

*Chapter - IV*

*ECONOMIC CONDITION*

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### ECONOMIC CONDITION

The areas of Ramnad and Sivaganga remained under the suzerainty of the Sethupathis of Ramnad for a period of two centuries from 1605 to 1795. Situated between 9 degrees 6' and 10 degrees 6' N latitude and 77 degrees 56' and 79 degrees 19' E longitudes the Sethupathis of Ramnad it comprised of the southern and eastern portion of Madura district and included the whole Bay of Bengal coast of the district.

#### **Agricultural Transactions**

Agriculture remained the backbone of the Indian economy. During the period of Sethupathi's agriculture and trade were considered as the major factors that decided their economy. Water and soil are supposed to be the essential things to develop agriculture. On the northern parts of the towns like Rajasingamangalam and Saligramam the alluvial soil seems to be on the increase. The natural resources and the agricultural products under the jurisdiction of Sethupathi of Ramnad promoted trade and commerce. Similarly the period of the Sethupathi of Ramnad was noted for its maritime commercial pursuits.

The eastern part which was supposed to be the part of the sea shore was found to be rich in having the sandy soil. On the western part a variety of soils such as black soil, vappal soil and alluvial soil is found to be abundant. The black soil which is found to be good for agriculture is found to be expansive on the places like Pallimadam, Kamuthi, Pappankulam, Muthukulathur and Abiraman.<sup>1</sup> Most of the people who lived in these places mainly depended on agriculture. The parts of the places where Sethupathi ruled over were full of forest trees and some of them were

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<sup>1</sup>Rajaram Rao, T., Manual of the Ramand Samasthanam, Madurai, 1891, p.8.

without sufficient supply of water and they seemed to be the drought hit parts of a desert.

The people living in these parts destroyed the deserts and changed them in to cultivable lands. The Sethupathis created several water bodies for these cultivable lands.<sup>2</sup> North east monsoons bring rain fall to these parts. If the monsoon is favorable it might bring about agricultural production. If it is unfavorable it might lead to famine. Thus agriculture depends mainly upon monsoon. Mostly all the agricultural products are used for self consumption but the merchants bought these products for trading them with in the territory and exporting them to other countries. Of all the people residing in these parts some of them were in possession of lands and some of them used to work as agricultural coolies. Thus agriculture remained an essential source of livelihood for the people living at the parts of Sethupathi's jurisdiction.

All the land under the jurisdiction of Sethupathi kings were in the forms of red soil, black soil, pottal and sandy forests. So the lands were classified as *nunchai*, *punchai*, *thettu*, *vayal* and *thottam*. The lands which were provided with irrigation facilities are termed as *nunchai* and those which were not provided with water facilities and looking up for water were termed as *punchai*.<sup>3</sup> The lands where agriculture is carried with a small quantity of water are called *thettu*, *vayal* and *thottam* and the lands where agriculture is carried with a limited supply of water from the wells and *kaenies* are called *thottam*. The small raised level of the lands which is not useful for bringing about cultivation is called *thittu*. If most of the raised lands appear to be there they are called *madu* or *thidal*. The land which is not useful totally is called *pottal*. The parts of the lands which are useful for carrying out the

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<sup>2</sup>Sella Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Palkulam Copper Plate, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Museum, Ramanathapuram, 1763, p.1.

<sup>3</sup>Thirumalai Raghunatha Sethupathi, Senneelakudi Copper plate, Byrava Sundara Gurukul, Thirupattur, 1668, p.2.

agricultural activities such as *suduaddithal* and *oppadi* to remove the food grains from the chaff is termed as *kalam*. The parts of lands which were full of fruit bearing and benefit giving trees were called *thoppu* because there would not be any agricultural activity carried out.<sup>4</sup> After the lands being measured their boundaries were determined and termed as *varambu, varappu, puravu, poli*. Mile stones were installed to mark the boundaries. To determine the lands relating to the Saiva *Samayam sullakkal* is used and to determine the lands relating to the Vaishna *samayam chakra kal* is used.<sup>5</sup> In general for all the lands *kuthukkal* or *vamakkal* is erected for measurement. Mostly the surface of the land is determined by means of the amount of seeds used *veradi* which the parts of the lands were termed into various types of soil according to their natural aspects. Tax or *Makamai* would be levied only on those lands which bring about crop cultivation and production.

It was during the reign of Sethupathi a method called *kulapramanam* was used for measuring to calculate the lands; basically the tool used for measuring the land was called *makani kole* which was made up of wood. The unit of measurement of *marakkalveradi* is the area between two Mekanikoles. 14 *marakal veraiadi* is equal to the area of the measurement of 1 *kala veraiadi*.<sup>6</sup> The measure of *marakkal veraiadi* and *kalamveraiadi* 6 are not the volume of measurement but the area of the land required for sowing the seeds was called *veraiadi*; the *kalaveraiadi* prevailing at present is equal to the mode of the area of measurement of one acre 17 cents. The *marakkal veraiadi* is today's method of measurement of 8 3/8 cents of land. This kind of the diagram of the scale of measurement is what is engraved on the first western wall of the southern side of the Vinayaga temple. In 1783 the *pradhani* of

<sup>4</sup> Kamal, S.M., Sethupathi Mannar Cheppedukal, Ramanathapuram, 1992, pp.47.

<sup>5</sup> Thirumalai Rangunatha Sethupathi Sivapuripatti Inscription thanthonri Eswarar temple.

<sup>6</sup> Thirumalai Rangunatha Sethupathi, Thirukanoor copper plate, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Museum, Ramanathapuram, 1676, p.1.

Muthuramalinga Sethupathi called Muthu Irulappa Pillai introduced the new method of measurement instead of *marakkole* in the land reform.<sup>7</sup>

The important water bodies of Sethupathi Nadu were the rivers, water tank, kanmai and lakes. Of all the rivers Vaigai is mostly irrigating the majority part of Sethu Nadu; the other bodies of Sethu Nadu are the rivers such as Kundalaaru, Sevalperiyaaru, Kiruthumalaaru, Kottakaraiaaru, Virusuliaaru, Manimuthuaaru, Bambaaru, Thenaaru, Vellaaru.<sup>8</sup> For the free flow of water they constructed canals to carry out water which were called water inlet or *neervangi* and inflow canal known as *varathukka*; for the water flowing from the river and for storing the rain water during the floods they constructed lakes called *kanmais* which were predominant in Sethu nadu; they also constructed bigger water tanks and for releasing of water directly, they formed the ways called *kalungu* in them which had bigger out let and smaller out let called *madai* for the smaller tanks.<sup>9</sup> They were called *yeinthals*. They also constructed small water bodies called *kulam, urani* for the purpose of bathing and drinking.

The important crops of Sethu Nadu are paddy, chilly, millets, ragi, cholam, varagu, samai, green gram, horse gram, korra or thinai.<sup>10</sup> Oil seeds such as vanilla, sesame and cotton and vegetables like, mullangi, brinjal, country beans, ladiesfinger, poosanikkai, avarakkai. Green leaves gourd, bitter gourd, snake gourd, coriander leaves, banana, onion, tamarind, ginger, tobacco, cucumber, suraikai and mango were produced in the territory of Sethu nadu.

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<sup>7</sup>Kamal,S.M.,Sethupathi Mannar Varalaru, (Tamil), Ramanathapuram, 2003, p.106.

<sup>8</sup>Muthu Vijaya Ragunatha Sethupathi Katha Thevar, Palakulam copper plate, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Museum, Ramanathapuram, 1763, p.1.

<sup>9</sup>Ragunatha Thevar, Rajasingamangalam copper plate, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Museum, Ramanathapuram, 1688, p.2.

<sup>10</sup>Ramaswami, A., Tamilnadu, District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram, 1972, p.201.

## **The protection of the water bodies**

The people who lived in the parts of the country which were under the control Sethupathi depended mainly upon the rainfall for carrying out all the agricultural activities. All the Sethupathis preserved and reserved the excessive floodwaters which were available in the rivers such as Kundaru, Kiruthumalaru, Vaigaiaru, Manimuthu and Virisala during the rainy seasons. The Sethupathi who ruled during the period in (1621-1635) was called Kilvan Sethupathi. He tried to carry the waters of Vaigai in to the dry of Muthukulathur through the town called Kamuthakudi in the south direction by constructing along a canal which was called as Koothakal which is still in use.<sup>11</sup>

Dalavoy Sethupathi alias Sadaikka Thevar, on the northern side of Vaigai called Mudhaloor nearer to the Kulathoor dug a *kanmai* in which he constructed a *kalungu* and also two *madais*.<sup>12</sup> Both the *kalungu* and the *madais* were of much use during the heavy floods for the sake of irrigation. Not only water was saved but also the excessive water was preserved from getting wasted and mixed with the sea. Later Raghunatha Sethupathi called Kilvan Sethupathi who ruled in the period between (1674to 1710) built a fort made of stones at Ramnad and with the result Sethupathi Rajas' capital was changed to Ramnad. To satisfy the needs of drinking water he got a pond to be dug near the western wall of the palace. As he had executed the deed of digging an *oorani*, he was called by all Mukavaioorani Ayya and it was named as Mukavai oorani.

It was during the period of Chellamuthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1749-1763) a *kanmai* was constructed at the western part of Ramnad to get usefully the water of Vaigai River. The *kanmai* was named after Lord Rama and called by all as

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<sup>11</sup>Kamal, S.M., Sethupathi Mannar Copper Plate, Ramanathapuram, 2002, p.54.

<sup>12</sup>Muthaloore Inscription, Sevvirukkai nadu, kalungu is a kind of construction made at the lower part of the kanmai (Tank) to release water. Madai is a kind of construction made for irrigating into the fields lying adjacent to the kanmai.

Raghunatha Samuthiram. As a result the agriculture carried on was very flourishing and as per this plan the king prevented the river from getting wasted and mixed with the sea. Likewise the king devised a plan to change the dry east and the west parts of Muthukulathur in to the most fertile parts. The king constructed a canal in the west to the Kamuthi kottai which was situated on the northern bank of the river Kundaru which was passing through the east to the west with which he got certain parts of Muthukulathur and Ramnad benefitted. This canal would end at the east with the Kalari Kanmai which was named as Raghunathakaveri.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise it was during the reign of Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi (1782-1795) one of the *pradhanis* called MuthuIrulappa Pillai devised methods to convert the drought hit parts Sethunadu in to the most fertile land. So he devised a plan not to allow the flow of the river Periyaru, originating from the western Ghats into the west to get wasted and he mixed with the sea for which he drew upon a plan to turn the current of water into the east to get it joined with Vaigai so as to get the parts of Madurai and enriched Ramnad. After having drawn the plan he gave it to sethupathi. On receiving it raja Sethupathi gave his approval, Later under the leadership of Muthu Irulappa Pillai, a team of soldiers moved towards the western Ghats and stayed there. The team destroyed the trees and the poisonous insects and selected the site and evaluated for the construction of the dam<sup>6</sup> but the plan was dropped because of the lack of sufficient fund in 1789 A.D.<sup>14</sup> Later on because of the good influence that Muthu Irulappa Pillai had with the British it had been taken for reconsideration against all the obstacles by the British Government engineer Fenny cook. It was of because of his own-efforts, after hundred years in 1895 it had been implemented. Now

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<sup>13</sup>Sellamuthu Vijaya Raghunatha sethupathi, Palkulam copper plate, Tamilnadu Government Archeological Museum, Ramanathapuram, 1763, p.1.

Kamal, S.M., Sethupathi Mannar Varalaru, p.54.

<sup>14</sup>“Mullai Periyar dam, An engineering marvel” CNNIBN, 26, November 2011.

due to the implementation of the scheme called the Mullaiperiyar project scheme agriculture flourish in the districts like Madurai, Dindugal, Theni, Sivagangai and Ramnad. The Sethupathis rendered their service to the society by reserving the water resources and made them beneficial.

### **The measurements**

To measure grains, ghee and oil, they made use of *makani*, *ulakku*, *paddi*, *naazhi*, *kuruni*, *marakkal*, *kalam*, as units of measurements out of which the smallest unit of measurement was *makani* which was the 1/16<sup>th</sup> of the *padi*. The scale of measuring units were checked and allowed to be used and this practice was called the stamped *paddi*.<sup>15</sup> Besides the other unregulated measuring methods were also in practice which were used to quantify salt by means of hands which was called *alluthiervai* or *keiyeduppu*; if it was measured with the help of one hand it was called *pidi* and if both the inner palm of the hands were used then it was called *kaiyeduppu*. Similarly for weighing, *palam*, *veesai*, *sumai*, *nadai* and *pothi* were used as the units of weight measurement. By these units of measurements the values of goods were measured with that of gold coins as *pon*, or of silver coin as *panam*.<sup>16</sup>

### **Lands exempted from taxation; charities (Dharmasasanam)**

Lands allotted to the community of Brahmins were called Dharmasasanam; these lands were bequeathed for preaching and teaching to the other Brahmins the Vedas and the purpose of religious related activities including for the teaching of the Puranas. The proceeds obtained from the above lands were used for the above said purpose. Hence the Raja Sethupathi exempted the lands from being taxed.

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<sup>15</sup>Raghunatha Thirumalai Sethupathi Katha Thevar, Allikulam copper plate, Ramanathapuram Devasthanam office, Ramanathapuram, 1659,p.2.

<sup>16</sup>Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi Katha Thevar, Vilathoor copper plate, Rameshwaram Ramanathaswami temple, Rameshwaram, 1714,p.2.

### **Temple lands**

Lands allotted to the Hindu religion relating to the institutions and the employees, saints, cooks, artists, scavengers who were working in them were exempted from paying the tax.

### **Mutt lands**

The lands awarded to the mutts or the individuals by the Raja Sethupathi were also exempted from taxation.<sup>17</sup>

### **Jeevathana lands**

The Raja Sethupathi awarded lands to the different individuals as gifts which were exempted from taxation.<sup>18</sup>

### **Lands belonging to mosque or church**

The Raja Sethupathi donated not only for the Hindu religion but also for the Christian and the Muslim religions<sup>19</sup> which were also exempted from taxation.<sup>20</sup>

### **Famine**

During the period of Sethupathi's reign at different time's different types of famine took place. Of all the most severe type of famine was what occurred during the Killavan period. On 18 December 1709, Tamil Nadu suffered on account of heavy rain and as a result the heavy loss to the life of the people took place;<sup>21</sup> because of the heavy storm that remained at the centre of the sea of the Sethu Nadu, moving towards

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<sup>17</sup>ARE,A.32 of 1947.Raghunatha Sethupathi Katha Thevar, Nallukuruchy Copper plate, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Museum, Ramanathapuram,1691,p.2.

<sup>18</sup>Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions No.15,pp.95-98.

<sup>19</sup>MuthuKumara Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Rameshwaram Copper plate, Abil kabil Dhargah Rameshwaram,1745, p.2.

<sup>20</sup>Muthu Ramalinga Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Muthupettai Church Inscription,1781.

<sup>21</sup>Diary and Consultation Books, 1703,p.244.

the country side with heavy rain brought huge abnormal waves and so the sea water fled in to the fields where the crops were fully grown which stood for ready harvesting ; they were washed away by the heavy rain; because of the tsunami people had lost their lives, cattle, house, things such as accessories, vessels, utensils ,grains and everything were washed away into the sea by heavy flood.<sup>22</sup> Because of the flood, the cultivable lands became salty due to the flow of sea water in to that area and so the condition of the land became uncultivable for many years. Well water also became salty and no drinking water was available for the people. Water storage tanks became very shallow with huge deposits of sand; as a result the first historical drought was faced by the people in Sethu Nadu. Because of this the land owners of Sethu Nadu left their homes and migrated to Chozha Nadu as agricultural coolies for their survival. This kind of famine made Sethu Nadu economically unviable and damaged the country; this was how the economy of Sethu nadu was found to be at the worst condition.

### **Taxes**

During the reign of Sethupathi various taxes were collected land tax was considered very important to be levied. Forty eight percentage of tax was collected out of the production of goods.<sup>23</sup> Besides land tax was collected according to the change of time. Muthu Irullappa Pillai, the *pradhani* of the King Sethupathi classified the lands such as wet land *nunchai*, wet land without the river irrigation facility as *kolam, korvai, nanchathiram* dry land, dry land without river irrigation water facility<sup>24</sup> for the wet land which was used for paddy cultivation higher tax was levied. Wet land without water facility was used for cultivating banana and sugar cane and

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<sup>22</sup>Sathyanatha Aiyar, R., History of the Nayaks of Madura, Madras, 1924, p.322.

<sup>23</sup>Mahalingam, T. V., South Indian Polity, Madras, 1967, p.166.

<sup>24</sup>Rajaram Rao, T.op.cit., pp.291-292.

the tax on *vetrilai* or betal was reduced. *Nanchathiram*, the dry land which was used for cultivating maize, millet, and kambu much lower tax was levied. The cereals grown in these lands much lower amount of tax was collected. On the dry lands which were used for growing chillies, brinjal, even much lower amount was levied; for kollam and korvai lands very low form of tax rate was insisted. All these tax rates were classified by the *pradhani* Muthu Irulappa Pillai.

Not only the tax on land but also on the houses was imposed; the lands which were to be used for the construction of the houses were classified and taxed; taxes were also imposed upon the storage of straw which was collected from the bigger land lords. During the reign of Sethupathi tobacco was cultivated in the regions of Thirupulani, Methalai odai, Samanatham, Thinaikulam and Maranthai. Separate tax was collected on it.<sup>25</sup>

In Sethu Nadu *vetrilai* was cultivated predominantly from the banks of Vaigai and in the areas of Rajasingamangalam.<sup>26</sup> The bigger lords stored the surplus grains above self consumption in *kalanjiam* (storage tank) on which tax was collected as *kalanjiam* tax.<sup>27</sup>

In Sethu Nadu in addition to the above taxes multiple types of taxes were levied from the Idayar for the usage of land for cattle rearing and for the production of milk and ghee as Idayar tax and Kethari taxes. From the Shanar community for the extraction of the juice from the palm trees which was sold as *pathaneer*, toddy and palm sugar taxes such as Shanar tax or *panangadamai* was levied.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Kumaramuthu Rangunatha Sethupathi Katha Thevar, Panaiyangal copper plate, Subramaniyar temple, Vaigai, 1729, p.2.

<sup>26</sup>Vijaya Rangunatha Sethupathi Katha Thevar, Ramanusaperi copper plate, Tamilnadu Archaeological museum, Ramanathapuram, 1688, p.2.

<sup>27</sup>Rangunatha Thevar, Rajasingamangalam copper plate, Tamilnadu Archaeological museum, Ramanathapuram, 1688, p.2.

<sup>28</sup>Ramanusaperi copper plate, 1688, p.2.

From the community of blacksmith, goldsmith and carpenter taxes were levied for the wood work, iron and steel production and golden studded with stones ornaments manufacturing respectively which were called *kollarvari*, *kalvari* and *thatchan vari*.<sup>29</sup>

From the community of Vanniya Chettiyar, taxes were levied for the extraction of oils and sale of seeds. Similarly for cow rearing *kosalavari*, *nanmattuvari* for the sheep rearing, *kittarivari* were also levied, further more *kothukkanaku vari*, *vendukol vari*, *varisal vari* and *attukkidai* were levied.

From the community of Ampattaiyar tax was collected in the name of *ampattaiyar*. From the Paraiyar and the Pallar communities *parai vari* and *palvari* were also collected respectively.<sup>30</sup> From the community of the Muslim and the Sourashtra a tax was levied for the occupation of weaving called *thulukkar tharikadamai vari*.<sup>31</sup> From the people who manufactured salt, *uppala vari* was collected. For those who were in the habit of paying homage to gods a tax called *kannikai vari* was levied.

## Coins

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Ramnad was under the regime of Madurai Nayakars from the year 1529 to 1569. Viswanatha Nayakar ruled the Sethu Nadu and their coins were in circulation bearing the emblem on one side with an image of fish and on the other side the image of the king Viswanathar engraved.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Kumara MuthuVijaya Rangunatha Sethupathi, Kollanoor copper plate, Tamilnadu Archaeological museum, Ramanathapuram, 1734, p.2.

<sup>30</sup>Muthu Ramalinga Vijaya Rangunatha Sethupathi, Nilamazhakiya Mangalam copper plate, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Museum, Ramanathapuram, 1764, p.2.

<sup>31</sup>Raju, S., Sethupathi sepedukal, Chidambaram, 1994, p. xxi.

<sup>32</sup>Sathyanatha Iyer, K., History of Nayaks of Madurai, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2001, p.65.

After his period (1601 to 1609) under the reign of Muthukrishnappa Nayakar copper coins were in vogue.<sup>33</sup> During the period Sethupathi for the suzhi panam, minnal panam, copper coins<sup>34</sup> and gold coins were used which were produced in the coin manufacturing factory which was established at Ramnathapuram and also more coins were made at Rameshwaram.<sup>35</sup>

During the period of Sethupathi Mannar the round type of copper coins were in circulation with the engaving on one side their names in Tamil and on the other side some of the pictures and symbols. In the coins released by the Sethupathis which were round type in shape, their names were engraved on one side and on the other side many images of gods such as Lord Shiva, Muruga, Thirumal, Rajarajeswari were engraved. In some coins made of Lord Ganapathy, Hanuman, Karudan, flower plant, elephant and Annam were also engraved as emblems. During the period 1635 to 1646 under the reign of the second Sadaika Thevar alias Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi on one side of the coin, the image of Rajaraja Thalavai and on the other side the image of peacock were engraved. The period 1710 to 1725 under the reign of Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi coins were engraved with the name of Sri Udaiya Thevar in Tamil and on the other side the symbol of Rishaba Vagana or bull bearing the *lingam* were engraved.<sup>36</sup>

In these areas the other coins of Europeans, Dutch and the coins released by the British and the English men were also in circulation which were called Portonova

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.,p.95.

<sup>34</sup>Karunakaran, M.T., A Copper coin in the name of Sethupathi, (Tamil) Madras Coin Society, Special Bulletin, Vol.VIII,2001,p.58.

<sup>35</sup>Kamal, S.M., Sethupathi Mannar Varalaru, (Tamil) Ramanathapuram, 2003, p.72

<sup>36</sup>Vasanthi, C., Ramanathapuram palace Museum Guide, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Department, Chennai, 2014, pp.29-30.

and Mint respectively and also the coin called Bakkoda was also in circulation. During the 18th century the silver coins of Arcot Nawab were also brought in to use.<sup>37</sup>

### **Customs Duties**

The commercial contracts were regulated through the collection of customs duties. The customs duties collected from the articles imported and exported formed the important source of revenue for the government. They were collected to maintain the balance of trade. The development of foreign trade made remarkable achievement in satisfying the needs and necessities of the people. By imposition of customs duties on the articles of import, the balance of trade and commerce was maintained. The terms *ulgu* and *sungam*<sup>38</sup> refer a tax imposed on the articles of import and export. The Sangam work *Perumpanatruppadai* mentions the term *ulgu*.<sup>39</sup> At the port the officers of the rulers charged duty in the incoming and outgoing merchandise before passing on to waiting ships or caravans. The customs officers clearly checked the merchandise and affixed the tiger emblem. Only after that the merchandise moved from the warehouse. The officers specially appointed soldiers to protect the merchandise at warehouses. Such protected places were known as *sarigaikottai* which denotes a fortified warehouse where local duties and tolls were collected.<sup>40</sup>

The trade guilds such as *manigramam* and *anjuvannam* built their factories. These organizations possessed the right to have the *karanmai*, a perpetual tenure, over the city's commerce. They allowed them to levy customs duties including an assessment of eight *kasu* on incoming and outgoing merchandise. For the improvement of the port they collected four *kasu* on goods coming into the city by

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<sup>37</sup>John Bruce, Annals of the East India Company, 1600-1708, London, 1816, p.289.

<sup>38</sup>Sami Chidambaranar, Pattupattum Pandai Tamilahamum, (Tamil), Madras, 1964, p.165.

<sup>39</sup> Perumpanatruppadai, 80-81.

<sup>40</sup> South India Inscriptions, Vol.V, No.40.

foot or in boats. The inscription further states that the levying of customs on taxable articles should be done only by the presence of these merchant groups and the appraising of articles and all other business should be done only in their company. Certain lands within Kollam had been set apart for the use of these merchants, lands which were regarded as subject to the merchant's *karanmai*.<sup>41</sup> The term *Thurai* mentions the port used for the import and export trade. The inscriptions explain the customs duties imposed taxes on the *Thurai* as export (*Thuraiyil eruvana*) or import (*Thuraiyil erankuvana*) weighted (*nirupana*) measured (*alappana*), (*pidipana*), *mukapana* and *eduppana*.

### **Makamai**

For the social causes, the individuals came forward voluntarily to offer money, goods which were called *makamai*. In Sethu Nadu most of the people came forward to participate in paying the *makamai* with zeal and spirit. It shows the charitable spirit of the people. The business people of the Sethurajan peittai of Ramanathapuram parted with a part of their earnings as *makamai* for conducting poojas of Iranabali Murugan temple and also for the annual celebration of the temple.<sup>42</sup> Likewise Raja Sethupathi also created *makamai* for the different temples and executed. Similarly during Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi the Pradhani Muthu Irullappa Pillai created two kinds of *makamai* known as *dharma makamai* and *jarimakamai*.<sup>43</sup>

### **Dharma Makamai**

*Dharma Makamai* was created for the distribution of the proceeds of paddy from the distant villages with a specified limit compulsorily to the poor, diseased, the

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<sup>41</sup>South India Inscriptions, Vol.V, op.cit., No.40.

<sup>42</sup>Muthu Kumara Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Peruvayal Copper plate, S.Meenachi Sundaram house, Peruvayal,1741,pp.1-2.

<sup>43</sup>Manoharan, Mee.,Kilavan Sethupathi,Sivagangai,1973,p.143.

blind, destitute and local doctors, vedhapada salai and other kinds of schools and the temple called Rajarajeswari.<sup>44</sup>

### **Jari Makamai**

A part of the land tax collected was allocated to be disbursed for *annathanam* (free meals), temples, chathirams and mutts for making of water outlets and for the welfare of the poets and so it was called *jarimakamai*.<sup>45</sup>

### **Foreign or international Business**

There are two types of business called external and internal business which were carried out in Sethu Nadu. The foreign merchants maintained commercial contacts with the regions of Ramnad and Sivaganga even before the beginning of the Christian era. It can be traced from the Biblical days. The earliest reference to such relations comes from the Book of Kings in the Old Testament. Solomon, the wise, King of Israel is said to have sent his ships along with the ships of Hiram, the Phoenician king to Ophir from where they brought gold and silver, ivory, apes and peacocks. From this it is clear that Solomon (c.974-932), King of the Hebrews, traded with West Indian ports and the main imports came from ancient Tamilakam. “Once in three years came the navy of Tharshish bringing gold and silver, ivory, apes and peacocks.”

<sup>46</sup>All these goods, excepting silver, were the products of ancient Tamilakam; the Hebrew names for the last two items, *Kapim* and *Tukim* are obviously of Tamil origin. The celebrated Ophir, from where gold was obtained, was identified by several scholars with *Beppur*, on the mouth of the river of the same name.

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<sup>44</sup> Rajaram Rao, T., op.cit., pp.124-125.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, pp.126-127.

<sup>46</sup> Kings, op.cit., 10/22.

The Sethupathis of Ramnad gave greater importance to trade and commerce. The traders of Devakottai, Tondi and Ramnad engaged in the lucrative export trade of the pearls and chanks. The soil of the Sethupathis of Ramnad was highly suitable for the cultivation of cotton. The Calico produced here in the Sethupathis of Ramnad found a ready market in foreign countries.

The goods such as teak, wood, elephants, horses, tobacco camphor and the glass ware were imported.<sup>47</sup> From the western sea shore betel nut, types of coir, coconut, soap nut, chukka, tamarind etc. were the goods imported.<sup>48</sup> Clove, cardamom, jathikkai, jathipathiri, copper, lead, pannier and other kinds of cents or deodorant, sheets were imported from the Arabian countries.<sup>49</sup> There was regular and systematic commercial with Ceylon. Keelakkarai became the international harbor of Sethu Nadu where traders from China, Arabia, and other southern east countries gathered to participate in the commercial transactions.<sup>50</sup> This was how export and import played a major role in the economy of Sethunadu.

The Sumerians and Babylonians also seem to have extensive trade relations with Tamilakam. On the Obseliks of Shalmanser III (c. 860 B.C) apes, Indian elephants and Bactrian camels are portrayed. Logs of teak wood were found among the remains of the temple of the Moon at Ur and the place of Nebuchadnezzar (604-562 B.C) at Birs Nimrud. With the conquest of Western Asia by the Persians, there was great development in trade between India and Western Asia. Darius, the Great (521-485 B.C) organized many merchantable expeditions to link Persia with ancient

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<sup>47</sup>Arasarethinam, S., Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromental Coast 1650-1740, Delhi,1986,pp.126-131.

<sup>48</sup>Rajamohamed, J., Maritime Activities Economy and Social Customs of Muslims of Coromendal Coast 1750-1900, Un published Thesis, Pondicherry University,1999, p.84.

<sup>49</sup>Dutch in Malabar, Dutch Record No.13, Selections from the records of the Government of Madras, pp.217-218.

<sup>50</sup>ARE, 396 of 1907. ARE, 398 of 1907.

Tamilakam and Egypt by sea as well as by land. The period witnessed tremendous progress in the volume of trade. His captains sailed down the Indus and thence round Arabia to Egypt. As a result of these operations trade greatly developed and naturally trade with Western Asia must have increased considerably.

The Persian conquest of the Middle East marked a new epoch in the course of commercial relations between Tamilakam and the Middle East. Herodotus, the Greek historian points out the significance of products like frankincense, myrrh, cinnamon and cassia. Herodotus (484-413 B.C) mentions that the trade in Indian goods like frankincense and myrrh, and cinnamon and cassia were clearly products of ancient Tamilakam. The loan words current in Greek, such as *Oryza* (Tamil, *Arisu*), *Aloes* (Tamil, *Puppali*) etc; show the great influence exercised by trade. It is believed that the Egyptians and Phoenicians did not proceed beyond the marts of Southern Arabia, where the Indian goods were available, brought by the Arabian and Indian merchants.

The anarchy in Syria and the expansion of the hostile Parthian Empire diverted the Indian trade from the Persian Gulf Route to the Red Sea Route. The dangerous route of the navigation in the Red Sea ultimately led to the development of the Arabian coastal route, starting from Aden and leading to Sidon and Tyre in Syria, and Alexandria in Egypt. The Ptolemies of Egypt greatly encouraged the trade with ancient Tamilakam. But the establishment of the Pax Romana and Hippalus' discovery of the monsoons further promoted the trade. It is said that long before the Romans, the Arab traders came to Tamilakam to trade in spices and they succeeded to establish their control over the supply of precious stones, muslin, spices and frankincense to the Egyptians for purposes of worship and mummification. In the words of Agatharchides "There was no nation upon earth so wealthy as the Gerrhaeans and Sabaeans because of their situation in the centre of all the commerce

which passes between Asia and Europe. It is they who have made Ptolemaic Syria, rich in gold, and who have provided profitable trade and thousands of other things to Phoenician enterprise.”<sup>51</sup> The Romans conducted their trade with Tamilakam through the Red Sea. In due course an alternate route was found out through the Arabian coast. Starting from Aden the Arabian trade route touched Sidon and Tyre in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt. Following the decline of Roman Empire by the beginning of the third century A.D the control of the Indian trade completely passed into the hands of the Arabs. The eighth century witnessed the beginning of large scale trade between Tamilakam and Arabia.

Even before the birth of Islam, the Arabs maintained trade relations with Tamilakam. The birth of Islam and its rapid spread gave an additional impetus to the commercial contacts that existed between Arabia and Tamilakam. The foundation of Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Empire and the continued peace in the Middle East (750-1258 AD) further promoted the commercial relations. Caliph Omar established trading posts at Basra, Shatt-Al-Arab and Socotra. During the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD the Arabs had Persia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt in their hands.

Besides the regular route of sailing across the Indian Ocean, there was another sea route from Arabia to India. The Arabian Gulf was the natural corridor between Mesopotamia and India, and the voyage could be made in small boats simply by hugging the coast, always keeping the land in sight. Unlike the Red Sea whose reef-filled waters and complex wind regime required skilled pilot age, the Arabian Gulf was relatively easy to navigate. While the shores of the Red Sea were sparsely inhabited and almost water less, the head waters and eastern shore of the Gulf were

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<sup>51</sup> Quoted by G.F. Hourani, Arab Sea-faring in the Indian Ocean, p.21.

home to ancient civilizations.<sup>52</sup> Along its coasts have been found the scattered evidence of some five millennia of trade; fragments of pre-Sumerian al-Ilbaid pottery from the third millennium B.C Chinese celadon and early Islamic glazed jars, Indian bangles, Gujarati carnelian beads, 19<sup>th</sup> century coffee cups, Roman coins and the occasional Chinese cash.

The period of Islamic expansion into the waters of the Indian Ocean roughly from 750 AD to 1500 AD witnessed intense maritime activity in Tamilakam. The territory encompassed by the Arab Empire from the eighth to the early twelfth century formed a natural trading and commercial entrepot. Within the Arab empire trade and commerce assumed wider dimensions. Islam arose primarily in a mercantile, not a nomadic or agricultural milieu.<sup>53</sup> By the end of the eighth century the Arab traders had developed routes from Mesopotamia, the new capital of Baghdad and the port of Basrah at the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to India, Madagascar, Ceylon, Indonesia and China. The area south of the Sea of Aral flourished under Arab suzerainty and from there Arab caravans set out along the “Silk route” to China over an arduous terrain that became further hazardous through the presence of hostile tribesmen.<sup>54</sup>

When Basra on the Tigris rose into importance, it became the terminus of Arab trade, where the imports and exports were collected and distributed. According to Al-Masudi (d.956 AD) “Large numbers of Arab merchants had settled down in many of the coastal towns of India for purposes of trade. These communities had their own ‘chiefs’ appointed by the ruling princes and given the privilege of administering their own communal affairs.

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<sup>52</sup>Saudi Aramco World, Vol. 56, no. 4. July/August 2005. “The Indian Ocean and Global Trade, pp. 20-21.

<sup>53</sup>Hayes (ed.), *Genius of Arab Civilization*, p. 223.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 224.

Among the external powers that came down from the earlier days the Arabs occupies a pre eminent position. From very ancient times the trade of Indian Ocean had been in the hands of the Arabs.<sup>55</sup> They expanded their commercial interests to Tamilakam.<sup>56</sup> Marcopolo, the Venetian traveler who came down to Tamilakam recorded that Pali and Aden were the important cities of Arab countries from where high breed horses were supplied to the province of Malabar.<sup>57</sup>

The Arab trade contacts are reflected in their travel accounts. The Arab itineraries furnish detailed information about ancient Tamilakam which is mentioned in different names like ‘Mulaybar’ ‘Malibar’ ‘Mamibar’ ‘Malai’ ‘Mabar’ etc. Among the Arab writers special mention should be made about Sulayman, Yaqut, Minishinqui, Abul Fida, Idrisi and Qazmini. Merchant Sulayman (c.825 A.D) the first Arab traveler, whose travel account has reached us thus described the seaborne trade with Indian. “The ships (starting from Basra) sail from here (Muscat). It takes a full month to reach Kulam Mali. From here ships sailed bound for China, Kulam Mali also possesses a dock where ships are built and repaired. The port dues for Chinese ships are a hundred drachmas and for other ships one to ten dinars.”<sup>58</sup> Abu Zayd, writing about 25 years later than Sulayman, mentioned that the sailors of Siraf are more at home in the Indian Ocean than the coast of China. Besides this the trade with ancient Tamilakam and China is more lucrative than the trade with the Red Sea ports.<sup>59</sup>

Ibn Khurdadbih, writing at the beginning of the third century Hijra speaks very highly of the flourishing trade of Jeddah. “The products of Sind, India, Zanzibar,

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<sup>55</sup>Nilakanta Sastri, K. A., Foreign Notices of South India, Madras, 1972, p.14.

<sup>56</sup> Muhammed Ali Marakkayar, M.G., “A Note on Marakkayars of Madras”, The Madras Tercentenary Commemoration Volume, Madras, 1994, p.65.

<sup>57</sup> Moule, A.C., and Paul Pelliot Marcopolo, The Description of the World, Vol.I, London, 1932, p.411.

<sup>58</sup> Sauvaget, Mr. Jean (ed.), Akbar us-sin Wal-Hind, pp. 16-1. cited by K.T. Muhammed Ali.

<sup>59</sup>Sauvaget, Mr. Jean (ed.), op.cit., p. 136.

Abyssinia and Persia are on sale here.”<sup>60</sup>Al-Masudi writing in 305 A.H mentions of a perfume extracted from “the sweat of an animal” carried by the Arabs to even far off lands such as Morocco. He also speaks very highly of the Indian peacocks. “Although peacocks have been imported into Iraq from India and allowed to breed there, their progeny are much inferior in size and beauty. <sup>61</sup>

Al-Masudi gives a description of pan (betel leaf) which was available from the Ramnad region in large quantities. He says pan is a kind of leaf and its plant grows in India. When the Indians chew it together with lime and betel nut their teeth turned like the grains of a pomegranate, their mouths become fragrant and they feel refreshed. The white teeth of man who does not chew pan are disliked in India. The leaf is so fine that it soon dries up and crumbles. It could not therefore be imported to Arabia in good condition. “In these days in Yemen and at Makkah in Hijaz, it is the fashion to chew betel nut.”<sup>62</sup>

The Arab accounts throw considerable light on this aspect of relationship. The Arab merchants, as pointed out earlier, carried the eastern commodities to Syria via the Mediterranean. ‘The customary trade route of Arabs was as follows: Coming from Egypt and Syria, They traveled by land along the eastern coast of the Red sea to the Yaman, where they embarked on sailing boats. Some went to Africa, others sailed past Hadramaut and Uman to Bahryan and the Iraq and thence to the Persian Coast of the Gulf. Then they went on and landed either at Thez, a harbour in Baluchistan, or at Daybal (Karachi), the port of Sind, and father on at Khambayat, the port of Gujarat and Kathiawar. Going still further by sea, they came to the shores of Ramnad and Cape Comorin and from there to Coromandal Coast; sometimes they served its

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<sup>60</sup> De Goeje (ed) *Kilab-ul-Masalik Wal Mamalik*, p.16.

<sup>61</sup>Maqdisi, *Ahsan-ut-Tagasim fit ma rifat –ul-Agalin*, p. 482.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 438.

different harbours by way of Saradip (Ceylon) and the Andamans. After touching a few ports in the Bay of Bengal, they went past Burma and Malaya to China and the East Indian Archipelago. On their way back they took the same route.

The Arab merchants carried numerous products of ancient Tamilakam. Following are some of the articles which were much in demand in the West Asian and European countries. Aloe-wood (Ud) its different varieties, Ambergris (Ambar), Bamboo, Camphor, Clove, Coconut, Cloth of different varieties, Cotton, Crystal, Cassia leaves, Cardamom, Elephants and elephant tusks, Ebony, Frankincense of benzoin, Fanid, Gold, Herbs, Horns, Ivory, Iron, Jute, Jewels, Kut, Kabab-Chini, Lak, Lemon, Musk, Betel leaves, Mace, Misri, Nil, Nutmeg, Oranges, Precious stones, Pearls, Pepper, Poison, Perfumes, Peacock, Qaqla, Rawandchini, Rice, Sambadhaj, Shoes of Kambayat, Spear, Swords, Sagon, Spices, Tabashir, Vessels of Clay and Willow. But only a few articles were imported by India, namely horses, dates, silks, furs and wine. Duties on imports and exports were charged either on the value of the articles or on the ship.<sup>63</sup>

### **Internal business**

Internal business was conducted under the name of *pettai*, *kadai*, *sillarai kadai* meaning market, shop, retail shop. Similarly the weekly markets were also transacted on a particular day of the week in a particular area. In *santhai* or weekly market some of the small business men would engage themselves to cater to the needs of the people who belonged to the small villages in around that area.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Zaki, M., (ed.) Arab Conquests from Indian during the Fourteenth Century, pp. 36-38.

<sup>64</sup> Vijaya Ramasamy, Textiles and Weaving in Medieval South India, Madras, 1985, pp. 25 and 29.

## **The internal trade**

The external trade of Ramnad with the foreigners paved the way for a place in the commercial history. Mutually the merchants of two nations purchased their commodities where ever they were in need of them. This developed the trade policy and encouraged the people to import some luxurious goods from the foreign countries. They also imported some commodities from the neighbouring countries. The following are the imported articles from other countries.

## **Camphor**

Camphor was an important imported commodity from the Eastern countries. In Sanskrit camphor was called *karpurah* and in Tamil *karpuram*. It was made from the wood of camphor tree. In the early days the people used camphor as medicine, to worship gods and goddesses and for eating purposes. Nowadays it is used as an ingredient in Pan. *Silappadikaram*<sup>65</sup> describes scenes of sailing ships on the Bay of Bengal laden with camphor exported from South East Asian countries. The name of camphor as *todukarpuram* is mentioned in *Silappadikaram*. It is also called *palitham*<sup>66</sup> in *Manimekalai*. Camphor had different varieties called *palapalitham*.<sup>67</sup> The people used it both as incense and as an ingredient for betel chewing.<sup>68</sup> The betel chewing camphor is called eating camphor. The literary work *Maduraikkanchi*<sup>69</sup> refers to the use of camphor and its trade in the streets. Betel chewing was a common practice in the ancient days, and so there was heavy demand for it. Inscriptions<sup>70</sup> mention it as the daily consumption article of the people.

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<sup>65</sup>Silappadikaram, XIV: 106-112.

<sup>66</sup>Manimekalai, XXVIII : 242-243.

<sup>67</sup>Paripadal, 10:82.

<sup>68</sup>Moule, A.C., and Paul Pelliot, op.cit., p.413.

<sup>69</sup>Maduraikkanchi, 399-400.

<sup>70</sup>South India Inscriptions, Vol.II, part V, p.18.

Goods like paddy, rice, tamarind, chilly, salt, oils, manjal, coconut, pepper, toddy, arrack, groceries, tobacco, other kinds of grains, palm sugar, pannier, copper and betel nut and also other coarse types of goods were sold in the local markets. The manufacturing of the salt in the sea shore of the territory of Sethu Nadu was permitted. The British Government issued an ordinance in 1793 on standing land tax and the tax was imposed from 1803 and the revenue out of it went over to the British coffers.

## **Export goods**

### **Coral**

Coral was a commodity which fetched remarkable foreign trade. The coral collected from the coral weeds at the sea shore was not sufficient. So they imported coral from foreign countries. *Padhitrupattu*<sup>71</sup> speaks of the neydal people collecting coral from the coral weeds on the shores. After collecting corals the goldsmiths added coral with other jewels for attraction. *Silappadikaram*<sup>72</sup> says that bright red coral beads were exposed in the jewellers' street. Pliny<sup>73</sup> says that corals were highly prized in India as pearls in Rome. He hints at a large import of coral to India, which later caused scarcity even in their places of production.

### **Precious metals**

Gold, tin and aluminium and copper are metals. Copper was largely used for making varieties of vessels. Later it was used for minting copper coins. The workers of copper were in plenty in the important cities.<sup>74</sup> But it seems that there were no mines or deposits of this ore. Therefore, it was largely imported from other countries.

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<sup>71</sup>Padirrupattu, 30:6-8.

<sup>72</sup>Silappadikaram, XIV:168-211.

<sup>73</sup>Pliny, XXXII:11.

<sup>74</sup>Silappadikaran, XIV; 168-211.

According to Periplus,<sup>75</sup> copper was exported in large vessels from Barygaza to Apologus and Omana.<sup>76</sup> It mentions of the import of copper at Barygaza and at Musiri.<sup>77</sup> It suggests that copper was imported at Barygaza from Egypt via Cana and reshipped to the ports on the Persian Gulf, which means that trade in copper was monopolized by the Indian traders.<sup>78</sup>

Gold was the earliest costly metal which attracted the attention of the traders. South Indians knew the gold objects (ornaments) which were substantiated by the availability of them from the burials.<sup>79</sup> Gold still remains a rare and precious metal used for ornaments and decorative purpose. *Pattinappalai*<sup>80</sup> refers to the fact that gold was imported into Kaveripoompattinam from the northern hills, probably from the Kolar hill regions. But it was not sufficient for daily use. Therefore, they imported gold from foreign countries. In Puhar the beach inhabited by the foreigners, there were many attractive articles made of gold which were exposed for sale.<sup>81</sup> The gold merchants hung flags in front of their shops to indicate the kind of gold available with them. *Silappadikaram*<sup>82</sup> and *Kalithogai*<sup>83</sup> contain references to different kinds of gold ornaments like necklaces, rings, bangles, anklets and crowns which positively asserts the supply of gold from out side Malabar. *Silappadikaram*<sup>84</sup> mentions of the varieties of gold known as *jatarupa*, *kiliceeirai*, *adakam* and *jambunadam*. *Ahananuru*<sup>85</sup> refers to the import of gold in ships. The gold ornaments were not only

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<sup>75</sup> Schoof, op.cit., p.170; Pliny, XXXVII, 33.

<sup>76</sup> Scoof, op.cit., para 36.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., para 49.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., para 56.

<sup>79</sup> Gururaja Rao,B.K., “Metal Technology with Special Reference to Megalithic in South India”, Sri. Ngabhinandanam (Dr.M.S.Nagaraja Rao Freshchraft) Bangalore, 1995, p.880.

<sup>80</sup>Pattinappalai, 185-190.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., V:20-27.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., VI : 76-108.

<sup>83</sup>Kalithogai, 85.

<sup>84</sup>Silappadikaram, XIV:180-204.

<sup>85</sup>Ahananuru, 149: 7-11.

used by the people but also used for bedecking gods and goddesses. Gold and gold articles were also gifted to the temples. Decoration of the image with flowers as well as jewels formed part of the daily rituals or *puja* and every temple worth the name seems to have possessed at least a few jewels. The foreigners sold varieties of lamps such as *othimavilakku* and *pavaivilakku*. *Silappadikaram*<sup>86</sup> and *Manimekalai*<sup>87</sup> mention the light called *pavaivilakku*. The metals like lead and tin were mostly required for Indian currency. These metals were imported from Rome at Barygaza, Musiri, Nelcynda and Bacre.<sup>88</sup> Pliny<sup>89</sup> observes that India had neither brass nor lead and they exchanged precious stones and pearls for them.

### Horses

Horse was an important animal imported from West Asian countries. *Pattinappalai*<sup>90</sup> indicates the horse trade at the port of Puhar. Marcopolo mentions that horses arrived from Hormos, Kis and Aden to Kayal, an important port city of Pandyas<sup>91</sup>. Inscriptions mention the monopoly of Chera traders in horse trade. *Pattinappalai*<sup>92</sup> refers horses which were imported from Arab countries. *Maduraikkanchi*<sup>93</sup> also speaks of the import of horses. *Ahananuru*<sup>94</sup> and *Purananuru*<sup>95</sup> speak of horses with a noble gait that came to Puhar. The bone of horses and stirrups obtained from the excavation at Kodumanal confirmed the use of

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<sup>86</sup>Silappadikaram, V:154.

<sup>87</sup>Manimekalai, 1:45.

<sup>88</sup> Schoof, Periplus, para, 56.

<sup>89</sup>Pliny, XXXIV, p.17.

<sup>90</sup>Pattinappalai, 118-125; 185-192.

<sup>91</sup> Moule, A.C., and Paul Pelliot, op.cit., p.386.

<sup>92</sup>Pattinappalai, 185.

<sup>93</sup>Maduraikkanchi, 317-325.

<sup>94</sup>Ahananuru, 140:3.

<sup>95</sup>Purananuru, 146:11.

horses during the early period.<sup>96</sup> Horses imported from the Arab countries were largely used by the rulers. The rulers imported good varieties of horses for their cavalry. Moreover, they presented best horses for the neighbouring state or kingdoms to cement their relationship. For instance, in sixth century A.D (510 A.D) the ambassadors of South India went to China with best horses presented to them.<sup>97</sup> The people used it for pulling chariots and *sivigais*.<sup>98</sup> The account of Marcopolo speaks about the varieties of horses imported from Curmos, Chisci, Dufar, Scier, Aden and other provinces.<sup>99</sup>

Many inscriptions<sup>100</sup> of medieval period refer to the glorious horse trade of *kudirai chetti*. Malaimandalattu *kudirai chettis* earned the fame and glory through the monopoly of their horse trade<sup>101</sup> and sold the imported horses at various markets. The rulers spent a good part of their revenue for the purchase of horses for the royal use and army. Thus there was heavy demand for horses imported from Arab region.

## **Silk**

Silk is the fine, soft, shiny fibre produced by silkworms. Known as *pattu*, the people of ancient Tamilakam did not manufacture large quantity of silk. Therefore they imported it from foreign countries. *Silappadikaram*<sup>102</sup> mentions of the arrival of *tukil* (silk) from the Eastern sea coast. The Romans exchanged silks and muslins for gold and spices. Silk yarn was imported from Barbaricon. The more valuable silk cloth besides raw silk and silk yarn was sent to Barygaza by way of Bactria and also

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<sup>96</sup>Subbarayalu, Y., and Rajan, K., Report of Kodumanal Excavations, Tamil University of Tanjavur, 1989, pp.1-5.

<sup>97</sup>Neelakanta Sastri, K.A., Foreign Notices of South India, University of Madras, 1972, p.83.

<sup>98</sup>Ahananuru, 104:3; Paripadal, 10:15-27.

<sup>99</sup>Moule, A.C., and Paul Pelliot, op.cit., p.386.

<sup>100</sup>South India Inscriptions, Vol.XVII, No.601.

<sup>101</sup>Annual Report on Epigraphy, 196 of 1928; 322 of 1958-59.

<sup>102</sup>Silappadikaram, XIV:106-110.

Musiri, Nelcynda and other parts of ancient Tamilakam by way of the Ganges and presumably down the East Coast of India.<sup>103</sup> During the period of Sangam age weaving was a specialized industry and an important occupation of weaving class. *Porunararrupadai*<sup>104</sup> mentions the use of silk by the aristocratic classes. Uraiyur (Argaru) was known for its muslin.<sup>105</sup>

## Sugar

Sugar, an important article was imported from China<sup>106</sup> during the middle ages. The people of Kerala later cultivated sugar-cane and sugar was extracted as an agricultural product, *Purananuru*<sup>107</sup> mentions that sugar was brought from heaven by a chieftain of Tagadur in Kongu country. Auvyyar praised the chieftain that *karumpu evan thanton perumpirankadaiya*.<sup>108</sup> Thus it is understood that sugarcane might have been brought for cultivation perhaps from a foreign country, either through sea or land route from very early period. Literary works indicate sugar with various names.

In *Perumpanatrupadai*<sup>109</sup> sugar is expressed as *vellam* or *visayam*. The field of sugar was mentioned as *karumpin kalani*.<sup>110</sup> *Kuruntoga*<sup>111</sup> refers to people who gathered sweet sugar from the trees like bamboo. The merchants of sugar and vellam are called as Panitha merchants. The people of marudham used to drink the juice of sugarcane.<sup>112</sup> Also sugar trees were used by the people to decorate their

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<sup>103</sup> Warmington, E.H., op.cit., p.37.

<sup>104</sup> Porunararrupadai, 155.

<sup>105</sup> Warmington, E.H., op.cit., p.61.

<sup>106</sup> Ramaswamy, T., Merchant Class- South India (1336-1665) Madurai, 1997 p.64.

<sup>107</sup> Purananuru, 99:1-4.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 329:20-21.

<sup>109</sup> Perumpanatrupadai, 99:1-4.

<sup>110</sup> Aingurunuru, Erandamoarru, 3:13.

<sup>111</sup> Kuruntogai, 85:4.

<sup>112</sup> Perumpanarrupadai, 262.

houses during festival seasons along with banana trees and arecanut bunches.<sup>113</sup> Sugarcane was largely grown in the Chera country during the medieval period.<sup>114</sup>

Wine, a fermented juice of grapes was used as an alcoholic beverage. An important drink of the rich as well as royal families, it was largely imported from the Arab countries. Literary works describe the import of wine from the Yavanavas. There was a custom among the people that whenever, where the kings or ambassadors met at a common place wine was distributed to them for joy.<sup>115</sup> Maduraikkanchi<sup>116</sup> indicates the import of wine from Greece.

Being the land of spices and precious jewels it remained a source of attraction to the foreigners from different parts of the world. There was regular healthy competition among the foreigners who in search of the valuable commodities which commanded global importance. During those days the territorial segment of Ramnad and Sivaganga formed an integral part of ancient Tamilakam. The commercial transactions of were largely regulated and controlled by the rulers of Sangam Age. As a result the Sangam literature furnishes a lot of valuable information about the commercial contacts especially the commodities on which the trade was carried out.

### **Animals and Birds**

Elephant was an important animal abundantly seen in the mountainous regions. Among the animals, elephants were highly valued for their use in the army and for transport as well as loading timber and celebrating temple festivals. The traders of *nanadesi*, *tisaiyairattu*, *ainnurravar* merchant guild visited the southern kingdoms including Chera, Chola and Pandya and they penetrated into the continents

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<sup>113</sup>Manimekalai, 1:46-47.

<sup>114</sup> Velu Pillai, T.K., op.cit., Vol.II, p.23.

<sup>115</sup> Purananuru, 24:31-3, 367:6-7.

<sup>116</sup> Maduraikkanchi, 318-324.

of six regions with superior elephants through land and water routes.<sup>117</sup> The early inscriptions mention that elephants were bought and sold. From an inscription<sup>118</sup> of Kulottunga Chola I found at Piranmalai it can be inferred that in the markets elephant's trade was conducted and the market tax collectors received  $\frac{1}{2}$  *achu* as tax for an elephant. Thus Tamilakam carried out animal trade with the West Asian countries including the United Arab Emirates.

Ivory was the most valuable commodity of trade between Tamilakam and the Arab countries. The people settled in and around the forest region engaged them in making ivory products. The regions of Pandya kingdom were known for ivory which had great demand in Egypt.<sup>119</sup> Therefore Egypt imported ivory from India. From early times, ivory and ivory articles, like chairs, tables, chests, statues and ships, were sent from the West Coast of India to the Nile valley.<sup>120</sup> From the trade centres of Musiri and Nelcynda on the West Coast, ivory was exported to Rome and other foreign countries.<sup>121</sup>

During the second millennium B.C. the Egyptians brought apes from the port city Punt (Somalia land).<sup>122</sup> Also in Israel apes received much importance. The name of apes object *kapin* as found in the Hebrew Bible are the same as those still used in Tamil, i.e., *Kavi*.<sup>123</sup> They imported monkeys from Indian marts.<sup>124</sup> Among the animal exported there were panthers along with peacock and elephants during early centuries in course of time, the Egyptians used the panthers for exhibition and for providing

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<sup>117</sup> Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., "A merchant Guild in Sumatra", Early Pandyan Chronology, Reprinted from the Journal of Indian History, Vol. XI, Part.I, Bandoeng, 1932. p.11.

<sup>118</sup> South Indian Inscriptions, Vol. VIII, no. 442.

<sup>119</sup> Srinivas Iyengar, P.T., History of the Tamils from the Earliest Time to 600 A.D. New Delhi, 1982, p. 41.

<sup>120</sup> Schoof, Periplus of Erythraean Sea, New York, 1974, p.61.

<sup>121</sup> Warmington, E.H., The Commerce between the Roma Empire and India, pp.163-164.

<sup>122</sup> Srinivasa Iyengar, P.T., op.cit., p.97.

<sup>123</sup> Kanakasabhai Pillai, V., The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago, New Delhi, 1979, p.31.

<sup>124</sup> Warmington, E.H., op.cit., p.147.

gifts. An inscription <sup>125</sup> of Harkhuf of Menere, of the sixth dynasty of the Egyptian king mentions that panther was exported from South India. Also the Egyptians used the panther skins<sup>126</sup> imported from the port of Punt (Somaliland).

The traders exported peacock to foreign countries. It was used for fostering the good friendship or alliance between the kings. During the reign of Solomon III (Circa.971-931 B.C) the king of the Israel made an alliance with the Phoenician king Hiram (circa 969-936 B.C) of Tyre. The Phoenicians designed and manned Solomon's ships which brought back "gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks from Ophir. The Jews of Palestine bought peacocks from South India. <sup>127</sup>

Peacock known as *tokai* is referred to in the Sangam anthologies. Mamulanar, a poet of the Sangam times, refers to Kosar (also called *vamba vadugar*) as skilled in peacock rearing. Buddhist sources record the export of peacock from the West Coast to Babylon in 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>128</sup> The Greeks also imported peacock and kept it in their cities.<sup>129</sup> Peacock was a most important bird exported to Iraq in 305 A.D by Al-Masudi<sup>130</sup> and Ophir from West coast.<sup>131</sup>

### **Precious Stones**

Ramnad was well known for precious and semi precious stones from ancient times. Precious stones obtained from the hills and from the pearl fisheries are highly valued and attracted the people for they used it in different articles. The high quality of the precious stones attained a peculiar place in the commercial history of the world.

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<sup>125</sup> Lekshmi,T.V., "Ancient South Indian Commerce", The Modern Review, Vol. LXVII, Calcutta, 1940, p.120.

<sup>126</sup> Srinivas Iyengar, P.T.,op.cit., p.97.

<sup>127</sup> Sur,A.K., Foreign Trade of Ancient India", The Modern Review, Vol, LXI Calcutta, 1937, p.100.

<sup>128</sup> Sridharan,K.,A Maritime History of India, New Delhi, 1965, p.12

<sup>129</sup>Douglas,D.,The New Bible Dictionary, London, 1968, p.156.

<sup>130</sup>Mohammed Ali,K.T., "Kerala Middle East Relations", Institute of Historical Studies, XXXIV, All India Conference Souvenir, Kollam, 1997, p.87.

<sup>131</sup>Sesha Lyer,T.R.,op.cit., p.134.

Some of the precious stones which attained importance were beryl, crystal, diamonds and sapphire. Beryl was an important export article to foreign countries at early period. The Indian beryls were exported to outside countries before Christ. Periplus<sup>132</sup> informs that beryls were exported from Musiri and Nelcynda in great quantities. Crystal, a clear transparent mineral was another important article of export. The Arabs and Romans preferred Indian rock-crystals for ornamentation and luxury.<sup>133</sup> Pliny mentions of cups of crystal for cool and ice drinks. He refers to the glass of India as being superior to all others, because of its pounded crystal. He further observes that the people of India, by colouring crystal have found a method of imitating various precious stones, beryls in particular.

Diamond was an important article of export from time immemorial. In German language diamond is called 'adams' and 'adamant'. The Romans called "adams" which they obtained as the true diamond.<sup>134</sup> Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, the earliest document refers to shells of all kinds including diamonds which were available in plenty in Dakshinapatha. Diamond is specified as the product of the south. The Periplus<sup>135</sup> of Erythrean Sea mentions that "the Graeco-Romans sent large ships to the market towns Musiri and Nelcynda from where are exported great quantities of transparent stones of all kinds, diamonds and sapphires". In the first century B.C diamond was exported from Musiri, Nelcynda and other parts of Tamilaham to foreign countries. The Periplus<sup>136</sup> mentions that sapphire from Musiri and Nelcynda got their way into Rome through Greek ships. Watts<sup>137</sup> states that sapphire in various

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<sup>132</sup> Periplus, para 39.

<sup>133</sup> Pliny, XXXVII, pp.23-24.

<sup>134</sup> E11. Warmington, op.cit., p.236.

<sup>135</sup> Schoof, op.cit., para 56.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., para 56.

<sup>137</sup> Watt, G., The Commercial Products of India, London, 1908, p.556.

colours was available in the hills of Malabar. It was largely used for decorative purposes and therefore it attained heavy demand in the Gulf countries.

Pearl is one of the most valuable natural products. It is a rare and costly commodity used as a beautifying object in the Gulf countries. The pearls are popularly known as *navamani* (nine gems)<sup>138</sup> which are precious, costly, beautiful and reflective. *Muthu-chippi* (pearl oyster) is the mother of pearls.<sup>139</sup> Oyster is an animal with a soft body inside a hare two piece shells.<sup>140</sup> The term *muthuccippi* is also used to refer to the pearl. Large and perfectly shaped pearls ranked in value with the most precious stones. Pearls differ from other gems. Pearls are formed inside the shells of oysters. Mineral gems also are hard and usually reflect light, but pearls are rather soft and they absorb as well as reflect. The pearls are taken from the shells of the deep sea water called *talnirmuthu*.<sup>141</sup> The pearls taken out by breaking the shells and conches were called *kilarmuthu*.<sup>142</sup> The pearls taken out of the shells were cleaned and polished. The unclean and unpolished pearls were known as *mannamutham*<sup>143</sup> while the polished one was called *selumutham*.<sup>144</sup>

The people believed that during rainy season pearl bearing oysters would come up to the surface of the sea and open the shell. Falling of even a drop of a rain into the shell, the oyster would then develop into a pearl inside the shell.<sup>145</sup> *Purananuru* and *Perumpanatrupadai* explained the stages of pearl. According to *Purananuru* “gems emitting rays while lying on bright, long buyers of

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<sup>138</sup>Tamil Lexicon, Vol. VI, p.3255.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., p.3256.

<sup>140</sup>The World Book Encyclopedia, Vol.XIV, p.681.

<sup>141</sup>Silappadikaram, XXVI: 168

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., V : 150.

<sup>143</sup>Ahananuru, 30:13.

<sup>144</sup>Silappadikaram, VI:106.

<sup>145</sup>Purananuru, 380:6.

sand which were like the pearls in a amature long shell”.<sup>146</sup> Another song of *Purananuru* describes *kathirvidum muthum* which means the “many rayed pearl born from the sea”.<sup>147</sup> *Perumpanatruppadai* refers to *muthuvarmanal*, which mentions ‘sand spread like pearls’.<sup>148</sup> The Romans largely used the pearls for beautifying ornaments. According to Pliny the natural pearl collected in Korkai was white in colour. In the Gulf region pearls from Korkai were regarded as a most valuable gem. Cleopatra, the most beautiful queen of Egypt (60-80 B.C) received with great honour the pearl of Korkai and as a reward she gave a royal feast to the pearl merchants.<sup>149</sup> Roman royal women tied pearls at the end of their sarees. Thus pearls attained an important place in external trade.

Marco Polo, the Venetian traveler of the 13<sup>th</sup> century described the pearl fishing and pearl-trading. According to him, pearl-fishing took place between Seilan and the great province of Maabar. In the region of Sendurpandi Thevar of Maabar, very large and good and beautiful pearls are found. He says that the king of the state has a very great receipt and treasure from his due upon pearls.<sup>150</sup> The Paratavars, the people who lived at the coastal area collected pearls from the sea. Merchants from other countries had every convenience of purchasing pearls in a particular place on a particular day.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>Purananuru, op.cit., 53:1-2.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 377:17.

<sup>148</sup>Perumpanarruppadai, 335.

<sup>149</sup> Raghavan, V.S., Ptolemy, (Tamil) Madras, 1978, pp.67-69.

<sup>150</sup>Moule, A.C., and Paul Pelliot, Marco Polo-The Description of the World, Vol.1, London,1938, pp.381-383.

<sup>151</sup> Rajamanickam, op.cit., p.369.

## Spices

The spices are aromatic or pungent vegetable substances used to flavour food. Spices were the natural wealth of the region largely produced and supplied to foreigners. Sometimes the spices are used as medicine too. So the demand for spices increased and the trade of spices gave much profit for the traders. Cinnamon is the yellowish brown spice made from the dried inner bark of an ever green tree or shrub native to the Malabar forests.<sup>152</sup> The Greek name *karpion* (cinnamon) is almost identical with its Tamil name *karuva*.<sup>153</sup> It was largely used as spice and medicine. In Rome the leaf of cinnamon was used as a raw product to manufacture oil.<sup>154</sup> Further the Jews used cinnamon and cassia in their religious services and festivals. So cinnamon occupied a particular place in the external trade commodities of Tamilakam. Malabar, to a larger extent, had supplied to the necessity of the Jews.<sup>155</sup> Cinnamon was largely exported from the port of Musiri to the West.<sup>156</sup>

Among the commercial spices cardamom largely grew in the region. The sea port Musiri mostly exported cardamom to the nations of the west. It was named according to the shape of its seeds. The merchants used the costly amomum which was yielded by the seed capsules as in medicines, perfumes and ointments. Its seeds were largely found in the highlands.<sup>157</sup> In *Silappadikaram*<sup>158</sup> it is mentioned as *vasam* which means cardamom. It was imported to Tondy and was sent to Madurai. Tondy, the sea port mentions of the large production of cardamom in its glorious period.

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<sup>152</sup> Nagam Aiya, V., Travancore State Manual, Vol. III, Trivandrum, 1906, p. 180.

<sup>153</sup> Kanakasabhai Pillai, V., op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>154</sup> Warmington, E. H., op. cit., p. 189.

<sup>155</sup> Nagam Aiya, V., op. cit., Vol. III, p. 180.

<sup>156</sup> Velu Pillai, T. K., The Travancore State Manual, Vol. II, Trivandrum, 1940, p. 10.

<sup>157</sup> Warmington, E. H., op. cit., pp. 184-185.

<sup>158</sup> Silappadikaram, XIV : 106-112.

Ginger is used as a spice and medicine. It is also called *zingiber*, *singavera* in Sanskrit and *inchiver* in Tamil.<sup>159</sup> Inscriptions mentioned it as *inji*<sup>160</sup> and its another form is known as *sukku*.<sup>161</sup> Large quantity of *zingiber* was taken from Tamilaham by the Roman merchants through the Arab intermediaries, which came from Far East.<sup>162</sup> During the Sangam age it was largely cultivated around the villages. There are references to it at *Maduraikkanchi*,<sup>163</sup> *Pattinappalai*,<sup>164</sup> *Padhitrupattu*,<sup>165</sup> *Ahananura*,<sup>166</sup> *Purananuru*<sup>167</sup>, *Silappadikaram*<sup>168</sup> and *Manimekalai*.<sup>169</sup>

Among the articles of export to the Gulf countries and elsewhere in the world pepper occupies the predominant place. Pepper became an unavoidable ingredient of medicines, and was commended by Hippocrates who calls it the “Indian remedy” and other writers also talk about it when deal with medicine.<sup>170</sup> In the world market pepper fetched an enormous price. In Rome, the use of pepper at the time of Augustus seems to have become very popular and its price was as high as 15 denari (about Rs.7) per pound. The price in India was not more than half that sum and the profit realized was therefore 100 per cent according to Pliny.<sup>171</sup> It is surprising that the use of pepper has come so much into fashion that sometimes its substance and sometimes its appearance had attracted our notice; whereas, pepper has nothing in it that can plead as a recommendation to either fruit of berry, its only desirable quality being a certain pungency; and yet it is for this that we import it all the way from

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<sup>159</sup>Pattinappalai, 19.

<sup>160</sup>Epigraphica Idica, Vol.XVIII, p.134.

<sup>161</sup>South India Inscriptions., Vol.VIII, No.442.

<sup>162</sup> Warmington,E.H.,op.cit., p.184.

<sup>163</sup>Maduraikkanchi, 289.

<sup>164</sup>Pattinappalai, 19.

<sup>165</sup>Padirrupattu, 16:1, 42:10, 58:6.

<sup>166</sup>Ahananuru, 35:2.

<sup>167</sup>Purananuru, 341:5; 350:2.

<sup>168</sup>Silappadikaram, X : 74.

<sup>169</sup>Mani,ekalai, V:112; VI:49.

<sup>170</sup> Schoof, op.cit., pp.214-215; E.II. Warmington, op.cit., pp.181-183.

<sup>171</sup>Pliny, VI, 101.

India! In spite of such structure the import trade in pepper grew and vast profits were made by the merchants. In 408 A.D, when Alaric the Goth; laid siege of Rome the terms he offered for raising the siege included the immediate payment of 3000 pounds of pepper along with other similar valuables.<sup>172</sup> They paid tolls at the government offices.<sup>173</sup> In Puhar pepper was imported from Chera kingdom<sup>174</sup> and was stored in godowns and was reloaded in foreign vessels. Owing to the heavy demand of pepper from the foreign merchants, it earned the name *yavanapriya*.

From the Kilakkarai harbour different types of grains<sup>175</sup> paddy, rice, silk, sarees, tobacco, beedi, sangu, dry fish, cotton, leather, rough garments, linseed<sup>176</sup> tamarind, palm sugar, a sweet called peenat<sup>177</sup> made from palm fruits were exported.<sup>178</sup>

From the harbours of Devipattinam, Aatrangarai, Bamban, Thondi, Puliadithurai, Pungadithurai, Mandapam, Vedhalai, Eirvadi, Vaalinokkam and Marakkayar pattinam goods were exported to Ceylon and the other western seashore countries.<sup>179</sup> In Sethu Nadu Islamia business men and Marakkayars were mostly involved in export and import business. The Portuguese converted the Parathvatha community to Christianity and developed them in export and import business against Muslims.<sup>180</sup> The Mannar Valaikuda was under the control of Raja Sethupathi which was a very apt place for harvesting corals in Pandya Nadu.

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<sup>172</sup> Schoof, op.cit., p.24.

<sup>173</sup> Pattinappalai, 118-125.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 185-192.

<sup>175</sup> M.D.R.Vol.9027,p.34.

<sup>176</sup> M.D.R.Vol.848,p.1319.

<sup>177</sup> Raghunatha Thirumalai Sethupathi, Keelakarai Copper plate, 1678, pp.1-2.

<sup>178</sup> ARE,A. 396 of 1907.S.I.I.xxiii 396.

<sup>179</sup> Gowri, K., Madurai Under the EastIndia company 1801-1857, Madurai, 1957, p.81.

<sup>180</sup> Rajamohamed, J., SethuNattu Kadal vanipathil Marakayar,Vallal Sethakathi memorial History Seminar Artical, Keelakarai, 2000,p.5.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Dutch people tried to harvest the corals in Ramnad sea shore regions which were under the control of Madurai Naiyakar, which was one of the reasons to give recognition to the Sethupathi Rajas; so the right to harvest the coral in the sea shore of Ramnad was granted to the Sethu pathi Rajas. In Sethu Nadu those who were ready to participate in harvesting the coral had to give as Kannikai or toll fee to the king.<sup>181</sup> So the Rajas exported the valuable corals to the foreign countries and raised the revenue of the country. On 08May1694 AD an agreement was made between the Kilavan Sethupathi and the Dutch people on harvesting the coral; on that basis the Dutch people were allowed to harvest the corals on the sea shore of Sethu Nadu.

Later the Dutch people tried to purchase the coral deposits for which Sethupathi had not accepted; hence they participated like others on the basis of granting the first day harvested corals to the Raja sethupathi.<sup>182</sup> Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi donated out of the revenue his own coral deposit in the area upto three miles out of harvesting the pearl in Salabadurai at Mannar area to the *puja* called Sukkuravara kattalai in the temple of Ramanathaswamy-the Parvathavarthini Amman at Ramnad under his name.<sup>183</sup> Sangu was also harvested during the period of the reign of Sethupathi and was exported to different countries and very huge revenue was raised. One of the best harbors during their reign was Devipattinam where the oyster or sangu business was carried out most predominately and the Dutch people also

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<sup>181</sup>Raghunatha Sethupathi, Thiruppullani Copper plate, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Museum, Ramanathapuram, 1699,p.2.

<sup>182</sup>Raju, S.,op.cit.,p.215.

<sup>183</sup>Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Mannar Salapa Copper plate, Samasthana office, Ramanathapuram, 1714,p.2. ARE,A.38 of 1947.

made use of this harbor for the export and the import business. The Raja Sethupathi had also established a place for storing the things in the harbour.<sup>184</sup>

During the period of Muthuramalinga Sethupathi an office was established at Calcutta to carry out the trade of selling the oysters or *sangu* which was managed by Dharma pilai in 1794 the August month 22000 oysters were sent to Calcutta harbor which took 40 days for completing the voyage for sale.<sup>185</sup> This was how the export business was carried on during the period of Sethupathis from Devipattinam. Thus the export business flourished in Sethu Nadu.

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<sup>184</sup>Devipattinam Copper plate, ARE,A. 46 of 1947.

<sup>185</sup>Raju, S.,op.cit.,p.216.