



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**History**

**THE ARRIVAL OF PORTUGUESE AND ITS IMPACT IN KAYALPATTINAM OF TIRUCHENDUR TALUK - A HISTORICAL STUDY**

**KEY WORDS:** Kayalpattinam, Portuguese, Tiruchendur Taluk, Paravas, Muslims

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**ABSTRACT**

This article illustrates the arrival of the Portuguese in Kayalpattinam of Tiruchendur Taluk and its impact. Kayalpattinam, a well-known port town on India's Coromandel Coast, saw substantial changes in its socio economic and religious landscape with the advent of the Portuguese in the early 16th century. The Paravas, a Kayalpattinam fishing community, first turned to the Portuguese for help in overcoming the local Muslim traders' hegemony in the pearl trade. After several conflicts with the local Muslim population as a result of this collaboration, the Portuguese eventually took control of the pearl trade. The ensuing forced conversions and the establishment of local churches signalled a significant shift in the religious dynamics of Kayalpattinam. The historical events surrounding the Portuguese intervention are examined in this study, along with how it affected local populations, trade, and religious connections, ultimately changing Kayalpattinam's cultural and economic landscape.

**INTRODUCTION**

Kayalpattinam is an ancient historic city in India. Situated on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, it is in the southeast region of the Indian submarine. A hub of trade and cultural interchange for many years, the town is located in Tamil Nadu's Tiruchendur taluk, which is part of the Tuticorin district. Before the Portuguese arrived, it was a bustling harbour where Arab traders conducted business, especially in the areas of fine silk, pearls, and horses. The town's advantageous location made it a cosmopolitan place where many different cultures and religions coexisted, with a notable Arab Muslim impact on the customs and ancestry of the local population. When the Portuguese first arrived on the coast of Tamil Nadu in 1502, they disrupted established trade lines and captured Muslim vessels. In 1525, they conquered the pearl fisheries from the Muslim traders of Kayalpattinam as a result of their aggressive expansion. This conquest sparked profound religious and cultural change in addition to being an economic takeover. A sizable Christian population was established in the area as a result of the Paravas, who were primarily Hindu fisherman who sought Portuguese protection and converted to Christianity. In order to solidify their power and change the town's religious landscape, the Portuguese also built churches and forts. Christian religious practices and European architectural styles were also introduced at this time, blending with the local culture and leaving a lasting mark on Kayalpattinam's legacy. In order to contribute to the intricate fabric of India's coastal history, this article will examine the various ways that Portuguese colonialism affected Kayalpattinam. Specifically, it will examine how the town's social structures, religious affiliations, and commerce dynamics were altered by their arrival.

**Arrival of Portuguese**

On May 20, 1498, the Portuguese arrived in Calicut, Kerala, India. Under the leadership of Vascodagama, the first European Mariner to reach India by doubling the Cape of Good Hope, they arrived in three small ships. The next year, he made his way back to Europe and gave his sovereign a synopsis of his journey's events and findings. There he mentioned a site called 'Kayal' on the coast of Tirunelveli, which he was told was under the Mussalman King and where pearls were found. At first, the Portuguese were unable to expand their business dealings directly with Tamil Nadu. because Tamil country's coastal portion was already inhabited by Moors or Muhammadans. The strategic value of the coastal region, especially the Gulf of Mannar, as a kind of

interpretive and cultural melting pot, the armed nature of the coastal trade, and the unprecedented interconnectedness of politics, religion, and commerce all became important issues. The Catholic missionaries' efforts to spread their faith among the pearl fishing coast's paravas provide coastal politics still another important facet. The illiterate Paravas were ensnared in the whirlpool of power politics and economic rivalry between the Portuguese and the indigenous potentates, between the Catholic Christian and the Arab Muslims (Mohammadans). They were frequently employed as important pawns on the colonial political chessboard, which kept them politically and religiously reliant for all time.

**The Battle of Kayalpattinam**

Dr. Caldwell claims that the earliest known instance of a Portuguese mission on the Tirunelvely coast occurred in 1532 when a delegation of Paravas, who belonged to the fisher caste, travelled to Cochin to seek assistance in fending off the Muhammadans. The main coastal settlement was populated by Kayalpattinam's Muhammadans during the time. The Paravas' application to the Portuguese at Cochin and their strategy of obtaining their assistance in converting to their faith, as recommended by their advisors. Father Vaz and other priests baptised the deputation members in Cochin after they agreed to the idea. In 1532, the Portuguese armada led by Father Michael Vaz, the Vicar General at Cochin, reached the Kayalpattinam shoreline at the Paravas' request. The Portuguese and the Muslim residents of Kayalpattinam engaged in a major conflict in 1532, during which the Paravas gave the European armies vital support. The Muslims of Kayalpattinam, led by the local Muslim authorities, were attacked by the Portuguese with the Paravas' support. Both sides suffered significant fatalities during the protracted and fierce battle, which was mostly limited to Kayal's coastal regions.

The Muslim community suffered greatly as a result of the Portuguese armies' extensive destruction of homes and places of worship and their superior armament. Along the seashore between Kattu Magudoom Palli and Punnai Kayal, there are tombstones honouring the Muslims who died in the war and others who were martyred. The finding of swords and bones from this era also serves as evidence, shedding light on the scope and savagery of the fighting. The Portuguese began their mission of conversion after their triumph. Along with many other residents of the coastal settlements, the Paravas, who had sided with the Portuguese, were baptised in large

numbers. Given that the pearl fishery, which had previously been under Muslim authority, were now under Portuguese control, the Christianization of the Paravas was considered a crucial step in ensuring Portuguese dominance over the area.

### Impact on Kayalpattinam

The Portuguese caused severe damage to Kayalpattinam, and many fled to locations like Kilakarai, Paranki Pettai, Nagore, Karaikal, Palaverkadu, Madras, and Ceylon because they were scared of their lawless, merciless enemy. Following their victory, the Portuguese proceeded to baptise the paravhs along the shore in compliance with the deal that their leaders had signed. The majority of the Parava caste were baptised, and the entire group embraced the religion of their Portuguese deliverers, according to Dr. Caldwell. After the war, they were obliged to subjugate the jealous Paravas of Kayal who had brought the Portuguese army from Cochin to repress the Kayal Muslims. The Portuguese built a fort in Punnai Kayal and established a garrison. Furthermore, all Hindu Paravas were asked to convert to Catholicism. The Paravas thus converted approximately thirty communities along the coast, at random intervals, from Cape Camorin to Ramesvaram to Christianity.

According to Francis Xavier, the chief of the Saracens (Muhammadans) was killed, and their power was completely broken. The pearl fishery, which had been under Muslim control, had fallen totally into Portuguese hands. Francis Xavier, the famed missionary, landed on the Tuticorin coast in 1542 and worked among the people for almost two years. Punnai Kayal, Manapadu, Tuticorin, and Vembar were the places where the Portuguese had settled under Xavier's reign. According to Dr. Brunell, until 1580, Punnai Kayal was their main settlement, with Tuticorin being less important. Tuticorin became the Portuguese's primary settlement after 1580 due to its harbour and road infrastructure. A church was established at Tuticorin in 1582. Kayalpattinam Muslims suffered greatly as a result of Portuguese atrocities between 1532 and 1560 A.D. Prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, Kayalpattinam Muslims enjoyed strong economic and social conditions. Kayalpattinam Muslims lost their trade and educational dominance due to Portuguese barbarous tortures, cruelties, and unhealthy business competition.

The importance of Kayalpattinam declined, and the Portuguese referred to Punnai Kayal as Kayal rather than Kayalpattinam. During this time, saints such as Kali Alauddin Wali, Abdur Rasheed Wali, Shaik SadakWali, a disciple of Nagore Qadir Wall, and other samts and academics assisted the community. In summary, the people of Tamil Nadu's coastal areas, including Kayalpattinam, Kulasekaranpattinam, Periyappattinam, and Kilakarai, were the most devastated by Portuguese crimes. O.K. Nambiar's work "Portuguese Pirates and Indian Seamen" provides a detailed description of Portuguese atrocities against Muslims in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The Portuguese captured the Muslim ship "Mevi" in the Indian Ocean during the Haj Pilgrimage in 1502 and set it on fire with passengers. They instilled enmity, instigated strife, and even killed thousands of innocent Muslims in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Ceylon. In his book "The Portuguese in India," P.C. Denver writes, "The King of Portugal was granted the power to conquer the kingdom of Muhammadans and the Pagans in order to possess their goods." The Padroda Charter was conditional. The Portuguese were required to spread Catholic religion in all new territories they discovered in order to hold them in conquest with papal sanction and benediction.

Dr. Tayka Shuayb claims that there is sufficient evidence to prove that the Catholic fisherman who presently live in Tuticorin and Ramnad districts near to Muslim centres were victims of forced conversion, for which the Portuguese were known. Mosques were transformed into churches, and Muslim dwellings that were forcibly taken became Catholic Church property. Targe churches and monuments were constructed

in locations like as Uwari, Alanthalai, Manapadu, and Virapadyan Pattinam. Muslims were not authorised to hold any office, according to 'Stanley Wolpert' in his book "A New History of India". According to 'Thomas Hooven,' the Portuguese sliced their captives' noses and ears and rejoiced in causing them to bleed to death.

As a consequence of Portuguese brutality in Tamil Nadu and Ceylon, older Tamil Islamic literatures from the pre-Portuguese period were largely destroyed. With the rise of Portuguese hegemony, Muslims' affluence plummeted.

### CONCLUSION

The Portuguese arriving in India in 1498 marked the beginning of a substantial period of European colonization in the region. Their creation of trade routes and communities throughout the Indian coast, particularly the Pearl Fishery Coast, resulted in significant economic, social, and religious changes. The conversion of the Parava people to Christianity, as well as later clashes with Muslim inhabitants, such as the Battle of Kayalpattinam in 1532, demonstrate the intricate interplay of business, politics, and religion at the time. These events not only altered the demographic and cultural environment of the region, but also established the groundwork for centuries of European dominance in South Asia.

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