CHAPTER ONE

THE PANDYA COUNTRY:
ITS POSITION IN TRADE MAP
CHAPTER-I

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Tamilaham:

Tamilaham, literally meaning “the home of the Tamil language”, is the land where the Tamils, who speak the Tamil language, live from time immemorial. The terms Tamilar and the Tamilaham are therefore the logical sequences of the term Tamil.1 M.S. Purnalingam Pillai said, that in the widest sense Tamilaham at present lies all the world over, wherever the enterprising Tamils have found their home. The name Dravida, a modification of Tiru (V) idam, a land of shrines2 was applied to Tamilaham by immigrants for some geographical reason or other, and has nothing to do with the word Tamil or the Tamilar, as some oriental scholars have fondly imagined3 Tamilaham, otherwise called the Tamil land or the Tamil country, was for sometimes called the Madras State in the recent past. The Madras State formed a part of the previous Madras Presidency, which comprised the Madras State proper, southern parts of Orissa, the present Andhra Pradesh, the southern parts of Karnataka, and the Malabar region, which now forms a part of the Kerala State. According to the Central Government’s decision of the reorganization of states on linguistic basis, the predominantly Tamil – speaking area was carved out from the erstwhile Madras Presidency and thus the post-independent Madras state was formed.4

Tamilaham or the home of the Tamils and their Tamil language was in the hoary past the southern region of the large island known as Navalam Theevu or

2 Atham malai (Eden Hill) called by Arabs, Sivanadipatta malai called by Indians (Lord Siva’s foot print of the hill) especially by Hindus; Buddhapatham (Lord Buddha foot print of the hill) by Sri Lankan Buddhist. It may be called as Tim (v) ideam latterly calls Dravidam. But Sanskrit scholars said Southern India called Daksinspatha in Sanskrit language, so the Dravidam may be derived latter days. But the research not accepted this Sanskrit scholars view. The Pearl fisheries belonging to this kingdom, the product of which was sold only at the capital, Uraiyr, were those of the Palk Strait, north of Adam’s Bridge, as distinguished from those of the Gulf of Manar, which belonged to the Pandyan kingdom, and were administered from Madura.
3 M.S.Purnalingam Pillai, Tamil India, Chennai, 1999, p.12.
Sambu Theevu. This part, one of the first land formations on either side of equator, was bounded on the north by the Vindhya mountains and touched Australia, Africa and China on the south, west and east respectively. Tradition and some early Tamil works refer to the loss of the vast land mass, which formed part of the Pandya Country. The Pandyas are said to have shifted their capital twice, firstly from Then Madurai and secondly, from Kavatapuram. Finally, they had to shift their capital to the interior land at Madurai (the present Madurai). This tradition awaits confirmation from archaeological (oceanographic) corroboration. At the present, one can safely say that there was some loss of land, which perhaps formed the Southern west part of the Pandya Country. This conclusion is derived from early Sanskrit and Tamil works.

Ancient Bounds of Tamilaham:

Ancient Tamilaham was situated to the south of the Mysore Plateau in the north and north-west and the Tirupati hills in the north-east. The limits of the then Tamilaham were from Thiruvenkatam in the north (the Venkatam hill is the modern Tirupati about 100 miles (160 K.M) north-east of Chennai-Madras) to Thenkumari in the south and from Kunakadal (Bay of Bengal) in the east to the Kudakadal (Arabean Sea) in the west. In the Sangam literature, the ‘Bay of Bengal’ is referred to as Todukadal meaning “the sea that was artificially created by digging”, whereas the Arabean Sea is referred to as “Tonrumutiriopouvam”, meaning the ancient Tamil sea that has been in existence from the days of the creation of the world.

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6 Patirrupattu, Il Pathikam; Manimekhalai, xi, 107, E.H.Warmingtton, The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India, (2nd edition), New Delhi, 1974, p.167.

7 Silappadikaram, xi, ll. 17-22; Silappadikaram is one of the five great epics in Tamil. It was composed by Ilango Adigal, brother of the great Chera King Senguttuvan, perhaps between 2nd and 3rd century A.D. (ed.) U.V.Saminathaiyar, Tanjavur, 1985.

8 P.T.Srinivas Iyengar, History of Tamils, (From the Earliest Times to 600 A.D.) (Reprint), New Delhi, 1982, pp.53-54.

9 V.Kanakasabhai, The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago, (Reprint), New Delhi, 1989, p.3.


Sanskrit word *Sagara* was specially applied to the Bay of Bengal, as it was supposed to have been dug up by 60,000 “Sons of the Sagara”.\(^{12}\) In those times Tamil was spoken from the eastern to the western sea.\(^{13}\)

**Location of the Pandya Country:**

The Pandya Country, similar to their pedigree and genealogy, has had a well-marked boundary. It comprised the earlier district of Madurai, Ramnad and Tirunelveli\(^{14}\) with some parts of Travancore. But at the time of the composition of the *Periplus Maris Erythraea* it extended even beyond the Ghats so as to include more of the Aii Country.\(^{15}\) From very early days the Tirunelveli region was called the Ten Pandynadu (‘the southern Pandya land’).\(^{16}\) The extreme south of the peninsula, the place where the three seas embrace each other, was a sacred center. The *Periplus* and the *Manimekhalai* record its sacredness in the first and third centuries A.D. *Manimekhalai* calls the Pandya Country as Purvadeya\(^{17}\) which means the land of remote antiquity.

It lies between 800, and 100 35' north latitudes and 760 15' and 800 20 east longitudes and is bordered on the east by the Coromandal Coast (Cholamandala Karai) and in between Dhanuskodi to Cape Comorian the seawater calls Gulf of Mannar. Ptolemy describes this seawater as the Argali Gulf or Palk Strait.\(^{18}\) According to *Perunthokai*,\(^{19}\) an early Tamil work, the Pandya Country was the land south of river Vellar, north of Kanyakumari, west of Peruveli i.e. the high way to

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\(^{12}\) *Silappadikaram*, xxvii, 127.

\(^{13}\) V. Kanakasabhai, *op.cit.*, p.9.


\(^{15}\) Ibid., pp.233-234.

\(^{16}\) Bishop R. Caldwell, *op.cit.*, p.3.

\(^{17}\) *Manimekhalai*, 9:12-32.


\(^{19}\) *Perunthokai*: 2091-2093,
Chera Country, and east of the Bay of Bengal. It mentions that the boundary of the Pandya Country was 56 nigathani,²⁰ perhaps of the modern kilometers in thousands. In fact Vellaru demarcates the Pandya and the Chola Countries. Vellaree runs in the erstwhile Pudukkottai Kingdom.

The region, being tropical has a fairly high degree of temperature during the major part of the year. The extremes of temperature vary between 59°F and 108°F. The hot climate is tempered by the monsoons, which are however very irregular. The annual rainfall is only about forty inches on the average.²¹ The Western Ghats somewhat shut off the region from the southwest monsoon. The region benefits the northeast monsoon lying between the months of October and November. Epigraphy furnishes us with several instances of tax-remission in case of failure of crops. The southeastern coast was susceptible to stormy squalls resulting in the silting of seaports like Korkai and Kayal.²²

The Pandya country contains all the five habitable regions (tinais), where the five kinds of love poetry, and the five kinds of war-poetry, each correlated to one or other of the tinais, could arise. It is no wonder then that Madura was the center of the growth of Tamil literature and the place where the literary dialect of Tamil (Sendamil) was the fashioned.²³ This does not mean that the dialect of the Pandya country is superior to the dialects of the other twelve districts, as it is usually understood to mean, for one dialect is just as good or as bad as another, but that the literary dialect was first fashioned in the Pandya country and when this dialect was adopted for poetry in the other tracts they allowed local words to find a place therein.²⁴

²⁰ 700 Kavathams or Kathams or about 7,000 miles. It means one Katham = 70 miles (105 Kilometers), M.S.Purnalingam Pillai, op.cit., p.10. The extent, that is, the area, of each of the three countries is represented in the various stanzas as follows: the Chera Country 800 miles; Chola 240; Pandya 560.) Bishop R.Caldwell op.cit., p.26. Adiyakkunallur says that the extent of the lost territory was seven hundred Kavadam (i.e. one thousand miles). P.T. Srinivas Iyengar, op.cit., p.241)

²¹ D.Devakunjari, Madurai Through The Ages, Madras, 1957, p.11.


²³ Tolkappiam, iii, 293, Expert Committee for History of Tamil Nadu, History of Tamil Nadu, Sangam Age (Social, Tl.), Madras, 1983, pp.7-28.

The land has the famous **Murudra (Marunadu Vaghmali)** mountain in the south, the Podiyil hills near Papanasam, the Courtallam falls, the Paphas hills and the Annamalai hills all in the Western Ghats. Sage Agastya had his abode in the Podiyil hills.\(^{25}\) Thus is a puranic story says that he subdued these peaks when coming down to the South. In the Pazhani hills, Lord Muruga’s one of his sanctum sanctoriums is on the top of the hills.\(^{26}\) Kodaikanal near the Pazhani hills was the health resort of the company during summer seasons. Some broken parts of the Eastern ghats are also there in the Pandya Country.

The Coastal belt, a part of the Eastern Coast composing of the Coromandal Coast and the Parava Coast or the Pearl- fishy famous parts, harbours, and trading centres.\(^{27}\) Tondi, Saliyar, Uvari, Korkai, Kayalpattinam’ Kanyakumari and Muttom are some of the brisk trading ports. Kulasekarapattinam and Devipattinam are also on the eastern coast.\(^{28}\) In the Pandya part of the Coromandal and the Indian Ocean Kanyakumari Temple are located. Muttom on the west and Chinnamuttom on the east are the famous fishing hamlets.

The two famous river systems of the Pandya Country are the vaigai and the Tambraparani; the vaigai takes its course in the Pazhani hills;\(^{29}\) the Tambraparani takes its course from the Papanasam hills;\(^{30}\) the former flows through Madurai, and Ramnad districts, the latter through the east (i.e.) Tirunelveli District.

**Antiquity of the Pandyas:**

The Pandyas, one of the earliest ruling dynasties of Tamilaham, has had a hoary antiquity. They are said to be earlier to the other two Tamil dynasties, the

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\(^{26}\) D.Devakunjari, *op.cit.*, p.10.

\(^{27}\) D.Dorcas Shanthini, *op.cit.*, pp.39-42.


\(^{29}\) D.Devakunjari, *op.cit.*, p.11.

Cheras and the Cholas; the antiquity of the Pandyas goes back to the B.Cs, even before the Mauryas. In fact, to Prof. N. Subrahmanian the word “Pantaiya” means “old”, 31 which is perhaps the correct form of the word Pandya, for the Pantiyars were one of the oldest dynasties ruling anywhere in India. There is no doubt, however, that it was the longest flourishing dynasty (with inevitable gaps in between), ruling in India i.e. certainly from the 5th century B.C. to the 17th century A.D., more than two millennia”. 32

The word “Pandayon” (பண்டையோன்) in Tamil means ‘the one who belongs to an ancestral family’. Due to frequent use, it became Pandyan. Here the word Pandaya stands for “remote antiquity” and Pandyar refers to the king of the “Pandyar Country”. 33 Hebrew texts refer to the Pandyas as Punt. The root of the word Punt is Pwn, ‘t’ being the usual feminine ending for a foreign country. James Hornell identifies the word Punt with the Pandyan Country. 34 The Pandyas have become most famous for the establishment of the Tamil Sangams. “The Pandya” and his capital Madurai were known to the Greeks, who called the people as Pandions. To the Muslim travellers the Pandyan King was the Pandi, and his people were the Pandis. 35

The remote antiquity of the Pandya Country is attested to by the Greek and Roman writers and ambassadors by Katyayana, the great Sanskrit grammarian of South India of the fourth century B.C., by the Ceylonese chronicle Mahavamsa, by the Asokan inscriptions and, above all, by the Tamil Classics and their Commentaries. 36

Further, some of the birudas or titles of the Pandyas such as Minavas or Minar (the lord of fish emblem), Maran 37 (the lord of Change) (changed capital),

32 The Hindu dated, November 12, 2003, p.3.
35 Bishop R. Caldwell, op. cit., p. 22.
36 M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, op. cit., pp. 75-76.
Kadalan (the lord of the sea),\textsuperscript{38} Cheliyan (‘the prosperous king’), Thennavan (‘the southerner’), Thinkat Chelvan (‘one of lunar origin’) refer to their relations with the sea or the land of the sea. The name Kauriar however, relates them with the Gauravar of the Bharata.\textsuperscript{39}

The pedigree of the Pandyas is traced back to Pantu, the progenitor (father) of the Pandavas. It has been said that the Pandavas left their progeny in the South, and that took the root of the dynasty of the Pandyas. To add credence to this story, it has been said that Arjuna, one of the Pandava brothers, married Chitrangatha, the daughter of the Pandya king namely, Chitrawahana, of Manalur an adjoining village of present Korkai and beget a son namely Papruvahana. This happened when Arjuna did his pilgrimage to the South. This name of the Pandyas has been referred to variously as Malayathwaja and Suvedan. At another place, during the digvijaya of the Pandavas for the conduct of the rajasuya sacrifice, Sahadevan is said to have met Papruvahana, the son of his brother Arjuna, embraced him and gave him a lot of presents and left for the digvijaya.\textsuperscript{40} In the North Indian version of Vyasa Bharata, the Pandya king Chitrawahana was mentioned as the king of Manipura.\textsuperscript{41} Manipura and Manalur appear to be the same, though there is little difference in the connotation of the two place names. This story of Chitrawahana (Malayathwaja) Chitrangatha+Arjuna is found mentioned in the Vishnupurana, Bhagavatapurana and Bharatham.\textsuperscript{42} The learned Pandit M. Raghavaiyangar accepts the derivation of the term “Pandyar” from Papruvahana Arjuna (Pandava) + Chitrangatha relations. For adding strength to this derivation, he cites some references from Katyayana, who says that the son born of the Pandava and the king of the Pandyadesa would be called Pandya. He refers to this in the sutra on Pandyodayam.\textsuperscript{43} The Pandyas were

\textsuperscript{38} P.T.Srinivas Iyengar, op.cit., p.139.

\textsuperscript{39} M.S.Purnalingam Pillai, op.cit., p.76.

\textsuperscript{40} P.T.Srinivas Iyengar, op.cit., p.89.

\textsuperscript{41} Mani means Gem in Tamil language; P.T.Srinivas Iyengar, op.cit., p.90.

\textsuperscript{42} M.Raghavaiyangar, Collected Essays, Madras, 1938, pp.70-75.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp.75-76.
also known in their records as Pandavar\textsuperscript{44} and where Gauriar,\textsuperscript{45} where Pandavar simply means the five brothers (Pandavas)\textsuperscript{46} and the Kauriar, the one hundred brothers.\textsuperscript{47} Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya (324-300 B.C.), gives a quaint account of the Pandya Country ruled over by Pandæa, a daughter of Heracles "to whom he assigned that portion of India which lies outwards and extends to the sea." (Perhaps he was referring to the story of the origin of the Pandyan dynasty). He adds that the Country was organised into 365 villages: one village had to bring the royal tribute to the treasury every day.\textsuperscript{48} The material used by Megasthenes\textsuperscript{49} should have lain submerged for about 1500 years when it was used in the Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam\textsuperscript{50} in the story of Thadathagai being born as the daughter of the Pandyan king and marrying Siva. In Silappadikaram the cowherdess Madhari mentions that it was their turn to provide milk products to the royal household on a particular day: Pandyan Koyilil Neimurai namakku inruam\textsuperscript{51} (today is our turn to provide ghee to the Pandyan temple’)

However, this derivation does not appear to be logical, for the simple reason that the Chera ruler Udyan Cheral Adan, the patron of the second ten of Padhitrupatthu, is said to have sumptuously fed the Pandavas and Gauravas in the Bharata war. This Udyan Cheral was a contemporary of a Pandya king whose name is not known. Hence the derivation of the word, “Pandyas”, the contemporaries of the Cheras from Pandava-Gauravar, is questionable.

The derivation of the name Pandya from Pantu of the Mahabharata fame and their descent from the family of the Pandavas does not appear sound. The

\textsuperscript{44} Purananuru, p.58.

\textsuperscript{45} Silappadikaram, xv, ll. 23.

\textsuperscript{46} M. Raghavaiyangar, op.cit., pp.76-78.

\textsuperscript{47} P.T.Srinivas Iyengar, op.cit., p.90.

\textsuperscript{48} Mc Crindle, Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrlan, Calcutta, 1929, p.159.

\textsuperscript{49} K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, op.cit., p.4.

\textsuperscript{50} D.Devakunjari, op.cit., p.28.

\textsuperscript{51} P.Ramanathan, op.cit., pp.30-31.
chronological gap between the Pandyas and the Cheras and the Pandavas is so vast that it is improbable to give them immediate contemporaries. The popular use of the term Pandus, Pandavar or Panchavar in the Tamil literary world and inscriptions could have been a later legend linking the Pandyas with the Pandavas.\textsuperscript{52}

Further, archaeological excavations conducted in Korkai (Tuticorin) help us establish the historicity of Korkai before the 8th century B.C., when the Mahabharata war could not have happened.\textsuperscript{53} In addition, there is another evidence to disprove the above derivation; in Valmiki’s Ramayana which was composed earlier to the composition of Mahabharata, there is a reference to the Pandyas. The Ramayana story seems to have received the literary form perhaps in the 8th century B.C. Valmikhari refers to a beautiful gate of the capital city on the coast, decorated with pearls and gems (rubies and diamonds) in the extreme South on the mouth of the river Tambraparani. This capital city is called Kavatapuram (Pandya Kavate), of the Pandyas. Kautiliya’s Arthasastra also praises the pearls collected from this city of Pandya Kavatam. When the Pandyas were ruling over the port-city (capital) of the Pandya Country in the extreme South earlier to the time of Ramayana, it is unacceptable that the word ‘Pandya’ derived from ‘Pantu’ or ‘Pandavas’.

i) Foreign Origin:

Megasthenes’ Indica states that the Pandya Country was ruled by a queen namely Pandaea.\textsuperscript{54} Megasthenes says that according to tradition the queen Pandaea was the daughter of Heracles of Greek origin.\textsuperscript{55} Researches tell us that Heracles was the Indian equivalent of Lord Krishna of Dwaraka. As per the Mahabharata, Lord Krishna was related to the Pandavas and Gauravas and more closely to the Pandavas as his sister was married to the Pandavas. Here too the story links the Pandyas with the Pandavas. Very recent researches conducted above these traditions tell us that it was just a concocted story created to trace the pedigree of the Pandyas to the Pandava fame. The Pandyas themselves were also in a way responsible for the popularization

\textsuperscript{52} Bishop R.Caldwell, op.cit., pp.12-13.

\textsuperscript{53} K.Dhamodharan, Tholliyalnokil Tamilakam, (Tl.) Chennai, 1999, p.3.

\textsuperscript{54} K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, op.cit., p.41.

of this tradition. They, in fact, seem to have received a kind of pleasure by tracing their pedigree to the Pandavas. But, archaeological, chronological and literary researches doubt the validity of this theory. What has been said about Kavatapuram in the Nakkirar’s commentary to Irayanar Ahapporul finds added strength in Valmikhi Ramayana which refers to the Pandya Kavate.56

**Historicity of the Sangam Age Pandyas and Madurai.**

According to the Commentary on Irayanar Ahapporul,57 the Pandyas founded three Sangams or Literary Academies, the first of which lasted for 4,400 years, the second for 3,700 years and third for 1850 years. The meeting place of the first Sangam was at Then Madurai on the banks of the Pahruli, (river) which is now under water, that of the second Sangam at Kavatapuram, which was also devoured by the sea and that of the third Sangam at Madurai, a town near the modern city of Madurai. According to this legend, the age of the three Sangams alone covered nearly ten thousand years before Irayanar. All critics including historians very much doubt the long duration of the Sangams, however, they do not reject altogether the existence of the Sangam. The duty of any historians is to reject hyperboles and accept the truth. What we understand from these legends is that the Pandyas had such a vast antiquity.58

The Mahavamsa one of the two major chronicles of Sri Lanka, which is said to have taken shape about the 4th century A.D., makes mention of the Pandyas, their relation with the Sri Lankan ruling family and the existence of Then Madurai a few centuries prior to its author’s time. Vijaya the earliest ruler of Sri Lanka, or the early Aryan immigrants had maintained their relations with the Pandyas by their matrimonial alliances, i.e. Vijaya is said to have married a Pandya prince. The author of the Mahavamsa seems to have given historicity to the event of the earliest Sri Lankan ruler entering into matrimonial relations with the Pandyas.59

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56 M.Raghavaiyengar, *op.cit.*, pp.1-5.
57 D.Devakunjari, *op.cit.*, pp.30-33.
58 Ibid., p.35.
one of the acknowledged historians of Sri Lanka, thinks that the shifting of the Pandya capital from Kavatapuram to the present Madurai could have happened probably about the beginning of the Christian era. Further, evidences of living towns in the first two centuries of the Christian era, as geophysically located by the Greek writers take the chronology of Maduari, the capital city of the Pandyas, still far back. Kavatapuram was in existence in the fourth century B.C. It is therefore could have been engulfed by the roaring sea between fourth century B.C. and first century A.D. What becomes clear from this is that Then Madurai might have been the Pandya capital before the fifth or the fourth century B.C. It is not possible for us to accurately ascertain how long this original capital of the Pandyas had existed.

According to some legends, supported by later day Copper-plates, the Pandyas were said to have descended from the Moon God i.e. of a Lunar ancestry, as against the Cholas who claimed to have descended from the Solar race. According to Tolkappiam (Porul-Ceyyuliyal), the ancestors of the Pandyas, had the double carp (fish) as their emblem. P.T.Srinivasa Iyengar thinks that the fish-emblem of this dynasty means that they originally belonged to a tribe of fishermen-sailors.

According to Mamulanar this incident occurred may be in and around 325 B.C. When Bindusara attempted to invade and conquer the extreme South including Tamil Nadu, the Tamils under the leadership, in all probability, of the Cerars and some other chieftains formed a defensive league to resist the Northern invaders. The league seems to have succeeded in saving Tamil Nadu from foreign conquests. This may be believed to have happened early in the 3rd century B.C.

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60 S. Paranavitana and Nichols, A Concise History of Ceylon (From the Earliest Times to Portuguese Invasion in 1505), Vol. I, Colombo, 1961, p.94.

61 Maduraik-Kanchi, II. 760-764.


63 N. Subrahmanian, op.cit., p.28.

64 Tolkappiam, iii, 8: 391-438.


66 Purananuru, 378; Maduraik-Kanchi, II. 144, P.T. Srinivas Iyengar, op.cit., pp.139; 461.

67 Ahananuru, 265.
century B.C. This state of affairs gets confirmation in a reference in the Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela, a Jaina ruler of Kalinga (2nd century B.C.) Sangam Literature - Ahananuru and Purananuru confirmed the above historical incident. Some silver coins found at Akala Kunnam Pakutty, Kottyam District, and Kerala State numbering 188 belonged to Chandra Gupta Maurya that is 321-291 B.C.

In addition, the Edicts of Asoka especially Rock Edict II and Major Rock Edict XIII bear ample testimony to the existence of the three royal dynasties viz, the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas. Besides, the Hathigumpha inscription of King Kharavela of Kalinga throws some new light on these dynasties. It is probable that, in the words of N. Subrahmanian, the Hathigumpha inscription was made around 175 B.C. That inscription, among other things says that Kharavela succeeded in breaking up a Tamilian Confederacy, which was made 113 years before his victory. This means that the Tamilian Confederacy was formed around 288 B.C., which falls within the reigning period of Bindusara. Romans were enlisted in the service of the Pandyan of the Sangam age, namely for example, during the reign of the one Pandya, namely Aryappadaikadanta Pandyan Nedunjezhian. Roman soldiers were employed to guard the gates of Madurai fort.

**Foreign Accounts on Pandya Maritime Trade:**

Being proximate to the Seas, the Pandyas from very early times had developed maritime trade contacts with many Western and Eastern countries. The Jewish

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69 "காறாவாள் பாண்டியர் கள்ள இல்லத்தில் பண்டையர் கொழுந்தார் மெல்லியதல் மேலாம்புரம் கல்லாரியம் (Puram, 175).


71 K.D.Thirunavukkarasu, Chieftains of the Sangam Age, Madras, 1994, p.65.
74 *Silappadikaram*, xiv, 66-67.
chronicles and the classical writers of Greece, Rome and Arabia record these relations. Historians like Bishop R. Caldwell, K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, N.Subrahmanian, M.S. Purnalingam Pillai, S.A.Q. Hussaini, P. Ramanathan, K.K. Pillay, T.P. Meenakshi Sundaranar, Mayilai Seeni Venkatasami, K. Sadasivan etc., are of the opinion, “From the earliest times the products of Tamilaham appear to have attracted the merchants of distant lands”. It was most probably from Tamilaham that during the reign of Solomon (about B.C. 1000) ‘once in every three years the ships of Tarshish came bringing gold and silver, ivory, apes and peacocks.’ The names of the last two objects kapin and tukim as found in the Hebrew Bible are the same as those still used in Tamil i.e., kavi and thokai. Subsequently, the Greeks appeared to have kept up the trade with Tamilaham. The Greek names for rice (oryza), ginger (zingiber) and cinnamon (karpion) are almost identical with their Tamil names ansi, inchi-ver, and karuva and they clearly indicate that Greek merchants conveyed these articles and their names to Europe from Tamilaham. The Egyptian Greeks under the Ptolemies carried on an extensive trade in Indian commodities, and Alexandria became, at an early period, the chief emporium of this lucrative commerce.

According to M.S. Purnalingam Pillai the excavations made in Egypt in quite recent times point to the burial of a Tamilian stalwart and hero, Thuthan-kanan, or Ambassador Kanan in the land of the Nile. The existence of Tamil colonies in Palestine has been demonstrated by an indefatigable researcher of the Holy Bible, he has pointed out the close resemblances that exist between Hebrews and Tamils in the modes of their daily life and worship. He has shown that Jesus Christ, son of Acher or Achari or carpenter, was, to all intents and purposes, a Tamilian.

Moreover, it is on record that Strabo the Greek historian mentions that the Pandyan King had sent two embassies (B.C. 26 and B.C. 20), to Augustus Caesar,
desiring to become his friend and ally.\textsuperscript{81} Pliny, the Elder (c.A.D. 75), speaks the 'Pande' the king 'Pandyan' and the western maritime emporium of Modura.\textsuperscript{82} It is the Madurai of the Sangam age Ptolemy (c.A.D.150) writes about 'Pandion' and their capital Modoura and the geographical features of the Pandya Country.\textsuperscript{83} An Alexandrian merchant who wrote the "Periplus Maris Erythraei" (c.A.D.81–96) gives a detailed account of the important ports of Tamilaham including Colchi (Korkai), Pandean Kingdom and particularly about the Pandyas.\textsuperscript{84}

Very recently, historians have come across in the Chinese records the mention of the Pandyas as one of the three Tamil ruling dynasties.\textsuperscript{85} All these facts point to the early historicity of the Pandyas in the extreme South of India. Among the sovereigns of the earliest times the most distinguished were the Palyagasalimuthukudumi Peruvaluthi and Nedunjezhiyan. The territorial boundaries of the Pandyas varied from time to time, even then there were traditionally accepted bounds. Under militant rulers it expanded and under feeble rules it shrunk.\textsuperscript{86}

\textbf{The Pancha Pandyas:}

According to Puram, we come to know that the Pandya Country was ruled by more than one Pandya Kings.\textsuperscript{87} According to V. Kanakasabhai, the Pandyan king called himself Panchavan (the descendant of the five) and Kaurian (of the line of the Kurus) the names that clearly indicate his origin from the Pandas, who were five brothers.\textsuperscript{88} In addition, there is also a view that the Pandyas were five numbers, and

\textsuperscript{81} K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, \textit{op.cit.}, p.46.
\textsuperscript{83} Mc Crindle, \textit{op.cit.}, p.183, V.S.V.Raghavan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.423.
\textsuperscript{84} W.H.Schoff; \textit{op.cit.}, p.313.
\textsuperscript{85} P.T.Srinivas Iyengar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.206.
\textsuperscript{86} M.S.Purnalingam Pillai, \textit{op.cit.}, p.76.
\textsuperscript{87} '\textit{மார்ப்பளோி வம்போரோ குரு உரோ லெனரு கிண்கோ},

\textit{கோதிசோ பொண்டாலோ அன்றொம் செறோ

நல்லோ விருதோலோ அத்தொம் செறோ

குருமோ பொண்டாலோ வங்கோ செறோ}' (\textit{Puram}, 9:8-11).

\textsuperscript{88} V.Kanakasabhai, \textit{op.cit.}, p.12.
therefore, were called Pancha Pandyas. These Pancha Pandyas are referred to in literature and Inscriptions. An inscription of the time of Kulottunga I says that the Chola monarch won a great victory against the Pancha Pandyas. They are said to have had their royal Capitals of five ruled at Madurai, Thenkasi, Kayattar, Korkai and Manamadurai. Thenkasi, Kayattar and Korkai that were within the Then Pandi Nadu, i.e. the erstwhile modern Tirunelveli region.

**Eastern Coast or Coromendal coast:**

The eastern sea, that is Bay of Bengal otherwise called as in Tamil Nadu Coastal region - Coramandal Coast has always been stormy and, therefore, inhospitable. This region, as it is now, was frequently rocked by destructive cyclones resulting in heavy loss of lives and property if land even today. Very recently made off-shore and under-water investigations corroborate the view of the loss of puhar, which is now found to have been located five kms into the sea. The Greeks in the time of Ptolemy called the river by the name of Solen. The Tambraparni, also known as Porunai, Ann Porunai, Than Porunai, Tambapanni or Taprobane; the perennial river, originates from the slopes of the Podiyilmalai, Poti or Tamil word Pothi a loaded goods like a hill, Kai means hand, that is these mountains were thick forest area; even now these mountain areas, thick forest of Kalakadu and Mundandurai have been declared as reserve forest for animals, medicinal plants and trees by Central and State Government of India. Podiyilmalai, or Agastyalamalai or then Tamil nadakan Podiyil in the Western Ghats has been

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92 1965 Bay of Bengal storm destroyed the town Dhanuskodi and, a high velocity ‘super cyclone’ hit the Orissa state on October 29, 1999 and has done irreparable damage to men and property and life was paralised. More than 5,000 people feared to dead. D.Dorcas Shanthini, *op.cit.*, p.27.


94 By Toprabane the Greek geographer appears to have meant the lands out of the Tambraparani river, particularly Ceylon. W.H.Schoff, *op.cit.*, pp.250-252.
referred to by Kamban.\(^95\) (80°37'N, 77°15' E).\(^96\) It traverses through the Tirunelveli and the Thuthukudi Districts. Before the 1989 A.D. (i.e.) bifurcation of the Tirunelveli District, it was said to be the only river in Tamil Nadu, which started and ended in the same district. After reaching the Papanasam falls that is Panatheertham etc., and running in easterly direction, the river flows into the Gulf of Mannar. Its tributaries are the Chittar and the Manimutharu. Kandana river and Karuppa river. There rivers jointly at Mukkudal (a small Village in Tirunelveli District.) with main Thambiraparani river derives its Waters from both the South-west and the North-east monsoons from May to December every year and hence its flow is almost perennial. Dams have been constructed across the river at various places namely Thambiraparani Dam, Cherverlaru Dam, Kadanantaki Dam, Karuppanathith Dam, Manimautharu Dam, and the new construction of Advinainar Dam near Kalakadu is going on for utilization of its water for irrigation. On its mouth was located Korkai on the Gulf of Mannar. Here was located the Pearl-fishery coast or the Parava Coast\(^97\) with in the traditional Pandya Kingdom.

**Gulf of Mannar**

This coast extended from Rameswaram in the north-east to Kanyakumari in the south, covering a coastal area of 250 kms and as far as the Adam’s bridge near Rameswaram to Thalaimannar of Sri Lanka. According to Wilfred H. Schoff, the pearl fisheries belonging to this kingdom, the product of which was sold only at capital, Uraiyur, were those of the Palk Strait. North of Adam’s Bridge, as distinguished from those of the Gulf of Mannar, which belonged to the Pandyan Kingdom, and were administered from Madura.\(^98\)


\(^96\) This hill is said to be the abode of the great sage Agastiyar, from whom, according to local traditions, Tamil was born. This has been variously called Agastiyakutam, Podikai, Podiyamalai, Podiga hill and Podiyam and in North Indian literatures as Potalagiri, Potalaka, etc. and the sage as Podiyan mamuni (Shu Hikosaka, *Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: A New Perspective*, Madras, 1989, pp.181-198). D.Dorcas Shanthini *op.cit.*, p.28.


Kapatapuram

Reference to Kavatapuram in Sanskrit literature has been observed by some scholars. Kavatapuram or Pandya-Kavatam is mentioned in the Arthasastra as a place where pearls could be obtained. Thus it is identified with Colchi of the Periplus. The Ramayana also refers to Kapata-Pandyanam, while Mahabharata speaks of Bhinne Kapata-Pandyanam. At the time of the composition of the Periplus, Kavatapuram was one of the chief ports of the Pandyan Kingdom, being more accessible to the capital.

The word ‘Kavatapuram’ is an adoption of the Sanskrit phrase ‘Pandya Kavatam’, meaning the “door of the Pandya Country”. The equivalent place in Tamilaham was Korkai. According to M.Raghavaiyengar, Pandya Kavata is referred to in the Ramayana which is said to have been composed before the seventh century B.C. According to the Ramayana story, when Sugriva had been asked by his Vanara men to locate the place of Sita in Sri Lanka, he informed them that they would come across Dandakaranya, after having crossed the Vindhya – Satpura ranges and the Narmada- Godavari rivers. He added that they would cross Andram, Pundram, cholam, Keralam and Pandya Countries. Then they would search for the Ayomukhamalai (Malaya Malai-Kudagumalai). Thereafter they would see the beautiful Kaviri. On the peak of Malaya Malai, they would see the great Agastya who was the venerable as the Sun God. Having met him and got his blessings, they would cross the Tambraparni river which was full of crocodiles. The river banks were full of sandalwood trees and groves giving gently shadow and the river joins the sea just like a lovely wife joining her husband. Then they would see Kavate of the Pandyas, gates of which were richly embellished and decorated with gold, pearls, jewels and other gems, giving a very lovely scenic beauty. Then they would reach the ocean and search for Sita. The Kautilyan-fame Pandya gate, which had been

100 Griffith, Valmikhi Ramayana, Book IV, Chapter 41, p.19.
104 D.Dorcas Shanthini, op.cit., p.31.
decorated with the Pandyan pearls, fished from that region itself.\textsuperscript{106} According to D.Doracas Shanthini, These places, mountains and rivers were parts of the \textbf{Dandakaranya}, in which there were no people nor any life, for thousand \textbf{Yojanas} from the foot of the Vindhya. It gave the appearance of a desert. Agastya is said to have peopled this area and made it fit for human living.\textsuperscript{107} The Pandya capital city after its destruction was renamed as Korkai.\textsuperscript{108}

After having described the origin, flow and joining of the river Tambraparani with the sea, Valmiki describes the scenic beauty of \textbf{Kavate}, the capital of the Pandyas. It is therefore said that the city of \textbf{Kavatapuram} was on the mouth of the Tambraparani river. Tilakar, Thirtha, and Govindaraja, the commentators of Valmikhi \textbf{Ramayana} interpret the passage to mean that the \textbf{Vanara} men would see the beautifully decorated entrance gate of \textbf{Kavatapuram} within its fortifications.\textsuperscript{109} It is believed that this Pandya capital of \textbf{Kavatapuram} was the seat of the second Sangam. In \textbf{Silappadikaram’s Urai Payiram} (preface to commentary), it has been mentioned as the place engulfed by the ‘second deluge’. According to it Kavatapuram was the capital of Nilamtharuthiruvin Pandyan. What we infer from Valmikhi’s reference and the commentators’ interpretations is that \textbf{Kavatapuram (Pandya Kavate)} was the capital of the Pandyas; it was on the mouth of the Tambraparni river; it was the seat of the second Sangam; and it was full of pearls, as pearls originate from this place.\textsuperscript{110} So we have the reference to pearls recorded in Sanskrit literature, particularly in Valmikhi \textbf{Ramayana}, even in the 7th century B.C.

\textsuperscript{106} K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, \textit{Age of the Nandas and Mauryas}, Benaras, 1952, p.134.

\textsuperscript{107} Even the myth about Parasurama says that he created the Kerala country by throwing his \textit{malu} (ax). These traditions refer to one fact i.e., the colonizing of the South by the Brahmins of the North. This is in no way true, that they had alone people the regions. They perhaps would have established Brahmin colonies. From what we get from the early sangam works about the physiographic divisions of Tamil land, its people and their occupations, we may not be far away from the truth that these regions were peopled with tribal such as the Veduvar, Kuravar, Villavar, Kurumbar, Idaiyar, Utr, Ulavar, Paratavar, Maravar, Nagar, etc., Had Agastya and Parasurama peopled the south, they would have done so with these peoples only. M.Ragavaiyengar, op.cit., (1938), p.7.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., p.211.

\textsuperscript{109} W.H.Schoff, op.cit., p.314.

\textsuperscript{110} D.Dorcas Shanthini, op.cit., p.33.
Korkai:

The Kolhai or Colchi of the Greco-Roman and Egyptian mariners and geographers was the brisk trading port of the Pandyas. It was one of the primary capitals or centers of Pandyan power.\textsuperscript{111} Ptolemy and the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea mention a place called Kolkhoi as an emporium of pearl trade.\textsuperscript{112} (It is located in Then Pandinadu (southern Pandya Country). It is situated in modern Thoothugudi District of Tamil Nadu State. According to Ptolemy, Colchi was situated 123° east longitude and 15° north latitude. River solen and its estuary was situated 123° east and 14°40' north.\textsuperscript{113} By tradition this was the earliest seat of Dravidian power in Southern India, where Chera, Chola and Pandya, the legendary progenitors of the great dynasties, ruled in common before their dominions were separated.\textsuperscript{114} At the time of the Periplus it was one of the chief ports of the Pandyan kingdom, being more accessible to the capital than Nelcynda. Owing to the deposit of silt by the Tamraparni River the sea retired from Kolkai, and in medieval times another nearby place, Kayal (the Coil of Marco Polo), became the port. At present the trade of this district passes through Tuticorin.\textsuperscript{115}

Korkai, the sea-port city of the Pandyas, became very busy in inter-continental trade mainly owing to pearl-fishing. The Pandyas seem to have made the crown prince stay at Korkai and look after the pearl-fishing and commercial contacts.\textsuperscript{116} Sangam works substantiate this view.\textsuperscript{117}

The Pandyas of the Sangam Age, are often called the Korkai Koman ('lord of Korkai') and Korkai Vendur ('king of korkai')\textsuperscript{118} located on the south-east coast at the

\textsuperscript{111} Ptolemy and the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea mention a place called Kolkhoi as an emporium of pearl trade.
\textsuperscript{112} V.S.V.Raghavan, op.cit., p.60.
\textsuperscript{113} W.H.Schoff, op.cit., p.211.
\textsuperscript{114} V.Kanakasabhai, op.cit., pp.53-54.
\textsuperscript{116} N.Subrahmanian, op.cit., p.40.
\textsuperscript{117} Silappadikaram, v.28.
\textsuperscript{118} R.Nagaswamy, Korkai Excavation, Damilica, December, 1970, pp.50-52.
mouth of the Tambraparani river, Korkai is a small village now six kilometers to the interior due to the recession of the sea in recent times. The urn burial cite of Adichchanallur, 119 also on the banks of the Tambraparani, is about fifteen kilometers west of the present village of Korkai. Sawyerpuram, the microlithic site (terisite) is only three kilometers away. Altogether the area is rich in archaeological remains, with an important group of proto-historic sites.120

In fact, Korkai presents an early occupation of it by the urn-burial folk, i.e. much earlier than the other dated sites of the Megalithic phase in the Tamil Country. It is indicated by the Adichchanallur urn-burials of a large size.121 The urn-burials of the Megalithic phase according to the Radio Carbon dating system of the lowest levels of occupation at Korkai locality it at 785 B.C. and even a little earlier.122

Saliyur:

Ahananuru, the Sangam work, mentions about Marungurpattinam, also mentioned in Agam and Nattrrinai123 or otherwise another one name, namely Nellurai in Madurai Kanchi124 a port city in Ramnad district and it was otherwise known as Saliyur which became the third port city of the Pandyas.125 It is said to have been situated between Korkai in the South and Thondi in the north.126

Thondi

Another port city of Pandya country during the Sangam Agam mentioned in Sangam Literatures Agananuru, Silapatthikaram refered it.127 The Pandya territory ran

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119 The Hindu dated, April 3, 2005.
121 N.Nagaswamy (Korkai Excavation), op.cit., p.50.
122 The Hindu dated February 17, 2005.
124 Maduraik-Kanchi, 75-88.
126 D.Dorcas Shanthini, op.cit., p.36.
127 Ahananuru, 10:8-13, Silappadikaram, xiv, ll. 106-112, Purananuru, 1.48.
along the Coromandel Coast on the east and from Quilon to Kanyakumari on the West Coast.\textsuperscript{128}

**Comari**

Comari or Comaria as mentioned by Ptolemy in his Geography and the anonymous author of the Periplus Maris Erythraea is nothing but Kumari or Then Kumari, i.e., the Cape Comorin (Kanyakumari). It is the southernmost extremity of the Indian Peninsula (8°5'N, 77°E) and also the southern extremity of the Pandya Coast.\textsuperscript{129} Its name is supposed to have come from the Sanskritised form of Komari, the ‘Virgin’, thereby attributing to its sacredness, as the ‘Virgin Goddess’ Parvati, the consort of Siva, is said to have her abode there. This story became very popular by the beginning of the first century A.D. Kanyakumari as a pilgrim centre is referred to in the Periplus, which states that pilgrims used to come to Comori to have bath in the sacred sea to wash off their sins.\textsuperscript{130}

This is Cape Comorin, the southern extremity of the Indian peninsula (8°5’N., 77 33’ E.). The name is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit Kumari, virgin, which was applied to Goddess Durgai, or Parvati, the consort of Siva.\textsuperscript{131} Comari or Comaria as mentioned by Ptolemy in his Geography and the anonymous author of the Periplus Maris Erythraea is nothing but Kumari or Then Kumari, i.e. the Cape Comorin (Kanyakumari). According to Periplus, there is another place called Comari where the Cape of Comari and a harbour are located. According to D. Dorcas Santhini, another legendary reference from Manimekhalai can be traced out; it speaks of one Sali who is said to have committed the sin of incest without knowing the identity of the partner.

\textsuperscript{128} The coasted belt from Panban to Tuticorin is popularly called the Gulf of Mannar, where there are a large number of (21) small coral reef islands like Kurusadi Thivu, Muyal Thivu, Appat-Thivu, Nalla Thanmeer Thivu; of them Muyal Around these islands are found Dukong (sea cow), Dolphin, sea horse, and large varieties of herbal fossils (plants) besides many other living creatures. The coral reef island near Tuticorin, which appeared very recently, is called Puthu Thivu (the New Island). It was discovered only last year (1998). Another coral reef island has made its appearance in the Keezhakarai Bhrathi Nagar near the Appat Thivu (Father Island). (Dina Mani, Madurai, July 2, 1999). The newly found island is expected to grow into a five hectare area in the next few years. In the Keezhakarai-sea there are the ‘Good Water Island’, ‘Thalaiyari Island’, Valait Thivu, and Manoli Thivu. D. Dorcas Santhini, op.cit., pp.36-37.

\textsuperscript{129} Mc Crindle, op.cit., p.110.

\textsuperscript{130} V. Kanakasabhai Pillai, op.cit., p.115.

\textsuperscript{131} W. H. Schoff, op.cit., p.237.
and had given birth to a son. Realizing her sin, she went on a pilgrimage from the North to South and had a dip in the sacred sea and thus washed off her sin. According to K. Sadasivan, there is also yet one more view that Kumari had derived its name from a zerophyte called Comari which appears to have been in abundance once in this place. It has been classified in Siddha herbal system as chenkomari (red) Venkomari (white) and Painkomari (green). Even today different types of coloured soil can be collected from the sea shore in and around Kanyakumari coastal area. These soils are being sold in small packets by small petty sellers even today.

Madurai as Capital:

The Pandyas had to shift their capital from Korkai to the present Madurai (9 55'N, 78 7'E) situated on the Vaigai riverbed at the time of Pandyan Mudathirumaran. The Pandyas had Madurai as the inland capital for safety and their secondary coastal capital at Korkai. References from Sangam Literature prove that Madura was doubtlessly the most famous and important town in Tamilakam at this period, being the capital city of the Pandyas who were renowned as the most powerful of the Tamil kings and munificent patrons of poets. What distinguished it however from other towns in the Tamil country were the high towers over the four gates of the fort. Hence it was familiarly known as Nan-madak-kudal or the "Cluster of four towers. The name was sometimes shortened into Madak-kudal, or Kudal.

The MaduraiK-Kanchi, the longest poem in the Pattuppattu Collection datable to the second century A.D. gives a graphic picture of Madurai as a large and beautiful city with a palace, a number of temples, two large markets. Markets or bazaars Nalankadi (daytime market) Allankadi (night time market) and well laid out streets

with lofty mansions.\textsuperscript{135} The site of this ancient Madura or Kudal was the most probably Pala Madura (or old Madura,) now in ruins, situated at a distance of about six miles to the southeast of the modern town of Madura. The ruins are now on the northern bank of the Vaigai where as ancient Madura stood on its southern bank; but it is quite possible that the river had changed its course since the destruction of the old city.\textsuperscript{136}

Madurai, the political center of the Pandyas, was perhaps the most important of the Tamil cities in the early historical period. There are four derivations to this place-name. Firstly, it is said to have derived from ‘Madura’ – a place in North India. The Pandyas themselves were considered the descendants of Pantu of the Mahabharata fame. Mathurai is not only related to Lord Krishna of Mahabharata, but it is still reposition of Indian art. Those historians having Sanskrit leanings accept this derivation only. Though the north Indian city of Mathura was very ancient, still ancient was Then Madurai (‘Soutehrn Madurai’), devoured by the furious sea.\textsuperscript{137} Secondly it is derived from the term Maduram (honey or ‘seat’). It indirectly refers to the nature of Tamil language, which is ‘sweet and chaste’, and this sweetness has been attributed to the place where the Tamil language and literature were patronized. It may be more applicable to the literary tradition.\textsuperscript{138} Thirdly, it has been given a physiographic derivation, which is from the commoners point of view. That is, it is said to have been derived from the land, i.e. Marudam which people used to call as Maduram.\textsuperscript{139} Even today, villagers, if asked where they go, used to reply that they are going to Marudai, instead of Madurai. Marudai is a corruption of Madurai, which appears to have been derived from the root Marudam. In fact, this etymological derivation has a folk tradition behind it. Fourthly, it is a later shortened form of Then Madurai, the first seat of the Pandyas and Tamil.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{135} Maduraik-Kanchi, ll. 489-492.
\textsuperscript{136} V. Kanakasabhai, op.cit., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{137} Silappadikaram, xi, ll. 17-22.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} Purananuru, 9, Kalithogai, 104:1-4.
devoured by the sea, the Pandyan Mudathirumaran is said to have shifted his capital to the present Madurai, since the Then (southern) Madurai was lost thus the place-name Madurai came to stay.¹⁴¹

The Pandyas had a great antiquity. The Pandyas became most famous for the establishment of the Tamil Sangams. The Sangam literatures contain much valuable sources on the early Pandyas. The foreign accounts and the works and other sources also throw light on the Pandyas of Madurai. Kautilya and Magesthenes also refer to them. The Pearls-fishery of the Pandya Coast or the Parava Coast extended from Rameswaram to Kanyakumari. The Pearl-fishery occupation assured the economic prosperity and external contacts of the Pandyas. It had helped the Pandyas to develop inter-continental trade and cultural contacts through Arabian Peninsula. It is an accepted fact that location is very important for any occupation and internal or external trade contacts.