

Colonial Culture – The Portuguese Influence on Kerala Society

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Abstract: Colonial culture is the result of Colonialism. Portuguese established a colonial control over Kerala from 1498 to 1663. Through their contacts with Kerala society they spread their language, religion, architecture, technology, agriculture, education, food varieties on Kerala society

Keywords: Colonial Culture, Portuguese, Religion, Language, Architecture, Technology, Farming, Food habits.

The First European power who reached in Kerala for spices were Portuguese People. The most powerful king in Kerala on those days was the Zamorin Raja of Kozhikode (Calicut). His capital Calicut was a trade Centre of Pepper, Ginger, Cardamom, and Sandalwood. He was the central figure of Kerala History in Middle Ages and the protector of Mamankam¹. His sphere of influence extended from Kannur to Kollam (Quilon). He was supported by a huge army of Nair's and Muslims. Kunjali Marakkars were the hereditary admirals of Zamorin's fleet. This brave and patriotic admirals-Kunjali Marakkars played a vital role in the naval conflicts between Zamorin and Portuguese².

But the Kochi Raja, the enemy of Zamorin of Calicut welcomed the Portuguese and promised support to their trade in Kerala. The angry Zamorin attacked Kochi to revenge on this but the Kochi Raja managed to win the war, with the help of the Portuguese. The King of Kochi pleased with the activities of Portuguese and gave them permission to construct a fort in Kochi (Fort Manuel)³. Later the Portuguese managed to get the naval chief of Zamorin ,Kunjali Marakkar to Goa and hang him there.

The supremacy of the Portuguese over Kerala ended in 1663 and a new colonial power-Dutch came here. After 1663, the Portuguese withdrew to Goa from Kerala and continued in Goa till the independence of India. But 165 years of Portuguese ruled over Kerala had left its marks on history , on the land and the people.

The polity of Portuguese over Kerala was alienating in character because they often used aggressive and violent methods for their influence. They destroyed Hindu temples ,harmed Muslims, attempted to convert the local 'Syrian Christians'-to Catholic church which annoyed the local Christian people⁴. But some positives of Portuguese cannot be ignored. New architecture, promotion of Latin language, establishment of schools ,printing presses, New farming techniques, culinary experiments are examples.

Through Portuguese colonialism , they introduced a colonial culture over the Kerala society through their language, religion, architecture, education, agriculture and food. The language of the Portuguese have wide influence on later Malayalam-the regional language of Kerala. Over 150 words in Malayalam language have similarities to Portuguese words. Some examples are as follows-

MALAYALAM

Altara
Kappitan
Kappela
Kurisu
Kristu
Tampakku
Tuvala
Pathiri
Pena
Porkku
Rassetu
Varantha

PORtUGUESE

Altar
Captain
Chapel
Cross
Christ
Tobacco
Towel
Priest
Pen
Pork
Receipt
Veranda

When we analyze the Portuguese influences on the religion of Kerala Christians , it is seen that the Kerala Christians (Syrian Christians) followed a different tradition from the Portuguese people. They were away from the control of Pope. They believed in Persian/Nestorian practices and had affinity towards the Hindu culture of Kerala. So, the Portuguese decided to take control over the Kerala Christian people . The Synod of Diamper in 1599 took measures to bring the Kerala Church under Portuguese rule and Papal control⁵. But a large number of Syrian Christians rose a rebellion against the decisions of Synod of Diamper and took their oath in front of the 'Coonan Cross' at Mattanchery in Kochi [January 3, 1653]. Through this , two distinct sections emerged in Kerala Syrian Christians, the 'Pazhaya kootu' section Romo-syrians who continued their allegiance to Pope and the Portuguese, the Puthen kootu section-Orthodox/Jacobites who denounced the supremacy of Pope and Portuguese⁶.

The architectural influence of Portuguese over Kerala is seen in the unique church architecture after 16th century. They discarded the granite idols which resembles Hindu architecture and instead of them used wood idols in the altar. Pointed and round arches were built, stained glass windows were installed, ceilings and walls of the churches painted with religious themes like in European churches.

They Introduced a number of fruit plants to Kerala ,examples are Cashewnut ,Papaya, Guava, Custard apple, Sweet Pototo, Cabbage etc⁷. They Introduced large scale scientific cultivation of Coconut, Ginger and Pepper. An Improved variety of coconut was popularized by them, coir become an important variety of export on Portuguese days.

In the cuisine of Kerala, Portuguese used Red Chillies, Vinegar as new items. They Introduced steamed food and fermentation, bread making in Kerala .

In the field of education they opened European school in Kochi. Their missionaries started schools in Kochi and Quilon where Latin, Portuguese and Grammar were taught. They introduced printing in Kerala. St. Francis Xavier translated Bible⁸. 'Chavittunadakam' the Christian counterpart of Kathakali was patronized by Portuguese missionaries. They propagated modern medicine in Malabar in 16th century.

The Portuguese policy of intermarriages with local women lead to a natural growth in the number of Christian converts in every year. Portuguese prevented the political unification of Kerala under Zamorin of Calicut. This type of political disunion helped Dutch and English to win future Colonialism in Kerala. But it is clear from the Portuguese episode that they are the colonial power behind the begining of modernization of Kerala society.

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