CONCLUSION

The maritime history of the Fishery Coast has been dealt with elaborately. The historical survey speaks about the antiquity and the greatness of the Paravas and the wealth of the marine resources in the Gulf of Mannar. The Portuguese with the help of the coastal community carried out their trade and later surrendered the space to the Dutch. The Portuguese had to face oppositions from different quarters, at least till their settlement at Mannar. Finally they left features of the Roman religion and the European culture on the fisherfolk who continue clinging to these vestiges firmly, at the while oblivious of their glorious past where their ancestors had carried pearls to all parts of the world.

As long as the Pandyas enjoyed monopoly over the Fishery Coast, the Paravas felt secure and their economy underwent great progress. Though the Pandya rulers were fascinated by the pearls and used them for ornamental purposes, they also promoted maritime trade in the early period. The ancient ports (Korkai and Pazhayakayal) served as international markets and many foreigners visited these ports. Among the foreigners, the Chinese showed much enthusiasm in taking pearls to their country.

Though the Muslims came as traders and settled down on the Fishery Coast for commercial purposes, they entered into marriage alliances with the Paravas. Such alliances were eagerly sought after to secure the maritime and navigational skills of the Paravas. (The offsprings born to the Muslims and Paravas came to be
known as Kayalars.) But as their number (the Muslim population) grew they became strong and began oppressing the rest of the Paravas. At one point, the Paravas were enslaved (by the Muslims) and were deprived of their economic resources i.e. the pearl fisheries.

Though the Muslims did not violate the open door policy in the Indian Ocean in relation with the Fishery Coast, the Paravas were alienated from their age old economic domain and as a result the Parava economy was in peril. The Muslims strengthened their hold further when the Madurai Sultanate was founded. Also they (the Muslims) established a strong network of trade and friendship with all the Muslim merchants of the west and the east coasts.

The Portuguese were looked upon as saviours not only by the Paravas but also by the Vijayanagar rulers. Since the latter were in rivalry with the Deccan Sultans, the Vijayanagar rulers allowed the Portuguese to enter the ports of the Fishery Coast hoping that the Portuguese would come to their rescue in their war with the Sultan. Since pearl fishing was seasonal the Portuguese maintained very cordial relations with the Telugu rulers because the Portuguese had a good scope to procure goods in the hinterland areas to compensate for off seasonal losses.

The perennial hatred and rivalry that had existed for long between the Cross-and the Crescent cropped up on the Fishery Coast also. Since the Kayalars were experts in sailing through the hard shallow coral-filled Mannar gulf, the Portuguese maintained friendly terms with the same till they (the Portuguese) acquired navigational knowledge. When they found skilled labour in the Paravas who
were also the masters of the pearl fisheries, the Portuguese were willing to help the Paravas against the Muslims.

Though juridically the Fishery Coast came under the administration of the Vijayanagar ruler and his viceroy the Madurai Nayak, they did not exercise their absolute control over it. As a result, the Fishery Coast had been territorially divided up and the lease on the pearl fisheries was enjoyed by the highest bidder which was always Muslim merchants. At this juncture, the Portuguese set their foot on the Fishery Coast without much difficulty.

Mutual co-existence that had been in vogue for a pretty long time in the Fishery Coast was given up when the Muslims entered the coast. In the same way the open door policy in the Indian Ocean was challenged at the arrival of the Portuguese.

The Portuguese took advantage of the troubled political and economic situation and established their settlements first in the Muslims dominated ports. The Kayalar-Parava struggle reached its climax and the year 1536 witnessed the historic event in the Fishery Coast. The Mass Conversion was followed by the fortification of the seven major ports. Also it (the Mass Conversion) resulted in the change of allegiance of the Paravas from the Vijayanagar emperor to the Portuguese Sovereign. The conversion was purely an economic attempt on the part of the Paravas to regain their old position. From now on, the pearl fisheries were declared as royal property.

Pearl fishing was seasonal but the revenue it yielded was high. So the Portuguese carried out a systematic administration of the coast from the island of
Mannar. Their officials extracted the maximum benefits in different forms. By introducing the cartaz system, the monopoly of the Portuguese was established in all the trading routes of the Indian Ocean. Thus the open door policy which had been prevalent for one and a half millennium was challenged and altered by the Portuguese.

As a consequence, the Muslims were completely evicted from their economic position. The Zamorin came to the rescue of the Muslims and a formidable alliance was formed by the Muslims against the Portuguese. The rivalry went on for quite a long time. But the Muslims could never regain their supremacy.

The Portuguese made use of the availability of commodities in the hinterland areas and a cacha (coarse) type of cloth was procured mainly from the Tirunelveli coast. A well-balanced economy was thus introduced by involving in alternative trade. During the off-season also a steady annual income flowed into the treasury of Estado da India.

The Portuguese responded well to the demands of the local situation. Horses were sold for cash and elephants were exchanged for saltpetre. Even though the Nayak of Madurai paid a very low price for the elephants in exchange for saltpetre, the Portuguese renewed their agreements because saltpetre was an essential ingredient of gunpowder. The international rivalry forced the Portuguese to exchange even gold ornaments and varieties of high quality textiles with the Nayak of Madurai. Thus a balance of trade was maintained.
The Portuguese encouraged the different merchant communities and casados to conduct trade. The private trade introduced by the Portuguese had both positive and adverse impacts on the Lusitanian economy. The private merchants were responsible for promoting intra-region, intra-Asian and even overseas trade in collaboration with the Portuguese. In due course, the private merchants were involved in an enormous volume of private trade which affected the inflow of money to the Portuguese exchequer. At one point the Estado da India could not control the private trade and this was one of the reasons for the decline of the Portuguese trade.

The cartaz system prevented the Muslim merchants from conducting commercial transactions. This resulted in the advent of corsairs and the activities of the sea-pirates was a big menace and the Portuguese had to deal with it.

Up to the fall of the Portuguese in 1658, the Fishery Coast was very active in exporting pearls, rice and textiles. The trade in pepper and spices had almost come to a standstill in the Malabar Coast due to international rivalries. But the new Christians continued to carry out the trade in the east coast though the Portuguese had lost their enthusiasm.

Immediately after the conversion of the Paravas, Vijayanagar sent its forces under the Vadugars and the Fishery Coast underwent untold miseries and hardships. Many reasons have been attributed for such attacks, but the main cause was the pearls. The new Christians were more loyal to their new liberators and so the Vijayanagar rulers experienced a dwindling income into their treasury. Thus the
Paravas experienced victimisation from all quarters, except from the Jesuit missionaries.

Since the Portuguese demanded enormous tributes from the Paravas, they (the Paravas) did not want to undertake pearl fishing. The Parava boat owners (as they had cartazes) left the Fishery Coast and settled in the Coromandel Coast, while the poor Paravas remained in the Fishery Coast and faced the wrath of their oppressors.

The international rivalry between the Dutch and the Portuguese echoed in the Fishery Coast also. The Portuguese persuaded the Madurai Nayak not to supply saltpetre to the Dutch. The strained relations between the Madurai Nayak and the Sethupathi worsened since the Portuguese and the Dutch were involved in their local politics also. The Portuguese lost the support of the Nayak of Madurai.

The Portuguese were not very ambitious in establishing an empire in India. They were interested only in sea-borne trade and so identified strategic ports and harbours. As the Portuguese lacked manpower they had allowed private trade. But this private trade could not be effectively monitored and controlled. Thus the unbridled private trade turned out to be smuggling and over exploitation of the Paravas. But when the Dutch were about to storm Thoothukudi, the Portuguese looked for help from the Paravas.

Xavier and his companions deserve great appreciation for transforming the untutored mob (the Paravas) into a refined community. Several liberative changes were introduced by the missionaries in all spheres of life. Particularly women were
freed from their enslavement. However, the Jesuit missionaries did not raise any opposition against slavery though they took care of them (the slaves) and were content with saving their souls.

The missionaries condemned as superstitions all the rites and rituals practised by the Christians. They (the Christians) were socially segregated and culturally alienated in order to impose the western culture on them. The Portuguese could succeed only partially because the Paravas were rooted very deeply in their native culture, native religion which had a great influence on their religious activities and festival celebrations. As a part of inculturation, the Christians were allowed to celebrate Pongal (boiling new rice), but in front of the Cross. The Paravas did never assimilate the western culture totally.

The scattered Paravas were asked to live in the seven ports to strengthen their identity as one caste. The consolidation of the Parava jati and their economy were the important outcomes of the Portuguese presence in the Fishery Coast. The consolidation of the jati and their economy promoted the loyalty of the Paravas (as a single unit) to the Portuguese.

The missionaries succeeded in founding an organized Christian mission on the Fishery Coast because they had established a good rapport with the local leaders. The Portuguese officials made use of the Jati Thalaivans and Pattangattis for the smooth conduct of the pearl fishing. The missionaries had the kanakkappilai, sacristans and teachers and imparted catechism. (This is still being followed in all the parishes of the Fishery Coast). The pious associations (which
continue to be active) were responsible for adding social dimensions in the Catholic religion. The origin of these associations goes back to the Portuguese period.

After a comprehensive understanding of the conclusions made at the end of each chapter, the researcher presents the final conclusion which is the outcome of the thesis on the Maritime History of the Pearl Fishery Coast during 1500-1658.

The Paravas as a maritime and merchant community co-operated with the Portuguese to carry out their (the Portuguese) commercial activities. The Portuguese-Parava relations enhanced the smooth running of the hinterland, foreland and overseas trade activities of the Portuguese.

It was the Paravas who were made to settle in the island of Mannar and Sri Lanka. So the Portuguese made use of the militancy of the Paravas also. To fight against the Dutch the Paravas were needed by the Portuguese. For the Portuguese, the Paravas were not merely a converted group but a community which excelled in commercial and strategic skills, and was therefore an indispensable part of their colonial design.

But I focus my thrust on the present position of this community - the Paravas. The Paravas who contributed their share to the growth of the economy of the Indian Ocean have been reduced to a marginalised section in the society today. Their economy has been deteriorating day by day and their future seems to be bleak.

Missionary historians and chroniclers of religion look upon the Paravas as the best models of a converted race. The loyalty and exemplary lives of the neo Christians were held up as a model for Christians elsewhere too. But the same
zeal and steadfastness of the Paravas to their new religion and to their liberators has
come their liability today. An unswerving loyalty to and an unquestioning faith in
their religion (Roman Catholicism) have pervaded every aspect of Parava life. As a
result, while the other communities could adapt themselves to the changing political
and social scenarios, the Paravas got mired in a religion and a social structure that
could neither promote their economic interests nor liberate and equip them for the
new trends. In consequence, the Paravas continue to dissipate their economic and
physical energies either on hollow religious ceremonies and rituals or a devastating
rivalries and petty squabbles among themselves. These misdirected exercises (in the
form of an extravagant life style and vain clashes) have only rendered the Parava
economy emaciated and unfit to face the challenges of a changing world order.

The college, the seminary and the printing press started by Padroado
Mission (except for the hospitals) aimed at facilitating the propagation of the
Portuguese religion (Roman Catholicism), so as to indirectly promote the colonial
interests of the Portuguese. Therefore these institutions could contribute nothing to
the social and economic empowerment of the Paravas. And so when the Portuguese
interests came to an end on the Fishery Coast, the services of these institutions too
became almost extinct. In several other parts of the world (in Latin America, for
instance) Roman Catholicism became a means for liberation. On the contrary, Roman
Catholicism on the Fishery Coast was a tool to domesticate, suppress and exploit the
Paravas.
Roman Catholicism, with its excessive emphasis on the world after death and the redemption of the soul, has failed to create in the Paravas an awareness about the more immediate and more demanding and non-negotiable needs and rights of this world, here and now. Therefore the Church (like the Portuguese) has treated the Paravas as a source of revenue and never as a flock that needs to be cared for and nurtured.

The Portuguese and the Roman Catholic Church did, of course, save the Paravas once from certain extinction. But the price the Paravas have had to pay in return to their liberators has been equally fatal. They (the Paravas) continue to pay the price and unless the Paravas change their attitude to their religion (Roman Catholicism) their liberation and empowerment are highly uncertain. In this regard, the Paravas are to be blamed as much as the Portuguese and the Padroado missionaries are to be. But hope is never far away.