CHAPTER III

THE PARATAVAR OR PARAVAR
THE PARATAVAR OR PARAVAS

In this littoral region of the Pandya Kingdom there lived, as of now, a very ancient people, primitive in many ways. They are called the Paravas, a corruption of the most ancient term Paratavar. This coastal belt has come to be called after the Paravas as the 'Parava Coast' after the advent of the Portuguese. The Portuguese who are said to have adopted the term Paravas for Paratavar, for those who lived in this Pandya Coast engaging themselves in pearl-fishing and chańk-cutting. These have become their professions from very early days as of hunting and gathering food, cattle-rearing and agriculture in the other three tinai (physiographic divisions), namely Kurinchi, Mullai and Marudam. Since the Paratavar had to dive deep into the sea for fishing pearls or for collecting chańks, they came to be called Mukkuvar also. This chapter tries to make an etymological study of these terms and find out their occupation, their social position, political vicissitudes, and such other matters related to their life.

Called neidal nilam in Tamil and littoral region or coastal belt in English, their habitat is on the sandy sea-shore, always at the risk of destruction by the powerful sea. Their life is one of irañgal (in anticipation of the return
of their menfolk, who went on fishing, challenging the roaring sea). In fact, their womenfolk, standing on the sandy sea-shore, were always expecting the return of their men with mixed feelings of anguish and excitement.

TRACING THEIR ORIGIN

In fact, today people of various communities are searching for their historical roots and identity. But here is a community which retains the name of its occupation, way of life, religious practices and certain characteristics like militancy, hospitality etc., for quite a long period of time. One is amazed at the fisher-folk of any village, for their unique culture, which has been preserved and nurtured very carefully for so long. These people are called Paravas in the Sañgam literature.¹ They were one of the earliest peoples to inhabit the littoral region, eking out a living challenging the various oddities of life put in their way by the roaring sea.

DERIVATION OF THE TERM PARATAVAR

The word Paratavar or Paratar or Paravar a variant form found in Piṅkalantai and Kambarāmāyanam means the people of the

Naccinārkkiniyar, the Commentator of Tolkāppiyam, also approves the meaning given to the term as a people of the sea. It is connected with Paravai, the sea. Coming from the root 'para', it means the vast expanse. The terms 'Paravai', 'Parappu' and 'Para' expand to mean sea and breadth. If the formative 'tu' is added to the root word 'Para', then Paratu will result. The word 'Paratu' means to spread, extend and grow broad. Probably to this word the suffix 'ar' has been added and thus the word Paratavar comes to refer to the fishermen, who lived on the expanse of the sea-coast. In Tamil, the word Paratavar, therefore, means the people of the neidal (littoral) region.

Paratavar were also called Minar or Minas or Minavar and Mukkuvar. Min in Tamil means fish. Minavar were also the fishing folk of the Tamil Country. Those who catch fish, make a sale and live on the fish are called Minavar. It is said that the word Minar had a very early origin. The Minavar are said to have descended from the very early people called Minas. The term Minavar is derived from the Dravidian word min which means a

fish. The Pandyas had the kāyal min (double carp) as their State emblem. On this ground it has been argued that the Pandyas had descended from the fisherfolk. Another argument is that the Pandyas had gained mastery over the fishing sea at a fairly early age. Yet one more argument is that the Pandyas established their mastery in overseas trade.

The term Mukkuvar is derived from the word Mung or Muk meaning to dive, to press underwater, to immerse and to drown. This refers to those fishermen who dive for pearls and conch shells. That is why, these divers were also called Mutthukkulippār in Tamil, which simply means 'divers of pearls'. It is said that this word has come from Mukthavan, meaning a person who possessed pearls. Thus the Mukkuvar were divers who originally engaged themselves in pearl-fishing.

The Mukkuvar are the predominant settlers on the coastal belt of Travancore. Besides, the fishermen on the sea-shore of the Ramnad and Kanyakumari districts are also called Mukkuvar. A

5. Cilappadikāram, VII.38.
variant form of this term in Tamil is Karaiyar or coast-men. Ptolemy, the Greek geographer of the 2nd century A.D., refers to them as Kareai.⁹ Again, another variant of this appears to be Karaiyalar (those who rule the inland). For example, we may cite here the name Sattanātha Karaiyalar. Thereby we conclude that it may mean those who have engaged themselves in fish-trade in the inland region. A Sri Laṅkan native researcher says that the Paravas rank first among the Tamil tribes of fishermen and are generally said to have been the earliest navigators in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ At present, the term Paratavar is very rarely used and that too in certain pockets only. In most of the coastal regions, it has fallen out of use. It is a living fact that the fishermen who live in the districts of Madras, Chengleput, South Arcot and Thanjavur are called Minavar, Pattinavar and Karaiyar.¹¹ Another section of them are called Nulayar or Nulambar, meaning those who were engaged in salt-fish trade.¹²

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⁹. V.Kanakasabhai Pillai, op.cit., p.22.


From very early days the Paravas have been living in the Pandya Coast that extends from Thondi in Ramnad to Kanyakumari and even Kumarimutham in the West Coast. They were living as a single community in the following villages and towns, viz. Rajakkalmaingalam, Thirumandiranagar, Kovalam, Kanyakumari, Kumarimutham, Perumanal, Sippikulam, Idinthakarai, Kuthenkuli, Uvari, Periathalai, Pudukarai, Manapad, Alanthalai, Tiruchendur, Virapandyapattinam, Tholampuli, Punnaikayal, Palayakayal, Thuttukudi, Vaipar, Vembar and Mukur. Traditionally, the area comprising all these places from north Ramnad to south Muttam has come to be called the 'Pearl-fishery Coast'.

THEORIES OF THEIR ORIGIN

The origin of the Paratavar is still shrouded in mystery. Various legends, myths and theories have been put forward to their origin. These theories range from their foreign origin to their indigenous one, and again, from their Aryan origin to their Dravidian origin. These are either conjectures or assumptions of some scholars in the light of the popularity of some Aryan or epic stories among them.

13. The list is based mainly on the letter written by Fr. Henrique Henriquez S.J to St. Ignatius Loyola on January 13, 1538 from Manakudi found in J. Wicki, Documenta Indica, Vol. IV, pp. 32-34.
JUDEO-CHRISTIAN THEORY

Simon Casie Chetty, the author of the Historia Ecclesiatica, (published in Tamil at Tranquebar in 1735), traces their original home on the North Western coast of Sri Lanka. This theory identifies them with the Paravaim of the Scriptures and adds that at the time of Solomon, they were famous among those who made voyages by sea. Perhaps they were the traders who brought teak, tokai (peacock's feather), rice, ginger and ivory to the King. There is also a strange coincidence to this view. Ophir mentioned in these records has been identified as Uvari in the Pandya Coast. Uvari now has a church modelled on an aeroplane resting on a ship. Scholars of this theory, however, forget the fact that the Paratavar were an indigenous people. 14

SANSKRIT THEORY

There is a common belief among the Paravas that their original home was Ayodhya or Oudh. If so, it appears that prior to the Mahabharata war, they inhabited the territory bordering on the river Yamuna or Jumna. 15 According to their own accounts they

15. Edgar Thurston, op.cit., p.140.
are said to be the descendants of king Bharata of the Lunar race, who ruled in Oudh. In support of their tradition they refer to their custom of displaying at their marriage feasts banners and emblems, peculiar to the distinguished race, to which they belong. They make their first appearance in history as fishermen or divers for pearls. At present they are chiefly found in the sea port towns of the Thūttukudi and Tirunelveli districts. They are also seen in some of the provinces on the North-western coast of Sri Lanka. If this theory is accepted, then it means that the coastal area was earlier uninhabited. But, it is learnt from the Saṅgam Classics that this region was the earliest home of the fishermen. Even if the north Indian Āryan origin theory is accepted, it is very difficult to say at what time and for what purpose they came down to the south and settled particularly in this littoral region. It is doubtful whether they had already acquired the pearl-fishing experiences, for in India pearl was available only in this region. It may be said that like any other caste or community of India, the Paravas

16. The term Parava is said to be a corruption of the name Bharata. [Ibid., p.142].

17. Ibid., p.150.

18. Pattinappälai., 11.172-175; Maduraik-kāṇchi., 11.78-79.
also take credit in their descent from North India; it may be the result of Aryanization or Sanskritization.\(^9\)

The Paravas were once a very powerful people and, no doubt, they derived much of their ascendancy over other tribes by their knowledge of navigation. They had a succession of kings and are distinguished by the title of Adhiyarasan\(^20\) (the first ruler). Some of them seem to have resided at Uttara Kosamāṅgay, called at that time, the city of Maṅgay, a famous place of Hindu pilgrimage in the neighbourhood of Ramnad.\(^21\)

Some of the puranas represent them to have descended from a brahmin, by a sudra woman, while the Jāti bēdi nūl, a tantra work, states them to be the offsprings of a Kurava or basket maker, begotten clandestinely on a female of the Chetty or merchant tribe.\(^22\) But the Paravas have among themselves

19. This is a process by which the non-Āryan races and peoples were Aryanized. The term "Sanskritization" is Prof. M. N. Srinivas substitute for the term "Aryanization". (See his Social Change in Modern India, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 1-45). There is also a view that it was a process of "Brahmanization" of the non-Brahmin castes in India.


quite a different tradition concerning their origin which is founded on mythological basis.

NAGA ORIGIN

V.Kanakasabhai Pillai is of the opinion that the Paratavar were of a Naga tribe. They occupied the sea-coast and lived by fishing or sea-faring. They dived deep into the sea for pearls and conch-shells. 23

In fact, Nāgas were one of the very ancient autoch'thon of Southern India. The Nairs of Kerala are said to have descended from the Nāgas. Even the Saṅgam works relate the Tondaiyar of Thondaimandalam with the Nāgas of Manipallavam. Similarly, the Paravas are said to have descended from the Nāgas, taking into consideration some of their qualities. The Nāgas were snake worshippers. As tribes, they were mostly of tribal characteristics, particularly ferocious and wicked. But, the paratavar were worshippers of Varuna and the horn of the shark and even Śiva. Their marriage rules are also said to differ vastly from those of the Nāgas. However, the Paratavar were like the Kuravar, İdaiyar or Kurumbar of early Tamilaham. They also took delight in their pedigree to the ancient mythological

23. V.Kanakasabhai Pillai, op.cit., p.22.
gods. Thus they relate that their progenitors were of the race of Varuna \(^{24}\) (the god of the sea). On the occasion, when Śiva had called Kartikeya (god of arms) into existence, for destroying the overwhelming power of the Asuras (evil spirits), they (the Paravas) sprang up with him from the sacred lake, Saravana and were like him, nursed by the constellation Kartika. At the close of the last Kalpa, when the whole earth was covered with a deluge, they constructed a thoni or boat and with its help escaped the general destruction and when the dry land appeared, they settled on the spot, where the thoni rested. Hence, it is called thoni-pura or city of the boat.\(^{25}\)

**MOHENJO-DARO OR DRAVIDIAN ORIGIN:**

There is also a view that they had descended from the people of Indus Valley. The Mukkuvar (fishermen) of Travancore trace their origin back to the ruins of Mohenjo-daro. This is because of the word Minas,\(^ {26}\) found inscribed in the seals

\(^{24}\) Edgar Thurston, *op.cit.*, p.41.

\(^{25}\) *Peruṅkathai*, p.63.

\(^{26}\) In Sanskrit, the word Minas finds its equivalent in Matsyar or fishermen. Their direct descendants are even today found in the state of modern Rajasthan. This has further to be investigated for establishing its real import.
unearthed from Mohenjo-daro. It is observed that the two groups Mukkuvar and Paravas might have come from the group of Minas or Minavas. The architects of the Mohenjo-daro Civilization are supposed to be Dravidians. Even though there are attempts today to distort this version and relate them with the Indo-Aryans, a study of the available seals points to a Dravidian origin of this civilization. In fact, the characteristic features of the Mohenjo-daro Civilization were more Dravidian than Aryan. Again, there is a view that, after the destruction of the Mohenjo-daro city by floods, those who escaped the floods, found their way to the extreme south. On their way the original people would have died and their descendants with faint memories about their predecessors would have come down and started a new way of life, that is

30. See the latest book by Rajesh Kochhar, The Vedic People: Their History and Geography, Delhi, 1999, on this issue. He is of the strong opinion that the Aryans were in Afganistan when the Indus Valley Civilization was tottering towards its end.
more akin to the present day Dravidian culture. If we accept this theory, then we have also to accept that this coast had no people before their arrival. It is certainly against truth. The fact is that all the Tamil regions were peopled by the ancient tribes, who continued to profess what the physiographic regions compelled them to profess, and the Paratavar thus became the original people of the littoral region. Like the Kuravar, Kurumbar, Idaivar, Uravar, Ulavar or the Maravar, they seem to have been the original inhabitants of this coastal region. Subsequently, these people were overlaid by various races from the north and foreign countries.

VARIOUS DIVISIONS

Among the Paratavar, some were expert divers who dived deep into the sea for pearls, conches and other precious sea products. They were called Mutthukulippavar and Chaṅkukulippavar. The living quarters of the Mutthukulippavar were known as Mutthukulippavar Ceri and those of the Chaṅkukulippavar were called Chaṅkukulippavar Ceri. During the Saṅgam age (c.300 B.C. to c.300 A.D.) there were two Ceris in

Korkai, one was of the pearl divers and the other was of the chaṅk divers. Ceri in this age denotes the streets or quarters outside the village, where downtrodden people live. Those Paratavar who engaged themselves in salt manufacture and its sale were known as Umanar and their womenfolk as Umattiar. This is also a professional name. All terms and names enumerated above indicate the various sects of the fishing community based on their specialization in certain profession. While the people of the Paratavar community were known variously as above, their chiefs and lords were called by old names such as Koṅkan, Thuraivan, Serppan, Mellampulampan and Parappan. They were the heads of the community. They have attained such a status either by way of heirship or influence over the community or by their flourishing wealth. At present, the living quarters

32. Ibid., p.55.

33. Cilappadikāram, V.25.


35. Ibid., 4:4; 163:12; 175:5.

36. Aiṅgurunuru, 151:2; 168:3.


of the Paratavar are called Kuppam, which simply means, a small village of fishermen. For example, we may cite Kottipakkam, Kalpakkam, Kudapakkam and Cheppakkam. Kuppam or Ceri stands for the quarters of the people, non-acceptable to the people of higher castes. Ceri earlier meant simply the living quarters. But at present it is given a pejorative meaning of the outskirts. Paravas are found chiefly in Tuticorin, where they constitute about one fourth of the population. In a number of sea-coast villages in the Nañguneri, Tiruchendur, Srivaikuntam and Kovilpatti taluks, they constitute about thirty per cent of the total population. The other districts in which the members of this community are found are Ramnad and Madurai. With an exception of a very few in these districts, who are Protestant Christians, the entire community is Roman Catholic.

The richer members of the Parava community are exporters, traders, whole-salers, fishers for wages, brokers,

40. Persis Rajammal, op.cit., pp.49.51.
42. As per 1991 census.
44. Ibid., p.92.
Their usual method of trade was to migrate to Sri Lanka, where they set up as importers of goods from the Indian mainland and as general dealers in all kinds of grocery. But, the poor sections of the community follow the traditional occupations of fishing and sailing, diving for chaṅks and pearls and cutting coral stones from the bed of the sea. 46

**SUB-DIVISIONS**

The Paravas are divided into thirteen classes, viz, headman, dealers in cloth, divers for corals, sailors, divers for pearl-oysters, divers for chaṅks, packers of cloth, fishers who catch tortoises, fishers who catch sharks and other fishes, palanquin bearers, peons who wait about the person of the chief and fishers who catch crabs. 47 There are also the *menakkadans*, who would not dare to go on sail but do the business of brokers. 48

47. Simon Casie Chetty, *Castes, Customs, Manners and Life of the Tamils*, Madras, 1988, p.102.
THE HEAD

At the head of the Parava community was the chieftain of their caste, who in the native tongue was known as Jatithalaivan. 49 In common parlance, the Paravas entitled him to be their king, since they considered him a descendant of the ancient Pandya dynasty. 50 The local Rajas or rulers had left the Paravas completely under the jurisdiction of their own Jatithalaivan receiving from them only an annual tribute and exempting them from all other taxes of the land. 51 The Jatithalaivan was the master of the pearl-fishery and had weapons and a small band of soldiers of his own, to defend the Paravas from the assaults of the enemies during the pearl-fishing. He was sometimes called the lord of the seven villages namely, Vembār, Vaipār, Thuttukudi, Punnaikāyal, Virapandyanpattinam, Tiruchendur and Manapād, which took active part in the pearl-fishing. 52

52. S.Leon, op.cit., pp.190-191.
For the better administration of a Parava village, the Jatithalaivan appointed a chief in every village to represent him in all the community affairs as well as in those of the caste as such. The latter was entitled as Pattāṅgatti meaning in Tamil, the 'title bearer'. The whole village was placed under the supervision of the Pattāṅgatti, who was responsible for the maintenance of law and order. He arbitrated disputes among the Paravas and punished the guilty. The authority of the Jatithalaivan was accepted without question and his office was hereditary. He enjoyed the dignity of a specially distinctive dress and commanded considerable respect among the bulk of the Parava community. His deputies, known as Adappans or Pattāṅgattis collected Kanikkai or contributions for their master's support.

In Tuticorin, however, the upper circles of the Parava society are divided between the supporters of the authority of the Jatithalaivan and those who do not support. The adherents of this chief are generally known as Mesaikkaran (i.e) 'those who eat at a table', a practice derived by the Paravars from their

53. Ibid., p.168.
54. H.R.Pate, op.cit., p.120.
intercourse with the Portuguese. This class consists mostly of well to do merchants. In opposition to them is the party, sometimes called Kamarakkarar, consisting of merchants, including boat-owners and others. In other words, merchants are Mesaikkarar, but boatmen and fishermen are not so.55

THEIR RELIGIOUS FAITH

The Paratavar were also religious-minded and worshipped a particular deity. The human form of worship has been present ever since man had been created. The God of the coastal region was the dreaded lord of the sea, wind and rain, i.e., Varuna.56 They worshipped him for protecting them from fierce storms, gales and cyclones. According to Pattinappalai, the Paratavar of Kāvirippumpattinam used to worship the horn of the shark which was fixed to the ground of the sandy plains. These horns symbolized the god Varuna. The worshippers, who crowded on the sea-coast offered him (Varuna) fresh and salted fish and meat.57 As lord of the sea, he was worshipped by the sturdy but dirty, the joyous but foul-smelling fisher-folk.58 When the nets

55. Ibid., pp.122-123.
56. Tolkāppiam, Agattinai Iyal, Nurpa : 5.
57. Pattinappalai, 11. 86-87.
proved unlucky, they used to worship Varuna. Gathering with their relatives, and planting the horns of the sharks, they offered prayers to him. The god-fearing Paratavar had their god on the trees like palmyra and laurel. According to Narrinai, they also worshipped the wind and the sun. This shows that they were the worshippers of nature. They manifested a deep attachment to the cult of Siva. There is a legend which says that lord Siva himself assumed the form of a Parava male to remarry his consort Parvati, who had condescended to be born as the daughter of a Parava King called Triambia. As a result of their devotion to Siva, and his consort Parvati, the Paravas naturally cherished a special reverence for certain Hindu shrines, especially for those of Tiruchendur, Madurai and Kanyakumari. They were predominantly a Hindu community but converted to Catholicism after the advent of St. Thomas the Apostle and later the Portuguese including St. Francis Xavier. But

59. Ibid., p.56.
60. Narrinai, 303 : 3-4; Ahananuru, 279:2.
Catholicism failed to alter their traditional beliefs and customs completely. Both traditional and modern concepts and practices coexist among them even now. 64

THEIR POLITICAL POSITION

The Paravas had developed culture and customs of their own, on account of their long isolation from the rest of the hinterland. However, their life was not totally independent of other people and other regions. Isolation does not mean that they were always out of contact with the people of the Marudam region. Their life was also interdependent; for getting provisions of life, they had to depend on those who produced them. 65 They had to sell their raw and dried fishes, salt and other sea products to the people in the neighbourhood. In fact, they were perhaps the pioneers of the barter system of inland trade. Even after having maintained steady contact with the neighbouring Marudam tract, they were not very much influenced by the food producing people. Perhaps, the faiths and beliefs,

64. S.V.Subramanian (ed.), Tamil Nattuppura Iyal Âíu (Tamil Folklore Research), Madras, 1979, p.312.
practices and customs, rites and rituals of these two peoples were entirely different. Still it is seen that clandestine love-making was there among them. 66

Their heroic sea-faring life and social customs have made interesting pages in the ancient Tamil literature of the Saṅgam age and also in the poems of later days. The famous Tamil poem, Maduraikkanchi extols the Paravas, who then formed an important section of the Pandyān army as powerful warriors in the country around Korkai. 67 The Paravas were well fed on fish and were armed with bows. Their hordes terrified their enemies by their dashing valour. 68 The Tamil anthologies such as Ahananūru, Pattinappalai, Narrinai and Aṅgurunurū give us graphic description of the fishing community of the Paravas. 69

As long as the Pandyān kings were ruling over the coastal regions of Tamil Nādu, the Paravas were enjoying their absolute right over pearl fishing. But since the 14th century the Pandyān power began to decline. The country had met with an

66. Ibid., p. 334.


68. E. Thurston, op. cit., p. 141.


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external threat in 1310-1311 under Malik Kafur and was conquered in 1323 A.D. by the army of Ulugh Khan and was completely brought under the rule of Delhi Sultanate. 70

The situation that led to the establishment of Muslim rule in Madurai was the war of succession to the Pandyya throne between the two sons of Kulasekara Pandyya I (1268-1310 A.D.), who was the last great king of the Pandyya dynasty. He is referred to as Kales Dewar. 71 Vira Pandyya II came to power and the other Sundara Pandyya was expelled from Madurai. He sought the help of Malik Kafur, the commander of Ala-ud-din Khilji, the Sultan of Delhi who wanted to annex south India with his Empire. Kafur seized Madurai and took a large booty consisting of elephants, horses and diamond-jewels, pearls and rubies. Again Khusru Khan


71. H.M.Elliot and J.Dowson, _The History of India as told by its own Historians_, Madras, 1964, Vol.III, p.52. 'Kales Dewar', The ruler of Ma'abar enjoyed a highly prosperous life extending to more than forty years during which time neither any foreign enemy entered his country, nor any severe malady confined him to bed. His coffers were replete with - gold, silver, rubies and other kinds of wealth more than in the power of the language to express.

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(1318 A.D.) invaded the Pāṇḍya territory. Muhamed Bin Tughluk's invasion in 1327 A.D. resulted in the annexation of Madurai with his Empire as a province. The greatness of the Pāṇḍyas thus declined and they became powerless. The Pāṇḍya kings were finally replaced by Vijayanagara rulers, particularly by Kumāra Kampana (1371 A.D.), and their authority was reasserted by Krishnadevarāya in 1510 A.D. and Achyutarāya in 1533 A.D.\textsuperscript{72}

The Empire of Vijayanagara extended along the fishery coast up to Kanyakumari.\textsuperscript{73} But taking advantage of the death of Krishnadevarāya, in 1530 A.D., king Uthaya Marthandavarman of Travancore, overran a large portion of the Pāṇḍya territory and extended his reign along the Pearl-fishery Coast up to river Tambraparni near Punnaikayal, though he was still a tributary to the Emperor of Vijayanagara.\textsuperscript{74} But, Achyutarāya, the Vijayanagara Emperor, undertook an expedition against Venru Mankonda Bhūtalavīran, the Tiruvādi king of Kalakād, with the support of the Tenkāsi Pāṇḍyas, defeated him, made him pay the arrears of tribute, restored their lost possessions of the Tenkāsi Pāṇḍyas.

\textsuperscript{72} N.Subrahmanian, \textit{op.cit.} (1974), pp. 80-83.

\textsuperscript{73} H.Heras, \textit{Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara Empire}, vol I, Bombay, 1953, p.112.

in Tirunelveli and erected a pillar of victory at Tambraparni river and thus reasserted the Vijayanagara supremacy. The battle of Talikota (Rāksasi Taggadi) gave the Nayaks an opportunity to assert their independence and establish the independent Madurai Nayakdom in 1565.

Meanwhile, the Pandyas withdrew to the region of Tirunelveli and ruled over a small tract of land making Tenkasi and Kayattar as their capitals. With their political eclipse,


76. These Pandyas are called the Tenkasi Pandyas, who ruled the region independently, but sometimes under the overlordship of the Vijayanagara Emperor. South Indian Inscriptions, Vol.XIV, pt.I, pp.20-71.

The founder of the Pandyas dynasty ruling over Tenkasi was Arikesari Parākrāma Pandyā (1422-64), the builder of the city Tenkasi and the Visvanatha Temple. He took seventeen years to build the temple. He was well versed in Tamil and Sanskrit. He was titled Korkai-Vēndan, Ponnin Perumāl, Manaka Vacha, Mana Bhūsha, etc. He died in 1464. His successor was Kulasekhara. He completed the gopuram of the Tenkasi Temple. He had two brothers, namely Alagan Perumāl Kulasekhara and Arikesvara. The brothers had a nephew, namely Ponnin Perumāl Parakrama alias Virapandya, who succeeded Parakrama Pandyā. He was defeated by the Banas. Towards the close of the sixteenth century or early seventeenth century, the Pandyas of Tenkasi had a steady decline and finally disappeared.
the future of the Paravas also underwent significant changes. The Muslims imposed heavy taxes on their pearl fishery, from which they had been hitherto exempted by the Pandyar kings. The Muslim rule at Madurai was, in fact, short lived from 1323 A.D. to 1371 A.D., just for 48 years, but left its destructive impress on the Paravas of Tuticorin also.

THEIR MAJOR OCCUPATIONS

Although fishing, pearl-fishing, chañk cutting, salt manufacturing and boat building were the major traditional occupations of the Paravas, the rich among them in course of time, developed good trade and commercial contact with distant countries. They went out to the sea during nights in large boats with upturned ends to catch fish with the aid of shining lights. When they were out in the sea, they kept small earthen lamps fed with fish fat. The boys on the shore were even able to identify their fathers' boats by the intensity and character of the lamps on the rafts. In fishing they used nets

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77. N. Athiyaman, op.cit., p.16.
78. Ahananuru, 65 : 11-12 and Narrinai, 388 : 3-5.
79. Ibid.,175 ; 3-4, 215:5.
80. Ibid ., 331 ; 1-8; 372 : 10-13.
with small holes, tied to long ropes. Sometimes they netted sharks in the sea by using harpoons.\(^{81}\) They used an axe like weapon while on fishing, probably to kill big sized fish. After a day's work, they were happy, sitting together in the shadow of \textit{punnai} (laurel) tree and drinking toddy with their friends to forget their strain.\(^{82}\) The fish caught by them were dried on the beach near their dwelling places.\(^{83}\)

Besides fishing, pearl-fishing was also their occupation. The \textit{Paravas} of this coast must have discovered early the periodicity of the monsoons,\(^{84}\) since pearl-fishing took place only during the commencement of the North-East monsoon and the pearl-divers were quite familiar with the period of the monsoon.

Another important alternative occupation of these \textit{Paravas} was the extraction of chaṅk shells from the sea floors and cutting chaṅk bangles out of them.\(^{85}\) The chaṅk-fishing and

\(^{81}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 358 : 2-4.

\(^{82}\) \textit{Ahananuru}, 210 and \textit{Narrinai}, 388 : 3-5.

\(^{83}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 388 : 4-8.


\(^{85}\) \textit{Maduraik-kānchi}, 11.315-316.
chaṅk-cutting were carried on with vigour under the Pāndyan rule as long as 1800 years ago. The industry of chaṅk bangle flourished in the fishery coast, especially at Korkai and Kayal, prior to 1000 A.D. At Korkai and Kayal, James Hornell unearthed a fine series of waste from chaṅk - workshop - seven fragments in all. The whole numbers were found lying on the surface of the ground. Again, at Tuticorin, he found a saw and hammer shoulder - piece of the typical form. The dialogue between a brahmin named Dharmi and Nakkīrar found in Thiruvilayādalpuranām brings to light that Nakkīrar, president of the Saṅgam Academy, was a chaṅk - cutter and was a Parava by birth. Another profession open to the Paravas was salt manufacturing. Salt was placed in bullock-carts and sold to the people in the interior villages, who were willing to pay a good price for this vital commodity. For their livelihood, fish and salt were the principal products of their own region. They bartered fish and salt for other kinds of food stuff.

86. James Hornell, op.cit., p.44.
87. Ibid.
89. Kuruntogai, 269.
The Paravas were also good boat-builders. Naturally, the early pattern of boats were little better than that of the primitive canoe, made of two logs bound together to form a float. Cattumaram (Tl.) Catamaran (Eng.) In due course, improved varieties appeared which could go farther into the sea. It paved the way for trade and commerce with other countries. The Tamil poets mention about the large ships like nankalam and Vilumia navai, Vallam, Thoni, Pahri, Kalam (very large ships), Marakkalam and Navai were some of the graded varieties of boats and ships built by them for travellers' transport, goods transport, naval battle and for shipment of other items.

The Paravas carried on brisk internal as well as external trade. In the beginning, they began fishing very near the coast and gradually proceeded far into the sea. It was from the class of ancient Paravas that there arose in due course the famous class of sailors, well to do merchants and


91. Ahananuru, 149.

shippers. They traded on pearls, chaṅk - bangles, gems, trinkets, pure and rich salt and dried fish in boats to Malaya, Indonesia and China in the East and to Arabia and Africa in the West. 93

OTHER MAJOR OCCUPATIONS

Paravas had also been in the business of horse - importing since 200 B.C. South India had been importing horses from Gujarat and Sindhu coasts, since the climate of South India is not conducive to the breeding of these animals. The Pandya and Chōla kings relied on this commercial community to import horses for them. It is known that East Coast (Fishery Coast) Paravas were famous for the fine horses, which they imported from the North. 94

THEIR SOCIAL LIFE

The social life of the Paravas was peculiar in many ways, when compared to that of the people of the other physiographic


regions. It was peculiar to them alone. Their daily life was one of joy and sorrow. If the menfolk fetched great hunts it was a day of merriment. On the other hand, if the hunt was a failure or brought the loss of the life of their bread-winner, then it was a day of mourning. "The sturdy sailors, who own strongly built boats drink hot (i.e. strong) liquor and dance the *kuravai* measure. They took hold of the bright hands of their women who were wearing the garlands of the soft clusters of the flowers of the Alexandrian laurel (*Punnai*), which has leaves soaked by the droplets of sea-water and drops with honey in the cool groves in which bees swarm round the flowers, the dancing women also drank the juice of the pulp of the palmyra fruit mixed with that of the shining sugarcane." 95

Parava women had been very active and energetic just like their men. Socially, they enjoyed equal rights and privileges, even to the extent of choosing their life-partners and going out for selling their fish and salt. The young girls used to dry the salted fish and guard the dried fish from birds. 96 Women used to get white rice by bartering salt. 97 They

96. *Ahanānūru*, 20.
hawked fresh fish and bartered dried fish in the interior villages of the Marudam tract (agricultural tract). 98

Since the regions formed the pivot of life, certain distinctive features of love were associated with each region. These features had been described by Tolkappiyar as the Uripporul or the distinctive tendencies of love pertaining to each region; thus in the neidal tract it is irañgal or lamentation of the lover's absence. Neidal means the pitiful expression of grief. The sea-board represented longer separation than the pasture land because the fishermen went to far off places for fishing at night and were involved in risk and danger. Neidal also implied long voyages across the ocean. The sea-shore and the grove offered a beautiful setting for the meeting of lovers. 99 Clandestine love was in vogue among them. Very often the heroine's father and brothers used to sail deep into the sea. Their mothers used to go to work in the salt pans or proceed to the adjacent Marudam land to sell their salt. In their absence, the girls used to go alone on the sandy beaches


near the sea-shore to gather neidal (laurel) flowers and leaves. They also used to swim and sport in the sea, indulge in sport like Ṓrai. ¹⁰⁰ These factors helped a lot in fostering clandestine love among youths of the neidal region. Even in those days the lovers used to give their lady-loves certain presents. Cilappadikāram states that the lovers of the littoral region gave their sweet-hearts pearls. ¹⁰¹ Marriage was considered a sacred rite of the union of two hearts. Monogamy was the only moral code. According to the Paratavar tradition if a son went to marry a girl, he should give her a lot of gold as a present and a lot of property and jewels. ¹⁰² A Dravidian custom, it was called parisam or mulaivilai. ¹⁰³ They sought the help of parpanar (brahmin) to officiate their marriage. ¹⁰⁴ Seeking brahmin officiation was a later practice, which perhaps became popular among Tamils only after the first century A.D.

100. Narrinai, 254.
103. Takkayagap Parani, Talisai, 3 ; 21.
The condition of the richer class of Paratavar is of a different one. Women of the rich Paratavar wore jewels of gold embellished with gems. Their women had their dress made of young shoots, fibres and roots of various plants and trees. The Paratavar women of Kāvirippumpattinam were found dressed in this fashion. They wore garlands which were made of neidal flowers. The salt-sellers of the Tondainadu had their clothes made only of leaves. The children of the Paratavar in Kāvirippumpattinam used to wear flowers of Adumbu newly grown in the sandy plains; they also wore Ambal, Vendali and Talai flowers, which were found along the sea-coast.

Paravas lived in separate areas at the outskirts of the city to have a close access to the sea. Their huts had low entrances and were filled with foul smell of the dried fish. But the quarters of the rich Paravas presented a prosperous outlook. Their houses were considerably huge and contained large godowns. They were provided with high entrances.

105. Perumpanārrupadai, 1-60.
108. Perumpanārruppadai, 322-324.
The food and drinks of the Paratavar included soft to hot drinks and cooked fish varieties with rice. Fish naturally played a prominent part in their diet. They took cooked rice mixed with a sauce of Aiyilai fish flavoured by the addition of tamarind. Fish was also fried in ghee or prepared as part of a tamarind sauce. The fishermen of Kaviripumpattinam had as their food prawns and flesh of tortoise. They also consumed a lot of toddy made of paddy. They had a strong liking for Varal and Valai fishes. They ate them fried. Their main delicacy was rice and meat. Toddy shops were mostly located near the quarters of the Paratavar. In these shops fried fish and meat were served. A more popular type of intoxicant was the fermented juice of the palmyra. It was known as Pennaipili. They also ate fruits of all kinds,

109. Ahananuru, 60.
110. Pattinappalai, 11. 63-64.
111. Ibid., 1.83.
113. Maduraik-kanchi, 1. 141.
especially mango, cashew, jack and eastern fruits. They got these fruits in exchange of fishes. Besides fruits, they ate roots and rice. 116

SPORTING AND MILITARY ACTIVITIES

Sea-bathing, playing with crabs in the punnai (laurel) shade and playing Oraigame were some of the pastimes of the people. 117 The children used to enjoy a sport called Kilukili. 118

The Paratavar were the lovers of adventure as they had to venture into the roaring seas. From the nearby coast they went into the deeper seas to fish for their livelihood. So their environment turned them to be adventurous inhabitants of the littoral tract. 119 They returned to the shore very late in the evening, after all their business was over. 120 For them the burning lights in the Maruvurpakkam (interior region) served as or acted as light houses.

118. A.James Maria Arockiam, op.cit., p.40.
120. Pattinappalai, 11. 112-115.
They were also a military force of some importance. They had their own chieftains and an army of spearmen. They were stationed at the important port of Korkai. They devoted special care to the training of the young in warfare as well as in other physical feats. An elaborate training was provided for the youth in the sphere of hand to hand fighting. They were great warriors and skilled in archery. They were always busy and active. They were compared to elephants for their strength. They were rebellious in character.

The traditional occupations of the Paravas brought considerable income and cultural contacts to our country. The prestigious, costly and rarest pearls of the Pearl fishery Coast attracted the attention of the Eastern and Western world. One of its subsequent results was the frequent invasions of the Pearl fishery Coast. As great sea-farers, no wonder, the Paravas were experts in the construction of boats and ships, as well as their use on the roaring seas. As such, they were the fore-runners of the modern inland and international trade and commerce.

123. Maduraik-kanchi, 11. 139-144.
At present, tremendous change has taken place in the life-style and culture of the Paravas. Though pearl-fishing completely ceased in 1961, the succeeding generations of pearl-divers are still residing in the area called "Chañkuli Colony", situated in the North-eastern part of Tuticorin (Therespuram). Some youths of the community are working in ships, sailing abroad as 'sea-men'. Even though they have to sail continuously for years together, they do it quite willingly, since they are accustomed to sea-life and it is very profitable. Now some boys and girls are going for higher education, since they are getting government benefits, such as scholarships.

Secondly, they have come out of their isolation. These days they are mingling freely with other people and have matrimonial alliances with other communities. They are competing with other people in all fields viz. as teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc. Most of the Paravas are Roman Catholics and they are very orthodox. They are very particular about church festivals, irrespective of their status. They never miss the Sunday Mass.

However, all Paravas are not equals. Economic distinction still prevails within the community. One section of the Parava community is extremely rich and the other very
poor. But both have the custom of giving dowry and jewels for marriages. The rich live in palatial houses and the poor in small thatched huts made of mud and bricks.

Down the centuries, the Paratavar or Paravas have undergone quite a lot of changes, particularly in their way of life and faith. They had been very much influenced by the Portuguese rather than any other European power in their cultural and religious life. Many Portuguese names like Rodrigez, Almeida etc. have been christened to the Paravas also. With their Portuguese contact Paravas have risen to great heights in life. They have imitated the foreign, especially the Portuguese ways of life. Once predominantly a Hindu community, it has now become predominantly a Christian community, because of the dedicated services of the Christian Missionaries. Though there was an amount of Portuguese exploitation of them, they are mostly unaware of it or never minded it. Independent India has, in a large measure, helped them come out of their seclusion and isolation. The Paravas, in fact, have left a record of pearl-fishing methods and techniques, which have earned world-wide reputation for them.

125. Field Survey conducted on 27.03.96 and interviewed Mr. S. Krishnan, a resident of Chaṅkuli Colony and son of a former pearl-diver at Tuticorin.