company also utilised their technical skill. The Marakkayars of Kayalpattanam built ships for their activities and they also sold vessels to the English East India Company. Similarly the maritime Muslim communities engaged in seafaring and fishing activities throughout the stretch of the Coromandel coast built ships and boats of their own with the available local skills. It is interesting to note that at present the Marakkayars and Labbais who are engaged in fishing in Thanjavur, Ramanathapuram, and Thirunelveli coasts build their boats of their own. There are also a number of Muslim carpenters engaged in these works. They build such vessels in the traditional way as handed down from generation to generation.

The coastal Muslim communities supplied skilled crew members required for shipping in large numbers because of their mastery in techniques in sea tradition and knowledge of oceanography. These traditions are getting lost under the impact of modern technologies and the last vestiges of a dying past can be traced only in remote locations and minor ports where country crafts still survive. The memory of the glorious past of the Muslim maritime communities has vanished still the vestiges can be traced among the Marakkayar and Labbai fishermen in Coastal villages. They have good knowledge about wind,
weather, sea and its bottom topography, water current and life, field knowledge about sky and stars method of determining distance, direction and fixing locations of the vessel in the open sea. Some information on the above collected in field studies in the coastal villages among Muslim fishermen are described here briefly.

The basic directions are understood by rising and setting of the sun and the pole star. The directions find a strong associations with wind and weather, since the wind brings the weather and sailing is regulated by wind direction and speed. The wind is named from the origin of its direction as, vadai, for north wind, cholakatru for southern wind, Kachan for west wind and Kondal for eastern wind, intermediate directions are Vadaikondal for north east wind, Cholakondal for south east wind, Vadai Kachan for north west wind and Cholakachan for south west wind. The wind that brings changes in the direction of the wind is called Thirvaikatru.

The location of the coast from the open sea is determined by the direction of the waves, since waves will be directed towards the coast, and the flight of birds as they will fly towards the coast at the fall of the day. During day, the time is ascertained by pointing the pointing finger vertically towards the sun and time is calculated approximately from the resultant shade. During night the time is ascertained with the help of the stars.

They use a handful of stars for finding directions, time and to forecast weather conditions. This varies with the seasons and regions. In Coromandel Coast the stars used are mainly planets and a few stars such as Jupiter, Erinjanveli and Vidi velli morning star (Venus), Vada Velli (pole star) Kappal velli (sapt Rishi or Ursa Majoris), Tarassu velli (Tulacentaurus) Kootu velli (orionis or Adira and Mrig), Raja velli etc.

The depth of the sea is measured by dropping a rope with a clay mass at the tip. As the clay mass touches the floor of the sea the sandy particles stick on it, the rope is drawn up and with the type of sandy particles sticking in the clay mass, the depth of the sea is ascertained.
This rope is called "Vizhuthu Coir". Further from the type and smell of the sand they can determine the availability of the particular species fish in the area, so as to regulate their catch programmes. The water current direction is ascertained by throwing some wet ash ball in the water. They believe traditionally that on certain days of the lunar cycle there will be low tide. For example on 3rd, 14th to 17th, 28th to 30th days of the lunar cycle there will be low tide and they call it as "Kuru neer". Change in weather condition is ascertained by the change in the brightness of the stars, with this they can forecast the nature of the wind and tide during Vadai Kachan (North West) which often brings high tides and cyclones on the Caoromandel Coast. The traditional, knowledge followed by the vast majority of the Muslim communities for centuries, can now be seen only among the scattered fishing population of the community in the coastal villages.

**End of the Enterprises**

The maritime enterprise of the Muslims of Coromandel Coast declined to near total by the end of nineteenth century. Only a handful of influential merchants withstood the storm, others went in search of better opportunities. Many were reduced to poverty. The labour class was the worst affected. No more sails to far off countries. The pearl banks were left unexploited. Many of the busy minor ports decayed and were reduced to fishing outlets. Various causes contributed to the decline of their maritime enterprises.

It is a fact that the Muslims of Coromandel stumbled by the ruthless attack of the Portuguese. Their maritime enterprises met with a sudden economic misfortunes. Many withdrew from the scene. But in the course of time the Muslim traders began to accommodate and cooperate with the exploiters. There developed a symbiotic relationship between the two even with mutual freight space on board on one others ship but it was too late for the Muslims to tide up the situations. With regard to the Southeast Asian markets the Muslims avoided the Portuguese and shifted to alternate trade centres. However the superior naval power and higher capital resources of the Portuguese continued to be the real challenge to the Muslims. With their half shattered economic condition they had to face the new competitors, the Dutch.
On their arrival at Coromandel the Dutch also found the Muslims as the major rivals to their trade prospects and were extremely hostile to them. The restrictive policies of the Dutch in Coromandel - Ceylon - Malabar trade deprived the Muslims of their legitimate trading activities, eroding their economy. They were forced to adopt clandestine methods like smuggling for their livelihood. The injuries inflicted by the blows of the Portuguese developed into an ulcer by the additional blows of the Dutch. With the adversely affected economic structure they met the English in the seventeenth century.

The English had no religious bias against the Muslims like the Portuguese and the Dutch. From the second half of eighteenth century to the first half of nineteenth, the English East India Company encouraged the Muslims particularly Marakkayars in the maritime trade. They extended them concessions and treated them with consideration. However from the second quarter of nineteenth century the economic ambitions of the English marginalised the Muslims also. In the period of our study the English emerged as the major political power in India and they were the purchasers and exporters of Indian goods. It was but natural for their subjects to turn in the direction of England for their trade prospects. But the policies of London were detrimental to Indian traders including the Coromandel Muslims.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the encouragement of the British administration to the Lankashire Jenny resulted in the import of cotton piece goods from Britain in to the South Indian market, making the then export and import pattern topsy turvy. Because of this, the export of cotton piece goods was sealed along with the fate of thousands of native weavers, intermediaries, traders and exporters among them were considerable number of Muslims. Economists state that this has no parallel in commercial history.

English administration in India bowed to the pressure of a group of individuals (both in India and England) who influenced the policies of the company. Accordingly they began to feather their own nest at the cost of the natives. The prohibition of Indian ships and sails to enter British ports and restriction on the Indian shipping and ships employing Indian sailors had a crushing effect on the native maritime profession. The Muslims who were in shipping profession were suddenly necked out to despair. There was racial discrimination in collecting tariffs. Higher tariff rates on the ships of Indians affected their profitability. Muslim ship owners and Nagudhas had to run with lesser profits.
Grain was an important commodity in Coromandel coastal trade and Indo - Ceylon- Malabar trade. Increase of customs duty on grains was injurious to these trading activities and it declined in course of time. The value of coastal trade in Madras Presidency in 1805 was Rs. 2075339/- but in 1845-46 it was only Rs.362534/-.

In the course of nineteenth century, the minor ports along the stretch of the Coromandel Coast were neglected. There were no dockyard for landing or repairing facilities. Bigger vessels could not call on these ports. The District collectors suggested to enlarge the facilities in these ports. The officials in Fort St. George were sleeping over the recommendations of the officials in the district administration. The Marakkayar ports on the Coromandel had to starve in this score. Moreover, trading activities of the company, were concentrated in Madras and it was not in the reach of the small traders. Heavy duty was imposed on the import of the spices. Hence spices trade declined. Further, cinnamone, cloves and other spices were introduced in the gardens of the Company in places like Courtalam and the Nilgris to cater to the local needs. This made the merchants to restrict the import of spices.

The English free merchants, the Nabobs, entered the fray in to the export and import trade, salt trade, rentorship of fisheries and inland trade. They had bigger resources with them and had the blessings and support of the Company. The Muslim merchants could not withstand this competition and it brought adverse consequences on them.

The prospects of foreign trade of the Coromandel Muslims was linked to the political conditions of the nations with which they were trading. Even during the eighteenth century the kingdoms of Southeast Asia were in a political mess. The Madras based English private merchants offered to help such kings in case of attack by enemy nations. They kept armed men on the shore of these countries for this purpose. For example the king of Ache granted many concession to the English private merchant. Jourdan in 1768, in return for the military help arranged by him. He shipped about 75 Muslim men from Nagore for this purpose. Jourdan also enjoyed the favour of the kingdoms of Kedha for arranging similar help. The Danes in Tranquebar also supplied sepoys to the kingdom of Kedha. Thus trade was preferred by the Southeast Asian Kingdom with traders who assisted them in their defence. The English merchants well utilised such opportunities and readily accepted the invitation for alliance.
in defence and trade. This is an illustration of the condition which thrust the political power into the hands of European traders. Thus the Europeans got a preference over the Coromandel Muslim traders even though they were frequenting these coasts for a very long time. In this way the Muslim traders were pushed to a second position in the trade of Southeast Asian countries by the end of the eighteenth century.

The various wars fought by the European powers in South Indian soil for supremacy, brought economic instability, among the natives. Money became scarce, there was none to purchase grains and export commodities. The trading vessels of the natives were subjected to hardship at the hands of the opponent European powers. For example in 1798, many ships of Coromandel Muslims were captured by French privateers resulting in great loss of properties. Similarly the English fleets also harassed the native vessels with French or Danish flags and colours. The Muslims of Nagore, Nagapattanam and PortoNovo were the worst affected during this period because of the hostile operation by the Europeans.

The horse trade which was in the hands of the Muslim Rowthars and Marakkayars for centuries also slipped into the hands of the English private merchants and they imported small handy and fast ponies from Pegu and Manila. The venue of the horse fair shifted to Hydrabad which became the centre of local horse trade. Thus the Muslims of Kilakkarai and Kayalpattanam lost their lioris shake in horse trade by the end of eighteenth century.

The pearl and chank fisheries suffered due to interference of the European powers. These fisheries became irregular. Even this was conducted to the whims and fancies of the particular power which engaged in them at that time. The vast majority of the coastal Muslim population in the lower strata of the society who were engaged in these fisheries activities were thrown out of employment. Such workers migrated to Ceylon for better livelihood. Many became fishermen. The pearl and chank merchants had to enter into other trades. A few of them became gem dealers.

A large number of petty merchants, shipping personnel and other labour class migrated to Ceylon and Southeast Asian countries and Burma in pursuit of better jobs. Such migrations affected the balance of Coromandel maritime professional activities and the economic condition of the coastal belt.
Apart from all the above external factors, the internal differences and deficiencies among the Muslims also contributed to the decline of their maritime commerce and other activities. Right from the early times, the Indian ocean trade was based on the commercial success of numerous individual Muslim merchants. Adherence to a common religious faith sometimes enabled the building of a commercial link and network and evolution of a mechanism of credit. But Muslim merchants competed fiercely with each other. They were by far the most numerous though they generally operated individually or in groups according to their ethnic origin and never as one cohesive group. The concept of high and low in terms of ethnicity, descent and culture and social position etc., creates a social situation characterised by the lack of solidarity and cooperation among people and these in turn fail to produce a collective consciousness among them to change and develop their society. It is a fact that laissez faire doctrine promoted by Adam Smith postulates that individual pursuance for their own interest will bring great happiness in economy. But in the changed modern capitalistic pattern of society, the monopoly of the Europeans and the formation of corporations (joint stock companies etc.,) proved a real challenge and competition to the free enterprises. This is true in the case of the Muslims of Coromandel.

Most of the Muslim traders were men who operated with limited capital resources and sometimes obtained loans from the money lending chettiars. There were only a few rich Muslim merchants and ship owners, who seldom undertook voyages across the sea but advanced money to small maritime traders on the condition that it should be returned doubled on return. The Coromandel Marakkayars and Labbais could not stand against the large capital resources of the European adventures. According to a statistics in the second half of the nineteenth century, the bigger individual Muslim merchants of Nagapattanam and Nagore operated with a limited capital of Rs.35,000 to 50,000 whereas the English private merchants had liquid capital several times higher than this. Though the Chettiar merchants in the coastal towns could not compete with the Muslims in commercial voyages and maritime commerce, they were better in financial resources. They financed large sums at a higher rate of interest, to those who were engaged in overseas trade. Many Muslim traders obtained loans from them for their trading activities. So the capital resources of the Muslims could not keep pace with the developed European capitalism. They took no serious note of the growing global modern capitalism and its characters. Further their economic activities were conditioned by their religious doctrines, as rightly put forth by Max Weber in his famous work "Protestant Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism". For example usuary is prohibited in Islam. Even though the Muslim traders paid heavy rate of interest to the Chettiar money lenders
and others they could not get interest for the credits they advanced. As strict followers of religious tenets almost all of them were ready to forego such an income whereas the coreligionists enriched themselves by such profits. Thus the religion also played it's own role in their economic wellbeing of the Muslims of Coromandel.

In the whole period of our study we do not come across among the Coromandel Muslims, business men of magnitude of Francisco of Nagapattanam or Achuthappa chetty or Chinnana Chetty, Malaya Chetty, the only exception being Periathambi Marakkayar in seventeenth century. To overcome the destructive circumstances of the wars, famines and financial crisis in South India during the eighteenth century, the English merchants organised themselves into agency houses with definite partnership, since the individual capital resources were inadequate in the changed situation. Many such agency houses emerged in Madras like, the Chase Sewell and Chinnery, Tullah, Connell, Brodie, Reoibuck, Abbot and Maitland. These agency houses transacted business of every kind. They advanced money, bought and sold commodities on commission conducted business of their own and their shipping activities were wide. The maritime Muslim traders never realised the importance of the modern capitalism and it's economic strength and also the viability of organisation like joint stock companies. They did not rise up to the occasion to build up their economy. It is a great fault on their part that they did not enter into such ventures. No doubt that such ventures would have rescued them from such an economic misfortune and downfall. Further, there was no any motivating agencies for their economic activities. The role of reforming agencies in that time were practically very insignificant.

The Coromandel Tamil Muslims had no occasions to enjoy the political patronage of the local ruling houses (except that of the Sethupathis). We have been seen that political support to a particular trade or community was essential for their development. For instance the Paravas who were fishermen, pearl and chank divers under the Muslims and other affluents emerged stronger with the support and encouragement of all the European colonial powers. In course of time they became traders and shipowners and challenged the Muslim enterprises. The Muslims were never offered such a support by the European powers and as well as the local rulers. These Tamil Muslims also stood away from political activities of the period.
They did not clamour for state owned financial or military assistance. They had no ethnic or kinship relationship to them among the ruling houses. Even the different ethnic or kinship relationship with the ruling houses would not have proved to be a hindrance if they had a will to enter politics. But by native it seems they had no quest or ambition for power. They adjusted themselves to the changed political situation, keeping away from confrontation. Whenever their rights were denied they accepted it quietly. They had no aptitude to warfare either in the sea or land to protect their maritime activities. In the absence of a state owned military support to them they bowed down to the force let loose on them. Thus without utilising the proper political forum for their development, they tightly remained in the precapitalistic shell in seclusion where individual tradition dominates unmoved by the concept of modern economic institutions.

The Coromandel Muslims did not attain any significant economic development under the Nawabs of Arcot. The Nawabs themselves were struggling for their political life and were always in need of large sums of money. The English private merchants were in favour of the Nawabs since they advanced loan to them, which the Coromandel Muslim traders could not. Hence they were never close to this Muslim power throughout the period of our study. Still it is interesting to note that the trade of Carnatic court was in the hands of the Armenian merchants. These merchants minted in lakhs by supplying fancy goods and fragrances to the Nawabs. Thus the hundreds of years Muslim rule also does not bring any special prosperity to the local Muslim population.

The introduction of railways came as a hurdle to the small traders who were engaged in interportal and coastal trade. In his famous minute of 1853 Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General of India advocated construction of railway lines in each presidency connecting the interior parts with its chief ports to serve the commercial advantages. Accordingly railway lines were laid connecting the coastal port towns with interior hinterland villages. It was advantageous for the hinterland traders to convey the commodities directly to the chief ports and other far off towns without waiting for the coastal boat service.
There was lack of creativity and innovations in thought even among the elite Muslims in relation to modernity and developmental aspects of the society as a whole. They have neither accepted the new age or mentally alert to the need of the time. The Coromandel maritime Muslims failed to pick up the modern navigational technologies. They used only the sails for their interportal, coastal and overseas trades. This was the condition till 1900. But steamers were introduced by the English in Indian waters and the first stream vessel arrived in South Indian coast in 1826 itself. From 1850 the traffic of English steam vessels became regular in Coromandel and called the ports of Nagapattanam, Pamban and Tuticorin. The old sails were no match to the steam vessels. Thus the Muslims neglected the modern technology, and ultimately lost the fruits of it. The Coromandel Muslims were lacking in warfare techniques failed to counter the attacks of the Europeans either in land or sea. Whenever they met with attacks simply they evaded them.

The educational backwardness of the Coromandel Muslims was also responsible for their economic stagnation. In eighteenth-nineteenth centuries the Muslims lagged far behind the English education. The progress of their education was very slow owing to their strict adherence to the faith. They totally obstained from Hindu Schools where they had no chance of studying the teachings of Islam. When the fellow religionist were crowding in schools and colleges the Muslim sat apart and held back by conservatism. The Muslims were borne of spirit of exclusiveness. They thought that conversion to Christianity was due to the English education in the missionary institutions. They were prepared to forego the advantages of English Education rather than risk the faith of their children. They opposed the opening of schools for modern education in their settlements. For achieving higher social status many Muslims of middle income groups were interested in religious education and preferred theology oriented institution like Madarasa. These Madarasas were outmoded educational institutions where education imparted was mainly theocratic in nature and did not evince any interest in the teaching of science and technology. The Coromandel Muslims became religiously obscurantists and intellectually sterile. Religious leaders wielded much influence on the Muslims of older generation. The attachment of Muslims in Public services was negligible.
Not knowing the technological revolutions around them they were satisfied with their traditional way of life and learning. In the last decades of the nineteenth century there were only about 80 Muslim students in Arts Colleges. There were only 450 students in secondary schools and the number in primary schools was 459,152,35. Thus the aversion of the Muslims for modern education and technologies widened the gap and caused a gulf and created barrier in their social and economic development to the generations to come.

By 1900, the masters of maritime commerce, the Marakkayars, Labbais, Sonakars and Rowthars were reduced to small and petty traders and intermediaries to the English and local artisans and peasants. Their independent economic stability and social standing were cut short due to the various causes enumerated above. Thus at the dawn of the twentieth century the enterprises of the Coromandel Muslims became the story of the past and forgotten unsung.
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