CHAPTER - V
PEARL FISHERY UNDER THE PANDYAS
PEARL FISHERY UNDER THE PĀNDYAS

In the last chapter, a discussion has been made about the methods and techniques of pearl-fishing, the ebb and flow in their fortunes under various powers. The use of 'stone-money', the levy of taxes, the impact of predatory activities on the profession and monopoly of pearls and fisheries by the various powers were laid bare. Much attention has been paid to the risky job of diving, the diving men, diving time, days, months and all other related matters. This chapter attempts to unravel the condition of the pearl-fisheries and the pearl-fishers under the Pāndyas, the hereditary rulers of this region. This chapter tries to throw light on this profession under the royal patronage of the Pāndyas alone. All these and such other things are studied again with the help of both indigenous and foreign sources, with particular reference to inscriptions and copper-plates. Since the chapter deals only with the Pāndyas, in whose territory were the pearl-fisheries, an amount of repetition of facts, already referred to in other chapters, has become unavoidable. For the sake of chronological sequence of the Pāndya history and pearl-fishing, the recurrence of data becomes inevitable.
With the beginning of recorded history, (though unrecorded history of the Vedas too lend support to the view), we find the existence of the pearl-fishery at Korkai. It is evident from the notices of foreign as well as native travellers and Tamil poets. The Indica of Megasthenese, the Periplus Maris Erythraea, Claudius Aelien, Pliny and Ptolemy’s Geography refer to the Kholkhoi or the Kolhhōi Gulf as the emporium of pearl-fishery.¹ This Kolkhoi or Kholkhoi Gulf is the Gulf of Mannār. In fact, the Sanskrit literature of the ancient period makes direct reference to the existence of pearl-fishery in the Pāṇḍya Coast. Besides, the Vedas, the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata make mentions of the use of pearls and chaṅks. It is inferred from this that there was a great demand for pearls and chaṅks even in those far off days. No doubt, therefore, that the pearl-fisheries were fully explored to meet their real demand.

¹ In Rome in the days of Pliny, pearls from the Gulf of Mannār were valued at a high price and Pliny refers to that fishery as the most productive of pearls of all parts of the world. While more than six centuries before (550-540 B.C), Vijaya, the Āryan conqueror of Ceylon is said to have included rich offerings of pearls among the presents to his father-in-law, the Pāṇḍyan King of Madurai. (W.H.Schoff, The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, p.58).
The Valmīkhi Rāmāyaṇa, in the Kishkinda kānda, speaks of 'the Pāṇḍyas' capital city being decorated with pearls and gold. This city of the Pāṇḍyas was 'Pāṇḍya Kavāṭē' and 'Ṭāmbraparnicā' was a river as well as the name of another kind of pearl. This shows that there was an abundant supply of pearls in the Pāṇḍyan Kingdom.

South India, particularly ancient Tamilaham, had attracted foreign merchants and travellers with its pearls, teak, peacock-feathers, ivory, spices and incenses. When the Greek, Egyptian, Chinese and Roman merchants and travellers visited Korkai, the ancient seat of the pearl-fishery, they found the industry fully developed and carried on in a scientific way. The anonymous author of the Periplus says that the pearl-fishery at Korkai was worked by the condemned criminals for the Pāṇḍyas. In fact, no other source, even the Tamil works, however, does not lend support to this view. Perhaps by the time of the

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2. Griffith's, Valmīkhi's Rāmāyaṇa, Book IV, Chapter 21, p.177.

3. As referred to earlier, pearl-fisheries seem to have existed not only in the Gulf of Mannār, but at Vīlingam and Panther (Muziris) in the West Coast as mentioned in Padirruppattu and by Claudius Aelian.

arrival of the mariner, condemned criminals would have been employed in the fishery as a kind of punishment. The Korkai pearls were incomparable in their value. Earlier, in the 3rd century B.C., Megasthenese, notices the pearl-fishery in Ceylon, which he calls Palaiogonoi (means old generation) and says that Ceylon was more productive of gold and pearls than India.  

EARLY TAMIL WORKS ON PĀNDYAN PEARLS:

Many of the Tamil poems of the Sañgam age point to the existence of the pearl-fishery and pearl-trade in the city of Korkai. We understand from them that the Paravas or Paratavar were engaged in pearl-fishing. When Pāndyan Nedunchezhian of the Sañgam age was ruling over the Pāndya kingdom, he subdued the warlike Paravas and extended his authority over the pearl-fisheries. According to Cirupānārruppadai, this Pāndyan conquered this warlike race of Paravas, in whose territories were the pearl-fisheries and took a necklace of lustrous pearls

5. Mc Crindle, op.cit., p.60.

6. Maduraik-kānchi, ll. 402-403 speaks of the greatness and valour of the Pāndyan King Nedunchezhian who ruled about 2nd century A.D. It talks of the Paravas as a war-like race and they had the priceless pearls dived for them.
as an honour of his victory. These indigenous evidences inform us that the Pandyas were in possession of these pearl-fisheries at Korkai. Mutthollāvirm mostly a post-Sāngam work, says that the pearls were found in Korkai only and that the 'Pāndya was the owner of Korkai on the black sea'. Cilappadikaram states that the Pāndyan monarch had the monopoly in pearls and sandalwood. The fact that the Pāndya king owned the sea near Korkai is best explained by Ahanānūru. At one place, the poet Maṅgudi Marudan says that the Pāndya King had a necklace of pearls taken from his sea. At another place the poet mentions that the Pandyas guarded the pearl-fishery at Korkai. Another poem in the same Ahanānūru Collection says that Korkai belongs to

7. Cirupanarruppadai, 11. 57-58.
8. Mutthollāvirm is a collection of about 100 stanzas, composed by a great poet, whose name is not known, and who is said to have lived in the beginning of 2nd century A.D. Commentry by Adiyārkkunallār.
9. Ibid., stanza, 36.
10. Ibid., 17, v.51.
11. Ibid., 17, v.55.
13. Ibid., verse, 4.
the Pandyan who possesses a beautiful chariot, to which are yoked beautifully trotting horses, whose hoof marks cannot be traced on the ground covered with the cool rayed pearls, which the surging waves yielded. Yet another poet in the same Collection says that the brilliant pearls and chaṅks are taken from the harbour of the famous Korkai which belongs to the valiant fighter, Pandyan. The pearl-fishers dived into the deep sea, while fishing for pearls. Deep sea pearls were greatly valued. Purananuru speaks of the pearl as a gem emitting rays while lying on bright long layers of sand.

**PANDYA MONOPOLY IN PEARL-FISHING**

From the very early times, the Pandyas had the monopoly in pearl-fishing and pearl-trade. Avvaiyar, the great Tamil

14. Ibid., verse, 130.
15. Ibid., verse, 125.
16. Kalithogai, verse, 131: 1-22. It is a Collection of 150 verses, sung by five great poets of Saṅgam age, about the five divisions of the Tamil Country and society called Tinai. It speaks of the pearls from the sea by saying that the pearls were born of the sea, they never beautify the sea, but beautified those who wore them. verse, 9 and 11-15-16.
17. Purananuru, verse, 51.
poetess, says in one of her poems that "The Pāndyas had the monopoly in pearls, as the Chōlas and Chēras had rice and elephants respectively to their credit". But political convulsions certainly had their adverse effect on the Pāndya monopoly of pearl-trade.

THE SAṆGAM PĀNDYAS AND THE CHŌLAS

In the beginning of the first century A.D., the Chōlas began to develop their own pearl fisheries in the Palk Bay. They had already conquered Ceylon and the great Karikāla conquered the Pāndyas too. When the Pāndyas had regained their former position under Pāndya Nedunchelian, the Chōlas had already established their pearl-fisheries in the Palk Bay. Hence the monopoly in the pearl-trade was no more to exist with the Pāndyas. Yet, the largest quantity of pearls was continued to be exported to the Mediterranean countries from the Pāndyan ports.

We learn from Cilappadikāram that when Madurai was set ablaze by the divine wrath of Kannagi, the Pāndya king, Vetrivel Cheliyan left for Madurai to crown himself and ruled Korkai till a new Madurai was built. Vetrivel Chelian is said to

have expiated the sin of his father by putting to death thousand goldsmiths. 19 Korkai served as the great sea-port, busying itself with trade in pearls, while Madurai served as the major inland capital of the Pandyas.

FIRST PANDYAN EMPIRE AND MONOPOLY IN PEARL-TRADE

The First Pandyan Empire was founded by Kaduṅgon, who overthrew the Kalabhra rule. It lasted for more than three centuries. The rulers of the First Pandyan empire were great conquerors. Hiun-Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, visited Kanchi during this time. From Kaduṅgon to Rajasimha, nearly thirteen rulers ruled over the empire for the period extending from A.D. 590 to A.D. 920. 20 Arikesari Maravarman (A.D. 670 - 700 A.D.) was one of the greatest rulers of the First Pandyan Empire. He ruined the Paravas, of the Korkai Coast for not having submitted to him. Maravarman Rajasimha I (A.D. 730 - A.D. 765) was a great conqueror. After having defeated the Pallavas and the Malavas, he proceeded to Kodumudi, where 'he worshipped the lotus feet of Pasupati; gave away with great pleasure heaps of gold and

lustrous gems'.\(^21\) His successor was Jatila Parantaka Nedunjadayan, who issued the Velvikudi grant and the Madras Museum plates. Rajasimha II (A.D. 905 – A.D. 920) was the last ruler of the First Pāṇḍya Empire, who was defeated by Chōla Parantaka I (A.D. 907 – A.D. 953), who got the title 'Madurai Kondan '. With him the First Pāṇḍya Empire came to an end. The Pāṇḍya rulers had complete mastery over the pearl-fisheries and they enjoyed considerable revenue from it.

Rājarāja, the great (985 A.D. – 1014 A.D.), established an Empire for the Chōlas by conquering the Pāṇḍyas and North Sri Lanka. The entire pearl-fisheries came to the possession of the Chōlas by this conquest.\(^22\) The inscriptions of this period give details of the large scale presents of pearls to various temples by the different kings of the Chōla dynasty. An inscription of Rājarāja states, "Sixty four pearls in all strung on it out of the pearls which the lord Sri Rājarājadēva had poured out as flowers at the sacred feet and with which he had worshipped the feet of God ".\(^23\) If the king Rājarāja should have poured the

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p.65.

\(^{22}\) S.Arunachalam, op.cit., p.59.

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. The same thing continued under Rajendra too. There is no authentic information about the pearl-fishery of the Chōla period except the inscriptions of the Chōla Emperors which refer to the wide grants of the pearls to various temples. Since Albiruni (1030 A.D.) has said that Ceylon did not produce pearls and the pearl oysters of Ceylon had migrated to East Africa, we may conclude that pearls were only from the pearl-fishery of the Indian side of the Gulf of Mannar. The Chōla Empire included North Ceylon and the Pāndyan Kingdom and we may take it that they monopolized the entire pearl-fisheries of the Tamil coast.

SECOND PĀNDYAN EMPIRE AND MONOPOLY IN PEARL-TRADE

But Maravarman Sundara Pāndya II asserted the Pāndyan independence from the Chōla overlordship by the year 1216 A.D. Jatāvarman Sundara Pāndya I (1251 - 1268 A.D.) was a great king of this dynasty. Maravarman Kulasekhara Pāndya I (1268-1310

25. Ibid., p.156.
A.D.) was the last great Pāndya king of this dynasty. The Pāndyas again gained the monopoly over the pearl-fishery from the Chōlas. The Pāndya kings monopolized the possession of best pearls. They never allowed anybody to take the pearls out of the kingdom without their notice. 27

Marco Polo, the Venetian traveller, gives a detailed account about pearls with the king of Ma'bar. The king of Ma'bar wears, hanging in front of his chest, from the neck downwards, a fine silk thread, strung with 104 pearls and rubies of great price. The reason why he wears this cord with 104 pearls and rubies is that, every morning and evening he has to say 104 prayers to his idols. 28 Moreover, he also wears on his arms, three golden bracelets, studded with very precious stones and pearls and he wears anklets also of the like kind on his legs and rings on his toes likewise. 29 This king carries on his person so many stones and pearls that the value there of is greater than that of a city's ransom.

27. Ibid., p.85.
29. Cilappadikāram, I, ll. 87-88.
TAXATION

Taxes were, as of now, a definite form of revenue to the State. All States had very much depended on taxes for implementing their schemes and measures. The Pāṇḍyas also collected a large number of taxes from the people. Some of them mentioned in records are kadamai (102/30) (general term for tax) achchu vari (31/-) (tax in achchu coins), kāriya-āratchi (10/7) (tax for the service of government officers), thōl vari (3/9) (tax on drummers), panju-pili (14/10) (tax on ginned cotton), sāntivigrha-peru (15/110) (tax for the service of the king's messenger or mediator), idaiyar-vari (6/11) (tax on the shepherds), ina-vari (7/12) (tax on some community), pirai (34/13) (a general tax), tattar - pāttam 5/8 (tax on goldsmiths), pāsi-pattam (7/3) (tax on fishing), pon-vari (15/10) (tax on cash or gold), vāsal-peru (2/8) (tax for the palace). Similarly, a tax on pearl-fishing called salapattevari was collected from the Nattar of Kudanādu. The king gifted these taxes to the temple. In times of famines and drought, tax exemptions were


made. Tax evasion was often punished with confiscation of land and property and donating it to the local temple. 32

Inscriptions belonging to Maravarman Sundara Pandya II, issued in his thirteenth year, corresponding to 1251 A.D., found in the Attur temple near Korkai bear some evidence to taxation. It records the remission of ponvari - tax on cash or gold. Another record of Virasomeswara confirms the remission of ponvari by the Pandya King and his famous military commander Kesava Dandanayaka figures as the signatory. 33

Moreover, since pearls were precious, costly and attractive, nobody was permitted to take out of the kingdom a pearl weighing more than half of Saggio, unless he managed to do it secretly. This order has been given because the king desired to reserve all such to himself. Thus, the Pandyas monopolized the possession of the best pearls. Several times a year, he issued a proclamation throughout his Kingdom to the effect that those who possessed fine pearls were to bring them to

32. Ibid., p.50.
his court and he would have them paid twice its value. So the people brought them to the court as they were well paid.  

In similar ways, trade in pearls with the foreigners was handled by the Pandyan government itself, if not by the king's men. There were officials, who dealt with foreign trade. These officials were sometimes foreign merchants, having the confidence of the Pandyan monarch. (it is dealt with in detail in chapter VI).

PEARL CULTURE

Since pearl is a gem, it had been in high esteem from time immemorial. In India, the Gulf of Mannar was endowed with rich resource of pearl oysters belonging to the species Pinctada Fucata (Zoological term for the family of an oyster). This resource has been explored for natural pearls and mother-pearl shells, since time immemorial. In a period of 298 years, from

35. Muslim historians say that some of the Arab merchants held high positions in the Pandyan Councils. One Abdul Rahman is described as the Prime Minister in charge of the customs to which office his son and grandson succeeded. R.Sathianathaier, History of India, Vol.II, p.95).
1663 to 1961, a total of 40 pearl-fisheries along the Tamil Nadu Coast had been active; from which pearls worth several million rupees had been obtained. Since 1961, these resources has totally disappeared from the pearl oyster beds and, as a result, the prospects for a pearl-fishing in the near future looks very bleak. 37

PORTS AND PEARLS UNDER THE PÂNDYAS

Ancient Tamils were great sea-farers and traders. The aphorism of Avvaiyar, 'seek fortune even by sea-faring' confirms it. 38 Internal trade was not so energetic for want of conveyance facilities. Pedlars, pack-bulls or asses carried goods from one place to another. One such merchant community called Vanikar dealt in every product of the land such as grains, salt, pepper, cloth, etc. External trade in Tamil Nadu was carried on through ports such as Ophir or Uvari, Korkai, Musiri, Vilingam, Thondi and Sâliyûr. However, due to paucity of information, or perhaps because of destruction of evidence in political convulsions, much could not be gathered about the pearl trade activities in the


38. Thirai Kadâlodium thiraviam thêdu.

191
port of Vilingam, Thondi and Saliyur. In the Āi (Venadu) port city of Vilingam, there were pearl-fishing, an arsenal, training centre, brisk shipping and trade activities. 39 The Pandyas too had invaded Vilingam for wresting it from the Āi (Venadu) kings. Parantaka Nedunchadaiyan (c.A.D.765-790), Srimara Srivallabha (c.A.D.835), Parantaka Pandy (c.A.D. 880), Jatavarman Parantakan 40 and Pandyand Nedumaran 41 are said to have attacked Vilingam pearl-fishing. The West Coast seems to have continued pearl-fishing even as late as the 17th century A.D. as recorded by John Fryer who travelled in those parts between 1672 and 1681 A.D. To cite Fryer himself: "They (sic pearls) are also found between Cape Comory and Ceilon as I formerly declared; but these are not to be compared with the Persian, which are the true oriental ones. They are of them in the Island Sumatra, by those that place the Golden Cheronese in Java, disputed to be the


41. Pandikkovai, one of the famous Tamil Works on the Pandyas of the First Pandyan Empire, makes mention of it in many stanzas. (Ibid., 69,119,127,160,209,298,301,310,314,319,305.).
Ancient Taprobane. Between greater Java and India there are very many; between Panana and Cochin are good store, but very small, as also all along the coast of Malabar. There is a view that Rajaraja I would have destroyed this port town because the vessels used for pearl-fishing might have out-grown and interfered with the normal shipping movement of trade in the Arabian sea. Musiripattinam is known in Sanskrit literature variously as Murasipanthanam (Ramayana) and Marisipanthanam (Brihatsamhita). It was the brisk trading port of those days. Puhar or Kaviripumpattinam, Kayal and Karaikal, were the other port cities of Tamil Nadu. Inland trading centres like Kanchi, Madurai, Uraiyyur, Karur and Tagadar also played important roles in trading activities.

KORKAI

The port of Korkai in the Pandya Country was one of the most ancient and busiest trading centres of India. It was


44. The Himalayas sends gem and gold, while the Kudda hills the Sandal-wood and Akhil. Pearls came from the South seas, the South sea near the Port of Korkai. (Pattinappalai, 11.214-220).
situated at the confluence of the river Tambraparni with the Bay of Bengal. The antiquity of Korkai has been proved by recent archaeological excavations. Some of the remains unearthed from there place Korkai, chronologically at 9th century B.C. Though much archaeological excavations have to be undertaken, what we have at hand tell us about its antique existence. Greek and Egyptian mariners, geographers and traders had spoken about Korkai even before 3rd century B.C. Thus it was mentioned by the author of the Periplus Maris Erythraea, the circum-navigator of the Erythraean or Red Sea. A Greek merchant, who started from Berenice in Egypt and visited India probably about 81 A.D. also spoke about Korkai but he has not mentioned his name anywhere in his work. Korkai has also been treated by Ptolemy, the Greek Geographer of 150 A.D. It was called Kolkhōi emporium by him. Korkai finds a place in the Potinger maps of the world, the map deriving its name from its discoverer. However, the date of these tables is unknown. The author of the Periplus and Ptolemy agree in representing Korkai as the headquarters of the pearl-fishery at that time and as included in the dominions of

the king Pandyan.\textsuperscript{46} Korkai was called "the emporium of pearls."\textsuperscript{47} The pearl grown there was called "Korkai Pearl" (Korkaiyam Perumthurai Mutthu - 'pearl of the great port - Korai'). From historical sources it is learnt that Malik Kafur, who plundered Korkai in 1310 A.D, carried away pearls and gold in 312 elephants.\textsuperscript{48}

At present, it is an obscure village on the northern bank of Tambraparni, four miles from its mouth. At one time, it was a place of busy trade with visiting foreigners. Korkai was eulogized by the poets of those days for its pearls, busy trade, foreigners and the wealth it brought home.

\begin{quote}
To the sea which has flowers

Inhabited by the humming bees

He who brings scented flowers in, is the Sōran,
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{48} T.V.Sadasiva Pandarattar, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 150.
He who brings garments is the Seran

He who brings the umbrella is the king of Korkai.49

This poem also refers to Korkai as a large sea-port and the centre of pearl-fishing.50 It was the first port visited by Greeks after rounding Cape Comorin and the first place on the Tirunelveli Coast, whose name was recorded by them. The Gulf of Mannar was called by them from the name of this place, as "Kolkhic Gulf", from which it may be inferred that Kholkhōi was regarded by them as a place of much importance.

According to Bishop Caldwell the identification of Kolkhōi with Kolkāi is one of much importance, because it helps other identifications. 'Kol' in Tamil means 'to slay', kai means 'hand or arm'. Kolkāi, therefore, would seem to mean the hand or arm of slaughter. It is said to be an old political name for an army-camp, the first instrument of a government in a rude age. 'Kai' is capable also of meaning a place, (e.g.) Poti-kai, the name of the mountain from which the river of Korkai takes its rise.51 This was the Korkai which all native traditions pointed

49. Aiṅgurunūru, 11. 60-65.

50. Ibid., 11, 38-40

to as the "Cradle of South Indian Civilization", the place where the three brothers, Chēraṇ, Chōlaṇ and Pāṇḍyaṇ are said to have been born and brought up and from hence they set forth to form dynasties and kingdoms. 52

Korkai, called by the Sanskrit writers, as Pāṇḍya Kavātam, was the capital city of the Pāṇḍyas for a long time. But later Madurai wrested the honour of being the Pāṇḍya capital. However, it retained it till about the time of Ptolemy, who recorded that the capital was then shifted to Madurai. Korkai's importance lay in the fact that it was the chief seat of the trade in pearls, so much prized by ancient people. 53

In the broad expanse of the sea near this harbour of Korkai grew pearls of excellent variety. 54 The 'valiantly fighting Pāṇḍyas' guard with justice, the fair and large port of Korkai, which produced pearls. 55 The poets of the Sangam age call the pearls of Korkai "brilliant pearls", 56 "the fishermen who dived and brought up

52. T.N.Subrahmanian, op.cit., p.45.
54. Narrinai, 23 : 11. 5-6.
56. Ibid., 130, 11. 9 - 11.
right - whorled chaṅk, blew it and produced great noise, they bartered the pearl-oysters for the sweet smelling toddy, etc.

Though it is an accepted fact that Korkai was once a port city, the location of the port is still a point of speculation. Now, it is an inland village situated 5 kms away from the sea. This port city lost its importance after the 11th and 12th century A.D. as a consequence of the gradual elevation of the sea coast. Due to the shifting of the course of Tambraparni river and the receding of the sea, Palayakāyal gained prominence as a port. It has been pointed out by scholars that Marco Polo disembarked at Palayakāyal in the last quarter of the 13th century A.D.

The gulf situated between Sri Laṅka and Tuttukudi - Rameswaram area, now called Gulf of Mannār, was originally called the Korkai Gulf and many wars were waged between the Pandyas and Sri Laṅka kings in the 13th century A.D., for gaining monopoly

57. Ibid., 300, 11. 10-12
58. Ibid., 295, 11. 7 - 9.
over pearl-fishing in this gulf. There are many lagoons, backwater pools called 'Kāyal' near Korkai. This seems to be the reason for some villages with their names suffixed with the word 'Kāyal' near Korkai (e.g.) Manjalinārkāyal, Palayakāyal and Punnaikāyal. Palayakāyal, situated 4 kms north east of Korkai, is on the way from Korkai to Samgamamukha (confluence of Tambraparni). Recently, a pottery piece, belonging to the Megalithic period, has been collected at a place called Manjammālsālai at Palayakāyal. This clearly establishes the fact that Palayakāyal was in existence in the Saṅgam period.

KĀYAL (KĀYALPATTINAM)

According to local traditions, a branch of the river Tambraparni, called Cirrāru was flowing through Arumugamaṅgalam and a village called Agaram near Korkai. In an inscription at Idalakkudi, Nāgerkōvil, belonging to the period of Jeyasiṁhavarman (15th century A.D.), the term agarakappalvahai occurs. It seems to denote the tolls collected from ships at the port near Agaram.

62. Ibid., p.170.
63. Agaram is a corruption of Agraharam, a brahmin settlement.
64. Ibid., p.172.
In 1994 when Thiru.Christudoss Gandhi, the then Commissioner of Archaeology, visited Korkai, he was surprised to meet some labourers engaged in digging out huge quantities of sea-shells and oyster shells that were available underneath and were sold to the industry for making lime and bleaching powder. He was further informed that the tract yielding huge quantities of sea-shells extended towards the north up to Korampallam and once in a while they had stumbled upon parts of wooden posts or shafts that were supposed to have been installed earlier. Since the labourers were not aware of their value, they had thrown them away as scraps. This area, due to the changes in the course of the river, because of the gradual elevation of the ground level due to silting, has become a huge mound and four or five centuries of agricultural operations have altered the entire landscape. 65

The above findings substantiate the fact that Korkai was once a chief port for pearl-fishing and for pearl-trade and it continued to be so, though river Tambraparni was accumulating silt in the sea near its mouth. Korkai became more and more an

inland town and was finally abandoned in favour of Kayal, which rose up on the deltas formed by river Tambraparni at its mouth.

The Kayal (Kayalpattinam) referred to by Marco Polo as 'Cael' was only a daughter-city of Korkai Kayal. It seems to have included Korkai which had then become a suburb of the great port of Kayal. The goods of India were exported to foreign countries through this port. Vasco De Gama, the first Portuguese mariner, found his way to India, by rounding the Cape of Good Hope. In his report to his king he mentions a place in Tirunelvelli coast called Cael (Kayal), where he was told that pearls were found.

The first settlement of the Portuguese in India was at Cochin, where they established a factory in 1502. In the following year, they erected a fort there. From that time, they became virtually masters of the whole sea-coast of India. Barbarosa, a Portuguese captain, who visited many places in the east, relates that in 1514, he found Kayal belonging to the King of Quilon, who at a later period was styled as the king of Travancore. Kayal was regarded by the earliest Portuguese as belonging to Travancore and that the King of Travancore was

67. Ibid., p. 450.
regarded as the legitimate sovereign of the whole of South of Tirunelveli. 68 This is quite in accordance with the Tirunelveli tradition and inscriptions and, in particular, with records found in the Temple at Tiruchendur.

At that time, the Pandyas had sunk into insignificance and the Nayaks of Madurai had not yet consolidated their power. It was natural, therefore, that the king of the adjacent territory of Travancore took this opportunity to bring at least the southern portion of Tirunelveli under his rule. 69

The word Kayal means a lagoon or back water. The small village, separated from the sea by two miles of swamp and sand, is situated on the old track, that lies south to north from Tiruchendur to Tuticorin, from the west it can only be approached by an abandoned sandy road. Like Korkai, its successor, Palayakayal too has receded from the sea, due to the accretion of land on the mouth of the Tambraparni. Other settlements have formed about the sluggish back waters and, naturally, Kayal once,


69. This has been attested to by epigraphs and traditions that until very recently, the Temples of Rameswaram, Tiruchendur and Sucindram were under the Travancore Kingdom.
the city of the back waters, came to be known as Old Kayal. Kayal has now shrunk into a petty village, inhabited partly by Muslims and partly by Roman Catholic fishermen, with a still smaller adjoining hamlet, inhabited by Brahmins and Vellalas.

Marco Polo has given an interesting account of this place. Call is a great and noble city and belongs to Ashar, the eldest of the five brother kings. It is at that city that all the ships touch, that came from Hormus (on the Persian Gulf) and from Kis and from Aden and from all Arabia, laden with horses and with other things for sale and this brings a great concourse of people from the country round about and so there is great business done in this city of Call. 

Kayal carried on an immense and direct trade with China and Arabia. Evidence of broken pieces of Chinese and Arabian pottery are found lying all over the open plain on which the city once stood. The continuous accumulation of silt at the mouth of the river, gradually brought Korkai and Kayal further inland and destroyed their value as ports. The Portuguese, who then established themselves at Punnaikayal, the successor of Kayal.

70. R.Caldwell, op.cit., pp.36-38.
Since 1580, as there was only an open road to go there, they soon abandoned it, in favour of Tuticorin, which has ever since been the principal sea-port of Tirunelveli, there being no river near to silt up the harbour. Even though Korkai and its sister pearl-fishing cities had faded into oblivion, the pearl-trade which they carried on with the eastern, western and south eastern worlds had become historic events. This trade helped the Pāṇḍya Country to maintain continuous cultural contact with these worlds.