

Historical gazettes of Iran. i. Tehran and north-western Iran, Graz 1976, 434-5.

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MARAKKAYAR (Tamil corruption of A. *markab* "boat"), an endogamous Tamil-speaking Muslim group of South India located mainly in the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu State in the Indian Union. Major concentrations are found in the districts of Thanjavur, South Arcot, Tiruchi-rapalli and Tirunelveli, particularly in the ports of Nagappattinam, sc. Nagor, Porto Novo, Adirampatnam, Muttupet and Pottalpudur.

No population figures exist, but the Marakkayar probably number under 100,000. They are Sunnīs of the *Shāfi'ī madhhab* and read the Qur'ān in a Tamil translation written in Arabic characters. Descent is claimed from Arab traders, and certainly Nagappattinam was known to early Arab merchants as Malifattan and was an important port of call en route to the Malay peninsula and Sumatra by the 15th century A.D.

The division between the Labbai [q.v.] and the Marakkayar is obscure. In the 19th century, the term was used in Thanjavur district amongst wealthy Labbai shipowners and traders to distinguish them

from their poorer co-religionists, and in the 18th century records of the English East India Company similar usage is found particularly for Muslims trading out of ports in the Thanjavur district. As late as the early 20th century the title was freely adopted in Tirunelveli district by Labbais engaged in the rice export trade to Ceylon.

Despite such loose usage, there was by the 19th century a clear division between Labbai and Marakkayar in larger ports such as Nagappattinam. The division was most clearly based on wealth, with the Marakkayar comprising the more prosperous section of the Muslim community and dominating indigenous seaborne trade with Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Ceylon. The Marakkayar Tamil dialect in Nagappattinam also included a smattering of Arabic words, and socially they followed fewer Hindu practices than the Labbai. In part, the division between Labbai and Marakkayar was probably confirmed by occupational and wealth differentiation which occurred during the 18th century and 19th with wealthy Muslim shipowners and overseas traders separating themselves socially from the larger and poorer Labbai community.

By the mid-19th century the Marakkayar were stereotyped as the wealthiest and most orthodox section of the Tamil Muslim community. Their women were unique in observing *goshā* (*pardah*), intermarriage with other Muslim groups was discouraged, and they deliberately attempted to eliminate Hindu practices from their social and religious life. In the late 19th century, under the influence of north Indian 'ulamā', and propagandists from 'Aligarh, there was a shortlived movement to abandon Tamil in favour of Urdu.

Despite the tightening of group boundaries in the 19th century, the Marakkayar remain a cosmopolitan community. Communities exist abroad today in Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Indonesia, and formerly in Burma. During the 20th century, they have broadened their economic base in southern India to include shopkeeping, hotel development and industrial development.

The most important Marakkayar religious centre, which is shared by other Muslim groups and Hindus, is the nationally-famous tomb of Shāh al-Hamīd 'Abd al-Kādir (d. 1600), commonly known as Kādir Walī or Mirān Shāhib, at Nagappattinam-Nagore. The tomb was endowed at foundation by the Hindu Raja of Thanjavur, and until the late 19th century it was patronised by the princesses of that family. Similar centres of pilgrimage patronised by the Marakkayar exist at Adirampatnam (the tomb of Shaykh 'Alā' al-Dīn Shāhib Andavār) and Muttupet.

Bibliography: The first references to Marakkayars are found scattered amongst the voluminous records of the English East India Company. G.A. Herklots, *Islam in India*, London 1832, details the history and practice of the Nagore shrine. E. Sell, *The faith of Islam*, Madras 1880; E. Thurston, *Castes and tribes of Southern India*, Madras 1909, and Kadir Hussain Khan, *South Indian Mussalman*, Madras 1910, provide the first modern descriptive and anthropological analysis of the group. *The census of India*, xv (1901), xii (1911), xiv (1931), provides details of occupation, distribution and social practices, but no statistics; the records of the Madras Presidency are similar. District Gazetteers provide local information concerning the group: L. Moore, *Trichinopoly*, Madras 1878; T. Venkasami Row, *Tanjore*, Madras 1883; F. R. Hemingway, *Tanjore*, Madras 1906 and *Trichinopoly Madras* 1907; W.

They have a *jamat* with a *mutavalhi* and *qazi* as their head who dispose of cases of divorce, marriage, widow remarriage, etc. Traditionally, they accept both cooked and uncooked food from other communities such as the Dhakkini and Nair. They have cordial relations with their neighbouring Hindu communities and participate in Hindu religious festivals.

Nowadays, marriages are contracted with the Labbe, Sheikh and Syed. Formal education is favoured for both girls and boys. Their attitude towards modern medicines and family planning is favourable. They avail themselves of the facilities of self-employment programmes.

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Marakkayar ✓ Community of India

The Marakkayar, also known as Maraikayar, are reported to be a community of mixed Hindu and Muslim origin who in many respects seem to differ