Chapter - IV

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF PARAVAS

According to James Hornell,

“When the Portuguese rounded Kanyakumari, they found the pearl fisheries of the Gulf of Mannar in the hands of the caste of shore dwelling people, already alluded to as Paravas, whom tradition shows to have had control of this industry from time immemorial”.

The Paravas enjoyed the monopoly of the fishing, pearl fishing and salt manufacturing which are said to be their chief occupations. Fishing and other work were done by the members of a Parava family together and no wage labour is said to have been associated with their activities. The fishing party consisted of both elders and youngsters of the same family. The technical knowhow, whatever they had, was passed on from generation to generation. This suggests that their production- relations had not cut across the limits of their kinship relations. The Paravas as expert boatmen were engaged in bringing the imports from the foreign vessels which must have been employed to take the exporting items like pepper to the distant ships.

The Paravas who were fishermen and coastal traders had formed themselves into a well-organized community. Their social organization had some peculiarities. According to one version, the community was divided into two distinct classes the wealthy and the boat owners. Intermarriages between these two classes were not permitted and if at all it occurred, it was only very rare.

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As a result of their connection with the pearl fisheries, their villages from Vembar to Ovari came to be regarded as typical of the community and its organizations while the Paravas who lived in isolated villages from Ovari to Kanyakumari were closely knit together into single entity.\textsuperscript{561}

The fisherfolk excelled in maritime skills and they attracted attention because of their multifaceted relationship with the sea. They lived at the junction of major trade routes between the western and eastern Indian Ocean, centering on Southern India and Sri Lanka and were involved in minor trade and fishing. Similarly, the \textit{Lakshadweep} and Maldives islands, source of cowrie shells and dried fish, invited the attention of mercantile and political elites from Southern India over the centuries.\textsuperscript{562}

From Manapadu to Tuticorin also for (small and bright pearls) which were more valuable was available and people here were economically better than others in the Fishery Coast.\textsuperscript{563}

In order to dispose their pearls, the Paravas made agreements with the Kings that a market day should be proclaimed throughout their dominion; merchants would come from all parts of India and the divers and settlers would furnish all the provisions necessary for the multitude. Two kinds of guards and tribunals were to be established to prevent all disputes and quarrels arising during this open market. Every man being subject to his own judge, and his case being the subject to his payments was then also divided among the headmen of the Paravas. The Pattangattis were the owners of that fishery and hence they

\textsuperscript{562} Kenneth Mc Pherson, \textit{The Indian Ocean – A History of People and the Sea,} Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{563} \textit{Ibid.,}
became rich and powerful. They had weapons and soldiers of their own, with which they were able to defend themselves against the violence of the kings or their subjects.\footnote{Georg Schurhammer, \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 188.}

About a month after the opening of the pearl fishery, the Pottangattis announced its end. The merchants packed their wares and loaded them on to the ships. Booths and cottages were set on fire and the return voyage would begin. They left the coast behind them as lonely and bare as they had dwellers in the vicinity, who sought for a few lost pearls in the sand of the pits. In the Parava villages, however, the wild lamentations of the women began for fathers, husbands, brothers or sons whom the sea, sharks and sickness had carried away and would never return again.\footnote{Ibid.}

Southern Coromandel was one of the intermediate points in this segmented trade, where ships from Malabar brought rice and abundance of goods from Gujarat, pepper, and commodities like copper, quicksilver and vermillion which normally were imported from Europe for the east. Ships came with spices and drugs, from Malacca, China and Bengal.\footnote{\textit{DL.}, \textit{Vol. IV (1557-1560)}, 1956, p. 34.}

Commodities, which came from diverse parts of Asia and Europe, were mostly bought in exchange for Indian cloth. The Coromandel merchants primarily invested in gems and precious stones to bring back to India. Trading in precious stones, pearls, coral, silver and gold were important part of their business both in the Coromandel and in the Malabar Coasts. Barbosa observed that in several port towns the Chetti merchants dealt in gem stones, pearls and precious metals.\footnote{Durante Barbosa, \textit{Op. cit., Vol. II}, p. 125.}
The trade covering South Coromandel, the Bay of Madura, the Ports of Sri Lanka and South Malabar was even more brisk. This was a trade in essential consumer goods which deeply influenced the lives of the people of those areas. Thanjavur and Tirunelveli were providers of rice to Sri Lanka and Malabar. The whole area up to Tirunelveli provided textiles to Sri Lanka and Malabar. In return came, pepper and spices from Malabar, betel nuts, elephants and cinnamon from Sri Lanka and coconut producets from both the regions.\textsuperscript{568}

The Paravas took to coastal small boat trading and to servicing ships out in the routes of the large ports. They used their expertise in pearl-diving and boating to move into shipping and trade. They became major operators in the trade between Coromandel, Madura, Malabar and Sri Lanka\textsuperscript{569}.

On the arrival of the Portuguese on the Fishery Coast, the Paravas seemed to be of experts in all the seafaring activities. They, along with the local merchant communities and Muslims, conducted maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. But, they had to fight with the Muslims to their fortune.

The Captain, the rector of the Jesuits, the Pattangatti-mor and the Kanakkapillai should make the owners of the Champanas to take an oath before they venture into the sea for pearl fishing. By taking this, the owners would make it clear how many persons they were taking in their respective Champanas, their names, religion, place of origin and addresses were also written down.\textsuperscript{570}

\textsuperscript{568} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{569} \textit{Ibid.},
\textsuperscript{570} Pissurlencar, \textit{Regimentos}, pp. 481-485.
Maritime Activities of Paravas

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 rock, 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 Parathavan (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 Marakkayar 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, Dhone, Kalam, Madhalai, Pathai, Punai, Thonnai, Paru, Podam. Panri,

572 Vangam, used for long distance voyages across the seas Pathirupathu. 52; Ahananuru 255;
573 Maduraikanchi, 356. 544.
574 Agananuru 29. 187.
575 Thirukkural, 496; Purananuru , 66,126; Maduraikanchi ,78, 88; Pernmpanatruvadaî 3 19; 32 1 ;
576 Seevagasinthamani, 2793.
577 Perumkathai, 36, 162-64; Seevagasinthamani, 967.
578 Thirukkural, 605; Ahananuru ,149; Silappathikaram - Maniyaram 7-8; Seevagasinthamani; 123 1 ;
579 Perumkathai , 42-77- 178; Kulingathupanril , 475.
Thimil, Pattihai, Paduval, Midavai and Odams. 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 Marakkayar traders of Nagapattanam regions 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 and Mohamed Ali. Thus, the Marakkayar, merchants-cum-shipowners were declining in the regions, and Paravas economic condition show a downward trend from this period onwards.

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

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577 Seeyagasinthamani, 505
578 Namadeepa Nigandu, Sivasubramaniya Kavirayar (1930; Rpt. Tamil University,Thanjavur) Sudamani nigandu 1915, Divakara nigandu.
579 Raghavan, R, Nam Nattu Kappal Kalai (Madras 1968), p. 76; N. Ethiraj, Kappalin Varalaru (Madras 1990); Kappal Sastram, Madras Government Oriental Manuscript series No.1 (The word Kappal appears in usage at a very late period only, and It first finds place in a 17th Century Tamil literary work, Thayumanavar Thiruppadalgal,12: 2 : 7 - 12.)
582 Ibid., Vol. 614, 30 October 1833, p.28.
583 Ibid., Vol. 615, 22 October, 1833, pp. 9 - 10.
584 Ibid., Vol.636. 18 May 1835, pp.30 - 31.
585 Ibid., Vol.641. 25 August 1835, pp.74 - 75.
586 Ibid., Vol.666. 18 April 1837, pp. 75 . 76.
587 Ibid., Vol.667, 16 May 1837, pp. 45 - 50.
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.\textsuperscript{588}

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 \textit{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 \textit{Navoy, Vankam} and \textit{Kalam} were used for overseas and long distance voyages and trade. Toni, Otam, Patak and similar vessels were in use for short distance and Coastal voyages and trade\textsuperscript{589}.

The boat builders followed astrological and astronomical data for favourable time for boat building. The timber used in boat building were \textit{Vembu, Neem, Iluppai, Punmai, Naval, Sirutekku, Sirunangu, Aini, Kongu, Karumarudu, teak and venteak}. The ships were propelled by wind and had sails for this purpose. The ship after completion, set on sail in an

\textsuperscript{588} Ahananuru : 101; 12-13; 149; 9-11; 172; 11-13; 175; 1-5, 180; 20-24, 186; 9-11, 190; 3-4,199; 6-1, 280; 7-11.
Kurunthogai : 168; 5; 304; 1-4.
Nattrai : 110, 258; 11-7-10.
Maduraikanchi : 75-85; 320-324.
Purananuru :11; 126; 14; 16; 24; 3-4.
Silappathikaram : 13; 176-177; 6; 141-142; 14; 72-75; 26; 176-177; 165-166.
Manimekalai : 29; 1-11; 16; 11-12.
Seevasinthamani : 580.
Perumkai : 1: 33; 206-207.
Periyapuram : 2798: 3-6.
Thaumanavar Thiruppadal : 12:2:7-12.

\textsuperscript{589} Arulraj, V.S and G.Victor Rajamanickam. "Traditional Boats In Tamil Literature". History of Traditional navigation.
auspicious time\textsuperscript{590}. 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.\textsuperscript{591}

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 carpentary occupation of the Muslims of peninsular India and Ceylon. No doubt, many of them were mainly boat builders.\textsuperscript{592}

**Pearl Fishery**

From time immemorial, the Tamils have found that there are nine gems in the world. Emerald, Sapphire, Diamond and Sardoyx grow on land and two pearl and coral in the sea. The Tamil Lexicon lists pearl as one of the nine gems (navamani) which is precious, costly, beautiful and reflective\textsuperscript{593}. It is one of the most valuable natural products. Pearl is the pride of the naturalists as diamond is that of the chemists. People have found the pearl as valuable item of jewel through the ages. Because of its round and complete shape\textsuperscript{594}. Pearl got its name Muthu that means something complete or perfect.

Rameswaram, bordering Modern Gulf of Mannar, which is still known as the pearl fishery coast, Centuries before the birth of Christ, pearl and chank, from the port of Korkai were the major export commodities to various parts of the Roman Empire and South East


\textsuperscript{593} Tamil Lexicon, Vol. V, Madras, 1930, p. 3255.

\textsuperscript{594} Some times rough and Shapeless pearl have also been noticed in some catches.
Asia. The Pearls fished are graded and classified into different categories based on their shape, size, weight and luster. The largest and the first class variety were the most valuable. The price of pearls depended on their size and weight. Normally, it took nearly seven years for a pearl to attain maturity. The pearl oysters grew in the seas of hot places. In tropical countries such pearls are big, attractive and costly.

The pearl kept at the South Kensington Museum, London is the biggest of all pearls in the world. But the pearl kept at the Zosimo Museum, soviet union is the most beautiful of all pearls in the world. It testifies to the glory of Tamil country since it was taken from India to Russia\textsuperscript{595}.

**Pearl and Chank Diving**

_Sangam_ Literature mentions the pearl and chank and the people who dived for fishing them. But, the method of diving is not adequately recorded. _Kalithogai_ mentions that the pearl is obtained from the deep sea and _Agananooru_ talks of the fishing community namely Parathavar who charmed the sharks and dived for right whorl chank. But, in contrast to this, the travellers’ accounts had references mostly to pearl fishery. For them, the pearls were of immense importance in terms of trade. Almost all the travellers who visited Gulf of Mannar region talk about the pearls derived from the sea off Korkai during _Sangam age_. Megasthenes mentions that pearl yielding oysters were fished with nets\textsuperscript{596}. _The Periplus of Erythraean Sea_ mentions that at Kolkhai (Korkai) condemned criminals

\textsuperscript{595} Vaithyanathan F.S, _Navamunigal_ (Tamil), Madras, 1959, p. 96.

\textsuperscript{596} Crindle J.W. Mc, _Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian_.(Ramachandra Jain, ed.) Today’s and tomorrow’s printers, New Delhi, 1972, p. 62.
were employed in this service\textsuperscript{597}. As the data is insufficient during Sangam Age, the method of diving in this period could not be ascertained clearly.

The first reference on pearl diving procedure came from Chau Ju-Kua the Chinese Author of \textit{Chu Fan Chi}, who wrote about the trade between Arabia and China and on the pearl fishery of South India during the Rule of Cholas\textsuperscript{598}. Marco Polo\textsuperscript{599} mentions about the pearl fishery and diving procedure of Gulf of Mannar of Indian and Sri Lankan coast. Later \textit{Wang Ta-Yuan}, a Chinese Traveller, vividly explains the diving for pearl at Gulf of Mannar\textsuperscript{600}. After a long gap Caesar Frederic, a Venetian merchant and Van Linschoten who travelled in India between AD 1576 and 1592, left some interesting accounts on pearl fishing technique\textsuperscript{601}.

Jean-Baptiste Tavernier a merchant from France gives valuable data on pearl fishing done at Gulf of Mannar\textsuperscript{602}. The description of the conduct of the fishery by Juan Ribeiro in his \textit{History of Ceilao}\textsuperscript{603} dated 1685, was one of the detailed accounts available. Father Martin\textsuperscript{604}, a jesuit missionary gives graphic description about the diving near Tuticorin conducted in AD 1700. During the British Period, there are several accounts: LeBeck and

\textsuperscript{597} Crindle J.W. Mc, \textit{The Commerce and Navigation of the Erythraean Sea}, Today’s and Tomorrow Printers, New Delhi, 1984, p. 140.
\textsuperscript{601} Caldwell B.R, \textit{Op.cit.}, (Reprint), Asain Educational Services, New Delhi, 1982, pp.73-74; S.Arunachalam, \textit{The History of the Pearl Fishery of the Tamil Coast}, Annamalai University Historical Series No.10, Annamalai Nagar, 1952.
\textsuperscript{602} Ball V, and W.Crooke, \textit{Travels in India by Jean – Baptiste Tavernier}, Oxford University Press, London, 1925, pp. 94-95.
Steuart\textsuperscript{605}, Vane and Thurston\textsuperscript{606} and Hornell\textsuperscript{607}. The 6700 years records between 13\textsuperscript{th} century and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries do not show remarkable change in the pearl and chank diving procedure.

**Season of Diving**

Based on the records available during the colonial period, it is generally found that the months between March and middle of May were considered the best season for the fishing. However, the pearl fishing season and period is generally decided on the inspection of banks regarding the abundance of pearl oysters and its economic viability.

**Inspection of Pearl Banks**

Before the start of fishery the oyster beds were surveyed for its potentiality. This kind of inspection is first reported by Caesar Frederic. He mentions that when the fishing season approaches, some good divers were sent to discover where the greatest quantity of oysters is to be found\textsuperscript{608}. Tavernier mentions that before the commencement of fishery, inspections were carried out in seven or eight boats. Thousand oysters brought by each boat are opened for the quantity and quality of pearl found in them. If the pearl worth of half *ecu or 5 fanoms* or more is found, then the fishery is considered productive in that year\textsuperscript{609}. Ribeiro adds that based on the yield on the inspection the traders or renters settle their royalty to the Ruler\textsuperscript{610}. Father Martin mentions similar thing\textsuperscript{611}. From this one can infer that

\textsuperscript{606} Vane G, Pearl Fisheries in Ceylon & C., Selection from the Records of Bombay Government No.86 New series, Education Society’s Press, Bombay, pp. 1-47, 1865, see also Arunachalam, pp. 163-164.
\textsuperscript{609} Ball V, and W.Crooke, Ref. 9, pp.631-668.
the inspection would have been conducted in the earlier periods also with the help of the experienced local divers who had the knowledge of the pearl beds. These people usually headed a group of divers and generally owned the boats. They were called *Adappanars.* Other headmen noticed in the records were *Mannigar* and *Pattangatyam.* During the British period it is learnt that *Adappanars* were utilised in the inspection of pearl banks. They were also used to guide the boats to the fishing grounds. Steuart suggests that these headmen had only general idea about the position of pearl beds\(^{612}\). Hence, a planned inspection of the pearl banks was started by Steuart and the proper map was prepared by him. Later this map was updated by the successive Superintendents of the fisheries

**Commencement of Fishery**

If the inspection of the pearl banks proved the potential of pearl fishing, the fishery is commenced after giving notice to the public. In the coast, an vacant space near the pearl banks is selected for the temporary buildings for the safe keeping of the oysters, until they are sold or the pearl is extracted. The Government building was called *Cutcherry.* Nearby the boat owners build their temporary huts called *koottos.* This common place is referred by the Wang Ta-Yuan without a specific name\(^{613}\). Ribeiro also quotes of such common place for the fishery\(^{614}\). The first specific reference to the name *Cottoo* is from Steuart\(^{615}\). *Cottoo or Kottoo* in Tamil means collection or gathering.

Stuart alludes to such places in the following manner. Some of these places had compartments paved with bricks, and covered with *cunam* plaster, which formed a hard

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smooth surface. From these compartments, small gutters were made to carry off the water and drainage to the sea. To prevent the pearl being washed away with the water, small reservoirs deeper than the gutters were made in them for the pearl to sink into, where it is retained until the Cottoos are cleansed out. In the cottos prepared by the natives for their own oysters, straw or rush mats are spread on the sand for the oysters to be heaped upon. Through these mats much pearl is lost. Near this place, there used to be temporary market of various articles during the entire fishery.

**Selection of boats for fishing**

During the British period, the seaworthiness of the boats to be engaged for the fishing is tested by the Superintendent of the pearl fishery. But, there is no evidence of such selection before this period. Boats have been given numbers before the start of the fishery. The boats without numbers were not allowed in the fishing area. There were number men appointed by the Government to do this job\(^{616}\).

Scanty information is available regarding the number of boats engaged in each fishery till the British period. Chau Ju-Kua specifies that thirty or forty boats were engaged in the fishery\(^ {617}\). Marco Polo mentions that boats of big and small size were involved in the fishery. He also says that big boats are anchored near the pearl banks and the smaller ones have been used for fishing\(^ {618}\).

Following are information from travellers regarding the numbers of boats engaged in pearl fishery: Friar Jordanus (AD 1323-1330), eight thousand boats were engaged for

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three months\textsuperscript{619}, Caesar Frederic, great number of boats; Riberio, three to five thousand boats; Pedro Teixeira (AD 1568), fleet of four hundred to five hundred boats\textsuperscript{620}, Tavernier 250 boats\textsuperscript{621}. The variation of the number of boats in pearl fishery could be the quantity of oysters expected to be taken up. Based on the above evidence, it can be concluded that generally hundreds of boats some times more than a thousand from Indian and Sri Lankan coast were engaged in the fishery.

**Number of divers**

There was countless number of divers in each boat and in the fishery. Most of latter-day travelers’ accounts suggest that generally thousands were at work. In the Sri Lankan fishery of 1694 there were 5524 divers employed in the fishing\textsuperscript{622}. In Tuticorin fishery, during 1708 there were in total 8643 divers comprising of 4760 christians, 3103 Muslims and 780 Hindus\textsuperscript{623}. In the pearl fishery of Sri Lanka 4090 Arabs from persian Gulf and 4577 Tamil and Muslim divers mainly from India were employed in diving\textsuperscript{624}.

*Chau Ju – Kua* remarks that crew of several dozens in each boat were fishing\textsuperscript{625}. *Wang Ta-Yuan* specifies that each boat had a crew of five men\textsuperscript{626}. Teixeira mentions that sixty to ninety men were employed in each boat and one tenth of them were divers and others were attendants\textsuperscript{627}. But Tavernier remarks that in bigger boats there were two divers,

\textsuperscript{619} Sastri K.A.N, *Foreign Notices of South India*: From Megasthenes to Ma Huan, University of madras, Madras, 1972, p. 212.
and the smaller ones had only one diver. From the above, it can be inferred that the number of divers in a boat was not a fixed one and varied according to the size of boats and the requirement.

In the year 1746, the Dutch Government, framed a rule of allowing only ten divers at the maximum in a boat. This would have continued even during the British period. A notice given by the Government clarifies the exact number of people allowed in the boat. The crew of a boat consisted of 23 persons, who included one tindil or steersman, one samain oatte who has charge of the boat, one thody, who bales out water and cleans the boat, ten divers, ten munducks, an operational assistant or diver’s attendants to pull up the stone and oysters and aid the divers.

**Traditional Equipment**

The divers in the boat had a minimum number of some locally made equipments. The essential materials are stone, ropes and a net for collection.

**Stone**

In order to produce negative buoyancy, stones tied in an end of the long rope were held by the divers while they are descending. Steuart says that the stones were looking like pine shaped and about 25 to 30 pounds. The weight of the stone quite varies from 14 pounds to 60 pounds in different sources. LeBeck elaborates that the diving-stone is a piece of coarse granite, a foot long, six inches thick, and of a pyramidal shape, rounded at the top and bottom. A large coir rope was put through a hole in the top. The most common or pyramidal stone generally weighed about thirty pounds. It has been mentioned by Steuart

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and Vane that some divers tied some more stone to their waist along with this stone to increase their negative buoyancy. Some of the divers used another kind of stone, shaped like a half moon, to bind round their belly, so that their feet was free\textsuperscript{630}.

**Rope and Nets**

Rope and nets were the important items used during the diving operation. Long rope was tied to the divers upper hand, which enabled the attendant to lift the diver from bottom. The boats were provided with five small nets, which were commonly termed as baskets. They were made of coir yarn, and were about eighteen inches in width and depth. The mouth was laced to an iron hoop, which was properly slung and suspended to a coir rope\textsuperscript{631}. Father Martin says that pulley fixed on the boat was used to haul the divers up. But this information has not been mentioned in other sources.

**Diving Community**

The *sangam* literature mentions an ethnic group named Parathava were involved in diving. The major occupation of this *Parathava* community is fishing. The *periplus* mentions that condemned criminals were used for such job near Korkai. They would have been *Parathavas* and not the criminals. The same community continued the diving activity even during the later Chola and Pandiya periods. The Muslims from the Persian Gulf also participated in the diving at Gulf of Mannar right from the 11\textsuperscript{th} century, which triggered the rivalry between the Muslim divers and the Hindu Parathava community. This made most of the Hindus to seek the help from the Portuguese. They extended the help and thereby

converted the Hindus as Roman Catholics. It is also to be noted that the divers of Indian and Sri Lankan coast were engaged in pearl fishing of both the regions though there were different administrative divisions between these countries throughout the history.

**Pearl Fishing**

The fishery was commenced on the first night of the boats going out to the banks, and of course created great interest and excitement. If there was moonlight, thousands of people assembled on the beach to see the start, and gave their good wishes. At about 10 o’clock the tindals who carried on their right arm a ticket number corresponding with that painted on the bows of each boat, assembled with crews, and as the beach-master checked each crew, they went to their boat and made the preparations of getting under way and into position, ready to hoist the sails and start directly while the signal was given. At 12 o’clock the gun was fired, the *Adappanar* (the senior head man) hoisted a light at the masthead and lead off. In a few minutes all the boats were under press of sail, and the sight was indeed a very interesting and exiting one. The crews of the boats cheered and the people on the beach echoed them, and the white sails followed the signal light of *adappanar’s* boat could be distinguished for miles out at sea.

The Inspector’s guard vessel, anchored close to the fishery ground, had a light at the head of main topmast and in dark nights blue-lights were occasionally burned to show her position.\(^{632}\)

Early in the morning, crews of five at the minimum and a dozen at the maximum got ready for diving. The divers individually had an attendant to help. A stone weighing

about 20 lb. to 30 lb. was tied by means of rope at one end. The other end was with the men on the board. For collecting the pearl oyster, a net, sometimes with a bamboo ring its mouth wide open was attached by means of rope with the diver. Sometimes, instead of net, a basket or a sack was attached. A long rope was tied over one upper arm of diver and the other end is held by the attendant on the boat. The stone was dropped down as soon as the diver gets into the water. The diver held the rope, which was tied to the stone, and he placed his foot over the stone ( Some of the accounts state that the rope tied with stone was wound around the diver’s leg or waist ). The rope tied with the stone was released, while the diver took deep breath and went down rapidly due to the weight of the stone. As soon as he reached the sea reef he removed the feet placed on the stone and gathered as much of pearl oyster as possible and put them into the basket. The stone was lifted up in the meantime by his attendant. The diver gave the signal on completion of the job by shaking the rope tied to him. The men on the boat hauled him on to the boat along with the oysters collected. After a few minutes gap, they went down again and the process was repeated. When the divers came up to the boat for rest, the second set went down. The work was so exhausting and, therefore, the diving was generally finished before noon and the boats returned to shore in the evening.

**Duration of diving**

Duration of the dive is the time taken by the diver to go down from the surface and returned to the surface. Ribeiro mentions that the time of diving is to be the time taken in saying two credos, which means about sixty to seventy seconds. LeBeck takes it to be about two minutes. Steuart puts it about a minute for the diving during his tenure. Though *Vane*
has recorded the time taken by the divers as even 95 seconds, he believed that to be a special one and the general working period is about a minute only. Thurston also observes it to be a minute only. From the above information it can be said that the time taken by the traditional divers is about one minute and exceptionally they can remain under water even for a couple of minutes.

**Number of dives per day and area covered**

In pearl fishing, generally a diver covers about 3 sq. yards at the depth of 6 fathoms in a single dive. In case of deeper diving, then the area covered will still be less. LeBeck mentions that a diver generally covers fifty dives a day on accident-free occasions. The quantity of collection of oysters depended on the abundance of the oyster in the seabed.

**Sharing of Oysters**

After the fishing was over, the oysters were shared by the Government, native chief, boat owners, divers and attendants. This economical factor always experienced fluctuation in the ratio of shares and disputes arose over this matter continually. This aspect requires a separate detailed Study.

**Cleaning of Oysters**

Chau Ju-Kua mentions that the oysters were placed in a pit and allowed to decay for more that a month and the pearls were removed from the oysters. Wang Ta-Yuan also comments on the shells with rotten meat stirred around a sieve where the pearl are left in

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them. Caesar Frederic mentions that people search for the pearl in dead and try shells after the end of the fishery.

Ribeiro comments on the evil smell of decomposed oysters in the coastal regions and enormous number of flies gathered in that area. Soon after the fishery has commenced, the air became tainted with putrescence of the oysters in the cottoos and was often very offensive, particularly if the weather was rainy. Because of this, the cholera morbus broke out on many occasions. The method of cleaning oysters seemed to have been primitive until the 18th century when it was changed by the Government.

The washing of the oysters took place in canoes or vallam, boats made of single piece of timber hollowed out, twenty to thirty feet in length, two to three feet wide and eighteen inches deep. After the oysters were put into vallam, sea water was poured in until about three fourths was filled and then severnal men being conveniently seated on each side of the boat carefully washed and examined every oyster shell. Those shells, which had pearl adhering to them, are set apart for the pearl to be cut off and those which have no pearl is thrown in heaps outside the cottoos. The muddy water was then carefully baled out and more seawater was poored in. The process was repeated until all the mud and filth were washed away and nothing remains but pearl and sand. The whole that remains was then spread on cloth and exposed to the sun to dry.

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Sorting of pearl

After removal the pearl from the oysters, they were sorted and classified as per their quality. Chau Ju-Kua mentions that the best pearl considered valuable was round in shape, which rolled always and never ceased to stop when put on a plate\textsuperscript{640}. Wang Ta-Yuan gives the first reference to the sorting of pearls using five sieves\textsuperscript{641}. Caesar Frederick refered to certain persons called *Chitini (Chettis)* who were learned in pearls. They were employed to sort and valued them according to their weight, beauty, and goodness, divided them into four sorts. The first sort which was round was named *aia* of portugal, as they are bought by the portuguese. The second, which was not round, were named *aia* of bengal. The third, which were inferior to the second, were called *aia* of Canara, which is the name of the kingdom of Vijaynagar, into which they are sold. And the fourth, or lowest kind, was called *aia* of Cambaia, being sold into the country\textsuperscript{642}.

Ribeiro mentions that the persons who sorted the pearls brought small sieves with which they shifted the pearls and deposited them on sheets. Then they separated those which had an individual price according to their size and degree of perfection. All the rest, they divided into nine classes. The first class was the best and they called it *ajofar* of the highest quality. This classification went on until their ninth which were of equal size and rounded\textsuperscript{643}.

Father Martin accounts that the pearls were placed in a metal receptacle containing some five or six colanders of graduated sizes which were fitted one into another so as to

leave a space between the bottoms of every two and were pierced with holes of varying sizes, smallest of them being the undermost. When dropped onto colander No. 1 all but the very finest pearls fell through into No. 2 and most of them passed into Nos. 3, 4 and 5 while the smallest of all the seeds were strained off into the receptacle at the bottom. When all stayed in their proper colanders, they were classified and valued accordingly.\(^{644}\)

Stewart clearly describes the method of sorting and classing the pearls.\(^{645}\) The classifying of pearls was done by passing them through a succession of brass colanders called baskets, in a shape of large saucers. There were ten and sometimes twelve of these colanders. The first had twenty holes in it. The pearls that did not pass through these holes after being well shaken, were called of the twentieth basket. The succeeding baskets had 30, 50, 80, 100, 200, 400, 600, 800, 1000 holes, each basket given the name corresponding with its number of holes. The pearls those did not pass through those holes were called by the number of holes in it. There were pearls of 20\(^{th}\) 30\(^{th}\) 50\(^{th}\) and so on to the thousand basket. The pearls which passed through the eleven and twelve baskets were called masie. The sorted pearls were then classified in seven distinct descriptions.

**Modern Day Traditional Diving**

A field survey was conducted to document the traditional diving practice followed in the Mannar Gulf region of Indian coast. More than 18 villages were covered for the interview with the traditional divers and documentation. Divers of age between 31 and 80 have been interrogated. Sea trips with the divers in the boat were also done to see the method of diving. As there is no pearl fishery in the Coastal regions of Gulf of Mannar of

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Indian coast, diving is done only for collection of chanks, varieties of shells and seaweed. The divers individually have an aluminium plate which is used as a fin by reinforcing a rubber strap, a net made of nylon which is tied in their waist to gather the shells and country-made masks to cover the eyes and nose. In Tuticorin region, the divers have a lead weight tied in a rope to use them as additional weight to descend fast to the bottom.

**Diving near Rameswaram region**

In Rameswaram region, divers numbering more than twenty generally go by an outrigger boat early in the morning. On reaching a spot where the chank and other kinds of shells are available they cast the anchor. The selection of the site is based on the experience only and in case no shell or only a few shells are found, the anchors are lifted and the boat is taken to some other spot. Upon casting the anchor, the diver straps the aluminium plate in one of his leg, ties the net in the waist and puts on the mask in the face and jumps into the water. This way, except a man who looks after boat from drifting away, all the divers plunge into the water and search for the chank and shells. Upon seeing the shells, they collect and put it in the net and move to some other place by swimming. Since no rope is tied with them they move freely wherever they wish during the fieldwork. It was noticed that the divers move even about half a kilometre away from the boat. The depth they generally dive is about six to eight fathoms and they are able to be under water for more than a minute. The maximum time took by a driver named Ansari of Kilakarai village was nine minute and thirteen seconds. On filling up the net they come to the boat to unload the items and take rest for a while and again go for diving. This process continues till 2 o’clock in the afternoon and they come back to the shore by four. The collection of
individuals is bought by the brokers and in turn is sold to companies situated in Kilakarai. Fifteen per cent of every individual diver's earning is taken as hiring charge by the boat owner. It is learnt that the income varies from a meagre surn to a thousand per day for a diver.

**Diving near Tuticorin Region**

In Tuticorin region similar procedure is followed as in Rameswaram area except for the following differences. In Tuticorin region, the number of divers going in a boat is limited to 10. The stone / lead weight tied in the end of a rope is used for fast descendence. In this process, the weight is hung near the boat. The diver rests his foot on the weight and holds the rope. When the rope is released he goes to bottom rapidly and lifts his foot from the weight and search for the shells. The weight is lifted up by the men on the boat for another set of divers to go down. In Tuticorin region, the maximum depth of diving is about 14 fathoms, whereas in the Rameswaram region, it is only about 8 fathoms. Hence, without the use of stone / lead weight diving is difficult in this area. Only about twenty years ago the mask and fin plates came into vogue. Information from the old divers suggest that before twenty years, they used stone to go down fast to the bottom even in Rameswaram region.

On comparing the old record with the present day diving procedure, one can conclude that the traditional method of diving still survives among the divers with the only slight alteration introduced by modern technology. This traditional chank fishing technique will continue to prevail among the fishermen of Gulf of Mannar region because the SCUBA (Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus) diving is highly uneconomical
for this diving. In fact diving with diving bell was carried out during the British period and was found uneconomical\textsuperscript{646}. If training is given to these chank shell divers for using the modern diving equipment, certainly the output will increase, but the cost of the equipment is very high and will be uneconomical compared to the conventional chank fishing. The sporadic distribution of the chanks nowadays fetches the divers limited income. Since this sort of fishing is seasonal, generally two to four months in a year, divers are eager to earn fast money which could be useful for the whole year. They feel that the reason for scarce number of chanks found in the Indian water is the extensive use of fishing trawlers resulting disturbance to the chank beds and the discharge of industrial disposals into the sea, causing water pollution have reduced the culture of chanks and other shells.

**Stones in Traditional Pearl Diving**

The term stone was used as an economic indicator in all administrative purpose in the traditional pearl fishing industry as it played vital role in diving. In the Gulf of Mannar region, the traditional divers used stones to go to the sea bottom to fish the pearl oysters. A tax termed as stone money was collected by the Rulers for every stone used in the pearl diving.

For accounting in the pearl fishery, the divers were numbered in terms of stones till the British period. Due to the considerable income the pearl diving industry was monopolised by the local Kings then ruling the coastal area till the invasion of Portuguese who took charge of it between 1524 and 1658 AD. The monopoly was subsequently

transferred to the Dutch between 1658 and 1796 A.D and later to the British who had the rights till the independence both in India and Srilankan waters\textsuperscript{647}.

Though the diving for chank shells continues even today, the last pearl fishery existed only in 1961. The traditional method of diving for collection of pearl and chank is followed with minor changes since Sangam Age. Even now, they do not use the artificial respiratory systems under the water while they collect chank shells.

The ruler who monopolized the industry accounted the number of divers per stone as each stone was shared by two divers in the operation. So, the ruling Government would have leased the rights of pearl fishing to the boat owners for the particular year and tax would have been charged in terms of diving stones. During the Rule of Portuguese and Dutch the above said system was followed.

Cardington mentions that Portuguese who took over the pearl fishery of India and Sri Lanka levied stone money as the tax on every stone used by the divers for the purpose of going down. Though Portuguese had the absolute monopoly over the pearl fishery between 1524 and 1658 A.D, to have a smooth trade, political harmony and a limited control over the interior territories they have allowed certain privileges to engage some free boats and stones in the pearl fishery to the Nayaks of Madurai and Sethupaties of Ramnad. The chief item of concession made to Nayak was grant of number of free boats in each fishery. In a copper plate grant purporting to be made by Tirumalai Nayakar in favour of the Mudaliyar Pillai Marakkayar, it is mentioned that world the head man to look after pearl fishing of the seven large boats with 96 ½ free stones (193 divers) granted by the

Portuguese to Nayaks. For that service, he shall receive 60 chacrums per month and shall be favoured with ten stones to dive for him at Mannar and Tuticorin region. In addition, the Sethupathi of Ramnad got a further number of free divers (60 stones) in each fishery in return for the help rendered to the success of the fishery and in guarding and providing pilots for the Pamban pass.\(^{648}\)

Some of these privileged free diving stones were donated by the Nayaks and Sethupaties to various temples, In 1542 and 1546 A.D, Nayaks had donated some privileged stones to temples on religious motives.\(^{649}\)

**Talavai Sethupathi Katta Thevar** of Ramanathapuram have donated 7 stones to the Rameswaram Temple in the year 1625 A.D. Five stones were donated during the year 1699 A.D to **Tiruppulani perumal temple** from the Mannar fishery and in 1714 A.D three stones were donated to the Parvathavarthim Temple of Rameswaram, Other than these privileged free diving stones offered to Nayaks and Sethupaties, the Portuguese and Dutch had allotted some more free stones to the headmen of diving community of different coastal regions for the smooth and successful conduct of fishery. In the fishery of 1708 A.D, there were 398 free stones admitted which included the privilege given to Nayaks and Sethupaties and headmen (Marakkayar) of diving community.\(^{650}\)

The Dutch Government framed a rule and allowed maximum of only five stones per boat. A share of pearl oysters on collection of each diving stone is taken as the rent. The privileged stones earlier offered to Nayaks, *Nawab of Karnatic* and Sethupaties were abolished and so the privilege enjoyed by the temples as a grant was also abandoned.

Likewise, based on the request made by the Nawab of Karnatic to Dutch Governor. 30 divers were allowed to dive for him in the year 1747. However, due to the fear of interruption of their cloth monopoly at Madurai, the Dutch had ordered the renters to allow 96½ stones to the Regent of Madura and two boats (ten stones) to Thevar of Ramnad region. These rights were enjoyed by them even in the fishery of Sri Lankan waters.

During Portuguese and Dutch period, there was a discrimination on the basis of religion in the tax levied on each stone. For instance, the tax on the stone handled by a Christian was lightest and heaviest on the Moors (Arabs).

**Korkai Pearls in Literature**

One of them said that it meant the beautiful pearls of Korkai port were safeguarded by the bravest Pandyas who also safeguarded the justice. The pearls fished from here were of good quality and thus had an international demand.

Another Song says that, “The great Pandyan king who went to the war by sitting on an elephant, his capital Korkai was familiar in pearls and chanks.”

Works of the ancient Greeks and Romans writer particularly of the Classical Age speak of Cape Comorin, Korkai, Pamban and the Gulf of Mannar. They refer to Korkai as Kolkhoi emporium and recognized it as Headquarters of pearl fishery in the Pandya Kingdom.

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652 *Aganamuuru* - 27.
Ptolemy of the second century A.D also alludes to the pearls of the Pandya nad. It is confirmed by the poems of sangam literature.

“Korkai is a very ancient port town and it has enormous wealth and it gives beautiful pearls to the world. This town’s ladies wear sea shell bangles. It consists of vast area of pakkums and cherries. The port area of Korkai has countless beautiful pearls spread out on the sand.”

The pearl merchants, not only foreigners and also Indians from various places like Bombay and Calcutta used to come Kilakarai to buy pearls. There were two inns to stay for such merchants, one in Madurai and another one in Rameswaram. These inns were called as ‘Muttu savadi’ it means ‘pearl – inn’.

The pearl merchants of Kilakarai also often had to go to Calcutta for their business. Hence, the Kilakarai pearl merchants built a mosque in ‘Machhuva Bazzar’, Calcutta. It still exists there. The name of the mosque is ‘sholia mazid’.

Inscription of Pearl Cholas(990-1216 A.D)

The history of the pearl fishery under the Cholas(990-1216 A.D): The inscriptions of this period give us details of the large scale presents of pearls to various temples by the different kings of the Chola Dynasty. For example, in “South Indian Inscriptions”, we get so many references to the dedication of pearls, of which a few are given below. “One pearl Ornament inclusive of gold and a pearl”. “One panchasari with two paligai of the middle gold clasp each consisting of five pieces…. Inclusive of the lac and the one hundred and

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655 Ibid., p. 15.
656 Madurai Kanji – 133-138.
657 Natrinai – 131, II 7-8.
eighty-seven pearls in all strung on it, viz… small pearls, polished pearls, crude pearls and sakkatu.\textsuperscript{660} “One girdle with eighty one pearls in all, viz. round pearls and roundish pearls, polished pearls and small pearls strung on its three strings.”\textsuperscript{661}

An inscription of Rajarajendra Chola at Tanjore Temple runs as follows; “One ring for the tusk of Ganapathi….. eight rubies, two crystals and fourteen crystal diamonds fastened on it and of the one hundred and nineteen pearl in all strung on it.”\textsuperscript{662} An inscription of the same King at the same place is as follows; “One ‘fore-head’ ornament weighing including the eleven pearls strung on it\textsuperscript{663}.” Lastly, here is an inscription of Rajaraja Cholodeva: “Sixty-four pearls in all strung on it out of the pearls which the Lord Sri Rajarajadeva has poured out as flowers at the sacred feet and with which he has worshipped the feet of God.”\textsuperscript{664} We have hundreds of references like these in the inscriptions of the great Cholas. If the King Rajaraja Chola should have poured the pearls at the feet of God as flowers, we can understand the munificent supply he had of the pearls from the fisheries of his empire. Rajendra Chola’s inscriptions as well as the inscriptions of the Kings that succeeded him show the extravagant presents of the pearls to various temples scattered all over the Chola empire.

Apart from these inscriptions, we get enough evidence to show that the pearls were very common with the people of this periods and that they were dived for in to the seas. The Tamil Literature of this period were in the form of “Ulas” and “Nikandus.” In these

“Ulas” and “Nikandus” there were many passing remarks regarding the fishing for pearls and the various uses to which the pearls were put.

“Thakkayakaparani”665, composed in the twelfth century A.D., have many references to the pearls. There was a reference to the matchless pearls.666 Another passage said that the products of the mountain and sea were to be had in this land.667 The products of the sea are the chank, pearl and coral. Another passage refers to the large pearls from the sea.668 Lastly it is said that “a shark discloses pearls of very large quantities when cut.”669 The great epic “Kamba Ramayanam” of this period also refered to the pearls in many places. But, these are mainly passing references, as we saw in the period of 400-1000 A.D., here too no information is given in the Tamil Works regarding the place or the method of pearl fishing.

Tamil poems of Sangam Age.

There are many evidences in the Tamil Poems of the Sangam Age to show that the Pandyas had the possession of the pearl fisheries at Korkai. “Muthollayiram”670 says that the pearls were found in Korkai only and that the Pandyas was the owner of Korkai on the Black Sea.671 ‘Silappadhikaram’672 states that the Pandy Monarch had the monopoly in pearls and sandal wood.673 That the Pandy King owned the Sea near Korkai is best

665 “Thakkayakaparini”. A Tamil poem sung by Ottakoothar, the Court poet of Kulothunga Chola III.
666 “Thakkayakaparani”,1.41.
667 Ibid., 1.72.
668 Ibid., 1.181.
669 Ibid., 1.182.
670 Muthollayiram is a collection of about hundred stanzas available of 2700 stanza composed by a great poet, whose name is not know and who is said to have lived in the beginning of the 2nd century A.D.
671 Ibid.,Stanza 30.
672 Silappadhikaram is one of the five great epics in Tamil and it was composed by Elango Adigal, brother of the great Chera King, Chera Chenguttuvan.
673 Ibid., p. 17.
explained by ‘Agananuru’. At one place, the poet says that the Pandya King had a necklace of pearls taken from his sea. At another place, it is said that the Pandyas guarded the pearl fishery at Korkai. Another poem in the same ‘Agananuru’ says that “Korkai belongs to the Pandya who possesses a beautiful chariot to which are yoked beautifully trotting horses, whose hoof marks cannot be traced on the ground covered with the coolrayed pearls, which the surging waves yield. Yet another poet, in the same collection of verses, says the following:’The brilliant pearls and chanks are taken from the harbour of the famous Korkai which belonged to the valiant fighter, Pandyan.

The pearl fishers dived in the deep sea when fishing for pearls. Deep sea pearls were greatly valued. While one verse in ‘Agananuru’ speaks of the pearls got from the sea by diving, yet another verse says that “the fishermen who from white boats dive into the Black Sea, avoid the attacks of the shark and bring up the rightwhorled chank, blow on the sounding shell and thus a great noise rises in Korkai. The pearl divers used to collect their oysters on the banks of the sea and they seem to have bartered the pearl oysters for other commodities that they needed. A verse from ‘Agananuru’ speaks of the bartered of the pearl oysters for toddy. “they barter for the sweet smelling toddy, filtered in the web of

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674 Agananuru is a collection of four hundred verses composed by different poets who are said to have lived in the first three centuries of the Christian era. In this collection, the glories of the different jings of TamilNadu are sung by poets belonging to the different parts of the country. These verses were collected by about the fourth century A.D. by the Sangam poets on the request of the Pandyan King.
675 Ibid., Stanza 3.
676 Ibid., Stanza 27.
677 Ibid., Stanza 130.
678 Ibid., Stanza 201.
679 Kalithogai, Stanza 131,1,22.
680 Agananuru, Stanza 280.
681 Ibid., Stanza 350.
the palmyra leaf, the pearl oysters brought by the men who fish in the broad sea.\textsuperscript{682} At Korkai, the pearls of excellent water were fished. ‘Natrinai’\textsuperscript{683} says that “in the broad expanse of the sea near this harbour of Korkai grow pearls of excellent water.\textsuperscript{684}

‘Kalithogai’\textsuperscript{685} speaks of the pearls from the sea by saying that though the pearls were born of the sea, they never benefited the sea, but only beautified those who wore them.\textsuperscript{686} ‘Purananuru’\textsuperscript{687} speaks of the pearl as a gem emitting rays while lying on bright, long layers of sand.\textsuperscript{688} It is further remarked in another stanza that the Pandya King ruled from Madurai with, sandalwood from the Pandya hills, and pearls from the sea.\textsuperscript{689}

The chank was also obtained from the Gulf of Mannar. We have noticed a verse from ‘Agananuru’\textsuperscript{690} which speaks of the right-whorled chank being obtained from the waters of Korkai. The chanks were classified into two categories. That which has the opening to the right was called “Valampuri” or right-whorled chank. That which has the opening to the left was called “Edampuri” or ordinary chank. The former was very rare to find, whereas the latter was fished in very large quantities. The right-whorled chank was very much revered by the Indians and it still continues to be respected and worshipped.

\textsuperscript{682} Ibid., Stanza 296.
\textsuperscript{683} Natrinai is a collection of four hundred verses sung by different poets belonging to different parts of the Tamil country and of different times. These were collected by a Board of poets on the request of the Pandya King, by about the Fourth Century A.D.
\textsuperscript{684} Ibid., Stanza 28, 1.6.
\textsuperscript{685} Kalithogai is a collection of 150 verses sung by five great poets of the Sangam Age about the five decisions of the Tamil country and society, called “Thinai”.
\textsuperscript{686} Ibid., Stanza 9, 11. 15-16.
\textsuperscript{687} Purananuru is a collection of four hundred verses sung by different poets in the first three centuries of the Christian era. They were collected on the request of the Pandya King by a committee of poets of the Sangam in about the fourth century A.D.
\textsuperscript{688} Ibid., Stanza 53.
\textsuperscript{689} Ibid., Stanza 58.
\textsuperscript{690} Agananuru, Stanza 350.
People of the Tamil country used to wear chank bangles. A verse in
‘Muthollayiram’ said that the heroine was wearing the chank bangles.\(^{691}\) Another verse said
that the sea abounded in pearls and chanks.\(^{692}\) The description of the girl-in-love with the
Pandya King is vivid. She consoles herself saying that “the chank bangles I wear are from
the sea belonging to him; so too, are the pearls.”\(^{693}\) An incident on the sea coast is described
by the poet. A chank which is sent up the sands by a big wave has given birth to a pearl
there. It is moving hither and thither waiting for a big wave to come and take it down to the
sea.\(^{694}\)

**Trade in Chank**

Since time immemorial, the pearl–banks lying between Sri Lanka and India were
being opened by Paravas the sturdy caste, who enjoyed special rights and privileges in pearl
and chank fishing.

The Hindus considered the chank as sacred and the possession of such a thing at
home is considered to be good by other religious communities also. Like pearls, chanks
also have a long history and chank fishing has been an ancient one. Kenneth Mcpherson
says that the Paravas worked the valuable pearl and chank fisheries of the Palk Straits.\(^{695}\)

Chank was called the mother of pearls (Turbinella phrum) and is divided into two
categories – the right–whorled or 'Valampuri' and the ordinary or 'Edampuri' chanks. The
right whorled chank has its opening from the left to the right and it is very rarely found.
The ordinary chank which has its opening from the right to the left is available in plenty.

\(^{691}\) *Muthollayiram*, Stanza 46.
\(^{692}\) *Ibid.*, Stanza 47.
\(^{693}\) *Ibid.*, Stanza 63.
\(^{694}\) *Ibid.*, Stanza 73.
The right whorled chanks are very costly, and it costs sometimes tens thousands of rupees. Agananuru speaks of the right whorled chank obtained from the waters of Korkai. The Muslims also like to have chanks in their houses since they believe that the possession of the right–whorled chank will do good to the possessor and the family.

In India chanks, were available only in the Tamil coast and Kathiwar and nowhereelse. In the Tamil coast, the Gulf of Mannar was fested with these sea shells. They were found between pearl banks and coral beds. Chanks were found both in Tuticorin and towards the north of it. They were also found in abundance in the islands situated before Tuticorin. Next to pearls, the chank was the second important commercial product of the Gulf of Mannar. It is called chank in English and chanco in Portuguese. The chank fishery went on from October to May and was worked by divers, who weighed themselves with stones and descended to the bottom of the sea with a net around their waist. Unlike the pearl-oysters which were found in clusters, the shells of the chank were scattered, so the divers had to move about from place to place to collect them.

At the close of the day’s fishery, the chanks were brought to the shore and tested using the wooden gauge with a hole two and three-eighths inches in diameter. Those shells which passed through this hole were discarded and returned to the sea on the chance that the animal may revive and continue to grow. The larger ones were stacked in a storehouse,
where the animal substance was got rid off. Finally, the shells were sold by auction to the highest bidder\textsuperscript{700}.

Cosmos, an Egyptian monk, who travelled in India in the sixth century A.D. and the Arab Abu Zayeed who wrote in 851 A.D. refered to the production and the export of the chank shells from the Tamil Coast to Bengal. Barbosa who was in India in the sixteenth century spoke about the trade that was carried at Kayal (Punnaikayal). From him, we learn that Punnaikayal was still an important seaport where many ships from the various parts of India including Bengal, landed every year to trade with the wealthy Hindu and Muslim merchants living there. There was no difficulty in forwarding the supply of chanks directly by sea to the Dacca workshops. Garcia de Orta, in 1563, and Boccaro, in 1644, spoke of the trade in the chank shells with Bengal where the chanks were made into bangles for the arms (jewellery).\textsuperscript{701}

Every year pearl fishing took place twice and the first one which took place in April – May was known as the great fishery and second one in October – November was known as the small fishery. From Xavier's letter, it is understood that the Paravas went chank fishing in September.\textsuperscript{702}

Caldwell speaks about the chanks which were available in Tuticorin as follows: "Chanks were found in 7-fathom water, but we may take a minimum depth of 5 fathoms, and reckon 30 feet for the depth of their habitat."\textsuperscript{703} At first the Portuguese did not seem to

\textsuperscript{700} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{701} Arunachalam, Op.cit., p. 185.
\textsuperscript{702} Letters of Xavier, November 10, 1544, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{703} Caldwell, R., Op.cit., p. 76.
have been very particular about chank fishery since they were more allured to the pearl fishery and the revenue they derived from them.\textsuperscript{704}

Commodities like chanks were excluded from the scope of the maritime trade of the Paravas because such articles were declared by the Portuguese captain as monopoly items in 1552. The King of Portugal relaxed the restrictions imposed on the Paravas to enable them to establish their own trade contacts. Some Paravas who became rich also built numerous champanas (boats) for their trading voyages and evinced interest in commerce.\textsuperscript{705}

These Paravas were therefore able to sell the chanks for better prices and exported a major portion of their chank to Bengal. The chank which fetched only five \textit{fanams} prior to 1536 was now sold at the rate of fifteen to twenty \textit{fanams}, thereby boosting the income of the Paravas. While the high quality chanks were mainly exported to Bengal for making ornaments, chanks of low quality were broken by shell burners called Caraiyars, who lived in the region and lime was produced out of it. This lime was mainly used in the construction of buildings in the region.\textsuperscript{706}

The chanks were exported to Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, where the people continued to wear chank bangles. Workshops to make bangles out of the chanks came to existence in many parts of Greater Bengal, viz. Dacca, Patna, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Burdwars, Balasore, Banikura and Sylhet. The chief workshops were found in Dacca and Dinajpur.\textsuperscript{707} Garcia da Orta says: And this chank are a ware for the Bengal trade and formerly produced more profit than now. . . and there was formerly a custom in Bengal that no virgin in honour and

\textsuperscript{705} Jeyaseela Stephen S., \textit{Tamil Coast}, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{706} \textit{Ibid.}
esteem could be corrupted unless it were by placing bracelets of chanks on her arms; but since the Patans came in this usage has more or less ceased, and so the chanks are rated lower now.\footnote{Pate, H.R., \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 235.} At one point, the Paravas were not allowed to sell the chank mussels to whom they wished. The Jesuits had to interfere in this matter and it was made as a request to the King of Portugal along with other concessions like reduction in paying taxes to the Royal exchequer.\footnote{\textit{DL., Vol. I (1540-1549)}, 1948, p. 160.}

**Economic conditions**

Economic development is an important continuum in the progress of the country. From the time of independence, the status of Indian economy was poor and backward. So, we adopted planned as one of our approaches to economic development. The anti Indian policy of the British rule was the main reason for the backwardness of the Indian Economy. Hence, the planning in India was aimed to channelize the country’s resources in different developmental activities.\footnote{Balakrishnan C, et.al, \textit{Social science Book}, Chennai, 2005, p. 47.}

**Nature of the Sea**

Sea means (in Tamil) there are some words, Punari, Munneer, Pavan, Aazhi. These words were used by fishermen, Sea and the seashore lands were called “Neithal land”. \textit{Neithal} land people’s main occupation is fishing. They go to fishing in \textit{Katamaran},
Marakalam to deep of the sea and by Ariyuli weapon they used to hunt Thimil, Ambi.

Shark fish hunting.  

**Fishing materials**

1. Boat  
2. Vallan  
3. Kattamaran  
4. Net  
5. Madi  
6. Cloth mate  
7. Plastic mate  
8. Role  
9. Anchor  
10. Iron  
11. Bull tack  
12. Tholavai  
13. Kazhuthatti  
14. Mattu  
15. Iron rope

These materials are used in fishing by fishermen. Fishermen used Katamaran till 20th century. Now, they use only motor Boats, plastic Boats and Engine Boats. So Katamaran was not functioning.  

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Kinds of Net

Fishermens used different kinds of net for fishing they are:

1. Cotton Net
2. Jute Net
3. Rope Net
4. Nylon Net
5. Kezha chalai Net
6. Aancha Net
7. Etcha Net
8. Vazhi Net
9. Katcha Net
10. Disco Net
11. Rani Net
12. Choodai valai
13. Singi valai
14. Iraal valai
15. Nandu valai
16. Paru valai
17. Disco valai Veechhu valai (Cast Net)

"Valai" in Tamil Vernacular means "NET".

These nets are used for fishing.\textsuperscript{713}

Alode of fish in the Sea

The fishermen well known about fish through their experience and they divide the living place of fish in the sea. They are

1. The fish live in upper part of the sea

2. The fish live in middle part of the sea.
3. The fish live in lower part of the sea.
4. During night the fish live in upper part, during day the fish live in lower part.
5. The fish live in Lower part and upper part of the sea.
6. The fish live in upper part and middle part of the sea.
7. The fish live in Lower par and Rock part of the sea.
8. The fish live in lower part and soil part of the sea.

The fisherman well known about fish through their experience. Some months they could not caught more fish. They know all of them about fishing then only they can go to correct season. They known about current of the sea besides they were fishing while know about place and distance.