CHAPTER FIVE

THE IMPACT OF THE PORTUGUESE ON THE FISHERY COAST

The Portuguese’ presence, settlement and commercial activities on the Fishery Coast for more than a century wrought enormous changes on the Parava community. Amidst such changes the Paravas never lost their uniqueness or identity but emerged as one caste and one religion. The impact made by the Portuguese on their culture and religion is amazing and the vestiges in these spheres still remain and continue to be expressed in their day-to-day life. It is true the Occident and the Orient embraced each other in the Fisher y Coast but the Parava community did not fall a victim to the European culture completely. They (the Paravas) made a synthesis of these two and formed a unique culture for themselves.

Societal Changes

The Portuguese found that certain social evils existed against women and they (the Parava women) were not treated on par with men. In order to establish equality of woman several measures were adopted. The Jesuit missionaries took up this task and passed several resolutions in the form of decrees in their Provincial Councils held in Goa from time to time. It is important to note that even before the British, the Portuguese had sowed the seeds for the emancipation of women.
The widows were asked not to commit sati or shave their heads at the death of their husbands. The Jesuit missionaries urged the Portuguese king to instruct the Brahmins in India that the latter should not force women to do such things. The widows were allowed to remarry if they were below the age of fifty. The Portuguese were not only particular about Christian women but also were concerned about the entire society that was under their jurisdiction.¹

Decree Seventeen declared that women should not be deprived of their property rights. As property right is a question of human conscience, both sons and daughters should enjoy equal rights. The decree further said that whoever violated this right would be excommunicated and forgiven only after returning the share to the affected person.²

The Fifth Provincial Council of Goa forbade the superstitious ceremonies at the time of wedding and child-birth and considered them as unwanted. Christian women after their delivery were asked to go to the church when they found themselves fit and could take their child to the church after forty days as a pious practice in imitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.³

A married woman could become a foster mother to bring up the child of another married woman by a contract. The contract should be made with the permission of the foster mother's husband. At the end of the agreement, the foster

² Ibid., Decree 17, p. 500.
³ Ibid., p. 279.
mother would leave the child and go back to her husband. The adoption of children was licit only when the foster parent had no biological children.¹

Xavier proscribed the consumption of urâk.⁵ He executed his desire by giving one fanam for each drunkard woman captured and she was to be confined for three days. The meirinho⁶ was asked to proclaim such an order in all the villages.⁷

The Portuguese were not very parochial and aimed at reforming and bring changes only among Christian men and women. The Non-Christians were also bound by certain decrees. The officials wanted the Christians not to be affected by scandalous acts of the non-Christians. Some Hindus had more than one woman as life partner and had even unmarried or married women as concubines. As this was scandalous for the new Christians, the Fifth Provincial Council of Goa requested the Portuguese king to authorise the ecclesiastical judges to punish such persons. The Second Decree said that Christians of low castes as well as non-Christians should be considered as equals before God and were therefore bound by the same laws.⁸

The children of the non-Christians should also be given care by the Portuguese when their parents died. Baptism would be administered to them when only if they really desired it. Slaves professing one religion could not be sold to the

---

¹ Ibid., Decree 9, p. 264.

⁵ Urraqua (urâk), a wine made from the sap of palm trees. Costelloe, op. cit., p. 76.

⁶ Meirinho in Portugal is a local official charged with executing the orders of the sovereign. In India meirinho was a warden or justice of peace. Ibid.

⁷ Letters of Xavier, March 14, 1544, pp. 75-76.

⁸ Cunha Rivara, Fas. 4, Decree. 2, p. 489.
owner of another religion. If a Hindu slave was sold to a Muslim, then the Hindu owner would be condemned to go to jail.

The negligence of the kanakkappillai in checking the co-habitance of the domestic servants between fields and infidels led to its occurrence. So the First and the Third Provincial Councils prohibited any such co-habitance between the various religious communities.

Whenever there were Christian women in the house, Non-Christian men should not enter their house. The Christians were forbidden to learn to sing or dance in the schools. They were threatened with excommunication. The teacher one who taught music and dance was punished with fifty pardaus and the half of which would be given to the complainant. The culprit would remain out of the school for two years.⁹

It was quite prevalent among the Hindus to get married to their first cousins. But the Christians were persuaded to avoid such alliances.¹⁰

Affonso de Albuquerque, the governor of Portuguese India encouraged the Indian unmarried Portuguese male residents in India to marry the local Indian women so as to increase the population of those living within the sphere of Portuguese culture. The intent was far reaching to have many armed men to fight the enemies of the Portuguese government. Muslim and Brahmin ladies, were preferred as they were of fair colour and could mix easily with the Portuguese race. Such

⁹ Cunha Rivara, Fas. 4, p. 269.
encouragements helped in bringing many of the Portuguese men to settle down in India, and they in turn helped the government to form new colonies.\(^\text{11}\)

**Slave System**

The slaves formed one of the agents who promoted Portuguese' interest in the Estado da India. Before the arrival of the Portuguese, slavery existed in Tamil Nadu and the Portuguese too promoted slave trade. In course of time the condition of the slaves seemed to have become precarious. The Portuguese forts contained a large number of slaves and they were subjected to several forms of tortures. Many of them died and to cover up such deeds, their corpses were put in boxes and buried. Though the Portuguese king condemned such occurrences as inhuman yet insisted that the slaves should be punished for the good of the humanity. The king ordered the viceroy to take the list of the names of the slaves of Hindus, Muslims and Christians. He also wanted the list of the names of those who punished the slaves in inhuman ways.\(^\text{12}\)

It was a custom that every year two thousand to three thousand slaves were brought from Sri Lanka, Bengal, Nagappattanam and Thoothukudi to Goa. A priest was asked to issue to each slave a letter to certify him as Christian when entering the city of Goa. It was ordered that any person who brought slaves from anywhere else to Goa would be punished.\(^\text{13}\)


\(^{12}\) HAG, MDR, Livro I, fl. 95, (1560-1601).

\(^{13}\) DL, *Vol. VI*, p. 75.
In the Fishery Coast, the Jesuit priests were sympathetic to the slaves. They instructed the slave masters to treat the slaves kindly. The slaves were asked to come to the church on Sundays after their masters left from there and they also taught catechism on Sundays. They were taught to pray, meditate, recite the rosary and make an examination of their conscience. The Jesuits spent several hours together with the slaves.\textsuperscript{14}

Since there existed a good understanding between the Madurai Nayak and the Portuguese at Thoothukudi, the slaves from the interior places were allowed to be baptized and the slaves who wished to live along with the coastal Christians were allowed to do so. At times Christian slaves who were fleeing from their masters in the Fishery Coast took shelter under the Nayak of Madurai. He too treated the slaves kindly.\textsuperscript{15}

In the Fourth Provincial Council of Goa convened in 1592, it was decided that slaves should not be prevented from getting married. Any slave, whether female or male, should not be sold out because she or he got married without the lord's consent. Anyone who violated this order would be excommunicated and had to pay two hundred xerafins as fine.\textsuperscript{16}

Usually when the slaves became sick and thereby useless, their masters threw them on the streets. Many died on the roadside itself without being taken care of by anyone. So the Fifth Provincial Council of Goa decreed that such

\textsuperscript{14} Dil., Vol. XI, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{15} Dil., Vol. XII (1583-1585), 1975, p. 420.
\textsuperscript{16} Cunha Rivara, Fas 4, p. 268.
slaves should be collected and given shelter in the Casas de Santa Misericordia (Houses of Holy Mercy).\textsuperscript{17}

Tearing away a part of the body with an iron rod or a stick or a stone, hanging, stricking the hands laid on stones or wooden pieces and throwing chilies, oil, vinegar or salt into their eyes were some of the cruel forms of torture meted out to erring slaves by their masters. By the Seventeenth Decree, it was decided that inhuman tortures should be avoided and whoever punished their slaves excessively would be produced before a judge and the affected slaves would be given the freedom of certificate by the judge. Secondly the slave masters who were very harsh toward their subjects were excommunicated with a penalty of fifty \textit{pardaus} and half of the fine would be given to the complainant. Sometimes the owners of the slaves were also castigated for their inhuman attitude toward their slaves.\textsuperscript{18}

The slave trade became a part of Portuguese colonisation wherever they went and settled. Though the slaves were treated cruelly and though the Jesuits were sympathetic to the slaves they (the Jesuits) never took steps to abolish the system. They knew that the slaves promoted Portuguese trade and commerce. Moreover, in Christianity slavery was an accepted phenomenon. The Bible itself says that the slaves should be obedient to their masters.\textsuperscript{19} Slave owners justified their dealings by referring to the same from the Bible. The Jesuits did not raise any

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 268.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 269.

opposition to slavery though but they were the ones who gave moral and spiritual support to the slaves.

**Politico-Economic Results**

The colonial and commercial activities of the Portuguese affected the Parava polity and economy to a great extent. It is very difficult to distinguish these two aspects from one another for the Parava polity and economy were inter-linked and inter-twined in the sense that one supported the other and the Parava polity could not function without Parava economy and vice versa. The Parava caste and their occupation were inseparable and this was realised by the Portuguese and the same was nurtured very strongly. The Portuguese were successful in establishing a strong Parava community even while introducing changes in the fields of politics and economy.

**Elimination of the Muslims**

Before consolidating the Parava *jati* (caste), the Portuguese wanted to eliminate the Muslims from the Fishery Coast. One of the promises made to the representatives of the Paravas at their baptism was that the Muslims would be eliminated from the Fishery Coast. So, immediately after the baptism of the Pattangattis, a Portuguese fleet arrived on the Fishery Coast. A series of battles took place between the Portuguese and the Muslims and the latter were forced to evacuate Pazhayakayal and find an alternative settlement at Kayalpattanam.
The fights between the above two groups (the Muslims and the Portuguese) continued. The Zamorin, Kunjalis, Dom Pedro and Irapali, all fought for the cause of the Muslims of the Fishery Coast. The Portuguese thwarted all the efforts of the Muslims and enabled the Paravas enjoy the profits of the pearl fisheries. In the Fishery Coast, the Portuguese were provided with the opportunity of gaining a Christian mercantile and seafaring substitute for the detested Muslims. In this sense the conversion of the Paravas offered the Portuguese a unique possibility.

Whatever the reasons for the Portuguese involvement on the Fishery Coast, it had a profound effect upon the fortunes on the history of the Christian Parava community. The Malabar Christian communities and the neophytes utilised religion and conversion as a crutch to win the Portuguese support against the Hindu and Mappila traders. Similarly, in the Fishery Coast, the Paravas used Roman Catholicism as the only force that could deliver them from the oppressive Muslims. After receiving such an assurance of freedom from the oppression of the Muslims, the Mass Conversion took place in 1536.

The Paravas increased their religious, commercial and social insularity and distinctness, and the view that the Paravas were protected Christian subjects of the Portuguese gradually took root and the identification of the Parava with the Portuguese and of the Parava with the ‘Catholic’ was strengthened to such a degree that most writing pertaining to the jati (the Parava caste) from Portuguese times to the present have found it impossible to dissociate the two.
Consolidation of *Yelu Urs*

After eliminating the Muslims from their presence and influence over the pearl fisheries and other sea-faring activities, the Portuguese resorted to consolidating their strength on the Fishery Coast. As a first step, the already existing seven villages (with their ports) were fortified. These villages were controlled by the *Pattangattis* and all the pearl and chank fishing and commercial activities were supervised by the *Pattangattis*. They (the *Pattangattis*) were advised by the elders of the villages called *Urars*. The Portuguese established cordial relations with these Parava leaders to further their (Portuguese) interests. There were other villages also in the Fishery Coast, south of Manappadu and north of Vaippar. These villages had their own headmen.

Above the *Pattangattis* and the *urars*, they (the Paravas) had the *Jathi Thalaivan* as head of the caste who resided at Thoothukudi and controlled the entire politics and economy of the coast.\(^{20}\)

Immediately after the conversion of the Paravas, the Portuguese moved systematically to consolidate the commercial and strategic position of the Paravas. Because the Portuguese power was restricted only to the Fishery Coast, they decided to relocate the entire Parava community within the *Yelu Urs* (Seven Villages) and these villages were to function as pivotal centres of security, trade, and educational and religious activities and were accordingly fortified by the Portuguese.

---

\(^{20}\) Patrick A. Roche, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
Continuous military harassment and a defensive mentality became pervasive hallmarks of subsequent Parava history, finding expression in such repeatedly exacted measures as the shifting concentration of the Paravas to these centres was most conducive to defense and security.

Sanjay Subramanyam sounds as though the Portuguese introduced the "Pattangatti system" in the Fishery Coast. He further says that the Portuguese intervention in Parava affairs saw the utilization of pre-existent hierarchies to a new end. But it is not true in the sense that the Pattangatis were already there in Fishery Coast and they went to Cochin to present their Parava-Muslim conflict to the Vicar General and made an agreement (Mass Conversion) with the Portuguese, though in fact, the Portuguese made use of the existence of the then hierarchical system to promote their interests.\(^{21}\)

It is true that the seven villages were turned into fortified ports by the Portuguese but their presence was less compared to their presence in the West—the reason being most of the factories were centred in Goa and Kozhikodu, and so the Portuguese had to preserve a greater part of their naval and military forces on the west coast. They had delegated a small part of their colonial officials down to the isolated areas of the east coast. Although the Portuguese governor and captains encouraged an overall repository of power on the Pescaria (Fishery Coast), they utilized indigenous caste leaders as agents of local government. The Portuguese

\(^{21}\) Charlie Pye-Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-190.
administrators and priests increasingly relied upon the authority of the "natural leaders" of the jati.\textsuperscript{22}

These positions became hereditary and as symbols of their new and elevated status that they wore gold Crosses and chains and assumed the title "Senhor" or "Senhor Don". The creation of a jati leadership provided another means for jati consolidation and a clearly defined group emerged within the jati with an economic and power interacts in maintaining a caste identity and solidarity. The Portugal intervention in the affairs of the Fishery Coast in 1530s and 1540s probably did save the Parava jati from precipitous social and economic disintegration. The consolidation of the Parava jati resulted in the flourishing of Parava economy and polity.\textsuperscript{23}

The running of the ports depended upon the Parava leadership. It was in this area that the impact of the Portuguese upon the structure of the Parava society appears to have been more. Development in settlement patterns, economy, political structure and religion during the period indicate the part innovative and part conservative traits in the Portuguese impact on Parava social and internal organisation.\textsuperscript{24}

The Pattangattis and the Urars who were the political brokers between the jati and the colonialists were transformed into commercial brokers known in

\textsuperscript{22} Patrick A. Roche, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{23} Kenneth McPherson, "Paravas and Portuguese", p. 144.
\textsuperscript{24} Patrick A. Roche, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 45.
major port settlements as “Campagnie Adepenars” and “Seethathys” (assistants).

Nevertheless there is evidence to suggest that the brokerage function performed by older caste leaders led to the centralization of the jati’s political structure under the direction of the Jathi Thalaivan during the Portuguese times.25

Strategic Importance

Control of the Fishery Coast provided the Portuguese access to the proceeds of the pearl and chank fisheries. More than that, it strengthened their strategic position in southern India. It facilitated their economic activities in Cochin, Sri Lanka and on the southern Coromandel Coast. Access to the ports on the Fishery Coast enabled the Portuguese, in theory at least, to better police the sea-lanes linking Cochin in the Sri Lanka and the Coromandel Coast.26

Control of the coast enabled the Portuguese to undermine a thriving Muslim seafaring community astride a sea-lane vitally important to Portuguese economic and strategic interests in the Indian Ocean. It is also provided new manpower resources to assist in the struggle to control Sri Lanka.27

Initially, the Fishery Coast was vital to the Portuguese if they were to secure sea routes eastwards from Cochin. Throughout the sixteenth century, Cochin was a central cog in a network of sea-lanes linking the major Portuguese commercial centres at Malacca and Colombo into the commercial structure of the Estado da India.

25 Ibid., p. 46.
27 Ibid., pp. 137-139.
But Cochin, Colombo and Malacca flourished to control contagious hinterlands— not evident in the case of Malacca, but equally importantly, on the Portuguese ability to enter the trading world of the Indian Ocean region and to exercise some control over major seaways.\(^{28}\)

The control of the Fishery Coast ideally permitted control of the Palk Strait and the Gulf of Mannar and kept across open to cloth exporting ports on the Coromandel Coast. (But once Jaffna was captured by the Portuguese the direct control of the Fishery Coast was considered less important.)\(^{29}\)

The strategic importance of the Fishery Coast to the Portuguese was emphasised by their tenuous position further north along the Coromandel Coast at Sao ‘Tome’ de Maliapur (Mylapore). To this end, the Fishery Coast was central to any plan to promote the economic and political interests of the Estado da India eastward from Cochin.\(^{30}\)

The Portuguese realised the inadequacy of manpower and it was impossible for them to construct a purely Portuguese run commercial empire in the Indian Ocean. Collaboration with non-Christians was forced upon them, but on the Fishery Coast they were presented with the opportunity to collaborate with a Christian community and indeed a Christian community that was Roman Catholic and not assigned to a suspect Christian sect, as was the case on the Malabar Coast.\(^{31}\)

\(^{28}\) Ibid.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., pp. 133-134.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., p. 140.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., pp. 138-139.
The Portuguese had two aims in establishing different segments in the Fishery Coast under the leadership of the Pattangattis. First, the Portuguese intended to mobilise labour to execute their imperial project of Portuguese expansion in Sri Lanka. The Portuguese knew very well that the strait between India and Sir Lanka was economically and strategically important.32

The pearl fishery carried on twice a year in the straits between the east coast and the west coast of Sri Lanka. So the Paravas were seen as a reserve pool of military labour, as well as a source of tribute through the conduct of the fishery itself.

One of the designs of the Portuguese colonial empire was to make the Paravas to be settled in Sri Lanka. Ten towns and sixty-two villages were assigned to the Jesuits in 1602 and it resulted in the settlement of sizeable communities of Paravas on the Singhalese coasts. The Paravas were a little hesitant to migrate since they were attached to their homeland and apprehensive that would not be possible to effect the migration of the whole caste. They suggested that about a thousand families might make the journey accompanied by their Jesuit vicars. The king therefore instructed his viceroy Azavedo to examine their representations and try to persuade as many Parava families as possible to settle in the coastal towns and villages of Sri Lanka.33

The Portuguese introduced certain agricultural crops in India and they were produced abundantly. They were potato, sweet potato, corn (maize), tobacco, cashew nut, red chilly and a number of other items.34

---

33 Ibid.
The Portuguese intervention affected the pattern of shipping from Coromandel ports in the latter half of the sixteenth century. They introduced the system of granting monopoly rights or concessions to individuals to trade to Malacca and other ports.\(^{35}\)

The political control was accompanied by the spread of Christianity. An easy and comprehensible connection was established between the Portuguese control and the government in the India of the sixteenth century and the Catholic faith as professed by these particular Europeans.

To become a Christian was to become automatically a Portuguese for the civil authorities were not adverse to so considering the Indian who passed over to Christianity and the association became stronger as time went on.

The indigenous or non-European character of the Christian faith was submerged in the face of a political reality. The incident of the massacre of the several hundred fishermen at Mannar, who had become Christians, because their king feared their conversion was advancing Portuguese influence, illustrates perfectly this very serious problem.\(^{36}\)

"The new Christians had cultivated an attitude that salvation in this life and the next could only be obtained through the Roman Catholic Church. The idea of giving of any portion of the Padroado Real (Crown Patronage of the Church) to heretics, to Muslims, or to the 'heathens' (gentios) was anathema. Even so, both the English and the

\(^{35}\) Kanakalatha Mukund, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

Dutch considered that many of the Portuguese in Asia might be prepared to live under the English Crown — or even under the Dutch Company — rule provided only that they could freely exercise the Roman Catholic religion.\(^{37}\)

That the fisheries were then flourishing is betokened by the fine churches and great monasteries that rose at the three centres (Punnaikayal, Thoothukudi, Mannar) named from the offerings and profits of the divers and merchants during the second half of the sixteenth century.\(^{38}\)

Shortly after 1563, when Caesar Frederic visited the coast, the fishers for pearls still continued to pay for permission to the representative of the King of Portugal. The Madura Nayak had therefore not yet succeeded in gaining supreme power.\(^{39}\)

**Portuguese Jurisdiction**

As soon as the Paravas became Christians (in the Fishery Coast) they accepted the Portuguese king as their sovereign and became his subjects. As a result, the Crown of Portugal enjoyed both civil and spiritual jurisdiction over these people. The viceroy, captain and other Portuguese officials exercised civil jurisdiction whereas the Padroado Diocese of Goa enjoyed the ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the new Christians.

---


\(^{39}\) Stuart, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction

Until the erection of the Diocese of Cochin as suffragan to Goa in 1557, there was normally a Vicar General residing at Cochin exercising spiritual administration both in Malabar and the Fishery Coast in the name of the Bishop of Goa. The Jesuit missionaries took up the task of nurturing the new Christians in true faith. King Philip in his letter to Count Viceroy of Goa said that he had every right to present the religions of his own choice with spiritual power and administer all Sacraments to the Christians in the Fishery Coast. This right of patronage began from the discovery of India, he added.

Xavier acknowledged the Padroado jurisdiction and asked his Jesuit companions to be obedient and co-operative to the Bishop and the Vicar General. The Diocese of Cochin was established on February 4, 1557, after the departure of Xavier from the Fishery Coast. From that time onwards, the Paravas and other Catholic communities of the coast were placed under the jurisdiction of the Padroado Bishop of Cochin.

The Paravas were ruled by several local rulers but they willingly became the subjects of the Portuguese sovereign. The king also in return protected these Christians whenever they encountered problems. They (the Paravas) were exploited by the Vijayanagar king, the Nayaks, the Poligars, the King of Travancore and the Muslims. The Portuguese viceroy, and the captain and other Portuguese officials fought against these oppressors in the same of civil jurisdiction. The Paravas
were provided with not only security and protection in the Fishery Coast when the pearl fisheries failed they were rid of their financial difficulties also.

Thus, the Jesuits guided by Xavier, took care of the spiritual and material well being of the Christians in the Fishery Coast. More than the Portuguese officials, it was Xavier who adopted protective measures when Vithala's army invaded south. Xavier even played peacemaker role between the Christians and the local kings. When the captains became tyrannical, Xavier raised his voice and put his heart and soul in protecting the Christians.⁴⁰

As a token of their gratitude and loyalty to the Crown of Portugal and as remuneration for the military help received from the Portuguese during the pearl fishery, the Paravas after their conversion bound themselves to pay an annual tribute of 75,000 fanams to the Royal Treasury from their pearl fishery.⁴¹ In addition to this, they also paid a tribute of 10000 gold fanams every year for the slippers of the Queen of Portugal.⁴²

Portugal was the first European country to have a deep and sustained interaction with India culture and the interaction was more pronounced and long standing with the Parava community. To understand the outcome of this interaction in its right perspective, it is necessary to take into account some of the factors that guided Portuguese activities, namely, the mandate obtained through the Papal Decrees by the Portuguese to discover, conquer, appropriate new lands and to

⁴⁰ Letters of Xavier, August 3, 1544, pp. 87-88.
⁴² Venantius Fernando, S., Padroado, p. 152.
propagate the Catholic faith; secondly, the fear of the possible spread of the Protestant Reformation; and finally, the new Decrees of the Ecumenical Council of Trent (1545-1563). 43

In fact, the Fishery Coast was the only Portuguese Mission that was originally designed and diligently cultivated by the Crown of Portugal in India in consequence of the Padroado granted to it by the Holy See. Padroado means “the right of spiritual jurisdiction granted by the Holy See to the Portuguese Crown over all the lands discovered or to be discovered by the Portuguese fleet in the East. The first explicit grant of this spiritual jurisdiction was made by Pope Nicholas V to the Portuguese King, Alphonsus V, by his famous Apostolic Bull “Romanus Pontifex” (January 8, 1455).

“The Padroado gave to the Portuguese Crown certain rights and duties, rights to supervise the church, to nominate bishops and to appoint suitable candidates to various ecclesiastical benefices; duties to convert the natives, to erect and maintain churches and other pious institutions and finally, to provide them with a sufficient number of missionaries”. 44

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

---


44 Venantius Fernando, S., “The Portuguese Patronage (Padroado) and the Evangelization of the Pearl Fishery Coast”, Indian Church History Review, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, June 1984, New Delhi, p. 94.
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 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 Christian life was promoted among them. 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".

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

---

45 Letters of Xavier, October 25, 1542, pp. 61-62.
46 Ibid., p. 60.
his language and the native language. These individuals helped Xavier to translate Latin into Tamil.\textsuperscript{47}

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 Confiteor.\textsuperscript{48} 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.\textsuperscript{49}

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.\textsuperscript{50}

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.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{47} Letters of Xavier, January 15, 1544, pp. 63-65.
\textsuperscript{48} Letters of Xavier, October 28, 1542, pp. 60-65.
\textsuperscript{49} Letters of Xavier, January 15, 1544, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{50} DI., Vol. XII, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
The missionaries established elementary schools near the churches in all the villages. Local children 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{52}

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{53}

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


\textsuperscript{53} Patrick A. Roche, op. cit., p. 56.
focal point of Parava 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 he 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 strived 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 Portuguese wanted the new Christians to be free from Hindu influence. They wanted

54 Ibid.
the Paravas to be separated physically and culturally so that a ‘client community’ of the Portuguese could be formed in the Fishery Coast.

**Social Segregation**

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.56

The First Provincial Council of Goa which was convened in 1567 recommended to the King of Portugal to keep the Hinds 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.57

The Christians received a favoured treatment and special attention as if they were quite a separate community, distinct from the Hindu community. The reason for such attention was that “the Christians are like tender plants which shake

56 Cunha Rivara, Fas 4, Decree 2, pp. 8-9.
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”.\textsuperscript{58}

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 penalize those who went against the instruction.\textsuperscript{59}

A fine was imposed on those Christians who frequented Hindu barbers for their service.\textsuperscript{60} 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.\textsuperscript{61}

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 prohibited by the Portuguese.\textsuperscript{62} This was the first step the Portuguese took to separate


\textsuperscript{59} Cunha Rivara, Fas.4, Decree 28, p. 24-25.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., Decree 29, p. 25.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., Decree 32, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
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.

Christians Uprooted

The second effort in implementing the segregation policy of the
Portuguese resulted in the uprooting of the Christians from their old culture. The
Christians were asked not to consult sorcerers and soothsayers before marriage, to
identify a thief, to get rid of disease or to beget children. Receiving articles inscribed
with charms from the sorcerers as a cure from certain infirmities and placing such
articles in fields for a good produce was also forbidden. 63

The Christians were told that it was irrational to perform purificatory
ceremonies in connection with water tanks or any inanimate things. 64 The Provincial
Council requested the Portuguese king to order the Brahmans to abolish all ‘devilish
rites’ before a wedding since they were scandalous to the Christians. It further said
that no public celebration should be held during marriage ceremonies and that
extravagant rituals on the occasion of marriage should be avoided. 65

63 Ibid., pp. 104-105.
64 Ibid., Decree 5, p. 492.
65 Ibid., Decree 10, pp. 127-128.
The smearing of sandalwood paste on the forehead, the cremation of the diseased and distributing food to others on the occasion of a death were forbidden. The Christians were forbidden to sing or dance in schools and were threatened with excommunication in case of violation. The teacher at the school was punished with fifty *pardaos* and half of which would be given to the complainant and the culprit would be out of the school for two years.

Christians were forbidden from practicing certain social customs like purificatory ceremonial baths by the survivors after the death of a person in a family, giving food to others in the name of the deceased by the deceased person’s relatives, making designs with rice flour or rice on the floor as decoration, seating the bride and the groom in a marked place, the ceremonies conducted when cooked rice was given as food for the first time to a child, and the custom of trade as removing a thread from the cloth to be measured and sold or removing two grains from the stock of paddy to be measured for sale were all declared superstitious and were to be avoided by Christians according to the decrees issued by the Portuguese in India.

**Inculturation**

After the conversion of the Paravas, the Portuguese customs, arts and ceremonies were naturally imported into the Fishery Coast. In other words, the Christianization of the Fishery Coast, as effected by the influence of Padroado,

---

assumed the garb of Portuguese culture and civilization, the effect of which is still visible in the present coastal Christian community though in a mitigated form. The Christian religion itself, as was presented under the guise of the Portuguese sense, viewed the Paravas as highly differentiated from the rest of the Christians in Tamil Nadu both in social and in religious practices. 69

Imposition of 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 Thoothukudi 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 holding these names and they (the names) continue to be transmitted to their posterity. Some people misunderstand and misinterpret these surnames. They have problem only with ‘Fernando’ as though it denotes the caste ‘Parava’. They are comfortable with other names. There are sixty eight names that are now prevalent in the whole Parava community as family names. 70

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,

69 Venantius Fernando, S., Padroado, pp. 154-155.
70 Ibid., pp. 153-154.
and granted him the highest privilege of wearing a gold chain with a cross, as a badge of nobility.  

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.

Similarly, several ceremonies used at wedding such as the twig of the arasu (a plant), the circlets drawn against the evil eye or against ill luck and the number and quality of the dishes were ordered to be given up 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.

The proclamation of three bands, at three Sunday masses before the marriage was stressed. Those who violated this were threatened with ten pardaus and excommunication. 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.

---

71 Edgar Thurston, op. cit., p. 140.


73 Ibid.

The Portuguese introduced celebration of saints' feasts in all most all the villages, especially at Thoothukudi. It is doubtful whether such an attempt was a part of their inculturation or the Paravas assimilated whatever introduced by the missionaries according 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 following is the description of the above feast this year (2004) the annual feast (as usual) began on the July 26 with the flag hoisting and the crowning of Our Lady, on the first day. There was a special novena every day for ten days and the feast ended with the vespers, procession and carrying the sapparam (float). (Occasionally the golden car drawn). On the feast day, a para-liturgical service ‘vespers’ took place and a solemn mass on the tenth day was the culmination of the annual feast. The vast crowd which flocked to the shrine was focussed on the elegant statue which was kept atop the altar. The statue of Our Lady of Snows has something to say about the inculturation that the Paravas have assimilated.

The statue of Our Lady Snows reached Thoothukudi 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 on to an Indian matrix.76

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 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 Thoothukudi has had great repercussions not only on the religion and the culture of the Paravas but has also affected their politics, economy and society very much because “indigenous Hindu festivals (*thiruvizhas*) in South India were not only religious events; they were also social events replete with processions (*suthukalam*), the pulling of temple carts (*thers*), dramas and music (*natagams* and *bhajanams*), floats (*saparams*) and festoons (*kodis*).”77

---

76 Patrick A. Roche, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
When this feast was introduced in Thoothukudi for the first time, all the rituals and practices of the Parava dharmakarthakkal during the festivals at Tiruchendur and Madurai entered the Fishery Coast.\footnote{Ibid.}

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 gives 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.\footnote{Ibid., p. 53.}

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 Kamarakkarar (common fisherfolk).\footnote{Ibid, pp. 54-55.} 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.

\textit{Jathi Thalaivan}, the Adepanars of the yelu urs, the Pattangattis and other elites were considered as the principal Christians. When the Dutch occupied Thoothukudi they suppressed the Society of Jesus in 1759. Then the \textit{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 Thoothukudi 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 Kamarakarar. “A custom of symbolic honour at a religious festival crystallized into a social distinction of great consequence for the jati.”

Village Festivals

The festivals that the Jesuits introduced in the villages continue to be celebrated with gaiety and fervour. Each village has a patron saint like St. James, St. Joseph, St. Antony, etc., and the celebration of these saints’ festival is an annual event in every village. All the elements of the feast of Our Lady of Snows are found in these festivals too. The shrines in some of the villages are very popular and attract large gatherings at festival times extravagant paraphernalia. Money is spent lavishly on decoration and other.

The Portuguese had the custom of putting up small structures called kurusadis (small shrines) with a Cross, in all the corners of the villages. A kurusadi is a raised structure with the Cross and a niche for a lamp. In the coastal villages, the Christians build kurusadis mainly at the entrance, and at each direction of the villages. The devotion and piety demonstrated here is greater than the solemnity and devotion at the main churches.

Though the Portuguese criticised the Hindu marriage and other rituals as devilish and meaningless, the Christians have perceived all these in a different

---

81 Ibid.
way. The liturgical ceremonies take place in the church are given less importance compared to the ceremonies which take place at home before and after the wedding mass. In case of death also the same attitude prevails.

**Indigenous Priesthood**

Though the Jesuit priests had an ardent desire to spread the Good News yet they were not liberated from their racial inclination towards the 'superior culture'. Xavier was very sad that he could not convert many Brahmans. He mentions in one of his letters that after having worked tirelessly for two years, he could convert only one Brahman. A Brahman boy was sent from the Fishery Coast to Goa for priestly training. He seemed to be well behaved but the Jesuits did not want him to join the Society of Jesus, rather he was admitted as a secular clergy.

Xavier envisaged an indigenous priesthood and he fought vigorously to encourage it. When he was in Japan, he heard that Fr. Anton Gomez, the director of St. Paul's seminary in Old Goa had dismissed all the Indian students because the rector thought that priesthood was not meant for dark skinned people. Xavier was horrified and reacted vehemently. On his arrival in India as the first Provincial of India, Xavier immediately dismissed the rector and saying he was a rotten fellow.

**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

---

82 *Letters of Xavier, January 15, 1544*, p. 70.


84 Charlie Pye-Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
was a kind of work, he said, so far unknown in these parts and was admired by the people of all 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 pardaus. Nearly two thousand pardaus 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 Thoothukudi. 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 to 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

---

86 *Di. Vol. XV*, p. 444.
87 Anony Da Costa, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
88 *Di. Vol. XV*, p. 44.
and distributed it to the non-Christians. The fame of the people and their charity went around the world.89

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.90

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.91 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

90 Stuart, op. cit., p. 43.
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.92

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.93 From another letter, we understand that he had picked up Tamil sufficiently to the point of making corrections in his first version of Christian prayers in Tamil.94 This shows the Jesuits’ love for learning Tamil to accelerate their missionary activities.

---

92 These names are in vogue in all the village of Fishery Coast even today.
93 Letters of Xavier, January 15, 1544, p. 65.
94 Letters of Xavier, March 27, 1544, p.78.
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 Thoothukudi. 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.95

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.96

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 years. 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.97

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 1575.98

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 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.99

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.100

---

98 Ibid., p. 318.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., p. 319.
The founding of a seminary was a clever and successful strategy to win local collaborations for missionary work.\textsuperscript{101} Xavier made use of two local deacons from Goa, in Thoothukudi.\textsuperscript{102} Native seminarians helped the missionaries as interpreters.\textsuperscript{103} 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.\textsuperscript{104}

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 raise 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.”\textsuperscript{105}

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

\textsuperscript{101} Di., Vol. IX (1573-1575), 1966, p. 276.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., Vol. III, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{105} Georg Schurhammer, Orientalia, p. 321.
1549. The Parava 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. 106

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. 107

In Thoothukudi 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. 108

As the Dutch pastor Philip Baldaeus observes, the Paravas, chiefly those living in Jaffnapattanam, generally spoke Portuguese. 109 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 Thoothukudi, were taught Portuguese. 110

107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
The Paravas use Portuguese vocabulary in their language. Some of
them are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portuguese</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Tamil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adiante</td>
<td>forward</td>
<td>adhiantham (beginning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alcunha</td>
<td>nick name</td>
<td>alcunha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Além</td>
<td>beyond</td>
<td>alam (depth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ananas</td>
<td>pineapple</td>
<td>annasi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armário</td>
<td>cup-board</td>
<td>alamari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arroz</td>
<td>rice</td>
<td>arisi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biscoito</td>
<td>biscuit</td>
<td>biskattu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabelo</td>
<td>hair</td>
<td>cabalam (head)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caçapa</td>
<td>pocket</td>
<td>ceppu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cachecol</td>
<td>scarf</td>
<td>cachei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café</td>
<td>coffee</td>
<td>kappi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calca</td>
<td>short parts</td>
<td>kalasam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calhau</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>kal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camisa</td>
<td>shirt</td>
<td>camsu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campa</td>
<td>gravestone</td>
<td>cambu (stick)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caril</td>
<td>curry</td>
<td>curry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chappatu</td>
<td>shoe</td>
<td>sappathu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chavi</td>
<td>key</td>
<td>savi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chita</td>
<td>printed cotton</td>
<td>cheetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compadre</td>
<td>god father</td>
<td>kumbadri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confraternity</td>
<td>fraternity</td>
<td>Kumbiriar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copo</td>
<td>drinking cup</td>
<td>koppai (a vessel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cozinha</td>
<td>kitchen</td>
<td>kusini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ela</td>
<td>she</td>
<td>yela (boy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equ</td>
<td>What</td>
<td>yekki (calling a girl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Espirito Santo</td>
<td>the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>Ispiritu Santu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leilao</td>
<td>auction</td>
<td>velam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macho</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>machan (brother-in-law)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macio</td>
<td>soft</td>
<td>macia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madre</td>
<td>nun</td>
<td>maduri (women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madurar</td>
<td>to ripen</td>
<td>maduram (sweet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mãe</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>ammae (grand mother)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mantle</td>
<td>mantle</td>
<td>mantei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastri</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>mestri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesa</td>
<td>table</td>
<td>mesai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novena</td>
<td>nine day devotion</td>
<td>navanazh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padre</td>
<td>priest</td>
<td>padiriyar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pai</td>
<td>father</td>
<td>appai (grand father)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pave</td>
<td>cream cake</td>
<td>pahu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pendante</td>
<td>pendant</td>
<td>pendant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastica</td>
<td>plastri</td>
<td>plastri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidente</td>
<td>president</td>
<td>preridenti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saco</td>
<td>sack</td>
<td>sakku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scribe</td>
<td>seribe</td>
<td>serivan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretario</td>
<td>secretary</td>
<td>secdadari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terco</td>
<td>third of a rosary</td>
<td>tersu 3o’clock player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toalha</td>
<td>towel</td>
<td>tualei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triste</td>
<td>sad</td>
<td>thusti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Va</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>va (come)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veranda</td>
<td>verandha</td>
<td>varandha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xarope</td>
<td>syrup</td>
<td>sirap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xodu</td>
<td>sweat heart</td>
<td>jodi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Christians' Exemplary Life

The Paravas did not embrace Christianity with high ideals yet they were fortunate to be Christians. The Christians manifested a fervour and consistency in their lives and they were heroic. According to Da Costa their life was such that it would edify and embarrass not merely the Christians of Europe but even the religious. Their (the Parava) faith, their charity and their modesty were most remarkable.\textsuperscript{112}

The missionaries must share the credit for this state of affairs with the lay helpers who played a very important part in the work of conversion and instruction. This was the case not only in Madurai but also on the Fishery Coast, from the time of Francis Xavier and indeed practically all the Jesuit missions in India to which what follows may be applied with due modifications.\textsuperscript{113}

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 Mukkuvars, 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

\textsuperscript{112} John Correia Afonso, \textit{The Jesuits in India}, p. 166.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
enthroned on the Fishery Coast as a result of the subjection of the Paravas to the Crown of Portugal.

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 (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.114

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.115

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.116

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

115 Cunha Rivara, Fas. 4, Decree 3, p. 9.
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.  

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 good will 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.

---

117 Ibid.
119 Sobhanan, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
122 Sobhanan, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.
Madura Mission

The interior of Tirunelveli and Madurai gave way for the Gospel work of the missionaries. The Old Jesuit Mission of Madurai was the chief outcome of the Indian Mission founded by Francis Xavier. The successor of Francis Xavier in the Fishery Coast was Father Criminali who took up the thread where Xavier left abruptly. Father Criminali was killed in 1548 and thus became the first martyr of the Society of Jesus in India. His successor father Henriques, who became the superior of the Fishery Coast Mission, was the path finder of the Old Jesuit Mission of Madurai. By 1600 there were more than 90,000 Christians in the twenty two parishes.

Conversion of the Coastal Communities

The Jesuits were particular in converting the coastal communities like the Mukkuvars, and the Caraiyars. Just like the Paravas, the Mukkuvars 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

123 Ibid., p. 79.
124 Ibid.
125 Caldwell, R., op. cit., p. 225.
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 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, Mukkuvars (Macuas) 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.\textsuperscript{130} Towards the end of 1544 he had baptized ten thousand Mukkuvars in Travancore.\textsuperscript{131}

Just to escape from the oppression of the Muslims at sea and from their native rulers at home, the Mukkuvars also desired to imitate the Paravas and embraced Christianity to get the protection of the powerful Portuguese.\textsuperscript{132} 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{133}

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{134}

Henriques says that there existed a Paraiya community at Periappattanam in the north region of the Fishery Coast. The Jesuits who had a resident there converted more Paraiyars in the hinterland.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{130} Letters of Xavier, December 18, 1544, pp. 104-105.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
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. But we see that in the interior of all the Parava villages the Nadars have residences and there are also Christians among them. These 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.”

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.

---


138 Johnson, Pioneers in India, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 70-71.
Missionaries

At home the Portuguese bourgeois appreciated the usefulness of these missionaries as the first marketing agents of their wares in the colonies. The Portuguese, according to Professor Boxer, the veteran historian of the Portuguese empire, thought that Asia was a good place to send their illegitimate children or outlaws who would not be tolerated in the home grounds.\(^{139}\)

The missionaries were usually more motivated to assist in the needs of the empire than the “degredados” (deported prisoners and criminals) whose only motivation was the hope of getting a reduction in their deportation period, and other victims of “reluctant” colonisation. Charles Marshall, an English, remarked on the missionaries in the later period that the missionaries succeeded in converting only the dregs of the society.\(^{140}\)

The Jesuit missionaries were more educated and more socially concerned agents of the colonial-imperial society. Also they became effective tools for shaping the native populations and transmitted to them the western cultural values through their gospel messages.\(^{141}\)

The Jesuits often as an integral part of their missionary role alienated the native populations from their traditional cultural roots. This is evident from the published correspondence of the Jesuits in the Portuguese Estado da India, the Letters


\(^{140}\) Teotonio de Souza (ed.), *Discoveries Missionary Expansion and Asian Cultures*, New Delhi, 1994, p. 39.

of Xavier and the decrees of the Provincial Councils held in Goa from time to time beginning from 1567.142

"The missionaries saw no elements in the native culture that they could emulate, and, much less, consider as superior to their own culture. The native religious practices are almost always described as worship of the devil. The language used for other native customs is also usually offensive."143

The Portuguese used three terms in order to distinguish the non-Christians from the Christians. The Hindus were called as gentios (gentiles), 'heathens' and infidels which denoted both the Hindus and Muslims. The Muslims, whether they were pirates or not, generally were known as Moors.

The evangelization of the Padroado missionaries and the establishment of the churches and other charitable activities had their own impact on the Estado da India in many ways. Some viceroys of the seventeenth century, particularly Count Linhares were of the opinion that the religious establishment was far too large. He was of the opinion that one half of the soldiers who arrived from Europe entered the religious orders. This was a means for them to avoid the rigours of a military life and thus weakened the defences of the Estado. Linhares also claimed that the 'lazy religious' were a crippling financial burden bleeding the treasuries white in order that they be supported.144

---

142 Ibid.
143 Ibid., p. 41.
Further, the religious establishments were supported by the contribution made by the parishners. For instance, in the Fishery Coast, after each fishery, the Paravas paid a huge sum to the Portuguese and that was used for the missionaries. So the religious were economically independent. Sanjay Subramanyam says this independence itself caused problems, for the religious orders emerged, as a consequence, with temporal (and even fiscal) powers or became semi-commercial enterprises.\(^{145}\)

"To the ecclesiastical authorities in India it was obvious that there was no breach of contract between the Hindus and the Christians, in spite of the conciliatory prohibitions. Paradoxically, the same Goan Councils had striven since the beginning in 1567 for the learning of Indian languages and had encouraged all kinds of cultural contacts, even if their aim was conversion and the translation of catechism into vernacular languages.\(^{146}\)

In 1552 there were between forty five and fifty thousand Christians in Travancore and on the Fishery Coast.\(^{147}\)

Assimilation

The Paravas were never truly ‘assimilated’, in any real sense, into Portuguese Asia but instead always maintained their separate identity, the reason being, the Portuguese presence on the east coast was limited when compared to their

\(^{142}\) Sanjay Subramanyam, *Portuguese Empire*, pp. 21-22.  
\(^{146}\) João Telles Cunha, *op. cit.*, p. 250.  
\(^{147}\) *Letters of Xavier, October 28, 1542*, pp. 60-63.
involvement on the west. Very few individuals who had been torn away from their native context assimilated themselves to a lesser or greater degree.\textsuperscript{148}

Though the Portuguese had established their settlement on the Fishery Coast for more than a century, it (the Fishery Coast) did not come into the grip of westernization. Some families, because of their wealth and their position of lending money to the Portuguese, enhanced their status in the society. An economic disparity was created between the boat owners and pearl-drivers.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam says that unlike in Japan and Goa, the Paravas had a collective identity even before the Mass Conversion. It was thus logical for them to preserve themselves into the eighteenth century as a Christian caste in a Hindu society.\textsuperscript{149} According to him "the most important communities of converts that the Portuguese dealt with in Asia were the Paravas.\textsuperscript{150} Because of their location and association with the Fishery Coast, northern Sri Lanka and southern Coromandel, the Paravas always maintained their separate identity.\textsuperscript{151}

Paravas remained largely endogamous, the extent of assimilation through miscegenation with the Portuguese remained limited, and anyway there was never a large Portuguese presence at Thoothukudi and other centres for this to become a possibility.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{148} Sanjay Subramanyam, \textit{The Portuguese Empire}, pp. 263-267.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., pp. 266-267.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., p. 263.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., p. 267.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
The Portuguese clerics worked very hard to transform the rough and untutored mob (the Paravas) into a refined community. The Parava women and men were freed from their old superstitious beliefs. The Paravas who had been scattered all over the Fishery Coast were brought under one leader (the Jathi Thalaivan) and thus the caste and the economy of the Paravas were strengthened. If the entire Parava community had not been converted in 1536, the history of the Fishery Coast would have been different.

Though the missionaries made numerous attempts to impose their culture on the fisherfolk, the former failed. The reason being the Paravas were a primitive tribal group at the arrival of the Portuguese. Their religious faith was based on the sea and sea-shore activities. So it was very difficult for them (the Portuguese) to delink them (the Paravas) from the sea-charmers and other rites and rituals which were always associated with the sea. So they adapted and modified the culture that the Portuguese imposed on them depending on their (the Parava) life pattern.

The spiritual and temporal conquest of the East was complementary and in effect served one ultimate goal i.e. to annihilate the arch enemies of the Portuguese, the Muslims. As the Franciscan chronicler Paulo da Frinidade observed in 1638, “the two swords of the civil and the ecclesiastical power were always so close together in the conquest of the East that we seldom find one being used without the other, for the weapons only conquered through the right, what the preaching of the Gospel gave them, and the preaching was only of some use when it was accompanied and protected by the weapons”.

255
It is true that the Padroado wrought enormous changes on the new Christians of the Fishery Coast. The poor Paravas were fed, dressed, sheltered and taught by the Jesuit missionaries. The sovereign granted special favours and privileges to the fisherfolk. Yet, the Christians experienced colonial oppression in the hands of the Portuguese, in place of the hands of the Muslims. They (the Paravas) had to pay more tribute and at time they were victims to the greed of the Portuguese officials. The Paravas were turned more religious oriented. Their religious faith continues to be expressed only in extravagant festivals and meaningless celebrations. The religion which they now practice does not answer to their temporal problems like illiteracy, poverty and political enslavement.