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Impact of the Dutch presence in the pearl fishery coast

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Abstract

The sea routes and the water routes of the Indian Peninsular served and still serve not only as the way for trade and commercial activities but also function as a centre of communication. The arrival of the Muslims and the Europeans to the coastal region of India had a strong impact on the political, social, economic and cultural lives of the people. Of all, the south Indian coastal region played a significant role in the maritime history of India. The Pearl Fishery Coast, situated in the southern part of Tamil Nadu, occupied an important place in the colonial imperialism of the Europeans. The coast has a long history as a maritime centre from the Sangam Age mainly because of the availability of pearls and chank. The Portuguese were the first Europeans who set their foot on the coast. They were pushed out by the Dutch in the year 1658. Though the Dutch did not receive nourishing support from the local rulers and the people, the political and commercial activities of the Dutch had an everlasting impact on the fisherfolk community of the coast, the *Paravas*.

Keywords: Pearl fishery coast, *Parava*, administration, trade, religion

Introduction

India is one of the countries which was focused more by foreign visitors, invaders, intruders, explorers and traders from the ancient times due to its diverse resources. The sea routes and the water routes of the Indian peninsular served and still serve not only as the way for trade and commercial activities but also function as a centre of communication. The exchange of goods in the coastal regions promoted maritime trade as well as the fusion of different cultures ^[1].

The period from C.E. 1400 to 1800 witnessed the arrival and settlement of two groups namely the Muslims and the Europeans in the coastal region of India. Many of them were army men but others, though in small number, played an important role. They were missionaries, generals, traders, administrators etc. This led to various interactions in various fields like religion, letters, law, architecture, industry, warfare etc ^[2]. Of all coastal areas of India, the south Indian coastal region played a significant role in the maritime history of India and in the entire Tamil coast, the Pearl Fishery Coast occupied an important place in the colonial imperialism of the Europeans.

The pearl fishery coast

Indian Peninsular has a vast coastal line of 6535 kilometres ^[3]. Tamil Nadu is situated on the eastern side of the southern tip of India. The extreme south east coast of Tamil Nadu from Cape Comorin in the south upto Rameswaram in the north bordering is called the Pearl Fishery Coast ^[4]. The distance of the coast is about 320 kms ^[5]. The coast includes the shore of the present districts of Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi. Vembar, Vaippar, Thoothukudi, Punnaikayal, Pazhayakayal, Kayalpattanam and Manappadu are the seven coastal regions which served as the centres of maritime trade for more than two thousand years ^[6].

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¹ Mathew, *Studies in Maritime History*, p. xi.

² Mathew, *Indian Ocean and Cultural Interaction*, p. 93.

³ Arulvalan, *The Liberative Mission of the Church*, p. 12.

⁴ Ramaswami, *Gazetteers of India, Tamil Nadu State, Ramanathapuram District*, p. 21.

⁵ Arulvalan, *The Liberative Mission of the Church*, p. 12.

⁶ Caldwell, *A History of Tinnevely*, p. 79.

The Pearl Fishery Coast is noted with different names in the historical records in different periods. The author of the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* mentioned the coast as *Paralia*. It was used to describe the coast-line below the Travancore backwaters, around Cape Comorin, and as far as Adam's Bridge 'Colchoi' or 'Kolkai' – the ancient port of Colchoi, as mentioned in the *Periplus* and also by Ptolemy, has been shown to be the spot now known as Korkai^[7]. Marco Polo, the Venetian traveller noted it as 'Máabar'. It was the name used by the Arabs to denote the south western coast of India which means 'bridge' or 'crossing' because the coast acted as a bridge between eastern and western countries^[8]. The coast came to be known as 'Cholamandalam' while it was occupied by the Imperial Cholas. They called it *Cholamandalakkurai*, the coast of the Cholas^[9]. The Portuguese texts indicated the place with the name *Charamandel* which was later pronounced as *Coromandel*. It was the corruption of the word *Cholamandalam* or *Choramandalam*^[10]. Francis Xavier, the first Jesuit missionary of the Pearl Fishery Coast used to call the coastal region of Tamil Nadu as *Comorin Coast* which included the coast^[11]. In literary works of the Portuguese, Dutch and Jesuits referred the coast as *Pescaria* or 'La Côte Pecherie'^[12]. The term *Madura Coast* signifies the seaboard of the ancient kingdom of Madurai and therefore includes the shore of the present district of Tirunelveli as well as that of Ramanathapuram and Thoothukudi districts^[13]. Robert Caldwell mentioned this area as *Tirunelveli Coast* or *Tinnevely Coast*^[14]. The coast is also called 'Fishery Coast' on account of the fishery of pearl oysters which form time immemorial^[15].

The Pearl Fishery Coast has a long history as a maritime centre from the Sangam Age. Though there were pearls of inferior variety in the European waters, the largest producer of the oriental pearls till the beginning of the present century was the Gulf of Mannar, both Sri Lankan and Indian side of the Gulf (the Pearl Fishery Coast)^[16]. The rulers who ruled the Tamil country from the very early days to the end of the fifteenth century had enjoyed monopoly over the pearl fishing and pearl trade and had commercial contact with the east and the west part of the world. There are evidences to prove that several foreign traders visited the coast for its valuable commodity, i.e. the pearls. Not only pearls, but trade in other items was also carried out in and through the coast^[17]. From the beginning of the New Age (sixteenth century), the coast acted as a major centre of the Portuguese activities in south India. A century later, the coast became a bone of contention and the Portuguese who had enjoyed monopoly of trade had to yield the coast to the Dutch.

The Dutch on the Pearl Fishery Coast

⁷ Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, pp. 234, 237.

⁸ Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 1.

⁹ Subramanian, *Sangam Polity*, p. 20.

¹⁰ Dames, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, pp. 124-125.

¹¹ Costelloe, *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier*, p. 50.

¹² Roche, *Fishermen of the Coromandel*, p. 4.

¹³ Hornell, 'The Indian (Pandyas) Pearl Fisheries of the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay', p. 6.

¹⁴ Caldwell, *A History of Tinnevely*, p. 22.

¹⁵ Besse, *La Mission du Madure*, p. 367.

¹⁶ Arunachalam, *The History of the Pearl Fishery of the Tamil Coast*, p. 1.

¹⁷ Decla, *The Portuguese on the Pearl Fishery Coast*, p. 13.

The Dutch entered the Indian mainland as early as 1602 soon after the formation of *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC)*, the Dutch East India Company and within a few decades they had set their foot on the Pearl Fishery Coast. The period from 1658 to 1825 was the era of the Dutch East India Company on the coast during which the Dutch played a very important role in the political and commercial affairs of the Pearl Fishery Coast.

In 1632, the Dutch attempted to capture the Pearl Fishery Coast for the first time. During this period, it was under the control of the Nayaks of Madurai, rulers of the region^[18]. The Dutch tried to get permission to build a fortress in the coast. Tirumalai Nayak, the then Nayak of Madurai and a supporter of the Portuguese, refused to permit an armed fortress anywhere in his domain^[19]. Later, he gave the Dutch the right to erect ordinary houses anywhere along the coast for the purpose of trade. He also granted a lease to the Dutch in June 1645. Thus, the Dutch established their first trading factory at Kayalpattanam on the coast in 1645.

Later on, the relationship between the Nayak of Madurai and the Portuguese improved and so Tirumalai Nayak sent the Dutch out of Kayalpattanam in 1648. To take revenge, the Company sent a fleet to Kayalpattanam and stationed the army near the temple of Tiruchendur. Then, the fleet marched to Thoothukudi on 12 February 1649^[20]. Dom Rodrigo de Monsanto, the Portuguese Captain at Cape Comorin, was ordered by the Portuguese Viceroy of India to proceed with a fleet to Thoothukudi. Likewise, another fleet was sent from Sri Lanka to Thoothukudi, but they were blocked at Colombo by the Dutch. The Portuguese were unable to get the needed provisions from Thoothukudi. They were beginning to lose their hold on the coast^[21].

In 1655 after the capture of Colombo, the whole of Sri Lanka fell into the hands of the Dutch^[22]. It was followed by the capture of Thoothukudi on 28 February 1658. Soon, they established themselves in the whole of the Pearl Fishery Coast^[23]. For administrating all these areas, Thoothukudi, situated in the centre of the coast, was made as the headquarters^[24]. Thoothukudi became the main trading port of the Dutch East India Company. It was a crucial spot in the triangular trade axis of the Dutch linking eastern Batavia and Colombo^[25]. It had a harbour, which was the only place that could be called as a proper harbour along the entire Pearl Fishery Coast though it had other smaller ports. The harbour was well sheltered from storms and cyclones geographically and from high waves by island and stretches of sand banks^[26]. The sea around Thoothukudi also had abundant corals, grit stones, deep sea shells such as chanks, pretens, pearl oysters and other oysters which were equally important to the Dutch.

The participation of the Dutch in the trade activities on the Pearl Fishery Coast received a new impetus only after their

¹⁸ Decla, *The Portuguese on the Pearl Fishery Coast*, p. 110.

¹⁹ Arasaratnam, 'Some Aspects Relating to the Establishment and Growth of European Settlements along the Tamil Coast in the Seventeenth Century', p. 362.

²⁰ Danvers, *Report to the Secretary of State for Indian Council*, p. 49.

²¹ Decla, *The Portuguese on the Pearl Fishery Coast*, p. 110.

²² Besse, *La Mission du Madure*, p. 460.

²³ Caldwell, *A History of Tinnevely*, p. 79.

²⁴ Pate, *Tinnevely District Gazetteer*, p. 442.

²⁵ Roche, *Fishermen of the Coromandel*, p. 57.

²⁶ Caldwell, *A History of Tinnevely*, p. 75.

settlement at Thoothukudi. The importance of the pearl and chank fishery was observed greatly by the Dutch in which they profited a lot and so the Dutch felt that they had greater rights over the coast which belonged to the Nayak of Madurai. But, the Nayaks stood against it. Hence, the Dutch fortified the seven sea ports and completely walled the town of Thoothukudi by 1683^[27] and also the Dutch flag was planted in the seven sea ports^[28]. In the late seventeenth century, using the fall of Nayak rule and the instability of the political condition of the Tamil country, the Dutch acquired concessions of trade rights down the coast. They also had number of ports spread out for their import and export trade.

Impact of the Dutch Presence on the Pearl Fishery Coast

Trade was the overriding reason for the Dutch presence on the Pearl Fishery Coast. The Dutch, with the help of the *Paravas*, fisherfolk community, carried out their trade. They had to face a lot of oppositions from different quarters during their 167 years of stay in the coast. Most of the years, they gave troubles to the *Paravas*. Yet they left marks on the socio, economic and religious lives of the people on the coast.

Pearl Fishing

The commercial relation with the Dutch had a constructive effect on the economic and cultural life of the *Paravas*. Pearl fishing was seasonal but the revenue it yielded was high. Philip Baldæus (1632 – 1672), a Dutch clergyman who was in the east from 1655 to 1666 and travelled in south India, mentioned that among the three famous pearl fisheries in the east i.e. eastern Batavia, Colombo and the Pearl Fishery Coast, the Pearl Fishery Coast was the most productive one^[29]. Though the Dutch extracted the maximum benefits, they offered privileges to the *Paravas* in pearl fishing.

The Dutch did not undertake pearl fishing on their own account but permitted the inhabitants of the coast whether Christians (*Paravas*) or Muslims (Moor men)^[30]. It is noted that during the fishery of 1708, out of 8,643 divers, 4,760 Christians, 3,103 Muslims and 780 Hindu divers were employed in the fishery^[31]. The activity of the Dutch in the pearl fishing enhanced unity among the people.

When the pearl fishery came to the Dutch in 1658, it was not in a prosperous condition. The people particularly the *Paravas* were very much impoverished by the heavy exactions of the Portuguese. At the same time, their fishing boats were destroyed by the Dutch in 1649 during their settlement in the coast. Due to which the Dutch could not have a fishery in five years between 1658 and 1663^[32].

To strengthen the relation with the *Paravas*, the Dutch offered material advantages with all honour to the head of the caste, *Jathi Thalaivan*. While their settlement in

Thoothukudi, the residence of the caste head was about twenty miles from the coast. The Dutch induced him to settle at Thoothukudi^[33]. The material advantages of the Dutch made the *Paravas* to get new boats and fishing materials^[34].

The administrative policies of the Dutch made the *Paravas* aware of various aspects of governmental activities. The caste head of the *Paravas* claimed privileges for himself. The Dutch, for the smooth running of their trade, made the caste head an important personage, by proclaiming him as 'the lord of the seven seas'^[35]. The Dutch placed the caste head and *Pattangatti* (headman of the *Parava* village) as guardian and director of the pearl fisheries^[36]. They were given many privileges and were allowed free stones in the fisheries^[37].

The Dutch sent armed forces to the right and left of the fishery to mark the limits of the fishery and to check the coming of the *Malabaris*, the inhabitants of the Malabar Coast^[38]. The headmen of the *Parava* village were allowed to assist the Dutch in superintending and guarding the coast during fishery for which they were awarded with free stone. These stone were specifically named as 'Christian Stones'^[39]. The activities and support of the Dutch in pearl fishing improved the economic and living conditions of the *Paravas* through proper community organization and leadership training.

Chank Fishing

The importance of chank fishing was observed only by the Dutch. The Dutch East India Company made a great advantage by the chank fishery. Father Martin quoted that the Dutch were jealous of this trade and compelled all divers to sell every chank they gathered only to the Dutch^[40]. The Dutch had a chank factory at Thoothukudi. The information regarding the factory was accounted by Thomas Bowrey, a British merchant sailor. When he referred to Odisha mentioned that the *ourias* wore shackles upon their arms and legs made of chank, a great shell brought from Thoothukudi, a Dutch factory near Cape Comorin which were exported to Odisha and Bengal^[41].

The chank bangle manufacturers of the coast were distinguished into *Tutticorie* (Thoothukudi) and *Ramessari* (Rameswaram) as per the quality of the product. Among the two, Thoothukudi bangle were well known for their opalescent, greater hardness and evenness of texture. From that time onwards, Thoothukudi became famous for chank cutting and chank bangle manufacture^[42]. The liberalised

²⁷ Sinnakani, *Gazetteers of India, Tamil Nadu State, Thoothukudi District*, p. 282.

²⁸ Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast*, p. 80.

²⁹ Baldæus, *A True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East-India Coasts*, p. 648.

³⁰ Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, p. 301.

³¹ Hornell, 'The Indian (Pandyas) Pearl Fisheries of the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay', p. 35.

³² Arunachalam, *The History of the Pearl Fishery of the Tamil Coast*, pp. 121-122.

³³ 'Milestones of the Parava Progress: A Brief History of the Conference Movement', p. 3.

³⁴ Arunachalam, *The History of the Pearl Fishery of the Tamil Coast*, p. 122.

³⁵ Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol. VI*, p. 153.

³⁶ Sinnakani, *Gazetteers of India, Tamil Nadu State, Thoothukudi District*, p. 282.

³⁷ Arunachalam, *The History of the Pearl Fishery of the Tamil Coast*, p. 129.

³⁸ Tavernier, *Travels in India, Vol. II.*, p. 93.

³⁹ Hornell, 'The Indian (Pandyas) Pearl Fisheries of the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay', p. 33.

⁴⁰ Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, p. 302.

⁴¹ Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal, 1669 to 1679*, p. 208.

⁴² Athiyaman, *Pearl and Chank Diving of South Indian Coast*, p. 30.

chank trade enabled the *Paravas* to sell the chanks for better prices.

Slave Trade

Slavery was one of the agents of the Dutch in India especially in the Pearl Fishery Coast for their maintenance of the maritime interests. The Dutch had the major impact on slave traffic and introduced a new demand for slave labours in their settlements. Mostly, the slaves were agricultural workers and there were a fair proportion of skilled labourers among them^[43].

The Dutch obtained slaves from various sources. Several families sold themselves as hereditary slaves and they were liable to change hands as chattels. Barbosa mentioned that when people were starving and many died of hunger, they sold their children for four or five fanams (currency) in exchange for rice and coconuts. Apart from this type of slavery, there was an illicit trade which involved the most iniquitous practice of stealing children and unprotected women^[44]. They were sent to Sri Lanka, Jaffna, Batavia and Malacca where they were employed in a variety of urban tasks^[45]. Trafficking became a threat to the people.

Trade in Textiles

The Dutch made use of the availability of commodities in the hinterland areas too. They were driven to take interest in the procurement of cloth meant for export in the Pearl Fishery Coast when there was heavy demand for textiles export to Batavia and the Netherlands in 1661. They did not set up weaving units at all but procured cloth from the weavers and merchants. As they were unable to get the export cloth on time owing to delay in the textile processing works, they began to undertake dyeing to suit their taste and requirements of export.

In this connection, they had established their first dyeing unit at Kayalpattanam in 1663 and the second at Thoothukudi in the same year. The main idea of the Dutch East India Company to start these two dyeing centres was an experiment mainly to avoid being compelled to obtain textiles from the Coromandel Coast. These dyeing units received the dye stuffs from Thoothukudi where dye roots were found in the nearby areas^[46]. The collection of a little root referred to in the old records as 'Chay root' (*oldenlandia umbellate*), from which a red dye was extracted. It was collected by the inhabitants of the region. The yearly auction of the right to collect it formed as an important item of district revenue during the early years of the century. The Dutch claimed the right to lease the privilege in the neighbourhood of Thoothukudi. In order to facilitate export of more textiles in Thoothukudi, the Dutch expanded their activities at a few more places. At Kuttapuli, the Dutch set up an *olabankzaal* (thatched shed) for storing the cotton textiles when it was first delivered by the native merchants. Later, these cloths were sent to Manappadu so that they did not remain very long before dispatch to the port of Thoothukudi^[47].

In course of time, the Dutch attempted to form a company

of merchants from various places on the coast to develop textile trade on the pattern of joint stock partnerships of merchants and this plan was materialised in 1697. This system appeared to be the safest method since the Dutch did not buy textiles competing with the private traders. Thus, the competition in the textile procurement was avoided by trying to secure the largest number of cloths in order to increase the profit of the Dutch East India Company. It was made sure that even if the price of textiles went high, the increased amount of price was not paid from the funds of the Dutch Company, but it was only borne by the native merchants as per the deed.

Though there were political disturbances and the failure of monsoon during 1697, the Dutch were eager in purchasing all the available textiles in the coast. The officers of the Dutch Company were authorised to pay even a somewhat higher rate at this time. This in fact had a good effect on the textile business of the Dutch. They realised that the payment for cotton goods in ready cash would undoubtedly bring more cloth for export.

In 1710, there was a phenomenal increase in the demand of coarse variety of cloth such as salemore and guinea cloth. In a communication sent to the Netherlands on 16 November 1701 mention was made that a sum of 4,00,000 guilders had been invested in the town of Madurai for the purchase of textiles. Again, on 30 November 1706, seventy five per cent of the textile demand of the Netherlands had been met out between 1704 and 1706 from the port of Thoothukudi. The Dutch officials in Madurai had reproached for their hastiness in closing the contract at the higher rate which was allowed under great necessity in 1732 for the purchase of guinea cloth and salemore by Versluys, the Dutch Governor. Those officials who failed to arrange for the supply of cloth as per the contracts were ordered to be punished. This was used as a lawful means to keep the Dutch officials to do their duty in the procurement of required textiles for the Dutch East India Company.

In 1734, possible quantity of textiles was exported. They were mainly exported to Sri Lanka. But in 1737, the local merchants stopped to supply textiles to the Dutch. As a result, the Dutch looked for able merchants in the area and entered into textile contract with the merchant community called *Chettis*. They supplied sufficient amount of textiles to the Dutch. In 1751, the contract with Madurai was revived again. Hence in 1752, 1,510 bales of cotton cloth were exported to the Netherlands. The Dutch paid ready money for the purchase of textiles. The Dutch factory in Thoothukudi received florins to the tune of 325286.08 from the Netherlands in 1753 for the purchase of textiles. In the absence of funds, gold was used by the Dutch for buying textiles^[48]. Thus the Dutch were the pioneers who developed cloth production and trade on the South Eastern Coast of India.

Medium of Exchange

In the Pearl Fishery Coast, the medium of exchange was based on gold for the high denominations, a few silver coins and copper for the small denominations and for circulation among the poorer sections of the community. Hence *fanão* or fanam was much in use in the Coast. Of all the fanams in circulation, the Madurai fanam had a good reputation and was widely used in trade in the South. It was used by the

⁴³ Mathew, *Mariners, Merchants and Ocean*, p. 204.

⁴⁴ Manickam, *Slavery in Tamil Country*, p. 49.

⁴⁵ Mathew, *Mariners, Merchants and Ocean*, p. 205.

⁴⁶ Stephen, 'The Dutch in Tuticorin: Cloth Production and Trade under the Dutch East India Company', pp. 128-129.

⁴⁷ Pate, *Tinnevely District Gazetteer*, pp. 444-445.

⁴⁸ Stephen, 'The Dutch in Tuticorin', pp. 134-135.

Dutch in their extensive textile purchases in Madurai, Trichinopoly and Tirunelveli. The main mint of Madurai Nayak was in Tiruvallur. The Dutch negotiated with the Nayak to transfer the mint to their port of Thoothukudi, but they were not successful. Instead they came to an agreement with the Nayak to ensure an annual supply of minted fanams [49].

After the decline of the Nayak rule in Madurai, a mint was opened at Thoothukudi in 1764 and a coin, new *Thoothukudi Pagoda* was minted in nineteen carat fineness. This was circulated for textile trade in the coast but did not attract the traders. In 1770 the fineness of the coin was cut down from nineteen carats to eighteen and exported to Sri Lanka for use in elephant trade [50]. Most of the coins bore the letters 'S.T.' standing for 'Stuiver', pre-decimal coin of the Dutch. Those issued for the circulation of Sri Lanka bore over the monogram of the Company (VOC), the letter 'G' standing for 'Galle', 'C' for 'Colombo', 'Ila' (in Tamil) for 'Ilangai' or Sri Lanka and the letter 'T' however represented the mint town Thoothukudi or Tegnapatnam [51]. In A.D 1787 silver alloyed rupee coins were issued from Thoothukudi mint. These coins were also intended for use in textile trade in the coast [52].

Administration of the Coast

As the Dutch had a factory and residence at Thoothukudi, it was felt necessary by them to erect fortifications. Therefore, they spent money for building a small fortress with four bastions to have sufficient protection against the attack of the rivals in trade. It was managed by a merchant known as Factor. The first Factor was Kryn Caperman [53]. He was assisted by an Under Factor with three assistants and six or eight soldiers [54]. To defend the fisheries, a chain of armed ships was employed.

The Dutch had a small stone house as residence at Alwarthirunagari, the interior part of the Coast. It was placed under the control of the *boekhouder*, the book-keeper. Manappadu was also put under the control of *boekhouder*. A clerk was charged to administer the trade at Punnaikayal. Kayalpattanam and Virapandiyanpattanam were placed under the command of a Dutch resident [55].

The inhabitants of the seven port villages were administered by native judges holding office for one year. Each village proposed four persons, of whom two were selected by the chief Factor of the Company and they swore allegiance to him. Civil suits were heard in these village courts, but criminal cases were directed at Thoothukudi by the Council of Nine with the Dutch Factor as President [56].

Though the Dutch were the masters of trade in the Pearl Fishery Coast, their religious policy aversively affected their growth in the Pearl Fishery Coast.

Religious Policy of the Dutch

The religious policy of the Dutch East India Company was strikingly different from that of the Portuguese, who claimed themselves to be the champions of the Catholic faith. The Dutch had a strong dislike towards the Catholic Church and they were bigoted Calvinistic Protestants [57]. The Dutch showed religious antagonism towards the Catholics on their conquest of the Pearl Fishery Coast. They endeavoured to convert the *Paravas* to Protestantism and to transform completely the social and religious customs of the *Paravas*.

Finding the strong loyalty of the *Paravas* towards the Portuguese and Catholic faith, the Dutch in terms of spreading their religion, pillaged edifices of worship and turned the Catholic churches of the Coast into warehouses and presbyteries into houses for their Factors at Manappadu, Virapandiyanpattanam, Punnaikayal, Vembar and Thoothukudi. Fearing of the activities of the Dutch, the statue of Our Lady of Snows was transported from Thoothukudi to Sivanthakulam by Dom Xavier Henry Dom Cruz Correa (1646 – 1671), the caste head of Thoothukudi. Here he placed the statue at the chapel of St. John, the Baptist. By the meantime, the Dutch expanded their control over Sivanthakulam. Hence, the statue was carried to Korkai. There, the caste head built a chapel and placed the statue of Our Lady of Snows [58].

Above all, in 1658, the Dutch issued a directive to expel the Catholic priests from the coast. Baptism according to Catholic rites and meetings of Catholics were prohibited, while all the Catholic churches throughout the coast were handed over to the Dutch Reformed Church. As a result, a steady migration of *Paravas* and the Jesuit missionaries to the interior villages and forests to cater to the needs of the Catholics who came there for help took place [59].

The Catholic seminary of Thoothukudi was razed to the ground, and the place was used as burial site for the Dutch people. This cemetery was known in the Dutch language as *Kerecope* and eventually the street leading to that cemetery as 'Kerecope Street' as it is known even today. Thus, the college was transferred to the village of *Coqueense* (probably Punnaikayal) and then to Manappadu [60].

After driving away the Catholic missionaries, the Dutch started to impart the Calvinistic doctrines to the Catholics in their own churches. Some Catholic churches were changed into schools where Calvinist doctrines were taught. Children were forced to attend these schools both in the morning and evening [61]. The Dutch, as soon as took possession of the coast, employed Philip Baldæus, the Dutch pastor to suppress the Roman Catholic faith, and to persuade the *Paravas* to adopt their own in its stead. But he failed in his mission. The complete failure of his efforts to make the *Paravas* change their religion was acknowledged by Baldæus himself:

"The *Paravas* ever since this Union with the Romish Church, are such Zealots in that Religion, that there are scarce any hopes of ever bringing them over to our side and their ignorance in Religious Concerns being such, that besides the use of their Beads, and making the sign of the

⁴⁹ Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, p. 294.

⁵⁰ Sinnakani, *Gazetteers of India, Tamil Nadu State, Thoothukudi District*, p. 560.

⁵¹ T. Desikachari, *South Indian Coins*, p. 84.

⁵² Sinnakani, *Gazetteers of India, Tamil Nadu State, Thoothukudi District*, p. 560.

⁵³ Stephen, 'The Dutch in Tuticorin', p. 131.

⁵⁴ Baldæus, *A True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East-India Coasts*, p. 648.

⁵⁵ Stephen, 'The Dutch in Tuticorin', p. 131.

⁵⁶ Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, pp. 242-243.

⁵⁷ Alasiar, *Christianity in South India*, p. 77.

⁵⁸ Victoria, *Panimaya Annai (Tamil)*, p. 102.

⁵⁹ Roche, *Fishermen of the Coromandel*, p. 62.

⁶⁰ Besse, *La Mission du Madure*, p. 466.

⁶¹ Arulvalan, *The Liberative Mission of the Church*, p. 73.

Cross, they know nothing of the true Fundamentals of the Christian Religion they pretend to process. In the year 1661, I was ordered to take journey from Tutecoryn to Coulang (Quilon), to visit the churches along the sea-shore, and endeavour to introduce a Reformation there and but my endeavours proved ineffectual”.

After the departure of Philip Baldæus, John Fereira Almeyda, a native of Lisbon, was employed for a whole year in the Reformation of the *Paravas*, but with less success^[62]. The Dutch realised that the presence of the Jesuit missionaries was the major reason for their failure and so they tried to get the Nayak of Madurai to interfere, but he refused to expel the Jesuits from the interior of the country^[63]. Soon, the Dutch engaged in the persecution of the native Catholics. But the *Paravas* stood firm in their Catholic faith and absolutely refused to listen to the preserve doctrine of the Dutch^[64]. When the Dutch tried to force the *Paravas* to attend their services, the caste head forbade all going to the Dutch church and only one man did so, whereupon the caste head sent armed men, who killed him as he came out of the church and the Dutch could do nothing^[65].

Realising their failure and its adverse effects on their political and commercial activities, the Dutch relaxed their policy. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the *Paravas* themselves felt the changing attitude of the Dutch. To give more attention on trade, the Dutch allowed the Jesuit missionaries to live in the villages of the Coast and carry on their pastoral ministries as before^[66]. The Dutch also raised the *Paravas* to the favoured status of ‘native Christian subjects’^[67].

The most important event in this period was the renovation and inauguration of the Church of Our Lady of Snows in the present location at Thoothukudi. The foundation of the church was on 4 April 1712. The commanding officer of the citadel and other Dutchmen witnessed the ceremony. The renovation was completed in 1714^[68]. Apart from the Church of Our Lady of Snows at Thoothukudi, other churches in the villages along the coast were also restored with their usual religious activities^[69].

Parava Society

The net result of the Dutch religious tolerant activities was that the *Parava* caste became an insular community politically, religiously, socially and spatially. For the Dutch, the coast was only of supplementary value to their larger commercial designs and investments in Batavia and Sri Lanka. However divergent, the interest and value placed on the coast and the rationale for the involvement of the two colonial powers in the area, both coalesced on one point to a remarkable extent, they placed top priority on establishing complete hegemony over the *Parava* caste to the exclusion of contiguous indigenous powers. While the Portuguese utilized the sea and their prowess on it to alternatively dissuade contiguous rulers from interfering with the *Paravas* by bullying tactics or scuttling them to safety and

insulation, the Dutch Factors achieved the objectives of extra-territoriality through the exercise of diplomatic, finesse, cunning and compromise.

Although colonial secular officials – Governors, Captains, Factors and soldiers and the clergy emerged as new, powerful and overall repositories of power in the settlements, their roles by and large constituted extraneous superimpositions which drew together an already close knit *Parava* caste. As long as their commercial and religious objectives were secured and in fact to secure these very ends, Dutch officials found it opportune to work closely with and largely through the authority structure of the caste. As a result, colonial presence rather than subverting the indigenous political culture strengthened it. As already mentioned, the caste head and headmen of the *Parava* village were confined in their role as guardians and directors of the pearl fisheries, brokers in colonial trade enterprises, enforcers of religious discipline and observance and overseers of the economic preoccupations of their respective settlements and communities^[70].

On 3 September 1759 Pombal published his famous decree “*banishing all the Jesuits from all the lands subjects to the Portuguese Crown*”^[71]. It resulted in the temporary abolition of Jesuit Order. The complete withdrawal of the Jesuits in 1765 responded for passing the direction of religious festivals into the *Parava* caste head crystallizing and shifted in the process the *messaikarar* (people of table) and *kamarakkarar* (common fishing segments of the caste) institution from a symbolic gesture at a religious festival to a pronounced social distinction. Caste head invited their closest supporters to the table and the practice in time became the principal means of identifying associates of the caste heads. The group comprised largely of settlement heads (*arasar*) and well to do traders (*vanihars*) developed exclusive norms of social intercourse (Roche 1984). Through which the caste head had been raised to the position of supreme patron of Our Lady of Snows. In return, he was given the first offerings (*muthal mariyathai*). He alone held the right to sit in a special seat directly under the Virgin’s statue during the prayer. As the *Parava*’s shrines and rituals became increasingly opulent, it was he who possessed the sole authority and right to have statue bedecked^[72].

Political and religious factors of the Dutch also made changes within the *Parava* caste, pertain to the physical features and spatial distribution of their settlements. As a result of the discriminatory religious measures of the Dutch, major shifts in *Parava* population took place both in Sri Lanka and the Pearl Fishery Coast. According to an official Dutch Memoir on the *Paravas* in 1677, their settlements stretched all way from Vangali on the Ramanthapuram coast to isolated settlements on the southwestern coasts of India. The remarkable feature about this spatially spread-out caste was clear evidence of horizontal solidarity of the same. Transport communications posed no problems for the seafaring *Paravas*. Their mobility from one settlement to the other in times of persecution or political upheavals, in conduct of relief operations, during the festivities of Our Lady of Snows or for participation in the corporate caste

⁶² Baldæus, *A True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East-India Coasts*, p. 647.

⁶³ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity of India*, p. 183.

⁶⁴ Arulvalan, *The Liberative Mission of the Church*, p. 74.

⁶⁵ Alasiar, *Christianity in South India*, p. 77.

⁶⁶ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity of India*, p. 183.

⁶⁷ Arulvalan, *The Liberative Mission of the Church*, p. 75.

⁶⁸ Besse, *La Mission du Madure*, p. 468.

⁶⁹ Arulvalan, *The Liberative Mission of the Church*, p. 75.

⁷⁰ Roche, *Fishermen of the Coromandel*, p. 66.

⁷¹ Besse, *La Mission du Madure*, p. 473.

⁷² Sinnakani, *Gazetteers of India, Tamil Nadu State, Thoothukudi District*, p. 286.

chores of pearl and chank fishing, was clearly borne out. In all these activities, the *Paravas* appeared to have been directed and coordinated by a highly centralized ecclesiastical and secular leadership characterised by the clergy, the caste head and headmen of the villages. Overall, the *Paravas* appeared to have been a community acting and guided in a spirit of corporate solidarity; in which members were all held together by a common religion and economy [73].

Conclusion

With sizeable segments of foreigners living in their midst, the *Paravas* of these settlements were most exposed to western influences in custom, language and dress. It changed the social framework and customs of the *Parava* caste. Due to nearly 167 years of contiguity with the Dutch, the *Paravas* assumed certain peculiarities and characteristics not readily observable among the other indigenous castes on the Pearl Fishery Coast. Dutch colloquialism found their way into their spoken language. Dutch influence even found their way into *Parava* dress and cuisine. The towns centred to enlarging trade and commercial activities of the colonialists, the merchant brokers and the supervisors of pearl and chank fisheries signalled the rise of wealthy individuals and classes within *Parava* settlements. These distinctive features made the seven ports as colonial towns at the close of the Dutch rule.

Though the Dutch helped to improve the socio-economic status of the *Paravas*, they left no everlasting legacy on the *Parava* society. The Dutch did not introduce any new changes in the hierarchical form of the *Parava* caste. They followed the policies set up by the Portuguese. Yet, the hierarchical *Parava* society prepared to adapt themselves to the changing political and social scenarios.

Though the Dutch economic activities were beneficial to the *Paravas*, their religious activities were not conducive. The Calvinists had faith in the predestination of God to be rich and they severely opposed the rituals. The *Paravas* adapted the Catholic religion with their traditional folk nature for their spiritual and psychological needs. Instead of giving more importance to their economic progress, the *Paravas* were religious oriented and they spent a lot on rituals and ceremonies. They got mired a religion and a social structure that could not equip them for the new trends and the principles of the Dutch Calvinism did not provide solace to the *Parava* society.

The intolerance and bigotry of the Dutch were directed more against accepting their religion. Moreover the negative method of trying to propagate their religion recoiled. These antagonistic activities instead of promoting their religion deepened the Catholic faith of the *Paravas*. Realizing their failure, the Dutch relaxed their intolerant activities against the *Paravas*. It paved the way for the caste identity through the fusion of indigenous and European religious practices into *Parava* rituals, festivals and social life and the Dutch got the wholehearted support of the caste head and *Parava* boat owners.

The relaxation of the rigid Dutch laws against Roman Catholicism and the generosity of the Dutch officials did not affect any consistent and purposeful improvement over their administration. It echoed in the total decline of the Dutch rule on the coast and the transfer of administration into the

hands of the English.

Except one or two families of mixed descent who preserve Dutch names, the church now popularly known as the English Church with some inscriptions, and their burial site with skull and cross-bones adorning the gate without the presence of any cemetery, the Dutch had left no memorials of their presence in the Pearl Fishery Coast. Yet, the Dutch Calvinistic doctrines spread some of the interior part of the Fishery Coast and it was strengthened by the missionaries of Society of Propagation of Christian Knowledge and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

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⁷³ Roche, *Fishermen of the Coromandel*, pp. 70-71.

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