CHAPTER TWO

TRADE AND TRADERS IN THE PANDYA COUNTRY
Trade and commerce was not new to the Pandya Country. Informations of foreign travellers, voyagers, mariners and adventurers of the ancient world have enabled the reflections about trade in the Pandya Country. The Hebrew and Latin literatures and archaeological remains in Aden, Alexandria, Java, Sumatra and even China add support to the fact of a trade network in the Pandya Country. Similarly, indigenous literature, inscriptions, coins and oral traditions very much corroborate the evidences found in foreign notices. These evidences are used as basic sources for reconstructing the nature and volume of trade and the various trade organizations, commodities of trade and the position of traders in the Pandya Country in general. This chapter therefore aims at recapturing the kind of Pandya royal patronage to trade and traders, issue of coins as currency and the nature of control they exercised on these trade, traders and trade organizations. It also tries to highlight the fact of recorded history of trade in the Pandya Country.

To begin with, man laboured for his subsistence. He hunted animals, gathered food, caught fishes and produced jungle food. But then man was a nomadic animal. When he began tending cattles, he developed pastures and settled down in groups, later into communities and little later into societies. When he started his settled life by means of agriculture, signs of culture appeared on the horizon. When production increased, he started to sell out the surplus. Sale to begin with was by barter and later by means of exchange. This was the beginning of trade. When population increased, demand for food also increased. To meet with this demand, man began to produce more and more goods. When he produced more and more, he found surplus products, which were used for exchange. Exchange was between groups, then between communities, then between societies and finally between countries. When there was a scarcity of certain commodities, he was in search of them and located places of surplus production. Thus he came into contact with new people and got his necessities. In his search for commodities, articles and goods, he explored new avenues of contact and trade. In such contact, traders of societies or countries came
closer and exchanged their goods. In some cases, they used middlemen for creating trade contacts. Trade in the Pandya Country was not an exception to this general rule. Trade and traders flourished voluminously under the Pandya patronage.

Man has passed through various stages of his cultural progress. He progressed from hunting, food gathering and fishing to cattle rearing in his pastoral land, to food producing in his agricultural land, and transporting the surplus production to his neighbourhood, and developing trade contacts with far off countries in his march to civilization and culture. In Tamil Nadu, the Kuravar, the Vetuvar and the Villavar of the Kurinchi tract hunted animals and gathered food such as roots, fruits, bamboo rice and honey; the Idaiyar or Ayar of the Mullai tract tended their cattle and produced small quantities of food in their pastoral land; the Ulavar or Urar of the Marudam land cultivated their lands and reaped bumper harvests and realized the beginning of a large number of institutions, indicating a primitive form of feudalism; and the Minavar (Paratavar) of the Neidal tract fished in the seas and produced salt and thus began developing inter-continental trade contacts. From the above, it becomes obvious that there were four forms of material production, namely animal husbandry, shifting cultivation, petty commodity production and plough agriculture. The Sangam classics, foreign notices, archaeological remains, particularly coins, ornaments and pot-shreds go to prove this state of life.

In the early historical period, urban forms emerged in restricted zones, i.e. urban enclaves in two eco-zones, viz., the Marutam (plains) and Neital (coast/littoral) in the form of consumption points and trading ports. Some transit zones like the semi-arid Kongu region, rich in mineral resources, acted not only as route areas but also as craft production enclaves. Similarly, the eastern littoral region in and around Thondi and Korkai also acted as centres of production of pearls and conch bangles, which were of great demand in western countries.

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2 Ibid., p.243.
Thus man developed both internal and external trade. Search for one’s own food resulted in accumulation of wealth. Accumulation of wealth resulted in artistic expressions. From simple trade, traders expanded their items of trade from food products to luxuries, arts and crafts. Thus arose the class of traders. Trade can flourish only in peace and prosperity under royal patronage and under healthy conditions. The Pandyas were, in fact, great patrons of trade and traders both from within and from abroad. This is borne out by a set of Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions of ca. 1st century B.C. coming from the Alagarmalai cave near Madurai. They record the endowment made over by a group of merchants and other donors, all from Madurai. The merchants are identified as traders in salt, sugar, iron implements and textiles. One of the donors was a goldsmith.

In the agrarian economy of yesteryears, merchants provided the impetus to the increase in production beyond subsistence, i.e., for exchange, and thus made possible the diversification of economic activity. Their trade, which extended beyond localized exchange to inter-regional and inter-national markets, succeeded not only in creating a more integrated market at a supra local level, but also enabled the growth of non-agricultural production beyond the limitations of local demand.

Further, Kanakalatha Mukund says that in the Indian ethos, trade has been recognized as one of the most important economic activities after agriculture and crafts. In the strictest sense, trade has always been associated with maritime trade. Against this background, this chapter aims at tracing the evolution of mercantile activities and organizations in the Pandya Country from its recorded history and especially in the early centuries before the birth of Christ. The focus here is not just on trade, but on the development of a social-economic phenomenon of merchant community and mercantile activity. This is used to denote a system in which merchants were not merely the agency in effecting the distribution of goods between

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3 Iravatham Mahadevan, Early Tamil Epigraphy From The Earliest Times To The Sixth Century A.D., Chennai, 2003, p.15.


5 Ibid., p.2.
different markets and regions, but had procured sufficient commodities to carry on trade even in the adverse seasons.

**Old Occupational Groups:**

The early layers of the Sangam society, had not been affected by the caste stratification. Its physiographic occupational groups lived in harmony with an amount of independence and interdependence. People engaged themselves in warfare, food producing, cattle-rearing, fishing, trading and teaching. There were artisans and craftsmen and trades like smithy (gold and black), carpentry, masonry, gem-cutting, bangle-making, singing and dancing. But when the rulers accepted the superimposition of the fourfold caste system, the simple Tamil society had become complex with a lot of problems. At a later time, as *Tolkappiyam*\(^6\) records, the Tamil society had become graded into Antanar (brahmins), Arasar (rulers), Vanikar (traders) and Velalar (agriculturists). In fact, there was no priestly or warring caste in ancient Tamil Nadu. The Pandyas are said to be of Paratavar (fishermen), the Cheras of Villavar (bowmen)\(^7\) as Nadars and the Cholas of agricultural lineage.\(^8\) The caste system appears to be a later social development, being the result of the process of Aryanization of Tamil Nadu. However, a Sangam poet, Mangudi Marudanar, mentions that four distinct sects rose on the basis of professions, namely Tutiyan, Panan, Paraiyan and Katamban.\(^9\)

It may be said that these people of the early Tamilaham were not based on the concept of the four varnas, but on its own norms. It has also been argued that these four kutis-panan, paraiyan, tutiyan and katamban - constituted the four castes of the region. However, in the poem the term kuti might have been used to mean a settlement of people or a family of people, but not a caste.\(^10\)

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\(^6\) *Tolkappiam*, iii, 977.81.9:76, 80.


\(^9\) *Purananuru*, 335.

The people who lived in the five-fold physiographic divisions belonged to various sects. They were:

1. Kuravar Kudi
2. Vetuvar Kudi
3. Ayar Kudi
4. Kanavar Kudi
5. Ulavar Kudi
6. Paradavar Kudi
7. Nulayar Kudi
8. Eynar Kudi
9. Maravar Kudi

We find in these several occupational groups early Tamilaham. Kollan (smith), Kuyavan (potter), Vetuvan (hunter), Itaiyan (cowherd or shepherd), Mallan (wrestler), Kuttan (dancer), Taccan (carpenter), Kuravan (hillman), Panan (itinerant singer), Katampan (tribesman), Tutiyan (player on a small...
drum), Paraiyan\textsuperscript{31} (player on a sounding drum) and Pulaiyan\textsuperscript{32} (cremation ground attendant). The Maravar is a class of warriors, praised for their valour and stoic endurance. The Velan (lancer) is another-a class of soothsayers dancing the veriyattu, often mentioned in akam poems.\textsuperscript{33} Besides these there were Cantor\textsuperscript{34} (intellectuals) and Ilicinar\textsuperscript{35} (the lowest people). Among these groups were the Vanigar\textsuperscript{36} (merchants), who carried on internal and external trade. However, the Vanigar class was in no way similar to the Vaniga caste of the four fold division. The Vanigar engaged themselves in trade by barter and there are frequent mentions of salt merchants traversing marine areas with their carts. Maritime commerce which flourished in later centuries pushed up the lot of the merchant classes.

Among the people of the Pandya Country, many classes of artisans and craftsmen lived therein. There were the workers on shells, chanks and pearls, goldsmiths, bullion merchants, clothiers, dealers in perfumes and flowers, painters and artists\textsuperscript{37} etc. Mangudi Marudanar records that dealers in various merchandise over crowded the bazaars and streets of the city of Madurai spoke different languages. The artisans and craftsmen argued the trade contacts. In this connection, Prof. T.P. Meenakshi Sundaranar observes, “Contact with another culture and civilization is responsible for a vigorous growth of civilization and culture. This happened in Greece, in England and in other places of the world. The contact with northern India, especially the two great missionary religions of Jainism and Buddhism, the contact with the west through trade, and the contact with the Eastern Islands through trade and colonization are responsible for stimulating a new growth in Tamil land which is formed in its Sangam literature, which represents a new historical development and a new trend in civilization and culture”.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{31} Purananuru, 335:7-8.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 82:1-4.
\textsuperscript{33} Encyclopaedia of Tamil Literature, Vol.I, pp.4-5; Purananuru, 20.
\textsuperscript{34} S.T. Jayapandy (Tr.), Tamilaha Nadar Varalaru, (Tl.) Thuthukudi, 1979, p.120.
\textsuperscript{35} Tolkappiam, iii, 632, 134:1-2, 170., Purananuru, 208:5-7., 287., 289., Kural, 120., Elathi, 78.
\textsuperscript{36} Kural, 981 – 990.
\textsuperscript{37} Madurai-Kanchi, II. 511-18.
\textsuperscript{38} T.P. Meenakshi Sundaranar, Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar, Madras, 1969, pp.6-7.
The Malavars (those from Malwa) and the Mlechchas (foreigners) or otherwise called Yavanas also lived in the city of Madurai. Impetus to maritime trade was improvised by the food producing agriculturists of the Marudam tract and salt fish and producing paravar and umanar of the neidal tract. According to Prof. R. Champakalakshmi, the differentiation became more marked in the marutam and the neital regions than in other regions. There the capitals and ports were located; there were an increase in trade ventures which introduced a further element of diversification. There was scope for the brisk activity of individual traders, vanikaccattu or groups of merchants, king’s officers or customs agents, and warehouse guards in the markets and port towns. Groups designated as vambalar, umanar, paratavar, vanikar, vilainar and pakarnar would refer to the itinerant trader or the newcomer, salt trader, fisher and trader, merchant, seller and hawker respectively.

The Sangam economy was simple and, in fact, mostly self-sufficient. People were industrious and frugal and believed in living well by earning wealth. They gained mastery in certain arts, crafts and industries-making bangles with diamond and beryl, weaving clothes, manufacturing articles of art such as toys and wheels. The need for owning wealth was frankly admitted thus: “This world is not for those who do not have wealth”. No doubt, there were, as of now, the very rich, the very poor and an intermediate class. The extreme opulence of some classes of people as well as the extreme poverty of some other classes is clearly portrayed in contemporary literature. The very rich were perhaps the kings and those that surrounded them earning their living by bestowing fulsome praises on kings. A vast majority of the

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39 Nedunyalvadai, II:31-5; Mullaipattu, II.65-66.

40 R. Champakalakshmi, op.cit., p.31.

41 Tamil Lexicon, Vol. IV, 2380 and 2496; V, 2380; VI.3492, 3586 and 3715.

42 Kural, 247.

43 The wealthy were such that they “Scared away the hens from the courtyard, where grains were spread for drying by throwing their precious ear-ring at them”. Pattinappalai, 23.

44 According to the poet Peruncittiranar, another Poet namely Peruntalai Sattanar, approached the exiled king Kumanan of Mudirai Hill, described his poverty in moving terms to him saying ‘when his child was unable to extract even a drop of milk from its mother’s prematurely dried up breasts, piteously looked up at the mother, the mother looked at her husband, the poet, with tears in his eyes; had come to the king for a favour’. (Purananuru, II.159-161).
people, with demanding stomachs and silenced voices, went on trying to solve their personal problems of food, clothing and shelter as best as they could by taking up sometimes very mean professions.

Food, an essential item for physical life, was the major item of man’s search. He did it by agricultural productions, fishing and salt-manufacturing and hunting. In the meantime, a considerable number of persons was engaged in industries and commerce both inland and foreign. The major towns like Korkai, Puhar, Uraiyyur, Vanci, Tondi, Musiri, Madurai, Kanchi and Karur, consumed most of these manufactured goods. Shipping and its allied industries like ship-building and harbour-building were developed to sustain this foreign trade.

Trade in ancient Tamilaham:

The Pattinappalai, Maduraikkanchi, Silappadikaram, Malaipatukadam and Manimekhalai and some foreign notices give graphic pictures about the city and village life of the Tamils. They describe the well-planned and fortified towns with their broad streets, palaces and mansions and an array of artisans and craftsmen in their dwellings. Notable among them were the weavers who spun rich brocaded dresses from cotton, silk as well as gossamer substances like rat hair in sections of towns set apart for them. Maduraik-Kanchi vividly describes the endless traffic and din and sights in the streets of Madurai round the clock, while Silappadikaram brings alive the luxurious life of its richer citizens dallying in love in their rich houses. Various grains (kulam) produced by local agriculturists with merchandise from various parts of India, as well as China, Ceylon and other parts of the world are known to the Tamil country. It is relevant to note here that the wealth of trade with Tamil Nadu attracted Roman traders to this soil; there were colonies of foreign Yavana merchants near the ports of Puhar and Arikkamedu45 (a site excavated in the fifties) on the east coast and Muziri on the west coasts. The Tamil kings had also well built naval force and their ships plied on the high seas.46


46 Purananuru, 66, 182.
Meaning of the term Vanigam (trade):

According to the Tamil Lexicon the word vanijya has a Sanskrit root, which means business. The words related to it are vanij, and vanija which mean a trader. It seems that the Tamil word vanigam has come from Sanskrit. However, we are yet to confirm the origin. The earliest trading population of India was the Indus Valley people. They certainly used a word for trade. It is unfortunately not known. But, it is said that the Indus script and language is Proto-Dravidian. In that case, the word vāniyam or vanipam would have had a Dravidian origin, as the Aryans did not develop their trading relations. The early Tamils produced their products and food stuffs in their own lands and bartered their surplus; thus trade came into existence.

Following the early phase, the Tamils accepted Buddhism and Jainism, which encouraged agriculture and trade respectively. Jains even today, are very great tradesmen. Buddha revolted against animal sacrifice, particularly oxen and cows, as sacrifice affected agriculture. However, the Tamil word viyaparam is a derivation from the Sanskrit word Viyapar. Trade meant buying wholesale or retail from shops or individuals and selling them wholesale or retail to shops or individuals. The Tamilmozhi Akarathi and Madurai Tamil – per – Akarathi (“the Madurai Tamil Great Dictionary”) give meanings like viyaparam (business), lapam and wuthiam (wages). Vanigam or business means service, buying and selling. An individual needs the goods, which another one has. He needs the service of others to get it. This need is the real beginning of trade. Tolkappiyam refers to it as Vanigam perume Vaniga Valkai.

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48 J.Kumudhini, op.cit., p.20.
49 N.Kathiraver Pillai, Tamilmozhi Akarathi, New Delhi, 1984, p.1546.
50 Tolkappiam, iii, 75.
51 Ibid.
52 N.Kathiraver Pillai's op.cit., p.1560; I.Kumudhini, op.cit., p.11.
54 Tolkappiam, iii, 632.
The Tamil Lexicon says that the word 'Vanigam' means business or trade.\(^55\) The words Vanigam (business) and Vanigan (trader) have been used widely in Sangam poetry. The following are examples of this usage in Purananuru\(^56\) and Elathi\(^57\) (one of the Eighteen Minor Works of the post-Sangam times). Tiruvalluvar in Tirukkural, Arathupal, Illaraviyal speaks about trade.\(^58\) However, K.Sadasivan traces the origin of the term from the root word pani, which means service. He thinks that the word Pani gives birth to Paniya from which the word Vanina would have emerged.\(^59\)

The term 'Vanigam' in Tamil Epigraphy:

In the Alagarmalai Tamizhi or (Tamil-Brahmi) records from 1 to 13 of Madurai District, the word 'Vanigan' is mentioned in more than four places as uppu vanigan, 'panita vanigan', 'kolu vanigan' and 'aruvai vanigan'.\(^60\) It shows that trade in salt, gur cloth and ploughshare flourished in the Pandya Country from about the 2\(^{nd}\) century B.C. Further, the Pugalur Chera inscriptions (No.9 of the series) assigned to 2\(^{nd}\) century A.D. records the name of a trader in gold from Karur as natthi (Nandi) the gold merchant from Karur-ur\(^61\) and (No.10) the name of an oil mongu as Venni Atan.\(^62\) The Mamandur Tamizhi (Tamil-Brahmi) inscriptions of the Late Tamil-Brahmi period (2\(^{nd}\) - 4\(^{th}\) centuries) refer to a carpenter by name ciruvan\(^63\).

Some Tamizhi (Tamil – Brahmi) inscriptions coming from Sri Lanka also refer to a 'Tamil vanigan Kudumbigan'\(^64\) Besides, the Tamizhi (Tamil – Brahmi) label-inscription at Mangulam\(^65\) cave refers to a dealer in kolu (ploughshares). From

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\(^{56}\) Purananuru, 134:1-2, 208:5-7.
\(^{57}\) Elathi, 78.
\(^{58}\) Kural, 120.
\(^{60}\) T.N.Subramanian, Pantair Tamil Eluttukkal, (TI.), Chennai, 1996, pp.73-89.
\(^{61}\) Iravatam Mahadevan, op.cit., p.417.
\(^{62}\) Ibid., p.419.
\(^{63}\) Ibid., p.423.
\(^{64}\) Inscriptions of Ceylon, Vol.I, p.28, Nos.356 (19),3 57(20).
\(^{65}\) ARSAE, 460 to 465 of 1906.
these we are able to push forward the antiquity of the use of plough, at least in the Vaigai river bed, to the second century B.C. The Tamil - Brahmi inscriptions from Alagarmalai, Pugalur, Mangulam and Sri Lanka illustrate that trade in gold, oil, plough share, cloth, etc., was of very early age. The occurrence of the term vanigan (merchant or trader) found mentioned in early Tamil- Brahmi inscriptions tells us about the advanced state of trade in the Pandya Country. Besides, the mention of ploughshare in the inscription very much strengthens the use of iron in the Madurai region in the B.Cs. This is further corroborated by the finding of iron objects in the megalithic cemeterial mound at Adichanallur near Tirunelveli, and it corresponds to the early layers of the Sangam age. This term has been invariably used to denote a merchant of internal trade and a trader of external contacts.

Modus operandi of Sangam Trade:

Trade in the Sangam age was both internal and external. Internal trade was within the five physiographic regions. It was conducted by means of barter (pandamarru). Since all the regions were inter-related there was much contact between each one of them. Trade was one of the major means of contact. Sangam works refer to great traders, their caravans, their police force, markets, marts, and the guilds of great traders.

The principal articles which the hilly tribes offered to their neighbours in exchange were honey, roots and fruits whereas the pastoral people offered cattles, milk and milk products. However, cattle became the commodity unit and assumed the function of money. Secondly, salt has been regarded as an essential commodity. Most of the inland trade was carried on in barter system. Paddy was also used as the medium of exchange. While the hilly man exchanged his honey, fruits and roots for milk, milk products and cattles, the agriculturist exchanged his rice for fish, salt, milk and cattles etc. There was independence and interdependence. No one, however, was exclusively independent of the other. While barter system cemented their relationship internally, coins were used for purposes of exchange mostly in the case of external

68 Pattinappalai, II. 80-93; Maduraik-Kanchi, II. 254-256.
trade. Rajan Gurukkal remarks, “Modern writings referring to the question of exchange during the period cast serious doubts on the relevance of the term trade in the context of exchange involving no notion of exchange-value and profit”. Historians like R.Champakalakshmi, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib and Valuthat Kesavan have supported this view. They argue that this is further corroborated by the absence of any means of exchange other than Roman coins in various places of South India. However, these historians do not deny the prevalence of a network of trade.

Commodities of Trade:

Epigraphical sources provide us with the necessary information about the various kinds of commodities, food products and spice items. Sangam works corroborate these inscriptive evidences. The Piranmalai inscriptions in the Ramanathapuram District give us a vivid picture of the following articles such as uppu (salt), nel (paddy), arisi (rice), payaru (green gram), avarai (beaños), tuvarai (dhal), amanam (castor seed), pakku (areca nuts), milagu (pepper), manjal (turmeric), sukku (dried ginger), venkayam (onion), kadugu (mustard), jirakam (cumin seed), kaducay (chebula myrobalans), nelli (embellic myrobalans), tanri (beleric myrobalans), irumbu (iron), parutti (cotton), nul (yarn or thread), parum pudavai (thick cloth), men pudavai (thin cloth), ulandu (a kind of thread), melugu (wax), el (sesamum), koni (gunny), sandanam (sandal).

Traders in the Pandya Country:

Early Tamil classics and the Tamil-Brahmi records around in the various kinds of traders of the Tamil country. In Madurai-Kanchi and other Sangam works, we come across information about various types of traders and trade.

1. Cloth merchants;
2. Copper vendor;

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70 ARE., 1914:88.
71 Pattinappalai, ll. 8-12; Perumpanarrupadai, ll. 260-261: Ahananuru, ll.350: 11-13;
72 SI!, Vol.VII, No.442, c. AD 1300.
73 Madurai-Kanchi, ll.513.
74 Ibid., ll.514.
3. Seller of flowers and sandal wood paste;  
4. Seller of rice products like appam;  
5. Fish mongers;  
6. Salt vendors;  
7. Toddy-sellers;  
8. Paddy merchants (dealers in Paddy);  
9. Cereal merchants;  
10. Pearl-traders;  
11. Sellers of miscellaneous things.

The list provides the names of goods and their dealers and sellers. Among them were external traders of pearls and conches. But all of them were inland traders, catering to local needs may also refer to traders outside the Tamil coastal areas. This information is substituted by the epigraphic evidences of merchants in oil, ploughshares, gur salt and cloth in and around the Madurai region. The persons who were engaged in inland trade were called Sathuvan and the leader of such traders was known as Masathuvan. Sea traders in general were called Manaikan. The word Manaikan is from the word navai, which means ship. Kovalan, the hero of the Tamil epic Silappadikaram was the son of Masathuvan, a great trader in land where ma means “great” or “big”. Thus the word means a big trader of land. Kannagi, the wife of Kovalan, was the daughter of Manaikan, a great trader on sea. The wealthy and

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75 Ibid., ll.515.  
76 Ibid., ll.624-627.  
77 Ibid., ll.225.  
78 Ibid., ll.117.  
79 Ibid., ll.662.  
80 Malaipatukadam, ll.413.  
81 Patirrupattu, ll.13:21.  
82 Pattinappsai, ll.98.  
83 Ahananuru, 181:22-23.  
84 I.Mahadevan, op.cit., (2003), PP.368-423.  
86 Ibid., p.138.  
87 Ibid., pp.138-139.
the noble trader was conferred the title **Etti** and presented with a shield namely **Etippu**. **Manimekhalai** records that Dharumadathan of Puhar, who came to the Pandya court as a leading international trader, was the recipient of such a honour at Madurai, i.e. the title of fame and the shield.\(^{89}\) In the past traders used to move from place to place in guilds. In Tamil these guilds were called **Vaniga Sathu**.\(^{90}\) Such a trader was called **Sathuvan**. Sangam literature call those who traded in groups as **Vaniga Sathu**.\(^{91}\) In Ramanathapuram District, near Elayankudi there is a village called **Sathani**. Similarly, there is a town called **Sathur** in Virudhunagar District. Among the Nattukottai Chettiyars, men are commonly named **Sathaiyah** and women **Sathammai**. The original name of the Ex.Minister for Hindu Religious and Endowment Board coming from the Idayar family is **Sathaiah**. However, he is known later as Tamizhkudimagan. From the above example it is learnt that even today the Sangam word **Sathu** is in vogue. As these traders formed guilds they had a lot of advantages. They moved together, they bought together, they transported their goods with care, sold together and, finally, it was helpful for them to safeguard their money.\(^{92}\) In the Sangam age itinerant traders were accompanied by their own soldiers.\(^{93}\)

**Merchant Guilds in the Pandya Country:**

The active functioning of trade guilds was an important feature of South Indian economy in the ancient and medieval times. Their activities in the Pandya Country were not so well-known because of paucity of evidence. Even the available information is very meager. The early **Tamizhi** (Tamil- Brahrni) inscription found in the vicinity of Madurai at Mangulam of 3\(^{rd}\) century B.C. furnishes some information about trade and traders. The inscription records that many traders in salt, gur gold and dealers in semi-precious stone were responsible for the donations made to the Jain ascetics undertaking penance in the hills around Madurai like Anamalai and

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\(^{88}\) **Silappadikaram**, xv, ll.163-164; see also S. Padmanaban, **Maritime Trade of the Early Tamils**, Nagercoil, 1990, p.2.

\(^{89}\) **Manimekhalai**, iv, 22:111-114.

\(^{90}\) **Perumpanarrupadai**: ll. 80-82; **Ahananuru**, 245:5-7.

\(^{91}\) **Kurunthogai**, 124:1-2, **Ahananuru** 17:12-14, 169: 4-7.

\(^{92}\) Ibid., 39:10, 119:8. **Silappadikaram**, i, 88-89.

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 89:9-14, 343:12-13.
Tirupparankundram. The Mangulam inscription records the donation given by a member of a merchant guild of Vellarai village. The term used for the guild is nigamattor, the same word by which the merchant guilds were called in the Satavahana inscriptions of more or less the same period. This refers to the active functioning of trade guilds in the Pandya Country even before the beginning of the Christian era. Further, amplification of the commercial activity, the flourishing market at Madurai is obtained from the literary works of the Sangam and post-Sangam works like the Silappadikaram. Besides, the matter of some importance from the Pugalur Cera inscription, specifying about guilds, is to be considered. According to Perunkadai, a work of the post-Sangam age, some of the guilds were bigger than other ordinary guilds.

Though the prevalence of the trade guilds could certainly be traced back to the Sangam period, the large scale development of guild commerce in the Pandya Country, indeed South India as a whole, could be traced only from 6th–7th centuries onwards, during the times of the Pallavas, Chalukyas, imperial Pandyas, Cheras of the Perumal line and the imperial Cholas. Inscriptions in the Pandya Country from 9th-10th century onwards give us a fairly connected picture of the activities of the trade guilds as well as the individual activities of the members of the guilds. Several facts concerning their free movement from one place to another, their settlements, the names of the guilds, their philanthropic activities both inside and outside the Pandya Country, are well attested to by inscriptions. A record of the 10th century A.D. at Sirudavur in Chingleput District has recorded a grant made by a merchant of the Pandya Country to the Vishnu temple of that village. Similarly, a record of the 14th century mentions that the merchants of Pandyamandalam met in

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94 ARSAE., 460 to 465 of 1906.
95 K.V.Raman Proceedings of the South Indian History Congress, 1980, Madurai, p.133.
96 ARSAE., 341 to 347 and 349 of 1927-28.
97 Perunkadai, 55:46-49.
99 ARE., 104 of 1933.
Tondaimandalam\textsuperscript{100} and undertook several charities in the area. Especially coastal towns like Mayilapur and Mamallapuram seem to have had close links with the merchant guilds.\textsuperscript{101}

Commercial guilds such as Manigramam, Nanadesi, Tisaiyirattu Ainurruvar, Nagarattar, Anjuvannattar, Ayyavole etc. flourished in South India in the medieval days. Many of them had a far-flung trade connections both within and beyond the shores of India in the foreign countries like Sri Lanka, Malaya, Sumatra, etc.\textsuperscript{102} Among them, of course, the Nanadesi-Tisaiyirattu Ainuruvar\textsuperscript{103} had a long and chequered history. This guild seems to have been quite active in the area around Tirumayyam on the borders of the Pandya Country. Even in the 9\textsuperscript{th} country A.D, it was responsible for a charity of excavating a tank and for its maintenance throughout the year for which the guild instituted an endowment. The activity of the same guild in Ambasamudram\textsuperscript{104} in Tirunelveli District is attested to by a record dated 1033 A.D. The guild donated lands to the Siva temple at Ambasamudram.\textsuperscript{105}

The community, which took the leading part in trade and commerce, was the Nagarattar, who were particularly active in the Pandya Country.\textsuperscript{106} By virtue of their long experience and enterprise in this field, they did yeomen service for promoting the commercial activities even with far-off countries. The numerous public charities and donations made by the community clearly suggest their flourishing position in the society and the abundant surplus they had. They were responsible for establishing and expanding the markets and market towns. A record of 9\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. at Uggirankottai\textsuperscript{107} in Tirunelveli District mentions the active functioning of the

\textsuperscript{100} ARE, 1912, 256. C. AD 1100.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{102} R.Champakalakshmi, op.cit., p.56.

\textsuperscript{103} K.Govindhan, Tamizhar Vanigam (TI.), Madras, 1956, p.82.


\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., p.134.

\textsuperscript{106} SII., Vol.VI, No.40.

\textsuperscript{107} R.Champakalakshmi, op.cit., p.44.
Nagarattars in the Rajasingaperangadi. They belonged to the guild called Ainurruvar evidently the Thisaiyirattu Ainurruvar. One of them was responsible for the construction of the outer courtyard of the temple, which is hence called Nagarattartiruchurralai.\textsuperscript{108} The merchant guild probably had substantial part to play in the formation of the fortified town.\textsuperscript{109}

A 13th century record at Pillaiyarpatti in Sivagangai District gives interesting details of the Nagarattars,\textsuperscript{110} who were colonizing at different towns. It speaks about the origin of Rajanarayanapuram branch of Nagarattar. Thus at Erukkankudi, the Nagarattars were living in the street called Ainurruvar perumteru.\textsuperscript{111} They purchased lands at Marudangudi for founding a new colony called Rajanarayanapuram or Pillaiyarpatti,\textsuperscript{112} which is stated to have been one of the 64 Davalams of merchant communities,\textsuperscript{113} that had organised themselves as associate bodies of Thisaiyirattu Ainurruvar.\textsuperscript{114} Their guild called Thisaiyirattu Ainurruvar was functioning at Pillaiyarpatti. The temple at Sivapuri was evidently built by them since the temple was called Ayirattu Ainurruvar Isvara Udaiyar.\textsuperscript{115} Ariviyur near Sivapuri was known as Nanadesi Uyyavandanpattinam.\textsuperscript{116} Periodical meetings or conventions of the members of the guild for transacting certain common matters were recorded. They also levied and collected special chess for various purposes and for certain common endeavours. Thus a record of the 14th century mentions that the representative of Thisaiyirattu Ainurruvar met and decided that contributions proportionate to the volume of trade and business transacted should be made for charitable purposes. Another such occasion, which took place in

\textsuperscript{108} SII. 199 of 1935-36.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., p.134.
\textsuperscript{110} ARE., 23 of 1935-36.
\textsuperscript{111} K.V.Raman, \textit{op.cit.}, p.134.
\textsuperscript{112} R.Champakalakshmi, \textit{op.cit.}, p.225.
\textsuperscript{113} SII., Vol.VIII, No.198.
\textsuperscript{114} ARE., 23 of 1960-61.
\textsuperscript{115} ARE., 31 of 1928-29.
\textsuperscript{116} SII., Vol.VI, No.31.
Kiramangalam,\textsuperscript{117} is recorded in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century inscriptions. Yet another occasion the merchants in the Ramanathapuram and Pudukottai areas belonging to Padinen Vishayattar,\textsuperscript{118} Valanjiyar, Anjuvannattar, Manigramattar met for similar common purposes. The Manigramattar were also functioning at Velankudi and Kodumbalur areas.\textsuperscript{119}

\textbf{Valanjiyar:}

The Valanjiyar was another merchant guild operating in different places. The Valanjiyar of Tennilangai or Sri Lanka was active in the Pandya Country, whose close trade relations helped many of them to operate in this country and their contributions to local Siva and Vishnu temples are recorded. Thus a member of Tennilangai, Valanjiyar guild was responsible for the construction of the Amman shrine in Sundarersvara temple in Aruppukkottai in Virudhunagar District.\textsuperscript{120} The Valanjiyar at Tirunelveli had the katranmai right of lands of the local temple in return for certain services to the temple. The presence of Valanjiyar at Ennayiram in South Arcot District is recorded in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{121}

\textbf{Anjuvannattar:}

Another merchant guild, which had trade relations with Tamil Nadu, was the Anjuvannattar. It is considered as the guild of Arab or Syrian merchants, later it was applied only to Arab merchant groups. We get evidences for their activity on the East Coast in places like Kilakkarai, Nagapattinam and probably Kayalpattinam also and Tithandodanapuram of Tondi\textsuperscript{122} in the Pandya Country. Probably they were engaged in importing horses from Arabia\textsuperscript{123} for supplying them to the Pandya kings and exporting pearls, spices, pepper, etc. Various explanations are given to this term

\textsuperscript{117} ARE., 125 of 1916.

\textsuperscript{118} SII., Vol.VI, 40, 41 & 47 of Mannargudi Epigraphy.

\textsuperscript{119} SII., Vol.III, No.52.

\textsuperscript{120} ARE., 406 of 1914.

\textsuperscript{121} ARE., 598 of 1926-27.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.,1926-27:598.

\textsuperscript{123} K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, op.cit., (1972), p.166.
Anjuvannam. Some interpret it as ‘a corporation of five classes of craftsmen’ and according to others it denotes ‘five communities.’ But Bhaskara Ravivaraya’s Copper-plates given to the Jewish merchants exempt their guild from payment of customs. From this, it is learnt that the term (Jews) is associated with them. The term Hanjamana is also found in Telugu and Kanada inscriptions. South India had horse trade with the Arab merchants for a long period of time. One of the Sangam poems, Pattinappalai makes mention of the import of horses from across the sea though the country is not specified. Besides mules and buffaloes used for transport of goods, there among them were people who travelled in chariots, which were either drawn by mules or by horses. Much have been yoked to the chariots were adorned with rings of beads. Bells were also tied round the necks of the horses. These chariots to which horses were yoked should have been used for distant travels and as fast moving vehicles on land. This indicates that horses were not unfamiliar to the people of the Sangam age. One particular class of traders called Kudiraichetties is mentioned in later inscriptions as specially engaged in importing and supplying of horses, possibly they acted as agents for the Arab merchants. We get a very graphic account of a busy trade in horses in 13th and 14th centuries in the account of Marco Polo and Wasaff.

According to R.Champakalakshmi, the Anjuvannam represented an organization of foreign merchants. They began their commercial activities on the West Coast (Kerala) in the eighth and ninth centuries and spread out to the other coastal areas of South India by the eleventh century AD. They interacted both with the local merchants and the Ainurruvar (‘five hundred’), a symbiotic relationship.

124 EI., Vol.III, No.11.
125 K.V.Raman, op.cit., p.135.
126 Pattinappalai, ll.185-191.
128 Ahananuru, 254.
129 Ibid., 66.
130 Ibid., 234.
131 ARE., 25 of 1913.
being fostered by trade interests. The earliest known record of the Anjuvannam refers to a group of Jewish traders who acquired settlements on the West Coast from the Venad (South Travancore) rulers. The term Anjuvannam, wrongly interpreted as a group of five different communities or castes, may well be derived from Anjuman, perhaps first used by early Arab Muslim traders of the West Coast, a name surviving down to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries on the Canara Coast among Arab Muslim traders as Hanjumana. From the west coast they seem to take made their area of operation including the East coast around the Tondi and Kayal regions in the eleventh century A.D.

Of course, Anjuvannam seems to have referred to Jewish traders who came to the West Coast and acquired settlements. Later, however, it was also used for Arab Muslim traders. Some epigraphic evidences fromKonkan in Karnataka State reveal that a merchant guild called Hanjumanna was active from about 10-11th centuries A.D. It was the same as Anjuuannam. It could be derived from Hanjuman. In Visakhapattinam we have three inscriptions which refer to a member of Anjuvannam who, coming from Matottam (Mantai) in Sri Lanka, seems to have constructed a palli (most probably a mosque) called as Anyutuva-perumpalli (in Telugu) or done something good to that palli. The palli has the name of Ainurruvar as its component and the nagaram of Visakhapattinam and the ruling king gave some privileges to him in appreciation of what he had done for the palli. The close relation of Anjuvannam with Ainurruvar is clear from these inscriptions.

133 R.Champakalakshimi, op.cit., p.49.
135 R.Champakalakshimi, op.cit., p.49.
136 M.G.S.Narayanan, Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala. Here the Anjuvannam is taken to be an organization of Jewish traders. R.Champakalakshimi, op.cit., p.237. Tittandatanapuram (Tondi) inscription, ARE., 598 of 1926.
137 Ibid., p.313.
138 Ibid., pp.312-327, South Canara, Annual Report on Kannada Research in Bombay Province, 1939-40, no.38. See also K.V.Ramesh, History of South Kanara, Dharwar, 1970, p.253, where the author suggests that Hunjamana represented Arab-Persian merchants.
140 R.Noboru Karashima, South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions A.D. 850-1800, Delhi, 1984, pp.85-86.
A late thirteenth century inscription from Tittandatanapuram (Tondi) states that a record of Pandya King Veera Pandya registers an agreement made by several merchant groups namely the Anjuvannam, Manigramam and the Samanta Pandasalis on the levy of certain taxes on commodities sold and purchased for the rebuilding expenses of the local Siva temple. The Erivirappattiman was located at Idaivali. The earliest Tamil Islamic literature Palchanthamalai has given evidence about settlements of Anjuvannam. One street called theru (street) in Tenkasi in Tirunelveli District and another at Thuckalai in Kanyakumari District stand as testimony.

Ayyavole:

Ayyavole is another merchant guild, patronised by the Pandyas. They have been invited by the Pandyas to settle in their country. Many South Indian historians differ in their opinion to the meaning of the Ayyavole guild. To them it was the same as the Ainurruvar. We do get references to Five Hundred Svamis of Ayyavolapura (Aihole). This Ayyavole guild or Ayyappolil received the first patronage from the Chalukyas and later on from the Cholas as well as from the Pandya Country. A passage from the Piranmalai record describes Ayyavole guild as Aimpolir Paramesvarikkum Bhumidevikkum makkalagi. The members were considered as the devotees or descendants of the Goddess Paramesvari of Aihole. Many of these members entered the Pandya Country from the Kaveri basin and settled down there. A record from Kiramangalam in Pudukottai District states

141 ARE., 598 of 1926-27.
142 Ibid., 38 of 1931-32.
144 Noboru Karashima, op.cit., p.297.
145 ARE., 138 of 1910; K.V.Raman, op.cit., p.315. Some records from Pudukottai refer to the gifts to the temple of Ayyappolil Nacciyar. IPS. 134.
147 Ibid., No.136.
that the Pandya King Maravarman Kulasekhara in his 38th regnal year\textsuperscript{148} attests to the presence of the \textbf{Padinen Vishayattar} there. There is also their family tradition which states that in Kali year 3808 some \textbf{Nagarattars}, on the request of the Pandya King, settled down at various places in the Pandya Country like banks of the Vaigai and around Piranmalai:\textsuperscript{149}

This date will take the episode back to the beginning of the 8th century when probably there was an influx of some \textbf{Nagarattars} from the Chola to the Pandya Country. But this may be one among the several such periodical settlements of the merchant classes at various places in the Pandya Country. We hear about the mobility of the merchants from Pandya Country to other places also. The Karnataka State had given some of the Tamil inscriptions about the Pandya Country trade patronising guilds in Karnataka also.\textsuperscript{150} A ballad in Malayalam refers to the merchants from the Pandya Country as \textbf{Pandi}. Arabs were recorded in it a \textbf{Jonagar}\textsuperscript{151} (Sonagar).

The foregone brief account gives us a glimpse of the activity of various types of the merchant guilds in the Pandyan Country at various periods of history. They seem to have functioned from early times as part of a vast network of guilds that was operating in South India as a whole. The presence of the coastal land and proximity to the country like Sri Lanka gave certain special advantages to the merchants of the Pandya Country. During the early centuries of the Christian era, the Tamil merchants seem to have acted as middlemen for the Sri Lankan articles exported to the West.\textsuperscript{152} They would have carried on their long tradition of promoting commerce and industry and contribute to the development of markets, trading centers and also cherish the tradition of philanthropy and charitable activities to the present day.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{148} \textit{ARE.}, 125 of 1916.

\textsuperscript{149} \textit{SIL.}, Vol.V, No.40.


\textsuperscript{151} K.Sadasivan \textit{op.cit.}, (1999), pp.395-398.

\textsuperscript{152} Paranavitana, \textit{op.cit.}, \textit{Plate XI}, No.94a, \textit{Silappadikaram}, xxx.160.

\textsuperscript{153} P.Jeyakumar, \textit{Ports of Tamil Nadu} (Medieval Period), Tanjavur, 2001, p.15.
There were sects like Valangiar, Anjuvannattar, Nagarattar, Nanadesi, Manigramattar, Nattukottai Chetty, Chithirameliperiya Nattar, Disai Ayirathu Ainurrvar. Upto the 14th century such guilds functioned in inland and foreign trade. Epigraphical sources, coins, copper-plates and literary evidence substantiate the details given above.

Trading Centres (Markets) in the Pandya Country:

According to the Tamil Lexicon the word angadi means bazaar and bazaar street.\textsuperscript{154} To the Kazhaga Tamil Agarathi it means shop or market.\textsuperscript{155} The work namely Chentamiz Cholpirappiyal Peragaramudali refers to it as shop, market or daily market.\textsuperscript{156} The Perunchol Agarathi refers to it as shop or market.\textsuperscript{157} An angadi is a place where the goods needed by the people are kept for sale. Besides, the term Avanam was also used to denote the market place.\textsuperscript{158} But the goods were sold even on the streets; for example, the palaiyar sold the flowers they had collected in bamboo pipes in the streets of the village.\textsuperscript{159} One of the poems of the Ahananuru refers to a Panmagal selling the valai in the streets.\textsuperscript{160} There were also round the clock markets. We know the details of angadis of Madurai from Maduraik-Kanchi and Nattrrinai of the Sangam age.\textsuperscript{161} As said above, Nalangadi refers to the day market. The poet Mangudi Marudanar compares the Madurai market to the sea. Just like the flowing of waters from so many sources which do not make any difference to the level of the sea, the buying of the goods from the various shops of Madurai does not reduce the goods from these shops. The businessmen bring goods steadily and supply them to these shops. Thus there was no shortage of goods for sale in the markets of Madurai,\textsuperscript{162} a cosmopolitan centre of bearing, trading and invoking God whereas Allangadi, meaning night market, started functioning after sunset and

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., pp.15-16.
\textsuperscript{156} I, Kumuthini, op.cit., pp.54-55.
\textsuperscript{157} Peruncholagarathi, Tanjavur, 1989, p.124.
\textsuperscript{158} Ahananuru, 122.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 331.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 126.
\textsuperscript{161} V.C.Sasivalli, Pandaya Tamilar Tolilgal, (Tl.) Chennai, 1989, p.237.
\textsuperscript{162} Maduraik-Kanchi, II.424-427.
business went on up to midnight. Mangudi Marudanar in Madruaik-Kanchi speaks about shops that were run day and night in Madurai. The poet describes both the day and night markets (Nalangadi and Allangadi) with a new word Iruperu neyamath. It means shops that were run day and night. Hence Madurai is also known as Thoonga Manahar (‘the sleepless big city’) always awake. As far as the knowledge of the researcher goes in no other literary text this kind of expression is used.

Coastal Trade:

Big cities like Puhar had the Maruvurppakkam (inland towns) and the Pattinappakkam (coastal towns). Such big cities had also markets and bazaars where many merchants met one another for the purpose of selling or buying different kinds of commodities including various foodstuffs. Port towns such as Tondi, Korkai, Puhar and Muziri were always seen busy with their marts and markets, imports and exports. Commodities were loaded and unloaded in native and foreign ships and vessels alike. In such a brisk trade, Paratavar, the people of the littoral region, engaged themselves and developed the inter-continental trade contacts. They fished various kinds of fishes, pearls, and conches, produced salt and built ships. Among the Paratavar were Chettis who controlled the trade abroad. At times, when the seasonal winds failed, they rowed their boats along the shore and carried on their usual trade. Pearls collected from Korkai were taken to Uraiur for their transport to Muziri and from there to the outside world. Thus the Paravas or Paradavar were quite used to sea voyages.

External Trade in the Pandya Country:

The indigenous traders not only controlled internal markets but also carried on external trade. This is particularly noticeable in the writings of Marxist historians like

\[163\] Ibid., II.536-544.
\[164\] Ibid., II.358-365.
\[165\] Ahananuru, 122:1-3.
\[166\] Pattinappalai, II.30-32.
\[168\] Purananuru, 343:2-10.
Rajan Gurukkal\textsuperscript{170} on the overseas exchange or the extensive foreign trade of the Tamils. These historians view that traders of Tamilaham had not initiated foreign trade. Instead, they were inspired by the notices of the Greco – Roman geographers and navigators and by the hoards of Roman coins. Even in the absence of initiative, they sarcastically remarked that a few historians of South India imagined a civilization of the Tamils as old as eighteen hundred years. They say further that the archaeological data from excavations and the literary references to \textit{Yavanas} bringing gold converge towards an inference to support modern imaginative reconstruction of the age of Tamil civilization. It was presumed that the Tamil benefited the most in these relations due to the drain of gold from Rome as noted by Pliny. However, in the absence of clear evidence for the Tamils organizing overseas trade and controlling the traffic of goods, it remains a problem. The silence of archaeology about the huge urban complexes described in \textit{Maduraik-Kanchi} and \textit{Pattinappalai} had been another vexing problem. This has led to the assumption that South India prior to the inception of Roman trade was not a seat of civilization but, on the contrary, the Roman trade acted as the catalyst for the genesis of its civilization\textsuperscript{171}. The reasons for such an assumption are that there seemed to be no proper trade connections with other countries. There were no references in early literatures for the availability of indigenously minted coins. Besides, there were no means of transport and no indigenous merchant to carry on trade, because mostly foreign ships were used and there were no merchant’s guilds too. This view does not hold good at present, for we have today a lot of evidences.

References to the activities of the trade guilds \textit{nigamattor}\textsuperscript{172} found in inscriptions lend further support to similar reference like \textit{masattuvan}\textsuperscript{173} found in literature. The discovery of a signet ring from the Amaravathi river bed at Karur with the name of a leader of Tamil caravan merchant (\textit{sattan sattavegi}) dated to 1\textsuperscript{st} century B.C. links Tamil Nadu with the commercial network of the neighbouring countries.

\textsuperscript{170} Rajan Gurukkal, \textit{op.cit.}, p.53.


\textsuperscript{172} Meenakshipuram Epigraphical Evidence, ARSIE, 460 to 465 of 1906. Reading through the estampages of I.Mahadevan.

\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Silappadikaram}, i, 4:30-35.
The existence of this commercial network is reinforced by the discovery of punch-marked and round-shaped coins, in gold and silver, minted in the Pandya Country found in many sites in Tamil Nadu and in many other parts of India. These coins carry the double-carp emblem and elephant. This link seems to be a forerunner of the well-known commercial guilds of medieval period like the Manigramam, Nanadesis, Aiohole, Thisaiyayirathu Ainurruvar and Anjuvannam, which played an active role in the internal and external trade in South India, particularly Tamilaham.\textsuperscript{174}

Moreover, a document of the 4\textsuperscript{th} century A.D., recently discovered in Egypt, speaks of a trade agreement signed by a Tamil merchant and the Egyptian government\textsuperscript{175} and the discovery of a touch-stone (uraikal) in Takua-pa\textsuperscript{176} bear clear testimony to Tamil's overseas trade contact.\textsuperscript{177} A large number of signet (gold and silver) rings have been gathered from the Amaravathi river bed. At Alexandria, there is a godown bearing the name 'Korkai'. The recent archaeological excavations conducted at Alagankulam, near Ramnad, has unearthed an ancient Pandya copper-coin and a piece of pottery, with black and red colours. The coin bears the image of an elephant on the one side, and that of a fish, the symbol of the Pandyas, on the other. The pottery chip bears the image of the term thuvariman in ancient Tamil letters, meaning 'with unique qualities'. A brick lined sewage system was also discovered recently at the Alagankulam site, with the bangles made of conch shells and colourful beads have also been found. archaeological evidence has shown that the ancient Tamils had trade links with Egypt, Thailand, Java, Sumatra and China. According to R.Champakalakshmi what has been explained in the Manimekhalai, in particular, reflects the importance of this circuit, by locating many of the incidents in the story of Manimekhalai, both in her previous and present births, in the Tamil cities of Puhar, Vanci, Madurai and Kanchi, and beyond the seas in other regions of South and


\textsuperscript{175} The recently discovered Ostracon inscription at Quseiral – Qadim, written in Brahmci characters, reading Catana and at the Red Sea ports and perhaps even Alexandria, which was the focus of much of the South Asian trade, from where the goods reached Rome. R.Champakalakshmi, op.cit., p.148.

\textsuperscript{176} P.Jeyakumar, op.cit., p.17.

\textsuperscript{177} Natana Kasinathan, Recent Discoveries on Tamil's Foreign Contact', Endowment Lecture, IV Session, Tamil Nadu History Congress, (ed.) K.Sadasivan, Thanjavur, 1997, pp.194-196.
Southeast Asia (e.g. Savakam = Java and Manipallavam = north Sri Lanka). A Tamil-Brahmi inscription from Klong Thom (Thailand) of the third and fourth centuries A.D. referring to goldsmith, an early Sanskrit inscription from Laos referring to a Pandya and a copper coin with the tiger emblem are some of the recent discoveries.178 Puhar and Alagankulam enjoyed the distinction of being a premier port along with Korkai and Arikkamedu, nearly 2000 years ago. The recent findings point to the existence of Roman settlements in Alagankulam.179 Very recently a British archaeologist, who had been engaged in underwater studies in Kavirippumpattinam, has come out with the startling discovery of a planned port-city at Puhar some 1700 years before Christ, that being one of the earlier centres of civilization. But, there is a view that there was no state (government) to take care of all these commercial contacts. Besides, there were no regular trade or prescribed industrial policy or guild enterprises. The state was there, but it did not interfere in trade and industry. The state issued coins in gold, silver and copper, the trade guilds fixed the prices of commodities, mode of exchange and means of transport.180

The excavations conducted at Kodumanal near Erode in the years 1985-86, 1989 and 1990 by the Archaeological Department, Tamil University, Thanjavur, under Prof.Y.Subbarayalu, brought to light the Tamil’s trade contact with North Indian states, Ceylon and Rome. The excavations have unearthed Roman mudwares, tiles, Roman coins and chank bangles. Some of the Brahmi letters written on the mud pots reveal North Indian contacts and the term nigama inscribed on it, meant a ‘trade guild’. This place was famous for the rare gems like beryl, garnet, lapis lazuli and chalcedony. The excavations have proved that it is the same Kodumanal, which had been ruled by the Sangam Cheras as mentioned in the Sangam literature Pathirrupatthu.181 The Paratavar, the people of Pattinapakkam, were engaged in the occupation of fishing giant fishes like sharks, costly pearls and conch shells and

producing salt and thus they were familiar with the sea going life. They made use of their course of seasonal winds and sailed on their boats into the neighboring coasts of ancient Tamilaham and carried on trade. In fact, the Paratavar were solely responsible for developing Tamil trade. South India had had trade relations with the West from very early times before the birth of Christ.

Seasonal Winds and Monsoon:

Since very early days they discovered the periodicity of the monsoons. They were perhaps the first to understand the character, especially the velocity of the lashing monsoons in the Malabar Coast. Moreover, they tested and listed the nature, time, potency of the Kudak-karru (Western wind), Kunak-Karru (Eastern wind), Thenral – Karru (Southern wind) and the Vadaik-karru (Northern wind). The Greeks and the Romans were familiar with the Western wind, which was otherwise called ‘the trade wind.’ In the first century A.D., Hippalus, a Greek mariner, discovered the ebb and flow of the Western wind. After knowing the character of the Western wind, the traders as well as the sailors ventured into the sea. The coastal people (Paratavar) were greatly responsible for establishing a world reputation in the field of trade and commerce in the far remote days. Both the Tamil fishermen and mariners made outstanding contributions to trade, wealth and prosperity of the Tamil kingdoms. Tempest and cyclone were known to the Tamils. We can trace out evidence from Manimekhlai and Purananuru. There are some interesting clues to the seafaring instincts of the Tamils in this early period. The Purananuru refers to a Pandya prince who was drowned in the sea Kadalul Mainta Ilam Peruvaludi. A Chola ruler who plied a ‘fleet’ across the seas and controlled the high winds is an oft-repeated legend in the Sangam age and in later literatures.

183 R.Champakalakshmi, op.cit., p.179.
185 Xavier S.Thaninayagam, Landscape and Poetry, New Delhi, 1996, p.82.
186 Manimekhalai, ll.4:30-33.
187 Ibid., 182.
188 Ibid., 66.
Varieties of Water Transport:

Boats like Odampunai, Padagu, Thimil, Thoni, Ambu, etc, were used to cross rivers. Kattumaram, from which the English term Catamaran emerged, is nothing but a few log woods tied together for purpose of floating and to carry weighted goods. To cross the seas, Kalam, Marakalam, Vangam, Navai (from which the English term navy is said to have emerged) were used. Flags were hoisted on ships for purposes of identification of the country. Pandyas used the flags of the double carp emblem on their flags.

Foreigners:

Foreigners who transacted business were known as Yavanars. At a later time the Arabs were called Jonagar. Pattinappalai praises Kavirippumpattinam as a city where various foreigners of high civilization, speaking different languages, assembled to transact business. Some foreigners were mediators in foreign trade.

Godowns:

Pattinappalai mentions godowns: "Commodities were stored in big godowns. They were stored prior to shipment or before taking imported commodities for inland market. The bags were sealed and placed one upon the other reaching great height".

Light House & Harbours:

Sangam literature and notice of foreigners refer to the harbours where foreign ships anchored. Puhar, Musiri and Korkai were some of the noteworthy harbours of

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189 Purananuru, 343, 299, 381, Ahananuru, 50.
190 Pattinappalai, ll. 172-173, Purananuru, 13.
191 Nattrrinai, ll. 174-75, Perumpanarrupadai, ll. 319-320.
192 Maduraik-Kanchi, ll. 322-323.
193 These Jonagar or Sonahar were the Moors, who lived in the eastern coast of Tamil Nadu and the Mattakalappu region in Sri Lanka, who were Muslims. Bhaktavatsal Bharathi, Tamilar Manidaviyal, (T1), Chidambaram, 2002, pp.26-27.
194 Pattinappalai, ll. 213-18.
195 Ibid., ll. 129-141.
Sangam age. Tondi, Saliyur and Kumari Vilinjam in the Pandya and Aii coasts were also famous port-towns, where commodities were exported and imported. These had light houses. **Perumpanarrupadai** and Silappadikaram mention lighthouse in order to direct the ships.\(^{196}\)

### Highways in the Sangam Age

Many highways were there to connect villages with towns. They were known as **peruvali**.\(^{197}\) The highways were very helpful in transporting goods available in one place to another place of need. Further, goods could be easily transported to port towns or capital cities to enable export. **Perumpanarrupadai**, one of the Sangam works, mentions the collections of toll in inland and foreign borders and the presence of armed forces in these places to give protection to the traders and their goods.\(^{198}\)

A milestone mentions the name of **Adiyaman peruvali** in Darmapuri District. Adiyaman was a ruler of the Tagadur region, the present Darmapuri of the Sangam age. From such sources we come to know of the existence of highways for trade during the Sangam period.\(^{199}\) The Pandya Country also had such highways. Epigraphical sources provide us with ample instances.\(^{200}\) The Mahadevar temple of Dhalapati Samudram in Nanguneri taluk, Tirunelveli District. Epigraphic evidence speak of the “Kottatru Peruvali”\(^{201}\) During the Imperial Cholas there existed highways called **Konguperuvali**, **Vaduga peruvali** and **Tanjai Peruvali**.\(^{202}\) From this we come to know that for both import and export, for transport to take place smoothly, the Pandyas, the Cheras and the Cholas laid highways. It is learnt from some foreign records that the pearls fished in the Korkai region were transported to Uraiyr, the inland capital of the Cholas, and from there they were then transported

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\(^{197}\) *Aingurunuru*, 80-82. **Adiyaman Peruvali** may be cited here for example.

\(^{198}\) *Perumpanarruppadai*, *Il*.77-82.


\(^{200}\) *SIL.*, *Vol.VIII*, No.459.

\(^{201}\) Ibid., XIV, No.264.

to Muziris in the Chera Coast. It helps us understand the existence of a highway linking the three major kingdoms and their port towns or inland cities.\textsuperscript{203} Similarly, from the coins collected from Shenkottai and Srivilliputur, it is understood that there existed a highway from Madurai to Quilon (Via) Rajapalayam-Srivilliputur, Shenkottai and Kottarakkara.\textsuperscript{204} In the same way, there seems to have existed a long highway from Korkai, Kaverippumpattinam, Mylapore and Palour and Tamralipti and Tamluk in the Orissa and Bengal coastal regions.

\textbf{Taxes during the Sangam Age}

Tax constituted a major source of government revenue; besides tax, customs duty, amount collected from petty kings, treasure captured during wars also contributed to Exchequer. Customs formed a major source of revenue to the government. Tollgates were established. Customs duty was collected according to the weights of commodities.\textsuperscript{205} Customs duty was known as \textit{Sungam} and \textit{ulgu}. People employed in tollgates, especially during king Karikalvalavan days, enjoyed no leisure.\textsuperscript{206}

Right from the Sangam Age taxes were, as of now, a definite form of revenue to the state. All states have very much depended on taxes for implementing their schemes and measures. The Pandyas also collected a large number of taxes from the people. Some of them mentioned in records are \textit{kadamai} (general term of tax), \textit{achchu vari} (tax in \textit{achchu} coins), \textit{kariya-aratchi} (tax for the service of government officers), \textit{tholvari} (tax on drummers), \textit{panju-pili} (tax on ginned cotton), \textit{santivigraha-peru} (tax for the service of the king’s messenger or mediator), \textit{idaiyar-vari} (tax on the shepherds), \textit{ina-vari} (tax on some communities), \textit{pirai} (a general tax), \textit{tattar-pattam} (tax on goldsmiths), \textit{pasi-pattam} (tax on fishing), \textit{pon-vari} (tax on cash or gold), \textit{vassal-peru} (tax for the palace).\textsuperscript{207} Similarly, a tax on pearl-fishing.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{203} Natana Kasinathan, \textit{The Metropolis of Medieval Cholas}, Madras, 1992, p.2.
\item \textsuperscript{204} C.Chandravanan, \textit{Virudhunagar Mavattam} (Tl.), Chennai, 2002, pp.10-11.
\item \textsuperscript{205} Porunararruppadai, \textit{ll.} 80-81.
\item \textsuperscript{206} Pattinappalai, \textit{ll.} 120-125.
\item \textsuperscript{207} R.Noboru Karashima, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.115-116.
\end{itemize}
called salapattevari was collected from the Nattar of Kudanadu. The king gifted these taxes to the temple. In times of famine and drought, tax exemptions were made. Tax evasion was often punished with confiscation of land and property and donating them to the local temple. During the Second Pandya period 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 Pandanayaka figures as the signatory. Tolls were collected at the entrance of towns and cross-roads.

According to Piranmalai inscription, the merchants could be classified after the articles of merchandise viz-cloth, grain, salt, horse, oil, pearl, betal-leaf and so on. Besides these, they traded in drugs, pepper and the like, spices, elephants, precious stones, etc. On these articles of merchandise, the merchants paid various taxes. They include Vali Ayam or tolls paid along highways, Angadipattam (shops), Irangu Sathu (imports), Eru Sathu (exports), etc.

**Medium of Exchange:**

Words like somarudal (‘exchange) tagilithal (‘give and take’) and parivarttani (‘distribution’) were synonymous to the word pandamatrudal (‘exchange’) pandam means ‘goods’ and matru means ‘to exchange’. “Barter means giving things and buying some other things in exchanges”. maru (marudal) means vitral (which means ‘to sell’. Words like matru (matru)

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211 Kural, 756.
215 I.Kumuthini, op.cit., p.32.
and (‘exchange’) mari (மாரிய) are found in Sangam works like Kurunthogai and Porunarruppadai.\textsuperscript{216}

It has been said that ancient Tamils had not used currency for internal trade but bartered goods like rice, dhal, salt, milk, curd, fish, meat, clothes, flowers, honey, potatoes, plantains, cattle and fowls. They bought with currency only very expensive things. The use of currency existed only in high societies. It was used only in cities and coastal towns. In other towns to a large extent the barter method was in vogue. Sangam works speak about the existence of the barter methods then.\textsuperscript{217}

According to R. Champakalakshmi, Tamil literatures speak about barter system, in relation to grain and salt. However, the rarer the commodity, the higher was the measure of goods got in exchange. The present Tamil word for salary is ‘sambalam’. ‘Samba’ means rice and ‘alam’ means salt. In the past wages were given in kind through rice and salt. Literary works like Agananuru, Nattrinai and Kurunthogai refer to the use of this word then\textsuperscript{218} The worth of grains and salt was equal in the past. Thus they could manage trade even in the absence of currency. They had agreed on the quantity of grains or salt that could equal the common goods of barter.

According to Purananuru, the ‘Vedars’ (hunters of the Kurinchi tract) gave vixen to the Idaiargal (shepherds) of the Mullai tract and got curd and grains in turn. The grains that grew on the shores of lakes were measured by baskets made of palm leaves.\textsuperscript{219} According to poet Kabilar, the inhabitants of the Kolli Hills, the subjects of kind Oori bartered tusks for cereals.\textsuperscript{220} There is no definite mention of the means of exchange in the Eighteen Minor Works, though barter has been mentioned in many

\textsuperscript{216} Kurunthogai, 269:4-6. Porunarruppadai, 214-215.

\textsuperscript{217} Mayilai Seeni Venkatasamy, op.cit., p.13.

\textsuperscript{218} Ahananuru,390; 140:5-8; Kurunthogai, 269:5.

\textsuperscript{219} Purananuru, 33:1-8.

\textsuperscript{220} Kurunthogai, 100:3-5.
Sangam poems.221 The exchange was based on a kind of barter system, referred to in the poems as *notuttal*, which involved only the use-value of goods.222

The people of the arid land gave toddy and got grains in exchange.223 The *Einars*, the men of the *Palai* tract, stole cows from their enemies and bartered them for toddy.224 According to Maruda Ilanaganar, in Agananuru not having anything to give in return for the toddy they needed very badly, they picked up a quarrel in the toddy shop; they even to go to the forest, hunted elephants and brought their tusks in turn for the toddy they needed immediately.225

The *Maravar* of the *Palai* tract, the warriors gave the booty they got from the battles and got toddy instead.226 *Narrinal* describes the exchange of salt made by the *Umanar* with the people of the *Maruda* tract for paddy. They transported the salt in bullockcarts.227 Ammuvanar in Agananuru says about the *Umanattiyar*; the women of the salt makers went to hamlets, villages, towns and cities and exchanged salt for paddy.228 The women of the Neidal tract sold fish during festivals in Neidal and Marudam tracts. This is referred to by Seethalai Sattanar in Agananuru.229

Right from the Sangam age to the present a fixed quantum of salt and paddy are the standard of exchange. The agricultural labourers in the Tirunelveli District are paid in kind. The amount of paddy they got for their work depended on the extent of land they harvested. Money, even today, does not play any role among them. For one *kuruni*230 of land they got 10 pakka of paddy. *Kurumani* is the produce from the

221 Porunararrupadai, 214-5, Kurunthogai, 269.
222 Rajan Gurukkal, op.cit., p.246.
223 Ibid., p.61.
224 Perumpanararrupadai, Il. 140-141, Purananuru, 258:3.
226 Pathirrupathu, 75:9-10.
227 Nattrrinai, 256:5-7.
228 Ahananuru, 140:5-8.
229 Ibid., 320:2-5.
230 Kuruni is from the word Kurumani.
land. As it is a result of their labour it is invaluable for them. One Kuruni = 1 maraka viapadu. (One kuruni is roughly 8 cents). To harvest one kuruni 10- pakka paddy is given to the labourers. This is about 10 to 11 kilograms.

1. Even where there is a demand for labourers the landlords pay more paddy but money is not used. They attract more workers from far and wide. The payment is negotiable. Mushrooming of shops during harvest times near paddy fields is a common phenomenon. The workers gave a part of the paddy they earned that day and got the refreshments or even things like clothes, vessels, etc. After the harvest these shops vanished. In villages too the people gave paddy, cereals, chillies and cotton and got whatever they wanted from shops. Often they took these things on loan and they repaid them after the harvest. These small businessmen supplied the sundry produce they got through barter, through brokers to commission shops in Tirunelveli town and got money instead.

Coins in The Sangam Age:

Coins were not in circulation as of now. They were minted in akkasalais (mints) and used in medium of foreign trade. ‘Blackgold’ as pepper was called was also a product of exchange in the Sangam age.231 Kasu originally referred to as small gold, copper and such other ready cash.

Nanaya is another word which means honesty according to the Lexicon. It refers to a sealed gold coin according to the Tamil Lexicon.232 Among the Tamils the expression chellakasu, ‘invalid coin’, used to refer to a useless person or one whom cannot be depended upon. Similarly, the word Nanayam is used frequently. To mean honesty, particularly a honest person or a coin. From the root word in Tamil Nanaya the word Nanayam, which refers to honesty must have been used to refer to (coin) nanayam, It means that one can depend upon the coin for buying and selling with out use of barter system. Since coins stood for high quality, its name became synonymous with ‘trustworthy persons’.

231 Ahananuru, 149:8-11.

During the Sangam age both the barter system and coin exchange were in vogue. The latter was minimal in local trade whereas it was predominant in foreign trade. Gold, silver and copper coins of various sizes and shapes were used in day-to-day transactions. These coins were not used for buying this basic food items but they were used for buying expensive goods. According to I. Kumudhini when unexpected problems arose during barter, coins were used to make the give and take of fair.  

The face value, the quality, the durability and so on of a produce had to be taken into consideration before barter. Further, certain produce had to be sold within a small area and that too within a short period of time. Cattle like goats and cows were attributed cash values and bartered. Obviously, cattle value went down due to disease or death. Thus metals like iron, copper and brass were used. Then standard metals like gold and silver were used for minting coins. To begin with, pieces of these metals were used, as the worth of these metals was high. While accepting them their quality had to be checked. As the process was lengthy, using coins made of precious metals was a hindrance to trade. 

Such exchange of commodities might have prevailed in the rural areas, but in the busy market places of Madurai and Puhar coins might have been more commonly used. In Sangam literature one come across numerous references to coins by the names of *pon* (gold coin), *kalanju*, *kanam* and *kasu* (coin), and they should have remained in circulation in later centuries as well. Without coinage, especially of gold and silver, as medium, foreign trade would have been impossible. Pallava records make frequent references to *kanam*, *palankasu*, *tulaippon*, *videlvidugupon*, *sempon* and *kalanju* and many of them bore Pallava emblems and legends. It is very likely that foreign traders were the first to introduce gold and silver coins in South India.

Madurai Kollan Vennaganar, the poet of the Sangam age, compares scattered coins to goose berries fallen from trees. Kavan Mullai Bhudanar, another poet compares the scattered coins to the yellow fruits of a local tree. Poet Kari Kannanar, describes the women of Pumpuhar wearing a chain of gold coins as is the practice of women in the present day.

Poet Othalandayar also refers to the practice of women of the Pandya Country wearing chains made of gold coins. As an evidence for this a chain of Greek gold coins has been unearthed from Sankarankoil area, in Karivalamvanthanallur, in Tirunelveli District. Madurai Bhuthanar also refers to the habit of women in Madurai wearing girdles made of gold coins. In those days, wearing ornaments of gold coins was a mark of one’s social status. Mostly foreign coins were used for making these ornaments. From the following extract we come to know that all these coins were made of gold.

Evidences of coins have come out from archaeological excavations at Arikkamedu near Pondicherry, Alagankulam near Ramnad, Kodumanal near Erode, Urkadu and Kudikadu near Cuddalore and perhaps one near Madurai region also. Many coins and signet rings have been collected from the Amaravati river-bed near Karu-ur, which stand testimony to the use of coins.

For a long time, it was supposed that the Sangam Tamils did not mint coins of their own. But, now coins of the Sangam kings are also available and it is certain that they had mints and coins were in circulation. Coins with punch-marks on them and

238 Ibid., 293:6-9.
of irregular shape were among the oldest coins in South India. Numismatists knew them as punch-marked coins (ancient coins). Some scholars think that these were the same as the kanam referred to in literature. These are in rectangular shape and have punch-marks on them. The earlier coins had only punched figures and no legend on them; the figures were elephant, tiger, tree, hills, etc. stamped on them.\textsuperscript{245}

When Korkai was the capital of the Pandya Country the currency needed for local trade was minted in the local mints. The Tamil word akkasalai referred to a place where gold coins were minted. Even today, a road to the west of the village Korkai is called Akkasalai, where some people live there. Once there was a mint\textsuperscript{246} and a temple called Akkasalai Eeswara Mudaliyar\textsuperscript{247} according to epigraphical sources. But later on it was changed in to a Pillaiyar temple and the name changed in to Akkasalai Vinayagar Koil.

Recently, coins of the Sangam age with legends inscribed on them have been discovered, which relate to the Cheran, Pandyan, Adiyan and Malaiyaman dynasties. There are as yet no Cholar coins discovered with legend on them. There are however thirty two listed tiger coins identified by R. Kirshnamurthy in his Sanga Kala Cholar Nanayankal. There is one Chera coin, which bears an inscription in ancient Tamil-Brahmi script. R. Kirshnamurthy in another of his publication The Pandyar Coins of the Sangam Age gives a list of five inscribed coins of that dynasty and of that age: the inscription is Perumaludi (the great Pandyan). The first notable source book about ancient Pandya coins is Father Lovanthal’s Coins of Tinnavelli published in 1888, in which he had published drawings of copper and square coins of that period.\textsuperscript{248}

Inland trade was slowly adopting monetary currency in the place of barter, but the use of metallic currency was limited. In the Sangam days there was a favourable foreign trade for the Tamils. They traded mostly with the Mediterranean countries,

\textsuperscript{245} Ibid., p.92.
\textsuperscript{246} A.Raghavan, Konagar Korkai, (Tl.), Palayamkottai, 1971, p.116.
\textsuperscript{247} P.Jeyakumar, op.cit., p.204.
particularly with the Roman Empire. The Romans were paying the Tamils so much
gold for the luxury goods imported from Tamil Nadu.

Weights and measures

Weighing gold:

The Tamils of yesteryears were traders and commercial men. They
manufactured goods, traded with them, lent money and earned profit. Such a
commercial-minded people should have had a system of weight and measures for
different kinds of measurements. Some tables of their weights and measures are
given below:

2 grains of paddy's weight  =  1 kunrimani
2 kunrimani    =  1 manjadi
20 manjadi        =  1 kalanji (u)

According to the Metric measures
1 kalanji (u).     =  5.45 gms.

In Tirunelveli District even today weight of gold is spoken of in terms of
kalanji. (u) In some other areas it is used as kanam or even as pon.

Weighing of other articles:

1 toti              =  1 palam
1 kasu              =  ¼ palam
1 panam             =  20 tulam
1 tukku             =  1 tulam or ka
1 vicam             =  1 makani

The Pandyas were very great patrons of trade, boths internal and external. Real
recorded evidences of their patronage to trade and traders begins from 3rd century
B.C. This recorded evidence is from the Tamil-Brahmi epigraphs coming from the

249 Purananuru, 159:25.
250 Silappadikaram, iii, 14:158-159., & 162-163.
vicinity of Madurai and its neighbourhood. Such an epigraphic record is further corroborated by the Sangam Classics which are generally dated between 3rd century B.C and 3rd century A.D. However, 3rd century B.C. was not the beginning of systematic trade, though done later, began internally and with coins as medium of exchange in external trade, in the Pandya Country. If sources are the bedrock of history, then there can be no doubt that trade flourished in the Pandya Country much earlier than the 3rd century B.C. This trend was further strengthened by the Pandyas encouraging traders of the various trade guilds to settle later in the Pandya Country and by conferring on them high sounding honours and shields. Trade and traders flourished under the Pandyas through the centuries.