

Transformations In Karaikal: From Secularization To Professional Training, Slave Trade Impact, And Currency Evolution In The 18th Century

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Abstract

The epoch of French influence in Karaikal stands as a pivotal juncture in the societal annals of the region, ushering in profound transformations with the advent of the French, deeply entrenched norms governing the lives of the local populace underwent discernible modifications across the spectrum of the caste system, customs, and social conduct. Notably, Karaikal distinguished itself as a bastion of religious amity, where Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Europeans coexisted harmoniously, fostering an atmosphere of unity and tranquillity. Despite the Hindu inclination towards spiritual pursuits over worldly endeavors and the perceived divergence between native Hindus and Europeans, daily life exhibited a conspicuous absence of overt animosity. While reservations lingered, particularly regarding European practices such as beef consumption and association with untouchables, overt hostility remained conspicuously absent in their interactions. A case in point is exemplified by Arunachala Sabapathi, a merchant from the Vellala community, hosting a convivial gathering for Europeans, illustrating a shared sense of unity in their quotidian lives despite underlying disparities in beliefs. The reluctance of Hindus to engage in communal dining or physical contact with Europeans served as a poignant reflection of a cultural schism. Within the Christian community, bifurcated into Roman Catholics and

Protestants, an implicit adherence to the caste system manifested itself in matrimonial unions among converts from Hinduism.

Introduction

The stratification and discrimination against Christians hailing from lower castes instigated protests, reaching a critical juncture in 1793 when some priests rebuffed the civic oath. A schism ensued in 1839, marked by the looting of a church in Karaikal amid a discord among Christians. Muslims involved in maritime trade (Maraikaiyar) and pawnbroker enterprises (Rauthar), established settlements in proximity to Ilayankudi. Adopting a stance of non-interference in political affairs, they maintained a deliberate distance from the ruling class. The Chuliya Muslims, dwelling in port-centric areas like Karaikal, exhibited a cohesive existence despite their division into Shia and Sunni sects.

French India's Cultural and Academic Transformations

The Rauthars, entrenched in pawnbroker pursuits, encountered opposition for their sale of betel leaves at exorbitant rates, leading to protests. Nevertheless, religious sects cohabitated without succumbing to major conflicts. The year 1829 witnessed the resolution of a Hindu-Muslim dispute during the Kandhoori festival through a mutual agreement, ensuring reciprocal respect for each other's religious observances. Similarly, in 1844, a Muslim procession during the Karaikal Kandhoori festival encountered opposition but was deftly and peacefully resolved by the Administrator of Karaikal. Before the advent of the French, the Gurukula system, an ancient educational framework reliant on a Guru (teacher), held sway. Consequently, education's scope varied according to the Guru's knowledge, lacking a prescribed syllabus. Teachers were venerated akin to deities. In the medieval era, the Brahmins assumed the role of educators, imparting knowledge using revenue from land donations known as 'Pattaviruthi,' facilitated by kings. Temples and mutts served as educational venues. The arrival of the French ushered in the 'Ecole de poyale' (schools at the porch of the tutor's house) prevalent in every village, focusing on foundational education from epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Panchatantra stories, and local transaction rules. Admission was limited to higher communities, with a monthly fee of one Pagoda overseen by Pandits. The

Europeans, particularly the French, introduced a scientific approach to education. In 1703, Fr. Pere Tachard established a school in Pondicherry for European settlers' children, teaching subjects like Mathematics, Cosmic Morphology, and Navigation.

The first French school in India emerged in 1820, teaching Tamil and French. Government-sponsored schools in Karaikal and Pondicherry, teaching in Tamil and French, excluding untouchables, began in 1827. By 1844, teachers in Karaikal received an annual payment of 250 Franc. To reform the education system, a Commissions d' Instruction Publique was established in Karaikal in 1844. In 1852, a boarding school, 'Maison d'education,' managed by Cluny sisters in Karaikal, was launched. Government schools for different communities were initiated before 1875. A comprehensive government school opened in Kottuchery in 1879. Responding to demands, a Boys' school started in Karaikal in 1880, offering courses in Latin, Arabic, Fine Arts, and Conducteur of roads and bridges. Primary schools were established in various locations before 1881.

The Gramboulan Committee in 1879 proposed a College in Karaikal. The arrete of 1880 aimed to enhance education quality. In 1903, teachers of all religions were admitted, and 'Cours Secondaire' (Secondary Education) was introduced in Karaikal. The French Indian Government's administrative apparatus included a diverse panel overseeing schools' functioning, playing a crucial role in school administration. The French administration emphasized preserving documents and official orders, a feature notably absent in the Indian governance framework.

In 1880, Primary Schools (ecole primaire gratuite laique de jeunes filles) were introduced in French India under missionary management. Initially, Caste Hindus and Untouchables were segregated, but integration occurred over time in Karaikal and Pondicherry. The primary education system underwent restructuring in 1898, introducing Midday Meals. The syllabus covered diverse subjects, and regulations for school education were reconstituted in 1885 and 1893. The 1893 reconstitution made Primary Education compulsory for Europeans, their descendants, and Renoncants. Primary education institutions included Nursery schools, primary schools, sub-schools, Higher-primary schools, and Craftsman schools (cours d'apprentissage).

Nursery schools were attached to primary schools, with the primary school syllabus covering various subjects.

Educational Landscape in French India during the Early Twentieth Century

The early twentieth century witnessed significant developments, with the education system in French India becoming secular in 1903. Primary schools were founded, and in 1904, a school at Ambagarathur was established and later annexed with Thirunallar School. Trainings for teachers in Karaikal occurred in 1905, followed by the establishment of a girl's school in T. R. Pattinam in 1907. Co-education schools were initiated in Neravy (1909) and Karukkangudi (1912), with French and Arabic subjects taught. Secondary education, through Cours Secondaires, commenced in Karaikal in 1918. In 1907, schools for Untouchables were introduced, and the Midday Meal Scheme began in 1931, operating in various primary schools. Notable changes, such as removing the term 'Cheri' from slum-associated village names in 1936, reflected evolving societal perspectives. A comprehensive monitoring system, implemented in 1901, covered aspects like admissions, working hours, uniforms, stationery, cleanliness, punishments, examinations, and leave policies.

In 1881, Pondicherry saw the establishment of an institution for professional education admitting students from all sects. The curriculum included French, English, Arithmetic, Geometry, *Mechanique industrielle*, Physics, Chemistry, Draftsman ship, Land survey, Fundamentals of Masonry, and Studies on roads and bridges. Practical classes in black smithy, molding, fitting, carpentry, bridge making, and automobile engineering were conducted, with stipends provided for articles produced during practical sessions. Through dedicated efforts spearheaded by Christian Missionaries in Karaikal, the Seminar College emerged on September 10, 1855. The Government allocated 2600 Francs for constructing buildings, marking the inception of this educational institution. Initially, 65 students enrolled a number that would later increase. By 1896, the college accommodated 310 students, providing education up to the 4th standard (*classe quatrième*).

The French education system implemented various initiatives for the continuous development of teaching skills.

Monthly meetings for teachers, educational conferences (Conferences pedagogique), award ceremonies for students, and the establishment of educational libraries (Bibliothèque pedagogique) and teacher associations were integral components. Additionally, a supplement teacher system (reliever) was introduced to address teacher absences due to training or illness. This holistic approach underscored the commitment to enhancing both the quality of education and the professional development of educators in Karaikal.

French Slave Trade and its Far-reaching Consequences on Colonies and Commerce

In the 18th century, the French strategically identified the slave trade as a highly profitable venture, engaging in the acquisition and distribution of slaves across their colonies, which encompassed regions such as Mauritius, Isle de Reunion, Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. The primary utilization of these individuals was in sugarcane plantations, consolidating the dominance of the slave trade over alternative economic pursuits like rice and textile exports.

The consequences of this flourishing trade reverberated through various sectors, leading to the displacement of individuals reliant on salt fields for their livelihoods, compelling them to abandon their ancestral lands. Many of these dispossessed individuals found themselves ensnared in bonded labor, having been procured by slave traders who specifically targeted vulnerable populations. Notably, during the severe famine spanning from 1771 to 1787, slave traders exploited the dire circumstances by exporting untouchables and fishermen who sought refuge in neighboring British Indian territories. To streamline the exportation of slaves, licensed agencies were established in Karaikal. During the 18th century, the cost of acquiring a slave in Karaikal fluctuated between 3 to 4 Porto Novo pagodas. Subsequently, these slaves were sold in foreign markets for considerable sums ranging from 2000 to 3000 Francs. Up until 1775, the French exported a total of 329 slaves to the Mascarenes, while the period between 1766 and 1776 witnessed the dispatch of 49 slaves to Le Reunion and Mauritius.

The French government, cognizant of the economic potential of the slave trade, imposed customs duties on slave

exports since 1715, amounting to 4%. Additionally, from January 1739, an extra half-percent ad valorem duty was instituted on slave exports. Simultaneously, in response to famine-induced hardships and unemployment, the exportation of labor paralleled the trajectory of the slave trade. Significantly, from 1853 to 1857, a staggering total of 26,822 slaves and laborers were exported to Martinique, Guadeloupe, and the Reunion Islands. This starkly underscores the lasting impact of French involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, leaving an indelible mark on the socio-economic fabric of the regions involved.

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Currency Evolution in 18th-Century French India

In the 18th century, as evidenced by the correspondence of Francois Martin, it becomes apparent that the equivalence between one Pagoda and 24 Rupees existed. Coins designated for use in Karaikal were dispatched from the Pondicherry mint. The volatile nature of silver coin values, influenced by trading transactions, led to fluctuations. Initially assessed at 7.5 Panams, Rupee coins were subsequently revalued at 8 Panams, while Panams, in turn, exhibited a range of 16 to 20 Douddous based on the supply of Panams and Douddous. Over various reigns, the French issued a diverse array of coins in this region. A meticulous monitoring of Pagodas was maintained, with 320 Rupees being equivalent to 100 Pagodas and 7.5 Panams being equal to one Rupee. Following the restitution in 1817, the French produced coins for circulation in Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe, Yanam, and Chandernagore. Samples of these coins were dispatched to the British Consul General at Madras. The established equivalences were 1 Pagoda = 3.5 Rupees = 28 Panams = 560 Kasu = 8.40 Francs. In November 1836, the Pondicherry mint initiated the minting of Kasu, with its value fluctuating based on the quality and supply of copper. The cessation of Kasu minting in 1940 resulted from an accumulation in the treasury.

The closure of the French mint in Pondicherry coincided with the reopening of the British mint in Chennai, rendering British coins the legal tender in French India. Due to a scarcity of British coins, both old and new Panams, double Panams, and half Panams were declared legal tender in French India. A double Panam was deemed equivalent to forty-eight Kasu, one Panam to twenty-four Kasu, and half a Panam to twelve Kasu. Considering the Indian Rupee's legal tender status for the entire subcontinent, the Banque de l'Indo-Chine issued paper currencies in denominations of one Rupee, five Rupees, and fifty Rupees. From 1885 to 1887,

the demand and supply dynamics of silver influenced the exchange rate, prompting the establishment of the official exchange rate through the presidential decree of September 13, 1884. Starting from January 1, 1885, the value of the Rupee in French India was determined by the commercial exchange rate, regulated quarterly by the Governor of French India. Initially presented in Francs until 1895, the budget of French India was subsequently denominated in Rupees from 1896 onwards.

Conclusion

The epoch of French influence in Karaikal left an indelible mark on the societal, cultural, and educational landscape of the region. The French presence ushered in profound transformations, bringing about discernible modifications in the caste system, customs, and social conduct of the local populace. Despite underlying disparities, Karaikal stood out as a bastion of religious amity, where Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Europeans coexisted harmoniously, fostering an atmosphere of unity and tranquillity. The educational sector witnessed significant changes with the establishment of schools, including the introduction of a scientific approach to education by the Europeans.

The educational landscape evolved, with the French administration emphasizing the quality of education and professional development of educators. The introduction of government-sponsored schools, reforms in the education system, and the establishment of colleges marked a transformative period in the intellectual development of the region. However, the socio-economic fabric of Karaikal also bore the scars of the French involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. The consequences of this trade, including the displacement of individuals, bonded labor, and the lasting impact on the economic structure, highlighted the dark side of French colonial history in the region.

The evolution of currency in 18th-century French India reflected the economic dynamics of the time, with fluctuations in silver coin values and the issuance of various coins by the French. The closure of the French mint in Pondicherry and the acceptance of British coins as legal tender further shaped the economic landscape of the region. In essence, the French influence in Karaikal was a multifaceted phenomenon, encompassing cultural integration, educational advancement, economic shifts, and the

painful legacy of the slave trade. The echoes of this historical epoch resonate in the contemporary identity of Karaikal, reminding us of the complex interplay of forces that shaped its past.

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