INTRODUCTION

A study of writings on Indian Muslims and their attitudes reveals that various analyses concerning them have always been attempted with in the perspective of their religion. Only a few scholars have concerned themselves with the study of the social and economic activities of the Muslims. Even such works concentrate more on the north Indian Muslims. Mrs. Meer Hussain Ali's Observations on the Muslims of India, Jaffur Shureeff's Qanun-i-Islam, Shaik Akbar Hussain's Marriage Customs Among the Muslims in India, and Dr. Imitaz Ahamed's recent works and Sekh Rahim Mondal's works on West Bengal Muslims may be cited as examples. However the customs and practices of Muslims in peninsular India particularly the Coromandel Coast, have been practically ignored. The Moplas of Western coast have received scholarly attention but not the Marakkayars, Labbais and Rawthars of Coromandel. Hitherto no serious attempt has been made to study the conditions of the Muslims of Coromandel Coast.

In the recent past, Mattison Mines has produced some articles about the economic life of the Muslims in a suburb in Madras. But it is a study at the local level in an isolated pocket. Susan Bayly has brought out a good monograph on the Muslims of Tamil Nadu, which is a first hand study on the social and cultural characters of the Tamil Islamic society. But she devotes most part of the study to the religious aspects.

As rightly pointed out by Stephene Dale the most striking omission of all the studies on Indian Muslims, is the lack of interest in their mercantile activities. No historical or economic study has been done on the founding and operation of the Muslim mercantile community nor is there any good study of their trading centres, nature and scale of their maritime trade and other related activities.

Fortunately the obscured maritime history of the Coromandel Coast was brought to light by a few scholars, where we find references about the maritime activities of the Coromandel Muslims. Sanjay Subramaniyan's work on the Economic History of Coromandel Coast between 1500 to 1650, refers to the trading activities of some Marakkayars amidst the Portuguese and Dutch dominance. Sinnappa Arasaratanam has produced a wide range of monographs and articles about the mercantile activities in the Coromandel Coast in 17-18th centuries. The works of this pioneer scholar shed new light on the dark passages of the Coromandel commerce where we find detailed analyses. In his writings we find many interesting references about the
maritime activities of the Muslims of Coromandel Coast, of course at a macro level. A few dissertations submitted to the various Universities by research scholars give some scattered informations about the mercantile activities and social customs of the Muslims of Tamil Nadu. M. Abdul Rahim’s M.Lit. Thesis on Nagapattanam, and Ph.D. Thesis on Muslims of Tamil Nadu 1800-1900, T. Jayarajan’s M.Phil Thesis on the Marakkaryars of Adirampattanam, Syed Abdul Razacks, M.Phil Thesis on the Social life of Nawabs of Arcot are a few works to cite.

The Muslims settled on the coastal towns of Coromandel speak Tamil and Tamil Language is their mother tongue. The progenetors of the early Muslims were the Arab Muslim merchants and navigators who settled in the port towns of Coromandel region right from the eighth century A.D. From here they continued their mercantile activities, for which the local rulers willingly extended all facilities. The Coromandel Coast was studded with ports like PortoNovo, Nagapattanam, Nagore, Karaikkal, Adirampattanam, Mandapam, Vedalai, Kilakkarai and Kayalpattanam and they served as passage or crossing points to Ceylon, Malacca, and other Southeast Asian lands. Guided by the previous experience the Arab Muslim continued their trade for which the local authorities offered facilities and concessions in view of the enormous profits from such trade contacts. The Arab Muslim settlers on the Coromandel region married the native women. Their offsprings continued the Arab sea-faring tradition as navigators, shipowners and overseas merchant princes. This mercantile population further swelled to make the Coromandel Muslim society, by conversions thanks to the efforts of these merchants and the influence of the zealous Sufi missionaries. The Coromandel Muslim communities mingled with the local population and lived in peace.

The Muslim mercantile community wielded enormous power in the courts of the local rulers and performed yeomen service as mariners, administrators, and guardians of the sea coast. They were the merchant princes in the real sense. They ruled the waves of the Indian Ocean till about the fifteenth century and they also established a network of overseas depots and branches in Ceylon, Malacca and other Eastern countries.

The Vasco da gama’s epoch inflicted a severe blow to the commercial activities of the Tamil Muslims in the beginning of sixteenth century. Misfortune came to them in succession in the form of Dutch and the English which proved fatal to their maritime activities. The monopolistic and restrictive policies of the colonial European powers and the unsettled political condition of Coromandel hinterland pushed back the Muslim mercantile community to a second rank. Bearing all the brunt the Muslim maritime community adjusted themselves to the changed situation and continued their activities with their available resources, eventhough the profits were lesser.
However the Muslims were no match to the newly emerged colonial power, the English, who became the masters of Coromandel by 1800. The English adopted an ambivalent policy towards Coromandel Muslims and their maritime activities declined gradually to insignificance by 1900. The Muslims by their maritime activities have contributed a honourable share for the economic development of the Coromandel region.

When the Muslims lost opportunities in maritime activities on the Coromandel many migrated to Ceylon and Southeast Asian countries and settled as traders, pedlars and labourers. With the closure of doors for seaborne trade by 1900, the Muslims with the spirit of Tennyson's Ulysses, "To find, to seek, to strive and not to yield", searched for new fields and spread themselves into the interior parts of Tamil Nadu where they established various business houses in wholesale and retail trade.

The Tamil Muslims share many customs and practices in common with their coreligionists, the Hindus. At the same time they identify themselves with their own customs and mannerse. They practise endogamous marriage. Matrilocal residence, house gift to the bride are some of the unique customs among the Marakkayars. As great fortune seekers, the material minded Muslims strictly perform their duties as expected of a devout Muslim. Charity, hospitality and philanthropy are in their blood.

Apart from the policies pursued by the European powers, neglect of modern education and technologies, limited capital resources, non cohesive nature of trade among themselves lack of interest in joint ventures and absence of political patronage were a few causes for the economic breakdown of the Maritime Muslim community.

As the socio economic profile of the Coromandel Muslims is not studied adequately a sincere attempt is made here to unfold the matrix of the maritime activities, economy and social customs of this community during 1750 - 1900. Thus this humble study is to bring to light the role of the community in maritime activities on the Coromandel Coast in various capacities, in overseas and coastal trade as traders, shipowners, shipping professionals; part played by them in pearl and chank fishing and other maritime activities and also their social organisation and customs at a micro level.
REVIEW OF SOURCES

Primary Sources

For the preparation of this dissertation, Tamil Sangam Classics like Ahananooru, Pattinappalai, Nedunandram, Silappadikaram, Manimekalai, Seevakasinthamanai, inscriptions found in various places such as Kilakkarai, Tiruippullani and Kayalpatanam; the travel accounts of Marco Polo, Wassaf, Ibn Batuta which shed light on the antiquity of the Arab and Muslim settlements on the Coromandel Coast, were consulted.

Islamic Tamil Literature, hitherto not utilised suitably which are authentic source materials on the Tamil Muslim society are consulted here. Islamic literary works such as Palsandamalai, Saithakkathiru Marakkayar Thirumana Vazthu, Seethakkathi Nondi Natakam, Yakobu Siddhar Padalgal, Deen Vilakkam and Seerapuram, which are the social documents of the Coromandel Muslims, were consulted for study on social customs and practices.

For the data on maritime activities, the Archival materials in the Tamil Nadu Archives, constitute the prime source materials. Dutch Records, English Records such as District Records of Madurai, Thirunelveli, South Arcot, Thanjavur, Diary and Consultation Books, Records of the Mayor's court, Public Consultation, Political Consultation, Marine Consultation, Judicial Consultation, Records of the Board of Revenue, Native News Paper Reports and Records of Marine and Commercial departments were profitably utilised. A few records from India office Library London were also consulted.

The census Records and Reports, the District Gazetteers particularly those of the coastal districts like Thirunelveli, Ramanathapuram, Thanjavur, South Arcot, books, monographs and periodicals published prior to 1900 were also consulted.

The famous Tamil Bell in the Wellington Museum, New Zealand (bell with Tamil inscription, reading, the bell of the ship Mohideen Bux) is considered as a source for the Tamil Muslims' trade intercourse in the Indian ocean region in the eighteenth - nineteenth centuries. Literature and photocopies on this bell were scrutinised.
Bell with Tamil Inscription
(Bell of the Ship Mohideen Bux)
Wellington Museum, New Zealand
Secondary Sources

Castes and Tribes of Southern India by Edgar Thurston, is a magnum opus in seven volumes, the fifth volume contain sketch on the Muslims. But for some inaccuracies and abrupt endings, this is a variable mine of source material. M.R.M. Abdul Rahim, a noted Islamic scholar, writer and publisher, has brought out an Islamic Encyclopaedia in Tamil in three volumes. These volumes give particulars about various Muslim centers and their social customs. But the information contained therein had been collected from informants many of whom are without historical sense or perception; source materials have not been cited, rendering verification difficult and the whole approach has been from a religious angle and some times religious fervour has stolen march over historical facts and realities. Modern writers on Muslims of Tamil Nadu use these materials scrupulously as source materials. But here it is carefully utilised wherever they are found to be authentic.

A few popular books and articles have been produced by a few Muslim scholars in the recent past on Muslims of Tamil Nadu. Kavi Ka.Mu.Sheriff 's, Vallal Seethakathi Varalaru, Captain Amir Ali's, Vallal Seethakkathiyan Vazhvum Kalamum, Dr. S.M. Kamal 's, Islamum Tamilagamum, A.K. Rifayee 's, Tamilagathil Islamiyar Varalaru, Idris Marakkayar's Keerthi migum Kilakkarai, K.S. Abdul Latheef 's Kayalpattanam Varalaru, J.M. Sali 's, Tamilagathu Dargakkal and some articles published in different magazines and souvenirs can be cited as examples. Many of these works are short of historical facts and conjunctions, making it difficult to use them as authentic source of information. However references are cited where ever datas are accurate and authentic.

Published standard works on travel accounts of European travellers; trading activities of Portuguese, Dutch, Danes, French and the English in India by learned scholars; unpublished M.Phil and Ph.D. thesis by Research Scholars in various Universities, articles published in standard journals, periodicals and magazines and papers presented in various seminars and conferences are also profitably utilised.

A cross section of leading Muslims-Marakkayars, Labbais and Rowthars in the coastal towns of Tamil Nadu were interviewed and relevant informations incorporated whereever appropriate. Members of the leading trading Marakkayar families of the past, in places like, Nagapattanam, Nagore, PortoNovo, Adirampattanam, Muthupet, Tondi, Mandapam, Vedalai, Rameswaram, Kilakkarai, Kayalpattanam and Kulasekarapattanam were collected from the family records in their possession. Though such materials were few in number it was very useful for filling up the gaps in the study of their maritime activities in the second half of 19th century.
METHODOLOGY

The methodology is one of the case study, partly historical and partly sociological. Data were collected from literatures, inscriptions and archival records for the historical studies. For sociological studies, extensive field survey was undertaken to study the significance and relevance of folklore traditions, customs, practices and ceremonies. The materials thus collected are analysed and synthesised. Apart from primary sources a few published works on this theme were also consulted. The sources are allowed to speak themselves.

The study is divided into eight chapters. They are as follows:

1. Introduction
2. The Coromandel Coast
3. The Political Background
4. The Muslims of Coromandel
5. Europeans on the Coromandel and it’s impact on the Muslims
6. Maritime Activities of the Muslims
7. Social Customs
8. Conclusion

A short note on the salient features as discussed in the relevant chapters are narrated here.

First Chapter introduces the space, time, theme, sources and objectives of the study.

The objectives of the study being, to focus on the facts about 1. antiquity of the Muslim society in the Coromandel region 2. Vital role played by them in maritime activities in the coast and their economic life 3. the interesting features about their social organisation, ceremonies, customs and practices.
Chapter two outlines the geographical position of the Coromandel Coast and its features, definitions, meaning and extent of Coromandel Coast and the nature of the ports of the ancient renown, major and minor ports in the middle and modern ages are discussed. A majority of the ports had settlements of Muslims (Marakkayars and Labbais). The commodities of export and import in these ports through ages, the economic viability and prosperity of these port towns due to the settlement of Muslims are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter three is a brief survey of the political conditions of the region since it was closely linked with the trade of the region. Prior to the beginning of the period of our study, the political condition of the Coromandel hinterland was very confused. The Europeans and the native powers were engaged in bitter contest for supremacy. A few important political events of the region from the victory of Kumarakampana, the commander of the Vijayanagar in 1370, to the proclamation of the English East India Company as masters of the land in 1800 are also included here, because each and every course of operation affected the economy, trade and traders of the coast. The events that lead to the disruption of the local ruling houses like the Nayakdoms of Ginjee, Thanjavur and Madurai, the Marathas of Thanjavur, the Sethupathis of Ramanathapuram and the Nawabi of Arcot are narrated. The position of the Tamil Muslims in the political background is also discussed here.

Chapter four focuses in a bird's eye view the mile stones in the Arab's contact with South India, later the spread of Islam and development of Islamic society on the Coromandel Coast. The age old trade contact between South India and Arabia from the Sangam period (2nd cent A.D.) strengthened further after the birth of Islam. The spread of Islam was closely linked with the wide ranging maritime trade network. These merchant missionaries also spread the message of the Prophet Mohamed among the local population and people were attracted towards Islam. The social inequalities and rigid caste system then prevalent in the South Indian society was favourable for this process and thus the Islamic society swelled by such conversions. The antiquity of Islam, the earlier names of the Muslims of Coromandel Coast are traced with the help of literature, inscriptions, and tradition. Definitions of nomenclature of the titles of the people constituting the different segments in the present day Tamil Muslim society such as Rowthar, Labbai, Marakkayar and Deccanis are discussed in detail.
Chapter five is a short account of trading and political activities of the various European Companies on the Coromandel Coast, and it's effects on Muslim maritime Community. The footing of Europeans on the peninsular India shattered the monopoly of the Arabs and the native Muslims in maritime activities. For better understanding of the circumstances in which the Muslims of Coromandel Coast entered into the period of our study, a preview of their economic activities during the dominance of the Portuguese and Dutch are given in a nutshell. The Portuguese who arrived first in the South Indian coast were very hostile towards the Muslims and used force to prevent their commercial activities. The native rulers like Nayaks, Sethupathis and Vijayanagar kings supported the activities of the Portuguese. In due course of time, they interfered in the internal affairs of these kingdoms and gained political importance along with commercial monopoly. The Muslims and other native traders were forced to trade only with the permit (Cartaz) issued by the Portuguese. Due to their religious bias towards the Muslims, the Portuguese encouraged the Paravas (the local Hindu fishermen community), baptised them in large numbers and prepared them as a local force against the Muslims and their maritime activities. Pulicat, PortoNovo and Nagapattanam where the important ports were the Portuguese were concentrated. In all these places their trading activities were aimed against the Muslims. This is the beginning of the economic downfall of the Muslims of the coast and it continued in the succeeding periods.

The Dutch-Hollanders-commenced their trading activities on the Coromandel Coast from 1605 A.D. onwards and they also considered the Muslims as their prime competitors. The Dutch appeared on the Coromandel when the native rulers were in search of a strong power to counter the Portuguese. Now the local powers in support of either of these powers and these aliens freely acquired territories in our land and obtained economic concessions at the cost of the natives. Nagapattanam, Tuticorin, Manapad, Alandalai, Virampattanam, Pinnakkyal, Vaipar and Vembar were important ports of Dutch trade. The Dutch also used force to curtail the maritime activities of the Muslims and patronised the Paravas. During seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Dutch continued the economic suppression over the Muslims. The French came into the Coromandel trade in 1672 and their main concentration was at Pondicherry. They rose as opponents to the English East India Company. However they met with failures in the Anglo-French wars in the middle of the eighteenth century and they were confined in some limited pockets in South India. The French were helpful to the Muslim traders at PortoNovo and Karalkkal. The Danish settlement was founded in 1620
at Tranquebar. Their trading activities were limited due to the lesser resources with them and the absence of support from their home government. They were very cordial to the Muslim maritime traders and freighted goods for them in their ships during the time of wars in Europe and it's consequent reflection in Indian ocean area.

The English East India Company entered into the Coromandel trade in 1614. Throughout the period of our study the English East India Company - British power-continued as a powerful force in political and commercial history of the Coromandel Coast. The Dutch power was vanishing, the Danes were weak and the French were behind in the race. When the English became the political masters of the land the maritime activities of the Muslims suffered further.

During the earlier period of their ascendency the English East India Company encouraged the Muslim merchants and extended concessions for their trade. They appointed Muslim crews in their vessels. The English ships freighted the commodities of the Muslim traders to far off countries whenever possible. Some of the rich Muslim merchants lent money to the Company. But when the economic ambitions of the English grew, they showed conflicting feelings towards Muslims. They showed favours to the Chettiar merchants than the Muslims. The racial discrimination followed by the English in shipping and trading activities were much against the Muslims and affected all their maritime activities, i.e., overseas trade, interportal trade, pearl and chank fishing, salt manufacture etc. Besides encouraging their own white race private merchants, the Nabobs, they also encouraged the Paravas much to the detriment of the Muslims. Thus the stand taken by the English was against the economic interest of Muslims.

Bearing all these setbacks the Muslim merchants continued their maritime trade, with their limited resources and old sails, to Ache, Malacca, Burma, Ceylon and West Coast. The woes of the Muslims who lost opportunities in shipping, pearl and chank fishing and other maritime activities are discussed with the evidences of archival data. However the animosity of the English is not one like that of the Portuguese and Dutch and they showed no religious bias towards Muslims.
Thus the economic onslaughts inflicted by the political activities and trade policies of the various European powers pushed down the Muslims of Coromandel Coast, never to rise again.

Chapter six outlines the various maritime activities of the Muslims of the Coromandel Coast. They were ship owners, ship crews, maritime merchants, pearl merchants, pearl and chank divers, boat builders, fishers, salt manufacturers and merchants in other marine products. The Tamil Muslim traders took over a dominant role in Indian Ocean trade from 13-14th centuries. Spread of Islam in Southeast Asian countries and the consequent religious ties extended them new avenues. On the Coromandel, Pulicat, PortoNovo, Nagapattanam, Nagore, Muthupet, Mandapam, Tondi, Kilakkarai, Kayalpattanam, Virampattanam, Kulasekarapattanam etc., were busy ports, where the export and import trade and other maritime activities were in the hands of the Muslims. In fact the records of Europeans call these ports as "Moor Ports" and Susan Bayly names them as "Marakkayar Ports". Horses were imported from Arab countries and it was the important trade of the Muslims. The Muslim traders of Coromandel were influential in the ports of the Southeast Asian countries and Ceylon and were king makers in the courts of the Sultans of many countries in the Far East.

The challenges and economic competitions and hostilities of the Portuguese and the Dutch during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought down the maritime activities of the Muslims gradually. However they avoided the competitive routes and picked up the favourable areas and continued their overseas trading and other activities to the extent possible. Their ships were on trade with Ache, Johore, Perak, Pegu, Arakkan, Burma, Malay Peninsula and Ceylon. Interportal and coastal trade was in their hands.

When the English gained the upperhand, they wanted to grab every thing into their fold. They plied their ships in all the traditional routes where the Muslims were trading. They began to procure commodities directly from the producers there by eliminating Muslim small traders who were dealing in commodities for export and home consumption. They interfered in pearl and chank fisheries, salt trade and tried to introduce the people of their own race replacing the Muslims. The records of the English give the names and list of Muslim ship owners and maritime traders in Coromandel Coast during 18-19th centuries. However by about the third quarter of the eighteenth century the Muslim merchants lost ground and voice in East India Company trade, which was then concentrated at Madras. The Chettiar merchants were close to the company.
At the beginning of nineteenth century, PortoNovo, Nagore, Nagapattanam and Kilakkarai were in the main stream of oceanic trade and the Muslims carried on brisk trade with Ache, Burma, Malacca, Ceylon and west coast but the quantum was lesser. The wars among the European nations who had interest in Indian ocean trade affected even this prospects of the Muslim shippers. The ships of many Muslims were captured by enemy nations and they lost their ships and commodities. Many active traders withdrew from seaborne trade. By about the third quarter of nineteenth century the English records show only a few ship owners at Nagapattanam, PortoNovo, Kilakkarai, Mandapam, Kayalpattanam and Kulasekarapattanam.

The Conquest of Malay Peninsula and Ceylon by the English robbed the maritime enterprises of Coromandel Muslims. The English private merchants replaced most of the prominent Muslim merchants in the ports of these countries.

The decline of shipping activities along the coast forced the Muslims to search for better avenues. A large number of them migrated to Southeast Asian countries, Burma and Ceylon. The cargo vessels of the Muslims, freighted such passengers in their vessels. At later periods, many went as plantation workers to Penang and Singapore.

At the close of nineteenth century there were only a handful of Muslim ship owners and a few maritime traders on the Coromandel Coast. Interport and coastal trade also slipped out of their hands. The data found in the archival records show that the Muslims were let down by the English administration. The Muslim maritime traders could not withstand the economic challenges of the period and only a few survived the storm. The countries they traded during the period of our study, commodities of export and import, trade practices, their relationship with other mercantile communities etc., are discussed in detail in this section.

The Muslims of Kilakkarai, Nagapattanam, Kayalpattanam and other coastal villages were renters of salt pans. Introduction of monopoly on salt by the English drove away the Muslims from this field and English private merchants dominated.

The Muslims in the lower strata of the society in Ramanathapuram and Thriunelveli coasts were living on pearl fishing. They were expert divers and used a special type of vessel for this fishing. Many rich Muslims at Kilakkarai, Vadalai,
Mandapam and Kayalpattanam owned fleets of such fishing vessels. Wealthy Muslim merchants at Ramanathapuram, Kilakkarai, Mandapam and Kayalpattanam were traders in pearl. They owned chavadis (Muthuchavadi-godown cum market place for pearl) in all these places. Like all other maritime activities this also got muddled in the European and native power struggles. The Portuguese and Dutch favoured the Paravas than the Muslims, in pearl fishing. There were a lot of claims and conflicts between the Europeans and the native powers with regard to pearl fishing and hence it was conducted at irregular intervals. By 1900 the pearl fishery of the Coromandel Coast deteriorated completely. Muslim divers, who were depending on pearl fishing were thrown out to seek alternate jobs.

Chank fishing was another important activity of the Muslims. Kilakkarai was a prosperous centre for chank trade. There was good market for chank in Bengal. The chank fishery also met with ups and downs like the pearl fishery. But it was not so badly affected like the pearl fishery. When the English introduced rental system for chank and pearl fishing, the Muslims of Ramanathapuram and Thirunelveli districts became rentiers. In due course, English private merchants also entered this field. It is interesting to note the available data that the pearl and chank fisheries have contributed a considerable share in the economic development of the region in which the role of the Muslims was primary.

A considerable population of Muslims, particularly in the lower strata of the society on the Coromandel Coast were engaged in fishing, for a very long time. Their fishing vessels and nets were different in different areas. Rich Marakkayars controlled a large number of such people under them. At the close of nineteenth century, many of the Muslims who were engaged in shipping activities as labourers and crews and in pearl and chank fishing, had to take up fishing as alternate job.

The Muslim maritime professionals had good knowledge in astronomy, geography and geology and weather condition of the oceans and followed them as handed down by tradition. The different practices followed by them in calculating the distance in the sea, identifying the nature of winds, waves etc., are gathered exclusively from field study for this work.

The Muslims were experts in building ships and boats. Cuddalore, PortoNovo, Nagapattanam, Tuticorin and Kilakkarai were important ship building yards. The archival record attest to the fact that Muslims built ships for the Sultans of Far East, the English and for themselves. They were skilled crew members of the ships. The Marakkayars hold appellations like Nagudha, Sukkani, Thandaiyar, Malumi etc., along with their names, even to this day, which shows their age old expertise in shipping profession.
There were Muslim weavers in large number in Ramanathapuram, Thirunelveli and Thanjavur districts who were supplying textiles to Muslim traders who in turn brought them to the port towns for export. Textiles were important commodity of export from Coromandel Coast till the middle of nineteenth century.

The maritime enterprises of the Muslims of Coromandel Coast slowly declined to near total by about 1900 due to various causes. The violent attack and monopolistic policies of the Portuguese and Dutch had shattered their economic activities. The general policies of the English were no better to them. The English started to feather their own nest. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the English textiles sealed the fate of thousands of south Indian weavers, small traders and exporters, in which there were considerable number of Muslims. English administration supported the white race in every field of economic activity in which Muslims were engaged. The Chettiar merchants came close to the English because of their vast capital. The English private merchants, the Nabobs, with their vast resources encroached the trade of Southeast Asian countries and pushed back the Muslims to second rank. On the coast itself the English nurtured the Paravas and made them to compete with the Muslims. The Muslims could not withstand all these competitions.

The pearl and chank fisheries were left unexploited. Many of the busy minor ports, where Muslim maritime traders were concentrated, decayed and were reduced to fishing outlets. Muslims lost employment on all these counts, either went in search of other trades or migrated to Southeast Asian countries, Ceylon and Burma. Introduction of Railways scathed the interportal and coastal trade to some extent. Coming to their own faults, the Muslims of the region never acted as a cohesive force. They failed to understand the concept of modern world capitalism. The Muslim shipowners and maritime traders in Coromandel Coast operated with a limited capital resources. Such being the case they did not rise up to organise joint ventures (like the joint stock companies of the Europeans) to avoid the economic misfortune. Further, the Muslims of Coromandel Coast ( Tamil Muslims ) had no political patronage. They failed to pick up the modern navigational technologies and were depending on the old fashioned traditional sails. Hence the Muslims were lagging behind in overseas trade. They neglected modern English education. Not knowing the technological and economic revolutions around them, they were in slumber. At the dawn of twentieth century, the masters of maritime commerce of the middle ages, met with a drastic economic downfall and their enterprises nearly collapsed.

The seventh chapter depicts the social organisation, manners, customs and practices and religious life of the Muslims of Coromandel Coast. Much has not written
on this subject, leading one to speculations as warrants and often misunderstood. Hence a brief account on the principles of Islam and the social life of the Tamil Muslim society are described in this chapter.

The Divine Commands of five pillars of Islam are 1. Confession of the faith (Kalima: that there is no other God but Allah and Mohamed is His Prophet) 2. Five time prayer for a day. 3. Fasting for 30 days during Ramzan month. 4. Zakath or alms giving. 5. Haj or Pilgrimage to Mecca for those who are able to do so. How these principles are followed are discussed. In Islam the sacred law is one for all. There is no distinction of caste or class. There is no priesthood in Islam. Islamic brotherhood is an institution. The prayer in the mosque is on equal terms without any difference of colour, rank or social superiority. Some of these principles of Islam clashed with Indian culture but the assimilative power of India, particularly the quiet Tamil society, fusing the new culture in to unity, made Islam as a product of assimilation, as it stands today.

Though Islamic society is one and indivisible social organisation recognised by the Cannon law but still arose some divisions on the basis of Khilafat (Political) movements. The two main religious sects of Islam are Sunni and Shia Schools. The Muslims of Coromandel profess Sunni school which is divisible in to four sub-sects, Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali and Maliki. The Sunni follow Sunna, (tradition) a term used to express customs and manners of Islamic life. The traditions which records either the sayings or doings of Prophet Mohamed are the traditional law, Sunna, which were later compiled and called Hadeesh. The Hadeesh and the Cannon law of Holy Quarn are the basic laws governing the Muslim society. Among the people adhering various sub-sects (of Sunnis) the basic concept and principles are the same and there are only some minor differences in celebrations, customs and practices. Among the Tamil speaking Muslims, Rowthars and Labbais follow Hanafi sub-sect and the Marakkayars, Shafi.

There is no place for caste or class in Islam. Social incompatibility with regard to either intermarriage or interdining whether due to difference of race or occupation is the essential element of caste. There is no prohibition for interdining and intermarriage among the sects and subsects of Islam. The appellations like Marakkayar, Rowthar, Labbai and Dekkani are not caste names. But Muslims of Coromandel region will look as if affected by caste system (Jathi) as in the Hindu society. Socially all subsects of Muslims are equally ranked.
The Tamil speaking Muslims of Coromandel identify closely with Hindu culture in many respects. How their manners, customs, dress, food, festivities have been influenced by the larger society is discussed.

Marriage in Islam is a social contract entered into by the parties on a footing of equality and free consent of parties. Islamic marriage is a simple process in which the consent of the bride, a man to give in marriage the girl (usually father of the bride), payment of dowry (mahar) by the groom to the bride, two witnesses, a kazi to recite holy verses, are essentials and with these the solemnisation of the marriage can be complete. But very elaborate celebrations and rituals are followed in the marriage of the Tamil Muslims, due to the influence of Hindu manners and customs. A detailed account on the practices and ceremonies in marriages of the Tamil Muslims are narrated here.

The birth of a child is well celebrated and naming of the child takes place with pomp and show. Kathna or circumcision is traditionally performed to the male children. Circumcision is neither a Quranic law or a religious injunction. But it is a tradition followed from the time of the Prophet Mohamed. To the converts and to those who embraced Islam it is kept as optional. Circumcision ceremony is celebrated as "Markkakalyanam", by the Tamil Muslims, i.e., as an initiation ceremony in to the religion as in the Hindu society. When a girl attains puberty it is also celebrated with a number of ceremonies and rites. The dead are buried and elaborate ceremonies are there before and after burial and for succeeding forty days. In all these celebrations the influence of Hindu culture can be seen in many aspects. Matters connected with all these ceremonies are well described.

The food habits of Muslims and their culinery art are also given. Majority of them are non-vegetarians. It is interesting to note that the Holy Quran prohibits eating the flesh of certain animals as unlawful.

Muslim women are very fond of jewellery. During marriage the quantity of jewels to the bride is an important offer. Apart from the common jewels that are in use in Tamil society, the Muslim women have some special types also. The names of such jewels are brought out from the evidences of Islamic Tamil Literature and inscriptions.

Position of women in Islamic society is always a subject of interesting debate. This is also one of the most misunderstood subject by many-scholars as well as common men. Islamic law protects the rights of women than any other religious laws. A true picture about the position of women-as given in the Holy Quran and the Hadeesh-her
rights and privileges etc., are discussed in brief. It is a fact that the law of divorce is misused on occasions, but it is not universal. A woman can also divorce her husband if she so wants. Polygamy is not an institution in Islam and it is an allowance made for the ardent human nature. Polygamy and divorce are met at a very low percentage only. Veiling and purdha system is an accepted custom of the women in Islamic society. It is not a part of Islamic law. The origin, practice and scriptural message on the system are discussed. Inspite of all these laws, the position of the women during the period of study does not seem to be appreciable. Except the right on property, other rights and privileges were at the minimum at their disposal. They were ignorant and illiterate. But they were trained to read Arabic there by to read Holy Quran and other religious books. There were even a few women Sufi saints. They were also trained to read and write Arabic Tamil (Tamil in Arabic character). This somewhat helped them to manage their household accounts.

The Muslim scholars have rendered yeoman service to the Tamil literature by producing a number of literary works in Tamil. Due to the contact of the Arabs and Persians in this land, thousands of Arabic and Persian words came into use along with Tamil words. Some of the kinship terms of the Muslims are also given. A few words that are in common usage among the Muslims due to the influence of European languages and their contact are also listed. The Muslims also introduced new techniques and designs in to the architecture of Tamil Nadu. They have also contributed their share in medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and music.

The celebration of important festivals like Ramzan, Bakrid etc., are also described. The Muslims of Coromandel Coast are influenced by the Dravidian form of worship of the Hindu society as we see in the dargahs or the tomb shrines of the Muslim saints. The Muslims, particularly women, visit the dargahs regularly. Though worship in dargahs is not sanctioned in Islam, it has come to be accepted as a part of the religious life of Muslims. In dargahs the method of worship, offerings made etc., are much in the Hindu fashion. It is no surprise that the orthodox Islam fluctuates here to accommodate the folk tradition. People of diverse culture meet in the dargah shrines. A large number of Hindus and Christians also visit and worship in the dargahs. Nagore is an important dargah shrine in Tamil Nadu. A detailed study about the worship in dargahs, its origin and various festivals celebrated there are also discussed. Thus the aspects of the social life of the Tamil speaking Muslims are brought to light in this chapter.

The concluding chapter is a discussion on how the Muslims of Coromandel Coast could not continue their operations in maritime activities in an unfriendly environment and heavily increased risk. Data were collected from all possible sources.
and they have been pooled together to present a micro study on the maritime activities of the Muslims of Coromandel region. An overall analysis show that the policies of the European companies combined with the absence of awareness among the Muslims and their satisfaction in the residual opportunities at their disposal were responsible for their economic failures.

A study on the social behaviour of the Tamil Muslims has proved that their customs and practices are continuing process from a very long period to the present day. Many of the customs are handed down by tradition.

The present day Tamil Muslims-Rowthar, Labbai and Marakkayars-many of them in multifarious business-sharing a few of the social customs of the co-religionists, the Hindus, are living in peace as Tamils in true sense as an integral part of the Tamil society. Their sails that steered the winds of oceans have embraced cold storage but pages of history reminds us their past glory.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The study is confined to the maritime activities and social customs of the Tamil speaking Muslims in the period - 1750 - 1900. The leading Muslims who were approached for information and materials lauded the project but pleaded ignorance about accurate details on their ancestoral maritime activities.

Being a member of a segment in the Muslim community, I had the privilege to knock at the door of many leading Muslims but many attempts were unfruitful.

Even the Archival materials were found to be insufficient on many points for the study. Only the published source materials about the Portuguese, Dutch and Danes could be utilised.

I however, venture to submit that this study is the first of it's kind, which sheds some new light on the hidden historic facts about the Tamil Muslim maritime community of the Coromandal which dominated the seaborne trade of the region for centuries. Thus this study is a voyage in unchartered seas in the true spirit of the maritime Muslims.
References


