Chapter - V

MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES OF PARAVAS

The caste Hindus considered the newly converted Christians as inferior and no Hindu was allowed to dine or drink with the Christians. The Hindus who associated with the ‘low castes’ became outcasts and such custom was so aggressive that the Hindus preferred death to violating the same. So the Portuguese decided to separate all the new Christians away from the Hindus and passed several decrees to keep the former as a separate community.\textsuperscript{714}

The First Provincial Council of Goa which was convened in 1567 recommended to the King of Portugal to keep the Hindus completely separated from the Christians. It (the Council) also decided on various ways and means to keep the Christians away from the Hindus and Muslims.

The Christian communities were asked to wear a particular dress that could distinguish them from the non-Christians. The Christians were also asked to wear some head dress (like the natives of Portugal) so that they could be identified as Christians.\textsuperscript{715}

The Christians received a favoured treatment and special attention as if they were quite a separate community, distinct from the Hindu community. The reason

\textsuperscript{714} Cunha Rivara, Fas 4, Decree 2, pp. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{715} Ibid., Decree 4, p. 187.
for such attention was that “the Christians are like tender plants which shake with the wind of persecution and might return to the worship of idols which they suck with their mother’s milk and if they mixed with the pagans”.  

The Council did not allow the Christians to borrow musical instruments, ornaments, fireworks, etc., from the Hindus to celebrate Christian festivals solemnly. Employment of Hindu artisans and craftsmen was not encouraged. The Council forbade the Christians from getting any paintings done, or statues moulded, chalices, crosses, reliquaries, statues of saints or crucifixes made by Hindus for divine worship in Christian churches. The ecclesiastical authorities concerned were asked to punish those who went against the instruction.

A fine was imposed on those Christians who frequented Hindu barbers for their service. It was further decreed that no Hindu should be appointed for any service in the Christian families. The Hindu capitalists used to lend money to the Christians for trade and commerce and enhanced their capital. This was forbidden by the Portuguese authorities.

A number of rich and resourceful Hindu businessmen used to employ Christians as their factors for trade and commerce to make use of the Christians to enter into areas where Hindus might not be able to. Partnerships of this sort were

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717 Cunha Rivara, Fas.4, Decree 28, p. 24-25.
718 Ibid., Decree 29, p. 25.
prohibited by the Portuguese.\textsuperscript{720} This was the first step the Portuguese took to separate the new Christians physically to form a separate community. The decrees passed in the Councils were binding not only on the Paravas but on the Hindus and the Muslims as well. Once the Paravas were separated from the rest of the religious groups, the Portuguese set out to obliterate the customs and practices that had been in vogue among them (the Paravas) for ages. In the second stage, the cultural alienation policy of the Padroado was implemented.

\textbf{Conversion}

The conversion of the Paravas, which originated purely as a communal affair in a remote region of Tamil Nadu, soon had a tremendous impact not only on their own race (the Paravas), but even on the society of South India as a whole. As a religious catalyst, it engendered the conversion of other coastal tribes too, like the Caraiyars, the Muukkuvas, the Paraiyars and so on, and of many people in the hinterland as well. As a political factor, it helped, to a great extent, to reduce the Muslim power from the South. As regards the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, the Portuguese Padroado, for the first time, crossed the boundary of Goa and was enthroned on the Fishery Coast as a result of the subjection of the Paravas to the Crown of Portugal.

\textbf{New Conversion}

After witnessing the attitude of the Jesuit missionaries, conversion took place among other castes and communities also. In 1595, about eight hundred gentios

\textsuperscript{720} Ibid.,
(Hindus) embraced Christianity. One of them even volunteered to denote one hundred *sardaus* for the construction of the church. Others, mostly poor, offered their physical labour. The officials of the Nayak of Madurai also became Christians.\(^{721}\)

By the Third Decree, the Portuguese enforced that no baptism would be administrated by force. If some one was brought to Christianity by force, it was understood that person was lead by the devil.\(^{722}\)

**Support for the Missionaries**

South India was opened for missionary activities on a large scale in the sixteenth century by the Jesuit priests of the Padroado system. The Jesuits utilized the political influence of the Portuguese in South India to gain the acceptance and respect of the native powers and the people.\(^{723}\)

The close ties between the Portuguese and Vijayanagar in the sixteenth century assured the Jesuit clergy a safe berth in the capital of Vijayanagar. The Portuguese victories in the Western Coast led to the planting of the Cross in the Eastern Coast also.\(^{724}\) It was not until 1593 that the Jesuits made a substantial effect to open a door to the interior for Gospel work. King Venkata I (1580-1614) of Vijayanagar permitted the Jesuits to stay in his capital and start a mission.\(^{725}\)

\(^{721}\) *Di., Vol. XVIII*, pp. 417-418.
\(^{724}\) *Ibid.*,.

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Soon Father Pimenta visited him. He was given a royal reception. When he met the King in his Court, Pimenta presented to him the portrait of the Pope. The Emperor was so pleased to see and admire the white garment of the Pope. The King was fascinated by the white dress that in due course white cassock was adopted as the Indian clerical dress. Pleased by the goodwill of the King Venkata, the Jesuits in his court wrote to the Nayak of Madurai in 1595 requesting him to provide safety to the missionaries in his territories.

By this time, the only Jesuit in Madurai was Father Goncalves Fernandez. The purpose of his stay was more political than religious. He remained as an agent of the Paravas and as an interpreter of the Portuguese Government in the court of the Nayak of Madurai. Taking advantage of the situation, the Jesuits obtained permission from Muttuvirappa Nayak to build a church for the Paravas in the city of Madurai. The Nayak also permitted the Jesuits to travel to any part of his Kingdom.

**Cultural Impact**

The changes that the Portuguese Padroado brought in the cultural sphere in the Fishery Coast has covered several aspects. The most important one was religion and the same was used as a tool to bring other changes. Just as Parava polity and Parava economy are inseparable, the Parava religion and Parava culture are also inseparable. In the name of religion, a cultural alienation took place by segregating

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the Christians from other religious groups by the Portuguese. Since the Padroado was fully backed by political support, the Portuguese thought that the Paravas could be assimilated forcibly into their fold. But, it did not happen. The changes occurred in the culture of the Paravas as a result the Portuguese impact may be studied as under.

**Organised Christian Mission**

The Mass Conversion in 1536 was not followed by any organised missionary work in the Fishery Coast. The scanty presence of the Franciscan fathers did not bring any change in the lives of the Paravas. Only after the arrival of Xavier in 1542, a true Christians life was promoted among them.\textsuperscript{730} The Himalayan task was very systematically schemed, organised and carried out by Xavier and his successors.

After visiting all the Christian villages, Xavier narrated his experiences in his letter to the then Superior General, Ignatius Loyola. The former wrote that there was no one to instruct the new converts in faith; they could say nothing more about their faith than that they were Christians. To put it in Xavier’s own words “they did not know the difference between their right hand and their left”.\textsuperscript{731}

Since Xavier did not know Tamil, the native language, he assembled those who were more knowledgeable and sought out individuals who understood both his

\textsuperscript{730} *Letters of Xavier, October 28, 1542*, pp. 61-62.

\textsuperscript{731} *Ibid.*, p. 60.
language and the native language. These individuals helped Xavier to translate Latin into Tamil.  

He (Xavier) began with rudimentary catechism that consisted of the Sign of the Cross, confessing that there were three persons in one sole God, the Creed, the Commandments, the Our father, Hail Mary, Salve Regina and the Coniteor. After Xavier had translated these into Tamil he learned them by heart. With a bell in his hand, he went around the streets of each village and called upon the women, gentlemen, labourers, slaves and children to come out of their houses and gathered them in one place and taught them these prayers.  

The Jesuit missionaries taught both catechism and moral instruction to the fisherfolk by dividing them into groups. On Sunday evenings, the men discussed their doubts regarding their faith. On Fridays, all the Christians meditated on the Passions of the Christ. They observed penance also. The women discussed practical issues on Saturdays.  

Children were taught practical lessons, on Wednesdays. Young girls were instructed about chastity and costumes. They had to give accounts of how they dealt with boys. The exemplary life of the neo Christians put even the Portuguese to shame.

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735. D'I., Vol. XII, p. 46.
736. Ibid.,
The missionaries established elementary schools near the churches in all the villages. Local children were mixed with the Portuguese children in the schools. Each year the viceroy gave four thousand pieces of gold to be paid to those persons who were very diligent in teaching the Christian doctrine in the villages.\textsuperscript{737}

Xavier is known for his diligent evangelising in the Fishery Coast. As historian, Stephan Neill says, Xavier arrived to find an untutored mob, but left behind a Church in being. By the end of the sixteenth century, each Parava village on the Fishery Coast had its own resident priest, and the Jesuits also moved among the fishing villages on the South West Coast and made many more converts.

In order to carry out the catechetical work effectively and fruitfully, a small circle consisting of four persons was created by Xavier. They were the moduthagam (overseer), the ubadesiyar (sacristian), the kanakkappillai (catechist) and vathiyar (teacher). Just like the Pattangattis, urars and Jathi Thalavan helped to carry out the civil administration, the trio “ubadesiyar, kanakkappillai and the padres (priests) became a nucleus and played an influential role in shaping the Parava mob into a cultured society.\textsuperscript{738}

“In each settlement the padre, the ubedesiyar and the kanakkappillai played an active role and the church, both physically and ideologically, became the focal

\textsuperscript{737} Di., Vol. XVII, p. 17; Di., Vol. XVIII, pp. 179-180.  
point of Paravas existence. Within the portals of the Catholic churches, the Paravas
were baptized, confirmed, educated, married and buried.”

Even among the ‘trio’ the role of the kanakkapillai was an incomparable one
and which continues to function in almost all the parishes even today. Xavier
himself appointed kanakkapillais and they were expected to be clean and pure in
heart. He (the kanakkapillai) had to monitor to the presence and activities of
pagodas and black magicians existed in the Christian villages. It was his duty to
supervise whether catechism was taught regularly. He had to make a survey of the
people of those who had not received baptism and confession. If any one wanted to
become a Christian, the kanakkapillai had to check if he or she had shed all the old
superstitious beliefs. The kanakkapillai had to arrange for the marriage of persons of
lost faith with the persons of less faith and vice versa. He had to visit sick people
also. In the absence of priests, he finally had to present a report to the parish priest
about the happenings in the parish.

While Xavier was imparting Christian faith to the Paravas, he found that it
was very difficult for them to cut themselves off from the trunk of their age old
Hindu religious practices. Yet, he strove hard and succeeded in bringing the same
fisherfolk out of their primitive form of worship. The children to whom he taught
catechism became agents in abolishing the vestiges of their previous religion. The

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739 Ibid.,
Portuguese wanted the new Christians to be free from Hindu influence. They wanted the Paravas to be separated physically and culturally so that a ‘client community’ of the Portuguese could be formed in the Fishery Coast.

**Introduction of sur Names**

Whoever was converted by the Padroado Missionaries received surnames along with their baptismal names. Just as the Christians of Goa and Mangalore, the Paravas at Tuticorin were also given a variety of Portuguese surnames. The Paravas in general have the surname ‘Fernando’. But, the people of the Yelu Urs have names like Almeida, Gomez, Lobo, Machodo, Motha, Vaz, etc., The Paravas are very proud of having these names and they (the names) continue to be transmitted to their posterity. Some people misunderstood and misinterpreted these surnames. They had problem only with ‘Fernando’ as though it denoted the caste ‘Parava’. They were comfortable with other names. There are sixty eight names that were now prevalent in the whole Parava community as family names.\(^{741}\)

It was the general policy of the Portuguese authorities also to invest the chiefs of the Parava communities with the honourable title of Dom to promote them to the rank of nobility. In realization of this policy, the Portuguese officials of the Fishery Coast invested the Parava chief or Jathi Thalaivan with the title of Dom, and granted him the highest privilege of wearing a gold chain with a cross, as a badge of nobility.\(^{742}\)


In some cases, the Christians were allowed to carry on certain native customs with modifications: Marriages were allowed to be celebrated with Tamil customs and manners. But, the Portuguese insisted that the tali (golden chain) given to a Christian woman on her wedding day might contain a picture of a saint or an image of “Our Lady” or the Cross and not a picture of a Hindu god or Pillaiyar, the idol presiding the over wedlock.\textsuperscript{743}

Similarly, several ceremonies used at wedding such as the twig of the arasu (a plant), the circlets drawn against the evil eye or against illluck and the number and quality of the dishes were ordered to be given by the Christians. Regarding the chord made of 108 threads and dyed in saffron with which the tali was tied around the neck, both the colour and number were condemned as superstitious.\textsuperscript{744}

The proclamation of three bands, at three Sunday masses before the marriage was stressed. Those who violated this were threatened with ten pardaus and ex-communication. This practice (the proclamation of the bands) spread to the other places also. These days reading of at least one band is necessary before the marriage.\textsuperscript{745}

The Portuguese introduced celebration of saints’ feasts in almost all the villages, especially at Tuticorin. It is doubtful whether such an attempt was a part of their inculturation or the Paravas assimilated whatever introduced by the missionaries according


\textsuperscript{744} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{745} \textit{Ibid., Vol. V}, p. 425.
to their temperament. For instance, the annual feast of Our Lady of Snows has got a lot of customs and practices adopted from Hinduism.

The statue of “Our Lady” Snows reached Tuticorin in June 9, 1582 by St. Helena (a ship) and was placed in the church of Nossa Senhora da Piedade. In Tamil Nadu, after the Bhakti Movement in the seventh century A.D., various forms of the Mother Goddesses (Shakthi, the cosmic power) emerged and reached the height of importance in the fourteenth century. This strong worship was perhaps noticed by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and motivated them to introduce devotion to Mary although it was popular among the medieval Christians much earlier.

Roche says that along with establishing a strong faith in the Paravas the Jesuits wanted an indigenization of ritual and worship. In an effort to supplant and divert the hoary attachment of the Paravas from their festivals at Madurai and Tiruchendur, the Jesuits sought to establish shrines and festivals which would transpose Catholic liturgy onto an Indian matrix.

Venantius says that Xavier himself, after seeing the Paravas’ deep attachment to their old tribal Mother Goddess, Meenakshi (deity of fish eyes), obtained for them the statue of Our Lady of Snows (Nossa Senhora das Nevis) from the Augustinian convent of Manila. The Paravas call her ‘Panimaya Matha’ (Tamil translation of Our Lady of the Snows) and Parava Matha (Mother of the Paravas). The annual feast of Our Lady of the Snows has thereafter been the feast of the entire Fishery Coast. Today this strong bond

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of exclusive identity is not so rigid as before. The people of the various religions (It is the feast of all the religions) visit the strike on the feast day. The feast of Our Lady of Snows which was introduced in 1582 at Tuticorin had great repercussions not only on the religion and the culture of the Paravas but had also affected their politics, economy and society very much because “indigenous Hindu festivals (thiruvizhakal) in South India were not only religious events; they were also social events replete with processions (suthukalam), the pulling of temple ears (thers), dramas and music (natagam and bhajanam), floats (saparam) and festoons (kodis).”\textsuperscript{748}

When this feast was introduced in Tuticorin for the first time, all the rituals and practices of the Parava dharmakarthakkal during the festivals at Tiruchendur and Madurai entered the Fishery Coast.\textsuperscript{749}

Just as the temple authorities hosted a banquet to the Kings, leaders and respected men of the dharmakarthakkal, the Jesuits also gave a dinner (virundu) to all the Parava elders and Jathi Thalaivans. The description of the feast that was held in 1600 gave interesting news about the dinner that the Jesuits gave to the principal Christians of the Fishery Coast: There was a large table where more than one hundred persons sat. The Paravas were flattered by this mark of honour.\textsuperscript{750}

The dinner during the annual festival, however, resulted in creating an economic disparity among the Paravas. Those who were invited and dined with the Jesuits at one table called themselves as ‘Mesaikarar’ (table Paravas) and other

\textsuperscript{748} Ibid., p. 53.
\textsuperscript{749} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{750} Ibid., p. 53.
Kamarakkarar (common fisherfolk). A751 Another version for this distinction namely the Paravas who had wealth and status in the society were in a position to lend money to the Portuguese to conduct their trade and therefore could sit at the dinner table along with the Portuguese.

Jathi Thalaivan, the Adepanars of the yelu urs, the Pattangattis and other elites were considered as the principal Christians. When the Dutch occupied Tuticorin they suppressed the Society of Jesus in 1759. Then the Jathi Thalaivan hosted the dinner during the annual festival of Our Lady of Snows. This disparity (between the elite and the other Paravas) was very obvious in Tuticorin and other villages where the seven major ports once existed. The Mesaikarar (the elite) considered themselves superior and did not have any marriage alliance with the Kamarakkarar. “A custom of symbolic honour at a religious festival crystallized into a social distinction of great consequence for the jati.” A752

Charitable Activities

The Portuguese introduced a lot of charitable activities. During pearl fishing, many Paravas fell sick as the oysters were strewn all over area causing an unhygienic atmosphere. Henriques set up a hospital for the poor in Punnaikayal. It was a kind of work, he said, so far unknown in these parts and was admired by the people of all

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751 Ibid., pp. 54-55.
752 Ibid.,
creeds. Maintained by the Christians themselves, at first, it was managed by a former catechist, who himself treated the patients.  

The Paravas donated generously to these charity missions and life-time patrons paid eighty *paraus*. Nearly two thousand *paraus* were spent for the welfare of the new Christian poor and orphans. The priests fed the poor. By 1575, another hospital was put up in Tuticorin. So, Henriques lived to see some of his hopes materialized. The Jesuits, who happened to be in station used to serve the poor and helped to keep the place tidy much to the edification of their flock.

The Paravas experienced utter poverty. Since they did not have clothes, they were ashamed of coming out of their houses. There is a reference about “clothing eight hundred people” by the Jesuits and made them go to the churches. The young girls who were not able to get married due to lack of money were given donations.

Non-Christians also came to the Jesuits seeking help. They were not asked to pay when they were treated in the hospitals. The non-Christian poor and orphans were also provided with food and clothes. The Muslims and the Hindus became friendly with the Christians. The priests borrowed money from the Christians and

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754 *Df., Vol. XV*, p. 444.


756 *Df., Vol. XV*, p. 44.
distributed it to the non-Christians. The fame of the Christians and their charity went around the world.\footnote{\textit{DF}, \textit{Vol. XV}, pp. 128-132.}

There was a great famine on the Fishery Coast in 1570. Henriques established famine-relief houses in some of which fifty persons were fed daily. Don Sebastian reduced the tithes on pearls.\footnote{Stuart, \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 43.}

To look after the hospitals and carry out other charitable deeds, the Jesuits founded many confraternities like the Holy Rosary, the Misericordia, the Sacred Heart and so on. The members of these Confraternities were dedicated and spent their time in taking care of the widows, the poor, the sick and the orphans. The members were in charge of the administration of the hospitals also. They consoled the sick, prepared the terminally sick to make a good confession so that they would die peacefully. They were the ones who collected alms to help the poor and for the young girls to get married. They submitted accounts to the priests. In case of any misunderstanding between the people and the priests, the Confraternity members brought reconciliation. Local people had more faith and found solace in them. In brief, the members lived like a leaven among the newly converted Christians.\footnote{\textit{DF}, \textit{Vol. XVII}, p. 416.} In due course, the Confraternity changed into sodalities which have been functioning very actively in the coastal villages.
The members of the Confraternities were invested with colourful robes, glittering badges, crowns, laced banners and other insignia, all in Portuguese style. Also the officials of these Confraternities, as they do even today, bore Portuguese titles though in corrupt forms as for instance, ‘persente’ (president), ‘sacadader’ (secretary), procurador (procurator), ‘iscriman’ (scribe), ‘melenge’ (messenger) and the like. 760

The same type of pious associations for all ages exist even today. It promotes piety among the members and they involve themselves in social welfare activities also. This adds colour and beauty to the local church. The credit goes to the Portuguese Padroado because no such practice has been in vogue in any other place. The members of these associations are emotionally balanced to blend both the spiritual and the mundane elements so beautifully and make these associations life oriented.

**Promotion of Tamil**

Xavier after staying with the Paravas for a period of four months at Thoothukudi, wrote in his letter that he could translate simple Christian prayers into Tamil. 761 From another letter, we understand that he had picked up Tamil sufficiently to the point of making corrections in his first version of “Christian

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760 These names are in vogue in all the village of Fishery Coast even today.
prayers in Tamil”. This shows the Jesuits’ love for learning Tamil to accelerate their missionary activities.

The Jesuit missionaries focussed on educating the Paravas with Christian religious ideals and so the printing of books in Tamil was adopted as the principal means to promote the same. The year 1586 witnessed the rise of a college, i.e. a boarding school at Tuticorin. By 1589, twenty out of thirty boys were learning Latin through the medium of Tamil. By 1590, some of them were composing Latin verses. In 1597, three of them were ordained as priests. These Catholic missionaries were among the forerunners in the art of teaching Tamil to foreigners and have composed several works for that purpose. Tamil language was learnt not only by the missionaries, but by almost all the Europeans who settled down in this part of the country for commercial or administrative reasons. That was not a period when the Tamils learned European languages, but it was the other way round. The literary activity of the period would not have been possible without printing. In 1556 the Jesuits in Goa opened the first printing press in India with Latin types brought from Europe. It became sporadically active, at least after the first

762 Letters of Xavier, March 27, 1544, p.78.
year. Fr. João de Faria was the first maker of Tamul (Tamil) types, who opened a printing press in Punnaikayal in 1578, producing a number of specific works.\textsuperscript{765}

Tamil is the richest and apparently the most ancient of the Dravidian languages. It was spoken in the entire Coromandel Coast including the Fishery Coast, Northern Sri Lanka, and the Malabar Coast of the Peninsula as far as Trivandrum in Travancore. The closely related Malayalam ultimately derived from Tamil but with different alphabets, is the basic language of the Malabar Coast north of Trivandrum, in Travancore and Cochin, although Tamil is interspersed all along the coast. Certainly, in the sixteenth century, Tamil was the dominant language in the Southern India Provincial Council of 1575.\textsuperscript{766}

It was Fr. Valignano who visited the Fishery Coast requested Henriques to prepare some printed material for the Tamil area. Henriques, in a letter dated 6 December 1577, wrote from Thoothukudi, that Tamil catechism was being printed and he thanked the endeavours of the Visitor (Valignano). The annual Goa letter of 1578, written 20 October by Fr. Gomes Vaz, reported that the Tamil printing press for the Fishery Coast had been perfected and that the Parava Christians had been much interested in the work, contributing four hundred cruzados towards it. On 10 January 1580, Fr. Gaspar Alvares wrote from Cochin that a Confessionary was

\textsuperscript{766} \textit{Ibid.,} p. 318.
being printed from Tamil types and that the catechism of Fr. Marcos Borge was to follow in the spring, with the native Christians defraying the expenses.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 319.}

But, in spite of such support, the printing enterprises soon suffered from want of money. Secondly the death of Fr. Faria in 1582 was a death blow for the enterprises, which was renewed only a hundred years later, at Ambalakadu, near Cochin.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 319.}

The founding of a seminary was a clever and successful strategy to win local collaborations for missionary work.\footnote{Di., \textit{Vol. IX (1573-1575)}, 1966, p. 276.} Xavier made use of two local deacons from Goa, in Thoothukudi.\footnote{Georg Schurhammer, \textit{Francis Xavier, Vol. I}, p. 147.} Native seminarians helped the missionaries as interpreters.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, \textit{Vol. III}, p. 147.} Unfortunately, the local clergy was mistrusted, relegated and denied minimum level of equality with the Portuguese missionaries and religious and secular clergy. They not only received insufficient attention that mattered, but were also frequently criticised.\footnote{Délio de Mendonça, \textit{Conversion and Citizenship: Goa Under Portugal 1570-1610}, XCHR Studies Service No. II, New Delhi, 2002, p. 340.}

**Language**

The missionaries are criticised for their contribution towards the native languages. This was not an expression of their appreciation of the language or culture. The critics raised the question that the interest shown to learn the native languages by the religious orders in the earlier period dwindled by the mid-
eighteenth century. At this time, the colonial control was firmly in place and the time had come to force the natives to forget their language and learn the languages of the colonial powers. This change of attitude was already noticed in Goa from 1684.  

**Education**

The Paravas were encouraged to get educated by the Portuguese clerics who sent them to the college at Quilon. The college was founded by Xavier in 1549. The Paravas students sat along with the resident Portuguese and other native Christians. The rector of the college at Quilon was actually the superior of the Fishery and Coromandel Coasts.

Portuguese language was given priority in the religious instructions and in the liturgical functions, next to the official liturgical language of Latin. The Christians of the Fishery Coast had been trained to recite the prayers and the Divine Offices both in Latin and Portuguese. Fr. Pietro Arboleda was surprised on his visit to the Fishery Coast and Mannar Island in 1501 where the Parava Christians recited the prayers in Portuguese as well as in Latin. He said that it was a wonderful thing to see the Christians in the morning with Rosaries in their hands and around necks and each one recited Rosary.

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In Tuticorin and in other coastal villages, the Portuguese language was partly used in the churches for instructions and for singing the Divine Office on Sundays and on feast days in which the people participated with great enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{776} As the Dutch Pastor Philip Baldaeus observes, the Paravas, chiefly those living in Jaffnapattanam, generally spoke Portuguese.\textsuperscript{777} The Portuguese language was taught and used also in coastal schools and seminary. The Jesuit Annual letter of 1600 says that the seminarians of the Fishery Coast, studying at the seminary of Tuticorin, were taught Portuguese.\textsuperscript{778}

**Conversion of the Coastal Communities**

The Jesuits were particular in converting the coastal communities like the Muukkuvas, and the Caraiyars. Just like the Paravas, the Muukkuvas and the Caraiyars were also involved in pearl fishing. The Paravas as sailors and boat owners had economic power also. They had formed a very powerful caste inclination among themselves.

**Caraiyars**

The Caraiyars lived in Kombuturai, Punnaikayal and Mannar in the Northern part of the Fishery Coast. There are many references about them in the history of the Fishery Coast. They were employed as pearl fishers by the Paravas and they seemed to be lower than the Paravas in social status. They had been converted even before the arrival of

\textsuperscript{776} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{777} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{778} Ibid.,
Xavier. Xavier also baptized the Caraiyars in six or seven villages. In his letter dated January 15, 1544 he says:

“As to the number who became Christians you may understand then from this, that it often happens to me, to be hardly able to use my hands from the fatigue of baptizing; often in a single day I have baptized whole villages”.  

Both free and slave Caraiyars of one thousand and two hundred people asked for baptism. They too wanted to live with the Coastal Christians.  

Henriques, in his report of 1561 says that he and his companions too baptized many Caraiyars at Punnaikayal. Also on the island of Mannar, there were some settlements of the Caraiyars, most of whom were migrants from the Fishery Coast. Their first group, about 1,000 in number was baptized in 1544 at Patti by a native priest sent by Xavier.  

**Mukkuvars**  

According to Thurston, Muukkuvas the maritime fishers of Malabar were also baptized by Xavier in November, 1544. He obtained permission from the King of Travancore, Martanda Varma as a reward for his valiant intercession with the Governor in his favour. Towards the end of 1544, he had baptized ten thousand Mukkuvars in Travancore.  

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780 Ibid.  
783 *Letters of Xavier*, December 18, 1544, pp. 104-105.  
784 Ibid.
Just to escape from the oppression of the Muslims at sea and from their native
Rulers at home, the Muukkuvas also desired to imitate the Paravas and embraced
Christianity to get the protection of the powerful Portuguese.\textsuperscript{785} At the time of Xavier, they
(the Caraiyars) were living in fourteen successive hamlets, of which only two, namely,
Pallam and Manakkudi, were counted as belonging to the Fishery Coast. The inhabitants of
the former were converted by Xavier himself and the latter at his request by his companion
Francis Mansilhas.\textsuperscript{786}

As we see today, the Paraiyars must have lived in the outskirts of the Parava
villages during the time of the Portuguese. The caste differences existed between the
Paravas and the Paraiyars and so the Portuguese were rather hesitant to convert this
community in the beginning. According to the Jesuit mission history, there was already a
Paraiya Christian community near Manappadu before the year 1600.\textsuperscript{787}

Henriques says that there existed a Paraiya community at Periapattananam in the
north region of the Fishery Coast. The Jesuits who had a resident there converted more
Paraiyars in the hinterland.\textsuperscript{788}

There are a couple of villages of the Nadars situated on the Fishery Coast and the
people are Catholics. Venantius says that they must have been converted during the last
quarter of the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{789} But, we see that in the interior of all the Parava
villages, the Nadars have residences and there are also Christians among them. These

\textsuperscript{785}\textit{Ibid.},
\textsuperscript{786}\textit{Ibid.},
\textsuperscript{788}\textit{Ibid.},
\textsuperscript{789} Venantius Fernando, S., \textit{Sacred Hearts Cathedral Centenary Souvenir Thoothukudi} (1864-1964),
Thoothukudi, 1956, p. 37.
people have been mentioned as Shanas and some of them even joined the Vadugars and troubled the Paravas.

“In the Indian sub-continent, the higher castes were only moderately affected by the missionary work. The Portuguese did a lot of conversions among the lower castes outside their jurisdiction. The low castes hoped to improve their social status under the political protection of the Portuguese. The Society of Jesus, the most suitable institution for missionary work, never operated in Muslim regions except for meeting the Mughal Emperor Akbar after being called by him”.790

The Jesuit missionaries found that the Vijayanagar Kingdom provided a conducive atmosphere to spread Christianity. Here, they could travel safely and the Christians were warmly welcomed. Of course, there were a few Nayaks who did not like the European religion to strike roots in their land. Yet the missionaries were not associated with any acts of exploitation or oppression and the Vijayanagar King hoped to find in the Portuguese useful allies against the invading Muhammadens.791

Towards Dawn

Seal fishing has been the occupation of coastal India. People from time immemorial, forming an integral part of India and making substantial contribution to the Indian economy. The fishing community contribute in sharing Indian economy in foreign exchange. This economy also feeds the entire nation with high protein by bring ashore

791 Johnson, Pioneers in India, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 70-71.
varieties of fishes from deep sea. The traditional fishing technics are eco friendly and are based on the principle of responsible fishing. Traditional sector has knowledge accumulated over the years of learning through labor and their ability to catch fish. Through the inherited knowledge the traditional fishermen on the coast know the different directions of the wind the various water current.

Rameshwaram is a beautiful island and has proud to have references in the epic Ramayana. As per the epic Rama worshiped Lord Shiva before taking his army to win over Ravana. No words can explain the island beauty and serenity. The total land marks is sandwitched between Gulf of manner on the south and the calm palk strait on the north. More than 80% of the island population are fishermen. Basically traditional fishermen. They all had migrated in the 1920s, and 30s from a place called Mukkaioor and they had settled. As by vadic by nature they were looking for suitable location for their livelihood and finally got settled at Rameshwaram. The proposition wise the place happend to be very good and can venture into sea all the 365 days of the year. They found south sea and the north sea provide alternate employment throughout the year. By generation to generation the sea and the seaside was inherited by the sea goddess and patrimony, and inherited asset were passed on to the succeeding generations intact. For the fishermen of the coast, fishing is a way of life not just a source of income. Sea is their mother, and the seashore is their mother laps, for fishing community.