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**Merchants in Transition: Maritime Trade and Society of Tamil  
Muslims in the Indian Ocean World, c. 1780-1840.**

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**Merchants in Transition: Maritime Trade and Society of Tamil  
Muslims in the Indian Ocean World, c. 1780-1840.**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family.

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Just like the merchants who are the subjects of this study, I have accumulated debts over the course of graduate study and the writing of this dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin (UT). Unlike the merchants' debts that were usually repaid, mine, on the other hand, will last a lifetime.

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**Merchants in Transition: Maritime Trade and Society of Tamil  
Muslims in the Indian Ocean World, c. 1780-1840.**

Sundara Sreenivasa Rao Vadlamudi, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Cynthia Talbot

Co-Supervisor: Gail Minault

This dissertation examines the maritime trade and society of South Indian Tamil-speaking Muslim merchants in the Indian Ocean during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It examines how these merchants, in a period marked by transition to colonial rule in India under the English East India Company (EIC), not only continued to trade along India's southern and eastern coasts but also expanded their sphere of operations to include the newly established EIC entrepôts of Penang (1786) and Singapore (1819).

This project accounts for this historical development by emphasizing two interrelated processes: the adoption of a specific set of trading practices by Tamil Muslim merchants and the creation of new opportunities by the expansion of EIC rule in South and Southeast Asia. In the Indian Ocean littoral region, governed by competing sovereignties, these merchants adopted diverse subjecthoods that guaranteed protection of their ships on sea. The merchants actively participated in new opportunities to transport salt from South India to Bengal, managed pearl and chank (conch shell) fisheries along the coasts of South India and Sri Lanka, and transported Indian textiles to Southeast Asia.



The merchants entered into partnerships with English merchants to raise capital for their trade voyages.

In short, this study challenges the dominant narrative of decline of Indian maritime merchants by 1800 and offers instead, in a revisionist vein, an account of continuity of operation well into the early decades of the nineteenth century. In doing so, my dissertation accomplishes three objectives: expand our understanding of maritime aspects of India's colonial economy, demonstrate a resurgence in the intra-Asian trade in the early nineteenth century, and explain the evolving relationship between merchants, the EIC state, and indigenous rulers.

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## A Note on Currencies

For the period of this study, currency in South India consisted of gold, silver, and copper, respectively *pagodas*, *fanams*, and *cash*. The following exchange generally prevailed.

3,520 cash = 44 fanams = 1 Star pagoda.

100 Star Pagodas = 350 Silver Madras Rupees

100 Madras Rupees = 93 Sicca Rupees

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### I. Introduction

Visitors to the UNESCO World Heritage site complex in Georgetown (Penang, Malaysia) will come across a monument identified as Nagore *dargah* (a Sufi shrine). Glossy tourist brochures advertise the shrine as proof of age-old connections between South India and Penang. In Singapore, one can find a similar memorial, also named Nagore *dargah*. In Sri Lanka, several Sufi shrines claim to be branch offices of Nagore *dargah*. Indeed, the shrines in Penang, Singapore, and Sri Lanka are replicas of the *dargah* of Shah al-Hamid (1507-1584), a famous sixteenth-century Sufi saint, located in Nagore, a coastal town in Southeastern India. Tamil-speaking Muslim maritime merchants from South India considered Shah al-Hamid as a protector of their ships and goods on the high seas. They built the shrine's replicas in the nineteenth century for their rapidly growing communities in the Indian Ocean region.<sup>1</sup> The proliferation of replicas of the Nagore shrine in the Indian Ocean region presents a puzzle – they occurred in the nineteenth century, long considered by scholars to be the period of decline of Indian maritime merchants. Perhaps the shrine's replicas and their benefactors have a different story to tell about Indian maritime merchants in the nineteenth century.

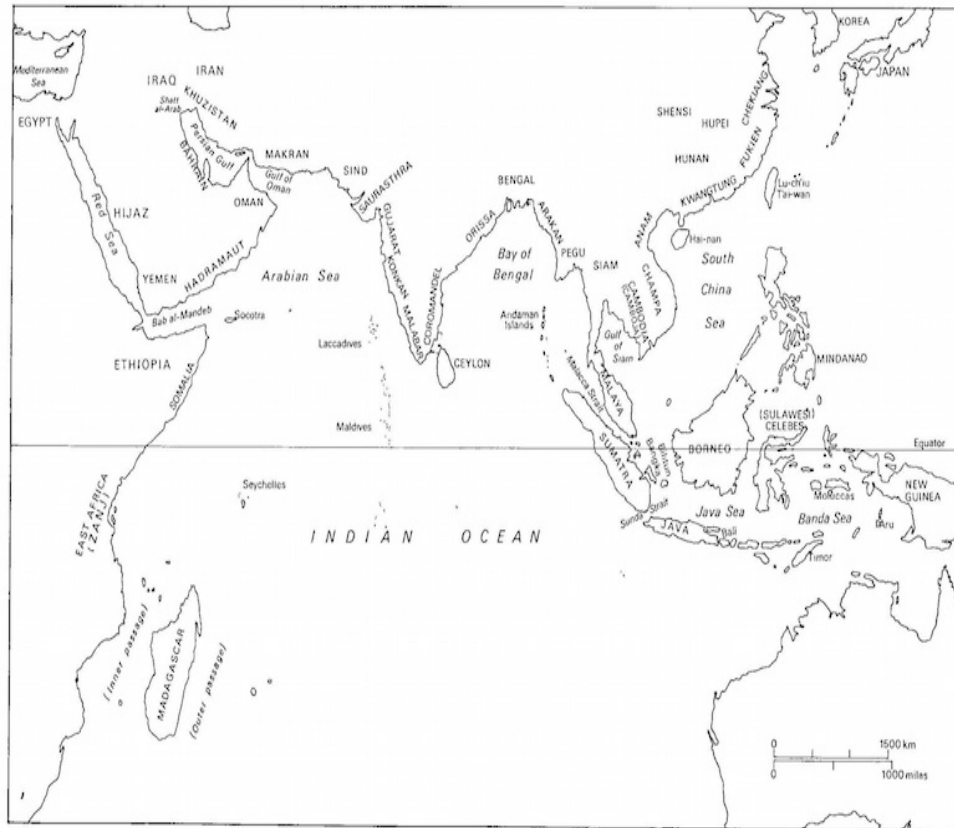
This project focuses on one such community of Indian maritime merchants – the Tamil-speaking Muslim (henceforth Tamil Muslim) merchants of South India. Islam reached the shores of Southeastern India through Arab maritime traders who used the eastern and western coasts of peninsular India as transit points to gather goods, stock up on refreshments, and wait for favorable winds. Indeed, Arabic sources identify the

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis McGilvray, "Jailani: A Sufi Shrine in Sri Lanka," in *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation & Conflict*, eds. Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld (Delhi: Social Science Press, 2004), 273-89. Sunil Amrith, "Tamil Diasporas across the Bay of Bengal," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3

southernmost part of India's east coast as *ma'bar*, meaning a passage or crossing over.<sup>2</sup> Arab traders and navigators began to settle in South Indian ports by the eighth and ninth centuries.

Map 1.1: Indian Ocean Trading Regions<sup>3</sup>



The precise process by which the Arab settlements became self-consciously Tamil-speaking Muslim communities is less clear. It is possible that the children born out of alliances between the Arabs and local Tamil women spoke Tamil because it was the dominant language in the region. The children became more proficient in Tamil since the

<sup>2</sup> “Ma’bar” in C.E. Bosworth (Eds) *Encyclopedia of Islam, Vol V* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 937-8.

<sup>3</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 35.

Arab merchants remained away for extended periods of time on trade voyages.<sup>4</sup> By the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, a chain of port towns developed extending from Pulicat located 30 miles north of Chennai down to southeastern ports such as Keelakarai and Kayalpattinam (see Map 2). In subsequent centuries, other places such as Nagore, Nagapattinam, Muthupettai, and Adiramapattinam became prominent ports with a sizeable population of Tamil Muslim merchants. These ports also became important sites of great mosques and Sufi shrines.<sup>5</sup> By the fourteenth century, Tamil Muslims were an important maritime merchant community trading with Southeast Asia. At the time of the Portuguese capture of Melaka in 1511, Tamil Muslims formed an important trading group there and possessed their own settlement called *kampong palli*.<sup>6</sup> While the advent of European trading companies in the Indian Ocean trade introduced some changes in the maritime trading world of Tamil Muslims, they continued to trade with Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka.

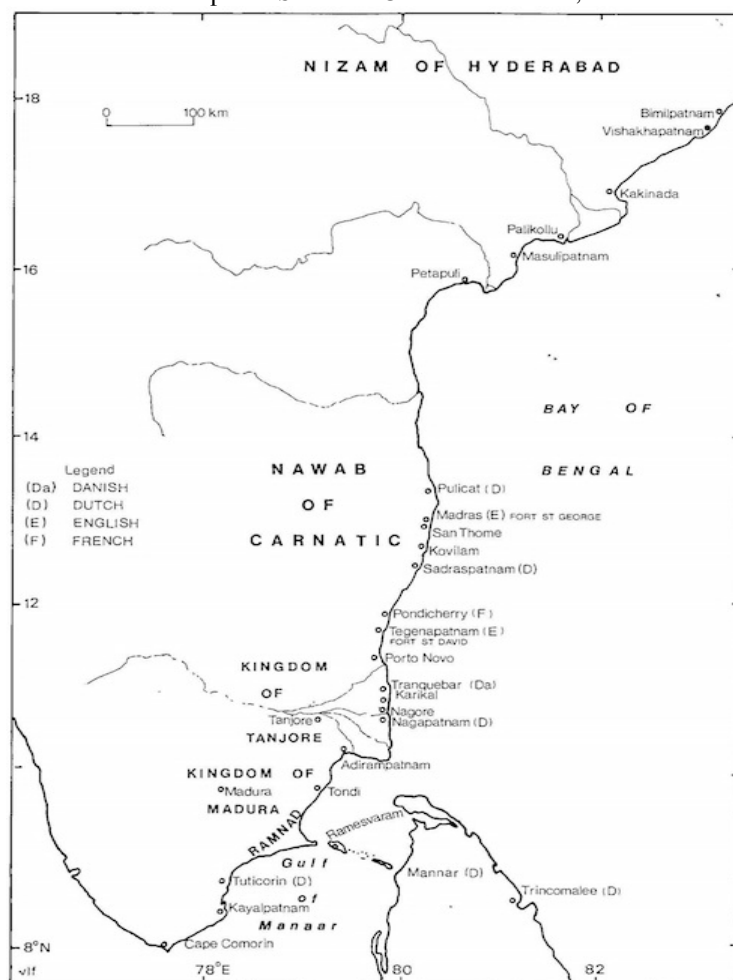
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<sup>4</sup> I wish to thank Prof. Sumit Guha for suggesting this explanation.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73-8; Raja Mohamad, *Maritime History of the Coromandel Muslims A Socio-Historical Study on the Tamil Muslims, 1750-1900* (Chennai: Government Museum, 2004), 58-99.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth McPherson, "Chulias and Klings: Indigenous Trade Diasporas and European Penetration of the Indian Ocean Littoral," in *Trade and Politics in the Indian Ocean: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Giorgio Borsa (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990), 35. *Palli* in Tamil refers to a mosque.

Map 1.2: Southern Coromandel Ports, c. 1800<sup>7</sup>



The manifestation of such commercial links between South India and Southeast Asia and the role played by Tamil Muslims in fostering such links are displayed in several ways. In Nagore, the annual death anniversary of Shah al-Hamid, known as *kandhuri*, is celebrated for fourteen days with great splendor. The festival's key event is the hoisting of five flags on the shrine's five minarets. Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore donate four of these five flags. The flags are carried on models of ships and a

<sup>7</sup> S. Arasaratnam, "European Port-settlements in the Coromandel Commercial System 1650-1740," in *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia from the 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. Frank Broeze (New South Wales University Press, 1989), 76.



palanquin, which are donated by the Chettiars, a Hindu merchant community prominent in both South India and Southeast Asia.<sup>8</sup> The replicas of the Nagore shrine still stand today. In Penang, the shrine is located on Lebuah Chulia (Chulia street, see fig. 1.1).<sup>9</sup> In Singapore, the *dargah* is commemorated as “Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Center” (see fig. 1.2).

Figure 1.1: Nagore *dargah* in Penang<sup>10</sup>



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<sup>8</sup> S.A.A. Saheb, “A Festival of Flags: Hindu-Muslim Devotion and the Sacralising of Localism at the Shrine of Nagore-e-Sharif in Tamil Nadu,” in *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*, eds. Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu (London: Routledge, 1998), 55-76.

<sup>9</sup> The term “Chulia” was used to refer to Tamil-speaking Muslims from South India.

<sup>10</sup> Author’s collection. Taken in October 2012.

Figure 1.2: Nagore *dargah* in Singapore<sup>11</sup>



Figure 1.3: Kapitan Kling Mosque (Penang)<sup>12</sup>



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<sup>11</sup> Author's collection. Taken in October 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Author's collection. Taken in September 2011. The term "Kling" was often used to refer to migrants from South India. For more on the mosque's history see Khoo Salma Nasution, *The Chulia in Penang: Patronage and Place-making around the Kapitan Killing Mosque, 1786-1957* (Penang: Areca Books, 2014).

In addition to the Nagore shrine's replicas, the urban landscape of Penang and Singapore remain dotted with mosques and Sufi shrines built by Tamil Muslims and contain street names that point to a rich history of migration from South India to Southeast Asia.<sup>13</sup> A prominent monument is the Kapitan Kling mosque in Penang (fig. 1.3), which is an important part of the UNESCO World Heritage complex in Georgetown. However, existing studies of mercantile activities of Tamil Muslims do not reflect this element of continuity of trading operations as evidenced in the commemoration of age-old connections by diaspora groups and the visible historical markers of a vibrant and prosperous mercantile community in Southeast Asia. Rather, the prevalent notion is of their decline, like other Indian maritime merchants, in the colonial era.

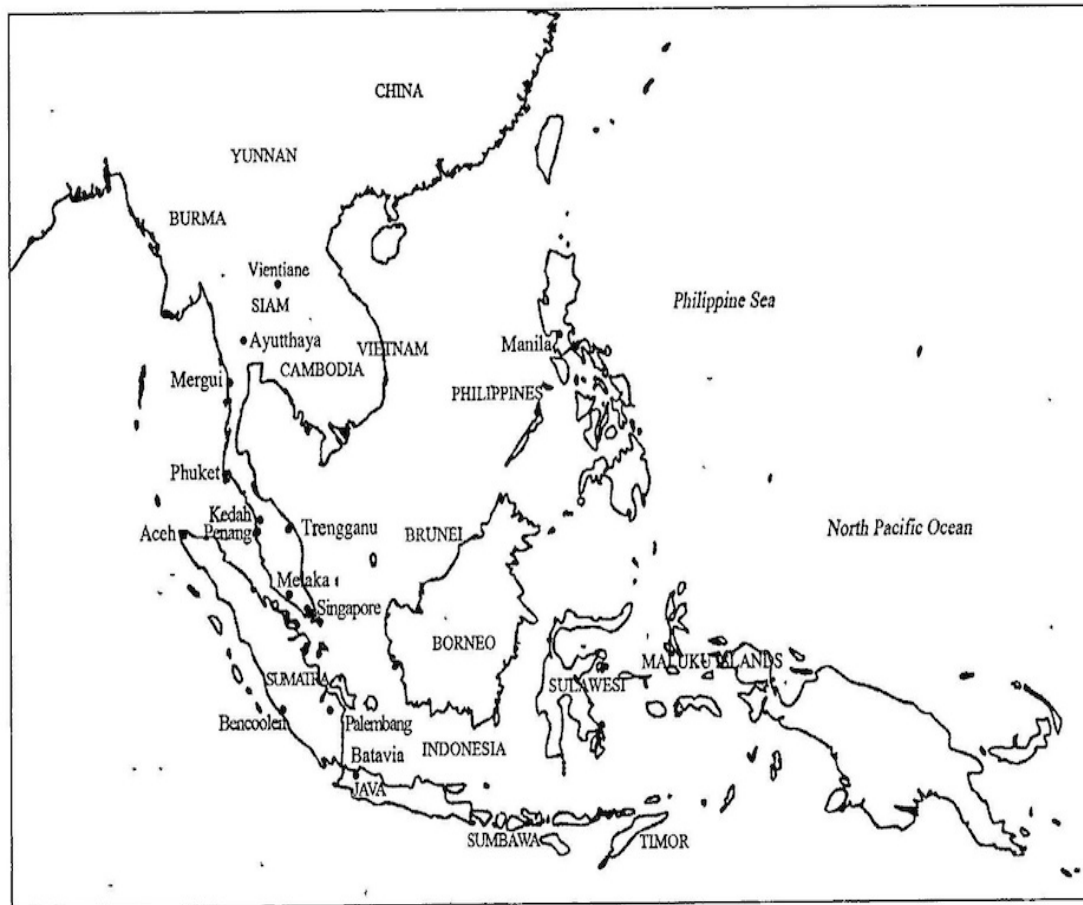
My research examines the mercantile activities of Tamil Muslim merchants in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In doing so, this study will question the conventional assumption about the decline of India's maritime merchants during the colonial period. The central question that this study seeks to answer is how to explain the ability of merchants to continue to operate and flourish in the nineteenth century given the dominant paradigm of withdrawal of Indian maritime merchants from maritime trade by this period. I challenge the existing narrative of decline during the late eighteenth century and offer, instead, a revisionist argument that these merchants continued to trade to ports along the coast of India and Sri Lanka, and also operated in the newly established East India Company (EIC) entrepôts of Penang (Malaysia) and Singapore. The next section examines the portrayal of decline of Indian maritime merchants by the late

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<sup>13</sup> Sunil S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 63-100; Torsten Tschacher, "From Local Practice to Transnational Network – Saints, Shrines and Sufis among Tamil Muslims in Singapore," *Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 34, no. 2 (2006): 225-42.

eighteenth century and discusses the recent scholarship that has begun to question such notions of decline by 1800 CE.

Map 1.3: Eastern Indian Ocean<sup>14</sup>



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<sup>14</sup> Anthony Reid, "Southeast Asian Consumption of Indian and British Cotton Cloth, 1600-1800," in *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (with collaboration of Om Prakash and Kaoru Sugihara) (Brill, Leiden, 2009), 32.

## II. Narrative of Decline of Indian Maritime Merchants

Existing histories of Indian maritime merchants indicate that, between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, they succeeded initially in competing against European trading companies such as the English and Dutch East India Companies, but gradually succumbed to European competition by the end of the eighteenth century. Scholars attribute several reasons for this decline: constant strife in the hinterland, loss of support from native rulers, restrictive trading practices of European companies, and superior European shipping technology.<sup>15</sup>

While regional variations exist, scholars have identified the seventeenth century as the main period of commercial growth in the Indian Ocean region and the eighteenth century as the period of decline of Indian maritime merchants.<sup>16</sup> Ashin Das Gupta concluded that political upheavals in the eighteenth century, particularly the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, adversely affected the fortunes of the Indian maritime merchants.<sup>17</sup> He summed up his stand in his classic statement that “the Indian merchant lost when the Mughal lost.”<sup>18</sup> Ashin Das Gupta’s work focused primarily on

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<sup>15</sup> There is an extensive literature on Indian maritime merchants, particularly for the period from 1500 to 1800. For a representative sample see, Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986); Om Prakash and Denys Lombard, eds., *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1800* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999); K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat: c. 1700-1750* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1977); Giorgio Borsa, ed., *Trade and Politics in the Indian Ocean* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); M.N. Pearson, *Merchants and the Rulers of Gujarat. The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California, 1976); Uma Das Gupta, comp., *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500-1800: Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, “India and the Indian Ocean in the Eighteenth Century,” in *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800*, eds. Ashin Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 133.

<sup>18</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, “Indian Merchant and Trade in the Indian Ocean,” in *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500-1800: Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta*, comp. Uma Das Gupta (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 81.

merchant communities on India's West coast and he observed that medium-sized Indian vessels of about 200 tons and the merchants who owned them disappeared by the end of the eighteenth century. He noted that the surviving Indian shippers sailed in smaller vessels and confined their trade to shorter distances along India's coast. Even in regional trade, Indian merchants were involved in shipping goods that did not attract European merchants.<sup>19</sup>

Ashin Das Gupta did not consider the situation as damaging for Indian merchants on the Coromandel coast, India's eastern seaboard extending from West Bengal to Tamil Nadu. He identified the Tamil Muslims as a prominent mercantile community but noted that their vessels had not been not as large as those of Gujarati merchants. He concluded that it "[was] impossible to examine the fortunes of the Indian shipping that remained because we know next to nothing of ports like Nagore and Porto Novo in the later eighteenth century."<sup>20</sup>

Besides Ashin Das Gupta, other scholars have commented on the status of Indian maritime merchants at the end of the eighteenth century. Frank Broeze noted a similar decline of Indian maritime merchants by the end of the eighteenth century and a reorientation of their activities to shorter distance trade along India's coast.<sup>21</sup> P.J. Marshall indicated that the carrying trade of Asian merchants was adversely affected by the growing participation of English private merchants in the intra-Asian commerce in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup> Om Prakash observed that the ascension of the English East India Company to political control in Bengal and other parts of India in the

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<sup>19</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, "India and the Indian Ocean in the Eighteenth Century," 143.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>21</sup> Frank Broeze, "From Imperialism to Independence: The Decline and Re-Emergence of Asian Shipping," *The Great Circle* 9.2 (October 1987): 73-95.

<sup>22</sup> P.J. Marshall, "Private British Trade in the Indian Ocean before 1800," in *European Commercial Expansion in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Om Prakash (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997), 242-43.

second half of the eighteenth century provided the Company with a “substantial differential advantage *vis-à-vis* both the rival European companies as well as the intermediary merchants and artisans.” Om Prakash’s comments were directed at the trade in Indian textiles but his overall assessment pointed to the disadvantaged position of Indian merchants in the late eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Kenneth McPherson suggested that the maritime trade in the Bay of Bengal underwent significant changes in the eighteenth century, which undermined the role of indigenous mercantile groups and seafarers. He noted that the lack of access to new shipping technologies possessed by Europeans and the rapid increase in profits from trade between Asia and Europe, rather than in intra-Asian trade, brought about transformations, which resulted in indigenous merchants moving away from a position of relative equality with European merchants to one of subordination.<sup>24</sup>

Such an understanding of the waning of Indian merchant communities in general during the period of collapse of the Mughal Empire, and not just maritime merchants, remained prevalent within scholarship until the 1970s. But a number of scholars, beginning with C.A. Bayly, questioned the notion of chaos in the aftermath of the decline of the Mughal Empire and offered a reinterpretation of eighteenth-century Indian history. In the revised view, there was a resurgence of merchant communities as the regional kingdoms that emerged from the collapse of the Mughal Empire sought to secure revenue from trade.<sup>25</sup> This led to a growth of regional trade networks and mercantile groups who

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<sup>23</sup> Om Prakash, “European Corporate Enterprises and the Politics of Trade in India, 1600-1800,” in *Politics and Trade in the Indian Ocean World: Essays in Honour of Ashin Das Gupta*, eds. Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Lakshmi Subramanian (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 177.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth McPherson, “Trade and Traders in the Bay of Bengal: Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries,” in *Politics and Trade in the Indian Ocean World: Essays in Honour of Ashin Das Gupta*, eds. Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Lakshmi Subramanian (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 183-209.

<sup>25</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For a discussion of the debates surrounding the interpretation of eighteenth century Indian history, see P.J. Marshall, ed. *The Eighteenth Century in*

were involved in several types of commercial activities such as inland trade and money-lending. The research on such groups has brought to light several aspects of colonial Indian society and economy – the creation of new elite groups in society, development of credit transfer mechanisms, migration of merchants and its effects on societies, and the nature of the links between merchants and their social universe.<sup>26</sup>

Claude Markovits, in his wide-ranging study of the international trade of Sindhi merchants, argued against a “simplistic” notion of the decline of South Asian merchants. He suggested that merchants redeployed their resources during colonial rule in several ways. Some communities, such as the Marwaris, ventured into commercial rural agriculture. The Khojas and Bohras took advantage of European imperialism in Asia and Africa and entered into new markets in these areas. The Parsis became prominent in shipbuilding and participated actively, both unilaterally and in partnership with English private merchants, in the trade with China in the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

However such revisionist interpretation of Indian merchant communities during the colonial period is limited to groups that were involved in overland trade and in providing financial services. In the case of maritime trading groups, the notion of their decline by 1800 continues to persist. Scholars have just begun to question the paradigm of the decline of maritime merchants and offer new ways to examine the status of Indian

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*Indian History: Evolution or Revolution?* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); Seema Alavi, ed. *The Eighteenth Century in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Kumkum Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics, and Society in Early Modern India: Bihar, 1733-1820* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); David Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Thomas Timburg, *The Marwaris: From Traders to Industrialists* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978); Scott C. Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and its Trade, 1550-1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Anand Yang, *Bazaar India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Gangetic Bihar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750-1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 23; Takashi Oishi, “Indian Muslim Merchants in Mozambique and South Africa: Intra-regional Networks in Strategic Association with State Institutions, 1870-1930s,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 2 (2007): 287-324.



maritime merchant communities.<sup>28</sup> In a recent collection of essays that focused on connections between Britain's empire in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Lakshmi Subramanian argues against the idea that maritime merchants fell into decline by 1800 and presents evidence of their continued operation well into the nineteenth century. She examines the operations of shore-based finance, brokerage, and money-exchange firms and suggests that Indian merchants were resilient in the face of rising political control by the East India Company and growing competition from English private merchants.<sup>29</sup> In the same set of essays, Rajat Datta indicates that Bengal's economy expanded during the early years of rule by the East India Company. While Datta's essay does not focus on maritime merchants, his arguments about an increase in export trade suggest that the carrying trade of Indian shipowners also benefited from the growing economy of eastern India.<sup>30</sup> Most recently, Pedro Machado has examined the maritime trade of Gujarat's Banya merchants between 1750 and 1850. He has shown how these merchants relocated from their bases in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea to Mozambique in the late eighteenth century and were able to carve out a niche trading area by monopolizing the trade in Indian textiles. Machado offers strong evidence to question earlier interpretations of decline of the Gujarat's maritime merchants by 1800.<sup>31</sup>

With regards to Tamil Muslim merchants, existing scholarship by Sinnappah Arasaratnam and Bhaswati Bhattacharya has shown that these merchants were able to

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<sup>28</sup> Bhaswati Bhattacharya, Gita Dharampal-Frick, Jos Gommans, "Spatial and Temporal Continuities of Merchant Networks in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (1500-2000)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 2 (2007): 91-105.

<sup>29</sup> Lakshmi Subramanian, "Seths and Sahibs: Negotiated Relationships Between Indigenous Capital and the East India Company," in *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550-1850*, eds. H.V. Bowen, Elizabeth Manke, and John G. Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 311-39.

<sup>30</sup> Rajat Datta, "The Commercial Economy of Eastern India Under Early British Rule," in *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550-1850*, eds. H.V. Bowen, Elizabeth Manke, and John G. Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 340-69.

<sup>31</sup> Pedro Machado, *Ocean of Trade: South Asian Merchants, Africa and the Indian Ocean, c. 1750-1850* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

continue their commercial activities into the late eighteenth century, at least until the establishment of an English settlement in Penang. But they do not examine the trade of Tamil Muslims in the nineteenth century. Raja Mohamad's work on the history of Tamil Muslims extends till 1900 CE. His scholarship, however, is based on the premise that indigenous merchant communities declined after the arrival of European trading companies. Therefore, his underlying argument is based on an earlier historiographical interpretation of the impact of European trading companies on Asian merchant communities.<sup>32</sup> For the nineteenth century, Lakshmi Subramanian and Barbara Andaya have examined the Tamil Muslim diaspora in Southeast Asia. In one study, Subramanian, while pointing to the continuity of trade by Tamil Muslims in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, focused on the process of identity formation of the Tamil Muslim community in Southeast Asia under colonial rule.<sup>33</sup> In another essay, Subramanian analyzed the commercial activities of Tamil Muslims in Penang and Singapore but concluded that the Tamil Muslims were relegated to a lower position as laborers in the emerging colonial order in Southeast Asia.<sup>34</sup> Barbara Andaya has surveyed the Tamil Muslim communities in Aceh, Perak, Kedah, and Penang in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and analyzed their role as merchants and cultural mediators.<sup>35</sup> Both Lakshmi Subramanian and Barbara Andaya focus solely on the Tamil Muslim diaspora in

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<sup>32</sup> Raja Mohamad, *Maritime History of the Coromandel Muslims: A Socio-Historical Study on the Tamil Muslims, 1750-1900* (Chennai: Government Museum, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Lakshmi Subramanian, "Commerce, Circulation, and Consumption: Indian Ocean Communities in Historical Perspective," in *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social, and Political Perspectives*, eds. Shanti Moorthy and Ashraj Jamal (New York: Routledge, 2010), 136-57.

<sup>34</sup> Lakshmi Subramanian, "Merchants in Transit: Risk-sharing Strategies in the Indian Ocean," in *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The History of the Indian Ocean World*, ed. Himanshu Prabha Ray and Edward Alpers (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 263-85.

<sup>35</sup> Barbara Watson Andaya, "'A People that Range into all the Kingdoms of Asia': The Chulia Trading Network in the Malay World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *The Trading World of the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800*, ed. Om Prakash (Delhi: Pearson, 2011), 353-86.

Southeast Asia and do not analyze the ways by which the merchants managed their trade from South India to Southeast Asia.

I examine the dynamics of maritime trade of Tamil-speaking Muslims in the Indian Ocean region between 1780 and 1840. In doing so, my project accomplishes two objectives: expand our understanding of India's colonial economy and intra-Asian trade in the early nineteenth century and analyze the evolving relationship between maritime merchants, the East India Company (EIC) state, and indigenous rulers during the transition to colonial rule.

A continued belief in the decline of Indian maritime merchants has skewed our perspective on the economy and society of colonial India. We have overlooked the numerous ways in which these merchants were embedded within the larger economy and society of nineteenth-century India. My research has shown that Tamil Muslim merchants were closely integrated within the economic structure of India's Southeastern coast. They were involved in the export of textiles and agricultural products, the two major forms of economic activity in the region. Consequently, they maintained extensive economic connections with the weavers and farmers in the hinterland. Muslim merchants controlled the pearl and conch shell fishing activities, and acted as agents on behalf of local rulers for collecting revenues. Studying maritime trade and merchants can help us comprehend the complex and shifting relationships between agriculture, industry, and commerce in colonial India.

Second, besides enhancing our understanding of the colonial economy during the period of colonial transition, my study contributes to the growing literature on intra-Asian trade and connections during European imperialism in Asia by examining the mercantile activities of Tamil-speaking Muslim merchants in the colonial entrepôts of Penang and Singapore. In recent years, a growing number of scholars have demonstrated that Asian

merchants operated trading networks that both supplemented and competed against European trading companies. Most of the scholarship has focused on East Asian and Southeast Asian trade.<sup>36</sup> My project makes a significant contribution to this literature by examining the trade flows established by Tamil-speaking Muslims between India and Southeast Asia.

Closely related to the development of intra-Asian commerce is the establishment of Indian merchant communities in Southeast Asia. Our understanding of the Indian diaspora has also been hindered by the belief that Indian merchants ceased to be active in maritime trade during the colonial era. Studies of the Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia remain primarily preoccupied with indentured labor and professionals who migrated during the mid-to-late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>37</sup> Ignoring the presence of Indian merchants prevents us from properly estimating the contributions of Indians to the culture and economy of their new overseas communities. In Penang and Singapore, Tamil-speaking merchants contributed significantly to the transformation of these two towns into thriving entrepôts.<sup>38</sup>

The third theme that will be examined in my dissertation is the changes in the relationship between Tamil Muslim merchants, the EIC state, indigenous rulers, and other merchant communities. In the centuries prior to the advent of European trading companies in Asia, South Indian Muslim maritime merchants were successful shipping

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<sup>36</sup> A.J.H. Latham and Heita Kawakatsu, eds., *Intra-Asian Trade and the World Market* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Kaoru Sugihara, "The Resurgence of Intra-Asian Trade, 1800-1850," in *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (with collaboration of Om Prakash and Kaoru Sugihara) (Brill, Leiden, 2009), 139-69.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Kernail Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement (1786-1957)* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in an Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> Helen Fujimoto, *The South Indian Muslim Community and the Evolution of the Jawi Peranakan in Penang up to 1948* (Tokyo: ILCCA, Tokyo Gaikokugo Daigaku, 1988).

merchants who acquired great wealth and attained high ranks in the courts of rulers in South India and Southeast Asia (Kedah, Perak, Malacca).<sup>39</sup> Such positions in the courts enabled Tamil Muslim merchants to acquire trade concessions. These transnational associations underwent transformations during colonial rule. The weakening of the authority of native rulers necessitated changes in the nature of previous linkages. My research reveals that the South Indian Muslim merchants were highly enmeshed within the local trading networks. This demonstrates a vibrant intra-Asian trade network that operated simultaneously alongside the global trading networks of European companies.

### **III. Age of Transitions**

The period under study was marked by important transitions in the histories of South Asia and the Indian Ocean region. In South Asian historiography, scholars identify the period from 1780 to 1840 as the era of transition to colonial rule in India during which the EIC expanded the extent of territories under its control, consolidated its position as a dominant military power, and laid the foundation for colonial rule in India. Existing studies focus on themes related to the territorial dimensions of colonial rule: the implementation of land revenue policy (Permanent Settlement), adoption of Lord William Bentinck's social reforms, spread of Christian missionary activity, emergence of new ideas of "race" and social hierarchy, codification of laws, military campaigns against Indian rulers and the French East India Company, and the religious and economic policies of the EIC.<sup>40</sup> In the process, however, we have overlooked the maritime

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<sup>39</sup> Barbara Watson Andaya, "The Indian 'Saudagar Raja' in Traditional Malay Courts," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society* 51, no. 1 (1978): 13-36; Andaya, "A People that Range into all the Kingdoms of Asia," 353-86.

<sup>40</sup> Ian J. Barrow and Douglas E. Haynes, "The Colonial Transition: South Asia, 1780-1840," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2004): 469-78.

dimensions of the colonial transition in India. Besides agricultural produce and manufactures, the EIC relied on marine sources of revenue such as salt, pearls, and conch shells. The EIC also tried to develop several ports along the Coromandel coast in Southeastern India in order to increase internal maritime trade along India's coasts as well as external trade with Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. In a similar vein, ignoring the maritime components of colonial transition in India would prevent us from properly understanding several aspects of colonial rule in India. For instance, the Admiralty courts operated independent of EIC-established civil and criminal courts and adjudicated petitions filed by Indian merchants against the capture of their vessels and cargo during the Napoleonic wars in the early nineteenth century. Therefore, focusing on the maritime aspects of colonial transition would help us better understand India's colonial economy and society.

From the mid-eighteenth century on, a series of conflicts between European powers spilled over into Asia as the trading companies from the warring nations fought for control over territories they possessed in Asia. The War of Austrian Succession (1744-48) began the era of fighting European battles for supremacy in Asia; by the end of the Seven Years' War (1756-63), the English East India Company asserted its dominance over the French in India. The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-84) and the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802) further consolidated the EIC's dominance in the Bay of Bengal littoral. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-15), the EIC emerged victorious militarily although rival European companies were allowed to possess territories in Asia. By 1825, the EIC possessed Sri Lanka, Penang, Singapore, and Melaka. As the nineteenth century progressed, the EIC (and later Britain) wielded enormous influence owing to its control of important commercial sea-lanes and the introduction of the steamship into the Indian Ocean region.

The East India Company's efforts to strengthen its position in the eastern Indian Ocean occurred in step with the acquisition of a land-based empire in India. H.V. Bowen notes that the "sea disappears from the view" in the general histories of the EIC from the mid-eighteenth century on when it began to acquire territories in India. He warns that an exclusive focus on "land-based imperialism in India" would diminish the importance of "British 'East Indian' maritime expansion" that continued in the Indian Ocean until the EIC lost its monopoly in 1833.<sup>41</sup> At one level it has caused us to overlook the connections between the British Empire in India and Southeast Asia. Between 1786 and 1861, the territories possessed by the EIC, and later the British Crown, in Southeast Asia (Penang, Singapore, and Melaka) were administered from Calcutta. The peril of ignoring the maritime dimension of colonial transition is evident from the fact that no historical scholarship has examined this administrative connection between India and Southeast Asia during the period of colonial rule. At another level, it has made us overlook the participation of Indian maritime merchants, with the exception of Indian opium traders in China, within the expanding maritime empire of the East India Company in the Indian Ocean.

#### **IV. Plan of Study and Sources**

The subsequent chapters are designed to elaborate on the themes outlined above. Chapter Two covers the last two decades of the eighteenth century and examines the impact of two developments on the maritime trade of Tamil Muslims: the acquisition of Nagore by the EIC from a South India ruler in 1778 and the establishment, in 1786, of an EIC

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<sup>41</sup> H.V. Bowen, "Britain in the Indian Ocean Region and Beyond: Contours, Connections, and the Creation of a Global Maritime Empire," in *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550-1850*, eds. H.V. Bowen, Elizabeth Manke, and John G. Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 45-65.

settlement at Penang in Southeast Asia. Nagore was a historically prominent port on India's Southeastern coast and was well populated for several centuries by Tamil Muslim merchants who traded with Bengal and Southeast Asia. The EIC sought to convert Nagore into a thriving port and, as a consequence, relied on the support of Tamil Muslims and other merchant groups to achieve its objective. As a necessity, the EIC granted several trade concessions, in the form of reduced port duties, to Tamil Muslims in order to attract them to Nagore. When the EIC acquired Penang from the Raja of Kedah in Southeast Asia, it was largely uninhabited. But it was located along the maritime route to Southeast Asian ports that was well travelled by maritime merchants from India. Tamil Muslims, both from the Coromandel coast and from communities already settled in Kedah, traded at the newly established trade settlement. These two developments indicate that, contrary to existing accounts of loss of trade for Indian maritime merchants by the end of the eighteenth century, the expansion of the EIC along the Coromandel coast and in Southeast Asia provided opportunities for Tamil Muslim merchants to trade in EIC-controlled ports, both in South India and Southeast Asia.

Chapter Three focuses on the participation of Tamil Muslim merchants in the colonial economy in India between 1800 and 1840. By 1800, the EIC emerged as the dominant power in South India and began to consolidate its position over the next four decades. Simultaneously, the Company pursued several strategies to increase its revenue from its possessions. As part of such efforts, EIC officials were drawn to South India's long coastline and sought to generate revenue from marine sources. Subsequently, the EIC identified three sources of marine revenue: salt trade, pearl, and chank (conch shell) fisheries. The EIC established a monopoly on salt trade and began to regulate the fishing of pearls and conch shells on the coast of South India and northern Sri Lanka. This chapter analyzes how Tamil Muslims took advantage of such opportunities and actively



participated in all three economic activities. By examining the involvement of Tamil Muslims in such ventures, we gain a better understanding of how they were able to leverage their pre-existing knowledge about such commercial activities and utilize them under the new conditions of colonial rule. This chapter also discusses the varying ways in which such involvement affected the different groups of Tamil Muslim merchants.

Chapter Four is centered on the participation of Tamil Muslims in the external commerce of Madras Presidency during the first four decades of the nineteenth century. The increased export of British cotton manufactures to Asia provides the context for examining the maritime trade of Tamil Muslims during this period. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, increasing quantities of cheap British cotton textiles entered the Asian markets. For centuries, textiles formed the staple item of export from South India to Southeast Asia and an elaborate system of exchange was underpinned by the desirability of Indian textiles in overseas markets. But the stiff challenge posed by British textiles adversely affected this pattern and forced the Tamil Muslims to adapt to this changed scenario. The shipping data from this period shows the continued participation of Tamil Muslims in the trade between South India and Malay ports. This chapter, therefore, examines the specific changes adopted by Tamil Muslim merchants in response to the changes in the nature of intra-Asian commerce in Indian textiles.

Chapter Five studies three distinct themes that are important for understanding the trading practices of Tamil Muslims during the period of colonial transition. The first section examines the evolving relationship between the Tamil Muslims, the EIC, and the rulers in Southeast Asia. This section studies the claims of Tamil Muslim merchants to be “British subjects” in their appeals for protection of their ships and cargo during the Napoleonic wars in the early nineteenth century. In particular, the chapter will analyze the merchants’ understanding of the nature of subjecthood in terms of their obligations

and the EIC's responsibilities towards its subjects. As the EIC became the dominant military power in the eastern Indian Ocean, claims of allegiance to the Company had important ramifications for the merchants since such pledges influenced access to ports and markets for the merchants. In turn, this affected the relationship between the Tamil Muslim merchants and rulers in the Malay ports.

The second section examines how the British efforts to abolish slave trade in the nineteenth century affected the recruitment of labor for ships and organization of trade by Tamil Muslim merchants. EIC officials charged Tamil Muslim merchants of involvement in kidnapping and trafficking in children. Such accusations arose within the context of enforcement of regulations passed by the British Parliament to abolish slavery and slave trade. In responding to such charges, Tamil Muslims agreed that they purchased children during their trading voyages. But they denied that such children were sold into slavery. This section analyzes these charges and explanations to provide a better picture of the recruitment of labor practices of Tamil Muslims, both for their ships and for their businesses in overseas markets.

The final section of the chapter will study the means used by Tamil Muslim merchants to raise capital for their trading ventures. While discussions in the previous chapters focused on the types of goods carried by Tamil Muslim merchants on their vessels and the business endeavors in which they participated, the crucial part of any commercial activity is the ability to raise funds. This section examines the partnerships formed by Tamil Muslims with other merchant communities in South India and Southeast Asia, including English merchants, and the legal arrangements that were drawn up to safeguard the interests of the various partners. Tamil Muslims did not borrow funds from any organized financial institutions and neither did they rely on the model of joint-stock firms that was adopted by English merchants. Yet, the continued ability of Tamil

Muslims to undertake trading voyages demonstrates the adaptability of Indian merchants, who could secure funds by relying upon pre-existing credit mechanisms.

The concluding chapter summarizes the findings of the previous chapters and provides a brief discussion of the condition of Tamil Muslims during the second half of the nineteenth century. This period witnessed the introduction of steamships in the Indian Ocean and the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869. There was also a large migration of laborers from India to Southeast Asia to work on rubber plantations in Malaya. These developments had important consequences for the Tamil Muslim merchants, both shipowners and traders.

This study is based primarily on the records of the English East India Company. Due to the itinerant nature of the merchants, material about their commercial activities was located in several places. I consulted the Tamil Nadu State Archives in Chennai, the National Archives of India in Delhi, the West Bengal State Archives, the National Archives of Singapore, and the India Office Records and Private Papers in the British Library (London). Within the archives, information about the Tamil Muslim merchants were recorded in different categories of documents. For the Madras Presidency, the following collections were utilized: the Collectorate records of the various maritime districts (Tanjore, Madura, Southern Division of Arcot, and Tinnevely), Board of Revenue Proceedings, Proceedings of the Sea Customs Office within the Board of Revenue, Consultations of the Marine, Military, Public, and Revenue Departments. Information regarding the activities of the Tamil Muslim merchants in Penang can be found in the Straits Settlements Factory Records, a large collection of documents on the East India Company in Singapore, Penang, and Melaka. Finally, the discussions between the Court of Directors and the EIC officials in India can be found in the Board's Records collection in the India Office Records and Private Papers in the British Library. In

addition to the EIC records, the study also used the travel accounts of several EIC officials who wrote detailed descriptions of the places they visited in India and Southeast Asia.

### **V: Typology of Maritime Merchants**

The term “maritime merchant” is an all-encompassing one that has been used to denote various types of participants in maritime trade. It is useful to delineate the various groups in order to better understand the effects of transitions that took place in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the particular case of Indian maritime merchants, Ashin Das Gupta identified different kinds of operators involved in the maritime trade. The first type of maritime merchants was the shipowner who did not necessarily always travel on board the vessel. Typically, this group of merchants invested in shipping, maintained a network of maritime communication to keep track of overseas markets, and built a network of alliances at several port cities. Next, the ship’s Commander or *nakhuda* represented the second type of maritime merchant. The *nakhuda* could be any one of the following: the vessel owner, a relative or a business associate of the owner, or a nobleman from the court of the port’s ruler. The *nakhuda* was primarily a businessman and Das Gupta claims that skilled sailors and navigators became *nakhudas* only in the later colonial era. If the vessel owner was not onboard, the *nakhuda* managed the disposal of the owner’s cargo as well as the cargo of other port-based merchants who entrusted him with such responsibilities. Similarly, at the destination ports, the *nakhuda* procured cargo for the return journey on behalf of the owner and other merchants. The third type of maritime merchant rented the cargo space from the vessel owner and carried goods on behalf of other merchants or shipped his own goods to be conveyed and sold at destination ports. Some merchants engaged in a significant volume of trade, whereas

others carried their merchandise in small bundles and sold them in the ports or in the interior. Skilled sailors managed the actual navigation and sailing of the ship. At the ports, a host of merchants serviced a ship in different ways: procuring cargo for export, buying goods from the ship, insurers, financiers of voyages, and brokers.<sup>42</sup> Thus, it is possible to identify several different types of merchants differing in their scale and scope of their operations.

Roxani Margariti, in her fascinating study of the port of Aden during the medieval period, provides a similar typology of maritime merchants.<sup>43</sup> The appellation *nakhuda* was used to refer to shipowning merchants as well as captains of the vessels.<sup>44</sup> Margariti observes that the shipowning merchants operated shipping and trading enterprises and also managed trade on behalf of other merchants. In some cases, a shipowning merchant's son acted as a *nakhuda* and sailed onboard the vessels while the elder merchant managed the business on land. She also notes the alliances between shipowners in which a merchant provided another with concessions in terms of freight rates or space or even provided money at distant ports in cases of shipwrecks. Besides the shipowning merchants, who possessed high status and wealth in the port towns, Margariti also describes the trade of several merchants who freighted space aboard the ships.<sup>45</sup>

Sebouh Aslanian's extensive study of Armenian merchants trading in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean worlds from their home base of New Julfa shows the

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<sup>42</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, "The Maritime Merchant and Indian History," in *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500-1800*, comp. Uma Das Gupta (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 24-6.

<sup>43</sup> Roxani Margariti, *Aden & the Indian Ocean Trade: 150 Years in the Life of a Medieval Arabian Port* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> For the most recent discussion of the various meanings of the term *nakhuda* in the Indian Ocean region, see S.D. Goitein and M.A. Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 121-56.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* See chapters four, five, and six, 109-205.

adoption of similar mercantile practices.<sup>46</sup> The Armenian merchants used a type of commercial contract commonly known as *commenda* to guide the transaction between a senior merchant and his agent(s). Under such a partnership a merchant entrusted his capital to an agent and received a major share of the ensuing profits, usually ranging from two-thirds to three-fourths. The investing partner was called *agha* and was commonly identified as *khwaja*, an honorific, and the junior partner was called *enker*. The contract between them was called *enkeragir* or *muzarba*. Such types of contracts were negotiated between merchants, not necessarily involving shipowners and their agents. Aslanian indicates that some Armenian merchants owned ships and it was possible that such shipowners used the *enkeragir* to entrust their capital and goods to either the vessel's commander or other merchants who sailed on the ship.<sup>47</sup> An important and interesting feature of the Armenian mercantile community was the formal training process in various subjects, such as accounting, arithmetic, geography, and currency exchange rates that young agents underwent before commencing their trading voyages.<sup>48</sup>

The information on Tamil Muslim maritime merchants shows similar structures of organization of trade. While the available data is not as extensive as in the case of the Armenian merchants analyzed by Aslanian, such information can be gathered indirectly through court cases, petitions, application for sea passes, and shipping lists. The applications for sea passes for trading voyages provide the names of the vessel's owner and commander. In most cases, the owner and the commander were different persons. The applications do not indicate whether the commander was a skilled navigator or a merchant. But several petitions and court cases discussed in the records indicate that the

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<sup>46</sup> Sebouh Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 121-165.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-5.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

commander or *nakhuda* was often a merchant who was entrusted with the disposal of the vessel's cargo and also the acquisition of cargo for the ship's return journey. Besides managing the vessel owner's cargo, the *nakhuda* also managed the cargo of other land-based merchants. There were variations in the nature of the relationship between the vessel owner and the *nakhuda*. In some cases, the owner and the *nakhuda* were members of the same family or were related by kinship ties. In other cases, the owner was a Hindu and the *nakhuda* was a Muslim. In addition to the *nakhuda*, several traders sailed in the vessel carrying goods on their own or as agents of other merchants. Such traders freighted cargo space on the vessel. Sometimes the merchants who freighted cargo also provided funds to build the vessel. According to the terms of the agreement between the owner and the merchants, a *respondentia* bond was given by the owner in which he promised to repay the loan provided by the merchants within twenty-one days after the vessel reached its destination port. Maritime merchants in India commonly used such *respondentia* bonds and Arasaratnam provides a detailed discussion on the use of such bonds.<sup>49</sup>

Similar to the Armenian merchants, who privileged a working knowledge of subjects such as accounting, arithmetic, and geography, the Tamil Muslims merchants were highly regarded in the trading entrepôts of Southeast Asia for their commercial and linguistic proficiency in multiple languages.<sup>50</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that the Tamil Muslims, unlike the Armenian merchants, underwent formal training in a preparatory school. Rather, training in languages, accounting, and foreign exchange rates took place as the young merchants accompanied senior merchants on trading voyages.

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<sup>49</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce*, 278-81.

<sup>50</sup> Subramanian, "Commerce, Circulation, and Consumption," in *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social, and Political Perspectives*, eds. Shanti Moorthy and Ashraj Jamal (New York: Routledge, 2010), 146-7.

But Tamil Muslim merchants considered the acquisition of these skills as important for their commercial success.

The society of Tamil Muslims in the English settlement of Penang reflected the categories of maritime traders as well as other categories of migrants. While the term “Chulia” and its various derivatives, such as “Choolier,” “Choliah,” or “Chouliah,” have been taken to be synonymous with Tamil-speaking Muslims, its use was not limited to identifying Muslims from Tamil-speaking parts of India. To be sure, all Tamil Muslims were identified as Chulias but not all Chulias were Tamil Muslims – the term was also used to identify other immigrants from the Coromandel coast. Captain Light, who established the English settlement at Penang, noted the Chulias to be shopkeepers and *coolies* and estimated them to number 1000. He added that vessels from the Coromandel coast brought 1,500 to 2,000 more Chulias annually, who by trade and labor made a little amount of money and returned home. He stated that new migrants replaced the departing Chulias.<sup>51</sup> Sir George Leith, who served as Lt. Governor of Penang from 1800 to 1803, wrote that Chulias were merchants with a lot of property and were fixed inhabitants of Penang. But he also noted that a number of Chulias resided there for a few months to dispose of their goods and returned to Coromandel with fresh items. He identified a third category of Chulias who were boatmen and coolies. This group remained in Penang between one and three years and returned to South India.<sup>52</sup> In 1824, John Crawfurd crossed Penang on his voyage from Calcutta to meet the rulers of Siam and Cochin China (present day Thailand and parts of Southern Vietnam) and noted that the Chulias were

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<sup>51</sup> “Notices of Penang,” in J.R. Logan (Ed) *Journal of Indian Archipelago*, Vol. 5 (1851), 9.

<sup>52</sup> Sir George Leith, *A Short Account of the Settlement, Produce, and Commerce of Prince of Wales Island in the Straits of Malacca* (London: J. Booth, 1804), 27.



employed as porters, field-laborers, clerks, police officers, shopkeepers, merchants and occasionally as mechanics.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, Chulias became shopkeepers, temporary traders, laborers, government employees, and prominent merchants in Penang. The categories most linked to maritime trade were traders and shopkeepers. The traders were primarily those people identified by Sir George as residing in Penang to dispose of their goods and then returning to the Coromandel coast with fresh goods from Penang and neighboring ports.<sup>54</sup> These were people whom J. C. Van Leur, during the 1950s, famously identified as “peddlers” in Asian trade, who carried small quantities of goods and moved from one port to another by freighting space on ships.<sup>55</sup> Tamil Muslims formed an important part of this group but there were several types of Hindu merchants from South India who participated in this trade as well.<sup>56</sup> The second occupational category for the Chulias identified by contemporary observers was that of shopkeepers. This suggests that Chulias established permanent physical structures to sell manufactures or produce. This is clearly evident by the presence of a street called Chulia Street that still exists in present day Penang.

This section briefly described the various groups of people usually subsumed under the category of “maritime merchant” and underscored the need to distinguish between these types of merchants. Usually, most of the information in the archival records relates to the shipowners or the ship’s commanders since they were the ones who sought trade permits, provided information about the shipping manifests, and faced

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<sup>53</sup> John Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), 30-1.

<sup>54</sup> Leith, *A Short Account of the Settlement*, 27.

<sup>55</sup> J.C. Van Leur, *Indonesia Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History*, trans. by James Holmes and A. van Marle (The Hague: W. Van Hoeve, 1955).

<sup>56</sup> For an example, see the list of merchants who freighted their goods from Penang to ports on Coromandel coast on a vessel that was captured by the British navy in 1808. Tanjore Collectorate Records, 26 April 1808 Vol. 3404, Tamil Nadu State Archives (TNSA).

allegations of evasion of port duties. Information about other traders who participated in maritime trade is sometimes available, usually when disputes arose between the shipowner and the traders who freighted space on the vessel. Such cases provide useful information to understand the different groups of traders who took part in maritime trade. With such a general understanding of the various classes of maritime merchants, the remainder of the chapter provides an overview of the activities of the Tamil Muslim traders in the Indian Ocean from the seventeenth century until the eighteenth century.

## **VI: Indian Merchants and Indian Ocean Trade: An Overview**

Maritime trade in the Indian Ocean dates back to antiquity and the region known as the Indian Ocean World developed the world's first "global economy" by the thirteenth century. The commercial link between the Mesopotamian and Indus Valley civilizations, two of the oldest civilizations, represents the earliest instance of transoceanic commercial connections in global history. Later, Greeks and Romans sailed to South Asian ports for South Indian pepper, glass beads, pearls, Chinese silks, and Southeast Asian spices. *The Periplus of the Erythraen Sea*, written by an anonymous Alexandrian Greek in the first century CE, describes the various ports in the Indian Ocean involved in trade with the Mediterranean world. A region in southern Vietnam, known by the Chinese name of Funan, emerged by the third century CE as a pivotal region of eastward and westward trade from Southeast Asia.<sup>57</sup>

Such an early integration of trade in the Indian Ocean region was made possible by the discovery of monsoon wind patterns by Indian Ocean sailors. From November to January, the Northeast winds blew from China towards Southeast Asia and from Arabia

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<sup>57</sup> Edward A. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 19-39.

and Western India towards Eastern Africa. Between April and August, the wind direction reversed and the Southwest monsoon winds blew towards Western India and China. Beginning with local and regional sailings often in sight of the coast, sailors gradually understood the Southwest and Northeast wind patterns and undertook voyages further away from land. By the time the Greco-Roman sailors “discovered” the operations of the monsoon winds between the first century BCE and the first century CE, Indian Ocean sailors had already been familiar with the winds’ operations for as long as eight centuries.<sup>58</sup>

Maritime merchants took advantage of the predictable monsoon wind patterns to manage their trade voyages. The Indian Ocean trading zone contained several sub-regions – Eastern Africa, Red Sea, Arabian/Persian Gulf, Western India, Eastern India, Straits of Melaka, Eastern Indonesian Archipelago, and South China. In the seventh century, the birth and expansion of Islam in the Arabian peninsula and the rise of the Tang dynasty in China brought political stability that was conducive to maritime trade. Indeed, over the next three centuries, Persian and Arab merchants undertook direct sailings from the Gulf to China, a return voyage that took eighteen months. Besides Arabs and Persians, several merchant communities from the Indian Ocean littoral regions and the Mediterranean region became prominent in trading across sub-regions in the Indian Ocean trading zone – Mediterranean Jews, Armenians, Hadhramis from Yemen, Indians, Malays, and Chinese.

In this vibrant trading world of the Indian Ocean, India and Indian merchants played a prominent role. The products exported from India, such as textiles, pepper, and precious stones, were highly sought after in other places. In addition, India’s location

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<sup>58</sup> Alpers, 2, 7-8.

roughly at the mid-point in the Indian Ocean meant that ships' captains used Indian ports as transit points for restocking the vessel's supplies. As a consequence, several ports became important trading hubs for maritime trade. From the sixteenth century, European trading companies, upon their arrival in the Indian Ocean, established their operations at or near the ports that were already established as important centers of trade. By the seventeenth century, four major zones of trade can be identified along India's coasts: Gujarat, Malabar, Coromandel, and Bengal. Besides shipownership and overseas trade, maritime trade also encompassed other activities such as moneylending, currency exchange, insurance, and shipping supplies. The discussion, however, will be limited to shipowners and traders who went onboard the vessels.

The trade from Gujarat went in several directions. Towards the west, ships sailed to ports in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, and eastern Africa. In the east, commercial links existed with the Southeast Asian ports of Aceh, Kedah, and Bantam. There were also extensive connections with the ports in Malabar, Coromandel, and Bengal regions. By the early decades of the seventeenth century, Surat became the most prominent port in Gujarat. But trade was also conducted from other coastal towns such as Cambay, Broach, and the Portuguese-controlled towns of Diu and Daman.<sup>59</sup> In the eighteenth century, Bombay rose to prominence and became a major trading hub. A diverse group of merchants carried out the trade from Gujarat's ports. In Surat, Muslims predominated in owning ships. The Muslim merchants in Gujarat's ports belonged to different ethnic groups and sects within Islam. There were Persians, Turks, Arabs, and Indian Muslims who were either Sunnis or Shias. Among the Shias, the Bohras were actively involved in trade with the ports in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. Mulla Abdul Ghafur, the well-

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<sup>59</sup> S. Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 193-94.

known merchant belonged to the Bohra community.<sup>60</sup> The Chellabies, competitors to Ghaffur, were Turkish immigrants. The term Banyas was used to refer to identify Hindu and Jain merchants. There were about eighty-four Hindu and Jain clans and they were primarily involved in shore-based aspects of maritime trade such as brokerage, insurance, shipping services, and money exchange. Some Banyas were also involved in shipping. Virji Vorah was a prominent shipowner in the seventeenth century who was actively involved in the pepper trade with Malabar and in textile trade with Southeast Asia.<sup>61</sup> The Parsis were another community of merchants who gradually rose to prominence by the end of the seventeenth century and achieved great success after their relocation to Bombay in the eighteenth century.<sup>62</sup>

The Malabar region roughly corresponds to the stretch of coastline of the modern Indian state of Kerala in Southwest India. Pepper, grown in the hills of Western Ghats, had been a staple product of export since ancient times. Ports such as Cannanore, Calicut, Cochin, and Quilon became active centers of trade. The most prominent among Malabar's merchants were the Muslims, known as the Mapillas. This community developed from the Arab settlements and through intermarriages between Arabs and local women. The Mapillas traded with ports in West Asia and were involved in trade with Gujarat, the Coromandel coast, Sri Lanka, and Bengal. The Hindu merchants of Malabar mainly belonged to the Tamil and Telugu Chetty castes and were mainly engaged in trade along India's coasts.<sup>63</sup> Besides the Mapillas and the Chettys, the other groups that were

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<sup>60</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, "The Ship-owning Merchants of Surat, c. 1700," in *Asian Merchants and Businessmen in the Indian Ocean and the China Sea*, eds. Denys Lombard and Jean Aubin (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 105-12.

<sup>61</sup> Lakshmi Subramanian, *Indigenous Capital and Imperial Expansion: Bombay, Surat, and the West Coast* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 25-26; S. Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 193-94.

<sup>62</sup> Subramanian, *Indigenous Capital and Imperial Expansion*, 26.

<sup>63</sup> Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century*, 201-202.

involved in maritime trade were a small colony of Jews in Cochin and Brahmans from Konkan region located just north of the Malabar region.<sup>64</sup>

The Coromandel region, among the four trading regions mentioned above, was spread over the longest stretch of coastline and encompassed the coastal areas of the modern Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and parts of Odisha. A variety of merchant communities participated in the maritime trade in this region. A majority of the merchants were Hindus and most of them belonged to the Telugu and Tamil Chetty sub-castes. These were the same category of merchants who operated from Malabar ports as well. Among the Telugu Chetties, Baliya Chetties, Beri Chetties, and Komatties were dominant in overland and coastal trade. Tamil Chetties were located in the ports in southern Coromandel and were heavily involved in inland and commodity trade and moneylending. This group also took part in overseas trade. Besides the Chetties, some members of the agricultural Vellala castes became merchants. There was also a similar migration of members of the weaving castes into commercial activities. Some coastal communities, such as the Hindu and Christian Paravas, were involved in small distance trade along the Coromandel coast. Besides the Hindus, Muslims comprised the second major mercantile community in the Coromandel region. In the sixteenth century, Muslim merchants with diverse backgrounds settled in the port of Masulipatnam in northern Coromandel as a consequence of the expansion of the Golkonda kingdom that was located in the interior. The second important community of Muslims was the Tamil Muslims, the subject of this present study, who were domiciled in ports located in the southern part of the Coromandel coast.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Mark Vink, "The Dutch East India Company and the Pepper Trade between Kerala and Tamilnad, 1663-1795: A Geo-historical Analysis," in *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History*, ed. K.S. Mathew (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), 283-84.

<sup>65</sup> Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century*, 203-205.

Following the Mughal conquest of Bengal in the seventeenth century, the maritime trade from Bengal increased as the region was better integrated with other parts of India and the Mughal governors took measures to control piracy along Bengal's coasts. There was greater trade with ports in Gujarat and the Coromandel coast. In addition, ships sailed to the Malay ports in Kedah and Johore. The Hindu merchants who took part in these trade ventures were Gujarati migrants. Muslims were also active in overseas trade and were composed of groups of varied provenance, just as in Masulipatnam. Some merchants were descendants of early Muslim settlers in Bengal, whereas others arrived in Bengal as a result of the Mughal conquest of the province. A number of Mughal officials also took part in Bengal's maritime trade.<sup>66</sup>

This brief overview of the Indian maritime merchant communities shows the diverse groups of traders who were engaged in maritime trade. The next section provides a brief history of the participation of Tamil Muslim merchants in Indian Ocean trade.

## **VII. Maritime Trading World of Tamil Muslims: Current Scholarship**

Maritime traders from the Southern Coromandel ports traded extensively in the first two zones at ports along the Burmese coast, the Malay peninsula, and Melaka. For several centuries, merchants at the ports on the Coromandel coast, south of Madras, carried on a brisk trade with Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and with ports along the India's east coast and parts of southwest India. While Madras emerged as a prominent English settlement by the eighteenth century and attracted several merchants, southern Coromandel ports such as Nagore, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, Porto Novo (Muhammad Bandar), and Karaikal

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 213-16.

housed indigenous mercantile communities and European private merchants who continued to trade from such ports. The trade from these ports was part of a wider Indian Ocean trading world in which trading cycles depended on the monsoon wind patterns and a complex system of exchange of goods and division of trade regions.<sup>67</sup>

The trade did not always originate at Coromandel ports; Indian traders domiciled at Burmese and Southeast Asian ports, as well as Southeast Asian rulers, sent ships to the Coromandel coast. In the early sixteenth century, a community of merchants, identified in the European records as Kelings, partly owned the shipping trade along the Coromandel-Melaka route.<sup>68</sup> Gujarati traders also played an influential role in the trade with Melaka. Sanjay Subrahmanyam notes the Kelings were Tamil-speaking and Telugu-speaking merchants who owned ships.<sup>69</sup> In fifteenth-century Melaka, the Kelings were one of the powerful trading communities that had a *Bendahara* (Prime Minister) in the Sultan's council and a settlement called Kampong Keling.<sup>70</sup> Besides the Kelings, Tamil-speaking Muslims identified as Chulias were another important Indian trading community in Melaka and other Southeast Asian ports. While the Chulias were not as numerous as the Kelings, they had their own settlement at Melaka called Kampong Palli.<sup>71</sup> Nicolas Conti,

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<sup>67</sup> For an early nineteenth century description of the various ports of trade and commodities of exchange in Asia, see William Milburn, *Oriental Commerce or the East India Trader's Complete Guide* (London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen, 1825). For ports in Southern Coromandel and Malay Peninsula, see 210-5, 308-56.

<sup>68</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Coromandel Malacca Trade in the Sixteenth Century: A Study of its Evolving Structure," in *European Commercial Expansion in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Om Prakash (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997), 46.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* The group of Indian merchants included in the category *Kelings* (also spelt as *Kling*) is not clear. Mostly, Portuguese and Dutch sources include South Indian Hindus and Muslims in the category. Sometimes they also used "Moor" or "Mouro" to refer to South Indian Muslims. English sources, other the other hand, used the term *Chulia* (also written as *Cholia*, *Chuliar*, *Choolier*) to denote Tamil-speaking Muslims from South India.

<sup>70</sup> Kenneth McPherson, "Chulias and Klings: Indigenous Trade Diasporas and European Penetration of the Indian Ocean Littoral," in *Trade and Politics in the Indian Ocean: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Giorgio Borsa (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990), 35.

<sup>71</sup> In Malay language, Kampong means a settlement, village, or enclosure. In Tamil, Palli means mosque.



an Italian traveler to Melaka in the fifteenth century, noted that the Chulias were “very rich, so much so that some will carry on their business in forty of their own ships each of which is valued at 50,000 gold pieces.”<sup>72</sup> While Conti’s claims about the wealth of Chulia merchants can be questioned, the Chulias remained a prominent trading community in Melaka.<sup>73</sup>

The Portuguese capture of Melaka in 1511 caused a dispersal of Melaka’s merchant communities, primarily Muslims, to ports outside Portuguese control in Southeast Asia. While Muslim merchants remained the primary group affected by the Portuguese, the hostility of the Portuguese to Muslims should not be overstated since the Portuguese, realizing the importance of Muslim merchants, allowed them to return to Melaka in a few years. However, Tamil-speaking Muslim merchants began to spread to friendlier ports in northern Sumatra, the western Malay peninsula, and the Burmese-Thai coast. Between the mid-sixteenth and late-eighteenth centuries, Tamil-speaking Muslims migrated to Aceh, Kedah, Perak, and the Tenasserim coast and became influential in the courts of the rulers of emerging regional kingdoms.<sup>74</sup>

Tamil Muslims attained the post of *saudagar raja* (commercial agent) or *shahbandar* (port agent) in the Malay kingdoms during the eighteenth century.<sup>75</sup> Several reasons contributed to the rise of influence of Tamil Muslim merchants in these royal courts. The revenue from maritime trade provided an important source of income for regional Malay rulers. Recently, Carl Trocki has argued that the opium tax farms in nineteenth-century Southeast Asia played an important role in the development of

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<sup>72</sup> Quoted in McPherson, “Chulias and Klings,” 35.

<sup>73</sup> S. Arasaratnam, *Islamic Merchant Communities of the Indian Subcontinent in Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya, 1989).

<sup>74</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce*, 218-9.

<sup>75</sup> Barbara Andaya, “The Indian ‘Saudagar Raja,’” 13-36; Lee Kam Hing, “Foreigners in the Achehnese Court, 1760-1819,” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society* 43, no. 1 (1970): 64-86.

capitalism in the region. In the revenue farming system, the right to collect a tax or to distribute and sell a commodity was auctioned to an individual, who was called the “farmer.” According to Trocki, the opium tax farms allowed the Chinese merchants to accumulate capital, which was then utilized to invest in the production of commodities such as tin, gold, pepper, gambier, sugar, and rice.<sup>76</sup> In the courts of Malay rulers, therefore, the ability of Tamil Muslims to conduct trade and to collect the port duties must have enabled them to rise to the important position of *Shahbandar* or *Saudagar Raja*. In nineteenth-century Penang, Tamil Muslims participated in the revenue farming system by managing the sale of betelnuts.<sup>77</sup>

In addition to their ability to collect revenue, the social and culturally important role of Indian textiles in Southeast Asian societies meant that the Southeast Asian rulers relied on South Indian traders to ensure a steady supply of Indian cloth. These merchants also served as agents of the Malay and Burmese rulers’ own trade with the Coromandel coast. For instance, a Tenasserim official designating himself as the Prince of Tenasserim sent a vessel to Madras under “Nakhoda Muhammad Ameen” for trading on his behalf.<sup>78</sup> In another instance, in 1758, a vessel belonging to the ruler of Kedah arrived at Madras to procure goods and was commanded by “Enayed Mohamad Markar” and “Katchal Shaikh Esmelebbe Periathamby,” two Tamil Muslims probably domiciled in Kedah.<sup>79</sup> They also

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<sup>76</sup> Carl Trocki, “Opium and the Beginings of Chinese Capitalism in Southeast Asia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 33, no. 2 (June 2002): 297-314. For a collection of essays on the system of revenue farming in Southeast Asia see, John Butcher and Howard Dick, eds. *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

<sup>77</sup> Wong Lin Ken, “The Revenue Farms of Prince of Wales Island, 1805-1830,” *Journal of the South Seas Society* 19, no. i (1964): 56-127.

<sup>78</sup> S. Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power: Southeast India 1750-1800* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), 246.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

served as procurers of arms and slaves from South India for Malay rulers.<sup>80</sup> In addition, Tamil Muslims, often conversant in several languages of the region, served as cultural brokers and interlocutors for the rulers in their dealings with the Europeans and other traders.<sup>81</sup> As a result of the influential position of Tamil Muslims in the Malay courts, trade between the Coromandel coast and Southeast Asia originated on both sides and was managed by Tamil-speaking Muslim merchants residing on the Coromandel coast and domiciled in Southeast Asia.

By dispersing from European-controlled ports, Tamil-speaking Muslim merchants, like other Asian merchants, did not completely avoid Europeans and ports under European authority. In fact, they formed partnerships with Europeans under certain circumstances. While such alliances did not imply an age of cooperation between Asian merchants and European trading companies and private merchants, the partnerships certainly represented what Sanjay Subrahmanyam identifies as an Age of Contained Conflict.<sup>82</sup> As new entrants into the Indian Ocean trading world, the Europeans relied on Asian merchants to act as intermediaries with the rulers and producers of goods. The Asian merchants used European ships to freight goods, raised capital for trading voyages with European assistance, and often used the competition among Europeans to their advantage.

After the Portuguese captured Melaka, they formed partnerships with the Kelings and sent vessels annually to Pegu and Pulicat on the Burmese and Coromandel coasts, respectively. The initial practice of having an Asian *nakhoda* (Commander) of these vessels was abandoned and the vessels were commanded instead by a Portuguese

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<sup>80</sup> Brown, *Capital and Entrepreneurship in South-East Asia*, 13; Barbara Andaya, "The Chulia Trading Network in the Malay World," 359-61.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 252-97.

*nakhoda*. The *cartaz* system of issuing passes affected shipping from the Coromandel coast but independent shipping continued from the Coromandel coast to Melaka. In one instance in 1526, the Portuguese sold a Muslim *nakhuda* and his family into slavery since their vessel did not possess a *cartaz*. However, the *cartaz* system was not strictly enforced and Asian merchants found ways to circumvent the restrictions. By the late sixteenth century, the Portuguese implemented a System of Concession under which certain ports were designated as reserved ports and only these ports had the right to participate in trade. Thus, there was an incentive to conduct trade using large ships from the selected ports. Under this system, the Portuguese began to send a large ship annually from Goa to Melaka that passed through Pulicat. The freight space on this large ship was mostly rented to Indian merchants, who used the cargo space on the Portuguese ship to circumvent the restrictions that prohibited Indian ships from sailing to Melaka.<sup>83</sup>

The Dutch, after capturing Melaka in 1641 and setting up factories<sup>84</sup> on the Coromandel coast in the late seventeenth century, imposed more restrictions on Asian merchants than the Portuguese and sought to monopolize intra-Asian trade. After realizing the futility of such efforts, the Dutch began to ease restrictions both at Melaka and in Dutch-controlled ports on the Coromandel coast. Tamil-speaking Muslim merchants took advantage of such opportunities and consigned goods from Coromandel ports to Tamil Muslim merchants already domiciled in Dutch-controlled Melaka.<sup>85</sup> The importance of the trade with the Dutch ports in Southeast Asia for the Tamil Muslims is borne out by the fact that, after the Marathas plundered the Dutch port of Nagapattinam in 1740, a prominent Tamil Muslim merchant from Porto Novo, Shaykh Hamid

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<sup>83</sup> Subrahmanyam, "The Coromandel Malacca Trade in the Sixteenth Century", 43-68.

<sup>84</sup> At a basic level, factories were fortified European trading posts that contained warehouses and houses for officials of the European trading companies.

<sup>85</sup> Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power*, 253.

Marakkayar, offered to negotiate on behalf of the Dutch with the Nawab of Arcot to obtain concessions on export duty for the VOC. The Nawab subsequently granted a *purwana*<sup>86</sup> to the Dutch offering them reduced duties.<sup>87</sup> The Dutch also attempted to woo Tamil Muslim merchants at Nagore to settle and trade at the Dutch port of Nagapattinam. Such efforts were partly successful; between 1739 and 1740, two influential merchants Sala Pillai and Sayyid Pillai left Nagore, then under the administration of the Marathas of Thanjavur, and settled at Nagapattinam.<sup>88</sup>

Besides the Dutch, the Danish East India Company also established a settlement on the Coromandel coast, in the town of Tranquebar (Tharangambadi) in 1620. The significance of the Danish East India Company in the Bay of Bengal trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries lay in its role as a partner with other European trading companies as well as with Indian merchants. The Danes allowed Tamil Muslims and other Indian merchants to trade from Tranquebar and even provided Danish ships for freighting goods to Burmese and Malay ports.<sup>89</sup> In fact, the Danish Factor at Porto Novo during the late seventeenth century was a Tamil Muslim merchant named Nellabocca Marakkayar who carried on an extensive trade from Coromandel ports to Aceh.<sup>90</sup> Similar to freighting on Danish ships, Tamil Muslims also freighted goods on French ships from Pondicherry during the eighteenth century. The French offered freight space provided the merchants did not carry English goods. While Tamil Muslims shipped goods using

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<sup>86</sup> A *Purwana* is an order, grant, or a letter under royal seal.

<sup>87</sup> Bhaswati Bhattacharya, "The Chulia Merchants of Southern Coromandel in the Eighteenth Century: A Case for Continuity," in *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1800*, eds. Om Prakash and Denys Lombard (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 294.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>89</sup> McPherson, "Chulias and Klings," 38.

<sup>90</sup> Bhattacharya, "The Chulias Merchants of Southern Coromandel," 290.

French vessels, they preferred to operate from Porto Novo. Thus, land records from Pondicherry show lands offered by the French to Tamil Muslims that were unoccupied.<sup>91</sup>

Unlike their partnerships with the Dutch, French, and Danish trading companies, Tamil Muslim merchants chiefly formed trade alliances with private English traders and dealt less with East India Company (EIC) merchants. This does not imply that Tamil Muslims rejected or avoided EIC merchants; since the Tamil Muslims were primarily involved in intra-Asian oceanic carrying trade, more opportunities arose for them to deal with private English traders, who were also engaged in similar ventures. Most of the merchants who worked for the EIC or formed partnerships with EIC merchants did so in their capacity as procurers of goods for EIC ships, accountants, brokers, and financiers.<sup>92</sup> Two developments in the mid-seventeenth century resulted in an increased prominence of private English merchants in intra-Asian trade: these merchants began to build their own ships and the EIC withdrew its earlier opposition to these private traders as long as the Company's interests were not harmed. As private English merchants began to participate in intra-Asian trade, they relied more on partnerships with Asian merchants to enter existing trade networks. Since the Tamil Muslim merchants were firmly entrenched in the Indian Ocean trade from Coromandel ports, English merchants used the knowledge and services of Tamil Muslim merchants. The common desire for the English and Tamil Muslim merchants to counter the Dutch monopoly in Southeast Asia also influenced the formation of joint ventures between them.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Catherine Manning, "French Country Trade on Coromandel (1720-1750)," in *European Commercial Expansion in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Om Prakash (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997), 290-1.

<sup>92</sup> For a discussion of new merchant groups that arose in Madras and dealt with the EIC, see S. Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India, 1750-1790: Changing British-Indian Relationships," *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 1 (1979): 19-40.

<sup>93</sup> P.J. Marshall, "Private British Trade in the Indian Ocean before 1800," in *European Commercial Expansion in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Om Prakash (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997), 237-61; D.K. Bassett, "British 'Country' Trade and Local Trade Networks in the Thai and Malay States, c. 1680-1770," in *European Commercial Expansion in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Om Prakash (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997),

Existing records do not allow us to construct uninterrupted statistics of the volume of shipping from the Coromandel coast to ports along the Burmese coast and Southeast Asia. European records and travelers' accounts only provide information for a particular year or for a short range of years, and that too only for a particular port. However, combining even such limited pieces of information will help us draw some general conclusions.

During the late seventeenth century, Dutch reports from Aceh noted the arrival of eight to twelve ships annually from India. But D.K. Bassett suggests that the number of Indian ships in Dutch reports could be understated since he estimates that five or six vessels sailed to Aceh from each of the Indian regions of Coromandel, Bengal, and Gujarat. For Kedah, most reports from the same period suggest that around 6 Indian vessels arrived from Coromandel.<sup>94</sup> English merchants at Kedah, Aceh, and other Burmese ports complained about the slow turnover of Indian textiles carried by them, whereas Indian merchants from Surat or on Danish freighters from Tranquebar sold their wares rapidly. During the mid-eighteenth century, Thomas Forrest, a noted English merchant and traveller, reported that twelve "Chuliar" ships arrived at Aceh in 1762, while the number dropped to seven in 1784. But in 1792 the number of Indian vessels from Coromandel increased to between twelve and fifteen. Forrest's companion Giles Holloway reported in 1771 that six to eight vessels arrived at Aceh from Coromandel alone.<sup>95</sup> Dutch records show that during the 1770s and 1780s, six vessels, mostly owned

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263-81. On India's West Coast, the policy of expansion of EIC rule in Gujarat and Malabar region (Southwest India) was largely driven by British private traders who desired greater stability in the hinterland to ensure commercial success. See Pamela Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India, 1784-1806* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

<sup>94</sup> Bassett, "British 'Country' Trade and Local Trade Networks," 265.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

by Tamil Muslims, sailed annually from Nagapattinam to Melaka.<sup>96</sup> The following table (1), adapted from Bhaswati Bhattacharya's study on trade at Porto Novo in the mid-eighteenth century, shows a higher volume of shipping from the Coromandel coast to Aceh and Kedah than to Melaka and Perak.

Table 1.1: Shipping at Porto Novo between 1729 and 1740.<sup>97</sup>

Destination Port	Number of vessels
Aceh	33
Kedah	26
Melaka	10
Perak	8

Dutch authorities, at Melaka, Batavia, and Nagapattinam, kept track of shipping at Melaka and along the Coromandel coast. In 1755, a report from Melaka noted the arrival of an English ship and seven ships belonging to Muslim merchants from Porto Novo, Pondicherry, and other Coromandel ports. Ships from Southeast Asian ports also sailed to Coromandel ports. In 1762, a report from Nagapattinam to Batavia noted that twelve vessels arrived at Porto Novo from ports on the opposite side of the Bay of Bengal. Again, between 1764 and 1766, an average of about 20 vessels arrived at Porto Novo and nearby Coromandel ports from Aceh Kedah, Pegu, and Melaka. These vessels brought spices in small packets from Aceh and Kedah, and they acquired coarse textiles for the Southeast Asian markets. Such arrivals created problems for Dutch merchants, since they were forced to pay higher prices for textiles and they also faced scarcity of goods due to

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<sup>96</sup> S. Arasaratnam, "Coromandel's Bay of Bengal Trade, 1740-1800: A Study of Continuities and Changes," in *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1800*, eds. Om Prakash and Denys Lombard (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 316.

<sup>97</sup> Bhaswati Bhattacharya, "Porto Novo and the Shipping in the Bay of Bengal in the Mid-18th Century," in *International Conference on Shipping, Factories, and Colonization*, eds. J. Everaert and J. Parmentier. (Brussels, 1994), 108.



higher demand. The high volume of shipping from Southeast Asia indicated a significant level of participation of rulers and private Asian traders in the region's trade.<sup>98</sup>

Thus, the Tamil-speaking Muslim merchants, by dispersing from highly restrictive European-controlled ports and by forming partnerships of necessity with European trading companies and private merchants, continued their maritime carrying trade throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The complex network of relationships that characterized the maritime trading world of the Tamil Muslims remains embedded in the Nagore shrine's architectural history. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the monument was built in stages using endowments from Tamil-speaking Muslim merchants in Melaka, the Hindu Maratha rulers from Western India who established a branch of their dynasty in South India, the Muslim Nawabs of Arcot who assumed Governorship in the mid-eighteenth century of South Indian territories conquered by the Mughals, and the Dutch East India Company. Tamil Muslim maritime merchants from South India considered Shah al-Hamid as a protector of their ships and cargo on the ocean. The merchants, therefore, built the shrine's replicas in the nineteenth century for the rapidly growing mercantile communities scattered across the Indian Ocean region.<sup>99</sup>

The preceding overview of the participation of Tamil Muslims in the maritime trade in the eastern Indian Ocean has highlighted several aspects of their trade that will be followed up on in the ensuing chapters. The first issue is the varying patterns of trade in which several years of increased shipping between South Indian ports and the Malay

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<sup>98</sup> Bhaswati Bhattacharya, "The Dutch East India Company and the Trade of the Chulias in the Bay of Bengal in the Late Eighteenth Century," in *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History*, ed. K.S. Mathew (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), 355.

<sup>99</sup> For more details about the shrine see Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings*; McGilvray, "Jailani: A Sufi Shrine in Sri Lanka"; Amrith, "Tamil Diasporas Across the Bay of Bengal," 547-72; Saheb, "A Festival of Flags," 55-76.

region would be followed by reduced numbers of vessels. While this could be attributed to the fragmented nature of shipping data, it is also possible that the merchants were responding to uncertainties or changes in the demands in overseas markets. The second feature is the relationship between the Tamil Muslims and indigenous rulers, particularly in Southeast Asia. The high status achieved by Tamil Muslims in the courts of Malay rulers was a direct result of these merchants' ability to bring trade revenue to the ruler's ports and also organize commercial ventures on the sovereign's behalf. Finally, the preceding discussion demonstrates the partnerships formed by Tamil Muslims with various European and Asian merchant groups.

## **Chapter 2: A Tale of Two Acquisitions: Nagore, Penang and the Maritime Trade of Tamil Muslims, 1778-1800.**

### **I. Introduction**

On March 14, 1778, the President and Governing Council at Fort St. George in Madras wrote to the Court of Directors of the English East India Company (EIC) in London and suggested that the EIC should request the Raja of Tanjore (Thanjavur) to grant the seaport town of Nagore to the Company in lieu of the interior district of Devecotah.<sup>1</sup> The President and the Governing Council remarked that Nagore is a place of “considerable trade and resort for merchants dealing to the Eastward<sup>2</sup>” and pointed out that the customs upon imports and exports from the place are considerable since the town was believed to be “opulent and flourishing.” In June 1778, the Raja of Tanjore granted Nagore and certain other lands to the East India Company.<sup>3</sup> A few years later, in August 1786, the East India Company established a settlement at Penang, renamed as Prince of Wales Island (PoWI), after acquiring the island from the Sultan of Kedah. The rationale for acquiring the island in Southeast Asia was twofold: to provide a safe harbor for His Majesty’s ships and establish a port for China-bound EIC ships for acquiring articles for the China trade.

This chapter examines the impact of these two acquisitions on the maritime trade

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<sup>1</sup> Military Dispatches to England. March 14, 1778. Vol. 13, 116-17, Tamil Nadu State Archives. Hereafter TNSA.

<sup>2</sup> Eastward was used to refer to Southeast Asian ports. It included Aceh, Kedah, Melaka, and Penang (after it was established in 1786).

<sup>3</sup> Military Country Correspondence, June 17, 1778. Vol. 27, 276-79, TNSA.

of Tamil-speaking Muslim merchants. In Nagore, the EIC implemented policies to attract maritime merchants to settle in the port and sought to acquire textiles for Europe and Southeast Asia. These steps had important implications for the Tamil Muslim merchants since they were also actively involved in the trade of textiles to Malay ports. Examining the Tamil Muslims' response to EIC policies will help us better understand the ways in which they managed the transition to colonial rule in South India. In Penang, Tamil Muslims, both from the Coromandel coast as well as from neighboring Malay states, were among the earliest traders and settlers in the new English entrepôt. Analyzing the maritime trade of Tamil Muslims at Penang will reveal how these well-established merchants coped with the growing influence of the EIC in the Indian Ocean region, particularly since the EIC's policy of expansion was partially aimed at curbing Dutch power in Southeast Asia.

Thus, the EIC, by acquiring Nagore and Penang, established control both at the points of origin and destination of the trade routes of the Tamil Muslim merchants. The EIC's control of Nagore and Penang did not present a completely unfamiliar situation for the South Indian maritime merchants. Beginning with the Portuguese in the seventeenth century and increasingly in the eighteenth century, various European maritime companies controlled ports along the Coromandel coast. Often, therefore, Tamil Muslim merchants sailed from European controlled ports on the South Indian coast. Since the Dutch possessed ports in South India as well as Melaka and Batavia in Southeast Asia, Tamil Muslims and other South Indian maritime merchants were familiar with operating from European ports at both ends of their journey.

The EIC's acquisition of Nagore and Penang, however, introduced changes in the trading world of Tamil Muslim maritime merchants. First, Nagore was the last major indigenous port to fall under European control. While other ports such as Cuddalore, Pondicherry, Karaikal, Tranquebar, and Nagapattinam came under the control of European trading companies earlier, the Raja of Tanjore retained possession of Nagore until 1778. The EIC established Fort St. David near Cuddalore in 1690 after the Marathas ceded the territory to the Company. Cuddalore itself remained under the control of the Maratha rulers of Jinji until the mid-eighteenth century. During the Seven Years War (1756-63), fought between the coalition of countries led by the French and the British, control of Fort St. David and Cuddalore changed hands between the opposing forces. The French settled in Pondicherry in 1672 and Karaikal in 1739. Both the ports remained under the French for most of the eighteenth century. The Danes built a fort in Tranquebar in 1620 and operated from that port in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nagapattinam was an important Dutch port from the mid-seventeenth century on and is located very close to Nagore.<sup>4</sup> As will be seen below, the Dutch vehemently opposed the EIC's acquisition of Nagore.

The second change caused by the EIC's possession of Nagore was that during the period leading to the acquisition of Nagore and after, the EIC emerged as a dominant, although not unrivalled, power in South India. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the EIC effectively usurped power from the Nawab of Arcot and the Raja of

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<sup>4</sup> S. Arasaratnam, "European Port-settlements in the Coromandel Commercial System 1650-1740," in *Brides of the Sea: Port-Cities of Asia from the 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. Frank Broeze (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1989), 75-96.

Tanjore. Furthermore, the Company established its military dominance over the French and the Dutch trading companies. Unlike the earlier control of port towns by European companies, the EIC during the last quarter of the eighteenth century acquired political control over vast swaths of inland territory. The production centers of textiles and the inland routes to ports came under EIC authority. This meant that the supply of textiles, which formed the staple item of trade for Tamil Muslim merchants, came under the control of the EIC.

Similarly, the establishment of an English settlement in Penang introduced changes in the trading world of Tamil Muslims. While Penang was situated along a maritime trade route already familiar to Tamil Muslim merchants, now they gained access to a port outside the Dutch influence in Southeast Asia and also independent of the Malay rulers. Penang was also closer to the Malay states of Aceh and Kedah that already had a large diaspora community of Tamil Muslims, some of whom had attained high positions in the courts of the Malay rulers. Therefore, Penang emerged as an attractive alternate that possessed the advantages of a less restrictive port than Dutch-controlled Melaka, while enabling the merchants to trade at Malay ports.

The East India Company's interest in acquiring Nagore is hardly surprising. For several centuries, merchants at the ports on the Coromandel coast, south of Madras, carried on a brisk trade with Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and with ports along India's east coast and parts of southwest India. While Madras emerged as a prominent English settlement by the eighteenth century and attracted several merchants, southern Coromandel ports such as Nagore, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, and Karaikal contained

indigenous mercantile communities and European private merchants who continued to trade from such ports. Thus the East India Company, in acquiring Nagore, sought to assume control of a prominent port on the southern Coromandel coast that would provide revenue for the company and also assume control over an important merchant community that maintained active trade connections with Southeast Asia.

This chapter combines an analysis of the response by Tamil Muslims to the EIC's acquisition of Nagore and Penang with an examination of the Company's rationale for making the acquisitions and the policies it adopted in its ports. The first two sections of the chapter analyze the factors surrounding the acquisition of Nagore and the settlement of Tamil Muslims in the port. Why did the EIC particularly desire Nagore and what policies did it adopt towards the Tamil Muslim merchants? Equally important, how did the Tamil Muslims respond to the EIC's overtures to them? In the third and fourth sections, I examine the other ports that fell under the control of the EIC and the maritime trade of these ports. Taken together, the EIC's efforts to gain control over the historically important port-towns in the southern Coromandel region reveal the Company's desire to establish supremacy over rival European trading companies, especially the Dutch East India Company. Under such circumstances, it is important to examine whether the EIC incorporated the restrictive policies of the Dutch East India Company, which attempted to enforce a monopoly on trade at its settlements. What impact did the EIC's control over these ports have on the trade of Tamil Muslims? The fifth section focuses on developments occurring across the Bay of Bengal and describes the conditions surrounding the establishment of an English settlement in Penang. What were the

underlying motives for the Company to possess an EIC-controlled port in the northern Straits of Melaka region? Since the objective of countering the Dutch in Asia played an important role in shaping the EIC's policies, the next section discusses the Dutch response to the EIC's efforts to gain control over ports on the opposite sides of the Bay of Bengal. In the seventh section, I analyze the pattern of trade of Tamil Muslims after the opening of Penang as an English settlement. Did the Tamil Muslim merchants settle in Penang and how did they manage their trade at the newly established but largely uninhabited island? The final section concludes with a discussion of the impact of the growing dominance of the EIC on the maritime trade of Tamil Muslim merchants.

## **II. Nagore Acquisition**

On March 2, 1778, Thomas Rumbold, the President and Governor at Ft. St. George pointed out to the Governing Council the advantages of acquiring Nagore from the Raja of Tanjore.<sup>5</sup> The ruler had promised to the late Lord Pigot that he would hand over the interior district of Devecotah (Devikottai) to the EIC as a mark of gratitude for the Company's support during the Raja's conflict with the Nawab of Arcot. Rumbold suggested to the governing council that the Raja could demonstrate a "more effectual way of showing the Company his attachment and regard" by granting Nagore.<sup>6</sup> He estimated that no advantage could be gained by acquiring Devecottah, since the revenue from the district could only be gained from the soil and as the soil was "barren poor, the revenue must consequently be trifling." The President, instead, suggested acquiring Nagore and

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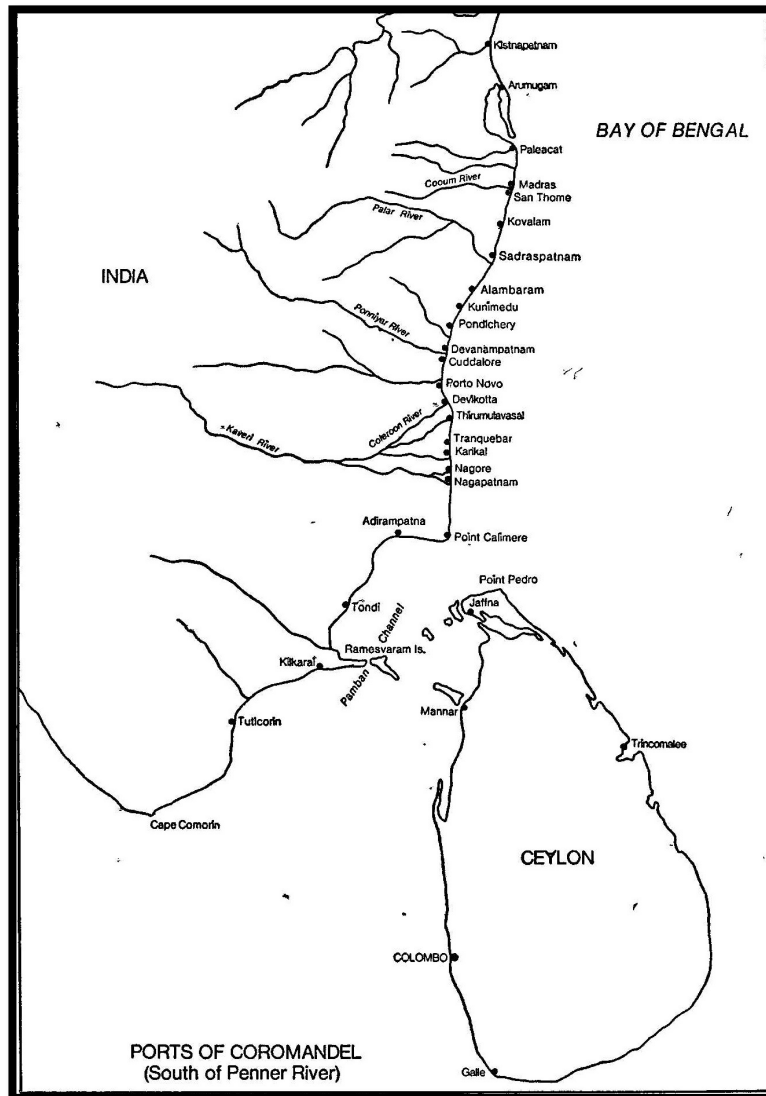
<sup>5</sup> Military Consultations, March 2, 1778, Vol. 61, 248-50, TNSA.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



certain surrounding districts so that the Company could establish a factory and maintain a Residency in Tanjore.<sup>7</sup>

Map 2.1: Southern Coromandel Ports<sup>8</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> S. Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 20.

Rumbold pointed to the commercial and political advantages of establishing a residency at Nagore. Commercially, the textile manufactures from the neighboring weaving districts could be brought easily and loaded on ships. The merchants who had left the port town due to recent wars could be provided security and persuaded to return so that the trading port could again flourish. The Nagore river allowed navigation for vessels up to 200 tons and could thus provide access to upriver ports in the Tanjore district. Finally, the duties on exports might provide considerable revenue. Besides the commercial benefits, Rumbold also explained the political advantages of acquiring Nagore. He indicated that Nagore was located at the heart of Tanjore and “it is situated in the very centre of those [European] settlements whose commercial concerns it is our duty to reduce & whose political conduct we should watch with every attention.”<sup>9</sup> From Nagore, the EIC could keep a close watch on the movements of the Dutch at Nagapattinam, the Danes at Tranquebar, and the French at Karaikal.<sup>10</sup>

Acting upon Rumbold’s recommendation, the President and Governing Council at Fort St. George in Madras wrote to the Court of Directors of the English East India Company (EIC) in London in March 1778 and suggested that the EIC should request the Raja of Tanjore (Thanjavur) to grant the seaport town of Nagore to the Company in lieu of the interior district of Devecotah.<sup>11</sup> The President and the Governing Council remarked that Nagore is a place of “considerable trade and resort for merchants dealing to the Eastward” and pointed out that the customs upon imports and exports from the place

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<sup>9</sup> Military Consultations, March 2, 1778, Vol. 61, 248-50, TNSA.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Military Despatches to England. 14 March 1778. Vol. 13, 116-17, TNSA.

were considerable since the town was believed to be “opulent and flourishing.”<sup>12</sup> In June 1778, the Raja of Tanjore, in consideration of the service rendered to him by the EIC and in the hope of the Company’s future protection, granted the seaport of Nagore and two *parganas* of Villevulum and Keevalore consisting of 277 villages to the EIC.<sup>13</sup>

The way by which the EIC took advantage of an offer of concession by Tanjore’s ruler and came to possess Nagore was not unique as other European trading companies had on previous occasions utilized similar methods to expand their jurisdiction. In fact, the EIC received permission from the Maratha ruler of Jinji to build a fort near Cuddalore in exchange for the Company’s support. In 1734, the French added four additional villages to the list of territories controlled by their settlement at Pondicherry.<sup>14</sup> At the time that the EIC came to possess Nagore, the Company sought to control a prominent port along the southern Coromandel coast since Fort St. David, its sole possession in the region, did not yield significant income and Indian merchants did not settle there in large numbers. The financial impact of controlling Nagore was evident in President Rumbold’s estimation that the Nagore grant would be worth 30,000 pounds. He expressed great satisfaction in obtaining such an important access route to the fertile Tanjore districts and highlighted the need for the resources of Tanjore districts “at a time when we [EIC] are in ... expectation of a war.”<sup>15</sup> A few years after gaining control over Nagore, the Company officials in Madras informed the Court of Directors in London about Nagore’s

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Military Country Correspondence, 17 June 1778. Vol. 27, 276-79, TNSA.

<sup>14</sup> Arasaratnam, “European Port-settlements in the Coromandel Commercial System,” 85.

<sup>15</sup> Military Consultations, 22 June 1778, Vol. 62 & 63, 861-82, TNSA.

Commercial Resident's estimate that "in a short period the greatest share of the Eastern commerce may center in the town of Nagore."<sup>16</sup>

### **III. Settling Nagore**

The EIC's plans for Nagore involved making improvements to the port's infrastructure and attracting native merchants to settle there. In March 1779, less than a year after acquiring Nagore, the Company's Resident petitioned Ft. St. George for funds to undertake improvement projects of the Nagore river in order to make it more navigable for commercial purposes.<sup>17</sup> As part of its efforts to lure merchants to settle in the port, the EIC provided concessions on import and export duties. Such a strategy was not just adopted by the EIC; during the mid-eighteenth century, the Dutch offered similar exemptions to attract merchants from Nagore to Nagapattinam.<sup>18</sup> The concessions provided by the EIC were in fact a continuation of grants issued by the rulers of Tanjore.<sup>19</sup> Upon the Company's takeover of Nagore, the merchants informed the Company about the grants given to them by the rulers of Tanjore that allowed the merchants to pay just 2.5% duties on their imports and exports. Although the merchants did not provide proof of such concessions, the Company extended the privileges until

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<sup>16</sup> Revenue Despatches to England, 12 January 1786, Vol. 2, 189-228, TNSA.

<sup>17</sup> Public Consultations, May 18, 1779, Vol. 121, 358-59, TNSA.

<sup>18</sup> Bhaswati Bhattacharya, "The Chulia Merchants of Southern Coromandel in the Eighteenth Century: A Case for Continuity," in *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1800*, eds. Om Prakash and Denys Lombard (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 291.

<sup>19</sup> Bhaswati Bhattacharya, "The Dutch East India Company and the Trade of the Chulias in the Bay of Bengal in the Late Eighteenth Century," in *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History*, ed. K. S. Matthew (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), 349.

1795, after which the duties were further reduced.<sup>20</sup>

The EIC's efforts to settle Nagore with prosperous merchants represented a standard policy adopted by rulers to increase the prosperity of their territories. In Nagore's case, its proximity to other European ports – Danish Tranquebar, French Karaikal, and Dutch Nagapattinam – added a greater degree of urgency to EIC's efforts. Besides the presence of neighboring European-controlled ports, the need for funds for procuring textiles also played an important role in the Company's plans to settle Nagore with prominent merchants. In October 1780, the Nagore Resident assembled all the "principal inhabitants" of Nagore and read an advertisement "in their own language" and sought funds from them. The Resident tried to persuade the inhabitants to assist the government during "this emergency."<sup>21</sup> He informed the Governing Council in Ft. St. George that the participants "pleaded poverty" and did not promise any support. The only offer for help came from "Mahomed Cossim," who promised to provide money upon the sale of his goods or informed the Resident that he could sell his goods to the Company at a reasonable price that would not burden the Company's limited supply of funds.<sup>22</sup>

The Company's need for funds continued even towards the end of the eighteenth century. In 1798, the Commercial Resident at Nagore informed the Board of Trade that the Company's merchants and contractors, who supplied cloth to the Company,

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<sup>20</sup> Tanjore District Records, 24 November 1795, Vol. 3325, 65-9, TNSA.

<sup>21</sup> Public Consultations, October 5, 1780, Vol. 124, 1161-63, TNSA. The precise nature of the emergency is not discussed in the document. It is most likely that it meant the impending attack on Tanjore by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. For more, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Politics of Fiscal Decline: A Reconsideration of Maratha Tanjavur, 1676-1799," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 32, no. 2 (1995): 177-217.

<sup>22</sup> Public Consultations, October 5, 1780, Vol. 124, 1161-63, TNSA.

expressed an unwillingness to accept Company bonds and instead desired to be paid in cash. The Board of Trade replied to the Resident that “under the existing circumstances it is impossible for them to appropriate any further means for the support of the investment on the coast” and urged the Resident to assure the merchants that the bonds were also a good mode of payment. The Board added “we are aware of the disadvantages which will accrue to them by this mode, but we are willing to believe that although they may not be gainers by goods so provided, yet that their gratitude for the protection they have received and their desire to merit a continuance of the Company's favor will induce them to assist their affairs at this juncture.”<sup>23</sup> The Board informed the Resident that the request for funds was a measure of temporary necessity that was intended to give employment to the weavers.<sup>24</sup>

The Commercial Resident, in his reply, stressed the difficulty of asking the merchants to buy the EIC's bonds by pointing out that “to prevail with people to lend and risk their property not only without profit but much against their advantage is not a very easy matter” and reported that the merchants agreed to raise 15,000 Star Pagodas for the Company's investment.<sup>25</sup> He informed the Board of Trade that the merchants, on an average, attain profits of about 5% on their investments with the Company. He urged members of the Board of Trade to accede to the merchants' request that the Company pay for any reduction in the merchants' profits arising from their purchase of the Company's

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<sup>23</sup> Tanjore District Records, November 2, 1798, Vol. 3350, 83, TNSA.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Tanjore District Records, November 23, 1798, Vol. 3350, 86-7, TNSA.

bonds.<sup>26</sup>

Some prominent merchants provided assistance, financial and commercial support, and received in exchange additional concessions. Some “Chulier” merchants got a *cowle*<sup>27</sup> (grant) that provided them exemption from paying half the amount of duties paid by other merchants.<sup>28</sup> The case of Muhammad Qassim illustrates the role of local merchants during the colonial transition. Muhammad Qassim was a prominent Nagore merchant even before the English acquisition of the port. The Dutch in Nagapattinam noted “Muhammd Kashim” to be a “principal merchant of Nagore with extensive network of overseas trade” and desired that he settle in Nagapattinam. In 1777, Governor Reiknier van Vlissingen convinced Qassim to relocate to Nagapattinam but the merchant changed his intentions when the EIC assumed control of Nagore. He informed the Governor that he wished to stay in Nagore since “it was more important for him to cultivate the friendship of the English at Nagore.”<sup>29</sup> The details of Qassim’s efforts to develop a closer relationship with the EIC are not available; however, Thomas Rumbold, the President and Governor at Ft. St. George, gave him a *cowle* in September 1778 as a “favor” for the “attention” given by Qassim to the EIC. The grant contained a provision

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> This is an administrative term, meaning grant, that was introduced by Muslims. It is known as *Qaul* in Arabic and as *Kaulu* in Telugu.

<sup>28</sup> Revenue Consultations, 19 July 1780, Vol. 10, 606, TNSA. It is unclear as to how the merchants got the *cowle*. But the provisions of the grant, exemption from paying half the duties, is similar to the *cowle* given to Muhammad Qassim, a prominent Nagore merchant whose case is discussed next. The provisions of the grant that granted exemption from paying half the regular duties appears similar to a grant given to Qassim for his support of the EIC. It is possible to conjecture that these merchants also assisted the EIC during the takeover of Nagore.

<sup>29</sup> Bhattacharya, “The Chulia Merchants of Southern Coromandel,” 291.

that exempted Qassim from paying “from half of the duties on his merchandize.”<sup>30</sup> The *cowle* contained other allowances that guaranteed significantly reduced duties on a variety of goods such as piece goods, betel nuts, rice, and any other goods. The grant also exempted Qassim from paying certain types of transshipment costs, duties on unsold goods, and manufactures brought from the Tanjore country.<sup>31</sup>

Besides deciding to reside in Nagore and offering help to the EIC, Qassim assured other inhabitants about the safety of Nagore for conducting commerce and set an example by placing goods in his Nagore storage depots. John Hudleston, Nagore’s Commercial Resident, paid glowing tributes to Qassim in his report to the Governing Council at Ft. St. George and stated that it is “a justice due to Mahomed Cossim ... that he has been very assiduous in his endeavours to prevent the inhabitants from leaving the town ... he has also promised to send for his family tomorrow.”<sup>32</sup> After deciding to reside in Nagore, Qassim also provided funds for the Company’s investments for its Nagore factory.<sup>33</sup>

Muhammad Qassim did not confine himself to investing in the Company’s factory, he also offered to rent the districts of Keevalore and Vellyvalum, comprised of 277 villages, for five years for 50,000 Porto Novo Pagodas and named Binkinjee, the *sahukar* (money-lender), as security. Qassim inserted three conditions to his offer: he must be allowed to bring the government's share of crops to Nagore free of duties and to export them free of duties. Second, the Governing Council must intervene in case of a

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<sup>30</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, March 13, 1805. 1842-48, TNSA.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Military Consultations, July 24, 1780, Vol. 70, 1045-60, TNSA.

<sup>33</sup> Public Consultations, October 5, 1780, Vol. 124, 1161-63, TNSA.



dispute between the inhabitants of Nagore and the Raja of Tanjore over shares of water and reach a settlement based on justice and established rights of inhabitants. Third, the inhabitants should enjoy the same share of crops, the same rights, and privileges as they enjoyed under the previous government.<sup>34</sup>

The Resident, in his comments on Qassim's proposal, informed the Governing Council that accepting Qassim's first condition would produce only an inconsiderable difference in revenue since Qassim already possessed a grant that allowed him to pay only half duties on imports and exports. He estimated that Qassim's offer appeared reasonable due to the war-ravaged state of the villages, but added that the revenue of the villages would be much higher under conditions of peace. The Resident attested to the reputation of Qassim and indicated that Qassim was well esteemed and known to all merchants and that his security was also incontestably good.<sup>35</sup> But the Resident expressed his opposition to renting out the collection of customs duties at Nagore port since he feared that any excessive efforts by the renter to collect revenue would lead to an exodus of merchants from the port. He added that the loss would be more in Nagore because it lay close to two ports under foreign authority (Dutch at Nagapattinam and Danes at Tranquebar).<sup>36</sup> Despite the Resident's apprehensions about renting out the collection of duties at the Nagore port, the Governing Council accepted Qassim's proposal.<sup>37</sup>

The case of Muhammad Qassim illustrates the role played by wealthy merchants

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<sup>34</sup> Revenue Consultations, July 15, 1780, Vol. 10, 610-31, TNSA.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Revenue Consultations, July 19, 1780, Vol. 11, 606, TNSA.

during the initial phase of colonial transition. While Qassim's wealth and prominence do not represent the conditions experienced by the majority of merchants, his relationship with the EIC demonstrates how a section of powerful Indian merchants negotiated with the new rulers and sought to leverage their wealth to their advantage. Qassim's decision to reside in Nagore, despite his previous overtures to the Dutch about settling in Nagapattinam, indicates an astute evaluation of political developments. By 1778, the EIC seemed militarily stronger than the French. Although the French, the Dutch, and the Danes would continue to hold ports along the Coromandel coast, the EIC provided greater safety to ports under its authority. In addition, the EIC assumed control of Nagore as an ally of the port's previous ruler, the Raja of Tanjore. For Qassim and other merchants, this provided some element of continuity in the political sphere.

Muhammad Qassim's offer to rent the revenue collection for the districts of Keevalore and Villyvellum for a period of five years for a sum of 50,000 Porto Novo Pagodas provides some insights into the ways in which he sought to maneuver himself under the new political conditions. By recognizing the weak financial position of the Company, Qassim sought to negotiate a highly lucrative contract with the Company. As a Nagore resident, Qassim probably understood the true revenue generation potential of the 277 villages under peaceful conditions. Indeed, the Nagore Resident noted in his report to Ft. St. George that Qassim's offer seemed generous for a region still recovering from war. The official, however, noted that amount of the offer was less when the region's actual capacity for production was taken into account. By submitting an unsolicited offer and, additionally, inserting conditions in it, Qassim demonstrated the strength of his

negotiating position.

The first condition, seeking exemption from payment of duties, appears to be a straightforward commercial request, which even the Resident conceded would not affect the Company significantly as Qassim already possessed grants that provided significant exemptions from payment of duties. The second and third conditions, however, venture beyond strictly commercial aspects and relate to arbitration settlement and inhabitants' rights. The second condition urged the Governing Council at Ft. St. George to intervene in disputes between the inhabitants and the officials of the Raja of Tanjore over water sharing. During the initial years, since the authority of the EIC did not extend into the interior of Tanjore country, Qassim's rationale for the condition could have been that the Raja's officials might misappropriate water resources for their own needs. Under such circumstances, Qassim's condition urged intervention by the Governing Council to ensure inhabitants' rights. While the second condition indicated Qassim's intentions to protect inhabitants' privileges, a certain amount of self-interest also possibly underlay his reasoning, since any loss of water suffered by inhabitants would affect the farm output of the lands under Qassim's revenue grant. The third condition stipulated that the inhabitants should enjoy the same share of crops, the same rights, and privileges as they enjoyed under the Raja's government. While the second condition sought to prevent an abuse of power by the Raja's officials, the next demand attempted to preclude the EIC from introducing significant changes that might affect the inhabitants. Qassim's third condition sought to ensure an element of continuity in the administration of Nagore and surrounding villages.

The actions of Muhammad Qassim merit a comparison to the role played by prominent commercial groups in other parts of India during the eighteenth century. In 1979, Karen Leonard argued in a seminal article that bankers and financiers played an important role in the decline of the Mughal empire when they diverted credit and trade from the Mughals to other political powers, including the English East India Company, in the eighteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Leonard discussed the crucial support provided by the Jagat Seth firm in Bengal to the Mughals and the shifting of the firm's support to the East India Company in the second half of the eighteenth century. Lakshmi Subramanian's study on the transition to colonial rule in Western India examined the emergence of an Anglo-Bania order and the important role played by bankers and financiers in providing credit to the EIC's military campaigns against the Marathas.<sup>39</sup> To a certain degree, Muhammad Qassim's actions exhibit close parallels to the role played by indigenous commercial groups in other parts of India in facilitating the East India Company's expansion in India. This approach challenges the arguments put forth by colonial administrators and historians that the EIC acquired its empire in India solely as a result of military superiority. Although the EIC acquired Nagore through negotiations, the discussion of Qassim's interactions with the EIC reveals the extent to which prominent indigenous merchants enabled the resettlement of Nagore.

Wealthy ship-owning merchants such as Muhammad Qassim leveraged their

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<sup>38</sup> Karen Leonard, "The 'Great Firm' Theory of the Decline of the Mughal Empire," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 21, no. 2 (April 1979): 151-67.

<sup>39</sup> Lakshmi Subramanian, *Indigenous Capital and Imperial Expansion: Bombay, Surat and the West Coast* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

wealth and influence to consolidate their gains in Nagore when the town passed under control of the EIC. A majority of the merchants, however, neither possessed Qassim's affluence nor his extent of influence. Most of these merchants freighted goods onboard the vessels of shipowning merchants or were involved in trade between ports over short distances. Several such merchants moved to EIC-controlled port towns, such as Nagore and Cuddalore, in search of security. Two factors impelled this type of migration: safety for trading ships on high seas during periods of conflict and mechanisms for redress for trade disputes. The remainder of this section will describe the movement of these merchants to Nagore.

In the 1780s, South India witnessed a series of conflicts between the East India Company, on one side, and Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, aided by the French, on the other. The Nawab of Arcot and the Raja of Tanjore supported the East India Company. During these series of conflicts, trading vessels became targets for capture by the opposing sides. In March 1781, two unnamed Tamil Muslim merchants of Porto Novo and Cuddalore met C.B. Dent, the Cuddalore Resident, and sought protection for a vessel named Cauder Bux expected to arrive at Nagapattinam from Kedah. The merchants feared that Hyder Ali's troops might capture the vessel and requested the Resident to station an armed vessel at Nagapattinam for protection. The merchants even offered to sell the vessel's cargo to the Resident at the market price. The incoming vessel was eventually captured near Porto Novo by Hyder Ali's troops. The Resident sent a rescue vessel, Success Galley, commanded by Cuthbert Fenwick, and so the Cauder Bux was released from Hyder Ali's captivity. But Captain Fenwick, instead of returning it to its owner, sold the

vessel and its cargo as prize money.<sup>40</sup>

During conflicts, vessels were typically captured as prizes and captors sold the cargo to recover prize money. The owner and commander of *Cauder Bux*, *Nacoda Caudoo Malam*, petitioned EIC authorities for compensation and claimed that the Commander of the rescue vessel owed him almost 14,101 British Pounds as the total value of the rescued vessel and its cargo.<sup>41</sup> The owner claimed that the vessel neither carried any military store on board nor did he intend to aid the enemies of the Company. *Caudoo Malam* proclaimed his fealty to the Company and professed his preference for English articles in commerce. He claimed protection for his vessel and recovery of money lost on the basis that he resided under the EIC's protection. He argued that the Nawab of Arcot gave the *Success Galley* to Captain Fenwick to conduct trade and that Captain Fenwick did not possess a commission to seize any vessels. He also pointed out that rules for seizing ships did not allow capture of "any ships or vessels of persons in friendship with the said Nabob as your orator saith that he is and always has been."<sup>42</sup> The merchants of Cuddalore vouched for the owner and certified that "*Nacoda Caudoo Malam* and his family have for a number of years resided at Cuddalore and Porto Novo under the protection of the Honorable the United East India Company and His Highness the Nabob of the Carnatick" and indicated that he had several houses both at Cuddalore and Porto Novo from where he carried on a considerable trade.<sup>43</sup> The outcome of the

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<sup>40</sup> Public Consultations, September 13, 1781, Vol. 126, 706-14, TNSA.

<sup>41</sup> Home Public Proceedings. August 6, 1787. National Archives of India, Delhi. Hereafter NAI.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Public Consultations, September 13, 1781, Vol. 126. 706-14, TNSA.

owner's appeal is unknown. However, the example illustrates the difficulties of merchants during periods of conflict and how they sought to prevent capture of their vessels and seek recovery of captured vessels by claiming residency in EIC controlled territories.

In another case, Mahomedtahir, an inhabitant of Nagore, petitioned in 1782 that his vessel was seized by English Admiral Sir Edward Hughes and sold at Madras. Underscoring the complex arrangements of maritime trade, Mahomedtahir claimed himself to be resident under English colors, while the vessel was sailing under the "Pegu Rajah's colours"; but the vessel and the cargo were mortgaged to Coja Wovanees Marterous, an Armenian merchant. The petitioner even threatened that unless the vessel and the cargo were returned to the mortgagee, he would complain to the Raja of Pegu and that "much hurt may arise to English vessels" as a consequence.<sup>44</sup>

Under conditions of war in which the safety of vessels from capture depended on loyalty and residency, Tamil Muslim merchants thus moved to EIC-controlled ports to seek protection for their vessels and cargo. However, the migration to EIC-controlled port towns, as seen by the above examples, could not guarantee safety from seizure, either by EIC ships or by those fighting the EIC. Under such circumstances, residency in EIC-controlled ports did enable the merchants to seek redress upon seizure of their vessels. The second level of security-related migration occurred due to the ability to seek redress in EIC-controlled ports. Maritime trade in general and in the Indian Ocean region in particular depended on complex arrangements for raising capital for building vessels,

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<sup>44</sup> Public Consultations, January 24, 1782, Vol. 127, 83-6, TNSA.

procuring and selling cargo, gathering labor for voyages, obtaining passes for voyages, and the levy and payment of taxes. During instances of breakdown of any components of this complex arrangement, merchants sought redress in the courts or judicial institutions of local rulers.

After acquiring Nagore, the EIC realized the importance of establishing judicial courts and instituted a form of justice in which the prominent merchants resolved disputes arising amongst them. Underscoring the need for a judicial system, two merchants from Pegu petitioned the EIC officials in Nagore seeking compensation from a Tamil Muslim merchant Mahomed Meerah Lubby.<sup>45</sup> They claimed that they had freighted goods on a vessel that was built in Pegu and that they had loaned some money to the ship's owner, Mahomed Saib (a) Tomby Noquedah, who was Mahomed Meera Lubby's brother-in-law. The ship was wrecked near Nagore and the petitioners claimed 1500 rupees, which the ship owner had promised them, and also claimed some parts of the vessel's wreck that was salvaged. The case was discussed first by a group of prominent Nagore merchants, Abock Chetty Meercoy, Cosa Meercoy, Seaja Mercoy, and Mader in the presence of Muhammad Qassim. This group opined that the salvaged portion of the vessel and the cargo must be given to the petitioners. Since Mahomed Meerah Lubby disagreed with the verdict, another group of prominent merchants comprised of Savemdalinga Chetty, Samy Chitty, Noor Mahomed, and Rajah Gopal Naick gave an opinion that required the sale of the salvaged cargo and the vessel and

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<sup>45</sup> The details of the case can be found in the following set of documents. Public Consultations, June 17, 1786, Vol. 138, 1097-99.; Public Consultations, July 17, 1786, Vol. 139, 1405-35, TNSA.



using the proceeds to buy cargo for a return voyage to Pegu. They concluded that the issue must be resolved in Pegu since the ship's owner was at Pegu. The EIC authorities agreed with the resolution and ordered Mahomed Meerah Lubby to abide by the decision of the merchants.<sup>46</sup>

#### **IV. Acquisitions Beyond Nagore**

The EIC's maritime interests were not limited to acquiring and improving Nagore. Gradually the Company expanded its control over the cluster of ports near Nagore: Cuddalore, Porto Novo, and Nagapattinam. The EIC had possessed Cuddalore for quite some time and even had built a fort in the town. Porto Novo remained under the authority of the Nawab of Carnatic, although the Dutch maintained a factory there until the mid-eighteenth century. In 1781, English forces captured Porto Novo during the Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780-84) between Mysore's ruler Hyder Ali and the EIC. Nagapattinam, the closest port to Nagore, remained under Dutch control until 1780, when the EIC captured it during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war (1780-84).

As a result of the rapid addition of several important ports to the list of territories controlled by the EIC, officials in Nagore made assessments of advantages that could accrue to the Company from these various ports and suggested ways to increase the revenue from these ports. The huge expenditures associated with the military campaigns also forced the officials to look for ways to increase the revenue from their possessions. In March 1784, C.B. Dent, a member of the Ft. St. George Governing Council, crafted a

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

report on the revenue generation potential of Cuddalore, Porto Novo, and Nagapattinam.<sup>47</sup> He wrote that Cuddalore provided “a tolerable investment of cloth” during times of peace and estimated that the town would need considerable investment to restore it to its former flourishing state. Since Cuddalore was almost contiguous to the French port of Pondicherry, he opined that any large investment in the port could not be considered as a wise strategy since any war with France would lead to their easy capture of Cuddalore. With regards to Porto Novo, Dent gave a favorable assessment of the port’s capacity to provide good returns on the Company’s investment. He noted that the port town contained a blue cloth manufactory that was “monopolized by 10 or 11 Choliar merchants who made immense fortunes by trade to the Eastward.” The river at Porto Novo, in his view, afforded the passage of vessels of some burden to anchor near the shore and enable shipping. Dent recommended appointing a Resident, two Assistants, and a Master Attendant at Porto Novo. Finally, Dent observed Nagapattinam as “a key to Tanjore” and recommended that the EIC fortify the port and establish a council with a Resident, three or four Assistants, and a Master Assistant. He indicated that it would be unnecessary to maintain a Resident at Nagore since that port’s revenue could be collected at Nagapattinam.<sup>48</sup>

Besides expanding control over a network of ports on the Coromandel coast, EIC officials kept a wary eye on trade at Danish-controlled Tranquebar and French-controlled Pondicherry and offered suggestions to the Ft. St. George Governing Council to divert

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<sup>47</sup> Revenue Consultations, March 30, 1784, Vol. 14, 494-500, TNSA.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

trade from ports held by rival European trading companies. In November 1784, Nagore Resident E.W. Fallofield, wrote a report on the revenue of Nagore, Karaikal, and Nagapattinam and made some recommendations aimed at attracting the commerce from other European settlements to Nagore.<sup>49</sup> He noted that the Nagore river's depth allowed the smaller native boats (Chillingas and Donies) to sail and at certain times even the larger vessels such as snows and sloops. The river was used by the "Choliar and other native merchants" to conduct considerable trade from Nagore. Fallofield observed that the previous government rented out the chank fishery at Nagore but the recent wars forced a halt on the fishery. With regards to weaving, he noted that the 56 looms in the district made only the commonest kind of bazaar cloth. In the same report, Fallofield remarked that Nagapattinam and Karaikal had about 185 and 240 looms respectively and that the looms in both towns produced only inferior quality cloth.<sup>50</sup> The production of low quality cloth in all three towns suggests that the textiles woven in these towns were primarily intended for the Southeast Asian market since Indian coarse cloth, identified as an inferior quality by EIC officials, was in fact highly sought after in Southeast Asia. While merchants also carried finer quality cloth, the bulk of exports of Indian textiles for Southeast Asia consisted of coarse cloth.

After reviewing the state of revenues in Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal, Fallofield suggested ways to increase the revenues. He recommended contracting out the collection of revenue for the following articles to the highest bidder: chank fishery and

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<sup>49</sup> Revenue Consultations, November 6, 1784, Vol. 16, 1192-1233, TNSA.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

salt in Nagore, betel and tobacco, arrack, salt, and chank fishery in Nagapattinam, and salt, chank fishery, and toddy in Karaikal. While Fallofield supported renting out certain farms, he opposed farming out the collection of customs duties at Nagore port. Instead, he recommended that the Company should collect the duties, since selling the right to collect duties to a third party might lead to abuse of power and cause distress to merchants that would eventually lead to a loss of trade at Nagore. Even if the Company decided to privatize the collection of customs duties, he advised that the designated revenue farmer should not hold any other executive or judicial privileges in Nagore. He also suggested that the Company had to take measures to ensure that merchants who paid all the duties at Nagore were not burdened with paying additional duties at other ports in the Madras Presidency. He noted that the principal merchants of Nagore were returning to the town and repairing their houses and boats and expressed hope that Nagore would be restored to its previous flourishing state.<sup>51</sup> In response to the Resident's suggestions, the governing council at Ft. St. George decided to assign the collection of import and export duties at Nagore to Company officials. The council also directed the Resident to grant certificates to merchants who paid all duties at Nagore, which could be used to avoid paying the same duty twice at other ports.<sup>52</sup>

## **V. Trade at EIC-controlled Ports**

By the end of the eighteenth century, EIC officials began to report a resurgence of trade from Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal to ports along the Coromandel coast as well as

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Revenue Consultations, November 24, 1784, Vol. 16, 1312-22, TNSA.

with Southeast Asia.<sup>53</sup> The reports indicate an active trade in food grains, salt, and tobacco. Rice was exported from Nagore and Nagapattinam to Bengal and Eastward. Coconuts were imported from Tanjore interior and re-exported to Madras, Cuddalore, and Pondicherry. Similarly, tobacco was imported from Jaffna and re-exported to Aceh and Eastward ports. Several items, primarily food articles, were imported from other ports on the Coromandel coast and used for internal consumption in Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal. Salt and small grains were imported from Tondi and Adiramapattinam. Indigo, used by weavers in making dyes, was imported from Porto Novo, Cuddalore, and Pondicherry. Chayroot, another dye-making material, was imported from Tanjore and Tondi. Gingelly oil and Tamarind were imported from Adiramapattinam. Chanks, used in making ornaments, were imported from Ramanathapuram and Tuticorin and chiefly exported to Bengal. In addition to conveying produce and manufactures from one place to another along the Coromandel coast, merchants in Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal carried the imports from Southeast Asia to other Coromandel ports. Thus, pepper from Aceh was shipped to Bengal and sandalwood from ports on the Malay coast was shipped to Bengal, Ganjam, and Masulipatnam. In 1795, W.H. Torreano, the Resident at Nagore, submitted a report on the commercial situation at Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal. He noted that the trade at Nagore had become more extensive than the other two places and that 25 or 30 substantial merchants conducted trade to all parts of India. The report indicated that the

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<sup>53</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the information in the following paragraphs is taken from two commercial reports on the districts of Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal. See Tanjore District Records, January 24, 1797, Vol. 3349, 4-9, TNSA; Tanjore District Records, March 12, 1798, Vol. 3350, 18-25, TNSA.

merchants were unhappy with the efforts of the Company to procure cloth in their region since they faced difficulty in buying cloth for their own shipments to Southeast Asia. But the merchants were generally satisfied with an additional reduction of import duties and the Resident believed that it would lead to increased trade at Nagore.<sup>54</sup>

The merchants in the districts of Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal began to produce several types of textiles, both for internal consumption and export.<sup>55</sup> In 1796, the total manufactured cloth weighed about 6,000 corges (a corge = 20 pieces of cloth), worth about 100,000 Star Pagodas and consisting of long cloth (coarse & fine), chintz, moorees, succatoons, comboys, romalls, gingham, juppies and bazaar cloth.<sup>56</sup> In 1797, the total quantity of manufactured cloth diminished to 4,687 corges, worth about 82,897 Star Pagodas. Typically, most of the cloth manufactured in the three districts and imported from other parts on the Coromandel coast was exported to Southeast Asia. Except for half-piece cloth, most of the types of cloth were produced in the districts of Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal; half-piece cloth was transported over land and sea from other parts of Tanjore to these three ports. Among the types of cloth produced, only Malabar cloth, a cheap type, was produced more for internal consumption than for export. Both in 1796 and 1797, while the merchants contracted by the EIC provided a certain portion, private merchants produced the major quantity of the manufactured cloth. During

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<sup>54</sup> Tanjore District Records, November 24, 1795, Vol. 3325, 65-9, TNSA.

<sup>55</sup> See Appendix 1 for details of cloth produced and exported in the districts of Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal for 1796 and 1797.

<sup>56</sup> The Glossary contains a brief explanation of the various types of cloth listed here. Unless otherwise stated, the information in the following paragraphs is taken from two commercial reports on the districts of Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal. See Tanjore District Records, January 24, 1797, Vol. 3349, 4-9, TNSA.; Tanjore District Records, 12 March 1798, Vol. 3350, 18-25, TNSA.

1797 in the districts of Keevalore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal, the Company's merchants were able to employ only 170 looms whereas the inhabitants employed 738 looms.<sup>57</sup> Almost all the looms employed by inhabitants produced Malabar cloth that was primarily utilized for internal consumption (see Appendix 1). The Company constantly faced a paucity of funds to make advances to its merchants. In 1796, the Company made contracts with its merchants worth 34,162 Star Pagodas but could only pay out 28,034 Star Pagodas. In 1797, the Company issued contracts worth 64,436 Star Pagodas but could only provide slightly more than 42,000 Star Pagodas. The Resident's reports for 1796 and 1797 suggested that the level of Company's investment, upon availability of funds, could be increased from its current low levels to between 100,000 and 150,000 Star Pagodas. This shows that, despite the acquisition of Nagore by the EIC, indigenous merchants still controlled the production of textiles and their export from Nagore.

The Resident noted that about 70 merchants, who possessed between them about 200,000 Star Pagodas for investment, primarily carried on the commerce in the three districts. According to the Resident, in case of unresolved disputes, the merchants submitted the case to the Resident for a resolution, but he added, "the honor of the Nagore merchants is such that very seldom any complaints are made to me [Resident]." The Resident provided the names of prominent merchants of Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal [see Table 2.1]. Among the three towns, the number of merchants in Nagore exceeded the combined total of the merchants in the other two ports. This suggests that the EIC successfully managed to settle Nagore by drawing merchants from other ports.

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<sup>57</sup> Tanjore District Records, March 12, 1798, Vol. 3350, 21, TNSA.

But the significance of the migration of merchants to Nagore should not be overstated, since the merchants typically maintained residences in several ports and could also continue to operate from neighboring ports through their kinship networks. The Resident noted that the trading vessels possessed by the merchants in the three ports, besides boats, numbered 180. While the report does not specify the merchants' religion, roughly 40 merchants possess Hindu names and about 30 merchants appear to be Muslims. Among the Hindu names, most contain the suffix "Chitty." Among the Muslims' names, the suffixes contain variations of the term "Marakkayar" as either "Mercoyer" or "Mercoy." In Nagore, Hindu merchants outnumbered Muslims; in Nagapattinam, there were roughly as many Muslim merchants as there were Hindus, and there were no Hindu merchants in Karaikal. The presence of a larger number of Hindu merchants than Muslims clearly indicates a continued participation of Hindus in maritime trade. Arasaratnam has suggested that Hindu maritime merchants shifted to coastal trade during the second half of the eighteenth century since it contained fewer risks and offered more profits.<sup>58</sup> This explanation is not completely satisfactory since any merchant community, including Muslims, would shift to ventures that offered higher profits at lower risks. While the Resident's report does not provide sufficient details to support Arasaratnam's conclusion, the existence of a large number of Hindu merchants at Nagore, a port with significant overseas trading connections, suggests a certain degree of continuity of participation of Hindus in overseas trade with Southeast Asia.

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<sup>58</sup> S. Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India," *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 1 (1979): 19-40; Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power: Southeast India, 1750-1800* (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1996), 257.



Table 2.1: List of Principal Merchants in Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal.<sup>59</sup>

Name of Port	Names of Principal Merchants
Nagore	Adeveraga Chitty, Shevenadalinga Chitty, Samenada Chitty, Catta Permal Sooba Chitty, Careve Chitty, Linga Chitty, Kanapa Chitty, Nullatomby Chitty, Videlinga Chitty, Cumarapa Moodely, Chockapah Chitty, Seerma Pilla, Canaga Saba Chitty, Maroodanaiga Pilla, Soobamania Chitty, Mootoo Caroopath Pilla, Dutchana Moorty Chitty, Lutchoomaniar, Rengair, Soobenmaniar, Shashiar, Mahomed Cosim Meeah, Noormuhomed Mercoyer, assanatomby Mercoyer, Coshamercoy, Maramanah Mercoyer, Assemeeralaba Mercoyer, Abuckoolava Mercoyer, Omercatta Mercoyer, Allie Saib Nagoda, Abuckoo Chitty Mercoyer, Abdelcader Mercoyer, Peer Saib Nagoda, Canemadoovedecan, Coshepilla Neatter, Vapoocooryoo Moodatia, Muttoo Tarigenar, Shadia Nasy
Nagapattinam	Veesoovanada Chitty, Caroopath Chitty, Ayen Chitty, Munnar Chitty, Aroola Pilla, Soobaroya Pilla, Peer Saib, Veramottoo Chitty, Vela Pilla, Cadermardeen, Videlinga Chitty, Soobermania Chitty, Cadermercoyen, Mappilla Mercoyer, Osan Saib, Agemed Saib, Videlingam, Cadenaloydam
Karaikal	Chennalava Mercoy, Mahomatombly Mercoy, Vapootombly Mercoy, Coopatomby Mercoy, Shameeralavatombly Mercoy, Shagoo Abdul Caer, Amedalava Mercoy, Asameeralava Mercoy, Saidomeeralava, Hoosin Saib, Madana Saib

Table 2.2: Statement of Exports from Madras Presidency to China, Manila, Penang, and Melaka (Star Pagodas).<sup>60</sup>

	1796	1797	1798	1799
China		121664—17	131747—2	354191—31
Manila	57111—24		64337—13	117597—13
Penang	24568—8	11794—29	42755—10	147302—35
Melaka	29814—7	8476		6525—33
<b>Total</b>	<b>111494—3</b>	<b>141935—10</b>	<b>238839—25</b>	<b>625608—4</b>

During the 1790s, the eastward trade from Madras Presidency increased. As seen in Table 2.2 above, with the exception of Melaka, increasing levels of trade flowed from the Madras Presidency to China, Manila, and Penang. While the trade to China and Manila was carried on from Madras, the trade to Penang originated primarily from ports

<sup>59</sup> Tanjore District Records, March 12, 1798, Vol. 3350, 23, TNSA.

<sup>60</sup> Public Consultations, March 1800, Vol. 243, 927, TNSA.

south of Madras. Within a few years of its establishment, Penang emerged as a major trade entrepôt in the region. The primary items of export to Penang were different types of cloths, sundries, tobacco, wine, and pearls. The next section examines the establishment of Penang and the gradual increase in the participation of Tamil Muslim merchants in the eastward trade of the Madras Presidency that included Penang and other Malay ports, such as Kedah and Aceh.

## **VI. Establishment of Penang**

The East India Company did not confine itself to acquiring ports on the Coromandel coast; the Company also actively sought to establish a settlement in the Malay peninsula. Just as commercial and political calculations drove the Company's efforts to acquire Nagore in the eighteenth century, similar considerations led efforts to establish an English settlement in the Malay Peninsula. The EIC's desire to establish a foothold in Southeast Asia did not originate in the eighteenth century; since the early seventeenth century, the EIC had made several attempts to establish a factory in Southeast Asia. In 1602, James Lancaster arrived at Aceh to establish a factory, ostensibly to partake in the profitable spice trade. While Lancaster signed a treaty with the Sultan of Aceh that offered English traders several privileges, the treaty mainly served as a term of reference rather than a working arrangement. Subsequently, the English established a settlement at Banten that served as a British outpost in Southeast Asia until 1682, when the Dutch captured the port. By the mid-eighteenth century, as the Company's China trade increased, the EIC felt an acute need for a strong English settlement in the eastern Bay of

Bengal in order to counter the Dutch monopoly in Southeast Asia. The EIC needed Southeast Asian pepper and tin to be exchanged for Chinese tea. While the Company possessed a fort at Benkulen (Ft. Marlborough) on the Southwest coast of Sumatra, it did not attract sufficient trade since it was located far from well-travelled trade routes and major ports.<sup>61</sup>

Rather than the EIC, it was English private traders who ventured into Southeast Asian ports and sought to challenge the Dutch monopoly over pepper, tin, and spices.<sup>62</sup> Arasaratnam indicates that two branches of English eastward trade existed during the mid- and late-eighteenth century. The first branch consisted of the voluminous direct trade between India and Southeast Asia. The imports from Southeast Asia fed internal demand in India and were also used for re-export to China. The second branch of trade was meant for China and the vessels engaged in this voyage conducted protracted trade in Southeast Asia in order to acquire goods for China trade.<sup>63</sup> Since imports from Southeast Asia formed a vital component of the EIC's burgeoning China trade, the Company actively pursued establishment of an English port in the Malay peninsula.

Private English traders played an important role in identifying advantageous ports and initiating negotiations with local rulers. Between 1772 and 1786 private English

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<sup>61</sup> For a brief overview of EIC settlements in Southeast Asia prior to the establishment of Penang, see Lee Kam Hing, *The Sultanate of Aceh: Relations with the British, 1760-1824* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), 13-60.

<sup>62</sup> S. Arasaratnam, "Dutch Commercial Policy and Interests in the Malay Peninsula, 1750-1795," in *European Commercial Expansion in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Om Prakash (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997), 177-207.

<sup>63</sup> S. Arasaratnam, "The Eastward Trade of India in the Eighteenth Century," in *Politics and Trade in the Indian Ocean World: Essays in Honour of Ashin Das Gupta*, eds. Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Lakshmi Subramanian (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 223-24.

traders submitted several proposals to EIC officials to form an English settlement in the eastern side of Bay of Bengal. Several places such as Junk Ceylon (Phuket), Negrais, and Andaman Islands emerged as potential places for English settlements. But none of the efforts bore fruition, as the EIC did not wish to entangle itself in security arrangements with the Malay rulers who agreed to provide land for an English settlement in exchange for such security agreements.<sup>64</sup>

By 1784 the Island of Penang emerged as a choice for establishing an English settlement.<sup>65</sup> Captain James Scott, a private English trader, wrote to Warren Hastings, the Governor General of India, and outlined the advantages of Penang: proximity to India, an all-weather harbor, a fertile interior, and an equable climate.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Captain Thomas Forrest, another English trader, described the advantages that would accrue to the Company by acquiring Penang. He compared the ports on the Coromandel coast and in the eastern Bay of Bengal and pointed to the advantages of the latter ports due to presence of favorable winds and deep harbors. Captain Forrest referred to Coromandel as similar to “the cultivated parts of Europe” whereas the “opposite coast is like the wilds of America, passable only by natives, impassable by an enemy, so that all offences by land should be avoided, whilst our long naval arms would teach them both to fear and respect us.”<sup>67</sup> The Sultan of Kedah offered Penang to the EIC in exchange for protection against

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<sup>64</sup> See Hing, *Sultanate of Aceh*; R. Bonney, *Kedah, 1771-1821: The Search for Security and Independence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); A. Aspinall, *Cornwallis in Bengal* (New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1987), 191-93.

<sup>65</sup> Aspinall, *Cornwallis in Bengal*, 191-93.

<sup>66</sup> Home Public Consultations, July 2, 1784, No 23, NAI.

<sup>67</sup> Original Consultations, August 24, 1785, No 52, NAI.; Quoted in Aspinall, *Cornwallis in Bengal*, 191.

attacks by either the Burmese or Siamese rulers.<sup>68</sup> In May 1786, the Governor General of India authorized Captain Francis Light, an English private trader who was already involved in negotiations with the Sultan of Kedah over founding an English trading post, to take possession of Penang. While it is unclear whether the Sultan allowed the formation of a permanent English colony, Captain Light, in August 1786, started an English settlement in Penang.<sup>69</sup>

## **VII. The Dutch Factor**

The establishment of Penang represents a culmination of efforts by English private traders and the East India Company to acquire a settlement on the eastern side of the Bay of Bengal. The acquisition provided the company with a lee harbor for the Company's ships on their long voyage to China. It also provided a safe port for refitting the British naval fleet. The Company hoped that Penang would become "the emporium of the eastern commerce, by which the trade of Bengal and the west parts of India will be connected with that of China." Company officials considered that Penang would offer the same advantages to the EIC as those gained by the Dutch by their possession of Melaka.<sup>70</sup> The settling of Penang also represented the first major effort by the East India Company to challenge the Dutch monopoly over trade in Southeast Asia.<sup>71</sup>

The Dutch East India Company stood to lose the most as a result of the

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<sup>68</sup> For a detailed discussion of negotiations between the East India Company and the Sultan of Kedah over the grant of Penang, see Bonney, *Kedah, 1771-1821*.

<sup>69</sup> Aspinall, *Cornwallis in Bengal*, 194.

<sup>70</sup> Home Department, Miscellaneous (Straits Settlements), December 13, 1786, Appendix B, NAI.

<sup>71</sup> Aspinall, *Cornwallis in Bengal*, 197-98.

acquisitions of Nagore and Penang, located on opposite sides of the Bay of Bengal, by the English East India Company. Immediately after the EIC took control of Nagore, the Dutch sent a protest letter to the President at Ft. St. George and questioned the authority of the Raja of Tanjore to grant Nagore to the EIC. The Dutch asserted that the Raja did not possess the requisite authority to make such transfers since he was a tributary of the Nawab of Carnatic. They claimed that their own grant to possess Nagore in 1773 was annulled as the Nawab opposed it and that an agreement was made between the Dutch and the Nawab of Carnatic, which stated that only the Raja of Tanjore could possess Nagore. The Dutch opposed the EIC's acquisition of Nagore for the same political and commercial reasons that the EIC acquired the port town. The Dutch feared that the proximity of Nagore to Nagapattinam, their seat of power on the Coromandel coast, would allow the EIC to keep a close watch on their movements and also allow the EIC to capture Nagapattinam easily in the event of a conflict. Commercially, the Dutch feared that they would lose their position of dominance in intra-Asian trade. From their strongholds in Batavia and Melaka, the Dutch possessed a monopoly over the exports of tin, pepper, and spices from Southeast Asia to the Coromandel coast. From Nagapattinam, the Dutch exported the highly sought-after South Indian textiles to Melaka.

Eventually the Dutch lost Nagapattinam to the English in 1781 during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-84). While the Dutch regained their lost possessions in Asia under the 1784 peace treaty, Nagapattinam remained under the control of the EIC. The loss of Nagapattinam did not deter the Dutch ambitions in South India since they

regained Colombo in Sri Lanka. In 1788, the Dutch in Colombo signed a treaty with the Nawab of Carnatic that granted exclusive rights to the Dutch to control pearl and chank fishing activities on the coast of Tutacorin (Thoothukudi).<sup>72</sup> Within two years, the Collector of Madura (Madurai) expressed fears that the Dutch activities were not limited to controlling the pearl and chank fisheries; rather the Dutch have “assume[d] to themselves the exclusive privilege of manufacturing most of the cloth produce of Tinnevely (Tirunelveli) and of navigating the Bay of Tutacorin and the Gulph of Manar.”<sup>73</sup> The Collector informed the Board of Revenue that the Dutch had maintained a “chain of guard boats” that “prevent merchants exporting the manufactures of the District or from trading in any articles” without possessing a pass issued by the Dutch Governor of Tutacorin. He noted that the Dutch extended their authority over the coast of Tinnevely despite possessing only the port in Tutacorin. The Collector, in his letter, questioned the basis for Dutch authority on the Tinnevely coast and asserted “custom alone cannot warrant the exercise of a power.”<sup>74</sup> Despite the defeat of the Dutch during the fourth Anglo-Dutch conflict, even the minimal presence of Dutch authority on the Coromandel coast raised fears among the EIC officials.

In Southeast Asia, where Dutch influence and military capability were much greater, the British feared that the Dutch had plans against the newly established settlement of Penang. At the time of Penang’s establishment, the Dutch East India Company in Southeast Asia maintained a fleet comprised of at least six line-of-battle

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<sup>72</sup> Military Country Correspondence, October 28, 1790, Vol. 40, 139-49, TNSA.

<sup>73</sup> Madura District Records, November 27, 1790, Vol. 1103, 49-52, TNSA.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

ships and frigates and several auxiliary vessels. Although the Dutch indicated that the primary reason for such a large naval fleet was to deter pirates, Captain Light noted that its sole intent seemed rather to prevent trade from reaching Penang.<sup>75</sup> During the initial years of Penang's settlement, constant worries plagued EIC officials in Penang that the Dutch might form an alliance with local Malay rulers and attack Penang or that the Sultan of Kedah might invite the Dutch to settle in Penang over growing differences with the EIC. Captain Light sought military reinforcements from the Governor-General of India in order to protect the fledgling settlement.<sup>76</sup> Upon the arrival of troops, Captain Light noted with satisfaction that the "merchants of Madras and the coast may now trust their goods here in safety ... the Dutch are very quiet but they prevent as much as possible all vessels coming to this port and keep a strict guard upon their inhabitants lest they should emigrate to this place."<sup>77</sup> Thus, both on the Coromandel and Malay coasts, the East India Company kept a careful watch on any Dutch effort to acquire territory and usurp authority. Among other European powers in the region, the Dutch posed the greatest challenge to the East India Company's plans to dominate the intra-Asian and China trade.

### **VIII. Penang and the Eastward Trade**

Vessels from the Coromandel coast began to visit Penang from 1786 onwards. In that year, three vessels, two commanded by Europeans and one by a Tamil Muslim, visited

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<sup>75</sup> Aspinall, *Cornwallis in Bengal*, 195-96.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-95.

<sup>77</sup> Public Consultations, March 5, 1787, Vol. 142, 988-90, TNSA.



Penang.<sup>78</sup> The earliest Tamil Muslims to settle in Penang migrated from nearby Kedah or Aceh. A census conducted in Penang in August 1788 reported that the settlement had 216 Chulias,<sup>79</sup> who altogether possessed 71 houses and shops. The report mentioned that Chulias mostly left their families in Kedah since the rudimentary nature of houses at Penang was not fit for maintaining families. The census contained other groups such as Malays and Acehnese (80 people, 17 houses), Chinese with families (121 people, 11 houses), Chinese without families (142 people, 27 houses), Christians (170 men and women), original Malay inhabitants (158 men, women, and children), and new Malay inhabitants (70 men and women).<sup>80</sup> Another census conducted in 1789 enumerated 334 Malays and Chulias living in Penang with their families. An additional 95 Malays and Chulias resided on the island without their families.<sup>81</sup> The census records all the Malay and Chulia inhabitants as arriving from Aceh and Kedah; no Chulia is listed as arriving from any Coromandel port. This is not surprising since the majority of the inhabitants are identified as shopkeepers. During the early years, Chulias from neighboring Malay ports flocked to the new English settlement and established themselves as shopkeepers and landowners. Besides, the early Tamil Muslim merchants to visit Penang were itinerant

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<sup>78</sup> IOR/G/34/2, Appendix to Consultations. Straits Settlements Factory Records (SSFR), December 13, 1786 & July 27, 1787. India Office Records, British Library, London. Hereafter IOR. The vessels commanded by Europeans sailed from Tranquebar. The third vessel was commanded by “Mahomed Kassim.” It is unclear whether the commander is the same as Muhammad Qassim of Nagore discussed earlier.

<sup>79</sup> Tamil Muslims were often referred to as Chulias in EIC records. Sometimes the term was also used to refer to anyone from South India.

<sup>80</sup> IOR/G/34/3, Straits Settlements Factory Records. Appendix to Consultations, August 25, 1788, National Archives of Singapore. Hereafter NAS.

<sup>81</sup> IOR/G/34/3, Straits Settlements Factory Records. Appendix to Consultations, April 10, 1789. I wish to thank Khoo Salma Nasution for providing a copy of this document.

traders and ship's commanders who returned to their native ports at the end of a trading voyage.

By early 1789, increasing numbers of merchants from the Coromandel coast began sailing to Penang. In a report to the Governor General at Calcutta in 1789, Captain Light expressed his inability to gather precise information from the Coromandel merchants about their cargo, since they “will not readily produce upon their arrival a just account [an accurate account] quantity of goods they have brought from an apprehension that a knowledge of the quantity might injure them in their sales and this principle in a smaller degree an effect upon the European merchants trading here.” The growth of Penang and the increase in the numbers of Tamil Muslims prompted the EIC authorities to appoint a merchant, Hussein Saib, as “Captain over the Chuliers or Malabars residing on the POWI [Penang].” The Captain’s responsibilities included adjudicating small disputes, in conjunction with other captains, between the “people of his cast” and the “Chinese, Malays, Buggeesses [Buginese] & others” and also managing disputes arising amongst the Chulias. The Captain was also entrusted to prevent the practice of vices such as cock fighting, gaming, and smoking of opium. Finally, a “particular part” of the Captain’s responsibilities included maintaining an “exact account of the arrivals and departures of all Chulier ships and vessels” and an account of their imports and exports.<sup>82</sup>

The following table (2.3) shows the arrivals and departures of vessels at Penang between 1786 and 1793 that were commanded by Tamil Muslims. The table uses data gathered from a large collection of Straits Settlements Factory Records (SSFR) and

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<sup>82</sup> Home Public Cons, Appendix O. January 11, 1796. NAI.

contains the following details: names of the vessel and its commander, dates of arrival and departure from Penang, the vessel's port of origin, and the vessel's destination port after sailing from Penang. The shipping lists also contain a "nation" field which most likely implies the flags under which the vessel sailed. In most cases, the "nation" of the vessels is identified as "Chooliar" and in some cases they are classified as "Moor." In a few cases, the vessels commanded by Tamil Muslims sailed under British or Danish flags.

Before examining the shipping lists, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the dataset. First, several vessels possess identical names, such as "Mohamed Bux" or "Cader Bux." In such cases, it is difficult to track the vessel's journey since vessels with similar names left the same port during the same year. Second, the commanders' names are also not precisely recorded in the shipping lists. Therefore, it becomes difficult to verify the identities of two commanders with the same or similar names. Finally, the shipping lists of arrivals and departures at Penang do not encompass the full extent of Tamil Muslim shipping from the Coromandel coast, since some merchants could have avoided Penang. Despite such limitations, it is possible to better understand the nature of Tamil Muslim maritime trade in the late eighteenth century by analyzing the shipping lists, as explained below.

Table 2.3: Shipping of Tamil Muslims at Penang between 1786 to June 1793.<sup>83</sup>

Vessel Name	Commander's Name	Date of Arrival	From	To	Date of Departure	Nation
<b>1786</b>						
	Mahomed Kassim	10 Dec	Tranquebar	Aceh	17 Dec	Chooliar
<b>1787</b>						
Snow Cadriem	Noq <sup>84</sup> Shaikhalle	14 Oct	Nagore	Melaka	27 Oct	
Snow Mahomed Bux	Noq Lebbemein	22 Oct	Tranquebar	Melaka	27 Oct	
Snow Mandambra	Noq Agebroom	23 Oct	Kedah	Melaka	27 Oct	
Snow Mahomed	Mahomed Cassim	27 Oct	Kedah	Melaka	29 Oct	
Snow Cader Sultan	Noq Caderbaceus	27 Oct	Tranquebar	Perak	1 Nov	
Ketch Hamder Cader	Semedin	27 Oct	Porto Novo		17 Nov	
Snow Cader Bauno	Noq Armahoon	26 Nov	Nagore	Melaka	28 Nov	
Snow Mahomed Bux	Noq Abull	23 Dec	Pegu	Melaka	1 Jan	
<b>1788</b>						
Snow Mamud	Noq Mamud	3 Sept	Conan	Aceh	28 Oct	Chooliar
Snow Cadda Bux	Shah Abdul Cida	2 Oct	Nagore	Pedir	19 Dec	Chooliar
Snow Mahomed Bux	Tomisail	7 Oct	Nagore	Melaka	31 Oct	Chooliar
Snow Cadda Bux	Noq Saib	11 Oct	Porto Novo			Chooliar
Snow Mahomet Bux	Simoce	16 Oct	Nagapattinam	Batavia	30 Oct	Chooliar
Snow Mahomed Bux	Shamaredin	28 Oct	Nagore	Nagore	21 Dec	Chooliar
Snow Mamud Bux	Noq Bappoo	10 Dec	Kedah	Melaka	16 Dec	Chooliar
<b>1789</b>						
Snow Cudder Bux	Slagmadin	12 Mar		Nagore	12 Mar	British
Snow Cudder Bux	Noq Abdul Cauder	6 Oct	Nagore	Kolkata	9 Oct	British
Snow Cudder Bux	Noq Liboo	22 Oct	Porto Novo		30 Oct	Danish
Snow Mahomed Bux	Noq Mahamett	23 Oct	Porto Novo	Melaka	28 Oct	Danish

<sup>83</sup> This table was compiled from a large number of sources. The spelling of names of the vessels and commanders have been retained from the sources. But the names of places have been changed to reflect current usage. IOR/G/34/2, Appendix to Consultations, SSFR, December 13, 1786, July 27, 1787, February 13, 1788. IOR.; IOR/G/34/3, Appendix to Consultations, SSFR, April 10, 1789, 10 December 1789, January 14, 1790. IOR.; IOR/G/34/4, Appendix to Consultations, SSFR, August 6, 1790, IOR.; IOR/G/34/3, Appendix to Consultations, SSFR, September 10, 1792, December 17, 1792, August 30, 1793. IOR.; IOR/G/34/6, Appendix to Consultations, SSFR. August 5, 1794, IOR.; Home Department, Miscellaneous (Straits Settlement), No 6, January 14, 1790, NAI.; Consultations of Home Department, Miscellaneous (Straits Settlement), December 2, 1791. Vol. 199, NAI; Consultations of Home Department, Miscellaneous (Straits Settlement), April 5, 1793. Vol. 200, NAI.

<sup>84</sup> Noq – Nakhuda (commander of the vessel)

Table 2.3 Continued

Vessel Name	Commander's Name	Date of Arrival	From	To	Date of Departure	Nation
Snow Salemannee	Noq Cabbiar Saib	31 Oct	Nagore			Danish
Snow Mahomed Bux	Noq Shaick,adin	4 Nov	Nagore			Danish
Snow Solomanny	Noq Cabier	31 Oct	Nagore	Melaka	13 Nov	Danish
Sloop Cuda Bux	Ramjan Ally		Penang	Pegu	16 Nov	Moormen
Songary Purvey	Shaik Mahomed	17 Nov	Nagore	Nagore		Danish
Snow Cudder Bux	Shaick Meera	18 Dec	Aceh	Aceh	11 Jan 1790	Moor
<b>1790</b>						
Snow Mahomed Marab	Shaick Hann	25 Jan	Kedah	Nagapattinam	27 Feb	Moor
Snow Mahomed Bux	Mahomed Ninny	24 Feb	Melaka	Nagore	19 Mar	Moor
Snow Mahomed Bux	Noq Nallendee	6 Mar	Melaka			Moor
Snow Salemanny	Noq Cabier Saib	13 Mar	Melaka	Nagore	20 Mar	Dane
Snow Hyder Bux	Mahommed Sariff	18 Jul	Aceh	Kedah	4 Oct	Chooliar
Snow Lader	Noq Lillecote	3 Aug	Cannanore	Aceh	3 Dec	Chooliar
Snow Allwanny	Checunny	20 Sept	Nagore			Chooliar
Hyder Bux	Mahommed Sarraf	25 Sept	Nagore	Kedah	4 Oct	Chooliar
Snow Mahomed Bux	Mahomed Gando	1 Oct	Nagore	Aceh	29 Dec	Chooliar
Snow Mahomed Bux	Mahomed Cundees	10 Oct	Pondicherry			Chooliar
Snow Daddee Lickie	Shake Meewn	12 Oct	Porto Novo	Kedah	5 Nov	Chooliar
Snow Gader	Syed Hassim	18 Oct	Nagore	Palembang	5 Nov	Chooliar
Snow Shinger	Shah Mahomed	26 Oct	Nagore	Rangoon	31 Oct	Chooliar
Snow Huda Bux	Husun Hiden	28 Oct	Nagore	Rangoon	31 Oct	Chooliar
Snow Cader Bux	Puria Tomby	1 Nov	Nagore	Aceh	3 Jan	Chooliar
<b>1791</b>						
Snow Bante Bux	Siak Saib	17 Nov	Kedah	Aceh	4 Feb	Chooliar
Snow Cader Bux	Mowna	20 Nov	Nagore	Aceh	7 Feb	Chooliar
Snow Nassare	Tombe Saib	4 Dec	Tringanno	Tringanno	12 Mar	Chooliar
<b>1791</b>						
Snow Ramane	Noq Hamat	26 Sept	Cannanore			Chooliar
Snow Mahomed Bux	Noq Mahomed Cando	11 Oct	Nagore			Chooliar
Sloop Mahomed Bux	Noq Cadder Cando	12 Oct	Kedah			Chooliar
Snow Porava	Noq Shaick Saib	4 Dec	Nagore	Nagore	21 Jan	Chooliar

Table 2.3 Continued

Vessel Name	Commander's Name	Date of Arrival	From	To	Date of Departure	Nation
<b>1792</b>						
Snow Mahomed Bux	Noq Tomby Saib	25 Apr	Aceh	Melaka	14 May	Chooliar
Ketch Cadderbux	Noq Abel	21 May	Porto Novo	Perak	27 Jul	Chooliar
Snow Cadder Bux	Noq Alle Saib	28 May	Nagore			Chooliar
Snow Cadder Bux	Sheik Mea	1 Jul	Porto Novo			Chooliar
Snow Patte Bux	Saibe	27 Sept	Nagore		6 Oct	British
Snow Cader Bux	Cundoo	28 Sept	Nagore			British
Snow Cader Bux	Mercain	29 Sept	Cuddalore	Perlis	13 Oct	British
Ketch Cader Bux	Mahomed Ally	2 Oct	Nagore			Moor
Sloop Cuderco	Syed Hussein	4 Oct	Nagore	Kedah	16 Oct	Moor
Snow Kerah Cutterah	Shaik SAib	9 Oct	Nagore	Melaka	20 Oct	Moor
Snow Cader Bux	Abdul Cader	9 Oct	Nagore			Moor
Snow Hydrose	Cagu Mahomed	12 Oct	Cuddalore			Moor
Snow Patir Rahman	Shaick Mahomed	13 Oct	Nagapattinam			Moor
Snow Mahomed Merah	Mahomed M	14 Oct	Porto Novo			Moor
Snow Batir Mahomed Bux	Hakim Sultan	16 Oct	Nagore			Danish
Snow Mahomady	Syad Hussein	20 Oct	Nagore			Moor
Snow Mahomed Bux	Ally Saib	21 Oct	Porto Novo			Moor
Snow Mydeen Cauder Bux	Tomba Saib	29 Oct	Cuddalore			Moor
Mahomed Cauder Bux	Mahomed Dellay	7 Nov	Kedah	Eastward	15 Nov	Chooliar
<b>1793</b>						
Patta Bux	Noq Saiboo			Pedir	11 Jan	Chooliar
Cader Bux	Noq Abdul Cader			Pedir, Nagore	23 Jan	Chooliar
Cader Bux	Noq Mahomed Gandoo			Pedir, Nagore	23 Jan	Chooliar
Bura Cuttra	Hakina Saib			Pedir, Nagore	24 Jan	Chooliar
Mahomed Bux	Alleg Saib			Aceh	25 Jan	Chooliar
Cader Bux	Mahomed Ally			Porto Novo	28 Jan	Chooliar
Lewis	Apka Pulla			Pedir	1 Feb	Chooliar
Cader	Cpnsepocker			Pedir	2 Feb	Chooliar
Cader Bux	Tomby Saib			Pedir	4 Feb	Chooliar
Cader Bux	Mahomed Hossain			Nagore	26 Feb	Chooliar
Snow Shah Madar Bux	Hossanee	3 Mar	Melaka	Nagore	9 Mar	Dutch

Table 2.3 Continued

<b>Vessel Name</b>	<b>Commander's Name</b>	<b>Date of Arrival</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>	<b>Date of Departure</b>	<b>Nation</b>
Sloop Maideen Bux	Noq A Merican	25 Sept	Porto Novo	Pedir	17 Jan 1794	Chooliar

The records show that between 1786 and 1793, 51 vessels sailed from Coromandel ports to Malay ports. Most of the vessels, roughly 30, sailed from Nagore, indicating its emergence as a preferred port of trade by Tamil Muslims. Porto Novo remained a distant second with 9 departures. Tranquebar, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, and Pondicherry were the other ports used by Tamil Muslims. The vessels from Coromandel ports typically left in the months of August or September and arrived at Penang during the months between October and December.

In most cases, the vessels did not terminate their trade route at Penang. Rather, the vessels anchored in Penang between a week and several weeks and proceeded to other ports in Southeast Asia, such as Melaka, Aceh, Kedah, and Pedir. Finally, the ships returned to Coromandel ports between the months of February and April. In some cases, it is actually possible to track the vessels from their departure from Coromandel to their return. On October 31, 1789, the vessel Solomanny commanded by Nacoda Cabier arrived at Penang from Nagore. The vessel stayed at Penang for about two weeks and sailed to Melaka on November 13. The Solomanny returned to Penang from Melaka on March 13, 1790 and set sail on March 20 to Nagore. In another example, the vessel Cader Bux commanded by Abdul Cader arrived at Penang from Nagore on October 9, 1792 and, on January 23, 1793, the vessel proceeded to Pedir and from there to Nagore. In some

cases, the Coromandel vessels shuttled between ports in Southeast Asia before returning to South India. On September 27, 1792, the vessel *Patte Bux* commanded by Saibe arrived at Penang from Nagore; it next sailed to an unknown port on October 6. The vessel returned to Penang sometime in November or December and again sailed on January 11, 1793 to Pedir. While most of the vessels visited other ports besides Penang, some vessels occasionally sailed to Penang from Coromandel ports and returned without visiting any other ports.

In addition to tracking the routes taken by the vessels, it is also possible to identify vessel commanders who undertook voyages on such vessels. On October 7, 1788, Nacoda Tombe Saib, commanding the vessel *Mahomed Bux*, arrived in Penang from Nagore and proceeded on October 31 to Melaka. The next year, Nacoda Tombe Saib, commanding the same vessel, arrived at Penang from Nagore on October 26 and left on October 31 to Melaka. In some cases, the commanders sailed different vessels. In 1791 Nacoda Shaick Saib commanded the vessel *Porava*, whereas in the following year he commanded another vessel *Kerah Cutterah*.

Besides the larger European and Indian vessels, hundreds of Malay *prahus* visited Penang. These smaller Malay boats, weighing less than 10 tons, played an important role in bringing the produce and manufactures of the surrounding Malay region to Penang and carrying Indian and Chinese goods back. In 1786, 31 *prahus* arrived in Penang and the number increased to 403 in the following year. By 1799, 1836 *prahus* traded at Penang.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Nordin Hussin, *Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka: Dutch Melaka and English Penang, 1780-1830* (Singapore: NIAS Press, 2007), 74.



Between May and August 1789, 244 prahus sailed from Penang. About 63 of them sailed to Kedah and 47 went to Perak. Other Malay ports to which significant numbers of prahus sailed were Batubara (20), Perlis (18), and Tulosamawy (11). In almost all cases, the prahus carried Indian opium and piece-goods back to the Malay ports.<sup>86</sup> Besides bringing Malay produce and manufactures to Penang, the Malay prahus also brought gold dust to Penang that was exchanged for Indian piece-goods and taken back to the Coromandel coast by Tamil Muslim merchants.<sup>87</sup>

While Penang was quickly becoming an entrepôt, the shipping lists show that Tamil Muslims did not confine their voyages to direct sailings from the Coromandel coast to Penang. Rather, Penang became another port of call for ships departing the Coromandel coast. The following table (2.4) shows the products exported from the Coromandel coast and the imports from various ports in Southeast Asia. As can be seen, cloth of various kinds formed the bulk of exports to eastward ports in Southeast Asia. More importantly, the imports from Southeast Asia show that ports like Aceh, Kedah, and Pegu supplied products that were not available elsewhere. Horses remained an important item of import from Aceh and Pegu, probably for the EIC troops and Indian rulers. Lead was imported from Kedah and the timber from Pegu was used for shipbuilding.

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<sup>86</sup> Home Public Cons, August 1789, NAI.

<sup>87</sup> Tanjore District Records, October 12, 1802, Vol. 3208, TNSA. In 1792, Captain Light estimated, based on the practice of Buginese traders in Rhio, that they would bring gold and silver worth 500,000 Spanish Dollars to exchange for Indian opium and cloth. "Notices of Penang," in *Journal of Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia Vol. 4*, ed. J.R Logan (Singapore, 1850), 657.

Table 2.4: Imports and exports at Tanjore ports<sup>88</sup>

	<b>Imports from</b>	<b>Exports to</b>
Aceh	Horses, raw & boiled nuts, pepper, rattan, brimstones, camphire, Benjamin, silk thread	Blue cloths, long cloths, salt, tobacco, bazaar articles
Penang	Rattan, tarr, dammer, cinnamon	Chintz, blue cloth, long cloth, salt, tobacco
Malay coast	Sandalwood, raw & boiled nuts, rattan, wood oil, galingal	Chintz, blue cloth, long cloth, coarse cloth
Kedah & Junk Ceylon	White lead, wax, nutmeg, rattan	Chintz, blue cloth, long cloth, salt
Pegu	Stick wax, horses, wax, timber & plank, cardamom	Muslin, hing, sandalwood, blue cloth, broad cloth
Batavia	Arrack, cloves, nutmegs, slices, copper, lead, gold thread, sugar & sugar candy	Blue cloth, long cloth, muslin, Chintz

## IX. Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine the impact of EIC's acquisition of Nagore and Penang on the Tamil-speaking Muslim maritime merchants. The EIC's policies in both Nagore and Penang emerged under a particular set of historical compulsions: to develop ports in the Coromandel region, generate revenue from such ports, and develop Penang as an entrepôt for its China-bound ships. To achieve its aims, the EIC required indigenous mercantile communities to settle and trade from ports under its control. The EIC's preference for acquiring the seaport of Nagore over the interior district of Devecotah (Devikottai) demonstrates the importance attached by the Company to gaining control of prominent ports. Nagore was important to the Company for commercial as well as political purposes. Commercially, the town served as an important port for the lucrative Eastward trade to Southeast Asia as well as the northward trade to Bengal. In addition, the

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<sup>88</sup> Tanjore District Records, January 24, 1797, Vol. 3349, 4-9, TNSA; Tanjore District Records, March 12, 1798, Vol. 3350, 18-25, TNSA.

Company considered Nagore as an entry point to the fertile interior districts of Tanjore. In acquiring Nagore, the Company hoped to establish it as the dominant port among the surrounding ports. By increasing the trade at Nagore, the EIC hoped to raise revenue from port duties. Similar objectives guided the EIC's policies in the ports that were gained by the Company after Nagore came under its control. Thus, acquisition of ports formed an important component of the EIC's efforts to generate revenue in India. The EIC desire to gain control of Nagore was influenced by political reasons as well. Since several European-controlled ports were located in close proximity in the southern Coromandel coast, the Company wished to acquire Nagore so that it could observe the movements of troops and flow of trade in neighboring ports – Dutch Nagapattinam, Danish Tranquebar, and French Karaikal.

The EIC's acquisition of Nagore brought one of the last major indigenous ports under the control of a European trading company. The Tamil Muslim maritime merchants' response was largely predicated by the Company's policies. The EIC viewed Nagore and other ports as a means to generate revenue and therefore adopted policies aimed at attracting and settling merchants in ports under its authority. The Tamil Muslims took advantage of offers such as low customs duties and exemptions from paying certain taxes, and returned to Nagore. Some prominent merchants, such as Muhammad Qassim, leveraged their wealth to seek lucrative revenue farming contracts from the EIC. Besides reduced duties, merchants migrated to Nagore and other EIC controlled ports seeking security; they requested protection for their vessels from capture, both by the Company's enemies as well as by the English Royal Navy, and they also sought redress through the

EIC courts for settling their disputes.

Similarly, in the case of Penang, a slightly different set of commercial and political factors drove the Company to take possession of the island. The Company needed a port to refit His Majesty's naval ships. Commercially, the EIC needed to procure items in Southeast Asia that could be used for its burgeoning China trade. English private traders led the effort to obtain Southeast Asian goods for the China trade. Since the Dutch, from their bases in Batavia and Melaka, exercised control over large parts of Southeast Asia and enforced a monopoly over the prices and quantity of trade goods in the region, the EIC wanted a port outside the influence of Dutch authority. As English private traders increased their commercial intercourse in Southeast Asia, they urged the EIC to establish a base from which the Dutch monopoly could be challenged.

The establishment of an English settlement at Penang also aided the Tamil Muslims. The new settlement lay along the merchants' existing trading route from the Coromandel coast to Southeast Asia; therefore, the merchants added Penang as an additional port to sell and gather goods. In addition to becoming just another port on the route, Penang gradually attracted Tamil Muslims merchants due to its status as a free trade port in the region. Similar to Nagore, the EIC desired to develop Penang as an important entrepôt and therefore implemented measures calculated to attract trade to the fledgling settlement. The Tamil Muslims, however, did not abandon their previous trading ports such as, Kedah, Aceh, and Pedir, and continued, instead, to sail to those ports.

Taken together, the acquisition of Nagore and Penang by the English East India

Company benefited the Tamil Muslim merchants. In Nagore, they gained from the several exemptions from port duties that were granted by the EIC. In comparison to the EIC and English private traders, Tamil Muslim merchants had better access to capital and were able to utilize their resources to continue their trade voyages to Malay ports. In Penang, the presence of a port outside Dutch control and within easy reach to Malay production centers of pepper, tin, and other items imported into Coromandel ports, was favorable for the maritime trade of Tamil Muslim merchants. As a result, there was a significant number of ships, as many as 51 between 1786 and 1792,<sup>89</sup> that sailed from Coromandel ports to Penang. The commercial activities of Tamil Muslims were not limited to trade with Malay ports. The next chapter examines the involvement of Tamil Muslims in the salt trade between South India and Bengal as well as their participation in the fishing of pearls and conch shells (chanks) along the southern Coromandel region.

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<sup>89</sup> See Table 2.3 above.

## Appendix I: Cloth produced and exported from Tanjore districts in 1796 and 1797.<sup>1</sup>

### Exports in 1796 (Star Pagodas)

	Quantity provided by Company Merchants	Quantity provided by merchants	Quantity of goods received by land & sea	Quantity of goods exported		To what places exported
	Corge	Corge	Corge	Corge	Star Pagodas	
<b>Nagore &amp; Nagapattinam Districts</b>						
Half piece 6,7,8,&9 Call	50		664	654	15160	Atcheen & Malay coast & Ceylon
Long cloth coarse & fine		105		85	3861	Ditto
Chintz, coarse & fine	130	76	27	84	1609	Eastward
Muslins			112	102	3255	Ditto
Handkerchiefs		102		52	310	Ditto
Tapees		204		184	910	Malay coast
Comboys		187		137	2510	Ditto
Dungrys		368		318	3315	Pulo Pinang
Ginghams & Dupatees		102		72	709	Atcheen & other eastern parts
Moories coarse & fine		108		78	1532	Ditto
Assacans		108		68	1720	Ditto
Ammoos		105		55	1410	Ditto
Succatoons		102		62	1730	Ditto
Percauls		135		125	910	Ditto
Silk cloth			31	5	168	Ditto
Malabar cloth		3117	316	272	3992	Ditto
<b>Karaikal District</b>						
Gingham	100	50		10	177	Atcheen & other eastern parts
Comboys blue	20	80		30	516	Ditto
Romalls	40	120		40	800	Ditto
Chintz	50	150		50	1325	Ditto
Tapoos	80	70		10	65	Ditto
Sastracundies	50					Ditto
Malabar cloth		230		50	1000	Ditto
<b>Total</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>5520</b>	<b>1152</b>	<b>2545</b>	<b>46984</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Tanjore District Records, January 24, 1797, Vol. 3349, TNSA; Tanjore District Records, March 12, 1798, Vol. 3350, TNSA. The description of the types of cloth is provided in the Glossary.

### Exports in 1797 (Star Pagodas).

	Quantity provided by Company's Merchants	Quantity provided by merchants	Quantity of goods received by land & sea	Quantity of goods exported		To what places exported
<b>Nagore &amp; Nagapattinam Districts</b>	Corge	Corge	Corge	Corge	Star Pagodas	
Half piece 6,7,8,&9 Call	50		752	721	16711	Atcheen & Malay coast & Ceylon
Long cloth coarse & fine	60	50		34	2444	Ditto
Chintz, coarse & fine	70	148	2	120	1980	Eastward
Romalls red	50					Ditto
Muslins			22	4	127	Ditto
Sastracundies	50					Ditto
Handkerchiefs coarse & fine		241	4	186	1603	Ditto
Tapies		362		332	1723	Malay coast
Comboys different sorts		167	3	130	1797	Ditto
Dungrys		194	8	132	1030	Pulo Penang
Ginghams & Dupaties	80	126	6	82	1082	Atcheen & other Eastern ports
Mores coarse & fine		133		98	1805	Ditto
Assacans		57	5	32	627	Ditto
Ammoos		77		42	1019	Ditto
Succatoons		82	3	40	1421	Ditto
Percauls		30	541	541	3014	Ditto
Silk cloth			51	5	226	
Malabar Cloth		1600	2302	504	7715	Ditto
<b>Kariakal</b>						Ditto
Ginghams		150		90	1620	Ditto
Camboy Blue		100		70	1132	Ditto
Romalls		160		100	1900	Ditto
Chintz		200		130	3400	Ditto
Tapees		150		70	535	Ditto
Malabar Cloth		300		100	3000	Ditto
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>4327</b>	<b>3701</b>	<b>3565</b>	<b>55921</b>	

## Chapter 3: Ocean's Treasures: Tamil Muslims and the Trade in Salt, Conch Shells, and Pearls, c. 1800-40.

### I. Introduction

In May 1802, Muhammad Aaqil and Muhammad Yaqub, sons of Muhammad Qassim, a prominent merchant from Nagore (discussed in chapter 2), submitted a petition to Lord Edward Clive, the President in Council at Fort St. George, and requested help in recovering their trading vessel that had been captured by a French privateer near Aceh and taken to the French-controlled island of Mauritius. The petitioners stated that the efforts of Aceh's ruler to recover the vessel proved to be futile and sought both the recovery of their vessel and payment of indemnity for their losses since France and Great Britain were not at war with each other.<sup>1</sup> In another petition in March 1805, Muhammad Aaqil requested the Tanjore<sup>2</sup> Collector for a continuance of certain trading privileges granted to his father in September 1778. The *cowle*<sup>3</sup>, granted by Thomas Rumbold, then President and Governor at Fort St. George, exempted Aaqil's father Muhammad Qassim from paying several port duties on his merchandize as a "favor" for his assistance to the Company.<sup>4</sup> The Collector declined to continue the privileges and the Board of Revenue in Fort St. George approved of the Collector's decision since the *cowle* was not intended to be hereditary.<sup>5</sup>

While the petitions demonstrate the continuity of maritime trading operations from the Coromandel coast to Southeast Asia across generations and during the early

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<sup>1</sup> Public Consultations, May 12, 1802, Vol. 264, 2009-11. Tamil Nadu State Archives. Hereafter TNSA.

<sup>2</sup> A maritime district in the Madras Presidency.

<sup>3</sup> An agreement or contract given by an official.

<sup>4</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, March 13, 1805, 1842-48. TNSA.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



nineteenth century, they also underscore, on a more substantial level, the changes in the East India Company's (EIC) political and military status by the beginning of the nineteenth century. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the EIC faced threats from Mysore's rulers Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan. The Company also had to contend with the Dutch and the French threats as a consequence of the spillover of European conflicts into Asia: the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-84) and the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802). Further, the French and Dutch forces also acted as auxiliaries of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan against the EIC. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the EIC emerged victorious over its European and Indian rivals in South India. In 1801, it assumed the governorship of the entire Carnatic region from the Nawab of Arcot who remained as a titular ruler. Closely related to the military situation, the Company in the late eighteenth century faced a chronic shortage of funds to pay its military and to invest in trade. In such a position, the Company provided several incentives to merchants to attract them from rival European trading enclaves and rewarded them for their assistance to the Company. Under such a policy, merchants, such as Muhammad Qassim, who provided funds to the Company and persuaded other merchants to settle in the Company's territories, received special privileges.

The Tanjore Collector's refusal to continue the special privileges to Muhammad Qassim's sons illustrates the strengthened position of the EIC in South India by the early nineteenth century. As the sole dominant power in the region, the Company did not fear the risk of merchants relocating to rival European trading enclaves. In addition, as the Company strengthened its hold on the economy, it did not face a critical shortage of funds making it necessary to rely on Indian merchants for financial support.

The EIC shifted its attention to generating increased revenue from its newly acquired possessions. Existing studies show the changes introduced in sectors such as

textile production and land management aimed towards increasing income for the EIC.<sup>6</sup> However, certain sectors of the economy, such as revenues from marine sources, have received little scholarly attention. Besides agricultural and textile production revenues, EIC authorities sought means to increase their revenue from marine resources such as salt and fisheries. Under such circumstances, the EIC regulated the conch shell and pearl fishing in South India and Sri Lanka. The salt monopoly was a remnant of the Company's policy from the eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, the Company further expanded its authority over the salt trade all over India.

This chapter examines the implication of EIC's focus on marine resources on the maritime trade of Tamil Muslims. The first part briefly discusses the various proposals of EIC officials in the Madras Presidency that were aimed towards increasing revenue from marine sources. The second section examines the need for transporting salt from the Coromandel coast to Bengal and the participation of Tamil Muslim merchants in this venture. The next part analyzes the EIC's efforts to regulate pearl and chank fisheries along India's southern coast and Sri Lanka and the involvement of Tamil Muslim merchants in this economic activity.

## **II. Generating Revenue**

After assuming control over much of South India by 1800, the East India Company embarked on several measures to improve revenue collection in its territories. Existing studies provide rich details about the land revenue settlements initiated by the EIC in South India during the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Besides land revenue, EIC officials also

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<sup>6</sup> Prasannan Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy: Weavers, Merchants and Kings in South India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); David Ludden, *An Agrarian History of South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Ludden, *Agrarian History of South Asia*.

sought other sources of revenue such as port duties. Towards that end, the Company continued its past efforts to improve ports and such efforts were not limited to major ports such as Nagore. The efforts to develop ports extended to smaller ports that were primarily involved in trade between ports along the Coromandel coast, generally referred to as coasting trade by EIC officials. In April 1801, W.R. Irwin, the Assistant Collector of Tanjore, reported to the District Collector about the success of previous efforts to improve the port of Tirumalavassel, located 45 miles north of Nagore, and noted the return of merchants from Karaikal and Porto Novo. The Assistant Collector also suggested an improvement of the river running through the town<sup>8</sup> so that vessels of 250 tons could be admitted in to the port.<sup>9</sup> He estimated that this improvement would greatly facilitate trade at the port.

The EIC's officials did not limit their efforts to increasing revenue from port duties. Their efforts encompassed a wide range of marine-based activities that could increase the Company's income. In December 1800, J. Wallace, the Assistant Collector of Tanjore, wrote a detailed report in which he outlined his suggestions to the District Collector on the means to increase the revenue. Wallace's proposals could be grouped under two headings. First, he recommended that the Company should abolish the practice of contracting out the collection of port duties to the highest bidders and instead collect port duties directly. Towards this end, he advised that the EIC must open customs collection in smaller ports in addition to augmenting the personnel in existing customs offices. Second, he identified salt manufacture and chank fishing as two economic activities that could provide significant benefits to the Company. He hinted at the long Coromandel coastline and suggested several places where salt could be produced and

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<sup>8</sup> Uppanar river.

<sup>9</sup> Tanjore District Records, April 22, 1801, Vol. 3202, 56-65. TNSA.

conch shell fishing could be undertaken. He criticized existing methods of salt manufacture and conch shell fishing as inefficient and provided ideas to improve them.<sup>10</sup>

Besides conch shells and salt, enthusiastic EIC officials sought to find other sources of revenue. In one such instance, the Collector of Tanjore noted that shark fins and tails and the skins of ray fish were obtained as casual products during chank fishing and suggested that they could be sent eastward. The Collector proposed an encouragement of chank fishery so that additional revenue might be generated from the sale of these products in Southeast Asia where the Chinese population desired them.<sup>11</sup>

These suggestions are examples of ideas proposed by EIC officials to increase revenue from marine sources. Some propositions were adopted by the EIC and others rejected. As will be shown below, the proposal to increase the manufacture of salt was shelved when the EIC implemented a monopoly on the manufacture and sale of salt in the Madras Presidency in 1805. Other initiatives, such as the plan to develop conch shell fishing along the Tanjore coast, could not be implemented due to the poor nature of shells in the region. But the suggestions reveal the importance attached by EIC officials to revenue from the ocean.

### **III. Salt Transport from Coromandel to Bengal**

The East India Company began to monopolize India's salt trade in 1772 and instituted steps to control the production and sale of salt by public auction. The ensuing high prices of salt resulted in significant profits for the Company.<sup>12</sup> While the monopoly existed in

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<sup>10</sup> Tanjore District Records, December 15, 1800, Vol. 3177. TNSA.

<sup>11</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, July 24, 1806, Vol. 430, 4645-54. TNSA.

<sup>12</sup>The monopoly on salt lasted until 1863. For more on the salt monopoly in India see Balai Barui, *The Salt Industry of Bengal, 1757-1800: A Study in the Interaction of British Monopoly Control and Indigenous Enterprise* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1985); K.V. Jeyaraj, *A History of Salt Monopoly in Madras Presidency, 1805-1878* (Madurai: Ennes Publication, 1984).

both Bengal and Madras Presidencies, the Company achieved a greater share of its profits in Bengal where it established, much earlier than in Madras, elaborate systems for procuring, storing, and the sale of salt. Salt in Bengal ranked higher in quality than Coromandel salt and lesser than that of Orissa<sup>13</sup> salt. In the late eighteenth century, the Company did not import significant quantities of Coromandel and Orissa salt into Bengal, although some limited salt trade existed between Madras and Bengal; the EIC formed agreements with Indian ship-owners to transport salt to Bengal.<sup>14</sup> The situation, however, began to change in the early nineteenth century due to a decrease in the production of salt in Bengal. Sayako Kanda, who has worked extensively on the salt trade in Bengal, attributes the scarcity of labor and the increase in fuel prices in Bengal as causative factors in lowering the output of salt production in Bengal.<sup>15</sup> The Company, to meet the shortfall, began to import salt from Orissa and Madras from the early nineteenth century. Kanda estimates that salt from Orissa and Coromandel contributed more than one-fourth of salt imported into Bengal.<sup>16</sup>

Bengal's need for salt was immediately felt in Madras. In September 1805, the Madras government issued a decree, which stated that "the manufacture or sale of salt, and the transit, export, and import of it, whether by sea or land, in the territories subject to the Presidency of Fort St. George (FSG), excepting on account of the Government, or

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<sup>13</sup> The Indian state of Orissa (Odisha) lies along the southeastern coast extending between the states of West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.

<sup>14</sup> The date and terms of the agreement are not clear. The existence of such an agreement is mentioned in later discussions on how to transport the increased demands from Bengal. See Board of Revenue Proceedings, May 24, 1807, Vol. 444, 3669-71; Board of Revenue Proceedings, May 18, 1807, Vol. 444, 3671-78; Board of Revenue Proceedings, May 30, 1807, Vol. 444, 3678-86. TNSA.

<sup>15</sup> Sayako Kanda, "Energy in Indigenous Industries: Re-considering the Decline of the Salt Industry in Mid-nineteenth Century Bengal," Keio University Market Quality Research Project Discussion Paper Series. 2006.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

with their express sanction, is hereby expressly forbidden.”<sup>17</sup> According to the new regulation, the Government reserved the right to employ its own laborers on lands whose owners refused to manufacture salt and also imposed heavy fines on clandestine efforts to manufacture or transport salt. The FSG government ordered a reduction in the number of saltpans that manufactured salt and built depots to centralize the storage and sale of salt.<sup>18</sup> The law banned the import of salt made outside the territories of the Madras Presidency and the carriage of salt within the Presidency was permitted only with the possession of a pass that allowed the conveyance of salt. The Company outlined elaborate measures for confiscating salt that was manufactured or transported illicitly. The government officials who made such seizures were guaranteed a portion of proceeds from the sale of the confiscated salt.<sup>19</sup>

Since salt was a commonly used item, it is probable that there were a number of offences arising from non-conformance to the highly restrictive salt laws. In 1831, an amendment to the 1805 regulation was introduced that announced that crimes relating to illicit manufacture and shipping of salt would be prosecuted in criminal courts rather than civil courts. Noticeably, the change in the law prohibited “*tahsildars*<sup>20</sup> and other inferior police officers” from handling offences relating to violation of salt laws and instead ordered the District Magistrates and their assistants to undertake the investigations.<sup>21</sup> It is likely that the higher officials of the EIC noticed an evasion of salt monopoly laws on a large scale and suspected that lower level district revenue officials colluded with the manufacturers and transporters of salt in breaking salt laws. By transferring the

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Clarke, *The Regulations of the Government of Fort St. George in force at the end of 1847* (London: 1848), 184-85.

<sup>18</sup> Tinnevely District Records, March 18, 1809, Vol. 3584. TNSA.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 186-190.

<sup>20</sup> Village level revenue officer.

<sup>21</sup> Clarke, *The Regulations of the Government of Fort St. George*, 505-506.

prosecution to criminal courts, EIC officials hoped that the increase of punitive measures would dissuade people from breaking the salt monopoly. In 1840, however, another regulation noted the “inconvenience ... experienced in consequence of sending persons accused of petty offences against the salt laws for trial in the criminal courts who might be more conveniently tried by magistrates.” This clearly indicates that minor infractions of salt laws occurred regularly and that the EIC administration did not trust the lower level district officials to enforce people’s compliance with the salt laws.

The new regulations did not leave the already existing Coromandel to Bengal salt transport policies untouched. In fact, several conditions were added to regulate the shipping of salt to Bengal. According to the 1805 regulation, persons who wished to transport salt were required to apply to the District Collector for permits and the rules necessitated the Collector to provide the permit and also a certificate prior to the departure of the vessel to Bengal. The rules stipulated that if a ship carrying salt was forced by bad weather to seek refuge at a port the vessel’s owner must bear the costs of landing, storing, and re-shipping the cargo. The new rules tightened the EIC’s control over the means of production and the transport of salt, both within the Madras Presidency and to Bengal. Another consequence of the formulation of these rules was the increased regulation and the associated growth in the rules and procedures that the shippers were expected to follow.

As Bengal’s need for imported salt increased, EIC officials in Calcutta and Madras explored several options to transport salt from Madras to Bengal. Since salt was exported to Bengal from the late eighteenth century, records indicate that the Company entered in to an agreement with native vessel owners to convey salt to Bengal. By 1807,

about 800,000 *maunds*<sup>22</sup> (or about 6700 *garces*) of salt were exported to Bengal. As the demands increased from the Bengal government for more salt, additional sources of transport were sought. In 1807, Bengal requested an additional shipment of 3000 *garces* of salt to Calcutta.<sup>23</sup> The Board of Trade (BoT) in Madras suggested that the Company could use its own vessels and those of private merchants, i.e. primarily European vessels, and ship the salt as ballast on those ships. The BoT recommended this option since the European vessels provided larger cargo capacity and the salt could be transported free of charge. The Board of Revenue (BoR), however, opposed using European vessels for transporting salt and instead proposed using “native shipping” for the purpose.<sup>24</sup> The BoR argued that the transport of salt did not provide any profits to the European vessel owners since they depended on other commodities for their profits. The Indian ship owners, on the other hand, used salt as a form of remittance for their purchase of rice and grains in Bengal. The conveyance of salt for the native ship owners, the BoR pointed out, provided “not a mere advantage but their absolute existence.” The BoR also cautioned that by employing its own ships and those of private European traders, the Company would “descend from its proper sphere of action and ... take to itself a part of the business of its own subjects.”<sup>25</sup> For 1807, the Governor in Council decided to send 1000 *garces* of salt on European ships and convey the rest using native vessels.

While the BoR’s suggestion to use Indian vessels appears highly noble, the policy of encouraging them could have economic underpinnings based on the important role played by such vessels in the trade along the Coromandel coast. An important component

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<sup>22</sup> *Maund* is a unit of weight and roughly equals 25 pounds. A *garce* is roughly equivalent to 3000 pounds.

<sup>23</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, May 18, 1807, Vol. 444, 3671-78. TNSA.

<sup>24</sup> See Board of Revenue Proceedings, May 24, 1807, Vol. 444, 3669-71; Board of Revenue Proceedings, May 18, 1807, Vol. 444, 3671-78; Board of Revenue Proceedings, May 30, 1807, Vol. 444, 3678-86. TNSA.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*



of this coastal trade was the conveyance of grain and rice from Bengal to Coromandel ports and Indian vessels composed the bulk of vessels involved in this coastal trade.<sup>26</sup> The abolishment of the EIC's monopoly in India trade in the 1813 Charter Act did not lead to a rush of participation by English merchants in the coasting trade between Bengal and the Coromandel coast.<sup>27</sup> As a result, Indian maritime merchants mainly operated the coasting trade between Bengal and the ports in South India. This trade played an important role in feeding the growing population of the Madras Presidency and to transfer produce from surplus centers to regions of famine or agriculture deficit. The main items of export from Bengal included grains, pulses, sugar, molasses, and ginger. In exchange, the Coromandel region provided salt, various types of cloth, chanks and other articles.<sup>28</sup> By providing salt as a lucrative cargo, the BoR, sought to encourage the Indian vessels to participate in the crucial coastal trade.

Table 3.1: Register of salt permits issued in 1812, 1818, 1822.<sup>29</sup>

Vessel Name	Commander's Name	Vessel Owner's Name	By Whom Exported	Maunds
<b>1812</b>				
Soobramoneya Poravy one mast camboo pan	Woodamalabby Mercoyer	Adevaroy Chetty (Nagore)	Woodamalabby Mercoyer	1800
Culleaunah Soondra Porvy two masts athy padagoo	Woodamalabby Mercoyer	Adevaroy Chetty of (Nagore)	Woodamalabby Mercoyer	1800
Mohodin Bux two masts Punney (or Punmay)	Ebramalabby Mercoyer	Mahomedally Mercoyer (Nagore)	Ebramalabby Mercoyer	4200
Marcatomby Antoney one half combo padagoo	Frances	Thyacaroya Chetty (Negapatam)	Frances	3120

<sup>26</sup> On the growing importance of coastal trade for the EIC in the Madras Presidency, see S. Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce & English Power: Southeast India 1750-1800* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), 235-274.

<sup>27</sup> "East India Monopoly – The Country Trade," *The Oriental Herald* 21,66 (June 1829): 415-17.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> The details are from the following sources, Board of Revenue Proceedings, September 1, 1812, Vol. 583, 10703-05; Board of Revenue Proceedings, Vol. 590. October 15, 1812; Board of Revenue Proceedings, September 21, 1818, Vol. 804, 10613-15; Board of Revenue Proceedings, September 6, 1822, Vol. 924, 8503. TNSA.

Table 3.1 Continued

<b>Vessel Name</b>	<b>Commander's Name</b>	<b>Vessel Owner's Name</b>	<b>By Whom Exported</b>	<b>Maunds</b>
Cauder Mohodin Bux one & half athy padagoo	Bava Saib	Shaik Naina Mercoyer (Nagore)	Shaik Naina Mercoyer	3608
Culleaunah Poravy two masts combo padagoo	Wosen Saib	Valangany Sungara Chitty	Shaik Mahomed Labbay Mercoyer	3360
Buttclaw Coer two masts ship	Mahomed Isoopeninah	Syed Ally Saib (Nagore)	Shaik Mahomed Labbay Mercoyer	1920
Pomona three masts ship	Captain Clark	Zachariah Clark	Captain Clark	6840
Lutchemy Poravy one mast bamboo padagoo	Mohomed Ally Bux	Gopoo Chetty (Nagore)	Gopoo Chetty	2160
Mahalutchemy one and half mast bamboo padagu	Shaick Mahomed Labby	Gopoo Chetty (Nagore)	Gopoo Chetty	3600
Lutchemy Poravy one mast bamboo padagoo	Mohodeen Cundoo Mercoyer	Soobramania Chitty (Nagore)	Soobramania Chetty	2400
Cauder Mohodin Bux two masts athy padagoo	Mohomed Tomby Mercoyer	Soobramania Chitty (Nagore)	Soobramania Chetty	4800
Mahomed Bux two masts athy padagoo	Bauva Saib Mercoyer	Tavoocany Mercoyer (Negapatam)	Tavoocany Mercoyer	3000
Mahaganapady Annapoorny one and half masts bamboo padagoo	Chinnatomby Mercoyer	Terovengada Chetty (Negapatam)	Shaick Mahomedlabby Mercoyer	3000
Muhummed Copy two masts athy padagoo	Tumby Saib Mercoyer	Mahomed Ninah Mercoyer (Negapatam)	Shaick Mahomedlabby Mercoyer	1800
Modecn Bux three masts athy par	Selamaulavy Mercoyer	Mahomed Tumby Mercoyer (Nagore)	Mahomed Tumby Mercoyer	6000
Cauder Modeen Bux two masts ship	Alley Mareyem	Auvoosooty Mercoyen (Carricul)	Auvoosooty Mercoyen of Carricul	2640
Mahomed Bux two masts Combo Padagoo	Cauder Saib Mercoyen	Auvoosooty Mercoyen (Carricul)	Auvoosooty Mercoyen of Carricul	3360
Caumatchy Soondaraparoyem Mast Combo Padagoo	Muthea Pillay	Aunah Moodaly (Carrecaul)	Aunah Moodaly of Carrecaul	2620
Meerah Mohadeen one and half-mast Combo Padagoo	Shaik Mohadeen	Caudercund Mercoyen (Carrecaul)	Caudercund Mercoyen of Carrecaul	3120
<b>1818</b>	<b>Commander's Name</b>	<b>Vessel Owner's Name</b>	<b>By Whom Exported</b>	<b>Maunds</b>
Meerahoossain Sooltain Accommead Box	Rayamuddoottah Saib	Causemaumirah Labby (Nagapatam)	Causemaumerah Labby	3600

Table 3.1 Continued

<b>Vessel Name</b>	<b>Commander's Name</b>	<b>Vessel Owner's Name</b>	<b>By Whom Exported</b>	<b>Maunds</b>
Meerahmuddum	Hoomaranayena h Maricoi	Labayvaupo Malemica (Nagore)	Labayvaupo Malimee	2400
Maganapatty Culleyaneparravey	Sadaseva Chetty	Canagasabah Chetty (Vellaganey)	Canagasabah Chetty	4200
Somasundraporavey	Saminadenpandaram	Suwendalinga Chetty (Nagore)	Suwendalinga Chetty	3600
Putmaganee	Vavoopillay Maricoi	Vencatarow (Nagore)	Vencatarow	3120
Audulachumeeporavey	Vavoopillay Maricoi	Vencatarow (Nagore)	Ditto	2880
Kader Box	Mogaden Cand Maricoi	Sicadennaina Nagoda (Nagore)	Secadennainar Nagoda	840
Mogaden Box	Everogu Labea	Magamadallee Maricoi (Nagore)	Magamadallee	4200
Soobaramaneya Poravey	Sanadeen	Adevaraga Chetty (Nagore)	Andevaraga Chetty	1440
Auberamy Poravey	Saiyadoomoostumbah	Sawmynada Chetty (Nagore)	Sawmynada Chetty	2640
Moogadeen Box	Accamadoo Tumbey	Macamadoo Tumbey Maricoi (Nagore)	Macamadoo Tumbey	9600
Caudar Box	Vydelingum	Cauder Saib (Nagore)	Cauder Saib	4200
Mogadeen Box	Caudermoogadeen Saib	Neelacunda Chitty (Napapatam)	Neelacunta Chetty	3000
<b>1822</b>	<b>Commander's Name</b>	<b>Vessel Owner's Name</b>	<b>By Whom Exported</b>	<b>Pounds</b>
Thedoocass Coimboopadagan Maria Jhonny Anthony	Chedumbra Pillay	Dyreyaroya Chitty (Negapatam)	Dyreyaraya Chetty	283360
Two mast Atty padagoo Cauder Bux	Cautoobava Mercoyen	Cauttoobavah Mercoyen (Nagore)	Cautoobava Mercoyen	283360
Two Mast Padagoo Mahomud Bux	Northern Mercoyan	Mahomed Mustan Saib (Negapatam)	Mahamud Mastan Saib	303600
Two masts Atty Padagoo Mohamud Cauder Bux	Hameer	Mathana Saib Mercoyen (Negapatam)	Mathana Saib Mercoyen	303600
Two Mast Atty Padagoo Cauder Moheedeem Bux	Bawah Saib	Sainaude [or Saikaude] Samban Notty (Nagore)	Bauvah Saib	354200
Dudagose Combo padagoo Cauder Moheedeem Bux	Pitchatomby Mercoyen	Pitchatomby Mercoyen (Nagore)	Pitchatomby Mercoyen	263120
Two mast Paur Aberamy Pooravy	Kuder Mahomud	Sauminada Chetty (Nagore)	Kuder Mahomud	253000

The salt transport permits issued during the second decade of the nineteenth century, shown in Table 3.1, indicate that a large number of Indian ship owners, both Hindu and Muslim, conveyed salt to Bengal. Even with the fragmentary nature of the data, two distinct trends can be seen. First, ship owners began to provide larger cargo capacity to convey salt to Bengal. In 1812, vessels conveyed about 77,000 *maunds* of salt to Bengal, whereas in 1822 the tonnage increased to 81,770 *maunds*. As the Bengal region's demand for salt increased, Indian vessel owners resorted to transporting salt in greater quantities to Bengal. The EIC officials also encouraged Indian vessel owners to carry salt by paying them higher prices to convey salt and requiring the merchants to pay only half the purchase price for salt with the stipulation that they will pay the rest on their return from Bengal. In addition, the Company also decided to pay a premium on the already higher carrying price for those vessels that made a second trip in a season to convey salt to Bengal.<sup>30</sup> Despite such concessions, the Company still found a shortage of Indian vessels to carry salt to Bengal. The Coromandel merchants who freighted salt and the vessel owners conveyed salt for the sole reason of securing remittance in Bengal with which they could procure items for import into Coromandel, primarily rice and grains. Therefore, the merchants and vessel owners hesitated to convey salt whenever the price of rice and grains was high in Bengal. The Indian vessels usually made one voyage each year in August, either to Bengal or to Southeast Asian ports. It would appear that the merchants alternated between the two destinations based on the prevailing market conditions, thus optimizing their trade returns.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Madura District Records, January 2, 1810, Vol. 1198. TNSA.

<sup>31</sup> See the reports of the Tanjore Collector J. Wallace. Tanjore District Records, November 11, 1809, Vol. 3265; Tanjore District Records, August 17, 1811, Vol. 3269. TNSA.

The second trend noticeable in the salt permits is the increasing number of vessel owners who transported salt in their vessels without offering the cargo space for any other merchants for freighting salt. In 1812, records show a distinction between the ship owners and the merchants who freighted space to convey salt. Gradually the situation changed and, by 1822, the vessel owners themselves were transporting the entire cargo of salt, partly due to the higher rates paid by the Company to convey salt. Table 3.1 contains information on forty-two salt permits issued for the years 1812, 1818, and 1822. While remaining cognizant of the fragmentary nature of the data, it is still possible to notice a pattern. Of the forty-two permits, only in four instances did a merchant other than the vessel owner or the ship's commander transport the salt. In ten cases, the license to transport salt was issued to the ship's commander. In twenty-eight instances, the ship's owner transported the salt under his own account. Unlike the trade to Southeast Asia where the vessel owners allowed merchants to rent cargo space, the salt transport to Bengal was characterized by the sole ownership of the entire cargo space by the vessel's owner in most cases. In addition, since the Company created an elaborate system of maintaining the monopoly on salt, the carrying trade in salt required merchants with sufficient capital and connections to maintain agents in Coromandel ports, Madras, and Calcutta to coordinate the overall transaction. This setup automatically precluded small merchants from participating in the salt carrying trade.<sup>32</sup>

The participation in the highly regulated salt trade provided another advantage to the maritime merchants: source of salt for their vessel's crews. In November 1832, about 63 *maunds* of salt was seized in Keelakarai<sup>33</sup> from Shaykh Sadaqatullah Marakkayar,<sup>34</sup> a

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> A historic port town located about 350 miles south of Chennai.

<sup>34</sup> Sadaqatullah Marakkayar's family was actively involved in chank fishing and their role will be discussed in the section on chank fishery.

prominent merchant who owned salt pans for manufacturing salt for the Company. The district officials alleged that the merchant had hidden a portion of the manufactured salt for the private use of his family and the crews of his vessels who went on voyages that lasted three to six months.<sup>35</sup> In the late eighteenth century, Thomas Forrest, a senior captain in the East India Company's Marine, noted the use of salt by the crews of vessels from South India. He noted a process in which the sailors would make four or five long incisions in a lime and add salt and let the lime dry for a few days. The dried lime pieces were packed in a jar with lime extract or vinegar and were called "atchar." Forrest noted the benefits of this practice among the South Indian sailors.<sup>36</sup> As the EIC monopolized the supply of salt and imposed large fines on any acts of illicit procurement of salt, the participation in salt manufacture and salt transport by Tamil Muslims allowed them to secure a cheap supply of salt for their vessel crews.

The information in Table 3.1 demonstrates the prominent role of Tamil Muslims in conveying salt from the Coromandel coast to Bengal. The table contains information on the salt permits that were issued in 1812, 1818, and 1822. EIC officials granted a total of forty-two passes in these three years.<sup>37</sup> The details of the permits provide information on the vessel's name, its owner, the commander of the vessel, and the merchant in whose name the salt was exported. Tamil Muslims commanded twenty-nine out of the forty-two vessels that carried salt to Bengal and owned nineteen of these vessels. Further, Tamil Muslim merchants were listed as the exporters of salt in twenty-five out of the forty-two licenses. This reveals the extent to which Tamil Muslims leveraged their long-standing participation in the coastal trade between South India and Eastern India and took

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<sup>35</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, March 9, 1833, Vol. 1358, 2970-82. TNSA.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Forrest, *Voyage from Calcutta to the Mergui Archipelago* (London, 1792), 40.

<sup>37</sup> This is not a comprehensive list of the permits that were issued in these three years. It is highly likely that passes were granted at other ports as well.

advantage of the opportunities presented by the EIC's need to transport salt to Bengal. It was particularly advantageous since the maritime trade was characterized by fluctuations and the availability of salt as a regular medium of exchange to purchase goods in Bengal reduced the extent of risk in the annual trade cycles.

#### **IV. Conch Shell (Chank) and Pearl Fisheries**

This section examines the trade in pearls and conch shells, known as chanks in India, in the first half of the nineteenth century. In this period, the EIC established its authority over the coastal territories from which the diving for pearls and conch shells were organized. As with the salt monopoly, the EIC promoted and regulated these two activities as a means to generate revenue. Unlike the salt monopoly, however, diving for pearls and conch shells had a long history along the coast of South India and in the Gulf of Mannar (located between South India and Sri Lanka). Historical sources mention the revenues derived from these fisheries and the great wealth of the rulers who controlled the coasts from which the fisheries were organized. Naturally, the European trading companies, upon their arrival in the Indian Ocean trading world, evinced great interest in these activities. The Portuguese participated in the pearl fishery from the early sixteenth century till 1658, when the Dutch took over from the Portuguese and managed the fishery till 1796. From 1796 on, the EIC administered the pearl fishery in South India and Sri Lanka.<sup>38</sup> Besides South India and Gulf of Mannar, there were several other pearl fishing sites in Asia. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, pearl fishing zones were located along the coast of the Red Sea, off the coast of Mozambique in Southern Africa, and also down the coast of Southeast Arabia. But the largest fishing zones were found near Hainan

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<sup>38</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Noble Harvest from the Sea: Pearl Fishery in the Gulf of Mannar, 1500-1925," in *Institutions and Economic Change in South Asia*, eds. Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Burton Stein (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 135.

in South China Sea, near Bahrain in the Persian Gulf, and in the Gulf of Mannar.<sup>39</sup> The trade in pearls and conch shells can be understood to comprise two sets of processes. The first consists of the gathering of these shells from the sea, an activity referred to as fishing in the EIC records, and the transport of these shells to places where they were processed and sold. The second set of processes involves the various steps by which these pearls and conch shells were cut, polished, and sold.

#### **IV (a). Pearl Fishing in Historical Sources**

Pearl oysters belong to the genus *Pinctada* and six species of this genus are known to exist. Among the six species, *Pinctada fucata*, *Pinctada margaritifera*, and *Pinctada maxima* are capable of producing good pearls. Of these, *P. fucata* are found in South India and Gulf of Mannar, whereas *P. maxima* can be found in the Andaman and Nicobar islands.<sup>40</sup> The typical life span of an Indian pearl oyster is around five years. The process of pearl formation begins when an external particle gets trapped within the two shells of the oyster. In response, the oyster covers the external particle with multiple layers of a composite material secreted within its shells. A mature pearl is formed when these layers become sufficiently thick around the object. When diving for pearls, smaller oysters are either thrown back into the sea or discarded.

The pearl fishing area of South India and Gulf of Mannar stretches from the southern coast of India, near Tuticorin, till the northern tip of Sri Lanka. Several historical sources mention the richness and importance of pearl fishing in this region.

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<sup>39</sup> C.R. De Silva, "The Portuguese and Pearl Fishing Off South India and Sri Lanka," *South Asia* 1, no. 1 (March 1978): 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Pearl Oyster Farming and Pearl Culture*. Prepared for the Pearl Oyster Farming and Pearl Culture Training Course conducted by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute at Tuticorin, India and organized by the Regional Sea-farming Development and Demonstration Project (RAS/90/002). Accessed at the Food and Agriculture Organization (UN) website.

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/field/003/ab726e/AB726E00.htm#TOC> Accessed on January 25, 2016.



Megasthenes (350–290 BCE), the Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya and the author of *Indica*, provided one of the earliest accounts of pearls found in India and the procedure used to extract them from the oysters. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, written by a Greek author in Alexandria in the first century CE, referred to the pearl fishing activity in the Gulf of Mannar region and indicated that slaves and captured criminals were used to dive for pearls. Claudius Ptolemy, a prominent Greek author in the second century CE, mentioned the presence of pearl fishing and an emporium for pearls in South India. Fa-Xian, a Chinese Buddhist monk who visited India in the early Fifth century CE, wrote about the efforts to guard the pearl fishing sites and the tax levied by the rulers. Besides Greek and Chinese sources, Tamil literary sources from the Sangam Age, corresponding roughly from 300 BCE to 300 CE, provide details of the coastal towns, the communities, the revenues derived, and the importance of pearl fishing. These ancient sources mention the town of Korkai as the center of pearl fishing activity in South India. The *Mahavamsa*, a chronicle of ancient Sri Lankan rulers written in Pali, records that a Sri Lankan king's gifts to Emperor Ashoka included eight kinds of pearls and a rare conch shell.<sup>41</sup> But by the medieval period, the silting of Korkai forced a relocation of the headquarters of pearl fishery to the new port town of Kayal,<sup>42</sup> located close to Korkai. The medieval accounts of Marco Polo (1254-1324), Ibn Battuta (1304-1369), Duarte Barbosa (1480-1521), and Ludovico de Varthema (1470-1517) contain

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<sup>41</sup> N. Athiyaman, *Pearl and Chank Diving of South Indian Coast: A Historical and Ethnographical Perspective* (Thanjavur: Tamil University Publication, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Due to the proximity of Korkai and Kayal, some confusion exists whether the Kayal mentioned in medieval accounts is the same as the ancient port of Korkai. In Tamil Nadu, another port town exists by the name of Kayalpattinam. It is unclear whether Kayal and Kayalpattinam are the same.

references to pearl fishing and mention Kayal as an important center for managing the activity.<sup>43</sup>

#### **IV (b). Chanks: Locations and Uses**

The conch shell, known as Chank and derived from the Sanskrit word Śaṅkha, is the encasing of *Turbinella pyrum*, a gastropod mollusk found in certain areas along India's western and eastern coastline, mostly in shallow waters. In Western India, they are found along the Kathiawar coast (in present day Gujarat) and the southern portion of Kerala's coast. On India's east coast, they are fished over a large part of the coastline stretching from Kanyakumari in the extreme south to Chennai (Madras). In these locations, sea beds with sandy bottom and some mud offer ideal conditions for the growth of this variety of mollusk since the worms upon which the *Turbinella pyrum* feeds grow under such conditions.<sup>44</sup> A well-formed shell, after it undergoes a cleaning process, is thick, can withstand a high degree of polishing, and resembles white porcelain in color and appearance.

Since antiquity, chanks have been widely used in the Indian subcontinent and neighboring regions. Excavations conducted in the sites of the Indus Valley Civilization reveal that ornaments in the Neolithic phase included wide shell bangles that were made from large conch shells. Archaeological evidence also shows that the conch shells were used as trumpets in the Indus Valley Civilization.<sup>45</sup> The sounding of shells is common across several cultures and was intended for different purposes: to ward off evil spirits by

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<sup>43</sup> James Hornell, "The Indian Pearl Fisheries of the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay," *Madras Fisheries Department Bulletin XVI* (1922): 6-10.

<sup>44</sup> James Hornell, *The Sacred Chank of India: A Monograph of the Indian Conch (Turbinella pyrum)* Madras Fisheries Bulletin, 7 (Madras, 1914): 3-29.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 38-39.

noise, gather people together for battle or sacrifice, or invoke the deities to sacrifice.<sup>46</sup> The blowing of conch shells constitutes perhaps one of the lasting legacies of the Indus Civilization in to classical and modern Hinduism. In the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, some of the protagonists are described as possessing chanks with names such as God-Given, Eternal Victory, Sweet voice, and Jewel Blossom.<sup>47</sup> A cursory examination of contemporary Hindu religious iconography reveals the continued relevance of the chank as a sacred object. Writing in the early twentieth century, James Hornell, a marine biologist and Superintendent of Fisheries in Madras during the period, observed the widespread use of chanks in a variety of settings: the blowing of these shells as part of life cycle ceremonies and religious rituals, its use as libation vessels in rituals, articles of personal adornment made using these shells, the placement of chanks in the foundations of new buildings, and its use in indigenous medicinal practices in powdered form. Hornell also noted the sacred status given to chanks in Buddhist monasteries in Tibet and its use as currency by the Naga tribes of Assam hills until the late nineteenth century.<sup>48</sup>

The widespread use of chanks contrasts with the limited areas of its availability as outlined above. This suggests that, since antiquity, long distance trade networks connected the areas of availability of chanks with workshops where the shells were processed and finally with the markets where chank products were in demand. In the Indus Civilization, the chanks were obtained from the Makran coast located at a distance of 500 kilometers to the south, near present-day Karachi, Pakistan. This represents the earliest instance of trade and utilization of chanks.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>47</sup> Hornell, "The Indian Chank in Folklore and Religion," 114.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 115-25; James Hornell, *The Indian Conch and its Relation to Hindu Life and Religion* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1915),16.

<sup>49</sup> Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*, 38-39.

Outside the zone of the Indus Valley Civilization, several sites in the Deccan and South India provide archaeological evidence for the presence of chank processing workshops during the Neolithic and Iron Age periods.<sup>50</sup> The first textual references to South Indian chank industry and the people associated with it occur in Tamil classical literature from the first and second centuries CE. These sources indicate the presence of workshops at the ancient port cities of Korkai and Kayal for processing chanks in southern Tamil Nadu. The chank cutting industry was dominated by members of the *parawar* community, a group that was spread along the southern part of the Coromandel coast and whose members were also involved in diving for pearls and chanks.<sup>51</sup> The *parawars* converted to Christianity in the early sixteenth century after the arrival of the Portuguese in South India.<sup>52</sup>

By the early twentieth century, chank fishery was conducted at several places: Tirunelveli coast, Ramnad coast, Tanjore and South Arcot coast, Travancore (Kerala), Kathiawar (Gujarat), and Sri Lanka. The majority of chanks sent to Bengal were shipped from South India. In all these places, chank fishery was organized as a government monopoly even if the manner in which the monopoly was regulated varied between them. In Tirunelveli, the government controlled the fishery through a Fisheries Department officer, named the Superintendent of Chank and Pearl Fishery. In Tanjore, the shells were bought at fixed rates from the fishermen by the Customs Department on behalf of the Fisheries department. In South Arcot, the exclusive right to collect is contracted out to a renter for a term of years. A similar process was adopted in Kathiawar where the Indian ruler, Gaekwar of Baroda, exerted his authority over the local fishery. In Sri Lanka, the

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<sup>50</sup> Hornell, *Sacred Chank*, 47-67.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-45.

<sup>52</sup> S.B. Kaufmann, "A Christian Caste in Hindu Society: Religious Leadership and Social Conflict among the Paravas of Southern Tamilnadu," *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 2 (1981): 203-34.

fishery was rented to the highest bidder, a system that was replaced in 1890 with a policy of levying an export duty on chanks. Travancore also adopted the method followed in Sri Lanka.<sup>53</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, while some chank fishing was done along Gujarat's coast in western India, the gathering of the shells was conducted chiefly along the southern part of India's East coast and in the Gulf of Mannar between India and Sri Lanka. Most of the workshops for processing the conch shells were located in Bengal, then a large territory that included both the present-day modern Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh. As the vast coastline in Southeastern India and Sri Lanka came under the control of the East India Company, these regions became testing grounds for the Company's efforts to identify various means to derive the maximum revenue from marine sources. The following section examines how the EIC managed the collection of these conch shells in South India and ways in which the Tamil-speaking Muslim merchants, who had participated in the conch shells trade for several centuries, were affected by the EIC's policies.

#### **IV (c). Pearls and Chanks: Fishing Procedure**

Pearls are found inside oyster shells and these oysters are clustered in pearl banks found at a depth of 10 to 20 meters in the ocean. The two locations that contained pearl banks in South Asia were near Tuticorin, a port town in South India, and the Gulf of Mannar. Typically, the banks were examined during the months of October and November and the fishery was conducted during March and April. Based on the availability of oysters, the number of boats allowed to participate in a pearl fishery varied from several dozen to a

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<sup>53</sup> Hornell, *Sacred Chank*, 3.

few hundred. Each boat typically contained 22 to 25 men that included 10 divers. Each boat was allotted five stones and the divers use this stone to reach the required depth and gather the oyster shells. In a typical day of fishing, a diver gathered 400 to 900 oyster shells. In total, a boat would collect 4,000 to 9,000 oyster shells in a day. At the end of the day, the shells were collected and divided in to heaps for partitioning between the divers and the government. In some instances, the government took two-thirds of the produce and in others it took three-fourths of the oyster shells. The shells were not washed until the end of the fishery and they were allowed to putrefy in the sun to remove the oyster flesh and this process produced intolerable stink. The rotting oysters attracted large swarms of flies that occasionally caused cholera among the population gathered at the site. At the end of the fishery, the shells were washed and examined for pearls. Women and children were typically used to examine the sand collected after washing to check for any washed away pearls. The collected pearls were examined to estimate their value. Finally the sand collected from the washing of oysters was sold to the highest bidder so that he could sift it for any lost pearls.<sup>54</sup>

Unlike pearl fishery, chank fishery involved a lesser number of people and boats. The mollusks carrying these shells were scattered across the ocean and were not clustered like oysters shells in pearl banks. The location of chank shells was also less deep than that of pearl banks. More importantly, chank fishery was conducted annually whereas pearl fishery occurred intermittently based on the availability of pearl banks. The chank fishery took place from November till May. Despite these differences, pearl and chank fishery had some common features. Both fisheries used the same community of divers. Whenever pearl and chank fishery occurred simultaneously, divers engaged in chank

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<sup>54</sup> This is a highly simplified summary of a very elaborate process. For more details see, Hornell, *Sacred Chank*; Steuart, *An Account of the Pearl Fisheries at Ceylon*; Edgar Thurston, *Notes on the Pearl and Chank Fisheries and Marine Fauna of the Gulf of Mannar* (Madras: Madras Government Press, 1890).

fishing were diverted to pearl fishing and the renter of chank fishery was granted a remission on rent by the government. Similar to pearls, chank shells also underwent an examination process. The chank shells collected at the end of the day were inspected and defective shells were discarded. The remaining shells were passed through a wooden gauge with a hole measuring  $2\frac{3}{8}$  inches. Any shells that passed through this hole were considered too small and underdeveloped and were thrown back in to the sea. At the end of the fishery, the government auctioned off the chank shells.

#### **IV (d). Tamil Muslims and Pearl Fishing Pre-1800**

The nature of pearl fishing meant that it was an elaborate and complex affair that involved at least several hundred people. Since the pearl fishery took place only intermittently, based on the availability of mature pearl oysters, the occurrence of a fishing season was described by Sanjay Subrahmanyam as “part fair and festival, part industry, and part pageant.”<sup>55</sup> While the pearl fishery was organized from certain ports, the actual site of the fishery shifted constantly based on the location of the availability of the oysters. So, a pearl fishing site was a quickly created temporary town that was filled with people during the occurrence of the fishery and it was quickly dismantled upon the completion of all activities. Prior to the commencement of the fishery, hundreds and even thousands of people gathered at the site since the fishery was an elaborate affair involving the boatmen, divers, rowers, government officials, boat owners, and buyers of varying capacities. W.C. Twynam, an English merchant and an eyewitness to the 1890 pearl fishery, noted the presence of “Jains and Arabs from Bombay; Mohammedans from Nagore, Kailpatan [Kayalpattinam], Keelakarai and Tondy; Komaty Chetties from

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<sup>55</sup> Subrahmanyam, “Noble Harvest from the Sea,” 138.

Negapatan [Nagapattinam] and Kumbakonem [Kumbakonam]; and Chetties and petty traders from Ramnad, Madura, Jaffna, Paumben & etc.; also boutique-keepers from Batticaloa, Mannar, Jaffna, Trincomalee, Colombo etc.” Floris Blom, a Dutch East India Company employee, noted a similar convergence of people from various parts of India almost two hundred years earlier.<sup>56</sup>

Tamil Muslims participated as both merchants and divers during the pearl fishing season. Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese official in India in the early sixteenth century, noted that “Cettis and Moors” were the major investors in the fishery. Besides investing, Barbosa also noted that Muslims acted as agents of local rulers in collecting duties on the proceeds of the fishery. Tamil Muslims also took part as divers in the fishery.<sup>57</sup> The other important community that dived for pearls were the Paravas, whose involvement in pearl and chank fishing has been recorded in the ancient Sangam literature. Upon the establishment of Muslim communities in South India and their participation in pearl and chank fishing, disputes arose between the Paravas and Muslims. In the early sixteenth century, the Paravas sought protection with the Portuguese and converted to Catholicism.<sup>58</sup>

Details from the pearl fishery conducted in 1694, 1698, and 1708 under the management of the Dutch East India Company reveal the religious denomination of the divers who participated in the fishery. The Dutch gathered such details since the tax levied on the diver was based on his religion, with the Muslim taxed the highest and the Christians taxed the lowest. With the exception of the 1698 fishery, which was boycotted

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>58</sup> A section of the community remained as Hindus. Patrick Roche, *Fishermen of the Coromandel: A Social Study of the Paravas of the Coromandel* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1984). For a discussion of the Parava community during the Colonial period, see Kaufmann, “A Christian Caste in Hindu Society,” 203-34.



by Muslims due to a conflict with the Paravas, fisheries in 1694 and 1708 demonstrated the dominance of Christian and Muslim divers in the pearl fishery. These divers came from more than ten coastal towns along the South Indian coast and involved several thousand men. Very few Christian divers came from towns from which Muslim divers participated. For example, in 1708, 446 Muslim divers went from Keelakarai but only 60 Christian divers originated from this town. Similarly, the towns with majority Christian divers had few Muslim divers. At the same time, Dutch records also indicate that divers of different denominations worked in the same boat.<sup>59</sup> This probably suggests that divers from the same locality went together in the same boat.

#### **IV (e). Pearl and Chank Fishing under the EIC**

During the last two decades of the eighteenth century, as the EIC acquired territories from which chank and pearl fisheries were conducted, the Company conducted both fisheries intermittently. Between 1782 and 1785, when the Company captured Tuticorin from the Dutch, the Collector of Assigned Revenue conducted pearl fishery and chank fishery once, which yielded 67,860 Porto Novo Pagodas<sup>60</sup> to the government.<sup>61</sup> In Sri Lanka, which the EIC acquired from the Dutch in 1796<sup>62</sup>, the Company administered the pearl fishery in the years 1796, 1797, and 1798 and collected a revenue of 810,295 Porto Novo Pagodas.<sup>63</sup> The need to generate revenue increased in the nineteenth century as the

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<sup>59</sup> Subrahmanyam, "Noble Harvest from the Sea," 147-52.

<sup>60</sup> Gold coins used as currency in the southern districts of Madras Presidency and Ceylon.

<sup>61</sup> James Hornell, *Sacred Chank: A Monograph of the Indian Conch (Turbinella Pyrum)* (Madras: Madras Government Press, 1914), 6.

<sup>62</sup> Sri Lanka was administered under a dual administration system that included the British Parliament and the EIC from 1796 to 1802. In 1802, it was declared a Crown Colony. For the three years, pearl fishery was conducted on the account of the Madras government due to uncertainty over the possession of Ceylon by the EIC.

<sup>63</sup> James Steuart, *An Account of the Pearl Fisheries at Ceylon* (Ceylon: Church Mission Press, 1848), 87.

Company assumed the governorship of South India from the Nawab of Arcot in 1801 and Sri Lanka became a Crown Colony in 1802. With regards to Sri Lanka, Henry Dundas, President of the Board of Control overseeing the East India Company, wrote to the Chairman of the East India Company suggesting that pearl fishery, after cinnamon, provided a valuable source of revenue. He noted that previous Portuguese and Dutch administrators “grossly mismanaged” the fishery and recommended that it remain a monopoly under the government. He suggested that the fishery could be rented out annually or conducted by the government.<sup>64</sup> In 1806, the Collector of Tanjore recommended to the Board of Revenue in Madras that the chank fishery on the coast must be encouraged since revenue could be derived from the sale of chanks as well as the export of shark fins, shark tails, and ray fish skins to Southeast Asia and China.<sup>65</sup> Unlike the salt trade, in which the Company had maintained a monopoly since the 1700s, the fishing of chanks and pearls was a new economic activity undertaken by the Company.

The EIC introduced changes in the way pearl fisheries were organized. Prior to the arrival of the European trading companies, the rulers did not manage the pearl fisheries directly. Rather, they claimed a share of the proceeds of the fishery. The Dutch, and it is unclear whether the Portuguese also followed this system, adopted the practice of taxing the stones used by the divers to go under water. The rates were based on the diver’s religion. By the 1740s, the Dutch abandoned the policy of taxing the stones and began the system of revenue-farming, i.e., awarding the contract to the highest bidder for the right to conduct the fishery. In deciding on the best way to maximize its revenue from pearl fisheries, the EIC vacillated between two options. The first options was to administer the fishery directly, in which the Company officials managed the hiring of

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<sup>64</sup> IOR/G/11/53, December 30, 1800, 26-30. India Office Records, British Library. Hereafter IOR.

<sup>65</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, July 24, 1806, Vol. 430, 4645-54. TNSA.

boats, the collection of pearl oysters, and the final sale of the pearls. The second option was to adopt the system of revenue-farming. Under this system, the farmer, the winner of the bidding process, paid the promised sum of money to the government and he was given the authority to award sub-contracts to smaller boat-owners to participate in the fishing process. In this method, EIC officials were frequently suspicious that the government lost revenue by not participating in the fishery. But this system offered the advantage of administering a complex operation with lesser costs than directly managing it. The EIC frequently tried to refine its management of the fishery with the goal of attaining more revenue. One option that was tried was to fix the rent for each boat used in the fishery. But officials abandoned this measure after two years on fears that this system led to overfishing and destruction of the pearl banks. In 1806, officials attempted another innovation by devising a system that was a hybrid of directly managing the fishery and awarding the fishery contract to a single farmer. In this modified system, officials awarded contracts to an individual renter for fifty boats for a period of thirty days. Thus this system created a group of renters instead of a single renter and the government officials believed that this provided the company with the maximum benefits. In 1816, the Company introduced further changes by reducing the both the number of boats and the number of days of fishing allowed for each renter.<sup>66</sup> These innovations were practiced in the fisheries in Sri Lanka. In South India, officials awarded the contracts for chank and pearl fisheries to a single revenue-farmer.

Since the revenue from pearl and chank fisheries provided a significant source of income, disputes arose between ruling powers in the region over shares of the fishery proceeds. During the second half of the eighteenth century, particularly, disagreements

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<sup>66</sup> Subrahmanyam, "Noble Harvest from the Sea," 149-158.

arose between the Dutch authorities, who controlled the chank and pearl fisheries in Tuticorin, and the Nawab of Arcot over the ruler's share of the revenue from the fishery, both at Tuticorin and Gulf of Mannar. Between 1768 and 1784, no pearl fishing took place at Tuticorin due to disputes between the Dutch and the Nawab of Carnatic. In 1788, the Dutch and the Nawab of Carnatic signed a treaty that specified the partitioning of pearl and chank fishery revenue between them. Despite the treaty, fishery took place only intermittently in the 1790s.<sup>67</sup> Besides the Dutch and the Nawab of Carnatic, the Raja of Tanjore also claimed a share of the profits of chank and pearl fisheries. But the ruler's claims were rejected by the EIC.<sup>68</sup> As late as 1833, the Manager of the Ramnad zamindari also claimed a share of the proceeds of the pearl and chank fisheries, claims that were also rejected.<sup>69</sup>

Table (3.2) shows the government's revenue from pearl and chank fisheries in Tirunelveli (Tuticorin), Tanjore, and Ceylon (Gulf of Mannar) for the period between 1801 and 1840.<sup>70</sup> Pearl fishery occurred less frequently than the annual chank fishery. But whenever pearl fishery took place, its revenue far exceeded that from chank fishery. Comparing the pearl fisheries at Tirunelveli and Ceylon, the revenues from the latter exceeded those from the former. Similarly, the revenues from Tuticorin chank fishery surpassed those from Tanjore.

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<sup>67</sup> For details of the treaty see, Military Country Correspondence, Vol. 40, October 28, 1790, 139-49. TNSA. For details of the dispute and its effect on pearl fishery, see James Hornell, *The Indian Pearl Fisheries of the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay* (Madras: Madras Government Press, 1922), 29-42.

<sup>68</sup> Tanjore District Records, March 1, 1806, Vol. 3486, 55-57; Tanjore District Records, March 8, 1806, Vol. 3486, 67-70. TNSA.

<sup>69</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, March 21, 1833, Vol. 1358, 2881-82; Board of Revenue Proceedings, March 13, 1833, Vol. 1358, 2982-84. TNSA.

<sup>70</sup> The revenue from chank fishery in Ceylon is not available. The end date of 1840 did not hold any particular relevance for the fishery. Rather it was chosen since it marks the end period of this study.

Table 3.2: Government's revenue from pearl and chank fisheries conducted in South India and Ceylon (Madras Rupees).<sup>71</sup>

Year	Tirunelveli		Tanjore	Sri Lanka
	Chank Fishery (Rs)	Pearl Fishery (Rs)	Chank Fishery (Rs)	Pearl Fishery (Rs)
1801-02	38,850	**	2137	1,50,227
1802-03	39,025	**	3407	1,63,154
1803-04	28,700	**	2100	7,20,202
1804-05	40,937	39,109	2689	**
1805-06	19,250	**	3525	4,12,842
1806-07	17,646	2,86,610	10198	**
1807-08	27,449	**	4456	8,42,577
1808-09	23,260	**	9838	2,72,463
1809-10	23,698	2,36,968	7497	**
1810-11	31,221	**	6841	**
1811-12	36,458	**	6840	**
1812-13	39,407	**	2572	**
1813-14	24,826	**	4398	10,51,876
1814-15	17,937	**	1785	5,842
1815-16	16,119	**	3792	9,266
1816-17	25,521	**	3998	**
1817-18	20,854	1,68,014	4527	**
1818-19	28,292	**	5468	**
1819-20	11,667	**	4597	30,410
1820-21	28,292	**	4433	**
1821-22	19,787	1,48,012	4666	**
1822-23	32,000	**	7000	**
1823-24	38,500	**	5444	**
1824-25	43,500	**	5445	**
1825-26	36,250	**	5444	**
1826-27	36,250	**	**	**
1827-28	36,250	68,593	**	3,05,234
1828-29	2327	**	**	3,82,737
1829-30	4,092	99684	800	2,22,564
1830-31	3904	**	1450	2,93,366
1831-32	3155	**	1450	45,810
1832-33	1500	**	442	3,20,896
1833-34	1000	**	1410	**
1834-35	1214	**	1410	4,03,460
1835-36	2500	**	1410	2,54,935
1836-37	5000	**	**	1,06,312
1837-38	5000	**	1531	**
1838-39	5000	**	1910	**

\*\* No fishery was conducted.

<sup>71</sup> Hornell, *The Indian Pearl Fisheries of the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay*, 44-48; Hornell, *The Sacred Chank*, 173-180.

An examination of the revenues from chank fishery reveals a sharp decline in the revenues from 1827-28 from which the proceeds never reached their previous levels. The reasons for decline are harder to identify, a prime factor could be the over exploitation of a natural resource by excessive fishing.

#### **IV (f). Participation of Tamil Muslims in Chank Fishery**

The Tamil Muslim merchants greatly benefited from the needs of the EIC authorities to raise revenue from pearl and chank fisheries. The Company officials in the coastal districts solicited proposals from bidders for renting the chank fishery. The Company officials reviewed these applications and announced the renter for the year. These applications contain information that demonstrates the increasing participation of Tamil Muslims in bidding for chank fishing contracts. The proposals provide details about the bidders, such as their place of residence and names of guarantors. Besides, the Company officials also commented on the capability of the proposers that provide useful information. The evidence from the records demonstrates an increasing participation of Tamil Muslims in renting the chank fishing farms in South India and Sri Lanka. In particular, Tamil Muslims dominated the chank fishing in the Tirunelveli and Tanjore districts.

The following table (3.3) shows the extent to which the Tamil Muslims controlled the chank fishing in Tuticorin. Specifically, Tamil Muslims residing in Keelakarai, a small and historic port town located 350 miles south of Chennai, owned the leases for 11 out of the 24 years between 1800 and 1824. The number could be higher since the Keelakarai merchants occasionally submitted bids through their agents, relatives, and

partners. Ramaswamy Naig, who leased the fishery between 1804 and 1806, sometimes acted in partnership with Keelakarai Tamil Muslim merchants.<sup>72</sup>

Table 3.3: Names of renters of chank fishery in Tuticorin from 1801-1833.<sup>73</sup>

Fusly	Year	Names of the Renters	Amount (Madras Rs)
1211	1801-02	Donda Row	38850
1212	1802-03	Donda Row	39025
1213	1803-04	Donda Row	39200
1214	1804-05	Ramasawmy Naig and Mahomed Selimolevy	40936-13-1
1215	1805-06	Ramasawmy Naig	22166-9-5
1216	1806-07	Pakevadaken	26395-10-10
1217	1807-08	Shaick Selimolevy	36198-10-2
1218	1808-09	Cawder Saib Mercoyen **	23260-6-9
1219	1809-10	Cavemahomed Mercoyen **	32447-14-9
1220	1810-11	Cauder Saib Mercoyen **	31281-4-0
1221	1811-12	Walootawle Pillay	36458-5-4
1222	1812-13	Walootawle Pillay	39407-1-4
1223	1813-14	Walootawle Pillay	33575-15-0
1224	1814-15	Abdul Cader Mercoyen **	26687-8-0
1225	1815-16	Abdul Cader Mercoyen **	24864-9-4
1226	1816-17	Mr. Meyer	25520-13-4
1227	1817-18	Syed Mahomed Levy **	23770-13-4
1228	1818-19	Mahomed Marcoyen **	28291-10-8
1229	1819-20	Mahomed Saib Levy **	11666-10-0
1230	1820-21	Mahomed Saib Levy **	28291-10-8
1231	1821-22	Mahomed Casim Levy Mercoyen **	28291-10-8
1232	1822-23	Mr. G. Hughes	32,000
1233	1823-24	Mahomed Casim **	38500
		Total	7070891-1-4
		Average 23 years	30740-0-7

\*\* Merchant from Keelakarai.

<sup>72</sup> In 1807, Ramaswamy Naig submitted an offer for pearl fishery at Tuticorin for which Caveeb Mahamud (Habeb Muhammad Marakkayar) also submitted a proposal. Both of them named each other as security for the proposal. Habeb Muhammad Marakkayar was a prominent Keelakarai merchant who participated in chank fishery. On one occasion he was accused of smuggling chanks from Tanjore ports to Calcutta. For the 1807 Pearl fishery proposal, see Tinnevely District Records, February 20, 1807, Vol. 3582, 64-73. TNSA. For chank and pearl fishery offers made by Habeb Muhammad Marakkayar, see Madura District Records, May 27, 1800, Vol. 1129, 136-40; Tinnevely District Records, February 27, 1810, Vol. 3586, 72-77. TNSA.

<sup>73</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, August 12, 1824, Vol. 1001, 9687-89. TNSA.

The renter for 1807-08, Shaick Selimolevy (Shaykh Sulayman Lebbai<sup>74</sup>), named Abdul Cauder Mercoy (Abdul Qadir Marakkayar) as his security, the same merchant who rented the fishery for the years 1814 through 1816.<sup>75</sup> Between 1818 and 1822, the lease for chank fishing at Tuticorin was successively granted to Mahomed Causim Levy Mercoyen (Muhammad Qasim Lebbai Marakkayar) and in all his proposals he named Sagoo Satagutollah (Shaykh Sadaqatullah), the son of Caveeb Mohomed Mercoy, as his security.<sup>76</sup> Besides the chank fishery at Tuticorin, the Keelakarai merchants also controlled the chank fishery at Tanjore. In 1822, the Collector of Tanjore observed that the “family of the Keelacaray mercoir” had secured “almost a monopoly” of chank fishery on the Tanjore coast.<sup>77</sup>

While the list of renters demonstrates the prominence of Tamil Muslims in obtaining bids for chank fishery, it does not mean that the benefits of participation were limited to an elite group of merchants. As mentioned earlier, chank fishing was an elaborate operation that involved the participation of several hundred divers, boat owners, and merchants. The extent to which small boat owners benefited from chank fishing can be understood from the details of a smuggling incident in 1812-13.<sup>78</sup> In July 1812, port officials in Nagore detained three vessels belonging to Cabeeb Mohamed Mercoy (Habeb Muhammad Marakkayar) and his brother Cauder Saib Mercoyer (Qadir Sahib

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<sup>74</sup> Wherever possible I have provided the plausible correct name of the person within parenthesis next to the name as recorded in the primary sources.

<sup>75</sup> Tinnevely District Records, October 2, 1807, Vol. 3582, 261-64. TNSA.

<sup>76</sup> IOR/F/4/1124/30141. 23 August 1819. IOR; Board of Revenue Proceedings, July 7, 1820, Vol. 857, 4861-63; Tinnevely District Records, July 16, 1821, Vol. 4695, 89-90. TNSA.

<sup>77</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, June 28, 1822, Vol. 918, 6386-88. TNSA.

<sup>78</sup> The details of the case are drawn from the following collection of documents. Public Consultations, Vol. 397, 5012-24; Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, July 11, 1812, Vol. 17, 647-58; Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, November 24, 1812, Vol. 18, 1412-15; Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, July 26, 1812, Vol. 17, 813-22; Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, July 23, 1812, Vol. 17, 828-34; Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, August 10, 1812, Vol. 17, 895-900. TNSA.



Marakkayar), two prominent merchants of Keelakarai who were actively involved in chank fisheries and transport of chanks to Bengal. Officials claimed that the vessels, a three-mast ship *Cauder Mohideen Bux*, a two-mast *Snow Cauder Bux*, and a two-mast Brigantine *Mohideen Bux*, contained chanks that were being smuggled to Bengal without the payment of port duties. Habeeb Marakkayar denied the charges and claimed that the chanks on board the *Mohideen Bux* belonged to Mawnah Pilla Mercoyer (Mauna Pillai Marakkayar) to whom he had freighted the vessel. He produced an agreement provided by Sagutamby (Shaykh Tambi), son-in-law and partner to Mauna Pillai Marakkayar, which indicated that Mauna Pillai Marakkayar rented the *Mohideen Bux* for shipping chanks to Bengal. The agreement promised Habeeb Marakkayar that if his agents in Bengal desired to ship grains to South India, then the vessel's renter would charge them less than what he would charge others. Besides demonstrating the role of Tamil Muslim merchants in grain transport from Bengal, the agreement also highlights the rights of the vessel's renter and the special privileges accorded to ship-owners. As for the chanks found on the remaining two vessels, Habeeb Marakkayar declared that the two vessels did not complete their last voyage to Bengal due to bad weather and so the vessels contained the chanks from the previous voyage as well as newly acquired chanks from the current year (1812).

In order to prove his legal ownership of the chanks in the two vessels and the payment of port duties, Habeeb Marakkayar provided a detailed accounting of his acquisition of the chanks in his ships. He produced certificates and port clearances issued to him and to twenty-seven other boat-owners, both Muslims and non-Muslims, that provided details of the various places from where the chanks were shipped. EIC authorities, while accepting the port clearances for boats carrying chanks that were issued by their own officials, questioned whether Habeeb Marakkayar purchased the chanks

from the listed suppliers. Irrespective of the veracity of Habeeb Marakkayar's claims of innocence, the details from the case illustrate the large network of boat-owners who benefited from shipping and selling chanks to merchants with more capital, who would then ship them to Bengal. The case of Habeeb Marakkayar is not an isolated one since in June 1811, another merchant, Soalimah Lubby (Sulayman Lebbai) was caught purchasing about 7,400 chanks from a fisherman and exporting them without paying duties.<sup>79</sup>

The smuggling case involving Habeeb Marakkayar also highlights the interconnected nature of the merchants involved in the chank trade. During the investigations, EIC officials discovered that Mauna Pillai Marakkayar had once served as Habeeb Marakkayar's broker (which might have meant an agent). Habeeb Marakkayar had stated in his petitions that he helped Mauna Pillai Marakkayar in bidding for chank fishing contracts by serving as a guarantor in the bid and also by providing boats and personnel. But EIC authorities suspected that Habeeb Marakkayar was the actual renter even though Mauna Pillai Marakkayar submitted the bids. The Collector of Sea Customs at Nagore informed the Board of Trade in Madras that "it is common proceeding in this country for rents or contracts to be made out in the name of some department of the real renter who frequently becomes the security."<sup>80</sup>

The Keelakarai Tamil Muslim merchants did not confine themselves to conducting chank fishery at Tuticorin and the Tanjore coast. They ventured to examine new places to find chanks. In 1805, Mahomed Maskay offered to fish chanks in a previously unexplored region between Cape Comorin and Manapar in the southernmost

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<sup>79</sup> Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, June 22, 1811, Vol. 15, 475-76. TNSA.

<sup>80</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, July 26, 1812, Vol. 17, 813-22.

region of the Coromandel coast. The Board of Revenue, however, declined the offer since it was too small and proceeded to explore the region on government's account.<sup>81</sup>

Two factors partly explain why the Keelakarai merchants were successful in obtaining leases for chank fishery in Tuticorin and Tanjore. First, the wealth and influence of the merchants played an important role. In an economic activity based on speculation about the quantity of product that could be fished, the EIC officials relied on merchants who could provide sufficient financial guarantees for their bids. In May 1800, Caveeb Mohomed submitted a bid for chank fishery at Tuticorin. In his remarks on the proposals, the Collector of Madura noted that Caveeb Mohomed is the nephew of Abdul Cauder "a Lubby<sup>82</sup> of great wealth, his security is unexceptionable."<sup>83</sup> In the list of proposals submitted in 1807, Shaik Sulliman submitted the highest bid and named Abdul Cauder Mercoy as his security. The Collector of Tinnevelly (Tirunelveli) noted that Abdul Cauder Mercoy was an inhabitant of Keelakarai and that he "carried on as extensive a trade as any native on the coast." The Collector recommended Shaik Sulliman's offer since it was the highest and had good security.<sup>84</sup> The second factor that helped the Keelakarai merchants was their ownership of ships that could transport the chanks to Calcutta where the chanks were in great demand. In 1810, the Collector of Tirunelveli recommended the offer of Abdul Cawder Mercoy and noted that he was able to offer a higher price since he could transport the chanks and other merchandize to Bengal in his own vessels. Besides, the Collector added, Abdul Cawder Mercoy's security was unquestionable.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, October 10, 1805, Vol. 416, 7513-14. TNSA.

<sup>82</sup> Lubby is a corruption of the term Lebbai.

<sup>83</sup> Madura District Records, May 27, 1800, Vol. 1129, 136-40. TNSA.

<sup>84</sup> Tinnevelly District Records, October 2, 1807, Vol. 3582, 261-64. TNSA.

<sup>85</sup> Tinnevelly District Records, November 17, 1810, Vol. 3586, 246-47. TNSA.

The dominance of the Tamil Muslims in chank fishing did not go unnoticed by the EIC authorities, who wished to introduce more competition in the bidding process in order to increase the price of rent for the fishery. As early as 1811, the Secretary to the Board of Revenue forwarded to the Collector of Tirunelveli an offer made by Edward Watts, an European merchant, for leasing the chank fishery at Tuticorin. Typically, only Indian merchants in the coastal districts submitted proposals for chank fishery and the district collectors forwarded them to Madras for approval. In this instance, the Board of Revenue added a note to the forwarded proposal, which asked the Tirunelveli collector to invite proposals by public advertisement at Madras as well as in Tirunelveli district since chank was a valuable article of trade.<sup>86</sup>

As the chank trade became valuable, European merchants gradually began to participate in the trade. In 1816, Mr. Hughes, an agent of Messrs.' Scott & Co of Calcutta obtained the lease for the chank fishery lease at Tuticorin.<sup>87</sup> In 1822, the Collector of Tanjore observed that the domination of Keelakari Tamil Muslims in Tanjore chank fishery represented a monopoly and noted that Messrs Scott & Co of Calcutta submitted a proposal that year through their agent. The European firm had already leased chank farms in Sri Lanka and wished to lease farms all along the Coromandel coast.<sup>88</sup> Probably in response to a gradual encroachment of European firms in chank fishery, Abdul Cawder Mercoyen submitted an offer in 1822 to lease the chank fishery for 10 years for Rs 30,350 per annum. The Collector rejected the offer since the annual leases might provide better revenue for the government.<sup>89</sup> Despite such efforts, European firms obtained the

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<sup>86</sup> Tinnevely District Records, September 9, 1811, Vol. 3572, 308-11. TNSA.

<sup>87</sup> See Table 3.2.

<sup>88</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, June 28, 1822, Vol. 918, 6386-88. TNSA.

<sup>89</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, March 9, 1822, Vol. 908, 2496-98. TNSA.

leases from the late 1820s on.<sup>90</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, two European merchants in Tuticorin acquired the leases for chank fishery in Tuticorin.<sup>91</sup>

#### **IV (g). Participation of Tamil Muslims in Pearl Fishery**

The Keelakarai merchants also attempted to rent the annual lease for pearl fishery at Gulf of Mannar and Tuticorin. Between 1800 and 1840, pearl fishery took place seven times at Tuticorin and nineteen times at Gulf of Mannar.<sup>92</sup> At Tuticorin, Tamil Muslims appear to have achieved only limited success in winning bids for conducting the pearl fishery. Records show that Caveeb Mohamed Mercoy (Habeeb Muhammad Marakkayar), a prominent chank renter from Keelakarai, submitted proposals in 1807 and 1810 to rent the pearl fishery in Gulf of Mannar, and was unsuccessful on both attempts.<sup>93</sup> In 1822, Abdool Cauder Mercoyer (Abdul Qadir Marakkayar), a prominent chank renter from Keelakarai, submitted a proposal to conduct pearl fishery at Tuticorin. Records do not reveal whether he was successful. But the Collector's remarks indicate that he received only a single proposal and a pearl fishery took place that year indicating that Abdul Qadir Marakkayar's bid was successful.<sup>94</sup> At Gulf of Mannar, the success of Tamil Muslim merchants is even less clear.<sup>95</sup> For the years when the names of renters are available, various "Chitty" merchants of Jaffna won the bids to conduct pearl fishery at Gulf of

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<sup>90</sup> Existing records show that Scott & Co obtained the lease in 1829. Between 1841 and 1843, Mr. Rosmally Cocq of Tuticorin won the contract. See Tinnevely District Records, November 18, 1829, Vol. 4712, 271-72; Board of Revenue Proceedings, June 15, 1843, Vol. 1864, 9017-23. TNSA.

<sup>91</sup> James Hornell states that two Tuticorin merchants, Mr Cocq (mentioned earlier) and Mr. Barter acquired the leases for chank fishery during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. See Hornell, *Sacred Chank*, 13

<sup>92</sup> Hornell, *The Indian Pearl Fisheries*, 47.

<sup>93</sup> See Tinnevely District Records, February 20, 1807, Vol. 3582, 64-73; Tinnevely District Records, February 23, 1810, Vol. 3586, 72-77. TNSA.

<sup>94</sup> Tinnevely District Records, February 1, 1822, Vol. 4364, 88-92. TNSA.

<sup>95</sup> The Gulf of Mannar pearl fishery took place under the Ceylon government which was a Crown Colony since 1802. The records for Ceylon exist in the Colonial Office archives which I did not consult for this project.

Mannar.<sup>96</sup> Other sources suggest that the “Chetties” were dominant in renting the pearl fishery at Ceylon.<sup>97</sup>

The absence of Tamil Muslims as renters of pearl fishery, both at Tuticorin and Gulf of Mannar, does not imply their lack of participation in the fishery. Pearl fishing at both places required large number of boats and several dozen to several hundred boats from South India participated at the Ceylon pearl fishery. Historical accounts of pearl fishery cite the importance of Tamil Muslims in this activity. It is therefore possible that Tamil Muslims, while not involved as renters, participated as boat owners in the pearl fishery at Tuticorin and Gulf of Mannar.

Besides bidding for pearl fishing, Tamil Muslim merchants sought permission to explore for new pearl banks on the coast of Madura and Ramnad districts. In 1833, Mahomed Causim Saib Mercoyer (Muhammad Qasim Sahib Marakkayar) and Shaick Saduckdoollah (Shaykh Sadaqatullah), renters of Tuticorin chank fishery from 1818 to 1822, offered to explore the coast of Madura district for pearl banks. In the event of the discovery of pearl banks, the merchants requested concessions in future fisheries in the form of two free boats in each annual fishery. The Board of Revenue declined this request and subsequently the merchants also withdrew their offer. Another Keelakarai

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<sup>96</sup> Candappa Chitty, son of Vydelinga Chitty of Jaffna, was awarded the contract to conduct pearl fishery for 1796 and 1797. See ADD MS.88900/1/1. IOR (London). Incidentally, Vydelinga Chitty conducted the chank fishery in Gulf of Mannar continuously between 1789 and 1798, except for one year 1794-95 when the contract was awarded to Mahomed Meeran Cunder Marcayen. See “Some Remarks on the Chank Fishery of Ceylon,” *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies* 23 (January-June 1827): 473.

<sup>97</sup> G. Vane, “The Pearl Fisheries of Ceylon,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Ceylon* X (1887), 17. Vane observes that when the Ceylon government decided not to rent the pearl fishery beginning in 1855 and to conduct it under government management, the “Chitties” who formed the renting class tried to subvert the policy by forming associations among themselves and reducing sales under the new method. Since Sri Lanka was administered by the Colonial Office, the records are archived at the Public Records Office and not in the India Office Records in the British Library. I have not accessed the PRO records for this project.

merchant, Vurshey Ebroye Mercoy (Varsay Ibrahim Marakkayar), made a similar offer but did not seek any concessions from the government and his offer was accepted.<sup>98</sup>

## **V. Conclusion**

The chapter examined how Tamil Muslim merchants utilized the opportunities provided by the EIC's need to generate revenues from its territories. As part of this wider effort, EIC officials identified marine sources, such as salt, chanks, and pearls, as potential sources of revenue. Tamil Muslims participated in the transport of salt from the Madras Presidency to Calcutta, rented the contracts to fish chanks along the South Indian coast and participated in pearl fishing at Tuticorin and Gulf of Mannar. By participating in different types of commercial ventures, the Tamil Muslim merchants built systems of trade that allowed them to withstand sudden changes in one market. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the introduction of English cotton textiles affected existing patterns of trade between South India and Southeast Asia since the English cottons replaced the Indian textiles that were the staple item of export from India. Thus, the Tamil Muslims were able to respond to shifts in trade patterns by maintaining a diversified portfolio of trade activities. The impact of participation upon Tamil Muslim merchants differed across salt, chank, and pearl trade.

In the case of salt transport, the merchants used salt as a form of remittance in Bengal in order to procure rice and grains for their return journey. The ship owning merchants, in particular, benefited greatly from transporting salt by edging out the smaller merchants who typically freighted limited cargo space on the vessel. The operation of salt transport was less elaborate than managing chank and pearl fisheries and

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<sup>98</sup> Madura District Records, May 21, 1833, Vol. 4681, 182-83; Revenue Consultations, December 23, 1833, Vol. 391, 5457. TNSA. It is unclear, from the records, whether any pearl fishery was continued on Madura coast after the examination of the coast.

it typically involved a single Tamil Muslim merchant planning the salt procurement for his vessel and disposing of it in Calcutta. In transporting salt to Bengal, the Tamil Muslims did not face much competition from European private merchants, who did not depend on it for their profits.

The chapter also examined the trade in chanks and pearls during the early part of the nineteenth century. The increased interest and management of the trade by the EIC occurred under a particular need of the Company during the early nineteenth century to increase revenues from its newly acquired territories in South India. Chank and pearl fishing, however, were elaborate and complex activities that involved planning and coordination between the government and several groups of people. Both chank and pearl fishing involved divers, boat owners, boatmen, moneychangers, and merchants for buying chank shells and pearl oysters. The person who rented the farm coordinated the complex management between the various groups of people. The Tamil Muslim merchants from Keelakarai dominated the renting of chank fishery during the early decades of the nineteenth century. The renters of chank fishery were not the only beneficiaries in chank fishing. Tamil Muslims who owned small boats and managed the trade between southern Coromandel ports and Sri Lanka participated in the fishery. Likewise Tamil Muslim merchants also bought chank shells and shipped them to Bengal. Unlike salt transport, a wide spectrum of Tamil Muslim merchants benefited from the chank fishery. Similarly, pearl fishery also benefited Tamil Muslims, although they were not as successful as in chank fishery in winning pearl fishing contracts.



## **Chapter 4: Tamil Muslim Merchants and the Trade in Indian Textiles, c. 1800-40.**

### **I. Introduction**

In June 1825, the Secretary to the Government of Fort St. George informed the Board of Revenue about two petitions that were submitted by some merchants at Porto Novo, a port in the Southern Division of Arcot. The merchants wrote to Governor Sir Thomas Munro and complained about the high rate of import duties on cotton textiles produced in the region. The petitioners claimed that they had paid a duty of two and a half percent on the import of cloth during the rule of the Nawab of Arcot. After the English East India Company (EIC) assumed control of the region from the Nawab, it abolished the duty for some time. Later, the duty was re-introduced at a higher rate of five percent and increased again to the current rate of eight percent. The merchants protested that the additional duties on dyed cloth increased the prices of cotton textiles produced on the Coromandel coast. They wrote that they had previously accepted the high duties since “[they] had at that time some income from their commerce.” The merchants lamented that in recent times they could not sustain their trade in Indian cotton textiles due to the importation of European cotton manufactures in Malay ports. The merchants highlighted the worsening situation by stating that several merchants had “wholly forsaken their commercial concerns from the experience of a great deal of loss whereby *many ships have been ceased and stopt* [sic].”<sup>1</sup> The petitioners requested the Governor to reduce the duties on imported cloth and to remove the duties on dyed cloth.

W.W. Weston, the Superintendent of Sea Customs at Porto Novo, agreed with the merchants’ observation that the growing importation of English cotton goods at the

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<sup>1</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, June 1825, Vol. 54, 439-47. Tamil Nadu State Archives, Chennai. Hereafter TNSA. Emphasis added.

Malay ports had caused a reduction in the trade of Indian cotton piece-goods. He noted that the eastern markets were overstocked with finer English piece-goods that had been patterned according to the “tastes of the Malays” and observed that this new pattern of trade could be considered “permanent” and that the Indian piece-goods could reclaim their lost market share only by reducing their cost price.<sup>2</sup> Weston indicated that the merchants paid a total of eight percent duty upon the export of cloths and that they received a drawback<sup>3</sup> of five and a half percent of the duties they paid.<sup>4</sup>

The merchants’ petitions and the EIC official’s responses highlight two important developments that affected the trade in Indian cotton goods between South India and Malay ports and thus influenced the extent of shipping conducted by Tamil Muslim maritime merchants. The first change relates to the extensive system of transit duties that was created by the EIC administration in order to gather revenue from overland and maritime trade. These duties were not introduced by the EIC officials but had existed during the earlier Mughal rule. But the system developed under EIC rule was extensive and did not differentiate, as was done previously, the rate of duties between different types of traders, such as merchants who traded over short and long-distances and the value of the cargo carried by various merchants.<sup>5</sup> The system of transit duties instituted by the EIC began to be implemented first in Bengal and then gradually in other territories

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<sup>2</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, July 20, 1825, Vol. 54, 470-75. TNSA.

<sup>3</sup> A drawback was a refund of the duties paid by the merchants. The amount was refunded to the merchant after the goods departed the British-controlled ports in India and sailed to the destination ports listed in the port clearance document.

<sup>4</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, July 20, 1825, Vol. 54, 470-75. TNSA. Thus the official pointed out that the merchants only paid a duty of two and a half percent effectively.

<sup>5</sup> Jitendra G. Borpujari, “The Impact of the Transit Duty System in British India,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 10, no. 3 (1973): 218-41.

that were acquired by the Company during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The system of transit duties remained in place until it was finally abolished in 1848.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of textiles, the duties were levied at every stage of the production process corresponding to the increase in the value of the cloth at each stage. The Collector of Sea Customs at Madras alluded to such a mechanism of collecting duties when he responded to the petition of the merchants. In his remarks he noted that most of the cloth exported by the petitioners was woven at Salem in the interior of the Madras Presidency where a general inland duty of five percent was levied and a *rowannah*<sup>7</sup> was issued. The cloth was then taken to Porto Novo on the coast where it was dyed a blue color. An additional duty of five percent on the amount of the increase in value was levied since the dyeing had increased the cloth's value. At the Porto Novo Sea Customs office, an export duty of eight percent was levied and a part of this duty was adjusted against the duties already paid as indicated in the *rowannahs*. Upon the arrival of the cloth shipment in Madras, another charge of eight percent on the difference between the Porto Novo and the Madras tariff was levied. The Collector noted that although the whole duty paid was only eight per cent on the Madras valuations of the blue cloth, the goods were examined and the duties were collected at four separate places.<sup>8</sup> Despite the "vexations" caused to the merchants, the Collector indicated that such an intrusive system "fetches the government the full duty on a product."<sup>9</sup> While the EIC government provided a refund of the duties paid on cloths after they were exported, the multiple stages of collection of duties meant that significant amounts of capital was locked up in duties for the merchants.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Clearance papers that indicated the amount of duty paid by the merchant and the details of the cargo.

<sup>8</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, September 14, 1825, Vol. 54, 564-70. TNSA.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

The second development underscored in the merchants' petitions was the rising importation of English cotton goods into Asian markets. Both contemporary observers in the nineteenth century and later scholars have amply demonstrated the gradual increase of importation of English cotton manufactures into Asian markets over the course of the nineteenth century and the concomitant reduction in the export of Indian cotton textiles to Europe, West Africa, and Southeast Asia. Understandably, an extensive body of literature exists that analyzes the impact of English cotton textiles on the Indian textile industry during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and some important conclusions can be identified.<sup>10</sup> First, the three main production centers of Indian textiles for export, viz. Gujarat, the Coromandel coast, and Bengal, underwent different trajectories of development between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Among the three regions, Bengal produced the majority of the cloth that was sent to Europe during the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Gujarat experienced a significant decline in its export of textiles during the eighteenth century. While South India experienced conflicts in the aftermath of the decline of the Mughal empire, the region continued to produce textiles for export to Europe and other Asian markets. Second, various interpretations exist about the extent of decline of production of Indian cotton manufactures. Some scholars have identified an absolute decrease whereas others have suggested a relative decline in which the textile industry's size remained the same while the output of the overall economy increased. Third, recent studies have emphasized elements of continuity in the Indian textile industry by pointing to a mixed-industrialization model in which textile producers adopted power looms while continuing the use of traditional handlooms. Finally, studies

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<sup>10</sup> For a sample of the literature see Tirthankar Roy, ed., *Cloth and Commerce: Textiles in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996); Douglas Haynes, *Small Town Capitalism in Western India: Artisans, Merchants, and the Making of the Informal Economy, 1870-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

reveal the differential impact on the people working in the several stages of the textile industry. While there was a greater degree of continuity among weavers and cloth merchants, there were severe disruptions in the categories of cotton cleaners and spinners, activities that were conducted largely by women and agrarian laborers. Similarly the adoption of synthetic dyes adversely affected the specialized dyers and painters.<sup>11</sup>

While existing studies provide us with a better understanding of the transformation of the Indian cotton textile industry in the nineteenth century, we do not possess a correspondingly extensive examination of the Indian shipping sector that carried these textiles to markets in Asia and Africa. This chapter examines the carrying trade of the Tamil-speaking Muslim maritime merchants between 1800 and 1840, a period marked by the introduction of English cotton piece-goods in Asian markets. Cotton textiles produced in South India were the staple item of export that was carried by these merchants to Malay ports and to Sri Lanka. Indian cotton textiles, therefore, formed a critical item of trade in the annual trading voyages from South India to Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka.

This chapter will focus primarily on the carrying trade of South Indian textiles by Tamil Muslim merchants. The trade in textiles produced on the Coromandel coast formed just one part of a wider world of trade in Indian textiles. In the case of the textile trade between India and Southeast Asia, textiles produced in Bengal also formed an important part of the merchandise. Since the Tamil Muslim merchants dealt mainly in South Indian textiles, the trade in cloths produced in Bengal will not be discussed in this chapter. The chapter contains the following four sections. The first section discusses the system of

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<sup>11</sup> Ian C. Wendt, "Four Centuries of Decline? Understanding the Changing Structure of the South Indian Textile Industry," in *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (with collaboration of Om Prakash and Kaoru Sugihara) (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 205-14.

transit duties that were implemented in South India in the early nineteenth century and its impact on the operations of maritime merchants. The next section disaggregates the term “piece-goods” and describes the categories that are subsumed within this commonly used word. The third part analyzes the exports of cotton piece-goods from South India to Malay ports and to Sri Lanka. The final portion of the chapter examines the maritime trade of Tamil Muslim merchants in terms of the sailings of vessels from South India to ports in the Straits of Melaka.

## **II. Transit Duties and Port Regulations**

As discussed briefly in chapter three, East India Company officials undertook efforts to improve the ports that fell under their control from the late eighteenth century. Such efforts were aimed towards increasing the commercial activities at these ports so that the EIC administration, in turn, might derive benefit by taxing the trade. The amelioration initiatives were not restricted to large ports such as, Nagore, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, and Porto Novo, but also included several smaller ports. These minor ports served as feeder ports to the major ports so that the produce and manufactures from the interior were conveyed from these smaller ports to larger ports from which they were exported to Bengal or to Malay ports. The minor ports also acted as distribution centers for goods that were brought from larger ports in order to be taken into the interior. The system of transit duties formulated by the EIC officials sought to encompass the produce and manufactures going towards the ports as well as the goods that were imported.

The arrangement of collecting duties consisted of erecting *chowkies*, or check posts, at specific towns or along the trade routes, and entrusting the EIC’s Indian employees to collect duties on the goods that transited through the towns. EIC officials in Fort St. George frequently sought the opinion of district administrators about the impact

of existing rules to collect duties or prior to promulgating new tariff rates. Such discussions between the officials reveal the difficulties in implementing the regulations and the problems faced by the merchants. The administrators sought to achieve a balance between attaining maximum coverage in terms of the ability to collect duties while keeping the cost of maintaining such *chowkies* to a minimum. In November 1804, V. Kinlock, the Acting Collector of Trichinopoly (Tiruchirapalli, commonly known as Trichy), pointed to the futility of establishing a *chowkie* in each village since the duties collected would not cover the expenses incurred in paying the *chowkidars* (personnel managing the *chowkie*).<sup>12</sup> Another problem caused by the system was the tariff rate fixed to articles. The merchants complained that the rates were based on the particular quality of an article whereas they carried several items of the same article that differed in the quality. Thus, the merchants protested the disproportionate taxes for the diverse varieties of similar goods. At the same time, the officials feared that providing the *chowkidars*, most often the native servants of the Company, with the authority to decide on the rate of taxes based on the quality of the articles might lead to fraud, since the merchants and the *chowkidars* might connive to mark superior goods as inferior goods and thus deprive the government of revenue.<sup>13</sup> The Acting Collector recommended punishing the *chowkidars* found guilty of defrauding the government with a fine of three times the value of the undervalued goods and also rewarding any informer with one-half of the fined amount.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the system of transit duties attempted to create a system of informers who would benefit from the successful prosecution of any fraud.

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<sup>12</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, November 8, 1804, Vol. 396, 10501. TNSA.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 10502.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

In November 1804, J. Wallace, the Collector of Tanjore, provided his report on the transit duties in which he “stated every objection which appeared to me to be just which I have heard merchants make to the provisions of the regulations [to collect duties].”<sup>15</sup> Based on the nature of trade at Tanjore ports, in which the value of imports exceeded those of exports, Wallace recommended either the abolition or modification of export duties and the establishment of import duties. He noted that an export duty would act as a tax on the products of the efforts of the local populations whereas the absence of any duties on imports would serve as a bounty to producers in foreign districts from which the items were shipped.<sup>16</sup> Wallace observed that merchants paid an export duty of twelve per cent – six per cent at the first *chowkie* and an additional six per cent as export duty. He noted that such an excessive duty acted almost as a “prohibition to all export commerce.”<sup>17</sup>

Wallace also remarked on the hardship caused to the merchants by the duty levied when goods are transshipped from one boat to another at ports. He described that articles produced in Arcot paid a six per cent town duty and later an additional six per cent duty when they were loaded on vessels at Cuddalore or Porto Novo in order to be exported to Malay ports. Since several eastward-bound ships departed from Nagore, the merchants were forced to pay an additional six per cent transshipment duty. Wallace opined that “no honest commerce can ... bear” the grand total of eighteen percent in duties.<sup>18</sup> Even in the case of items that are brought to Tanjore ports, such as tobacco from Sri Lanka on which a heavy duty of 25 per cent is levied there, the Collector remarked that Tanjore merchants are still affected since their wealth is invested in such ventures and the returns of their

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<sup>15</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, November 22, 1804, Vol. 397, 11044. TNSA.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 11049-51.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 11052-53.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 11054-55.



commerce circulated in Tanjore.<sup>19</sup> Since Tanjore usually provided a surplus of grain, he recommended the abolition of duties on transporting grain as they impeded the sale of grains from surplus regions to deficit areas.<sup>20</sup> Wallace also faulted the improper implementation of existing rules. In one instance he reported that, although current rules prohibited the levying of import duties, town duties were collected on goods landed at Tanjore ports since the ports were also considerable towns.<sup>21</sup> Wallace presented his objection to the method of taxing items at the place of manufacture. Instead, he suggested that items such as textiles might be taxed after the producer gained revenue by selling the items.<sup>22</sup> Overall, the Collector also noted that the existing system of tariffs and arrangement of *chowlies* would require “considerable alterations.”<sup>23</sup>

While the Tanjore Collector’s report in 1804 advised the Board of Revenue officials to implement changes in the arrangement of collecting duties, merchants, not just Tamil Muslims, faced problems during the next three decades. Most of the problems were related to the way in which the sea customs offices were managed. In one particular instance in 1807, the merchants of Porto Novo complained to the Board of Trade that the newly appointed Head of the Custom department, Mr. Stevenson, was an English merchant and also the Master Attendant at the port. The petitioners expressed concerns that Stevenson would be able to use his position to gain an undue advantage by usurping contracts to supply the vessels with goods and stated their fears that they would be unable to protest against Stevenson’s actions due to fear of repercussions. They stated that “if the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 11056.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 11059-60.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 11057-58.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 11060-61.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 11047.

business is conducted in this mode ... we shall be able to carry on our merchandize for few days in this country.”<sup>24</sup>

The problems faced by the merchants were not limited to the appointment of English merchants, who were the competitors to Indian merchants, as port officials. There were several objections about the routine operations of the ports and sea customs offices. The most frequent complaint raised by the merchants was related to the issuance of port clearances, which were certificates issued to vessel commanders upon the ship's departure from a port. The EIC officials used these clearances to ensure the submission of proper details about the vessel's cargo and depended on this system to prevent smuggling.<sup>25</sup> In larger ports, due to the presence of more vessels, the port clearances were not issued immediately and the commanders of the vessels sailed away as they did not wish to lose a favorable wind pattern.<sup>26</sup> But such vessels were penalized when they arrived at the next port without the required clearances. In one instance in 1837, a small vessel commanded by Akmud Pillay arrived in Madras with a cargo of tamarind, wood planks and thirty-three bags of peas that belonged to Vabada Marcoyer. The commander did not possess the certificate for the peas. But the clearance arrived by post a few days later as Vabasa Marcoyer's accountant forgot to give the certificate to the commander. Nevertheless, the commander was fined for not carrying proper documents. The penalty fee was only refunded after Akmud Pillay petitioned authorities in Madras over the incident.<sup>27</sup> An additional problem for merchants was that in some ports the officials required the shippers to obtain port clearances on stamped paper, which added to the

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<sup>24</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, January 15, 1807, Vol. 2, 5-7. TNSA.

<sup>25</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, March 28, 1829, Vol. 59, 141-45.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, September 19, 1837, Vol. 76, 488, 523-27, 564-66. TNSA.

costs incurred by the merchants.<sup>28</sup> The regular operating schedule for sea customs offices was another issue of complaint for the merchants. As per the regulations, the shippers were required to put down a deposit equal to the amount of duty on their cargo. In 1825, the merchants of Cuddalore and Porto Novo wrote to the district collector that they were forced to borrow funds from the moneylenders at the port to pay the deposit and in return the lenders required them to sell the cargo at reduced prices.<sup>29</sup>

This section provided a brief overview of the problems faced by merchants as a consequence of the implementation of an arrangement of transit duties and port regulation by EIC administrators. The system changed frequently as officials in the Board of Revenue and the Board of Trade revised the rules based on feedback from district officials and complaints from merchants. In several cases, confiscated goods were ordered to be released since officials in Madras considered that the value of confiscated goods were too small or that the actions of port officials to be against the spirit of the regulations.<sup>30</sup> Despite such corrective actions, the scheme for collecting duties, primarily designed to increase the revenue for the Company, affected the merchants who usually operated on short-term credit. Under such circumstances, the imposition of even small amounts of fines and the time spent in recovering such penalty fees adversely affected the operations of the merchants.

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<sup>28</sup> Revenue Department Consultations, March 19, 1821, Vol. 267, 1347-50. TNSA.

<sup>29</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, July 20, 1825, Vol. 54, 439-47, 470-75. TNSA.

<sup>30</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, April 24, 1811, Vol. 14, 373-74; Board of Revenue Proceedings, April 8, 1813, Vol. 605, 3307-8; Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, August 15, 1825, Vol. 54, 516-17; Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, July 28, 1841, Vol. 85, 401-6. TNSA.

### III. Piece-Goods

This section provides an overview of the types of Indian textiles traded with Southeast Asia and discusses the importance of cloth in Southeast Asian societies. Such a discussion is essential to understand the patterns of textile trade between India and Southeast Asia. This section depends mainly on the accounts of European merchants about their participation in the textile trade in Asian markets. Most of these sources describe incidents that took place in the late sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, much earlier than the period under study in this chapter. But such narratives provide important insights into the role of cloth in Southeast Asian societies and the specific reasons why Indian textiles attained popularity in those markets.

The East India Company records indicate the quantity and value of cotton cloth shipped from the Coromandel coast to ports eastward under the general rubric of “piece goods.” However such an abstraction ignores the bewildering number of varieties of cloths that were shipped from India to Southeast Asia. While the nineteenth-century EIC records occasionally reveal the types of cloths that were exported, the earlier records of the Dutch and English East India Companies from the seventeenth century indicate that over 150 varieties of Indian cloth were sold in Southeast Asia.<sup>31</sup> In the Malay Annals *Sejarah Melayu*, the Sultan of Melaka ordered an official Hang Nadim to procure from South India forty varieties of cloth with four lengths of each variety and forty floral patterns for each length. While the extent of the demand might be exaggerated, the narrative illustrates the varieties of cloth sought by consumers in Southeast Asia from India.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> S.P. Sen, “The Role of Indian Textiles in Southeast Asian Trade in the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 3, no. 2 (September 1962): 100.

<sup>32</sup> Fiona Kerlogue, “Textiles of Jambi (Sumatra) and the Indian Ocean Trade,” in *Textiles in Indian Ocean Societies*, ed. Ruth Barnes (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 140-141.

For several reasons, a certain degree of confusion exists in identifying precisely the various types of cloths exported during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. First, the trade documents did not mention the items according to their Indian names but used the terms with which they were identified in the destination markets. For example, “tappechindaes” was a cloth name that was derived from a fusion of Javanese *tapih* (skirt) and Hindi *chitta* (spotted cloth, commonly known as chintz).<sup>33</sup> Second, the production of several varieties of cloths was stopped as consumers’ taste shifted towards new fashions. Finally, the European traders distorted Indian names so as to make them largely unintelligible.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the lack of clearly identifiable information on cloth types, it is still possible to examine and appreciate the plethora of cloths that were produced and exported. The fabrics involved in Southeast Asian trade were mainly piece goods and articles of apparel. The former were mostly plain or painted calicoes and the latter were chiefly waistcloths and mantles.<sup>35</sup> Most of the textiles for the Southeast Asian markets consisted of plain woven cotton cloth that was decorated either by mordant-dyeing or by a combination of mordant-dyeing with resist-dyeing in order to prevent the loss of colors during washing. While all such cloths were not painted, they were known as such and were given a variety of names in the trade records based on their fineness and length.<sup>36</sup>

Several varieties of cloths were developed to satisfy particular consumer demands across the Malay Archipelago. The unyielding preference for certain types and colors of cloth among the Malays exasperated early Europeans who ventured to supply cloths in

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<sup>33</sup> John Irwin, “Indian Textile Trade in the Seventeenth Century: Coromandel Coast,” *Journal of Indian Textile History* 2 (1996): 25.

<sup>34</sup> Sen, “The Role of Indian Textiles in Southeast Asian Trade,” 99.

<sup>35</sup> Irwin, “Indian Textile Trade in the Seventeenth Century: Coromandel Coast,” 25. See also Glossary for a detailed list of varieties of cloths.

<sup>36</sup> John Guy, *Woven Cargoes: Indian Textiles in the East* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 21.

exchange for spices with an incomplete understanding of the market dynamics. In 1613 Peter Floris, a Dutchman working for the EIC wrote that “a great oversight” had been made by bringing cloth with a white edge since the Malays did not prefer such a design and noted that the Malays would not “once put forth their hands to look upon them.” He added that without his personal experience he would not have believed that “so small a fault should cause so great an abatement in the price.”<sup>37</sup> In 1615, an English Factor noted that Gujarat textiles could be sold for 12,000 Rials in Sumatra but not in Bantam.<sup>38</sup> Due to the high degree of market specialization, goods produced for one market could not be sold in the other locations.<sup>39</sup>

The specificity of demands for Indian textiles in Southeast Asia underscored the fact that the cloths assumed multiple meanings in overseas markets that were not intended by the producer. Initially, European merchants did not comprehend fully the cultural significance of cloth in the Malay world and their actions produced unintended consequences. While they understood the importance of cloth, they did not fully realize the complexities of tradition and taste in different markets. Barbara Andaya provides several instances of the “fastidiousness” of Malay consumers with respect to color. During the early seventeenth century, people in the interior pepper-growing regions of Sumatra only accepted white and black *bafta*, a cloth from Gujarat. While everyone wore black cloth, white cloth, besides being worn by priests and rulers, was used in funerals. Even the poorest person sought to set aside a white cloth for their own funeral as

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<sup>37</sup> Irwin, “Indian Textile Trade in the Seventeenth Century,” 24. It is also possible that the Malay consumers exaggerated the extent of their displeasure as a tactic to acquire the cloths at a much cheaper rate.

<sup>38</sup> Sen, “The Role of Indian Textiles in Southeast Asian Trade,” 97.

<sup>39</sup> John Guy, “‘One Thing Leads to Another’: Indian Textiles and the Early Globalization of Style,” in *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 23.

evidenced by the possessions of two *orang laut*<sup>40</sup> who were robbed by pirates, which included two white robes for their burial. Red was another color with a considerable reputation. The difficulty in achieving a red dye increased the value of red cloth and people often attributed protective qualities to such textiles. Andaya notes that the King's bodyguard wore a red attire and that the canon was wrapped in red cloth during the 1658 Dutch siege of Palembang.

In court settings in which colors were used to demarcate ranks, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) incurred the anger of a ruler in Jambi when the ruler and the prince received presents wrapped in cloth of the same color. Court etiquette also accorded ranking to colors.<sup>41</sup> The governors of provinces and protectorates also used the cloths to send tributes to the royal court. In the eighteenth century, Lady Chan, the wife of the Governor of Phuket, sought Indian textiles from Captain Francis Light (who established an English settlement in Penang in 1786) and specifically requested "flowered *chintz*"<sup>42</sup> and "patterned white *muslin*" that were renowned products from the Coromandel coast and Bengal, respectively. These cloths were ordered to contain special patterns that were suitable for a king.<sup>43</sup>

Beyond the court, Indian cloths were used extensively in rituals. In Jambi, a type of *chintz* cloth from the Coromandel coast, known as *Sembagi*, was used to cover the body between death and burial. While white cloth was used in burials, black cloth was

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<sup>40</sup> The term *Orang Laut* literally means "sea people." They were one of the earliest inhabitants of the Malay archipelago who lived on a special type of boats rather than on land. They were involved as collectors and carriers of goods for maritime trade and also provided their services to the Malay rulers when needed.

<sup>41</sup> Barbara Andaya, "The Cloth Trade in Jambi and Palembang Society during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Indonesia* 48 (October 1989): 34-35.

<sup>42</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>43</sup> John Guy, "Fit for a King: Indian Textiles and Thai Court Protocol," in *Through the Thread of Time: Southeast Asian Textiles*, ed. Jane Puranananda (Bangkok: River Books, 2004), 102.

associated with magic and was worn by practitioners of *pencak silat* (self-defense art) and by *dukun* (shaman). *Kumitar*, an expensive *batik* cotton cloth, was used in wedding ceremonies in Palembang. In Jambi, the *sembagi* cloth was used to wrap the sacred *kris* (a type of dagger) that was taken out from the wrapping to mark the end of the fasting month for Muslims.<sup>44</sup> In Southeast Asian Islamic communities, textiles acquired protective and healing properties based on previous ownership or their association with important events. The talismanic powers of cloths were supposed to pass on to the wearer or bearer of the pieces of the cloth. Shrouds from tombs of Muslim holy men were cut and distributed to pilgrims.<sup>45</sup>

Besides their symbolic and spiritual values, textiles were also a means of storing wealth. Within families, textiles were used to secure marriage alliances and formed an important part of the gift exchange process. Imported cloths were considered prized family possessions and were often displayed at wedding ceremonies. Textiles were used as a means of storing wealth and were used to settle social or commercial debts. Since the cloths were durable and portable, particularly in highly inaccessible interior parts of Southeast Asia, they were universally valued and were used in a bartering system even after monetization was well underway.<sup>46</sup> Upon a person's death, the cloth left by the person possessed real value.<sup>47</sup> Expectedly, when the European trading companies entered the spice trade, they followed the existing practice of negotiating trade agreements for spices in terms of varieties and quantities of cloths. For example, in 1649, the Queen of Aceh negotiated a contract with the VOC in which the price for 360 Dutch pounds of

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<sup>44</sup> Kerlogue, "Textiles of Jambi," 134.

<sup>45</sup> Guy, *Woven Cargoes*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Barbara Andaya, "The Cloth Trade in Jambi and Palembang," 32.



pepper was specified in terms of eleven varieties of cloths of varying colors and textures. Similar agreements were made with various members of the ruling hierarchy.<sup>48</sup>

Due to the high degree of market specialization, specific production centers of textiles in India catered to particular regions in Southeast Asia.<sup>49</sup> However, this does not imply a static pattern of relationships as new arrangements resulted from changes, in terms of consumer tastes and political stability of regions in which the cloth production centers were located. Among the varieties of plain white cloth, the fine-quality muslin was commonly referred to as “Betilles” (Portuguese *beatilla* meaning veiling) and was mainly woven in Golconda in the northern Coromandel region. By the end of the seventeenth century, the production centers shifted south to locations near Madras. Longcloth was a particularly large cloth of exceptional length, usually 37 yards, that was produced for the European markets as a way to compete with the larger linen cloths. A shorter plain cloth that was sent to Southeast Asia was *Percallas*,<sup>50</sup> which was about 8 yards in length. In Eastern Indonesia, the famed double-*ikat* silk *patola* and block-printed cotton fabrics were in high demand. While hand-drawn cotton textiles from Coromandel were imported, they were sent to Sumatra.<sup>51</sup>

Dyed cotton cloth formed an important component of textile shipments from India. These cloths were made from cheaper varieties of *Salempores* and *Muris*, plain cloths that were 16 and 10 yards in length, respectively. Some of the names for dyed cotton cloth exported to the Malay archipelago included red-and-white or blue-and-white

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<sup>48</sup> S.P. Sen, “The Role of Indian Textiles,” 106-07.

<sup>49</sup> This discussion will be limited to textiles produced and shipped from the Coromandel coast. It must be emphasized that there was also an extensive trade from Bengal and Gujarat with Southeast Asia. For a list of the types of cloths exported from Gujarat and Bengal in the seventeenth century, see Sen, “The Role of Indian Textiles,” 92-110.

<sup>50</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>51</sup> Ruth Barnes, “Moving between Cultures: Textiles as a Source of Innovation in Kedang, Eastern Indonesia,” in *Textiles in Indian Ocean Societies*, ed. Ruth Barnes (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 150.

*Allejaes*, checkered cotton *Chellies*, painted cotton *dopatta* (literally a “cloth of two widths”), black-and-red *Dragam*, and blue-and-black or black *Sallalus*. Besides dyed cotton cloth, loom-patterned cotton cloth was another type of cloth shipped from the Coromandel region. The most important and common variety of cloth of this kind that was exported was *gingham*, a striped cotton cloth woven with double-threaded warps and wefts that provided a toughness of texture. Several varieties of *ginghams* were sent to Japan, Thailand, and the Malay Archipelago. *Sacerguntes* was another type of loom-patterned cloth whose warps and wefts were tie-dyed before weaving.<sup>52</sup> It is probable that this style of cloth was patterned in the same manner as the Gujarati *patolas* that were in demand in Southeast Asia.

This section provided an overview of the extensive textile trade between India and Southeast Asia with a particular emphasis on illustrating the multiple meanings associated with cloth in Southeast Asian societies. The specificities as well as differences in tastes regarding color and texture of textiles suggest that the cloths served social, ceremonial, ritual, and economic needs, beyond the utilitarian purpose of covering one’s body. As a result, the cloth produced in India attained different connotations in the destination markets. Thus, Indian textiles remained popular for several centuries. When the English cotton manufacturers began to produce textiles to compete with Indian textiles in the world markets, they did so primarily by attempting to imitate Indian cloths in terms of texture, dyeing techniques, printing and painting methods, and production of patterns. In fact, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the value of English textiles printed on imported Indian plain cloth and exported to Asian markets

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<sup>52</sup> Irwin, “Indian Textile Trade in the Seventeenth Century: Coromandel Coast,” 35-40.

exceeded those of textiles printed on English fabrics.<sup>53</sup> Even in the petition discussed at the beginning of the chapter, the EIC officials noted that the Southeast Asian ports were overstocked with “finer” quality English cottons that were made according to the “tastes of the Malays” and thus would “drive traders of Indian manufactures from the ports.”<sup>54</sup> Giorgio Riello has documented the processes by which Indian cloth production techniques were copied and later refined by European textile producers.<sup>55</sup> Beginning in the late eighteenth century, as the English cotton manufacturers began to compete with Indian textiles in Asian markets, they actively sought information on the preferences of their customers and designed cloths to suit local tastes. The perfection of production to suit the demands of specific markets took some time and the initial consignments of English textiles did not sell completely in several Asian markets. In Penang, for example, English cloths did not find ready acceptance in the early nineteenth century and by 1810 about £75,000 worth of unsold British manufactures had accumulated in the EIC’s warehouses. Moreover, the excess cloth from one market could not be sold in another location.<sup>56</sup>

The precise process by which English textiles became widely accepted in Asian markets is still unclear. The improvements in textile designs and textures, as documented by Giorgio Riello, certainly played a role in changing the consumers’ attitudes towards English cotton goods. An increased preference for English textiles took place first in India in the early nineteenth century. H.R.C. Wright noted that the consumption was

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<sup>53</sup> H.R.C. Wright, *East-Indian Economic Problems of the Age of Cornwallis & Raffles* (London: Luzac and Company, 1961), 242.

<sup>54</sup> Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, July 20, 1825, Vol. 54. TNSA.

<sup>55</sup> Giorgio Riello, “The Indian Apprenticeship: The Trade of Indian Textiles and the Making of European Cottons,” in *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (with collaboration of Om Prakash and Kaoru Sugihara) (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 309-46.

<sup>56</sup> Wright, *East-Indian Economic Problems*, 192-225.

higher among the Europeans, the Parsees, and the Portuguese community in Bombay. The preference for European goods was not limited to colonial port cities but also spread to the interior regions.<sup>57</sup> One explanation, at least in the Madras Presidency, for the easy flow of European goods into the interior was that the merchants were not charged duties for moving the goods from the ports into the interior towns.<sup>58</sup> A former East-India Company ship captain noted that English printed cotton were used as turbans by the Hindus,<sup>59</sup> probably a use not originally intended for that cotton article.

But the limited success of English textiles in Malay markets during the early to mid-nineteenth century had important consequences for the Tamil Muslim maritime merchants. The continued, although gradually declining, preference for Indian textiles enabled the Tamil Muslim merchants to continue their shipments of Indian cloths from South India to Malay ports. The following two sections examine the volume of Indian cotton goods traded between South India and Malay ports and Sri Lanka and the extent of Tamil Muslim shipping that conveyed these goods. Another explanation was the change in consumer preferences.

#### **IV. Trade in Indian Piece Goods, 1800-40**

This section discusses the general patterns of commerce in the southern ports of the Coromandel coast and the specific trade in cotton piece-goods. In particular, this section will examine trade at the ports in the coastal districts of Tanjore (Thanjavur) and the Southern Division of Arcot. Tamil Muslim maritime merchants lived in these districts and used the ports to embark upon trading voyages. In Tanjore, the prominent ports were

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<sup>57</sup> Wright, *East Indian Economic Problems*, 214-15.

<sup>58</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, May 17, 1833, Vol. 1367, 6747-48. TNSA.

<sup>59</sup> Wright, *East Indian Economic Problems*, 216.

Nagore and Nagapattinam. In the Southern Division of Arcot, the important ports were Cuddalore and Porto Novo. This section will analyze the trade in Indian cotton goods from South Indian ports to two regions: Malay ports (Penang, Singapore, Melaka, and Aceh) and Sri Lanka.

The information on trade in the southern ports was collected from the annual Reports of External Commerce produced by officials in the Madras Presidency. After the EIC acquired control of territories in South India, the Company officials in Madras and London sought reports from the officers in the coastal districts regarding the commercial situation in the ports. This interest in the various ports was accompanied by an investigation of various options to improve the condition of the ports and to identify commodities that would help the Company in deriving revenue from the newly acquired territories. Thus, the Reports of External Commerce were compiled in order to help the Company officials in India and London to measure the extent of trade conducted at various ports in the Madras Presidency.

These reports are available in a continuous sequence for the period between 1800 and 1840. However, the type of information collected in the reports did not remain consistent throughout the period. For example, between 1800 and 1825, the reports provide detailed information on the volume of trade at several ports in the Madras Presidency. A notable feature of the reports produced during this period was the inclusion of details about trade conducted at several smaller ports. By the early nineteenth century, Madras had emerged as the largest port in terms of volume of trade and the number of sailing vessels that visited it. But there were also other ports that continued to conduct a significant amount of trade. Of particular importance for studying the trade of Tamil Muslim merchants are the ports of Nagore, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, Porto Novo, Karaikal, and Pondicherry. Besides these major regional ports, there were a large number

of smaller ports that dotted the Coromandel coast which served as feeder and distribution ports for the larger ports. Such ports played an important role in transferring textiles from places of production to ports of export and in moving grain from rice growing areas to deficit regions.

The Reports of External Commerce produced till 1825 contain information on the trade carried on at the ports of varying sizes. This provides us with crucial information on the trade between South India, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia. Even within this period, uninterrupted data is not available for all ports. For instance, there is an unbroken record of information on the trade between ports in the Southern Division of Arcot and Tanjore for the first decade of the nineteenth century. However, the reports do not provide information on this trade for subsequent years. Additionally, between 1800 and 1825, the reports do not provide information on the names of items and their trade volumes. Thus, while we can track the total volume of trade between various ports, the composition of the trade is not clear.

During the 1820s, a shift occurs in the type of information included in the reports. There is an increasing emphasis on measuring the volume of trade carried out for specific commodities. In particular, the Company officials included the data on the annual trade in Indian cotton textiles conducted from the various ports in the Presidency. The emphasis on cotton goods underscores the importance assigned by the EIC officials to this particular item since it formed the staple item of export from South India. The availability of the information on the annual exports of cotton textiles allows us to track the shipments of cotton piece-goods from South India to Southeast Asia and from South India to Sri Lanka. But the reports for this period do not provide information on the volume of trade carried on from the various southern ports in the same manner as provided in the earlier years. Instead, the reports indicate the nature of trade carried on

from the Madras Presidency as a whole with other regions such as the United Kingdom, France, Arabia, Malay Ports, and other parts of India. The only port for which detailed information on the volume of trade is available is the port of Madras. Such a change in the content of the Reports of External Commerce in the 1820s suggests a change in the interest of the Company officials from the smaller regional ports to that of the trade of the Madras Presidency as a whole. It also demonstrates that during this period the EIC officials were mainly interested in the trade at Madras port, which by then had become the most important port in the entire Presidency. While the following data, compiled from two different sets of reports, does not provide a seamless track of trade information, it still permits us to draw a detailed picture of the trade in cotton piece-goods in the southern ports.

#### **IV (a): Trade in Cotton goods with Southeast Asia**

The trade between the southern ports along the Coromandel coast and Southeast Asia was mainly carried on from Nagore, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, and Porto Novo. While the EIC records contain references to ships sailing from Pondicherry and Karaikal to Southeast Asia, the number of such voyages was far less than those carried out from the ports mentioned above.<sup>60</sup> As noted earlier, the trade reports that were compiled during the early nineteenth century only contained information on the trade carried on at these ports but did not give details about the items that were traded. Thus it is not possible to get precise information on the quantity and value of cotton goods exported from the Madras Presidency ports.

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<sup>60</sup> It is certainly possible that the EIC records did not track the sailings from Pondicherry and Karaikal since they were under French control and were only transferred to the EIC for a brief period in the nineteenth century.

Fortunately, the trade report compiled for the year 1813-14 provides information on the values of goods traded at the various ports in the Presidency. While it is impossible to develop accurate figures for the trade in cotton goods for the period between 1800 and 1825 based on the information from a single year, it is possible to develop an understanding of the extent to which cotton textiles comprised the export trade from South Indian ports. During 1813-14, the total value of exports from the ports in the Southern Division of Arcot (Cuddalore, Porto Novo, and Pondicherry) was Rs. 513,000. Of this amount, cotton piece-goods worth Rs. 393,100 were exported, which indicates that about three-quarters of the value of exports from the Southern Division of Arcot was derived from cotton cloths.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, for the Tanjore ports of Nagore and Nagapattinam, the total value of exported goods was Rs. 748,000 of which cotton goods contributed to Rs. 204,000, which suggests that textiles comprised slightly more than a quarter of the export trade at Nagore and Nagapattinam. The lower percentage of cotton goods in the trade at Tanjore ports can be explained by the fact that the volume of total trade was regularly higher at Tanjore ports and the trade in grains was a major part of commercial activity. The information on the composition of trade at the ports in Tanjore and the Southern Division of Arcot for a single year indicates that the trade in cotton goods formed anywhere between a quarter to three-fourths of the annual trade conducted at these ports.

The following figure (4.1) shows the volume of trade conducted by private merchants between these ports and the eastward ports such as Aceh, Penang, and Melaka. The information from figure 4.1 allows us to draw several conclusions about the pattern of trade between the ports in Tanjore and the Southern Division of Arcot with Southeast

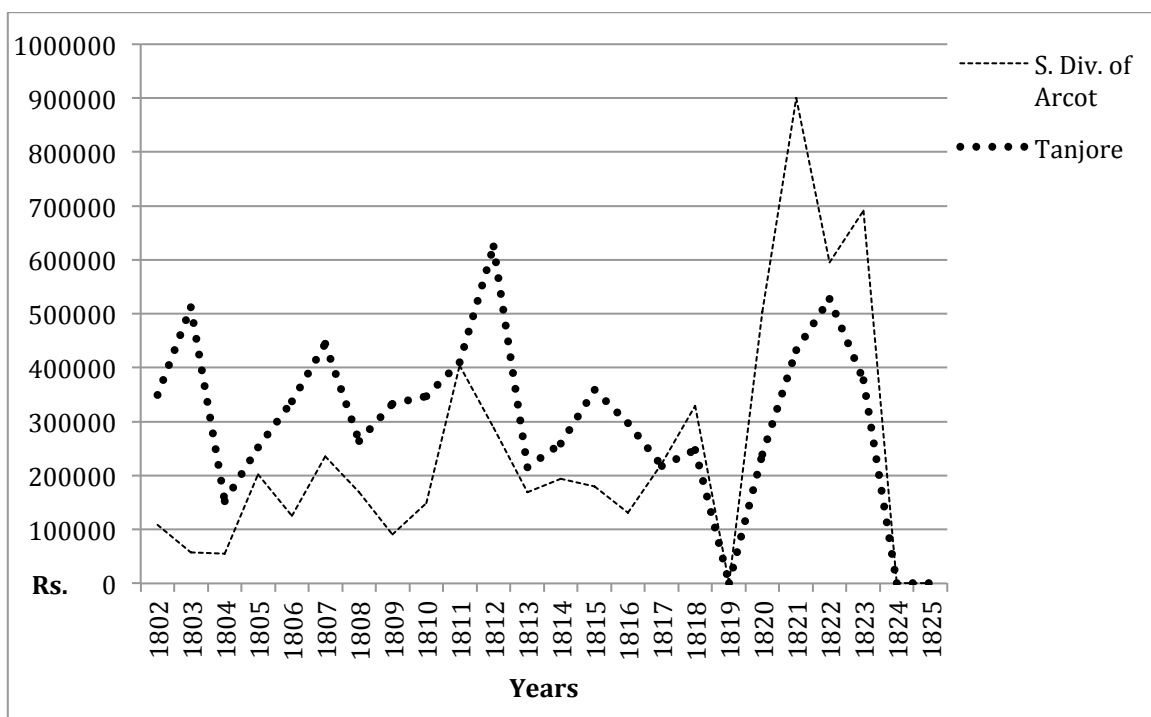
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<sup>61</sup> IOR/P/339/128. India Office Records, British Library (London). Hereafter IOR.



Asian ports. The first notable feature is the fluctuating nature of trade. For instance, the total exports from the Southern Division of Arcot was Rs. 91,000<sup>62</sup> in 1809 and the amount increased more than fourfold to Rs. 404,000 in 1811. In subsequent years the volume of exports decreased steadily until it reached Rs. 131,000 in 1816. In the following years, the trade increased again to reach Rs. 504,000 in 1820, the highest value in the previous two decades. A similar fluctuating pattern of trade marked by ups and downs can be found in the trade at Tanjore ports.

Figure. 4.1: Value of exports of merchandise at Tanjore and the Southern Division of Arcot.<sup>63</sup>

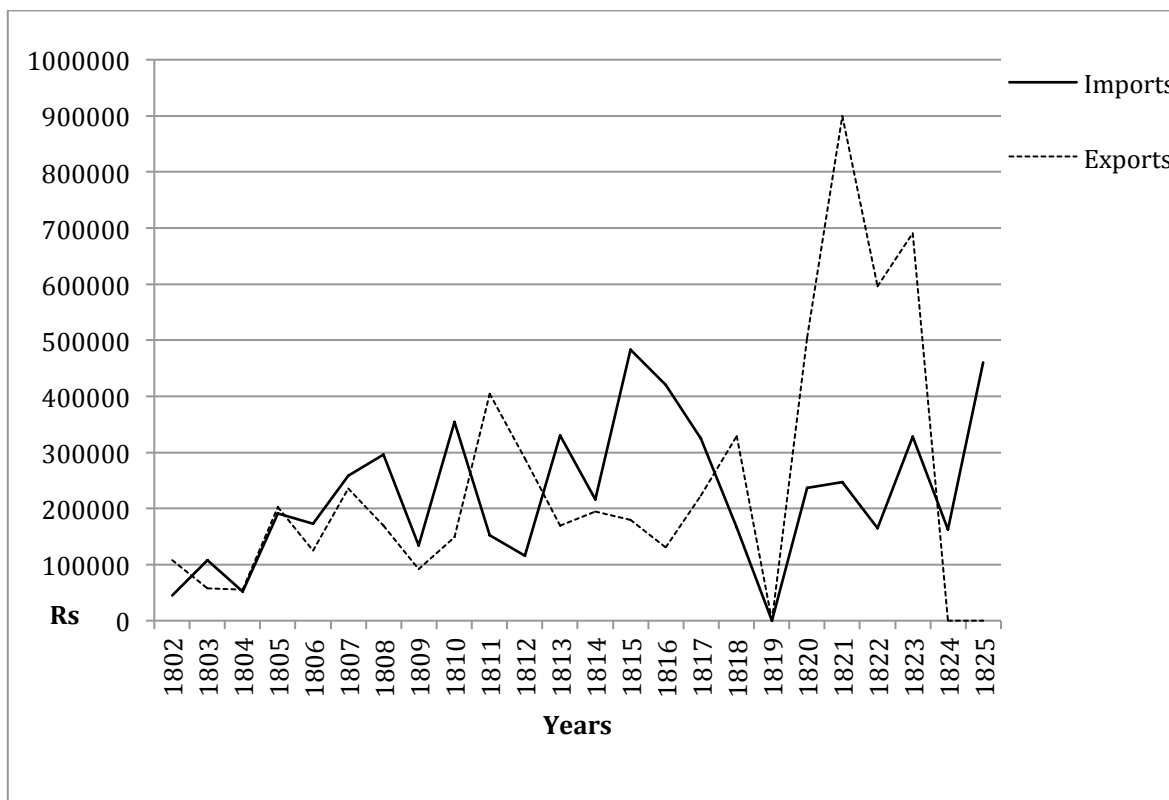


<sup>62</sup> See Table 1 in the Appendix for details about the values for each year.

<sup>63</sup> This chart was created using the values in Table 1 in the Appendix. For the 1819, the chart drops to “0” value since the data on trade is not available in the records.

Second, the value of imports of merchandise and treasure usually exceeded the value of exports, which indicates that the merchants were able to dispose of the exported merchandise at higher values (figures 4.2 & 4.3). The large amounts of treasure imports, often comparable to the value of imported merchandise and sometimes exceeding it, reveals that the merchants brought back treasure in the form of gold dust and Spanish dollars from eastward ports in order to invest in procuring merchandise, mainly cloth, for the next sailing season.<sup>64</sup>

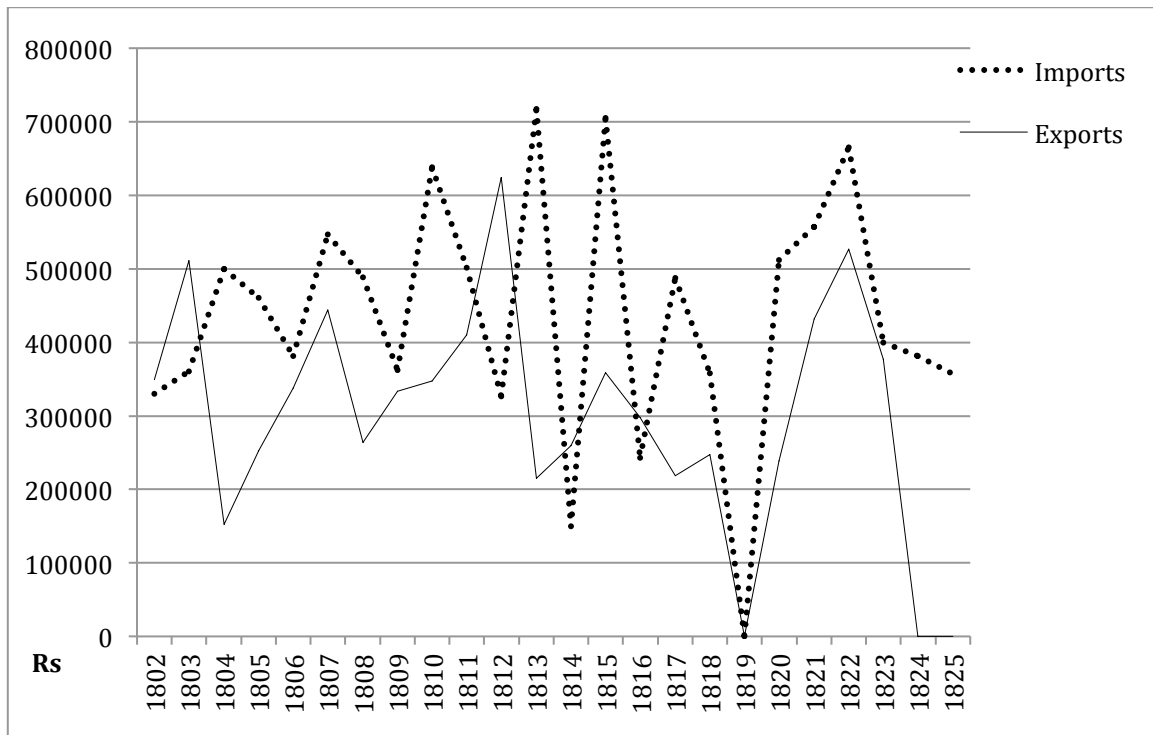
Figure. 4.2: Values of imports and exports at the Southern Division of Arcot.<sup>65</sup>



<sup>64</sup> EIC officials in the Madras Presidency often noted this pattern. See Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, January 24, 1823, Vol. 48, 124-47. TNSA.

<sup>65</sup> This chart was created using the values in Table 1 in Appendix. For the 1819, the chart drops to “0” value since the data on trade is not available in the records.

Figure. 4.3: Values of imports and exports at Tanjore.<sup>66</sup>



Third, the amount of imports and exports from eastward ports were significantly higher in Tanjore than in the S. Division of Arcot. This indicates that the Tanjore ports, especially Nagore, had emerged under the EIC rule as the important port of departure for private vessels sailing to Malay ports. Fourth, and related to the previous point, the volume of export for each trading season from Tanjore and Arcot ports was comparable for only a very few years (see fig. 4.1). For example, in 1817 the amount of exports from Southern Division of Arcot was Rs. 223,000 and it was Rs. 218,000 from Tanjore ports. However, for most of the period, the amount of exports in one was significantly higher than the other. Such a large difference in the volume of exports at ports lying very close

<sup>66</sup> This chart was created using the values in Table 1 in Appendix. For the 1819, the chart drops to “0” value since the data on trade is not available in the records.

to each other (Cuddalore is located about seventy-five miles north of Nagore) suggests that merchants could have alternated in using the various ports to acquire different types of goods based on market demand in Malay ports instead of shipping the same type of goods every year. For instance, between the years 1820 and 1824, there was a large discrepancy in the amounts of treasure imported and the value of merchandise exported from Arcot ports. The amount of treasure imported was Rs. 85,000, Rs. 129,000, Rs. 64,000, and Rs. 172,000 and the corresponding amounts of export of merchandise was Rs. 504,000, Rs. 900,000, Rs. 595,000, and Rs. 691,000. For the same period, the amount of treasure imported into Tanjore ports was Rs. 330,000, Rs. 412,000, Rs. 466,000, and Rs. 184,000. Therefore it is possible that the merchants importing such large treasure into Tanjore ports invested the money in procuring merchandise that could be obtained from the hinterland of Arcot ports and then shipped such items from Arcot ports.

As indicated earlier, from the 1820s there was a change in the type of information included in the annual Reports of External Commerce. The reports contain detailed information on the commodities that were traded and tracked the trends in the imports and exports of various items. The reports, however, did not focus on the volume of trade at individual ports as was done in the earlier reports. Thus, an increased focus on commodities came at the expense of an understanding of the condition of trade at various ports. With the exception of Madras, these reports did not contain information on the trade between various ports. In the case of Madras, the reports provided data on the trade with other ports in India, Southeast Asia, and Europe. For all other ports in the Madras Presidency, these reports provided information on the types and amounts of commodities traded between ports.

The reports, however, did not itemize the types of cloths exported to various ports in Southeast Asia. The following table (4.1) show the types of cloth sent from Tanjore ports to markets in Southeast Asia.

Table 4.1: Imports and exports at Tanjore ports<sup>67</sup>

<b>Destination</b>	<b>Exports</b>
Aceh	Blue cloths, long cloths, salt, tobacco, bazaar articles
Penang	Chintz, blue cloth, long cloth, salt, tobacco
Malay coast	Chintz, blue cloth, long cloth, coarse cloth
Kedah & Junk Ceylon (Phuket)	Chintz, blue cloth, long cloth, salt
Pegu	Muslin, hing, sandalwood, blue cloth, broad cloth
Batavia	Blue cloth, long cloth, muslin, Chintz

The table shows the similarities in the types of cloth exported to eastward ports. During the early decades of the nineteenth century, the types of cloth that were exported did not belong to the superior types of cloths. Most of the cloth varieties described in Table 4.1 were of the coarser varieties. In 1813, the Commercial Resident of Nagore listed the types of cloths that were exported to eastward ports and it included unbleached *salempores*, blue *salempores*, *muris*, *succatoons*, *ginghams*, *chintz*, *comboys*, and handkerchiefs.<sup>68</sup>

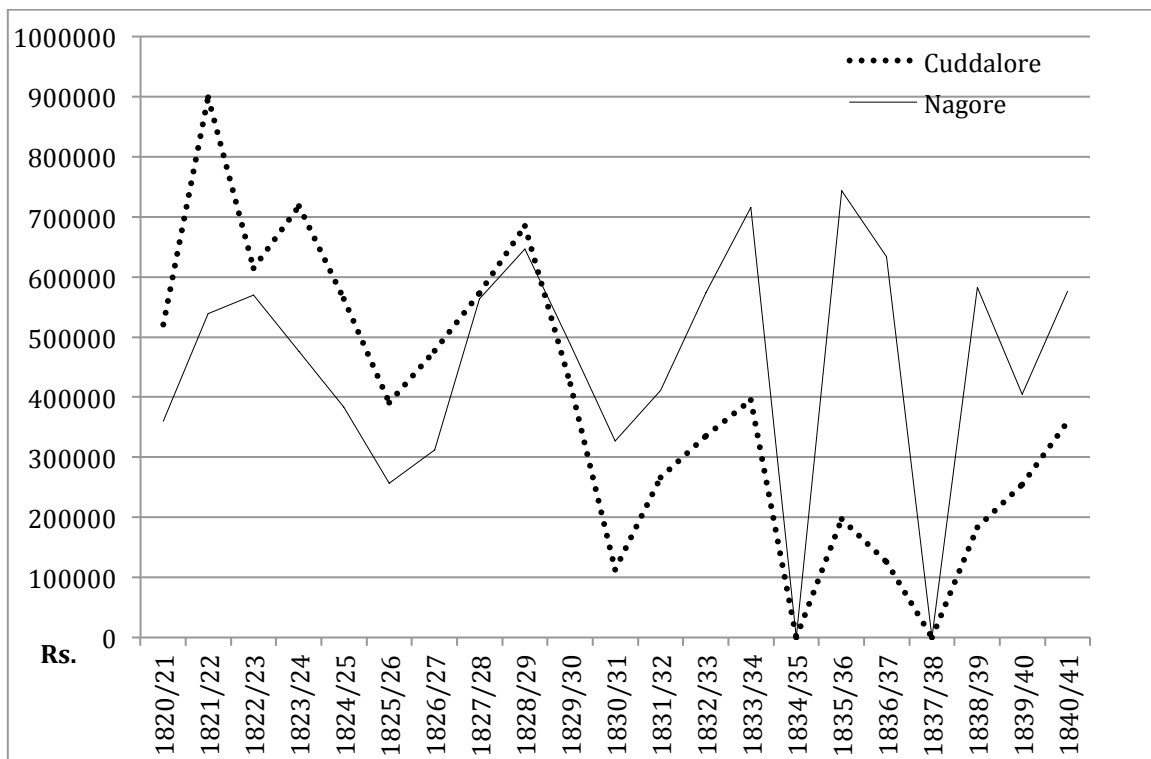
The following figure (4.4) shows the export of Indian cotton piece-goods between 1820 and 1841 from the ports inhabited by Tamil Muslim merchants. The chart was prepared using the Reports of External Commerce for the period between 1820 and 1841. The EIC officials were particularly interested in tracking and encouraging the trade in Indian cotton piece-goods since it was the staple item of export from South India to other

<sup>67</sup> Tanjore District Records, January 24, 1797, Vol. 3349; Tanjore District Records, March 12, 1798, Vol. 3350. TNSA.

<sup>68</sup> Tanjore District Records, June 25, 1813, Vol. 3337, 45-48. TNSA.

Asian markets. Besides providing revenue from customs duties, the Indian cotton goods were also useful for the Company and the English private traders in procuring items in Southeast Asia that could be used in the trade with China.

Figure 4.4: Values of cotton textiles exported from Cuddalore and Nagore to Southeast Asia.<sup>69</sup>



The amount of exports of cotton goods shown in the figure above includes the trade conducted by private merchants and the EIC. In addition, the entire quantity of cotton goods exported from these ports was not destined for ports in the Melaka Straits (Aceh, Penang, Singapore). Even with these caveats, the information in the figure (4.4) provides a useful means to understand the trade in cotton goods between South India and

<sup>69</sup> This chart was created using the data in Table 2 in the Appendix. For the years marked by unavailable data, the chart indicates a “0” value for the trade.

Southeast Asia. In the Southern Division of Arcot, which contained the port of Cuddalore from which several vessels sailed to Southeast Asian ports, there was a significant decline in the value of cloth exported in 1840/41 (359,000) as compared to the value of cloth exported in 1820/21 (521,000). But during this twenty-year period, there was neither a consistent increase nor decrease in values of exported cloth. A similar trend can be noticed in the case of Nagore, the other major port from which extensive foreign trade was carried out by the Tamil Muslim merchants. In the case of Nagore, the value of piece-goods exported in 1840/41 (Rs. 576,000) was higher than in 1820/21 (Rs. 360,000).

The total value of cloths exported from the Southern Division of Arcot and Nagore followed a varying pattern over a twenty-year period between 1820 and 1840. The value of cotton goods exported increased sharply from Rs. 880,000 in 1820-21 to Rs. 1,438,000 in 1821-22. The sharp increase during the 1821-22 trading season could have been produced by the abolishment of import duties on India cotton goods in 1820 at Penang, a port where significant quantities of Indian cloth were imported, in a decision that was taken by the government in Calcutta in order to increase the trade in Indian piece-goods in Penang.<sup>70</sup> In the following four years, however, the value decreased gradually and reached Rs. 648,000 in 1825-26. The value of cotton goods exported exhibited an increase over the next two years and then decreased over the next two years and again increased to reach Rs. 1,110,000 in 1833-34.

Not surprisingly, as shown in the table (4.1) below, the value of cotton goods imported in to the ports in the Straits of Melaka also exhibited a similar pattern. The alternating periods of increasing and decreasing values of imports of Indian cotton goods in eastward ports indicates a fluctuating demand caused by an oversupply of goods

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<sup>70</sup> IOR/F/4/726/19686, August 28, 1822. IOR.

during the previous years. In such a case, the merchants sought alternate sources to bring back the remittances to India. EIC officials noted that during the years of decreased exports of cotton goods from the Coromandel coast, the merchants returned with decreased amounts of treasure and brought back greater than usual quantities of merchandise such as betel nuts and pepper from Malay ports. The Report of External Commerce for 1828-29 noted a decrease in the importation of treasure from the Straits of Melaka and a corresponding increase in the import of pepper from the Straits of Melaka and the West Coast of Sumatra and most of the pepper was then re-exported from Tanjore ports.<sup>71</sup> For the following year, the report observed an increase in the importation of betel nuts from the Straits of Melaka in to the ports in the Southern Division of Arcot and Tanjore.<sup>72</sup>

Besides the fluctuating pattern of trade in Indian cotton goods, the period between 1820 and 1840 also witnessed a gradual decline in the value of exports of Indian textiles from South India to Southeast Asia. In table 4.1, the peak value of export was in 1823/24 when Rs. 2,697,000 worth of textiles were exported and for almost the next two decades the maximum value of cloth that was exported was in 1828/29 when Rs. 2,265,000 worth of cotton goods were sent to eastward ports. While the nature of decline did not follow a steady pattern, an overall decline can be noticed. The decline of imports of Indian cotton piece-goods was also caused by the gradual increase of importation of British cotton goods in Asia. The Javanese market was the earliest one in which British cottons established their dominance. In Java, British plain cloths were imported in large numbers and were used to produce Javanese *batik* cloth.<sup>73</sup> In other Southeast Asian markets, the

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<sup>71</sup> Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, December 24, 1829, Vol. 61, 1-93. TNSA.

<sup>72</sup> Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, January 7, 1831, Vol. 63, 15-88. TNSA.

<sup>73</sup> Reid, "Southeast Asian Consumption of Indian and British Cotton Cloth, 1600-1800," 46.



success of British cottons over Indian piece-goods took a longer time to achieve. Between 1828 and 1866, British cotton cloths gradually replaced the Indian cloths in exports from Singapore to various Southeast Asian markets.<sup>74</sup>

Table 4.1: Indian piece-goods from Coromandel coast imported at ports in Melaka Straits (Madras Rs.)<sup>75</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Melaka Straits (Madras Rs.)</b>
1823/24	2697000
1824/25	1429000
1825/26	1050000
1826/27	1545000
1827/28	2066000
1828/29	2265000
1829/30	1589000
1830/31	648000
1831/32	969000
1832/33	1413000
1833/34	1612000
1834/35	
1835/36	1188000
1836/37	1072000
1837/38	
1838/39	1020000
1839/40	775000
1840/41	1183000

The following table (4.2) shows the increase in the percentage of European cloths in the cloths exported from Singapore to other Southeast Asian ports. Due to its strategic location in the southern end of the Straits of Melaka, Singapore became an important port

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>75</sup> This table was compiled from data gathered from several volumes of Sea Customs records in Tamil Nadu State Archives for the years included in the table. See Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 46, May 1, 1821; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 48, January 24, 1823; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 50, February 1, 1824; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 53, January 31, 1825; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 55, February 15, 1826; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 57, March 1, 1827; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 58, 1828; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 59, March 10, 1829; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 61, December 24, 1829; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 65, January 9, 1832; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 67, March 18, 1833; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 70, April 30, 1834; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 71, February 28, 1835; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 78, March 5, 1838; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 85, June 29, 1841.

for import and redistribution of European cloths. The table reveals that between 1800 and 1840, the percentage of European cloths increased from about 30% to 72%. This suggests that Indian cloths, produced in South India, Bengal, and Gujarat, still retained a significant portion of the market share of the Southeast Asian textile market. Since Indian textiles comprised a significant portion of textiles sold in Southeast Asian markets until 1840, Tamil Muslim merchants could find a market for the cotton goods produced along the Coromandel coast. But the merchants' petition discussed at the beginning indicates that the introduction of English cotton goods affected the trade of these merchants.

Table 4.2: European and Indian cloth exported from Singapore to the Malay Archipelago, Siam, and Cochin-China (Sp \$).<sup>76</sup>

Year	European	Indian	Total	European percentage
1828-9	245,000	616,000	861,000	28.4
1835-6	563,000	458,000	1,020,000	55.2
1840-1	618,000	234,000	852,000	72.5
1843-4	531,000	157,000	688,000	77.2
1845-6	895,000	235,000	1,130,000	79.2
1848-9	666,000	103,000	769,000	86.6
1855-6	1,031,000	115,000	1,146,000	90
1865-6	4,015,000	108,000	4,123,000	97.4

Faced with growing competition from English cotton goods, the Tamil Muslim merchants shifted their trading operations and began to ship British cotton goods both within the regional trading in Southeast Asia and also to the Coromandel coast. This shift can be noticed in the export lists of goods carried on vessels commanded by Tamil Muslims and sailing from Singapore to other Malay ports. The export lists contain items such as British muslin, British long cloth, British plain cotton, and British printed

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<sup>76</sup> Lin Ken Wong, "The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 33, no. 4 (1960): 81; cited in Reid, "Southeast Asian Consumption of Indian and British Cotton Cloth, 1600-1800," 47.

cotton.<sup>77</sup> The Reports of External Commerce produced by revenue officials in the Madras Presidency also reveal a gradual increase in the importation of British cotton piece-goods, both from Bengal and ports in Melaka Straits. During the 1828/29 trading season, the value of British cottons imported from Melaka Straits increased to Rs. 9,000 from Rs. 7,000 in the previous season. During the 1831/32 trading season, Rs. 7,500 worth of British cottons were imported and the value increased to Rs. 15,000 for the following year. In the following year, the value of imports decreased slightly to Rs. 11,000, but still higher than any of the trading seasons before 1832/33. By 1838/39, the value of British cottons imported to the Madras Presidency from Melaka Straits increased to Rs. 28,000.

This section examined the export of Indian cotton piece-goods between 1800 and 1840 from ports in the districts of Tanjore and Southern Division of Arcot to ports in the Straits of Melaka. The trade in cotton goods followed a fluctuating pattern marked by periods of high exports followed by years of low value of exports. Such a condition was produced both by the over-stock of Indian textiles in Southeast Asian markets and also by the gradual increase in the importation of English cotton piece-goods into Asian ports. As shown above Tamil Muslim merchants overcame such periodic shortages of trade in Indian piece-goods by shifting to carrying other items, both to send remittances back to South India and to find substitutes for the low volume of trade in Indian cotton goods.

#### **IV (b): Trade in Cotton goods with Sri Lanka**

The second component of the trade of cotton goods from South India was the trade between the southern ports along the Coromandel coast and Sri Lanka. The volume and value of cotton textiles trade with Sri Lanka was not as extensive as that carried with

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<sup>77</sup> For examples of export lists of British cottons on board vessels to Penang and the Coromandel coast, see *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, particularly for January 6, 1831, January, 13 1831, January, 20 1831 for a representative sample of such lists.

Malay ports. Unfortunately, the records do not provide information on the types of cloths that were shipped to Sri Lanka. In 1813, a vessel belonging to a Tamil Muslim merchant was confiscated for shipping cloth without paying duties and contained the following types of cloths: longcloth, *salempores*, *dungarees*, handkerchiefs, painted cloth, and silk-bordered cloth.<sup>78</sup> The list suggests that the cargo contained a mix of coarse and some fine cloths. Second, besides ports in Tanjore, ports in the districts of Tinnevelly and Ramnad (Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram) were also involved in the trade in cotton goods.

The following table (4.3) shows the value of trade carried on at the ports in the Southern Division of Arcot, Tanjore, and Tinnevelly and Ramnad with Sri Lanka. Similar to the data on trade in cotton textiles between South India and Southeast Asia, the information on trade with Sri Lanka is compiled from the annual Reports on External Commerce. As explained earlier, the reports created between 1800 and 1825 contain information on the trade at several ports. The table shows that the total value of exports to Sri Lanka from ports in Tanjore and Tinnevelly and Ramnad exceeded the value of imports from Sri Lanka. Grains and cotton goods were the major items of export from Tanjore ports. Similarly, cotton goods formed a major portion of the value of exported goods from Tinnevelly and Ramnad.<sup>79</sup> Thus, it can be understood that cotton goods (and grains) formed an important component of the trade with Sri Lanka.

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<sup>78</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, June 28, 1813, Vol. 20, 716-17. TNSA.

<sup>79</sup> IOR/P/339/128. British Library.

Table 4.3: Trade with Sri Lanka (Madras Rs.).<sup>80</sup>

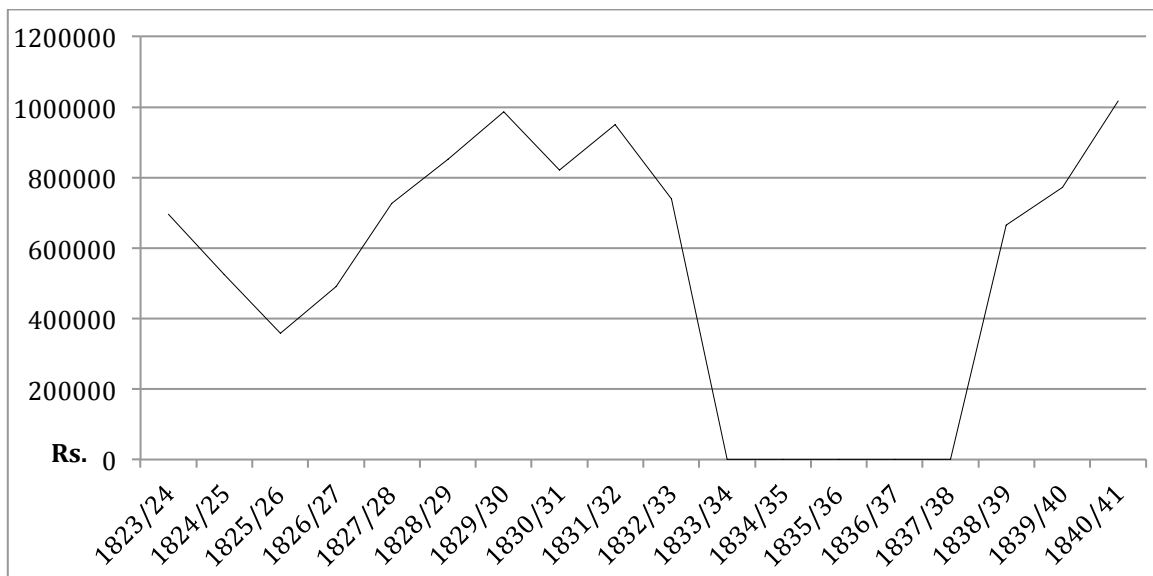
- Data unavailable for these years

Year	Imports from Ceylon			Exports to Ceylon		
	S. Div. Arcot	Tanjore	Tinnevely & Ramnad	S. Div. Arcot	Tanjore	Tinnevely & Ramnad
1802	900	415000	64000	2000	134000	125000
1803	49000	238000	104000	7000	366000	87000
1804	84000	319000	61000	7400	375000	276000
1805	53000	281000	16000	5400	324000	225000
1806	67000	309000	33500	11000	430000	186000
1807	136000	512000	105000	2400	205000	260000
1808	188000	516000	67000	10000	440000	250000
1809	45000	255000	49200	11000	558000	149000
1810	24000	203000	49000	9700	267000	159000
1811	33000	208000	39000	6500	337000	182000
1812	51000	241000	71000	7000	280000	103000
1813	16700	288000	32000	1800	787000	111000
1814	80000	349000	13100	*	940000	221000
1815	24000	325000	20400	*	1028000	361000
1816	13000	209000	43000	*	560000	255000
1817	5700	230000	24000	*	606000	450000
1818	12000	170000	31000	1300	675000	488000
1819	*	*	*	*	*	*
1820	16600	207000	27800	16000	815000	287000
1821	19000	209000	28000		574000	431000
1822	26000	217000	46000	11000	546000	508000
1823	39800	221000	75000	29000	460000	525000

<sup>80</sup> The information in this table was compiled from a large set of Reports of External Commerce prepared by EIC officials in the Madras Presidency. These records can be found in the Tamil Nadu State Archives in Chennai and in the India Office Records collections in the British Library in London. The following records were used to compile this table. The code IOR refers to records from the India Office Records collection in the British Library. IOR/P/339/75, IOR/P/339/76, IOR/P/339/78, IOR/P/339/79, IOR/P/339/84, IOR/P/339/85, IOR/P/339/90, IOR/P/339/94, IOR/P/339/99, IOR/P/339/104, IOR/P/339/109, IOR/P/339/115, IOR/P/339/120, IOR/P/339/124, IOR/P/339/128, IOR/P/339/133, IOR/P/339/135, IOR/P/339/137, IOR/P/339/141, IOR/P/339/145, IOR/P/339/147, IOR/P/339/149, IOR/P/339/153, IOR/P/339/155, IOR/P/339/159, IOR/P/339/166, IOR/P/340/1, IOR/P/340/8, IOR/P/340/13, IOR/P/340/15, IOR/P/340/19, IOR/P/340/24, IOR/P/340/26, IOR/P/340/28.

The Reports of External Commerce compiled from the 1820s contain information on the various commodities that comprised the external trade of the Madras Presidency. The reports also contain information on the value of trade with ports outside British India. Therefore, it is possible to track the value of cotton goods exported from the Madras Presidency to Sri Lanka during the 1830s and 1840s. As in the case of cotton goods exported to Malay ports, the trade reveals a fluctuating pattern. But unlike the trade with Southeast Asia, there is no overall decline of trade in cotton goods between South India and Sri Lanka.

Figure 4.5: Value of cotton goods exported from South India to Sri Lanka.<sup>81</sup>



The above figure (4.5) shows the variation in the value of cotton textiles exported to Sri Lanka. In 1823/24, cloth worth Rs. 697,000 was exported to Sri Lanka and the trade declined steadily for the next three years. The Collector of Tinnevely attributed the cause

<sup>81</sup> This chart was created using the values in Table 3 in the Appendix. Between 1833 and 1838, the chart shows “0” value for the export value since the data is unavailable for these years.

of decline to the diversion of textile trade to Arabia and to the growing importation of English cottons in Sri Lanka.<sup>82</sup> But the increase in the exports of Indian cotton goods in the following years to Ceylon, exceeding the previous high point in 1823/24, suggests that the temporary diversion of cotton goods trade to Arabia caused only a temporary decline in cotton goods trade with Sri Lanka.

This section examined the external trade of cotton textiles from South India to Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. In both cases, the trade followed a fluctuating pattern, which could be attributed to the variations in demand caused by the oversupply of textiles. Additionally, in the case of Southeast Asia, there was an overall decline in the importation of Indian cotton manufactures due to the growing absorption of English cotton goods in Southeast Asian societies. The Tamil Muslim merchants exported cotton textiles and brought back gold and silver that was invested in acquiring cloths for the next trading voyage. The merchants reacted to the growing loss of markets for Indian cotton goods by importing merchandise from Malay ports, instead of gold and silver, and also participating in the trade in English cotton goods. In the case of Sri Lanka, the information in the Reports of External Commerce shows that the introduction of English cottons in that country did not cause an overall reduction in the importation of Indian cotton goods during the period under study.

## **V. Tamil Muslim Shipping**

In June 1813, the Commercial Resident of Nagore, F. Richardson, submitted his annual reports on imports and exports at the ports in the Tanjore district. In describing the trade between Bengal and the Tanjore district, he noted that about twenty-eight vessels sailed

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<sup>82</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, March 1, 1827, Vol. 57, 61-138. TNSA.

annually to Bengal from the ports of Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal. With regards to the trade between Southeast Asian ports and Tanjore, he noted that Tamil Muslim merchants primarily conducted the trade. He noted that thirty, ten, and seventeen vessels with burthens<sup>83</sup> ranging from 100 to 400 tons sailed from Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal, respectively.<sup>84</sup>

In September 1834, the Principal Collector of Tanjore responded to a series of queries from the Board of Revenue about the economic conditions in the ports of Nagore and Nagapattinam. The Board of Revenue initiated the inquiries to ascertain the nature and extent of foreign trade in the various coastal district of the Madras Presidency. In compiling the report, the Collector N.W. Kindersley provided the following breakdown of the trading vessels at Nagore and Nagapattinam. The former port contained fifty-six vessels, of which twenty vessels with a combined tonnage of 3,304 tons sailed to Calcutta, Penang, Aceh, and other eastward ports. Among the remaining vessels, six undertook trading voyages to Sri Lanka and nine were engaged in coasting trade along India's Southeastern coast. At Nagapattinam, there were fifty-five vessels among which five vessels with a tonnage of 719 tons sailed to Calcutta and Southeast Asian ports. Among the remaining vessels, thirty-three traded with Sri Lanka and six were involved in the coasting trade.<sup>85</sup>

The following table (4.4) shows the data of arrival and departure of vessels commanded by Tamil Muslims at Penang. While the shipping lists provide a useful indicator of the number of vessels commanded by Tamil Muslims that sailed between South India and Penang, other types of records provide us with important details

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<sup>83</sup> Carrying capacity of a vessel.

<sup>84</sup> Tanjore District Records, June 25, 1813, Vol. 3337, 45-48. TNSA.

<sup>85</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, September 22, 1834. TNSA.



regarding additional aspects of Tamil Muslim shipping such as the names of merchants who shipped goods to eastward ports, the quantity shipped on each vessel, and the procurement of vessels by Tamil Muslim merchants.

Table 4.4: Arrival and departures of vessels commanded by Tamil Muslims at Penang<sup>86</sup>

- - several native arrivals and departures of no importance;
- \*\* - several additional small vessels from Coromandel coast

<b>Year</b>	<b>Arrivals at Penang</b>	<b>Departures to Coromandel coast Ports</b>
1808	12	2
1809		
1810	1	
1811	7	6
1812	2*	7
1813	11**	
1814	3	2
1815	22	7
1816	6	3
1817	4	2
1818	5	6
1819	10	5
1820	10	3
1821	6	5
1822	9	13
1823	10	8
1824	6	
1825	1	2
1826		
1827	16	
1828		8
1829	6	4
1830	2	4
1838	6	
1844	5	
1847	12	

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<sup>86</sup> This table was compiled from shipping information at Penang gathered from the following newspapers: *The Prince of Wales Island Gazette, Penang Register and Miscellany, Penang Gazette and Straits Chronicle,*

Ship owners and commanders frequently applied for passes to sail to ports not under the jurisdiction of the Madras Presidency. It is unclear whether such passes were required to sail to other Indian presidencies, such as Bengal and Bombay, since the records only contain requests to sail to ports lying beyond the Indian coast. The records contain only a few copies of the requests for sea passes. The applications provide information on the destination port of the vessel, the cargo, and details of the vessel such as its weight and the place of its construction. Examining these applications reveals that the ship owner did not always sail along with the vessel. In August 1816, “Soobramania Chitty,” a ship-owner from Nagore applied for a sea pass for his vessel *Cauder Moyadeen Bux*, built at Nagore with a burthen of 200 tons, and commanded by Peer Mohammadoo and destined to sail to eastern islands with a cargo of sundries.<sup>87</sup> In this case, the owner remained in Nagore and the vessel and the cargo to be sold in eastern ports was entrusted to a commander. In 1830, “Shaik Saib” of Cuddalore requested a sea pass for his vessel *Mydeen Bux* in order to sail to Penang and Aceh with a cargo of piece-goods under the commandership of “Nacoda Shaik Abdul Cauder.”<sup>88</sup> In other instances, the owner commanded his own ship on a trading voyage. In 1828, “Nacodah Cader Moyideen” claimed himself as the sole owner and commander of the Brigantine *Hamed Bux* with a burthen of 140 tons and requested a pass to sail to Penang and Singapore.

The applications also provide information on the transfer of ownership of vessels among merchants. In the previous example, the original documents submitted by Nacoda Shaik Abdul Cauder revealed that in 1824 “Yap Oankho” sold the vessel in Batavia to “Tan Bing Chong” for Sp\$ 1,580. A second bill of sale indicated the sale of the vessel to Cader Moyideen for Sp\$ 2,300. The Superintendent of Sea Customs at Cuddalore noted

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<sup>87</sup> Tanjore District Records, August 9, 1816, Vol. 3340, 50. TNSA.

<sup>88</sup> Public Consultations, June 9, 1830, Vol. 583, 1788-89. TNSA.

that the vessel underwent significant repairs at Porto Novo and he agreed with the owner's deposition that the replacement of the timbers cost him about Rs. 6,300.<sup>89</sup> In another case, "Cauder Mydeen" requested a pass for his vessel Syed Hydroos to sail from Cuddalore. He indicated that he bought the vessel from "Kong Twan" in Singapore.<sup>90</sup> In 1831, "Sheikh Amanullah" requested a pass for his vessel Brigantine Pasangan to sail to the West Coast of Sumatra with a cargo of blue cloth and tobacco. Amanullah claimed that he bought the vessel from "Chundrasagra Naik" and "Comerapah Naik."<sup>91</sup> Another application contained a request for a pass for Brigantine Moideen Bux that was built in Java.<sup>92</sup>

The applications for sea passes also indicate that vessels were continuing to be built along the Coromandel coast during the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1831, the list of registered vessels in Tanjore ports listed two vessels that were built in Nagapattinam in 1827 and 1828 and another vessel was built in Nagore in 1830.<sup>93</sup> Four applications for passes to sail to Sri Lanka indicated that two vessels were built in Karaikal in 1828 and 1830 and remaining two vessels were built in Nagore.<sup>94</sup> Even as late as 1837, "Ali Mercan" of Cuddalore requested a pass for his new vessel of 187 tons to sail to Melaka.<sup>95</sup> Unlike the larger vessels that sailed to Southeast Asia from Cuddalore, Porto Novo, Nagore, and Nagapattinam, the smaller boats with a carrying capacity of less than 100 tons were typically used in the trade between South Indian ports and Sri

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<sup>89</sup> Public Consultations, September 25, 1828, Vol. 564, 3321-22. TNSA.

<sup>90</sup> Public Consultations, June 29, 1830, Vol. 584, 2160-62. TNSA.

<sup>91</sup> Public Consultations, July 13, 1831, Vol. 593, 2587-88. TNSA.

<sup>92</sup> Public Consultations, October 8, 1828, Vol. 565, 3667-68. TNSA.

<sup>93</sup> Public Consultations, January 14, 1831, Vol. 588, 331-32. TNSA.

<sup>94</sup> Public Consultations, August 20, 1833, Vol. 614, 3279; Public Consultations, August 22, 1833, Vol. 614, 3280; Public Consultations, October 18, 1833, Vol. 615, 4061; Public Consultations, June 11, 1834, Vol. 622, 2019. TNSA.

<sup>95</sup> Public Consultations, April 22, 1837, Vol. 667, 2401-04. TNSA.

Lanka.<sup>96</sup> These smaller vessels were commonly known as “dhoney,” an Anglicization of “Thoni,” the Tamil word for a boat.<sup>97</sup>

The constant buying and selling of vessels by Tamil Muslim merchants at ports along the Coromandel coast and in Southeast Asia ports suggests their active participation in the maritime trade between South India and Southeast Asia. Besides purchasing used ships, Tamil Muslim merchants also invested in building new vessels and in one instance spent a large sum in refitting an old vessel. In fact, the continued existence of a shipbuilding and repair industry near the southern ports denotes the constant demand for new ships, more than the scattered references found in the EIC records. These efforts were not limited to Tamil Muslim merchants, although Muslim merchants accounted for a majority of transactions.

Information on the amounts of piece-goods shipped on the vessels can be obtained from the Statements of Drawback that listed the merchants who were entitled to a refund of five percent of the duties they paid on cotton goods after the goods were exported from India. In 1822, the drawback statement showed that twenty-four vessels sailed from Nagore to eastern ports with cotton piece-goods worth Rs. 133,000. In the same year, seven vessels sailed from Negapattinam and carried cotton goods worth Rs. 25, 000.<sup>98</sup> In 1823, the statements show that sixteen vessels sailed from Nagore with piece-goods worth Rs. 245,000.<sup>99</sup> In 1824, nine and six vessels sailed from Nagore and Nagapattinam

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<sup>96</sup> The smaller size of the vessels can be noted in the application for sea passes for proceeding to Sri Lanka. Such smaller vessels were also used in sailing between various ports along the Coromandel coast. See Public Consultations, August 20, 1833, Vol. 614, 3279; Public Consultations, August 22, 1833, Vol. 614, 3280; Public Consultations, October 18, 1833, Vol. 615, 4061; Public Consultations, June 11, 1834, Vol. 622, 2019. TNSA.

<sup>97</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, December 31, 1824, Vol. 53, 27-29; Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, April 20, 1829, Vol. 59, 220-23. TNSA.

<sup>98</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, March 26, 1823, Vol. 48, 247-49. TNSA.

<sup>99</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, December 17, 1823, Vol. 50, 120-22. TNSA.

with goods worth Rs. 75,000 and Rs. 58,000, respectively.<sup>100</sup> In 1828, fourteen vessels sailed from Nagore loaded with cotton goods worth Rs. 379,000 and seven vessels departed Nagapattinam with cotton goods worth Rs. 38,000.<sup>101</sup> In 1832, six vessels from Nagore departed to eastern ports with piece-goods worth Rs. 66,000 and three vessels from Nagapattinam carried cotton goods worth Rs. 108,000 to Penang and Aceh.<sup>102</sup>

The number of vessels listed in the Statements of Drawback provides a clear indication of the large number of vessels that were involved in carrying cotton piece-goods produced on the Coromandel coast. With few exceptions, most of the commanders of the vessels were Tamil Muslim merchants. Besides providing information on the number of vessels and the names of the commanders, the system of issuing Drawback also permits us to understand the number of merchants who were involved in the trade in cotton goods between South India and Southeast Asia. In 1841, the Collector of the Southern Division of Arcot wrote to the Secretary of the Board of Revenue that he had received 134 applications for Drawback over the past nine months and that he approved the claims of 70 merchants.<sup>103</sup> The notable aspect of the Collector's report is the large number of merchants who were still shipping Indian piece-goods to Southeast Asia as late as 1841 when the British cotton goods were being imported into Asian markets in large quantities.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This chapter set out to examine the condition of maritime trade conducted by Tamil Muslim merchants between 1800 and 1840. In order to do so, it was necessary to

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<sup>100</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, December 31, 1824, Vol. 53, 27-29. TNSA.

<sup>101</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, April 20, 1829, Vol. 59, 220-23. TNSA.

<sup>102</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings: Sea Customs, October 4, 1832, Vol. 66, 471-72. TNSA.

<sup>103</sup> Board of Revenue Proceedings, 22 May 1841. TNSA.

examine the trade in Indian cotton goods since these items formed the most important article of trade carried by these merchants. This chapter utilized a diverse array of sources, such as reports of external commerce, shipping lists, applications for sea passes, and drawback statements, to examine the trade in Indian cotton piece-goods from South India to Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka between 1800 and 1840 and to study the shipping activities of Tamil Muslim merchants during this period. The data examined in this chapter indicates that British cotton goods gradually displaced, although not completely, Indian piece-goods in Southeast Asian markets. Under such circumstances, the Tamil Muslim maritime merchants, who had used Indian piece goods as the staple items of export for several centuries, shifted to procuring British cottons in Southeast Asia and brought them to the Coromandel coast. They also began to import other items, such as betel nuts and pepper, from Malay ports in order to use them as remittances from eastern ports. The data on shipping also indicates that Tamil Muslim merchants remained highly active in the trade by building new ships, and procuring old vessels and refitting them. Besides the ship-owners and commanders, other merchants who were primarily involved in freighting space on vessels and carrying goods from one port to another continued to ship cotton piece-goods from South Indian ports to Southeast Asia. In the case of Sri Lanka, Indian cotton goods maintained their market-share in Sri Lanka during this period. While it is difficult to establish a baseline of the shipping of Tamil Muslims in 1800 in order to estimate the extent of change in shipping during the early to mid-nineteenth century, the changes adopted by Tamil Muslim merchants in response to declining sales of Indian cotton goods in Southeast Asia demonstrates the continued and active participation of these merchants in the maritime trade in the Indian Ocean.

The case of Tamil Muslim merchants during this period differs from those of Indian merchants in Bombay. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Indian merchant

groups in Bombay that were involved in shipping included Parsis, Konkani Muslims, Gujarati Hindus, and Jains.<sup>104</sup> Asiya Siddiqi closely examined the mercantile activities of Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, a prominent Parsi merchant, and identified the following sources of his income: profits from trade on his own account, interest on loans, dividends from his shares in maritime insurance companies, and commission on the sale of bills of exchange.<sup>105</sup> Jamsetjee's trading on his account was primarily focused on the export of opium and cotton from India to China. In the opium trade he partnered with James Matheson and William Jardine who maintained the most successful opium business at Canton. Despite possessing a diverse portfolio of commercial ventures and a strong partnership with successful English merchants, Siddiqi notes the decline of Jamsetjee's shipping trade and attributes it to the increasing participation of English private merchants in trade between India and China. As a result, Jamsetjee and other Indian shippers faced two problems. First, they gradually became unable to send the remittances of their trade back to India in an optimal manner. Since the credit networks of British merchants were extensive, they were able to send the bills of exchange from China to Bombay, Calcutta, or London and obtain favorable rates of exchange. But Indian merchants did not possess such extensive credit networks and so they were forced to accept unfavorable rates of exchange in India. In some instances, Jamsetjee was unable to procure bills of exchange on Bombay and his remittances were sent to London. In order to return his money to India, he was forced to purchase English cotton goods and ship them to India. Such an action, if practiced more commonly by Indian merchants, could partially explain the growing volume of English goods in Indian markets. The second

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<sup>104</sup> Asiya Siddiqi, "The Business World of Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy," in *Trade and Finance in Colonial India, 1750-1860*, ed. Asiya Siddiqi (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 191.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

problem for Indian shippers as a consequence of the increased participation of English merchants in Asian trade was the lowering of freight rates from India to China. Siddiqi notes that the English sailing vessels sometimes offered freight rates that were less than half of the lowest rates offered by Indian shippers. Faced with such mounting problems, Jamsetjee sold his larger ships and maintained just a smaller vessel, possibly around 300 tons.<sup>106</sup> Marika Vicziany has documented a similar process between 1850 and 1880 during which foreign firms took over both the trade and shipping of raw cotton from Bombay.<sup>107</sup> In Calcutta, N.K. Sinha notes the disappearance of Muslim merchants from maritime trade in the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1848, following the collapse and liquidation of the Union Bank, which was established by Calcutta's indigenous merchants in 1829, Hindu merchants also withdrew from participation in business ventures. To be sure, Sinha's observations on the decline of Hindu businessmen were primarily on the collaboration between Indian and European merchants.<sup>108</sup>

The case of Tamil Muslim merchants differed from those of Indian merchants in Bombay in several ways. First, the Tamil Muslims were not as tightly integrated with English private merchants as was the case in Bombay. The following chapter discusses the partnership(s) between Tamil Muslims and English merchants but the extent was limited. Second, Tamil Muslims did not depend on as much on using bills of exchange to bring remittances from Southeast Asia to South India. These merchants brought back gold dust, Spanish dollars, and other items. Third, the Tamil Muslims' ships were small and medium-sized vessels ranging from 80 tons to about 250 tons. Therefore the costs of

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 196-217.

<sup>107</sup> Marika Vicziany, "Bombay Merchants and Structural Changes in the Export Community, 1850 to 1880," in *Trade and Finance in Colonial India, 1750-1860*, ed. Asiya Siddiqi (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 345-82.

<sup>108</sup> Narendra Krishna Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal, 1793-1848, Volume III* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1970), 105-27.



sailing and maintaining large vessels did not affect the Tamil Muslim merchants. At the same time, the entry of English cotton goods in Southeast Asian markets forced the Tamil Muslims to seek alternative ways to sustain their trade between South India and Southeast Asia.

## Appendix I

Table 1: Trade between ports in Tanjore and Southern Division of Arcot with Eastward ports<sup>1</sup>

- Information for this year was not available (Madras Rs.).

Year	S. Div. of Arcot			Tanjore		
	Imp. From Eastward	Imp. Of Treasure	Exp. To Eastward	Imp. From Eastward	Imp. Of Treasure	Exp. To Eastward
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
1802	45000	*	108000	330000	*	350000
1803	108000	*	58000	361000	*	511000
1804	52000	*	55000	347000	153000	152000
1805	133000	58000	203000	444000	17000	252000
1806	121000	52000	125000	321000	60000	338000
1807	182000	76000	236000	377000	170000	445000
1808	198000	98000	169000	387000	101000	264000
1809	76000	58000	91000	234000	129000	333000
1810	178000	176000	149000	546000	92000	347000
1811	153000	*	404000	501000	*	410000
1812	116000	*	289000	327000	*	624000
1813	76000	254000	169000	319000	398000	215000
1814	122000	93000	194000	141000	8000	259000
1815	277000	207000	179000	297000	408000	359000
1816	147000	272000	131000	159000	84000	297000
1817	194000	130000	223000	183000	305000	218000
1818	97000	69000	330000	132000	226000	247000
1820	152000	85000	504000	181000	331000	239000
1821	118000	129000	900000	146000	412000	432000
1822	100000	64000	596000	200000	466000	527000
1823	156000	171000	691000	215000	184000	377000
1824	*	162000	*	*	382000	*

<sup>1</sup> The information in this table was compiled from a large set of Reports of External Commerce prepared by the EIC officials in the Madras Presidency. These records can be found in the Tamil Nadu State Archives in Chennai and in the India Office Records collections in the British Library in London. The following records were used to compile this table. The code IOR refers to records from the India Office Records collection in the British Library. IOR/P/339/75, IOR/P/339/76, IOR/P/339/78, IOR/P/339/79, IOR/P/339/84, IOR/P/339/85, IOR/P/339/90, IOR/P/339/94, IOR/P/339/99, IOR/P/339/104, IOR/P/339/109, IOR/P/339/115, IOR/P/339/120, IOR/P/339/124, IOR/P/339/128, IOR/P/339/133, IOR/P/339/135, IOR/P/339/137, IOR/P/339/141, IOR/P/339/145, IOR/P/339/147, IOR/P/339/149, IOR/P/339/153, IOR/P/339/155, IOR/P/339/159, IOR/P/339/166, IOR/P/340/1, IOR/P/340/8, IOR/P/340/13, IOR/P/340/15, IOR/P/340/19, IOR/P/340/24, IOR/P/340/26, IOR/P/340/28.

Table 2: Export value of Indian cotton piece-goods (1820-41) (Madras Rs.).<sup>2</sup>

Year	Cuddalore (Madras Rs.)	Nagore (Madras Rs.)	Total (Madras Rs.)
1820/21	521000	360000	881000
1821/22	898000	539000	1437000
1822/23	614000	570000	1184000
1823/24	717000	476000	1193000
1824/25	564000	384000	947000
1825/26	391000	257000	648000
1826/27	477000	312000	790000
1827/28	573000	563000	1136000
1828/29	684000	647000	1331000
1829/30	422000	487000	909000
1830/31	113000	327000	440000
1831/32	266000	411000	677000
1832/33	335000	574000	909000
1833/34	395000	715000	1110000
1835/36	197000	743000	940000
1836/37	126000	634000	760000
1837/38	*	*	*
1838/39	183000	582000	766000
1839/40	254000	404000	659000
1840/41	359000	576000	935000

<sup>2</sup> This table was compiled from data gathered from several volumes of Sea Customs records in Tamil Nadu State Archives for the years included in the table. See Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 46, May 1, 1821; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 48, January 24, 1823; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 50, February 1, 1824; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 53, January 31, 1825; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 55, February 15, 1826; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 57, March 1, 1827; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 58, 1828; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 59, March 10, 1829; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 61, December 24, 1829; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 65, January 9, 1832; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 67, March 18, 1833; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 70, April 30, 1834; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 71, February 28, 1835; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 78, March 5, 1838; Board of Revenue: Sea Customs, Vol. 85, June 29, 1841.

Table 3: Value of exports of cotton goods to Sri Lanka (Madras Rs.).<sup>3</sup>

- Data not available

<b>Year</b>	<b>Madras Rs.</b>
1823/24	697000
1824/25	525000
1825/26	358000
1826/27	490000
1827/28	727000
1828/29	852000
1829/30	987000
1830/31	822000
1831/32	950000
1832/33	739000
1833/34	*
1834/35	*
1835/36	*
1836/37	*
1837/38	*
1838/39	665000
1839/40	773000
1840/41	1017000

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<sup>3</sup> See fn. 47.

## **Chapter 5: Elements of Trade: Subjecthood, Labor Recruitment, and Raising Capital.**

### **I. Introduction**

The previous two chapters focused primarily on the commodities that were traded by Tamil Muslim merchants, particularly salt, conch shells, pearls, and textiles. The chapters examined how the Tamil Muslim merchants took advantage of the East India Company's necessity both to transport salt from South India to Bengal and to generate revenue from marine sources along the Coromandel coast. In the case of textiles, the staple item of export from India, the merchants faced a setback due to the introduction of British cotton goods in Asian markets. But they adopted a set of practices, such as finding alternate products to bring back to India in lieu of gold dust and switching to trade in English cotton textiles, which helped the merchants to overcome the challenges caused by the decline in the sale of Indian textiles in Southeast Asian markets.

While commodities form the most important aspect of trade, several other factors play a significant role in affecting the mercantile operations of merchants. Some of the obvious factors are raising capital to build ships and to procure cargo, availability of bulk goods as freight that would serve as the ship's ballast, finding sufficient number of traders to rent space on the vessel, access to currency exchange facilities at ports, ease of disposal of cargo in markets, and the presence of legal mechanisms to settle disputes. Besides these issues, there are other less evident aspects that play an important role in facilitating maritime trade. One such element is the subjecthood of the merchants, also expressed as the "flag" under which the ship sailed or the sailing pass carried by the ship's commander. Despite its abstract character, subjecthood had real and concrete implications for maritime trade. The Indian Ocean region in the late eighteenth and the

early nineteenth centuries was characterized by multiple and competing sovereignties. Under such circumstances, pledges of allegiance had important ramifications for traders since they either provided valuable commercial advantages by providing preferential access to markets and favorable port duties, or denied such advantages to those who were viewed as loyal to rival sovereigns. The second lesser-known factor in maritime trade relates to recruitment of labor, both for carrying out the ship's operations and for assisting the merchants in distant ports. The availability and cost of labor was an important issue since it had a direct impact on the ability of ship-owners to send vessels on trade voyages and also affected the extent of profits that could be earned on such trips.

This chapter discusses three distinct themes, subjecthood, labor recruitment, and capital accumulation, which taken together help us in understanding the organization of trade by Tamil Muslim merchants. The first section of the chapter considers how Tamil Muslim merchants understood the meaning of British subjecthood and also explores the implications of such claims on their maritime trade. The second section examines the allegations of slave trade in children that were leveled against Tamil Muslims by the English East India Company (EIC) officials. Rather than viewing these allegations as part of the efforts to abolish slavery in India or the transportation of slaves in the Indian Ocean, the section attempts to understand these charges of child trafficking by situating them within the trade practices of Tamil Muslims. The final part of the chapter studies the various ways by which Tamil Muslim merchants raised capital for their trading activities.

## **II. British Subjecthood**

On 15 February 1808, a group of ship-owning maritime merchants in Nagore submitted a petition to the Collector of Tanjore requesting him to notify the Admiral of the English fleet not to capture their vessels sailing under Danish flags that were

returning to Nagore from Southeast Asian ports. The petitioners indicated that due to the long ongoing Napoleonic wars in Europe between France and Great Britain, French privateers had previously captured and sold their vessels and cargo as war prizes because they were sailing under British flags. To avoid further loss, the merchants claimed that they obtained Danish flags for their vessels from the Danish-controlled South Indian port town of Tranquebar (present name Tharangambadi) since Denmark had remained neutral in the Napoleonic wars. The merchants had sent their vessels under the neutral Danish flags to Aceh, Melaka, Penang, and Bengal. While some vessels had returned safely, others were still on their way to Nagore. However, as Denmark had recently entered the war as France's ally, the merchants feared that their ships returning from Southeast Asia might be captured by the British navy as enemy vessels and sold as war prizes. The merchants, therefore, requested the Collector to issue instructions to the "Admiral or any Commanders of ships ... to pass unmolested" any vessels that belonged to Nagore.<sup>1</sup> The merchants in Cuddalore and Porto Novo submitted similar petitions to the Collector of the Southern Division of Arcot.<sup>2</sup> Despite the merchants' pleas, some vessels were captured as enemy property.<sup>3</sup> In subsequent petitions, the merchants identified themselves as British subjects and the ships and the cargo to be British property. Thus, they argued, the British navy could not seize and sell their property.

This section examines these petitions to analyze how these maritime merchants understood and utilized the notion of British Subjecthood during the early nineteenth century. The merchants did not use the term "British subject" as a simple identifier; rather they explained the bases for their claims to British subjecthood and demonstrated a

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<sup>1</sup> Public Consultations, February 15, 1808, Vol. 339, 1312-16. Tamil Nadu State Archives, hereafter TNSA.

<sup>2</sup> Public Consultations, March 12, 1808, Vol. 340, 2137-40. TNSA.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.; Public Consultations, July 15, 1808, Vol. 345, 5451-55. TNSA.

nuanced understanding of the East India Company's obligations towards British subjects and their property.

## **II (a). The Petitioners**

The merchants submitted a number of petitions both prior to and after the capture of some vessels. Of these several petitions, about eight can be found in the archives.<sup>4</sup> Among the eight petitions, two from Nagore and one each from Cuddalore and Porto Novo were submitted by the merchants who sought to prevent their ships being captured.<sup>5</sup> Despite the submission of the four petitions, six vessels were detained as enemy vessels. Subsequently, two petitions were submitted by separate groups of merchants who had freighted goods on board two of the vessels that were captured.<sup>6</sup> Allamiah Nagoda, the owner of two captured vessels, submitted the seventh petition<sup>7</sup> and the eighth petition was submitted by a group of merchants from Nagore, Nagapattinam, Karaikal, and Tirumalarayapatnam who wrote on behalf of the owners of a captured vessel.<sup>8</sup>

Two categories of merchants submitted the aforementioned petitions: ship-owners and traders who freighted space on the vessels. The majority of the petitions were submitted by the ship-owners from the port towns of Nagore, Nagapattinam, Karaikal, Cuddalore, and Thirumalairayanpattinam. Two groups of ship-owners in Nagore submitted similar petitions to different district officials in which they requested a safe

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<sup>4</sup> The communications among EIC officials indicate the presence of several petitions. See the comment by Thomas Newnham, British Commissioner of Tranquebar about his repeated efforts to prevent the merchants from "continually crowding petitions ... to the government of Madras." See IOR/F/4/340/7932, India Office Records, British Library (London), hereafter IOR.

<sup>5</sup> Public Consultations, February 15, 1808, Vol. 339, 1312-16; Public Consultations, March 12, 1808, Vol. 340, 2137-40. TNSA.

<sup>6</sup> Public Consultations, April 26, 1808, Vol. 341, 3292-93. TNSA; IOR/F/4/340/7932, IOR.

<sup>7</sup> Public Consultations, July 15, 1808, Vol. 345, 5451-55. TNSA.

<sup>8</sup> Public Consultations, March 12, 1808, Vol. 340, 2137-40. TNSA.



passage for their vessels. This suggests a certain degree of coordination among various merchants and also reveals an effort by them to secure the attention of EIC officials by communicating their appeals to multiple officials in different departments. Similarly, merchants in Cuddalore and Porto Novo submitted petitions with the exact same content to the district officials. This reveals a significant level of organization and cohesion among these ship-owners residing in various towns, which arose from the interconnected nature of maritime trade in the region. This is clearly revealed in the petitions submitted by ship-owners following the capture of some vessels. The following table (5.1) shows the details of the ships that were detained by British officers for sailing under Danish flags.

Table 5.1: Details of ships detained for sailing under Danish flags.<sup>9</sup>

<b>Names of Vessels</b>	<b>Names of owners, residence</b>	<b>In whose name the Danish passport and colors were taken</b>	<b>Quantity of goods exported</b>	<b>Destination</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Khader Bux	Comarapa Naik, Hudunmer Cawn, Fackery Saib (Cuddalore and Porto Novo)	Comarapa Naik of Cuddalore	Cloth, tobacco, and the produce of the Company's territories	Penang & Kedah	Detained by His Majesty's Ship Victor with elephants
Mahommud Bux	Comarapa Naik, Vauvaumer Cawn	Ditto	Ditto, sundries goods	Ditto	Detained at Penang with elephants
Moideen Bux	Alleemiah	Alleemiah of Porto Novo	Ditto	Ditto	Detained by HMS Victor with elephants
Tadyelaky	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
Moideen Cauder Bux	Levy Vappoo of Nagore. Natchiar Moideen Cundoo ( Karaikal)	Levy Vappoo of Nagore. Natchiar Moideen Cundoo of Karical	Ditto	Penang	Stopped by HM Ship Victor
Cauder Bux	Peersah Nagodah, deceased	Aboohas – Chitty Mercoir, son of Peersah Nagodah	Ditto	Penang and Melaka coast	Stopped by HM Ship Victor

<sup>9</sup> Tanjore District Records, March 21, 1808, Vol. 3404, 48-53; Tanjore District Records, April 26, 1808, Vol. 3404, 246-52. TNSA.

In one case, the British naval ship *HMS Victor* captured a vessel named *Moideen Cauder Bux* that belonged to two Nagore merchants, Levoy Vaupah Mahlen and Moyedin Caudoo Mercoir. The ship-owners from Nagore, Nagapattinam, and Karaikal asserted on behalf of the ship-owners that the vessel indeed belonged to the two merchants and declared that the merchandise and treasure aboard the captured vessel was owned by merchants residing in several ports on the Coromandel coast.<sup>10</sup> In another instance, Allemiah Nagoda, a ship-owner from Porto Novo, sought redress for the capture of two of his vessels – *Moideen Bux* and *Tadyelaky* – by *HMS Victor* and noted that the confiscation had caused significant losses to him and to “all the persons who advanced and sent money” for the trade with Southeast Asian ports.<sup>11</sup> Tamil-speaking Muslims formed a majority of ship-owners. But the group also included some members from the Hindu Chettiar community.<sup>12</sup>

The second group of petitioners consisted of the traders who freighted their goods on the vessels. Typically, such traders paid a fee to the ship-owners to carry them and their cargo to distant ports where they sold their goods and returned home with new cargo and treasure. A list of the passengers aboard the captured ship *Cauder Bux*, which belonged to Peersah Nagoda, reveals that there were about seven merchants from Cuddalore, two from Porto Novo, four from Karaikal, sixteen from Nagore, twelve from Nagapattinam, and one each from Penang and Thalacherry. An account of the passengers’ property shows the wide differences among them, with some merchants, such as Nagodah Saib, possessing goods and money worth about 15,000 Spanish Dollars, and

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<sup>10</sup> Public Consultations, March 12, 1808, Vol. 340, 2137-40. TNSA.

<sup>11</sup> Public Consultations, July 15, 1808, Vol. 345, 5451-55. TNSA.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; Tanjore District Records, February 18, 1808, Vol. 3219. TNSA.

several merchants who carried goods worth only a few hundred Spanish Dollars.<sup>13</sup> Besides claiming protection for their property, the traders protested that they should not be punished for the commander's decision to display Danish flags. They asserted that the ship was under British colors at the port in Southeast Asia when they loaded their cargo. As in the case of the group of ship-owners, Tamil-speaking Muslims formed a majority. Unlike the first group, however, members from the Hindu Chetty community formed a sizeable minority within this group.<sup>14</sup>

## **II (b). The Petitions**

Scholars have studied the issue of British subjecthood from several vantage points. From a legal and constitutional perspective, several studies exist on the construction of subjecthood within the United Kingdom as the Crown and the Parliament addressed the issue of people of different confessions (Catholics, Jews) and the incorporation of the Welsh, the Irish, and the Scots within the empire.<sup>15</sup> Scholars such as Linda Colley have examined how external events also shaped the formation of ideas of British subjecthood.<sup>16</sup> With the establishment of European colonies around the world, the idea of subjecthood received greater attention as judges, lawyers, litigants, and administrators in Europe and the colonies sought to define the rules for categorizing people as subjects and aliens.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.; IOR/F/4/340/7932. IOR.

<sup>15</sup> For a summary of various debates within the United Kingdom on this issue, see Sudipta Sen, "Imperial Subjects on Trial: On the Legal Identity of Britons in Late Eighteenth-Century India," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 3 (July 2006): 532-555.

<sup>16</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Lauren Benton and Richard J. Ross, eds., *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500-1850* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Anthony Pagden, "Fellow Citizens and Imperial Subjects: Conquest and Sovereignty in Europe's Overseas Empires," *History and Theory, Theme Issue* 44, no. 4 (December 2005): 28-46.

In the context of the East India Company's rule in India, discussions over the extent of the Company's sovereignty and the status of Indians residing within its territories went hand in hand. Sudipta Sen has argued that the sovereignty of the EIC was ill-defined as it sought to rule India while not wishing to appear as usurping authority from the Mughal rulers.<sup>18</sup> Under such conditions, questions regarding the definition of a British subject in India underwent constant reinterpretations. Such discussions typically took place in the courts administered by the Company during the adjudication of civil or criminal cases. Thus, the studies of these valuable legal records have provided us detailed descriptions on the fashioning of colonial identities through courts, the legal status of Britons in India, and the demarcation of racial boundaries in the colonial justice system.<sup>19</sup>

According to Sudipta Sen, judges in Calcutta's Supreme Court of Judicature in the late eighteenth century defined subjecthood on the basis of "allegiance" to the Crown and laws of England.<sup>20</sup> Sen notes that the debates on defining rules for identifying proper subjects mainly focused on European natives in India. He also observes that such discussions were crucial in formulating a hierarchy of subject races in the territories administered by the Company. In Sen's view, the ruling minority formed the "principal core of subjects around which others could be arranged."<sup>21</sup> In a recent article, Mitch Fraas

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<sup>18</sup> Sudipta Sen, *Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British-India* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Niels Brimnes, "Beyond Colonial Law: Indigenous Litigation and Contestation of Property in the Mayor's Court in Late-Eighteenth Century Madras," *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 2003): 513-50; Mattison Mines, "Courts of Law and Styles of Self in Eighteenth-Century Madras: From Hybrid to Colonial Self," *Modern Asian Studies* 35, no. 1 (2001): 3-74; Pamela G. Price, "The 'Popularity' of the Imperial Court of Law: Three Views of the Anglo-Indian Legal Encounter," in *European Expansion and Law: The Encounters of European and Indigenous Law in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Africa and Asia*, eds. W.J. Mommsen and M. de Moor (Oxford, Berg 1992), 179-200; Lauren Benton, "Colonial Law and Cultural Difference: Jurisdictional Politics and the Formation of the Colonial State," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 3 (1999): 563-88; Elizabeth Buettner, "Problematic Spaces, Problematic Races: Defining 'Europeans' in Late Colonial India," *Women's History Review* 9, no. 2 (2000): 277-98.

<sup>20</sup> Sen, "Imperial Subjects on Trial," 549-550.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 555.

examined the claims and strategies of Indian litigants in EIC-managed courts in India and in the legal institutions in Britain. He noted that Indian litigants proclaimed themselves as British subjects to sue in British courts and that they based their claims on their period of residence in Company-controlled territories and their amenability to English law.<sup>22</sup>

Sen and Fraas provide useful insights into the ways in which EIC officials defined the terms of British subjecthood and how Indians in the EIC-controlled territories proclaimed themselves as British subjects. An examination of the petitions submitted by Tamil Muslim merchants and others shows that these merchants also based their claims to be British subjects on their residency within EIC-controlled territories. But the case of the maritime merchants differs from those of the residents discussed by Sen and Fraas. First, the itinerant nature of their profession meant that the maritime merchants and traders moved constantly and stayed in different locations for extended periods of time. Second, the maritime traders traveled to several ports in the Indian Ocean region that were still outside the control of the East India Company during the early nineteenth century. In Southeast Asia, the East India Company's territorial possessions only included Penang and Benkulen. Several ports in the region lay under the authority of local rulers. In South India, although the EIC attained greater political authority and military dominance by the beginning of the nineteenth century, other European trading companies possessed ports under their authority: the French in Pondicherry and Karaikal and the Danes in Tranquebar. At a time when sovereignty in the region was shared among several, and often times competing, sources of authority, pledges of loyalty and claims of subjecthood assume greater significance since it guaranteed political protection and economic benefits on the one hand or persecution and ruin on the other.

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<sup>22</sup> Mitch Fraas, "Making Claims: Indian Litigants and the Expansion of the English Legal World in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2014).

The merchants used the term “British subjects” to identify themselves in these petitions. A petition, submitted by a group of merchants, claimed, “your petitioners who are from time immemorial living under the protection of the Honorable Company and of course British subjects have no other resource for the support of themselves and families but the maritime commerce.”<sup>23</sup> In July 1808 Allahmiah Nakhoda protested against the capture of his two ships and indicated “[that] from the commencement of the English colony in the coast of Choromandel, your petitioner being as His Brittanick Majesty's subject had been following in the profession of trade by sea under the British territories.”<sup>24</sup> The group of traders who freighted goods on a captured vessel declared, “we are ... inhabitants of the territories of the British government ... we have always acted and continue to act as British subjects.”<sup>25</sup> In declaring themselves British subjects, the petitioners emphasized their long period of stay in EIC-controlled territories in order to provide a contrast to their possession of Danish passes that were obtained merely as a temporary measure. By underscoring their long period of domicile in the Company’s port-towns, the merchants were also implying their contribution towards the trade in EIC territories.

An important point is that the petitioners did not use the term “British subjects” as a simple identifier. The petitioners demonstrated a keen understanding of the meaning of the term, the requirements for being a British subject, and, very importantly, a nuanced interpretation of the obligations of the East India Company toward its subjects. The petitioners understood that fidelity to the East India Company was an important condition of their British subjecthood. The petitions reveal that the merchants understood loyalty to

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<sup>23</sup> Public Consultations, March 12, 1808, Vol. 340, 2137-40. TNSA.

<sup>24</sup> Public Consultations, July 15, 1808, Vol. 345, 5451-55. TNSA.

<sup>25</sup> Public Consultations, April 26, 1808, Vol. 341, 3292-93. TNSA

the Company as comprised of two elements. First, it involved residing in EIC-administered regions. This condition was also found in the cases discussed by Sudipta Sen and Mitch Fraas, in which residency within the Company's territories was a precondition for any claims to British subjecthood. As suggested above, the petitioners pointed to their long years of residence and the location of their property in the Company's port-towns as signs of their loyalty.

In the case of the merchants, however, the itinerant nature of their profession meant absence from the Company's territories for extended periods of time. Therefore, as a second condition, the merchants made their claims to British subjecthood on the basis of their trade to and from British-controlled areas. In one petition, the petitioners, after identifying themselves as British subjects, indicated that they "accordingly are in the habit of collecting goods of the Company's territory and sending them from this port on board their own ships to Penang, Quedah, and Acheen."<sup>26</sup> Since several ports in Southeast Asia were not administered by the Company, the petitioners indicated that they never traded with any "class of people whatever in enmity with the British nation but have confined our commerce to states still at peace with it [Britain]."<sup>27</sup> Another group of petitioners stated they were residents in the territories of the Company, "the places of our nativity, our residences and our prosperity being there."<sup>28</sup> Repeatedly, the petitioners pointed out that they never belonged to Tranquebar and that the Danish passes were obtained when Denmark and Britain were at peace with each other and that they "never

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<sup>26</sup> Public Consultations, March 12, 1808, Vol. 340, 2137-40. TNSA.

<sup>27</sup> Public Consultations, April 26, 1808, Vol. 341, 3292-93. TNSA

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

did nor do possess any allegiance to the Danish government and utterly deny connection or interest with the Danish people of the territory of Tranquebar.”<sup>29</sup>

The merchants indicated that the proof of their loyalty, in the form of trade to and from Company ports and trade dealings with friendly rulers, could be found in the records of the district offices and payment of port duties in the Sea Customs offices. Besides such records, the merchants offered the cargo manifests of the ships and the invoices for the goods as proof that they were actually British subjects despite sailing under Danish colors. The petitioners also indicated that the location of their houses and possession of extensive properties in British controlled territory offered sufficient evidence of their loyalty.<sup>30</sup> The merchants understood fidelity to the government in primarily economic terms such as property ownership in British territories, trading to and from British ports, and carrying goods produced or manufactured in British territories.

In addition to providing details about how South Indian maritime merchants understood the requisites of British Subjecthood, the petitions also reveal what the merchants expected from the East India Company in return for their loyalty. The petitioners expected the East India Company to protect them and their property. For the ship-owners and traders, the property consisted of the actual vessel, the cargo, and treasure in the form of gold dust and gold and silver coins. In one of the first petitions submitted to the Collector of Tanjore, the merchants reminded him of their presence in Nagore ever since the port was acquired by the Company and that they had always previously received protection for their mercantile transactions.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Public Consultations, March 12, 1808, Vol. 340, 2137-40; Public Consultations, April 26, 1808, Vol. 341, 3292-93. TNSA.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Public Consultations, February 15, 1808, Vol. 339, 1312-16. TNSA.



In another petition, the traders who had freighted space on the vessel captured by *HMS Victor*, *Cauder Bux*, stated that they were “living and trading under the full protection of its laws” and they added that the property on a captured ship was their own and “consequently British property and can only be regarded in that light.” The petition informed the British authorities that the property on the captured ships included remittances sent from Southeast Asia to South India. They reminded the authorities that since the persons sending such remittances were employed or trading in British controlled territories in Southeast Asia and sending money to their families, who were British subjects, it was incumbent upon the British government to protect the property and ensure its safety since a failure to do so would result in misery for the families. The traders also suggested that they should not be punished for the ship’s commander’s decision to display a Danish flag and sought the separation of their freighted property from that of the ship’s owner and commander. The petitioners displayed a nuanced understanding of subjecthood and hoped that the proclamations of “His Britannic Majesty,” which guaranteed safety to all British property that was shipped on Danish vessels when the two nations were still at peace, could equally apply to “British subjects in India.”<sup>32</sup> This suggests that the petitioners were conscious of a hierarchy of subjecthood in the British empire and were aware of the protections guaranteed by the king and sought to negotiate the same level of protection given to all British subjects and their property.

## **II (c). British Subjecthood and Multiple Sovereignties**

While the Tamil maritime merchants acquired Danish passes as a temporary mechanism to avoid French privateers, the petitions discussed above reveal that these merchants

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<sup>32</sup> Public Consultations, April 26, 1808, Vol. 341, 3292-93. TNSA

resided and traded from EIC-administered territories and sailed using British passes. Such a practice of declaring allegiance to a single political authority and sailing under the protection of that authority had important consequences for the maritime merchants in a trading zone in which several sources of political authority competed for sovereignty, particularly in the early nineteenth century.

In September 1812, a new vessel, *Annapoorny*, built at Nagore and owned by Condapah Chitty, a Hindu merchant from Nagapattinam, set out for Tappanooly on the West Coast of Sumatra with a cargo of salt and cotton piece-goods. The vessel was commanded by Seyed and the owner assigned a supercargo<sup>33</sup> named Coopa Tomby to the vessel. After sailing for about twenty-two days, the vessel stopped at “Soosoo” for three days to replenish their supplies. The King of Aceh, Sultan All-ud-Din Johor Allum Shah, reached the place and took away about 4000 Spanish Dollars worth of cotton goods. Initially, he demanded the goods on credit and later declared that the goods were duties and provided a written permission to trade in his territories. The vessel proceeded to Sinkell where the cargo was exchanged for Benjamin<sup>34</sup> and pepper and the merchants traded for about three months. The vessel did not proceed to Tappanooly owing to bad weather but the commander sailed to Tappanooly separately to deliver a letter regarding the ship’s cargo. In early March, the vessel set sail on its return journey to Nagapattinam and was stopped by a vessel belonging to the King of Aceh at “Poolo Dua.” The vessel was captured and the crewmembers were arrested. The commander was sentenced to fourteen years in prison and the others were promised they would be set free after the King’s fleet reached Telok Samoy. The commander was given such a severe sentence because the ruler considered him to be an Acehnese subject and punished him for acting

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<sup>33</sup> A supercargo was a representative of the ship’s owner and supervised the sale of the cargo.

<sup>34</sup> Benzoin or gum Benjamin, a type of resin used in producing perfumes and in medicines.

against royal authority. The supercargo stated that this was only partly true as the commander was a native of Porto Novo and had a family in Nagore. At the same time, he had also married an Acehnese woman and had a family in Aceh. As a result of this marriage, Aceh's ruler viewed the commander as his subject and declared his actions as treasonous. Eventually, the ship's supercargo escaped custody after two months and reached Penang where he narrated the entire episode to EIC officials.<sup>35</sup>

Initially, the King's officials informed the crew that their detention was caused by the commander's visit to Tappanooly, where he was supposed to have informed some Europeans that the ruler had unlawfully confiscated the cargo. Later, the crew was charged with trading at Sinkell, a place that was believed to be a stronghold of rebels challenging the King of Aceh.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Sinkell was strategically located along the pepper growing districts in Aceh and posed a significant challenge to the ruler's efforts to control the pepper trade. Several vessels bypassed his authority and traded independently with Sinkell. In addition, the ruler sought to consolidate all trade with Europeans at the ports of Banda Aceh and Telok Samoy. But the European merchants in Penang wished to have unhindered access to all ports in Aceh.<sup>37</sup> Both developments indicate an effort by Aceh's ruler to assert his sovereignty that was challenged both by rebels within his kingdom and by foreign maritime merchants.

The ship's owner and crewmembers sought redress from the Governor and his council in Penang "as subjects under the protection of the British flag." The Governor of Penang wrote to the King of Aceh that the ship's crewmembers were "subjects of the

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<sup>35</sup> This entire account of the ship's journey and capture is based on the depositions provided by the ship's owner and crew. Public Consultations, August 20, 1813, Vol. 412, 5682-85. TNSA.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Lee Kam Hing, "Foreigners in Acehnese Court, 1760-1819," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 43, no. 1 (1970): 76-79.

British government of Madras and that the vessel was trading under English colours” and sought the release of the ship’s commander. He sent a British naval ship *HMS Africaine* to Aceh and instructed the ship’s captain to inquire into the incident.<sup>38</sup> Upon the arrival of *HMS Africaine*, Aceh’s ruler released the commander of *Annapoorny* and the rest of the crew members. The king had already sold the vessel’s cargo but the ship was brought back to Penang. Aceh’s ruler challenged the shipowner’s depiction of events and asserted that the vessel was trading unlawfully and claimed that he would “not suffer any foreign power to alter the laws and usages of my country or intimidate me from preserving my revenues.”<sup>39</sup>

Sultan Johor Allum pointed out that the *Annapoorny* did not have any “English commanders, no English pass or port clearance” and asserted that the ship was sailing under “red colors with a moor in them” at the time of its capture. The ruler informed the captain of *HMS Africaine* that native vessels navigated by Muslim commanders were allowed to sell their goods on shore after paying duties to the King. On the other hand, European vessels commanded by “Christians” were only allowed to trade with the headmen in the districts or the King’s merchant, but they did not pay any duties since the headmen or the King’s merchant provided an account of the profit to the ruler. The King added that “consequently we cannot suffer a native vessel on hoisting English colors to evade the duties, yet as Mahometans have the privilege of trading and retailing their goods on shore. They must either come to this country avowedly in one capacity or the other and not by hoisting Mahometan colors one day and English the other ... to the total evading of all established duties.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Public Consultations, August 20, 1813, Vol. 412, 5682-85. TNSA.

<sup>39</sup> Public Consultations, August 25, 1813, Vol. 412, 5718-20. TNSA.

<sup>40</sup> Public Consultations, August 28, 1813, Vol. 412, 5727-34. TNSA.

While Sultan Johor Allum's reasons for capturing the *Annapoorny* and detaining the crew might have been different from those stated by him in his correspondence with EIC officials, the important point to note is the way in which the declaration of allegiance to a political authority and the carrying of passes affected the dynamics of maritime trade. In the case of *Annapoorny's* commander, Aceh's king considered him an Acehnese subject because he possessed a family in Aceh, even though he was a native of Porto Novo and considered himself a British subject. In addition, Aceh's maritime laws only recognized European vessels and native vessels, with the former commanded by "Christians" and the latter by "Mahometans." The rules for levying duties were framed accordingly. When Tamil Muslim merchants declared themselves as British subjects, Aceh's ruler viewed such practices as attempts to evade duties.

## **II (d). Conclusion**

In discussing the presence of multiple legal systems in empires, Paul Halliday observed that "to the early modern eye, subjecthood appeared as a condition of possibility, one arising from the protection ... given in return for obedience ... subjecthood was not simply invoked by people who might have seemed self-evidently to be subjects. *It was chosen.*"<sup>41</sup> Between the sixteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, the system of trading passes introduced by European trading companies in the Indian Ocean was profitable not just due to the Europeans' maritime military superiority but also due to the vulnerability of these trading companies to land-based Asian powers that allowed the companies to

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<sup>41</sup> Paul D. Halliday, "Laws' Histories: Pluralisms, Pluralities, Diversity," in *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500-1850*, eds. Lauern Benton and Richard J. Ross (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 270-71. Emphasis added.

trade on the coasts.<sup>42</sup> Even as late as 1782, a Nagore merchant protested against the capture of his vessel by a British Admiral by declaring “I Mahomedtauyer reside under English colors, therefore who do they seize the vessel and I hope it will be returned.”<sup>43</sup> The merchant threatened that he would inform the ruler of Pegu (Myanmar) if the vessel was not returned and that as a consequence “much hurt may arise to English vessels that sail to Pegu.”<sup>44</sup> By the early nineteenth century, the balance shifted in favor of the English East India Company as it emerged as a dominant territorial power in India and also in the Bay of Bengal trading zone. As keen observers of such shifts, South Indian maritime merchants often sought protection for their trading vessels by declaring themselves as British subjects.

This section has examined how a particular group of maritime merchants articulated a form of subjecthood during this period. The merchants understood subjecthood as loyalty to the EIC that could be demonstrated by residing in EIC-controlled ports and trading goods produced in EIC territories with other English ports. In return the merchants expected the Company to protect the vessels and cargo of its “loyal subjects” as British property. Such an understanding of subjecthood by the merchants arose under particular historical circumstances. In an era of rivalry between European trading companies, the “nationality” of a vessel regulated access to ports and markets, the levy of duties, and safety on high seas. Since the trading world of these merchants in the Indian Ocean region contained multiple sovereignties, the meaning of subjecthood assumed the form articulated by the South Indian merchants.

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<sup>42</sup> Om Prakash, “European Corporate Enterprises and the Politics of Trade in India, 1600-1800,” in *Politics and Trade in the Indian Ocean World: Essays in Honour of Ashin Das Gupta*, eds. Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Lakshmi Subramanian (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 165-82.

<sup>43</sup> Public Consultations, January 24, 1782, Vol. 127, 83-86. TNSA.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

At the same time, the episode also demonstrates the transitory nature of claims of subjecthood. The close proximity of different European colonies on the South Indian coast and the ease of getting a sailing pass from a European colony meant that several competing subjecthoods could exist at the same time. The practice of carrying multiple passes on board a single vessel was a legacy of the pass system introduced by the Portuguese and developed further by the Dutch, French, and English trading companies. In such a system, ships sailed with multiple passes and multiple flags and displayed the flags and submitted the passes selectively.<sup>45</sup> The conditions for obtaining a pass were also less stringent. An East India Company official observed the ease with which a Danish pass could be procured. A merchant could obtain a Danish pass by simply purchasing a small cottage in Tranquebar to demonstrate ownership of property and then dispose the cottage immediately after securing a pass.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the fact that the merchants could sail from British controlled ports into Danish territory and obtain a Danish pass without the notice of the East India Company reveals the transient nature of such pledges of loyalty. Politically, therefore, subjecthood in the early nineteenth century for the Indian maritime merchant implied a flexible identity that could be changed under certain circumstances. But the adoption of a particular form of subjecthood had economic implications. It opened up new markets to sell and obtain goods. Being a British subject meant that a merchant could trade from British controlled ports in South India to British controlled ports in Southeast Asia. At the same time, as evidenced by the experiences of the Annapoorny's crew, sailing with British passes and declaring oneself as a British subject could have adverse consequences.

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<sup>45</sup> Lauren Benton, "Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 4 (October 2005): 714.

<sup>46</sup> Tanjore District Records, March 21, 1808, Vol. 3404, 48-53. TNSA; IOR/F/4/340/7932. IOR.

### III. Labor for Maritime Trade

In early November 1839, Captain Christopher Biden, the Master-Attendant and Beach Magistrate at the port in Madras, detained the crew of *Mydeen Bux* on charges of kidnapping children and carrying them in their boat in order to sell them as slaves at Nagore and at various Malay ports along the coast of Sumatra. The vessel was commanded by a Tamil Muslim and was proceeding from Bengal to Nagore. The enquiry revealed that the boat had stopped temporarily at Calingapatam (Kalingapatnam), a port in the northern Madras Presidency, to seek shelter from bad weather and remained there for a few days. During this stopover the *nakhuda*<sup>47</sup> and the crew gathered 28 children from the neighboring towns and brought them on board the vessel.<sup>48</sup> The discovery of the children initiated an investigation into the alleged practices of Tamil Muslims of acquiring children and selling them as slaves. The ship's commander and crew were brought to trial in the Supreme Court of Judicature at Madras. But the case was eventually dismissed on a technicality due to an omission in the formal indictment.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, *Streevesha Lutchmy*, another vessel that returned from Rangoon, was found with ten children onboard. Since the port officials at Madras were unable to find evidence that the ship's crew had kidnapped the children, the Beach Magistrate ordered the *nakhuda* to pay a penalty bond for one year and he held the crew liable to prosecution and loss of their vessel if they were implicated in a criminal offense during the year.<sup>50</sup> Based on these incidents, marine officials in the coastal districts were instructed to be watchful of attempts by the commanders and crew of native vessels to conduct a slave trade in children. In July 1840, four boys were found on a boat that

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<sup>47</sup> The term used to refer to the vessel's commander.

<sup>48</sup> IOR/F/4/1836/76287. IOR.

<sup>49</sup> Marine Consultations, January 20, 1840, Vol. 6, 144-45. TNSA.

<sup>50</sup> Marine Consultations, January 11, 1840, Vol. 6, 114-16. TNSA.



arrived at Nagore from Calcutta. Upon questioning, the boys informed the Acting Magistrate of Tanjore that they were from Bimlipatam (Bimlipatnam<sup>51</sup>), a former Dutch-controlled port near Kalingapatnam. The Magistrate of Vizagapatam (Vishakapatnam) was asked to enquire into the issue and he reported that the boys' relatives informed him that they "had disposed of their children willingly and were not desirous for their return." At Nagore, the boys were returned to the boat's crew.<sup>52</sup>

These instances of detention and investigation of native vessels commanded by Tamil Muslims did not represent the first occasion in which Tamil Muslims were accused of kidnapping and selling children as slaves. In at least four previous cases, similar charges were leveled against Tamil Muslim ship-owners, commanders, and crew.<sup>53</sup> In March 1790, six Tamil Muslims were apprehended in Madras on suspicion of purchasing forty-one children (twenty girls and twenty-one boys) at various locations in the northern Madras Presidency in order to sell them as slaves.<sup>54</sup> In February 1793, three boats that arrived from northern ports in the presidency were seized at Madras for carrying children. In the ensuing raid, twenty-two children, seventeen boys and five girls, were found in the vessels. In a separate operation, about forty children (thirty-six boys and four girls) were found in various houses in the "Blacktown"<sup>55</sup> part of Madras. The Fort St. George Governing Council ordered the boat owners to be publicly flogged.<sup>56</sup> In early 1825, several cases were decided in the Magistrate's Court at Tanjore that involved the sale of

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<sup>51</sup> The actual name is Bheemudipatnam, but the place is locally known as Bimlipatnam.

<sup>52</sup> Marine Consultations, July 16, 1840, Vol. 8, 858-60. TNSA.

<sup>53</sup> It is possible that there were more than four occasions of allegations against Tamil Muslims of involvement in slave trade. The instances mentioned here are the ones that could be traced in the records.

<sup>54</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Public Consultations, 5 March 1790. *Slavery in India: Correspondence of Court* (1828), Vol. 4, No. 125, 468.

<sup>55</sup> The portion of Madras that was inhabited by Indians was called Blacktown and the section of the city where the Europeans resided was called Georgetown.

<sup>56</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Public Consultations, February 22, 1793. *Slavery in India: Correspondence of Court* (1828), Vol. 4, No. 125, 511-15.

children. Unlike the previous examples, all the cases in Tanjore involved the discovery of children in the houses of Muslims in Nagore and Nagapattinam.<sup>57</sup> In the fourth and final instance, Alley Mercoyen and Ebram Saeb Magapale of Cuddalore were apprehended on charges of purchasing twenty-nine children for the purpose of enslaving them. The Acting Judge of Chingleput observed that Alley Mercoyen was a shipowner and ordered each prisoner to pay a penalty bond of Rs. 200 with the condition that they would not engage in trafficking children.<sup>58</sup>

The allegations against Tamil Muslim merchants of acquiring children, through purchase or kidnapping, for the purpose of selling them as slaves and the judicial action initiated against them, could be viewed as efforts by the EIC officials to abolish slavery and the slave trade within their territories. In 1774, the EIC promulgated a series of regulations to control the flow of slaves from India. Again in July 1789, a proclamation was issued that prohibited Europeans from transferring slaves from India. In the nineteenth century, the passage of several Acts in the British Parliament, beginning with the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807 and culminating with the enforcement of the Slavery Abolition Act in 1843 in India, led the EIC to adopt measures to ensure conformity to those laws. However, Indrani Chatterjee's work has shown that "though the English East India Company deployed a rhetoric of humanitarianism in proceeding against its rivals' slave-holdings or transfers, the underlying concerns were mercantilist" as the Company sought to conserve its slave-holdings in India. She also argues that the

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<sup>57</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Judicial Consultations, June 28, 1825. F/4/1034/28499. IOR.

<sup>58</sup> Criminal Cases forwarded by the Acting Judge of Chingleput, December 26, 1835. *Copy of Report from The Indian Law Commissioners relating to Slavery in the East Indies* (1841), 455.

Company actively sought to minimize the impact of British anti-slavery parliamentary regulations within its territories.<sup>59</sup>

A second way to approach the issue would be to place it within the existing literature on slavery in the Indian Ocean region. Several scholars have examined the vast networks of exchange of slaves in the region over long periods of time. Such efforts have highlighted the intensification of the slave trade during the nineteenth century as European capital sought to develop plantation economies in several areas in the Indian Ocean world. But such slave trade dealings involved the transportation of several thousand adults and children. The cases mentioned in this section concern only a few children and mostly involved boys. This section, therefore, closely examines the allegations that Tamil Muslims were involved in the slave trade of children and provides an explanation that situates such practices within the context of the labor requirements and maritime trade networks of Tamil Muslim merchants.<sup>60</sup>

The first recorded allegation of child trafficking against Tamil Muslims occurred in March 1790. James Taylor, the Acting Justice at Madras, informed the governing board that several children had been landed in Madras on board vessels that had arrived from ports in the northern Madras Presidency (Table 5.2). The police in Madras took away the children and housed them within the office of the chief police officer.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999). See in particular chapter 5 for a detailed examination of the EIC's policy towards slavery in India. For an extended discussion of the issue of slavery across time and space in South Asia, see the extremely useful collection of articles in Indrani Chatterjee & Richard Eaton, eds., *Slavery & South Asian History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006). I would like to thank Professor Chatterjee for her suggestions that enabled me to approach the allegations of slave-trading against Tamil Muslim merchants from the perspective of creating kinship networks and labor recruitment.

<sup>60</sup> Gwyn Campbell, ed. *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London: Frank Cass, 2004); Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon, and David W. Blight, eds., *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Public Consultations, March 5, 1790. *Slavery in India* (1828), 468-70.

Table 5.2: Names of prisoners arrested for transporting children (5 March 1790)<sup>62</sup>

<b>Brought from</b>	<b>Brought by</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>
Ganjam	Nagore Sheck Meeralubby	4	3
Calingapatam	Nagore Cathur Modein	1	
Chicacole	Nagore Cathur Modein	1	
Poondey	Karaikal Murapilly	1	
Poondey	Nagore Modein Bava (brought by his brother-in-law)	2	2
Soimapaoram	Meeralubby Malamy (sent by his brother-in-law)	2	2
(Some more children were found in the different houses of "Coyalor or Lubby cast at Maratta town)		9	14
<b>Total</b>		20	21

Among the places included in the table, where the ships had sailed from, Ganjam, Calingapatam, and Chicacole (Ganjam, Kalingapatnam, and Srikakulam) are located in the northern part of the modern South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. In the late eighteenth century, these areas belonged to the erstwhile Madras Presidency. The location of the remaining two places, Poondey and Soimapaoram, is unclear, since the identity of these two places could not be verified. It is possible that Poondey and Soimapaoram could refer to smaller ports in the vicinity of the remaining three ports since the records indicate that the children were "brought hither [to Madras] from the northern settlements in country vessels."<sup>63</sup> The table shows that the children were brought to Madras by merchants based in Nagore and Karaikal, port towns located along the southern coast of the Madras Presidency. In most of the cases, the merchants themselves brought the children in their own vessels. There were two exceptions to this pattern. In one instance, involving two girls and two boys from Poondey, the children were brought to Madras on behalf of Nagore Modein Bava by his brother-in-law. Similarly, in another

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Public Consultations, March 5, 1790. *Slavery in India* (1828), 468.

case, Meeralubby Malamy's brother-in-law, based in Soimapaoram, sent two girls and two boys to Malamy.

Some children were also found at "Maratta Town," a neighborhood in Madras that is presently known as Muthialpet and located close to the port, in the houses of people identified as members of the "Coyalar or Lubby" cast. Scholars have identified Kayalar and Lebbai as two divisions within the Tamil Muslim community. Generally, Lebbai is used to identify an Islamic scholar or someone managing the rituals at mosques and shrines. At the same time, several Tamil Muslim merchants possessed names that contained Lebbai in them. To further complicate the issue, EIC officials often used Lubby to refer to Tamil Muslims. According to Mattison Mines, Kayalar in modern usage referred to a division of Tamil Muslims who traded in raw and salted hides and skins and in scrap material.<sup>64</sup> In the case under discussion, it is unclear, however, whether EIC officials used the terms synonymously or to refer to two distinct groups. But it is unambiguous that the children were found either in the houses of Tamil Muslims residing in Madras or in boats commanded by Tamil Muslims.

The merchants submitted a petition to the Acting Justice at Madras in which they narrated the circumstances under which they acquired the children. They explained that about twenty vessels sailed northward for trade and landed their goods at "Ganjam, Soornaporam, Cullingapatam, and Beemoodcepatnam [Bimlipatnam]." As a result of a famine at "Jaggernautporam" that was about "thirty leagues distant" from the ports, several people sold their children at these ports. The merchants declared that they bought

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<sup>64</sup> For a discussion of various divisions among Tamil Muslims, see Mattison Mines, "Muslim Social Stratification in India: The Basis for Variation," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1972): 333-49; Frank Fanselow, "Muslim Society in Tamil Nadu (India): An Historical Perspective," *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 10, no. 1 (January 1989): 264-89; Frank Fanselow, "The Disinvention of Caste among Tamil Muslims," in *Caste Today*, ed. C.J. Fuller (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 202-26.

one or two children each whom they “maintained and nourished as our own sons.” The children were boarded separately on the merchants’ vessels and they paid a duty of two rupees at the ports. After arriving at Madras, one of the crewmembers of a boat sold a child and a “cutwal” (a police officer) promptly detained the child and the seller. Following this incident, the police went to the boats and houses of Tamil Muslims and gathered all the children. The merchants urged the Acting Justice to ask the children about their condition and pointed out that the children “had the happiness of enjoying and eating good bread” with the merchants, whereas “they were destined to live on light food” while in custody. Finally, the petitioners requested the official to return “our said children” and the goods that were confiscated during the search.<sup>65</sup>

EIC officials, however, did not heed the merchants’ requests and decided to send the children back to their ports of origin in the northern Madras Presidency. Some of the children who were capable of gaining employment were allowed to stay in Madras. About thirty-two children were sent on an English vessel *Experiment*, whose commander was paid one pagoda<sup>66</sup> for every child transported. The Fort St. George Governor in Council issued a proclamation, which asserted the Governor’s determination to “prevent a practice so detrimental to the country and injurious to the rights of humanity.” The Governor ordered that anyone who resided under the authority of the presidency at Fort St. George or within the limits of the jurisdiction of English courts would be prosecuted “with the utmost rigour” if they were found “directly or indirectly in carrying on a traffic in the purchase or sale of the natives as slaves.”<sup>67</sup> The Governor also sought the assistance of the “commercial houses and private merchants” and recommended them to

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<sup>65</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Public Consultations, March 5, 1790. *Slavery in India* (1828), 468-69.

<sup>66</sup> A gold coin.

<sup>67</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Public Consultations, March 5, 1790. *Slavery in India* (1828), 469.

instruct the commanders of their vessels to avoid “carrying away natives” and selling them as slaves. The prohibition against transporting Indians away from EIC-controlled territories was ordered to be repeated at ports within the Company’s territories every year during the first week of January.

Despite such pronouncements, in February 1793, three vessels belonging to Tamil Muslims were seized in Madras on suspicion of transporting children (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Description of boats seized on charges of importing slaves into Madras.<sup>68</sup>

<b>Date</b>	<b>Commander’s Name</b>	<b>Port of Origin</b>	<b>To whom Consigned</b>	<b>Cargo</b>
25 January 1793	Saib Hoosseein	Poondy	Sakoo Paredoo	Grain, ghee, and mustard seed
29 January 1793	Cashmeea	Calingapatam	Sakoo Paredoo	Rice, paddy, and tamarind
1 February 1793	Anthy Mooko	Masulipatam	Chinny Setty	Piece-goods and Japan copper

There were twenty-two children, seventeen boys and five girls, found on the three vessels. It is more than likely that the names listed under “to whom consigned” referred to the people to whom the cargo was delivered. A fourth boat from Coringa with a syrang<sup>69</sup> named Moota Augmed was also present but it did not contain any cargo and was not seized. But the boat was consigned to Augamea and an official noted that the boat might have been laden only with slaves.

The merchants, whose vessels were seized, wrote to the Governor of Fort St. George and explained that they accepted the children at the northern ports from people who were suffering under a severe famine. They indicated that the children were not acquired in order to be sold but rather to provide relief from poverty. The petitioners indicated their willingness to return the children but requested the Governor to release

<sup>68</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Public Consultations, February 22, 1793. *Slavery in India* (1828), 514.

<sup>69</sup> A title given to the boatswain.

their vessels' crew and to return their boats and sails.<sup>70</sup> Unlike the previous case, the merchants did not appeal for the return of the children to them. The Governor, however, decided to sell the boats by auction and to use the proceeds of the sale towards the upkeep of the rescued children. In the earlier instance, the EIC administration paid the expenses for taking care of the children as well as for transporting them to their native ports.

The third case of charges against Tamil Muslims of purchasing children in order to sell them as slaves occurred in January 1825. Alley Mercoyen and Ebram Saeb Magapale of Cuddalore were charged of purchasing twenty-nine children in the district of the Southern Division of Arcot “for the purpose of making them slaves.” The prisoners claimed that as a result of the recent famine some parents sold the children to them whereas other children “spontaneously placed themselves under their protection.” The charges were dropped in the Zillah court of Chingleput since no evidence was found that the children were either “forcibly abducted” from their parents or purchased “surreptitiously.” But Alley Mercoyen and Ebram Saob Magapale were ordered to pay a penalty bond of 200 rupees and to promise that they would not engage in child trafficking or export of children.<sup>71</sup>

The fourth instance of allegations against Tamil Muslims of participation in child trafficking occurred shortly afterward in June 1825. The Collector of Tanjore, J. Cotton, expressed his concern to the Governing Council in Fort St. George over the involvement of Tamil Muslims in kidnapping children in Tanjore and selling them as slaves in eastern ports (in Southeast Asia). The Collector based his allegations on a set of cases that were adjudicated by the Magistrate of Tanjore. The Collector informed the Secretary to the

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<sup>70</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Public Consultations, February 22, 1793. *Slavery in India* (1828), 514.

<sup>71</sup> *Copy of Report from the Indian Law Commissioners relating to slavery in the East Indies* (1841), 455.



Government at Fort St. George that the merchants who carried on trade with eastern ports were the ones mainly involved in slave trade involving children. He told the officials in Madras that several children were discovered in houses at Cuddalore or Porto Novo, two of the primary ports for trade between South India and Malay ports. He pronounced that the sole purpose of acquiring children was to sell them as slaves.

But the statement of cases reported by the Collector did not contain a single instance of children who were found on a boat. Rather, the cases involved the discovery of children in the houses of Tamil Muslims in Nagore and Nagapattinam (see Appendix I). These two towns, along with Cuddalore and Porto Novo, were prominent ports on the southern Coromandel coast that carried on extensive trade with eastern ports, which was largely conducted by Tamil Muslim merchants. In four incidents, the children were reportedly enticed from the parents and sold to households in Nagore or Nagapattinam. The Collector's statement did not provide details whether a Bill of Sale was produced in these transactions. In the fifth case that involved two girls named Curpee and Curpahee, Curpee's mother sold her to Chinna Colandarowten for five chakrams and she was resold to Allapichee of Nagore for three pagodas, according to the bill of sale. In the case of Curpahee, a person named Pandee sold her to Syed Cunne and she was later resold to Allapichee for 32 double fanams. Allapichee was ordered to pay an amount as security in order to guarantee that he would appear before the court whenever ordered and also produce the children.<sup>72</sup>

The Collector also ordered the detention of all dhoney<sup>73</sup> at Nagore and other ports in the Tanjore district that contained children until the boat's captain provided "a satisfactory account of them." He also instructed his port officials to check all vessels

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<sup>72</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>73</sup> A small sailing boat that is commonly found along the Coromandel coast.

bound for eastern ports in order to ensure that children were not shipped on them.<sup>74</sup> In July 1825, the Assistant Magistrate of Tanjore, R.A. Bannerman, informed the Collector that some “Lubbay people” of Nagapattinam brought three boys from Madras. Bannerman ascertained that the boys did not have any relatives in Madras and that they came voluntarily with the men in order to avoid starvation. The Assistant Magistrate informed the Collector that the merchants agreed to pay an amount as security that they would not sell or export the boys and that they would produce the boys whenever required.<sup>75</sup>

The fifth and final case against Tamil Muslims, which alleged their participation in slave trade involving children, occurred in November 1839 when the Beach Magistrate at Madras detained the vessel *Mydeen Bux* after he found twenty-eight children on it. Unlike the earlier incidents, characterized by a paucity of information in the records, a significant amount of material is available regarding this case as a result of the investigations conducted by officials against the commander and crew of *Mydeen Bux*. Therefore, it allows us to gain a better understanding of the processes involved in acquiring these children and the explanations provided by the merchants for the presence of so many children on the vessel.

J. Conway, the Head Assistant Magistrate of Ganjam, conducted enquiries at a charitable asylum in Chicacole that was managed by a Christian missionary named Dawson, who fed poor people that had fled the drought in the neighboring Vizagapatam district. A worker at the asylum informed Conway about a boy from Vizagapatam who had sought food at the asylum. The boy had stopped visiting and the worker saw the boy in the company of three or four boys. The boy’s head was shaved and he informed the

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<sup>74</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Judicial Consultations, June 28, 1825. IOR/F/4/1034/28499. IOR (London)

<sup>75</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Judicial Consultations, July 22, 1825. IOR/F/4/1034/28499. IOR (London)

worker that he had decided to join the “Cholia<sup>76</sup> people” from Nagore who promised to “take better care of him.”<sup>77</sup> The worker informed Conway that the “strangers of the Cholia caste” stayed in the house of Meerasaib whenever they passed through Chicacole. Upon questioning, Meerasaib told the Assistant Magistrate that the nakhuda of *Mydeen Bux* stayed in his house for about two months while the vessel’s cargo was disposed. He also mentioned that some of the ship’s crew visited the nearby town of Bimlipatnam and returned with four boys. Subsequently, the vessel went to Calingapatam with the crew and the boys, where it was forced to seek shelter from bad weather.<sup>78</sup> The ship’s crew rented some houses from Calingapatam’s inhabitants and the village barber told Conway that he shaved the heads of fifteen or sixteen boys at the house rented by the nakhuda.<sup>79</sup> At the same time that Conway conducted his investigation, he came across resident Chulias in Chicacole and Calingapatam with children in their homes who were acquired from others. At Calingapatam, Conway came across a boy aged fourteen or fifteen who was adopted by Chulias after his parents died when he was three years old. He noted that the boy had “adopted their [Chulias’] dress and caste.”<sup>80</sup>

The information gathered from the children<sup>81</sup> found on *Mydeen Bux* during their questioning corroborates some of Conway’s findings. Among the twenty-eight boys, six revealed that one or both of their parents had sold them to the Chulias. In one case, the boy indicated that his father “delivered” him to the Chulias and it is unclear whether the boy’s father received a payment for his action. In two cases, the boys told the

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<sup>76</sup> The term is used to refer to Tamil Muslims. It is also spelt as Chulia or Choolia.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from J. Conway, Head Assistant Magistrate to The Magistrate of Ganjam, November 21, 1839. IOR/F/4/1836/76287. IOR (London)

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> See Appendix II.

investigators that someone other than their parents delivered them to the Chulias and in three cases persons unrelated to the boys sold them to the crew of *Mydeen Bux*. Officials found three boys to be too young to explain the circumstances of their discovery aboard the vessel. Finally, thirteen boys claimed that the Chulias found them and shipped them on the vessel. Eight of the thirteen boys mentioned that the Chulias found them begging and promised to take care of them if they accompanied the crewmembers to Nagore.

R.A. Bannerman, the District Magistrate of Ganjam, expressed doubts about whether charges of kidnapping of children could be levied on the ship's crew since evidence of forceful or fraudulent procurement of children had to be presented in court to prove such claims. He noted that most of the children were acquired in the Vizagapatam district that was affected by drought during the previous year.<sup>82</sup> N.U. Arbuthnot, Vizagapatam's Magistrate, conducted his own investigation and observed that "I have no reason to suppose that the Choliahs themselves have used violence to procure children simply because I know that any number of them might have been procured for the merest trifle or even by person of respectability for nothing at all." But he indicated that the practice of purchasing children provided "unprincipled persons" with an opportunity to kidnap and to sell the children to the Chulias. Arbuthnot blamed the Chulias for buying children from individuals who were identified as child traffickers.<sup>83</sup>

The question then arises as to why Tamil Muslims acquired the children? H.C. Montgomery, the Acting Magistrate of Tanjore, queried several "most respectable Musselmen [sic] in Nagore" regarding the trafficking in slaves from ports in the northern Madras presidency. He reported to the officials in Fort St. George that the representatives

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<sup>82</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Marine Consultations, December 10, 1839. *Correspondence on the Slave Trade and Measures Taken for its Abolition* (1841), 114.

<sup>83</sup> Marine Consultations, 24 December 1839, Vol. 6, 19-20. TNSA.

in the Muslim community denied any such trade but admitted that they purchased children from parents during seasons of scarcity. They added that such children were raised as “slaves or rather servants for domestic purposes” and that “several of the traders and shopkeepers in the town of Nagore own their present station in society to their having been thus purchased when children.”<sup>84</sup> The evidence gathered from the boys found on the *Mydeen Bux* reveals that the ship’s crew purchased children and also relied on other methods to acquire children. The replies given by the prominent members of Nagore’s Muslim community reveal that the children acquired as slaves performed roles both as domestic servants as well as shopkeepers.

Vizagapatam’s Magistrate noted in the results of his investigation that the Tamil Muslims acquired the children “to procure converts to their religion, lascars for their vessels and slaves for domestic purposes.”<sup>85</sup> In fact, when Captain Biden detained the *Mydeen Bux* and found twenty-eight children on the vessel, he also noted the presence of four boys of similar age as the other children and “*who are supposed to belong to the Brig [Mydeen Bux]*.”<sup>86</sup> After an examination of the nakhudas, crew, and the children who belonged to *Mydeen Bux* and *Streevescha Lutchmy*, a vessel from Rangoon that was detained shortly after the children were found on *Mydeen Bux*, Captain Biden indicated that the children declared their status as cook boys on board the vessels.<sup>87</sup> Captain Biden himself alluded to the employment of boys onboard native vessels when he mentioned that *Mydeen Bux* caught the attention of port officials because the crew attempted to transport a large number of children all at once from their vessel to the port due to a

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<sup>84</sup> Marine Consultations, 16 July 1840, Vol. 8, 858-60. TNSA.

<sup>85</sup> Marine Consultations, 24 December 1839, Vol. 6, 19-20. TNSA.

<sup>86</sup> Letter from Captain Biden to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort St. George, November 7, 1839. IOR/F/4/1836/76287. IOR (London).

<sup>87</sup> Marine Consultations, February 1, 1840, Vol. 6, 220-25. TNSA.

scarcity of boats to ferry passengers. Biden noted that the children on *Mydeen Bux* would have been landed unnoticed if they had been brought ashore a few at a time, since “all native vessels have some boys on board.”<sup>88</sup> The registration of ships in the ports of Nagore and Nagapattinam shows the number of crewmembers carried by these vessels. In 1840, the *Somasoondra Poravy* was registered in the port of Nagore and its tonnage was listed as 280 tons and the crew strength was shown as 50 “men and boys.” The *Tinnagavully* with a tonnage of 180 tons had a crew of 30 men and boys. Similarly in Nagapattinam, the vessels *Chindateray Maria* (80 tons), *Maria* (72 tons), and *Tendapany Aunayletchumy* (100 tons) required crews that numbered 20, 15, and 20 men and boys respectively.<sup>89</sup>

The Magistrate of Ganjam, R.A. Bannerman, in his answers to questions regarding slavery in India that were circulated to district authorities by the officials in London, remarked that the Tamil Muslims of Nagore and other southern ports adopted children of other castes. He added that these children were used as domestics in their homes, as maritime labor in the ships, and in commercial transactions.<sup>90</sup> Regarding the case against the crew of *Mydeen Bux*, the Magistrate noted that he “had an opportunity of seeing something of the Lubbies in the Tanjore and Madura districts, and consider them a very industrious and well-conducted class, and I am disposed to think that in obtaining these children the people of the *Moydeen Bux* had no criminal intention of selling them again as slaves for the sake of credit.”<sup>91</sup> Bannerman indeed was in a position to observe closely the issue of slave trading by Tamil Muslims since he served as the Assistant

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<sup>88</sup> Letter from Chris Biden, Beach Magistrate to The Chief Secretary to Government, Fort St. George, May 16, 1842. IOR/F/4/1965/86102. IOR.

<sup>89</sup> Marina Consultations, August 23, 1841, Vol. 14, 1026-30. TNSA.

<sup>90</sup> *Copy of Report from The Indian Law Commissioners relating to Slavery in the East Indies* (1841), 117.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

Magistrate in Tanjore in 1825 and the records show that he had investigated allegations of slave trade in children against Tamil Muslims.<sup>92</sup>

G.S. Hooper, the Judge of Madura, also responded to the same questionnaire that was answered by Ganjam's magistrate. However, Hooper prefaced his answers with a statement that his answers were not based on observation and experience since no civil or criminal case appeared in his court that involved the issue of property in slaves. Hooper informed the Law Commissioners in London that his answers were based on inquiries conducted with the "most intelligent of my court servants and others."<sup>93</sup> Based on such conversations, Hooper reported that Muslims purchased children from Hindus during times of scarcity and also bought children who were stolen or kidnapped. He noted that slaves thus acquired were raised as Muslims and rose to "much consequences in the family ... that they are no longer regarded as slaves, but become as members of the family." Despite such observations, which portray a picture of benevolence, perhaps gathered from his informants, the unequal status of such members of the family was maintained. The Judge noted that these children were married to Muslim women who were "of a lower grade."<sup>94</sup> The process of assimilation of these slave children occurred over generations. Hooper alluded to such a long process when he noted that after three generations the descendants of the slave children were considered as "pure Mussulmans [sic] and are admitted to all rights and privileges as such."<sup>95</sup>

As part of the investigation into whether Tamil Muslim merchants shipped children on their vessels and sold them at Malay ports, officials in Madras requested the

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<sup>92</sup> Extract, General Report of the Foujdarry Adawlut, to the Governor in Council of Fort St. George, 1825. *Slavery in India: Correspondence of Court* (1828), Vol. 4, No. 125, 931-32.

<sup>93</sup> "Appendix IX," in *Copy of Report from The Indian Law Commissioners relating to Slavery in the East Indies* (1841), 455.

<sup>94</sup> *Copy of Report from The Indian Law Commissioners relating to Slavery in the East Indies* (1841), 126.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

administrators in Penang, Melaka, and Singapore to conduct inquiries on this issue. J.W. Salmond, the Resident Councillor of Singapore, replied that during his earlier position as an administrator in Penang, he had noticed that vessels from the Coromandel coast arrived with men and boys. Some boys were represented as domestic servants of the “most respectable of the passengers” whereas others arrived to assist their relatives. In other cases, the boys had bound themselves to work in exchange for their passage from South India to Penang. Salmond noted that such agreements seldom exceeded twelve months and that the boys were free to seek additional employment options upon the completion of their bond.<sup>96</sup> In Singapore, the location of his present position, Salmond indicated that about 100 Chulia boys were employed as cooks and servants to native merchants and others, as vendors of food, and employed at the harbor. He noted that the boys were mostly Muslims and were aged between 10 and 17 years.<sup>97</sup>

In Penang, the Assistant Resident W.T. Secois wrote that there was no slave trade in children. He noted, however, that Kling<sup>98</sup> boys complained to officials on several occasions that their masters, to whom the boys were bound as apprentices by their parents, had mistreated them. During investigations, the boys also acknowledged their masters as “near relatives.” The Assistant Resident reported that between 3000 to 4000 migrants arrived in Penang from the Coromandel coast and that there were on average about four or five boys for every hundred men. The boys typically served as cooks to the wealthy Klings and also worked in the boats.<sup>99</sup> The presence of boys as assistants to merchants is revealed by a court trial in Penang regarding the murder of a merchant named Cauder by another person named Malim. In the ensuing trial at the court, one of

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<sup>96</sup> Marine Consultations, 9 June 1840, Vol. 8, 847-54. TNSA.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> A term used to refer to people from South India.

<sup>99</sup> Marine Consultations, 9 June 1840, Vol. 8, 847-54. TNSA.



the witnesses, Jemaut, deposed before the court that he was a “slave of Cauder” and that he had waited upon Cauder at breakfast on the day of his murder. The various tasks performed by such boys is revealed in the deposition when Jemaut informed the court that he heard of Cauder’s murder when he was “passing through the streets of Georgetown.”<sup>100</sup>

The discussion of several allegations against Tamil Muslim merchants of involvement in slave trading in children highlights several aspects of their trading operations. First, it is clear that Tamil Muslim ship-owners and merchants obtained or purchased children, particularly from regions that suffered from drought or famine. But their procurement efforts were mainly concentrated in places that were close to their port towns or were located along their regular trade routes. Second, the acquired children were given Muslim names and were usually adopted as members of the family. But they did not gain equal status with other family members. Third, the details of allegations reveal that the Tamil Muslim merchants mostly acquired boys. These boys were made to work on the boats and also to serve the merchants in their trading voyages to distant ports. It is also clear that this served as training for them to become as sailors and traders. However, it is unclear whether the boys who began working in the vessels remained in that capacity or were allowed to become traders. Finally, the exclusive targeting of Tamil Muslim merchants by EIC officials as traders in slave children raises questions whether Tamil Muslims were the only group of ship-owners who acquired children in order to serve as the vessel’s crew members.

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<sup>100</sup> IOR/G/34/14, 22 August 1806. IOR (London)

#### **IV. Trade Arrangements**

This section examines the various ways by which the merchants raised capital for their trade voyages and their partnerships with other merchant communities, particularly English traders. The next two parts discuss two specific modes of raising capital: mortgages and respondentia bonds. The final part of the section examines the association between Tamil Muslims and English traders in South India and Penang.

##### **IV (a). Mortgages**

For maritime merchants the ability to raise capital was an important aspect of their trade organization. Particularly in the case of ship-owners, the amounts of money involved were significantly high since funds were needed for several purposes: to build ships, to procure cargo, and to pay the crews' wages. The merchants relied on several means to acquire money for their requirements. Often, merchants mortgaged their property, in the form of houses, lands, vessels, or cargo.

In one example, Segoo Mira Labay, son of Labay Nainah Marikan, borrowed Rs. 300 at twelve percent interest from Cawder Meeyoodin Marikan. He pledged his dhoney and all the apparals<sup>101</sup> as security for the loan and promised to return the money in six months.<sup>102</sup> The large sum of money and the long period of repayment involved in the transaction suggest a longer trading voyage and the settlement of the loan after the return of the vessel rather than upon reaching the destination. Tamil Muslims also borrowed from Englishmen in Nagore. In 1804, Seyoode Meyoodine and Mahumed Azum of Nagore mortgaged their house to Peter Battger of the same town for Rs. 55 and promised to repay the loan in three months with a twelve percent interest. In contrast to the earlier

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<sup>101</sup> This could mean the sails.

<sup>102</sup> Tanjore District Records, Vol. 3382, 1804. TNSA.

case, the smaller amount of money suggests that the borrowers were probably traders who sought funds to purchase cargo for a short voyage that was expected to last three months. Tamil Muslim merchants also lent money to English merchants. Records show that in August 1804 Simon of Negapatam pledged his two houses and borrowed Rs. 700 from Atty Saib Nacodah of Nagore. He undertook to repay the money in May 1805 and was charged twelve percent interest.<sup>103</sup> Tamil Muslim merchants also borrowed money from Armenians, another prominent mercantile trading community in the Indian Ocean region. In 1782, a Nagore merchant named “Mahomedtauayer” angrily protested the capture and sale of his vessel by the English Admiral Sir Edward Hughes and claimed that his vessel was mortgaged to “Coja Johannes Martoaras” and demanded the vessel be restored to the mortgagee.<sup>104</sup>

The practice of mortgaging property also continued in the newly established settlement of Penang. Unlike the ports towns on the Coromandel coast, the places of origin for several merchants, Penang was scarcely populated at the time of its establishment and the Tamil Muslims did not possess any previous trade links with the island. But they were one of the earliest settlers and quickly built houses, shops, and warehouses. The following table (5.4) shows the list of mortgages granted in Penang within the first decade of its establishment. Almost all the mortgages were issued on the basis of twelve percent interest and most of the terms were for shorter periods, which suggests that the borrowers needed money to conduct trade at Penang or in the surrounding ports. Penang served as an important trading hub and as an exchange point for the produce and manufactures of the neighboring region. Tamil Muslims from the Coromandel coast usually visited the nearby ports for two to three months before

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Public Consultations, January 24, 1782, Vol. 127, 83-86. TNSA.

returning to South India. In this context, the warehouses and the shops that were established to facilitate retail trade were used as collateral to raise money for procuring goods from the surrounding ports.

Table 5.4: List of Mortgages in Penang (1792 – 1795) (Spanish Dollars)<sup>105</sup>

Date	Borrower	Article mortgaged	Lender	Amount (Spanish Dollars)	Time	Interest
21 Jan 1792	Libbee Abdull Latiff	A godown in the Chuliar street	James Scott	900	3 months	12%
29 Jan 1793	Catib Libby	A brick shop in the Chuliar street	Francis Light	200	2 months	12%
24 Dec 1794	Meer Saib	A garden measuring 5 Orlongs <sup>106</sup> , a brick kiln at Tulloh AyerRaja and a house in Georgetown	Burjojee Munnee	100	5 months	No interest
28 Jan 1795	Soodagur Abboo Calippee	A piece of garden	Noq. Sapoodien	171	2 months	10%

The practice of acquiring land in Penang and using it to conduct trade was widely practiced by Tamil Muslims. In 1801, Penang’s administrators began to issue land grants to the residents and Tamil Muslims were among the earliest to receive such grants.<sup>107</sup> Newspapers in Penang in the first two decades of the nineteenth century published the sale of property that was confiscated from the debtor due to non-repayment of debts and the Sheriff ordered the sale of such properties. In several cases, the plaintiffs or defendants or both were Tamil Muslims and the property that was appropriated and sold

<sup>105</sup> Consultations of Home Department, Miscellaneous (Straits Settlements), March 27, 1795, Vol. 201. National Archives of India (Delhi). Hereafter NAI.

<sup>106</sup> A measure of land, roughly equal to 1<sup>1/3</sup> English acre.

<sup>107</sup> IOR/G/34/16. IOR (London). The list of holders of land grants contains the names of several Tamil Muslims with several names within the first 100 holders of land grants. The records also show cases in which the ownership changed hands which implies a change of ownership due to inheritance or loss of rights over the land.

was either land or shops or gardens. An announcement in 1812 indicated that in a case between Seid Abdulrahman Ben Hassan Abooftan vs Fackeer Saib, a piece of land and all its buildings, located on the south side of Malabar street in Georgetown (Penang) were taken by a writ of execution in satisfaction of a mortgage that was due by Fackeer Saib.<sup>108</sup> Such notices appeared on several occasions and reveal that Tamil Muslim merchants raised money with the help of other Tamil Muslims, Englishmen, Parsees, and Malays.

Tamil Muslim merchants were not always the recipients of loans. On some occasions, Tamil Muslim merchants loaned money to Englishmen. In June 1833, Lubbay Tomby Mercour of Keelakarai, “a respectable merchant carrying on an extensive trade in the southern districts [of Madras Presidency],”<sup>109</sup> submitted a petition in which he claimed that he had loaned 2000 Pagodas in June 1821 to the recently deceased Mr. Peter, a former Collector of the Southern District of Arcot, and wished to recover the amount from the estate of Peter. Narain Row, a lower level administrative official in the district administration, arranged the loan agreement.<sup>110</sup> Peter’s reason for borrowing the money is less clear. As EIC officials often participated in maritime trade, it is possible that the funds were invested in a commercial venture. As Lubbay Tomby Mercour was also a merchant, the loan could have been part of a joint commercial venture. At the same time, the money could have been used by Peter for other non-commercial reasons and he approached Lubbay Tomby Mercour owing to his wealth and stature. This demonstrates that some prominent Tamil Muslim merchants were in a position to lend money to EIC officials and that such funds could have been used towards joint commercial activities.

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<sup>108</sup> *Prince of Wales Island Gazette*, May 16, 1812. Singapore National Archives, Hereafter NAS.

<sup>109</sup> Revenue Consultations, July 11, 1833, Vol. 388, 4151-53. TNSA.

<sup>110</sup> Madura District Records, June 30, 1833, Vol. 4681, 213-16. TNSA.

#### **IV (b). Respondentia Bonds**

While mortgages offered an opportunity for merchants to borrow money on a fixed loan period, the respondentia bond was another way to secure funds in which the period of repayment was based on the length of a trading voyage. Under such loans, the ship-owner or a trader borrowed money on the basis of the cargo and the vessel. Sinnappah Arasaratnam points out that the respondentia loans on the Coromandel coast did not include a bottomry element, i.e. the ship's keel or bottom, as part of the security for the loan. But the ship's name was included in the bond along with details of its destination. The lender expected repayment within twenty-one days after the vessel reached the specified port, either the destination or its homeport. Unlike the mortgage system in which a uniform rate of interest was levied throughout the loan period, a respondentia bond accrued a higher interest rate when the vessel remained at sea. After the ship reached the destination port, a lower land interest rate became applicable. The bond documents indicated whether the loan period included the small or big monsoon, southwest and northeast monsoon respectively, and the interest rate was higher in case of a trade voyage that extended over the two monsoons. In case of freighters who rented space on vessels, the respondentia bond's terms were applied to any vessel upon which the trader freighted his goods. In case of a shipwreck, the borrower did not have a liability if the entire cargo was lost. In the event that a portion of the cargo was salvaged, the debtor was expected to repay a share of the loan in proportion to the recovered goods.<sup>111</sup>

A dispute arose over a shipwreck in Nagore in 1786 that highlights some of the complexities and risks associated with raising funds for maritime trade. In April 1786, a

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<sup>111</sup> Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1650-1740* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 278-79.

vessel named *Hussein Bux* was shipwrecked near Nagore and a portion of the cargo was recovered. The ship was built at Rangoon and its owner, Tomby Noquedah, resided there. Tomby Noquedah's brother-in-law Mahomed Meera Lubby commanded the vessel. A group of passengers from Pegu, Abob, Mogan, Fakeer Saib, and Mahomed Yesaw, who had brought goods on the vessel, petitioned the authorities in Nagore that they had loaned funds to the owner in Rangoon through a respondentia bond that was used to build the vessel. They sought either the delivery of the salvaged cargo or the sale of the recovered goods and the procurement of a return cargo to Pegu from the proceeds of the sale. The vessel's commander rejected their claims on the grounds that the loan agreement was voided as the ship was wrecked.<sup>112</sup>

The following table shows the money invested by various people in the ship and its cargo.

Table 5.5: Investors in the *Hussein Bux* and its cargo.<sup>113</sup>

<b>Name</b>	<b>Amount (Star Pagodas)</b>
Tomby Noquedah, (ship-owner)	4669
Mahomed Esaw, Abob, Mogan, Fakeer Saib (petitioners)	3135
Noquedah Mahomed Meera Laby (ship's commander)	479
Putta Mahomed	427
Magudoom Saib	99
Dawdoo & Cawder Saib	75
Vastan Alaba	34
Mahomed Saffee	30
Boddesan and Cumamalame	27
Wooprienty & Cadessaib	24
Vaupoo Marcayer & Cassim Saib	20
Casatava	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>9058</b>

<sup>112</sup> Public Consultations, 17 July 1786, Vol. 139, 1405-35. TNSA.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

The ship's commander provided this account of the value of the ship and its cargo. In his estimate, the vessel was valued at 5,700 Star Pagodas and the cargo was worth about 3,350 Star Pagodas (total of 9058 Star Pagodas). According to him, Tomby Noquedah, his brother-in-law, supplied the largest share of the value of the vessel and its cargo. The petitioners disputed the commander's version and claimed instead that the total value of the vessel and its cargo was only about 3,000 Star Pagodas, of which they gave the significant share. The Resident of Nagore, E.W. Fallofield, requested the opinion of four merchants in Nagore who valued the vessel's cargo at about 1750 Star Pagodas and estimated that the cost of a new vessel to be about 2650 Star Pagodas (total of 4,400 Star Pagodas). While the amount of the ship-owner's investment remained a source of contention, both the commander and the petitioners agreed that the latter loaned about 3,000 Star Pagodas on a *respondentia* bond.<sup>114</sup> The vessel's commander and Putta Mahomed provided the next ranked set of funds, although they were significantly lower than those provided by Mahomed Esaw, Abob, Mogan, and Fakeer Saib. The remaining set of amounts show even lesser values of funds that were given.

The details of the investment in a trading voyage reveal some useful information about such ventures. First, it shows that the traders who freighted goods were also active investors who provided funds to build ships. This contrasts with Jacob van Leur's portrayal of Asian traders who freighted space as primarily "peddlers" who traded in small quantities. In the case of the *Hussein Bux*, the traders provided a significant amount of money and also travelled onboard the ship. At the same time, there were a large number of traders whose shipments were of smaller values and these correspond to van Leur's descriptions of Asian traders who traded in low quantities of goods. Second, the

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.



case informs us about the way family networks operated in maritime trade. The ship-owner was an inhabitant of Porto Novo who had settled in Rangoon.<sup>115</sup> He appointed his brother-in-law as the commander of his newly built vessel and entrusted him with its cargo to sail to the Coromandel coast and conduct trade. The commander also invested in the ship, although it is unclear whether he gave money for building the ship or provided for its cargo. Third, the incident demonstrates the difficult, complex, and risky nature of maritime trade. Ship-owners mostly borrowed the capital that was required to build a vessel and undertake a voyage. The ever-present danger of rough weather and shipwrecks added to the risks. In the absence of insurance mechanisms, ship-owners and traders did not possess any mitigating mechanisms to lessen the losses that arose from maritime mishaps.

#### **IV (c) Freight Arrangements**

After the arrival of European traders in the Indian Ocean from the sixteenth century, Asian-owned ships carried the goods of European merchants and vice versa. In the particular case of English private traders, P.J. Marshall, D.K. Bassett, and I.B. Watson have studied the interactions between Englishmen and Indian merchants.<sup>116</sup> Such commercial associations also existed between various Asian trading communities. In Melaka, for example, Indian merchants commanded or freighted goods on Chinese-

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<sup>115</sup> The Respondentia Bond agreement identifies the ship-owner as “Mahomed Saib alias Tomby Noquedah and son to Mahomed Sultan, inhabitant of Porto Novo.” Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ian Bruce Watson, *Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India 1659-1760* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980); P.J. Marshall, “Private British Trade in the Indian Ocean before 1800,” in *European Commercial Expansion in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Om Prakash (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997), 237-61; D.K. Bassett, “British ‘Country’ Trade and Local Trade Networks in the Thai and Malay States, c. 1680-1770,” in *European Commercial Expansion in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Om Prakash (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997), 263-81.

owned vessels.<sup>117</sup> Such partnerships continued into the nineteenth century but references to such links are difficult to find due to the private nature of such transactions. However, evidence of mercantile links between Tamil Muslim merchants and English traders can be gathered from the records, particularly from proceedings in the courts.

In the incident of the capture of the vessel *Annapoorny* by the ruler of Aceh discussed previously, the ship's cargo contained about 20,000 pagodas worth of piece-goods. According to the statement provided by the ship's commander after its capture, a part of the cargo belonged to Mr. Richardson of Nagapattinam.<sup>118</sup> Besides carrying the cargo of English traders, Tamil Muslims also began to conduct business on behalf of Englishmen. In Penang, in 1798, a Tamil Muslim named Dulbadel was charged for leaving and entering Penang without procuring the required pass and for not reporting the return of his vessel at the Customs House. He was also detained on suspicions that he might have corresponded with the King of Kedah and might have acted as his secret agent. During questioning, Dulbadel revealed that he went to Kedah since he was ordered by his "master" Mr. C.W. Young to collect money that was owed to Young by Potee, the King's merchant (or the merchant assigned by the ruler to manage the kingdom's trade). Dulbadel claimed that he did not obtain a pass since he assumed that Mr. Young would settle the issue regarding the pass. He further claimed that he had made repeated trips between Penang and Kedah "in the service of Mr. Young."<sup>119</sup> In this instance, based on Dulbadel's reference to Mr. Young as "master," he would seem to have been in the direct employment of Mr. Young. And Dulbadel's responsibilities were important enough that

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<sup>117</sup> S. Arasaratnam, "Coromandel's Bay of Bengal Trade, 1740-1800: A Study of Continuities and Changes," in *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1800*, eds. Om Prakash and Denys Lombard (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 316.

<sup>118</sup> Public Consultations, July 24, 1813, Vol. 412, 5686-90. TNSA.

<sup>119</sup> Home Public Consultations, March 5, 1798, No. 11. NAI.

he was assigned the crucial tasks of recovering Mr. Young's debts from a court official in Kedah.

Other types of relationships also existed. In another instance, Varshay Mahomed, a Tamil Muslim merchant in Penang, sailed from Penang to the Coast of Pedir in a vessel owned by James Douglas and John Grant Wilson, two merchant in Penang. The English merchants managed a firm named Douglas & Wilson and, in consequence of the "special trust and confidence reposed by them ... in the integrity and ability of ... Varsey," Douglas & Wilson entrusted Varshay Mahomed to dispose of the cargo and return to Penang. The details of this voyage were revealed in the court since Varshay Mahomed died during the voyage and a dispute arose as to the management of his property.<sup>120</sup> In this instance, Varshay Mahomed was not under the direct employment of Douglas & Wilson. Rather, he operated as an independent merchant who was contracted by the English merchants to manage their trade voyage. Thus, Tamil Muslim merchants worked with English merchants under different arrangements.

## **V. Conclusion**

This chapter examined three distinct themes, subjecthood, labor recruitment, and capital accumulation, with a view to understand the organization of trade by Tamil Muslim merchants. These factors assumed particular salience due to a series of developments in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region in the period between the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. In South Asia, the East India Company directly administered large swaths of territory and negotiated treaties with Indian rulers that allowed the EIC to influence the policies of the "independent" kingdoms. In the Indian Ocean region, the

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<sup>120</sup> IOR/G/34/14, August 11, 1806, IOR; IOR/G/34/15, December 19, 1806, 2647-49. IOR.

EIC established its supremacy over the French and the Dutch trading companies and established its own settlements in Penang and Singapore. But the rival European companies continued to possess enclaves in several regions along the Indian Ocean littoral. Finally, the Abolitionist Movement against slavery resulted in the passage of laws in the British Parliament that sought to prevent slavery and trading in slaves in English colonies.

This chapter studied how the Tamil Muslim merchants understood British subjecthood in particular economic terms and declared that the proof of their loyalty could be demonstrated in specific economic transactions. They also showed an interpretation of subjecthood as a shifting concept, which allowed them to adopt the flags of rival European companies under different circumstances. The East India Company was the dominant military power in India and the wider Indian Ocean region. Under normal political conditions, the merchants sailed under British passes. During the Napoleonic wars, however, the merchants feared the capture of their vessels by French privateers and resorted to carrying Danish flags as Denmark remained neutral in the conflict. This practice was known to EIC officials and was permitted to continue. The acquiescence of the officials reveals the inability of the East India Company to control fully the trade routes between South India and Southeast Asia. The possession of multiple passes by the Tamil Muslim merchants underscores the changing nature of claims of subjecthood and reveals the manner by which these merchants managed to trade in an era of multiple sovereignties in the Indian Ocean region.

The chapter also examined how the EIC's efforts to abolish slave trade affected the practice of labor recruitment by Tamil Muslims. Our knowledge of the mode of hiring and wage structures for seamen on Indian ships is largely limited. Michael Fisher and G. Balachandran have examined the ways in which Indian maritime laborers were recruited

and paid on British vessels.<sup>121</sup> In the case of Tamil Muslim merchants, Arasaratnam briefly alluded to the system of managing the labor on the ships. He indicated that the most of the seamen were related by kinship. He observed that the crew were paid low wages and were allowed to conduct trade in small amounts. At the port, the crew worked as carpenters, caulkers, riggers, and performed services for other ships.<sup>122</sup> Arasaratnam's description, while providing clues about the cost-effective operation of Tamil Muslim vessels, does not provide details about the recruitment of labor by Tamil Muslim merchants. The cases discussed in this chapter reveal that Tamil Muslim merchants actively sought to purchase children, particularly in areas stricken by famine. In other instances, the children were brought to the houses of Tamil Muslims and sold. This implies the existence of a general understanding about the purchase of children by Tamil Muslim households. The cost of maintaining a crew partially composed of children would be less than providing for a crew entirely made of adults. It is unclear when the Tamil Muslim merchants began to use children on their vessels. As the Tamil Muslims began to establish themselves in Penang and Singapore, the need for workers must have increased tremendously, in order to sail the vessels and also to work in the retail shops in Southeast Asia. During this same period, Tamil Muslims had to confront the gradual decline in the sale of Indian textiles and the growing number of regulations that governed the trade between South India and Southeast Asia. Under such circumstances, the necessity to reduce the cost of operations of maritime trade could have induced the Tamil

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<sup>121</sup> Michael Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travelers and Settlers in Britain, 1600-1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004); G. Balachandran, "Searching for the *Sardar*: The State, Pre-Capitalist Institutions, and Human Agency in the Maritime Labour Market, Calcutta, 1880-1935," in *Institutions and Economic Change in South Asia*, eds. Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Burton Stein (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 206-36.

<sup>122</sup> S. Arasaratnam, "Coromandel's Bay of Bengal Trade, 1740-1800," 322.

Muslim merchants to increase their reliance on using children as maritime laborers and retail workers.

Finally, the chapter discussed the various ways in which Tamil Muslim merchants raised capital for their trading voyages by collaborating with other merchant groups, including English private merchants. A noticeable feature of these associations was that the Tamil Muslims did not form long-term partnerships with English merchants, as was the case with Parsi merchants in Bombay and the case of Dwarkanath Tagore in Calcutta. Rather, Tamil Muslims worked with other merchants over the period of a single trade voyage and the accounts were settled at the end of each trip. While this style of operation prevented the Tamil Muslims from accessing the larger international credit networks, this conservative approach helped them to suffer minimal losses in the fluctuating nature of maritime markets. In addition, by confining the agreements to a single trading trip, the merchants possessed the flexibility to operate on different routes without relying on supplying a single market. This would have allowed the merchants to negotiate the rates of interest for loans that were based on specific markets. Thus, the merchants' use of mortgages, respondentia bonds, and partnerships allowed them to raise the required capital while distributing the risks associated with constantly inconsistent markets.

**Appendix I: Statement of Cases under notice of the Magistrate of Tanjore involving children who were kidnapped and sold.<sup>1</sup>**

No.	Details of Parents	Details of children	Locations of Discovery	Remarks
1. (Nov 1824)	Moortee Ammal (mother), from Negapatam	A boy, name unknown, about 3 years old of the Cowery caste. The boy was delivered to his mother.	This child was discovered in the house of Shelaiman, a Lebbai of Nagore. Shelaiman absconded after the discovery of the child.	Shevagawmee, who was accused of stealing the child, confessed that she enticed it away and sold the boy to a Lubbay man in Nagore for 2 Pagodas. She was sentenced to one year's imprisonment and labor without irons.
2. (May 1825)	Meerasen Beebee (mother), from Cuddalore	Noorsa a Lubbay boy, about 6 years old. The boy was delivered over to his mother on 3 June 1825.	This child was offered for sale by a Lubbay woman (name unknown) at the house of Accoonamercair of Nagore, where objections were raised over the sale. Subsequently, the police were informed.	A Muslim woman enticed the boy and brought him to Nagore to sell him. The woman's name is not known and she has absconded.
3.	Parents unknown	Curpee, a girl about 6 years old, and Curpahee, a girl of about 4 years old. Both the girls belong to the Vellalachee caste.	Both these children were found in the house of Alla Pichee of Nagore, who stated that he purchased the first child from Chinna Colenda Rowten of Aderampatam on the 6 May 1825 as per Bill of Sale in his possession for 3 Pagodas. The second girl was purchased from Syed Cunnee of Adrampatam on 5 May for 32 Da. Fs. (unclear) as per another bill of.	A former Bill of Sale for the child Curpee indicated that she was sold as a slave by her mother Addakee of Manalacodee to Chinna Colanda Rowten for 5 Chuckrums on the 28 October 1824. The other girl, Curpahee, was previously sold by Paudee of Manamailcodee to Syed Cunnee. These two children have been transferred twice by sale from the possession of one person to another.  N.B. The above persons concerned in these transactions were been summoned to give an account and Alla Pichee was ordered to pay a security amount in order to guarantee that he would appear before the court and also produce the children whenever required.

<sup>1</sup> Extract of Fort St. George Judicial Consultations, 28 June 1825. F/4/1034/28499. IOR.

Table 1 Continued

<b>No.</b>	<b>Details of Parents</b>	<b>Details of children</b>	<b>Locations of Discovery</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
5.	Curpahee (mother) from Madras	<p>Moorcandee, a boy, about 4 years old. He was delivered over to his mother on 15 June 1825.</p> <p>N.B. The boy's sister, about 10 years old was carried away at the same time and brought to Nagore. But she has not yet been found.</p>	<p>The boy's mother discovered him in the house of Komman auchee, who acknowledged that she received the child from a man who gave the boy to her. Komman auchee stated that she did not pay any price and that she did not know any information about the boy.</p>	



**Appendix II: Details of the Children found on the *Mydeen Bux*.**

S.No	Former Name	Present Name	Residing village of parents	Statement before Captain Biden	Information procured by Vizagapatnam Magistrate
1	Guddegaudoo	Robjeeb	Coringa	My mother sold me to a moor man. The Nacoda Oudutnainah Murkad brought me to my country. I was taken home when the Brig arrived. I was shaved at Madras. Nacoda gave me my present name.	Coringa, the native place of the child, is in the Rajahmundry district.
2	Mulliah	Ahlmass	Pendooroo	A fisherman sold me to Mohamed Gouse. I wish to go back to my country. Mohamed Gouse, my father, ordered a barber to shave me at Bimlipatam, my name was changed after I was sold.	The parents of this child are both supposed to be dead. His grandmother states that the child and his mother came to Vizagapatam about six months ago to beg and have never since been heard of as they were in great distress. She supposed they died of starvation.
3	Appoodoo	Dhundar	Chepoorpilly	My mother sold me to a person for $\frac{3}{4}$ of a rupee and that man sold me to Mohamed Gouse Ninah. I was shaved on board the Brig. I wish to go back to my mother.	There is no family of this boy's caste in the village stated to be their residing place.
4	Soiapah	Kudjee	Vizagapatam	My mother sold me to a person for two rupees near Bimlipatam, who sold me for four rupees to the nakodah Oudulninah Murkad. I wish to go with the nakodah. Jamall's wife at Vizagapatam named me; after they shaved me they named me.	The relations of this child could not be traced anywhere.
5	Appamah	Meera Hussain Beebe	Not known	My mother sold me to the nakodah for four rupees. He brought me on board the Brig. I was shaved at Vizagapatam by the nakodah. I wish to go back to the nakodah.	The residing village of the relations of this child is not known nor mentioned in the list forwarded by Captain Biden.
6	Gooravadoo	Yacoot	Appuluidipatam	My mother sold me to Coopoo Tumbee for one-and-a-half rupee. He brought me to the Brig. I was shaved at my own country. Coopoo Tumbee brought me here. I wish to go to Nagore. My name was changed after I was sold.	This boy's relations cannot be traced anywhere.

Table 2 Continued

S.No	Former Name	Present Name	Residing village of parents	Statement before Captain Biden	Information procured by Vizagapatnam Magistrate
8	Thummiah	Chinnapillay	Kintadah	From Vizagapatam I came to Bimlipatam and Adam Bava decoyed me away. I was put on the Brig by Adam Bava. I wish to go to Nagore.	This boy's parents are both dead. His mother's brother states that he proceeded to Vizagapatam for want of food and he believes took service with the Choliars of his own accord.
9	Forgotten	Shakarey	Simmachellum	My father and mother sold me to Coonamany for two rupees. I was put on the Brig by the same person. I was shaved in my own country. I wish to go back to my country.	This boy's name appears to have been Gooravunnah. His mother has been examined. She states that being unable to support the boy she sold him to a moorman.
10	Pothegaudoo	Cholley	Voosecondah near Vizagapatam	Cholia people brought me on board the Brig. I wish to go back to my country. My mother sold me for a quarter of a rupee, the Cholia man told me. So I was shaved in my country after I left my mother.	The relatives of this child could not be traced anywhere.
11	Appauah	Rajeeb	Rendoogeddalapau doo near Vizagapatam	A woman gave rice to my mother and the woman sold me to Chinnavapoo for 1 ½ rupee. He shipped me on the Brig. I wish to go back to my mother. I was shaved at Calingapatam afterwards, my name was changed.	The relatives of this child could not be traced anywhere.
12	Nagadoo	Hussain Pilla	Bimlipatam	The Chota Nacoda or Deputy Nacoda shipped me on the Brig. When the Brig arrived here the Chota acoda's son-in-law told me that he bought me from my mother for rupees 5. I was shaved at Calingapatam. I wish to go back to my country.	There is no family in Bimlipatam of the name which this boy states to be that of his parents.
13	Appadoo	Caderbux	Ankapilly	Cholia people brought me away from Calingapatam without my relations' knowledge. I wish to go to my country. I was shaved at Calingapatam, afterwards my name was changed.	No relative of the child can be found at Ankapilly nor is it known where they are.

Table 2 Continued

S.No	Former Name	Present Name	Residing village of parents	Statement before Captain Biden	Information procured by Vizagapatnam Magistrate
15	Venkiah	Shakabrey	Davadah near Vizagapatam	I went begging at Davadah at Vizagapatam and the Cholia people told me to they would give me rice and brought me away. I wish to go to my country. I was shaved at Calingapatam and my name changed.	This boy's parents are both dead. His uncle states that he came to Vizagapatam to beg and never appeared since.
16	Appadoo	Mohrum	Davadah near Vizagapatam	I went begging at Vizagapatam Choultry and the Cholia people told me to they would give me rice and brought me away. I was shaved at Bimlipatam and my name changed. I wish to go to my country.	No persons of the name stated to be that of the parents of this child are to be found in Davadah nor is it known where they are.
17	Kistamah	Meera Hussain	Vizagapatam	I went begging at Valltharah at Vizagapatam and a person took me to the Cholias. I was brought to Calingapatam, shaved, and named. I wish to go to my country.	The house name of this boy is unknown and his relatives cannot therefore be traced but it is not improbable that Depositions no. 18 and 19 refer to him.
18	Sanashy	Jahpoorey	Vizianagrum	I went begging at a choultry at Vizagapatam and the Cholias told me they would give me rice and brought me away. I was shaved at Vizagapatam and named immediately. I wish to go to my country.	No persons of the names stated by the child to be those of his parents are to be found any where at Vizianagrum.
19	Appadoo	Moobareck	Simmachellum	I went to choultry at Vizagapatam and the Choolias told me that they would give me rice and brought me away. I was shaved at Calingapatam. I wish to go to my country. My name was changed at Calingapatam.	This boy's mother has been examined. His father is dead two years ago. She acknowledges that she sold the boy. Vide deposition no.9.
20	Yeneanah	Koosale	Waltair, near Vizagapatam	I went begging at Choultry at Vizagapatam and a woman named Polee brought me to the Cholias and sold me. She told me that the Cholias will feed me well. She received 2 ¼ rupees from the Cholias. I was shaved at Calingapatam and my name was changed. I wish to go to my country.	A separate report regarding this boy will be sent in a day or two.

Table 2 Continued

S.No	Former Name	Present Name	Residing village of parents	Statement before Captain Biden	Information procured by Vizagapatnam Magistrate
22	Seethanah	Iherekey	Vizagapatam	I went begging at Vizagapatam and the Cholias took me away. They brought me to Bimlipatam, shipped me on the Brig. I was shaved at Bimlipatam and named the same day. I wish to go to my country.	The relations of this child could not be found.
23	Appadoo	Jamal	Conadah	Too young to explain himself.	This boy's name, it would appear, is Jegadoo. His nearest relation, his uncle, states that he used to gain his livelihood by begging. That one day he was not to be found. It is supposed he was taken away by somebody. <i>Vide</i> deposition no. 5.
24	Gurregapillay	Morah	Gopaulputnum	My father delivered me up to the Cholias at Vizagapatam and the Cholias shipped me on the Brig. I was shaved at Vizagapatam and was named there. I wish to go to my country.	This boy's uncle states that his father (the mother being dead) with the child left the village in great distress with the intention of going towards Chicacole for the purpose of begging, He does not know what has become of them. <i>Vide</i> deposition no. 6.
25	Uplamah	Jamanah	Waltair, near Vizagapatam	Too young to explain himself.	The relations of this child could not be found.
26	Yenkannah	Meerapillay	Bimlipatam	Too young to explain himself.	The relations of this child could not be found.
27	Gooriah	Meera Hussain	Vizagapatam	Cholias have brought me away from Vizagapatam. I was shaved at Vizeanagrum and named me at Vizagapatam. I wish to go to my mother.	The relations of this child could not be found.
28	Cassee Unnar	Huseen Pillay	Peddamadaka	Cholias decoyed me away from Vizagapatam. I was shaved at Calingapatam. I wish to go to my mother.	The deposition of the brother of this boy confirms his statement. He remained in Vizagapatam for the purpose of begging and was missing. <i>Vide</i> deposition no.7

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation set out to answer a central question: what happened to the Tamil Muslim maritime merchants during the early decades of East India Company (EIC) rule in India between 1780 and 1840? The impetus for this inquiry was driven by two factors. First is the absence of scholarship on the status of this long active community of merchants in the nineteenth century. The second reason was the availability of monuments, street names, and historical memory of the establishment and growth of Tamil Muslim merchant communities in Penang and Singapore in the nineteenth century. In the preceding four chapters, I have presented evidence that points to the continued presence of Tamil Muslims in the maritime trade between South India and Southeast Asia and also along India's eastern coast. This chapter provides a summary of the findings from the previous sections, discusses some of the broader implications of this study, and offers suggestions for fresh lines of inquiry into studying this community of merchants.

In 1778, the East India Company took control of Nagore, an important historical port among the cluster of coastal towns inhabited by Tamil Muslims and the site of the shrine of the *Sufi* saint Shah al-Hamid. In 1786, the EIC acquired the island of Penang from the Sultan of Kedah and renamed it as the Prince of Wales Island (PoWI). These two developments, taking place only a few years apart, occurred at the two ends of a maritime trade route from South India to Southeast Asia and had a significant impact on the Tamil Muslim merchants. In Nagore and Penang, the East India Company sought to develop these ports into important trading hubs. As part of such efforts, the EIC invested in improving the port's infrastructure, issued concessions to indigenous merchant communities from paying the full rate of port duties, and encouraged the settlement of Indian merchant communities in these two ports. These efforts were aimed at increasing

the revenue from port duties that could be levied on goods and for procuring goods from Southeast that were necessary for obtaining tea in China.

Tamil Muslim merchants took advantage of such policies in Nagore and Penang. In Nagore, and other South Indian ports that were subsequently won by the EIC in its battles with rival European trading companies, Tamil Muslim merchants settled and traded under the EIC's authority. Some wealthy merchants such as Muhammad Qassim negotiated favorable contracts to collect revenue on behalf of the EIC administration, a system of managing taxes previously practiced by Indian rulers. This allowed Muhammad Qassim to increase his wealth and also his prominence in Nagore. Smaller traders were attracted to Nagore by the system of courts and the granting of trade concessions. Penang lay along existing trade routes between South India and Southeast Asia and Tamil Muslims took advantage of the free trade policies at Penang to trade and settle there. The developments in Nagore and Penang show that the expansion of the EIC along the Coromandel coast and in Southeast Asia provided opportunities for Tamil Muslim merchants to trade in EIC-controlled ports, both in South India and Southeast Asia.

While the opportunities existed for maritime trade to continue along India's eastern coast and with Southeast Asia, the conditions of trade began to change in the nineteenth century. The concessions from paying the full port duties that were granted to Tamil Muslims were gradually withdrawn. The EIC began to implement a system of transit duties that aimed to collect duties at multiple stages from the production of a good till its export. By 1801, the EIC emerged as the dominant military power in South India and controlled a vast territory. The development of the system of transit duties emerged alongside the expansion of administrative mechanisms by the EIC. Another development in the nineteenth century that affected the maritime trade of Tamil Muslims was the entry

of English cotton goods in Asian markets. Indian textiles formed an important item of export to Southeast Asia. In return, Tamil Muslim merchants brought back gold dust that was used to invest in cloth production for the next trading season. The introduction of English cottons threatened this system of trade.

But the English textiles did not completely displace Indian textiles in the first half of the nineteenth century and South Indian textiles remained popular in a number of markets, especially in Penang. Thus Tamil Muslim merchants were able to continue to export Indian cotton goods. But Tamil Muslims also adapted some measures that allowed them to continue their commercial operations. They began to transport and sell English cotton goods at Malay ports and also imported them into South India. They also brought back items such as pepper and betel nuts that could be sold in South Indian markets. The continuation of maritime trade by Tamil Muslims in the first half of the nineteenth century is evidenced by the shipping information at Penang, the applications for shipping passes, the construction of new ships and the purchase of second-hand vessels, and by the applications for the refund of a portion of port duties that were allowed for Indian cotton goods. This demonstrates the continuity of operations by Tamil Muslims despite the challenges posed by the entry of English cotton goods in Asia and by the restrictive system of transit duties in South India.

Besides participating in trade between South India and Southeast Asia, Tamil Muslims also took advantage of the East India Company's efforts to generate revenue from marine sources. In the 1770s, the EIC established a monopoly on the production and sale of salt in Bengal and a similar monopoly was implemented in Madras in the early nineteenth century. In order to overcome a decreasing supply of salt in Bengal, the EIC shipped salt from the Madras Presidency to Calcutta. The administrators in Madras particularly encouraged the native shipowners to convey the salt to Calcutta since it

allowed vessel owners to use salt as a medium of payment for goods in Bengal that could be brought back to ports along the Southeastern coast. This was important since several locations in South India depended on the timely supply of food grains from Bengal and only Indian shippers ventured to such ports. Tamil Muslim merchants took advantage of this opportunity and participated in the salt trade between Madras and Bengal.

Besides the salt monopoly, the EIC actively regulated the fishing and sale of pearls and conch shells (chanks) that were found at particular locations along India's Southeastern coast and in the Gulf of Mannar between South India and Sri Lanka. The extraction of chanks and pearls from the ocean bed was a complex operation that involved hundreds of men and a large number of boats. This was not a new initiative that was started by the EIC. Rather, the fishing of pearls and chanks was conducted for several centuries and several coastal communities in South India and Sri Lanka specialized in this activity. The Tamil Muslims, who had played a prominent role in the fishing of chanks and pearls for several centuries, became important stakeholders in this economic activity. The EIC managed the fisheries through a bidding process and the details of the submitted bids reveal that Tamil Muslims were highly successful in winning contracts for fishing chanks and in conveying the shells to Bengal where they were processed into artifacts and ornaments. Thus, the participation in salt trade and chank and pearl fisheries shows that the Tamil Muslims possessed a diversified range of commercial ventures by which they were able to manage the uncertainties associated with maritime trade.

Tamil Muslim merchants depended on a variety of ways to raise capital for their trade voyages. A commonly used option was to mortgage their property – house, boat, shop, or a piece of land – for short-term loans. Another option was to sign a respondentia bond in which the borrower agreed to repay the loan within a certain number of days after



the vessel reached its destination. Tamil Muslim merchants also worked with English merchants. However, such arrangements were different from those formed between Indians and English agency houses since the Tamil Muslims did not form long-term associations. Rather, the partnership was limited to a single trade trip and the accounts were settled after the completion of the voyage.

While the East India Company expanded its power in India and Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean region remained a zone of multiple sovereignties shared among indigenous rulers and European trading companies. For Tamil Muslim merchants, conducting maritime trade under such circumstances were at once both challenging and advantageous. On one hand, the merchants could claim to be subjects of a sovereign authority that offered better protection or commercial advantage. At the same time, declaring loyalty to one power risked alienating other rulers. Under such circumstances, Tamil Muslims carried multiple passes and utilized a shifting form of subjecthood that allowed them to continue their commercial ventures during this period.

As the Tamil Muslim merchants continued to trade and settle in Penang and Singapore, the requirements to find personnel to sail the ships and to manage the retail shops increased. The charges of selling children as slaves against Tamil Muslims reveal the ways in which the merchants addressed the need for laborers. The recruitment and training of children also helped the merchants to reduce the cost of their operations. This was particularly important as the merchants had to pay transit duties in several places and they were also confronted with the decline of sales of Indian textiles in Southeast Asia.

In the preceding four chapters, I have presented evidence that indicates a continued presence of Tamil Muslims in the maritime trade between South India and Southeast Asia and also along India's eastern coast well into the early decades of the nineteenth century. Previous scholarship on Indian maritime merchants utilized several

indicators to suggest a decline in their status by the late eighteenth century. For example, Ashin Das Gupta pointed to the loss of shipownership by Gujarat's maritime merchants as proof of a fall in the fortunes of the maritime merchants.<sup>1</sup> Arasaratnam suggested that the diminishing position of Masulipatnam in the northern Coromandel and the dispersal of merchants from that port was a sign of decline.<sup>2</sup>

In this study, I have used various sources to illustrate the sustained participation of Tamil Muslim merchants in maritime trade in the nineteenth century. I have examined the shipping lists at Penang and counted the number of vessels that arrived from or departed to Coromandel ports. I have utilized the Register of Salt Permits to gauge the extent of participation of Tamil Muslims in shipping salt from the Coromandel coast to Bengal. Tamil Muslim merchants submitted requests for refunds of a portion of port duties that they had paid on their shipments of textiles to Southeast Asia. This provided a useful indicator to measure the number of merchants that were trading with Southeast Asia and the value of their cargo. Ship's commanders submitted requests for Sea Passes to sail to particular ports. The applications contained information on the type of vessel and the ports to which the commander wished to sail. These submissions also revealed that Tamil Muslims were procuring second-hand vessels or building new ones, which showed that these merchants were making an investment to continue their trading voyages. The submission of bids by Tamil Muslim merchants for contracts to manage the fishing of conch shells and pearl oysters reveal the involvement of Tamil Muslims in different types of commercial activities in the colonial economy. Thus, this study has

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<sup>1</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, "India and the Indian Ocean in the Eighteenth Century," in *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800*, eds. Ashin Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 131-61.

<sup>2</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 200-02.

relied on several types of sources to describe how Tamil Muslim merchants continued their maritime trade in the nineteenth century.

Besides demonstrating a continuity of maritime trade by Tamil Muslims, this dissertation also makes a contribution to the study of British empire in South Asia. In a recent essay, Rajat Datta examined the impact of early British rule on the economy of eastern India. While he agreed with the earlier scholarship that the East India Company rule resulted in a drain of wealth from India, he offered a fresh interpretation which argues that the period of early British rule witnessed an expansion in economic activity that was marked by inward flows of silver bullion from Europe, an increased monetization of the economy, and an increase in the agricultural and commercial outputs.<sup>3</sup> Datta indicated that the expansion of the economy occurred as a result of the Company's efforts to remove impediments to the free flow of goods between markets. At the same time, Datta is careful to point to the coercive nature of the EIC regime and noted the structural changes in the Indian economy that tied the economy to the changes in the global economy.<sup>4</sup>

The details provided in this study reveal a similar effort by the East India Company to improve the conditions for maritime trade. Such efforts included improvements to the port facilities, offering refunds on port duties paid for Indian textiles, establishment of courts to settle disputes, and providing protection to ships on the high seas. Such provisions of "public goods"<sup>5</sup> greatly aided the expansion of maritime trade. Such an increase in trade, particularly between South India and Southeast Asia and

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<sup>3</sup> Rajat Datta, "The Commercial Economy of Eastern India Under Early British Rule," in *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550-1850*, eds. H.V. Bowen, Elizabeth Manke, and John G. Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 340-69.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> I wish to thank Professor Mark Metzler for suggesting the applicability of this concept to the present study

also along India's coast, closely relates to Kaoru Sugihara's argument that the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a significant increase in intra-Asian trade volume.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the introduction of EIC rule created unequal competition for the Tamil Muslim merchants since EIC officials often took part in commercial ventures and their official positions gave them unfair advantage over the local merchants. By presenting a nuanced view of the impact of early British rule in South India, this study adds to the emerging scholarship that is offering a revisionist interpretation of the transition to colonial rule in India.

In demonstrating the continuity of maritime trade of the Tamil Muslims, this study also adds to the discussion about the periodization of the eighteenth-century Indian Ocean history. In a recent article, Prasannan Parthasarathi and Giorgio Riello question the existing characterization of the mid-eighteenth century as a breaking point that ushered in the era of European dominance in the Indian Ocean. Instead, they suggest that the mid-eighteenth century "may not be a marker of dramatic change in the Indian Ocean world."<sup>7</sup> Based on the continuing trade in Indian textiles and the inflow of silver into Asia till the early nineteenth century, Parthasarathi and Riello offer a new scheme of periodization in which European supremacy in the Indian Ocean only began in the second-half of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> The popularity of Indian textiles in Penang and the voyages of Tamil Muslims to that port till the 1840s echo the observations made by Parthasarathi and Riello. In addition, a periodization scheme based on the trade in commodities and the

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<sup>6</sup> Kaoru Sugihara, "The Resurgence of Intra-Asian Trade, 1800-1850," in *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (with collaboration of Om Prakash and Kaoru Sugihara) (Brill, Leiden, 2009), 139-69.

<sup>7</sup> Prasannan Parthasarathi and Giorgio Riello, "The Indian Ocean in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* Vol. 48, no. 1 (Fall 2014), 3. I wish to thank Professor Cynthia Talbot for providing this article.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

inflow of silver into India offers a better way to organize the periodization in this project. At present, the study identifies 1840 as the terminating point. Following the model adopted by Parthasarathi and Riello might be a better way to schematize the chapters, which would relate more closely to developments in trade.

Finally, this study began with a story of the proliferation of replicas of a South Indian *Sufi dargah* in Penang and Singapore in the early nineteenth century. Tamil Muslim merchants, who traveled from South India to Southeast Asia, built these shrines to worship Shah al-Hamid, a sixteenth-century *Sufi* saint who was considered by the merchants as the protector of their ships. The existence of these shrines provided a point of entry to study the persistence of maritime trade by Tamil Muslim merchants during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Besides the religious significance, the presence of these shrines also offers a way to examine the commercial, social, and cultural strategies of Tamil-speaking Muslims. Recent scholarship is beginning to explain the important commercial role played by the Islamic endowments in generating revenue and circulating capital among Muslim merchants.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the Nagore shrine offers a new way to examine the maritime trade network of Tamil Muslim merchants.

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Dale, "Empires and Emporia: Palace, Mosque, Market, and Tomb in Istanbul, Isfahan, Agra, and Delhi." *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* Vol. 53, no. 1/2 (2010): 212-229.

## Glossary

*Bafta*: Plain white cotton textile

*Brig*: A sailing vessel with two square-rigged masts

*Calico*: A generic name for cotton cloth. Probably named from the city of Calicut in Kerala.

*Candy*: a unit of weight, roughly equivalent to 500 pounds.

*Chintz*: Painted or printed cotton cloth used in Europe for bed and pillow covers, tablecloths, and handkerchiefs. Another name for this type of cloth was Pintadoes.

*Chowki*: Checkpoint

*Chowkidar*: Keeper of checkpoint

*Comboys*: Long petticoat, sarong.

*Corge*: A mercantile term used to represent twenty pieces of cloth

*Cowle*: Grant

*Dargah*: Hospice of a Sufi saint

*Dhoney*: A common boat on the Coromandel coast with length ranging from 36 to 100 feet.

*Dungrys*: A strong and coarse calico sail-cloth used for making bags.

*Dupatees*: This meant Do-Patta or two-breadths. This was a type of cotton calicoes, plain or printed, that was worn as shawls. The type of Dupatees exported from Coromandel to Southeast Asia was painted cotton and was also known as Jackandamas.

*Gingham*: Type of coarse cotton cloth. In Javanese dictionary, the word meant a type of striped or checkered East Indian cloth.

*Grab*: Derived from the Arabic *Ghurab*, this is a type of galley that has a tonnage ranging from 150 to 500 tons. It has two or three square-rigged masts.

*Long cloth*: Plain cotton cloth piece measuring 37 yards long and more than a yard wide. This type of cloth was woven primarily due to European requirements and was commonly exported by the East India Company from South India.

*Maund*: A unit of weight, roughly equivalent to 82 pounds.

*Muris*: Plain cotton cloth measuring about 8 to 9 meters in length and about 1.3 meters in width with a thread count of 70 per inch for normal cloth and as high as 130 threads per inch for fine cloth.

*Nakhuda*: Commander of a ship

*Nankeens*: An off-white cotton cloth manufactured in Jiangnan in the Yangzi river delta and exported from Canton to Britain and used in producing trousers, breeches, etc. A piece of nankeen measured 16 yards in length and 1 yard in width.

*Palempores*: A type of chintz bedcover.

*Percauls*: A type of spangled cotton cloth. This was probably a type of spangled cloth inlaid with piece of glass.

*Picul (picol)*: Chinese measurement unit roughly equivalent to 133.5 pounds.

*Purwana*: Warrant or letter of authorization

*Romalls (rumals)*: Small cotton or silk cloth squares typically decorated with painting, printing, and embroidery.

*Salempores*: Broad cotton cloth produced in the Coromandel coast in white or blue colors. The cloth measured between 14 and 16 meters in length and 1 meter in width with a thread count ranging from 50 to 90 threads per inch.

*Sanad*: A deed of grant by the government of a privilege or right

*Sastracundies*: Cotton fabrics whose warp and weft were dyed before being woven.

*Saudagar raja*: Commercial agent

*Seer*: A unit of weight roughly equal to 0.625 pounds.

*Shahbabdar*: Port agent

*Shroff*: Banker who specializes in money exchange

*Sicca*: Stamped silver coin. Designation of the silver currency of the Mughals adopted by the East India Company.

*Snow*: A vessel with two square-rigged masts and a supplementary mast behind the main mast.

*Tehsildar*: Revenue officer



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