

*Chapter - V*

*CULTURAL CONTRIBUTION*

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### CULTURAL CONTRIBUTION

The cultural life of the Sethupathis of Ramnad was greatly influenced by the models of the Vijayanagara and the Nayak rulers. The Sethupathis extended their sincere support to the temple arts. The temples at Rameshwaram, Tiruuttara kosamangai and Tiruppullani represented the best examples of their liberal patronage. The religious sculptures of both Saivism and Vaishnavism are represented in their monuments. For the development of culture and tradition, the temples and the celebration relating to it gained much importance. Arts like architecture, sculpture, painting, dance, and literature played a vital role in developing culture and tradition. The Sethupathis contributed a lot for the development of temple culture.

Temples are the important centres which held a unique place in the society, economy and culture of the past. Worship of divinities in the temples leads to purity and calmness in the mind and heart of the devotees. Temple worship and Images of deities might have been prevailed in pre – Aryan form of religion.<sup>1</sup> It is believed that divine element was actively found in the places of natural beauty. The Saiva and Vaishnava hagiologists' propagated the temple cult and their devotional songs refer to different types of temples. They are called Perumkoil, Karakkoyil, Nalakkoil, Kokutikkoyil, Ilamkoil, Manikkoyil, Alakkoyil and Tirukkoyil.<sup>2</sup> Temples have been enlarged with the increase of population and their piety, the royal patronage and the

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<sup>1</sup>Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., Development of Religion in South India, Delhi, 1963, p.26.

<sup>2</sup>Dayalan, D., Early Temples of Tamilnadu, Delhi, 1992, p.18.

conduct of elaborate number of pujas and festivals. This resulted in a corresponding expansion of the temple structure also.<sup>3</sup>

Origin of the temple may be known from the cult of the dead. The earliest buildings are found as the dolmens, the places of the dead. They were built in the style of huts of those days, after which the temples must have been constructed. Thus the worship of nature and ancestors were deep rooted in the early society.<sup>4</sup> Primarily, the shelter of god got enclosure and shaped as a room (*graham*). Such rooms developed with more parts of ornamentations like a dome and spire. The architecture in the temples was designed with a view to aesthetic approach in three different ways by the treatment of walls, proportion of windows, the exterior projections and recessions. In accordance with the Hindu temple architectural rules, the earliest structural edifices devoted to gods and goddesses were built in Gupta's rule. The unique features of these temples are of a square section with a flat ceiling, simple interior, dressed stone masonry and heightened plinth.<sup>5</sup>The flat roofed ceiling was a continuation of the earlier *stupas* and rock-cut caves of Buddhist tradition.

The different forms of Siva are depicted in the temples and mandapas. The ten incarnations of Vishnu are also depicted in several temples. Narasimha slaying Hiranyakasipu is shown in two pillars in the Kalyanamandapa at Alagarkoil. Aesthetically it shows the dynamism and vitality and the whole weight is borne by one leg only showing the perception in iconographic pereception.<sup>6</sup>These sculptures reflect the social habits and events such as family, Devadasi system, hunting scenes,

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<sup>3</sup>Ramachandran, T.N., Historic India and Her Temples, Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum, Vol.III, Part I, Madras, 1977, p.vi.

<sup>4</sup>Viraswami Pillai, S., Temple and Its Significance, Srirangam, 1974, p.138.

<sup>5</sup>Puri, B.N., Hindu Art and Architecture – An appraisal: Our Cultural Fabric, New Delhi, 1982, pp.1-5.

<sup>6</sup>Sethuraman, G., Facets of Indian Art and Culture, 1995, p.42.

war expeditions, ornaments, household articles, hairstyle, music, festive scenes and military parade.

The Hirannyagarbha danam ceremony, taking the ruler through the womb of a golden cow and distribution of valuable gifts to the Brahmins was first conducted by Tirumalai Raghunatha Sethupathi, the predecessor of Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi on 12 January 1659.<sup>7</sup> Aadi Thiru Kalyanam, the marriage festival of the God and Goddess of the Rameshwaram temple for seventeen continuous days was commenced by Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi.<sup>8</sup> He assigned the income from Vilathur village for the expenses of the festival. Besides he started the chariot race for the first time.<sup>9</sup> Kilavan Sethupathi continued the Hirannyagarbha danam commenced by his predecessor with the income from the villages of Puliyankudi, Karumal and Kumarakurichi.<sup>10</sup> His second wife Katali Nachiyar granted the Kalathur village in Therbogi to Sankaranarayan, the son of Venketeswara Iyer, the priest of the Rameshwaram temple free of tax.<sup>11</sup>

Kumaramuthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1729-1735) established twenty four agraharams in Ramanathapuram granted the income from Kallikottai, Kollanoor, Mennanthi and Kamankottai for its maintenance.<sup>12</sup> Chellamuthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1749-1763) granted to Chandrasekara Avathani, the son of Sesha Avathani granted Ariyakudi village for his expertise in Yajurveda.<sup>13</sup> Vijayakumaramuthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1735-1748) granted the income

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<sup>7</sup>Ramaswami, A., Tamilnadu district Gazetteers Ramanathapuram, 1972, p.84.

<sup>8</sup> Arumugham, Hindu matha vizha InappuVilakam, p.50.

<sup>9</sup> Thevar Kula Song, No.129.

<sup>10</sup>Raghunatha Tirumalai Setupathi, Mugil Thagam Copper plate issued in 1649. S.M.Kamal House, Ramanathapuram, pp.1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Katali Nachiyar, Kalathur Copper plate in the custody of Professor N.Valli's House, Karakudi, 709.

<sup>12</sup>Kumaramuthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Katha Thevar, Kallikottai Copper plate, Samathana Office, Ramanathapuram, 1731, pp.1-2.

<sup>13</sup>Chellamuthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Ariyakudi Copper plate,1763, Government Museum, Egmore, Chennai, pp.1-2.

from the Muthaloor gramam to Ramaiyya, the son of Kalanidhi Konaiyya for his expertise in Rig Veda.<sup>14</sup>

### **Rameshwaram Ramanathaswami temple and other temples**

The Sethupathis constructed *mandapas*, *praharas* and *gopuras* besides the mighty temples. The first ruler of the Sethupathis called Sadaika Thevar donated numerous villages for conducting *pujas* at Ramanathar Thirukoil.<sup>15</sup> The eldest son of the Sadaika Thevar called Koothan Sethupathi like his father constructed Artha Mandpam and Nadana maligai at the first praharam of the Ramanathaswamy temple at Rameshwaram.<sup>16</sup> He also constructed a small Vinayaga temple. At the southern side of the Mandapam he constructed a temple for the Koori Sastha Ayyanar at Ramanathapuram.<sup>17</sup> Besides in the headquarters of Raja Sethupathi called Pogaloor he constructed an Iyanarkovil near Vinayagar kovil.<sup>18</sup> In the kingdom of Sethupathi most of the people carried out worship in the Ayyanar temples as their kaval gods. In many temples the celebration called Puravi Eduppu is being conducted even now.

Raja Sethupathi (1635-1646) Thalavai alias Sadaiakka Thevar second constructed a temple for Chokalinga Swami at Ramanathapuram.<sup>19</sup> During his powerful reign he constructed east gopuram at the Ramanathaswamy temple.<sup>20</sup> Raghunatha Sethupathi alais Thirumalai Sethupathi (1647-1672) decided to construct a second *praharam* in such away to suit to the appearance and the raising of the temple. Because the temple was situated in the midst of the seas on four sides, it required

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<sup>14</sup>Vijayakumaramuthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Muthalur Copper plate, 1739, pp.1-2.

<sup>15</sup>Robert Swell, Archaeological Surveys of South India, List of the Antiquarian Remains, The Presidency of Madras, Vol.I, 1882, p.300.

<sup>16</sup>Robert Swell, The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India, Madras, 1932, p.274. Burgess and Natesa Sastri, Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions, p.60. ARE, 101 of 1903. ARE, 105 of 1903.

<sup>17</sup>Kamal, S.M., Sethupathi Mannar Cheppedukal, (Tamil) Ramanathapuram, 1992, p.111.

<sup>18</sup>Kamal, S.M., Sethupathi Mannar Kalvettugal, (Tamil) Ramanathapuram, 2002, p.45.

<sup>19</sup>Rajaram Rao, T., Manual of the Ramnad Samasthanam, Madurai, 1891, p.220.

<sup>20</sup>Fergusson, James, History of India Eastern Architecture, London, 1972, p.383.

stones which could not be brought from Madurai, Nellai, Trichi via, Mandabam through Bamban canal to reach Rameshwaram and so it was found to be very difficult. Finally he got an idea that instead of bringing the stones from the hilly regions of Tamil Nadu he should take the same from the opposite side of the hilly regions of the Sri Lanka and he got the approval of the Raja of Srilanka to carve the stones at Kindy.

Normally in ancient times stone bars were used for the construction of temples to be brought to the site and carved in to the required shape of the statues. Contrary to the practice Raja Sethupathi sent the Sthapathies, stone cutters and artisans with necessary drawings to Thirikonamalai to carve the required pillars, load bearing and ceiling stones and bring them through *thoni* (boat) to the Thiruppulani site.<sup>21</sup> To supervise the work he stayed at Ramnathapuram by establishing a palace. Now a days the palace is used as a Higher Secondary School, Co-Oprative Bank and also a place for making the Helipad where the golden north car street and the western car street would meet. Raja Sethupathi constructed the second *praharam* which had the area of extension of east to west with 115.80 mtrs in length and south north with 94.20 mtrs in breath.<sup>22</sup> In the 17th century because of the good relationship that he had with the Madurai Thirumalai Nayakar, the temples built at Madurai by him resembled with that of the architecture of Raja Sethupathi.<sup>23</sup> The Raja Thirumalai Sethupathi during his reign constructed temples for the incarnation of Kotravai, the deities Maridurgai and Vanasankari, Rajarajeswari, MalaiValar Kaathali. In Ramanathapuram he constructed a fort on the eastern side of Raja Durgai Amman

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<sup>21</sup>Kamal, S.M., Sethupathi Mannar Varalaru, Ramanathapuram, 2003, p.34.

<sup>22</sup>Sethuraman, K., Rameshwaram Temple, (Tamil) Madurai, 1981, p.60.

<sup>23</sup> Fergusson, James, op.cit, p.380. In 1658 Thirumalai Sethupathi completed the second praharam.

temple<sup>24</sup> and in the southern side Vanasankari Ammankovil inside of the fort Raja Rajeswari temple but it was at the time the fort was built out of mud. On the south western side of Ramanathapuram a village called Malasirupothu; he constructed a temple for Malaivalakar Kathali. The Raja Sethupathi worshipped the Amman called Vanasankari as the *kaval* deity of Ramanathapuram fort. From 1710 to 1725 Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi ruled the Sethu Nadu. He came to the throne on Vijaya Dasami on the final day of celebration of the Dasami festival. Hence he was called under the surname of Vijaya. During his reign he laid the foundation for the most world famous third praharam of Ramanatha Swamy temple at Rameshwaram.<sup>25</sup> He also donated a silver cradle made of 18000 varagans for the use of the deity Swami Ambal.<sup>26</sup> He also constructed a temple for Aathimuthu Ramalinga swamy Thirukoil. Besides he also constructed a temple for Kothanda Ramaswamy.

During the period 1725-1735 under the reign of Sadaika Thevar alias Kumaramuthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, his *prathani* Ramalingam Pillai constructed a temple at Kulavayal for Subramaniyar which was on the way to Eeirvadi about five kilometres to Vaigai for which Sethu pathi offered donations.<sup>27</sup> He also allowed another *pradhani* Vairavan Servai to construct one temple at Peruvayal for Lord Murugan. This was how the Sethupathi became the pioneer of worshipping Kumarakadavul in their region.

During the period of 1763 to 1795, under the reign of Muthuramalinga Sethupathi who ruled Sethu Nadu in 1769 the Third Praharam of Ramanathaswamy

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<sup>24</sup>Raghunatha Thirumalai Sethupathi, Allikulam Copper plate, Ramanathapuram Devasthanam office, 1659, pp.1-2.

<sup>25</sup>Kamal, S.M., Ramar Seitha Kovil, Ramanathapuram, 2004, p.61.

<sup>26</sup>Rangacharya, K.V., A Topographical List of Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency (collected till 1915), Madras, 1919, p.1168.

<sup>27</sup>Kumara Muthu Raghunatha Sethupathi, Panayangal Copper plate, Subramaniyar Temple, Vaigai, 1729, p.2.

temple at Rameshwaram was completed. For the completion of the third praharam, the first prathani MuthuIrulappa Pillai and the junior pradhani called Krishna Ayyangar became very important for the management and supervision.<sup>28</sup> In the third *praharam* near the eastern Gopuravasal a statue MuthuIrulappa Pillai could be seen.<sup>29</sup> Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi came to know about the ruined part of the Naganatha swamy temple at Nayinar kovil which was constructed by Varaguna Pandiyan and he sent Muthu Irulappa Pillai, his pradhani to repair the Karpagragam Arthana mandapam, Karunkal Vimanam, and completed the Kumbabishekam.<sup>30</sup> This was on the basis of the details made above the Sethupathi contributed in the 17th and the 18th century for the reflection of the uplift of the tradition of the society by constructing temples, mandapams and praharams. They not only built the temples but also the palaces, forts and other monuments.

### **Method of worship and pujas at the temples**

The Sethupathi issued *kattalais* or orders and made different types of donations to conduct *pujas* daily without interruption at the Ramaswamy temple at Rameshwaram and other temples which were constructed by them. Besides they gave donations not only to the temples but also to the mosques of the Muslims, Christians and Samanars to upkeep the unity in culture in the midst of diversity. During 1605 to 1621 Sadaika Thevar alais Udaiyan Sethupathi donated lands to the Brahmins at Ramanatha swamy temple at Rameshwaram by making them earn their livelihood to satisfy their needs. Besides the revenue from the temple was granted to those who came from the Pancha desam called, Andhra, Kerala, Karnataka, Marattiyam,

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<sup>28</sup>Raghava Iyengar, M., Research part, 1938, pp.13-14.

<sup>29</sup>Rangacharya, K.V., op.cit., p.1168.

<sup>30</sup>Kamal, S.M., Nainar kovil Inscription, p.142.

Konkanam; he also donated the five villages and their aeinthals<sup>31</sup> and the land and tax also to conduct daily *pujas* like *abishegam*, ghee and for lighting and offering *pujas* at Ramanathaswamy temple and Parvadhavarthini temple at Rameshwaram through Ramanatha Pandaram, the kovil administrator.<sup>32</sup> During the reign of Kilavan Sethupathi (1674 to 1710) donated a part of the pearl harvested from the coral land called Salapathurai for the Rameshwaram temple to perform the *pujas* under the name of the Rajaas *kaanikai*.<sup>33</sup> They had also given grants from the revenue of the donated lands and from their own possessions of wealth. He ordered that the Pandaram<sup>34</sup> not to use the *kaanikai*, goods and valuables for performing the *pujas, kattalaikal* in their names, since if the others who gave the offerings were found to be sinful in their ways of earnings which would afflict them with sorrow. He also donated the village called Allikulam for conducting daily the *pujas* like daily *kattalai, abishekam, neivaithiyam*, lighting the Thiruvillaku, the wearing of *parivattam* in the temple of Mari Durgai at Ramanathapuram.<sup>35</sup>

Raja Thirumalai Sethupathi for his and his for fathers' *puniyam*, donated many villages to Audaiyar Athmanathaswamy temple at Thiruperundhurai to conduct *pujas* during the early morning *usha* times. Taxes collected from these villages including palvari were used for conducting *puja* at the time of (Usha).<sup>36</sup> Similarly for the same temple he donated Perungadu village<sup>37</sup> to conduct the early morning *puja* called *usha*. Thirumalai Sethupathi donated the rights and the lands at

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<sup>31</sup>Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions, No.3, pp.66-68. Swell lists, Vol.II, No.30, p.5.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., No.4, pp.68-70. ARE, A.20 of 1911.

<sup>33</sup>Dalovoy Sethupathi Katha Thevar, Mannar Salapa Copper plate, Government Museum Egmore, Chennai, 1625, p.1.

<sup>34</sup>ARE, A.36 of 1947.

<sup>35</sup>Raghunatha Thirumalai Sethupathi, Allikulam Copper plate, Ramanathapuram Devasthanam office, Ramanathapuram, 1659, pp.1-2.

<sup>36</sup>Thirumalai Sethupathi, Thiruperumthurai Copper plate, Thiruvaduthurai Adinam, Thiruvaduthurai, 1668, pp.1-2.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-2.

Kothankulam besides the wet, dry, einthal, kuttam, mavadai, maravadai, thittu, thidal, pallu, parai to the Attala Chokanathar temple at Perunkarai, a village which was five kilometers nearer to Parthibanur.<sup>38</sup> During the period 1674 to 1710 Kilavan Sethupathi under his reign for the *puniyam* of his father, mother and the progeny of the female children donated the village called Utharakosa Mangai to the temple Mangai Nathar<sup>39</sup> and he ordered that all the taxes of the village to be granted to the temple. He also ordered that the fixed Makamai' which should be given from the sale of goods at Kilakkarai harbour for conducting *pujas* at the temple Meenakshi Chokkanatha Swamy at Kilakkarai for the benefit of his ancestors.<sup>40</sup> Kilavan Sethupathi donated eight villages to the Yekambaranathar temple at Sundara Pandiyapattinam for conducting *pujas*.<sup>41</sup> He also donated three villages near Kalaiyar kovil to conduct the *pujas* at the temple Vairava Viswanathar and Akillandeswari in Tenalai Nadu.<sup>42</sup> He also donated Silugavayal village near Rajasingamangalam to the Ramanatha Swamy temple at Rameshwaram.<sup>43</sup> He donated the village Paranoor near to Thirupulani and the lands related to it for the conduct the *pujas* for the temple Tharbasayana Mazhakiya Deiva Chillai Perumal at Thirupulani not only the Sethupathi but also the Prathani and their wives also gave donations for the smooth conducting of the *pujas* for the temple.<sup>44</sup> The second wife of Kilavan Sethupathi, Kathali Natchiyar<sup>45</sup> donated the village called Mela seethai, to conduct the *pujas* at Rameshwaram temple. During 1710 to 1725 under the reign of Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi he ordered the citizens

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<sup>38</sup>ARE,A.33 of 1947.

<sup>39</sup>ARE,A.48 of 1947.

<sup>40</sup>ARE,A.396 of 1907.S.I.I.XXIII 396.ARE, A.397of1907. S.I.I.XXIII397. ARE,A.398.of 1907.S.I.I.XXIII 398.

<sup>41</sup>Sethupathi Raghunatha Thevar, Sundara pandiyan Pattinam Copper plate, Government Museum, Egmore, Chennai,1684, p.1.

<sup>42</sup>Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions, No.9,pp.81-83.

<sup>43</sup>ARE, A.27of 1947.

<sup>44</sup>Kilavan Sethupathi, Ramanusaperi Copper plate, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Museum, Ramanathapuram,1688,pp.1-2.

<sup>45</sup>Kathali Nachiyar, Meelasethai copper plate,Kamal House,Ramanathapuram,1694,p.1.

of Ramanathapuram to give one money per family of Chettiyar, Vaisiyar, Suthirar, who had the authority, similar to the powers of the Rajas and also the Chettiars, Thuluvars, Varai Idaiyars, Chaluppar, Sriyar for conducting the daily *pujas* like *abishekam*, neivaithiyam, at Kothanda Ramaswamy temple at Ramanathapuram.<sup>46</sup> Raja Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi ordered to donate the pearls harvested from his own Mannar coral coast upto three miles distance for Sukkura vara kattalai *puja* at the temple of Ramaswamy and Parvadhavardhini temple at Rameshwaram.<sup>47</sup> He also ordered to donate one part of the revenue obtained from the harbour, the revenue of Navabasanam and the proceeds from the sale of oysters to the temple Ulagamaha Devi at Devi pattinam. Sethupathi Rajas during their coronation as Rajas to the throne they used to donate a village as *patha kanikai* every time to Ramanatha swamy temple at Rameshwaram.<sup>48</sup> During 1729 to 1735 under the reign of Kumaramuthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, while ascending to the throne, he offered a village called Aathan kothakudi as Pathakanikai to Deiva Chillai Perumal.<sup>49</sup> Thiupulani during 1765 to 1795, under the reign of Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi donated the two villages called Chokkalai and Mathivayil for conducting *pujas* at the temple called Muthuramalinga Sethupathi at Ramanathapuram.<sup>50</sup> The Sethupathi donated not only to the Hindu kovils but also to the worship places of the other religions including Muslim, Christian and Samanar for their better functioning. During 1735 to 1748, Siva Kumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi donated some parts of the villages

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<sup>46</sup>Raghunatha Sethupathi, Ramanathapuram Copper plate, Kothanda Ramaswamy Temple, 1711, pp.1-2.

<sup>47</sup>Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Manaar salapa Copper plate, Samasthana office, Ramanathapuram, 1714, pp.1-2.

<sup>48</sup>ARE, A.46 of 1947.

<sup>49</sup>Kumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Kothankudi Copper plate, Deivasilai Perumal Kovil, Thiruppullani, 1730, pp.1-2.

<sup>50</sup>Siva Kumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Ervadi Copper plate, Ervadi Dhargah, Ervadi, 1742, pp.1-2.

of Periya Mayakulam through Uttthara Kosamangai for the Dharga of Sultan Syed Ibrahimali at Eirwadi. He bestowed the village called Puthukulam and its tax revenue collected to Abil Kabil Dharga at Rameshwaram.<sup>51</sup> Siva Muthu Kumara Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi granted a few donations to the Mosque at Anumanthakudi near Devakottai.<sup>52</sup> During 1763 to 1795 Muthuramalinga Sethupathi donated the village called Thenchi Einthal and its revenue to the church at the Muthupettai village.<sup>53</sup> He also donated the village called Anumanthakudi and its revenue to the schools of Samanars at Anumanthakudi.<sup>54</sup> As said above the Sethupathi constructed not only the temples but also donated for the better conducting of *pujas* namely *abishekkam* and also for *kattalaikals*. Besides as the reflection of tradition, they offered donations for the better functioning of Muslim, Christian and Samanars centres which were worthy to be appreciated.

### **Architecture**

During 1674 to 1710 the Kilavan Sethupathi who ruled over the Sethu Nadu shifted his capital from Pogalur to Ramanathapuram.<sup>55</sup> After demolishing the fort made of mud at Ramanathapuram the Kilavan Sethupathi constructed a fort made of stones.<sup>56</sup> This fort was constructed with a height up to 27 feet and with a breadth of five feet to accommodate during war fare small and big tanks for keeping at 44 *kothalankals*. *Kothalam* is the sloping part of the rising stage ending by the side of the fort wall which would help to attack the enemies from the unreachable height.

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<sup>51</sup>Siva Muthu Kumara Sethupathi, Rameshwaram Copper plate, Abil Kabil Dhargah, Rameshwaram, 1745,pp.1-2.

<sup>52</sup>Rangacharya, K.V., op.cit.,p.1196.

<sup>53</sup>Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi, Thenchiyendal Copper plate, S.M.Kamal House, Ramanathapuram, 1781, p.2.

<sup>54</sup>S.I.I.XXIII-408.ARE,408 of 1907.

<sup>55</sup>Ramaswami, A.,op.cit.,p.87.

<sup>56</sup>Kamal, S.M.,Viduthalaiporil Sethupathi Mannar,(Tamil),p.10.

Out of them, the *kothalam* at the south west corner was still found to be in a damaged condition and people called it as Moolaikothalm. He also constructed a hill fort at the boundary of the northern side at Thirumayam for the safety and security of the people in Thirumayam in 1687. During his reign Sethu Nadu being very vast and extensive, he constructed very strong forts for the safety and security at Aranthangi, Keelanilai Kottai, Anumanthakudi and Piranmalai.<sup>57</sup> During 1710 to 1725 Thiruvudaiya Thevar alias Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi under his reign constructed many forts for the safety and security of the territories such as Thirupathur, Oriyoor, Rajasingamangalm, Bamban and Kamuthi.<sup>58</sup>

The fort at Kamuthi was constructed with round shape in stead of rectangular shape at the northern banks of Gundaaru with walls like a border in the midst of hills. This fort was constructed with a design made by a French expert engineer in 1751.<sup>59</sup> This type of the round fort was designed by Denois, a Dutch captain for the king of Travancore Raja Marthanda Varmana at Uthayagiri.<sup>60</sup> During the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the Sethupathi serected, as illustrated above many temples, palaces and forts in order to reflect forever the symbols of their rich cultural tradition.

## **Sculpture**

The period from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 18th century was considered as an important period for the growth of sculpture at Sethu Nadu. The statues of the kings, queens, prathanis and the persons who carried out the religious activities, Nivanthiangals granted by the donars were carved and kept at kovil mandapam and the praharams up

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<sup>57</sup> Venkatarama Ayyar, K.R., Manual of the Pudukottai State, Vol.II, part.I, Pudukottai, 1940, p. 718.

<sup>58</sup> Ramaswami, A., op.cit., p.90.

<sup>59</sup> M.D.R. Vol.1245, p.532.

<sup>60</sup> Kamal, S.M., op.cit., p.52.

to the height of a person.<sup>61</sup> The statues of the Raja Sethupathi and their prathanis were visible in the Sukrakaravara Mandabam and kalyanamandabam at Rameshwaram.<sup>62</sup> The statues of Thirumalai Sethupathi and his son Raghunatha Sethupathi were visible at the southern entrance of Amman Sannathi. The statues of Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi and also his prathani Muthu Irulappa Pillai and Krishna Ayyangar were kept there; the statues of Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi and Chella Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi were erected at the Kalyana mandapam. All these statues were up to the height of a person. All the statues were made as per the tradition of wearing the dhotis, turban around the head, and the *arakkatchai* around the waist with a sword which were visible and on the pillars smaller statues were finely carved which stood visible. All the statues were made up on the basis of stories relating to the Ramayana epic, Vishnu Avathars, Hanuman, monkey masters and snake charmers and to show the wealth of nature, the creepers, flowers and animals like deer, snake and elephant were beautifully carved.

During the reigns of the Sethupathis not only the stone statues but also the statues made of copper Thirumeni which attracted the notice of the entire on lookers. A copper Thirumeni statue called the Horse Chokkar which denoted Lord Siva was kept at Rameshwaram. Lord Siva seemed to be on the back of the horse and so he was called the Horse Chokkar. Lord Shiva was called as Chokkanathar in the Meenachi temple at Madurai.

The *Thirumeni* was made during the reign of Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi in 1710. When the Sethupathis were unable to visit Rameshwaram<sup>63</sup> at the time this statue which was in the Palliyarai was brought in to the round along with Swami

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<sup>61</sup>George Michell, Architecture and Art of Southern India, 1995, p.180.

<sup>62</sup>Kamal, S.M., op.cit., p.173.

<sup>63</sup>Somalay, Saga of Rameshwaram Temple, Rameshwaram, 1975, p.160.

which was the practice followed by all.<sup>64</sup> The Sethupathi made stone statues and statues made of metals which were not subject to damage were still seen there which showed how they contributed to the betterment of the younger generation. Sethupathis were very keenly interested in painting. The Kilavan Sethupathi constructed a fort made of stones at Ramanathapuram in which a palace called Ramalingavilasam was set up like the temples with Karuvarai, Artha mandapam, Mahamandapam. During the period from 1710 to 1725 under the reign of Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, colourful paintings were drawn in the palace of Ramalingavilasam. As the Sethupathis had great veneration for Swamy Rama and the Ramanathaswamy they named the palace where they stayed as Ramalingavilasam. In Ramalingavilasam while entering into the palace, one could see the pictures of Sethupathi fighting war with Thanjur Raja, the picture of the *oorvalam* of the Muthuvijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, the meeting with the foreign delegates in the Maha Mandapam on the southern side. In this Mandapam, the paintings of the other temples and the paintings of the gods were seen.<sup>65</sup> Next to the maha mandapams in the Artha Mandapam, one could see on the walls, the depicted pictures of Lord Krishna and his feats of bravery at Aayarbody and the coronation of the Lord Krishna.

Next to the Arthamandapam, on the walls of Karuvarai Mandapam, the birth of Rama up to the marriage with Seetha could be found on the inner ceiling. The scenery relating to the bed rooms of the queens, the king Sethupathi receiving the sceptre from Rajarajeswari and the Rathina pattabishekam conducted by Madurai Nayakar to Muthu Vijaya Raghunathar, Sethupathi's Bavani, Enthisai kaval portraits like rare scenes were painted. The Raja Sethupathi's personal life scenes were painted on the walls of the upstairs. The pictures of his public life, Bhagavadha scenes, the

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<sup>64</sup>Somalay, op.cit., p.11.

<sup>65</sup>Kamal,S.M.,op.cit.,p.52.

spiritual scenes of Dhasavadharam could also be seen even after three hundred years of time. Besides some notes of spoken Tamil language letters were also seen under the picture which denoted the Marava Nadu vernacular which could be understood.<sup>66</sup> Thus the art of painting remained as an example of the reflection of the tradition even after three hundred years which showed the contribution made by the Sethupathis.

### **Painting**

The Sethupathis of Ramand excelled in the field of painting also. The murals on the wall represented the Gods and Goddesses and stories from epics and puranas it depicted even war and peace treaties with kings and queens. The scenes from the epics like Ramayana are portrayed in a explicit manner.<sup>67</sup>

Ramanad Palace remained the home of the Sethupathi kings who ruled this region in the 17th century and were considered the guardians of the Sethusamudram near Rameshwaram. Pilgrims and travellers were protected by these rulers. The kings ruled parts of southern Tamilnadu for more than two hundred years. The palatial complex includes their private royal rooms. Besides the many buildings, the temples and durbar hall were built by the Sethupathies. The the durbar hall constructed during the period of Kilavan Sethupathi in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, represents a visually colourful period of that era. With white pillars holding the foundation rather strong, the hall is a veritable storehouse of weapons and daggers.

The Sethupathis are immortalised as well in the world of murals as they are shown rewarded and honoured by the Nayaks. The Marathas, the British, the Nayaks – the tableau of paintings take into a world of various dynasties and stories of their flimsy friendships and power struggles. Decked in layers of costumes and bold

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<sup>66</sup>Vedasalam, V.,Ramanathapuram Palace Museum guide, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Department, Chennai, 2014,pp.5-13.

<sup>67</sup>Nagasamy, R., The Art of Tamilnadu, Madras,1972, p.16.

jewellery, these rulers sit either at each other's table for signing treaties or to form new conspiracies. The Europeans are here too, flattering the king and enticing them with gifts or demanding that they pay tribute to them. The life style of the era is painted here in bold strokes depicting dances, sports as the romance of the era comes out alive in these panels. Palaces are purely symbols, reminding one of the erstwhile glories that have crumbled over the passage of time.

## **Social Habits**

### **Family**

The family is considered as a basic unit of the any society. Hindu society had the joint family system. Joint family system was in existence in Sethupathi region. This system removed many of the anti social elements in the society. The family was patrilineal and patriarchal in which the word of the father was respected more. If the father passed away, in the absence of the male members in this family all the other members had to accept the word of the mother. The family was well integrated, homogeneous and stable, where all the pleasures and pains were shared by all the members and many incidences of mental derangements and suicides were thwarted. More over the credit of a member went to the honour of the family.<sup>68</sup>

In joint family, incomes of all the persons of the family are added to the general fund of the family and expenditure the economic need are met. In the family property all the male members had equal share which is a widely accepted practice in almost all the traditional Hindu society. In the joint family system, the eldest son had the right to inherit the house. <sup>69</sup> Modern education had also brought about this change.

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<sup>68</sup>Ramasami,A., op.cit, p.169.

<sup>69</sup>Edgar Thurston and Rangchari, op.cit., Vol.II.,p.251.

## Food

Food habits of people normally depended on the crops grown in the geographical limit of that area. As Ramnad region was of dry land of all the crops cultivated were dry crops. Though rice was commonly used as main food, other foods items were, cholam, ragi and cumbu. All Brahmins and some of the higher caste non-Brahmins such as Vaishyas and Vellalars abstain from meat. They were strict vegetarians, lived simply upon vegetables and milk. Their food consisted simply of boiled rice, pulses, green grains, curries and pickles made of lime and mango, butter and ghee. Generally the muslim and the Christians take more fish and meat than others. Maravars and Kallars considered that the marriage ceremony was consummated only if the feast with mutton was served.<sup>70</sup>

The Naidus and Nadars eat fish and mutton but abstain from beef. Low caste people like Chakkiliar and Parayar had the habit of eating meat as well as beef. The Koravars, a wandering tribe ate cats, fowls rats, pigs, rat's deers, goat and sheep.<sup>71</sup> Drinking habit was also common among the people of Sethupathi region. The fermented juice of Palmyra tree was called *kallu* which was an intoxicating drink used in the festive occasion and at the time of marriage ceremony.<sup>72</sup> Sethupathi's people largely used salt, tamarind and chilies in foods.

## Dress

Dress represents the manifestation of the culture of the people of a period. Purananuru finds reference about that the Marava chieftains wore a cloth round his

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<sup>70</sup>Maravar Jathi vilakam, Mackenzie Collections, oriental Manuscript Library, Madras, Document No.370a,, p.6.

<sup>71</sup>Edgar Thurston and Rangachari. K, op.cit., Vol.II,p.475.

<sup>72</sup>Maravar Jathi Vilakkam, op.cit., p.4.

waist by a blue strap and adorned the head with peacock feathers.<sup>73</sup> The history of the dress including headgears and ornaments reveals the social and economic conditions of that period and also proclaims the people's love for beauty. Dress is an important adjunct of personality and it is said that, "God makes and apparel shapes".<sup>74</sup> It is true that dress and ornaments are the mirror of the society, the fragrance of flowers but there is a wealth of literary evidence to confirm the fact that the practice was widely prevalent and even today scent is smeared on clothes on auspicious occasions and festivals.<sup>75</sup>

The dress of the people does not differ greatly from that in other southern areas. The ordinary dress of an adult male consists of two thin cloths. The long waist-cloth or veshti is tied round the waist. The upper cloth is called *angavashram* and is worn in the fashion of a Roman Toga, or it is folded and thrown over the shoulders. Children up to about five years of age generally go about with only a strip of cloth just sufficient for decency. Girls wear *pavadai* (skirt) and choli. The women dress along one called *selai* (saree) 25 to 30 feet long wrapped round the body hanging down low enough to conceal the knees. Putavai is another important lower garment.<sup>76</sup> The Muslim women wear purdah, not as a social inhibition but as a cover to prevent men from seeing their face. They were not supposed to see any strange men, and were expected to wear a *thuppattim*, a long cloth to cover their entire body except hands and eyes.

In certain areas they wear saris of the longer variety and in certain places they wear brightly coloured flowered or checked pattern lunges tied over the waist and in certain other areas they wear long-sleeved jackets descending to their elbows. Their

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<sup>73</sup>Purananuru, 189.

<sup>74</sup> Mohini Verma, Dress and Ornaments in Ancient India, Varanasi, 1989, p.4.

<sup>75</sup> Srivastava, A.L., Life in Sanchi Sculpture, Atlantic Highlands, U.S.A., 1983, p.12.

<sup>76</sup> Namadipa Nikandu, 452.

upper garment is *kachchai* or covering material for their breast.<sup>77</sup> The queen's upper garment was known as *sivikai*.<sup>78</sup>

### Ornaments

Tamil women were fond of wearing different types of ornaments made of gold and silver. Tali is the essential ornament for every married Hindu woman. There are special ornaments for the nose, ears, head, neck, arms, wrist, fingers and toes.

“Ramapaiyan Ammanai” refers to a number of ornaments such as “Seeni Sarapalli,” Virathandai, Kalkattu Mothirams, Muthumani, Thangakadayam, Muthukadukkan, Neelakadukkam, Aali pathakkam, Kaivalai.<sup>79</sup> Some men of the Maravaras are accustomed to lengthen the ear lobes to the extent of six or seven inches wear different kinds of jewels. Some women wear necklace more than an inch wide, set with rubies emeralds and other Precious stones.<sup>80</sup>

The ear is the most be jeweled part of a woman. Ear-rings (Thodu) *Mukkutti* (Noseornament) Toe-ring (Minchi) Anklets (Thandai) and *Kolusus* are the common ornaments of the women. The Nattukottai women wear heavy ornaments. The Nadar women neckles, bracelets, rings and gold chains: The Muslim women wear heavy anklets but this custom is disappearing. The Kallar woman decorated themselves with ornaments made of silver different colours of beads called *karugamani*, worn by unmarried Kallar woman.<sup>81</sup> The Maravars *tali* size and shape varied from each sect. Sembunattu Maravars used one *tali* with *pavalam*, Kodayam Kottai Maravars used big cubic size *tali*, whereas the Siruthalikattu Maravars used a small flat *tali*.

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<sup>77</sup> Mantaipal, 85.

<sup>78</sup> Pillai, K.K., History of Tamilnadu Her people and Culture, Government of Tamilnadu, p.94.

<sup>79</sup> Kamalaiah, K.C., Ramappayyan Ammanai, Chennai, 1980, pp.31-40.

<sup>80</sup> Dutois, Abbe J.A., Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, New delhi, 1982, p.343.

<sup>81</sup> Somale, Ramanatha Puram Mavattam, Chennai, 1972, p. 207.

## Cosmetics

Women paid special attention to cosmetics and maintained longhair. They decorated their hair with flowers. The use of pearl string and ribbon was very common. Bathing and cleaning the body with water using oily substances and pastes before bathing, drying the body by fragrant powders and applying *pottu* on their forehead were common practices among the well to do. They also applied saffron or musk to their breasts in winter.<sup>82</sup> The women wore *kuppi*, *Manmatam* or musk and civet is used both by men and women for smearing over their body and garments.<sup>83</sup>

## Amusements

The people have fewer amusements. A game which is peculiar to this region and one of the very few manly sports which survives in southern India was the Jallikattu. The Jallikattu begins at Pongal and goes on till the end of May. The village drama (*Theru koothu*) is the most important amusement. The plot is generally taken from the Ramayana or the Mahabharatha or other classics. The life of Rama, the wanderings and sufferings of the Pandavas and their consort of the patient Draupati, etc, are the principal themes of perennial interest. Cock fights and quail fights are also favourite games in this region. Other amusements are hunting, fishing, swimming, music and dance. *Silambam* was a martial game played with bamboo sticks by the youth to exhibit their prowess.

Among the women *kummi* and *kolattam* were famous, *aintamkal* (Chotankal) was a game in which a woman would throw up five stones in to air and catch them by changing the direction of hands. Pallankuli was a game played by two with a board with two rows of little pits in to which a certain number of seeds were dropped in

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<sup>82</sup>Nilakanda Sastri, K.A., The Cultural History of the Tamil, Madras, 1975, p.95.

<sup>83</sup>Tiruvilayadal Puranam, 2496.

succession. The dance form of the fortune teller or gypsy is widely known in the Ramnad area is known as Koravanji.<sup>84</sup>

## Music

For all public and festive occasions music remained indispensable. Music has a longer unbroken and continuously evolving tradition.<sup>85</sup> Imitation of nature and invention of musical instruments and their use is a unique achievement in the cultural history of mankind.<sup>86</sup> To indicate the dawn of the day *nagara* or big kettledrum and other musical instruments like conch, *dhundhubi* etc. were played.<sup>87</sup> *Dhundhubi* or *kutamula* is monofacial instrument, which was used on special; occasions like war and temple festivals. It is referred to in the literature as *perior murasu*.<sup>88</sup> In the Ramanathaswamy temple at Rameshwaram, a *Sekkandi* was played to indicate the dawn of the day and it continues till this day.<sup>89</sup> It is also called Jayaganta. They were very familiar with the war songs. When they strike up their music as sign that they are about to give battle it would seem as if the heavens must fall.<sup>90</sup>

## Marriage

Among all the castes and communities of Sethupathi region, marriage was considered as the most important ceremony, but the details vary from community to community and caste to caste. In all the social groups' monogamous marriage was

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<sup>84</sup>Kurtralakkuravanji, 1-6.

<sup>85</sup>Ramanathan,S., "The Musical Heritage of the Tamils", Cultural Heritage of the Tamils, International Institute of Tamil Studies, p.60.

<sup>86</sup>Nirmala Kumari, Y., Social Life as reflected in the Sculptures and Paintings of the Later Vijayanagara Period,1500-1650, Madras, 1995, p.57.

<sup>87</sup>Sugasaptati, 2-254.

<sup>88</sup>Vatpokki Ula, 116-7.

<sup>89</sup>Sethuraman,G., Rameswaram Temple, History, Art and Architecture, Madurai, 1998, p.201.

<sup>90</sup>Robert Sewell, A Forgotten Empire, Reprint, New Delhi, 1995, p.333.

widely prevailed and was a welcome one. Among the ruling class, polygamy was common but rare among the low class, the reason being their economic inability.

Marriage had been regarded as a sacred ritual. The divine marriage is regarded as a paradigm of human marriage.<sup>91</sup> It was the important and most engrossing event in the life. An unmarried man has no social status and was treated as useless member of society. He was not consulted on any important subject and no work of any consequences might be given to him.<sup>92</sup>

The role of maternal uncle in a marriage was important. Maternal uncle's acceptance makes the family for preliminary arrangements for the marriage. The horoscopes of the prospective bride and groom ensure that the stars offered no insurmountable obstacle to their union. On the proper moment for the marriage the date and time for the ceremony was fixed accordingly. Nitchayathartham was one of the ceremonies before marriage. Nitchayathartham would confirm the marriage date, time and location. Some of Sethupathi rulers married many wives. Kilavan Sethupathi married 47 wives. Thiru udaya Thevar alias Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi married three hundred and sixty wives.

### **Rendering Justice**

During the reign of the Sethupathi the way of rendering justice and punishment was very proper. On some occasions Sethupathis would permit the government officials to have the responsibility of awarding punishment. Sadaika Thevar I(1605-1621) during his reign if at all any crime would take place at Rameshwaram, had entrusted the authority of enquiring and awarding punishment to

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<sup>91</sup> David, D., Shulman, Tamil Temple Myths, New Jersey, 1980, p.138.

<sup>92</sup>Dubois, Abbe, J.A. op.cit., p.205.

the Kariyakarar of the temple called Ramanatha Pandaram.<sup>93</sup> It was during the period of Kilavan Sethupathi, the granddaughter called Veerayee of Veramooan had an illegal relationship with an Agamudaian called Naiyunukutti Servai and became pregnant. The entire relatives reprimanded her and so she committed suicide. All belonging to the Valaiyar community went to the king with Naiyunu Kutti Servai and pleaded with the king. Though the community of the Agamudaians served as Dalavoyas and on some occasions married their women to the king, the king without taking in to consideration that they were the close relatives, rendered justice to the Valayars, by means of the capital punishment.<sup>94</sup> There was also another incident which showed how the Sethupathi showed no partiality in rendering justice. It was during the reign of Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1710-1725) that the devotees would cross the sea through the ferry to Rameshwaram for the sake of all the devotees coming to Rameshwaram the king nominated Dhanda Thevar as the governor of the island of Rameshwaram to operate the ferries from the Mandabam ferry department to the bank of Pamban and from the inn of Pamban to Rameshwaram and make him render facilities for the travelers. Dhanda Thevar had already married the daughter of the king. In course of time in the meanwhile Dhanda Thevar had informed the travelers that he would provide them with more road facilities from Pamban to Rameshwaram and then collected small amount as donation from them. On coming to know that Dhanda Thevar had collected money without his permission, the king became extremely angry and considered it as a deed against God Shiva. Without considering the fact that he was his son-in-law the king gave the verdict of death to him. Just like Manuneethi Chola he granted the punishment of death, so he was called

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<sup>93</sup>ARE, A 34 of 1947. Dalavoy Sethupathi Katha Deviar, Rameshwaram Copper Plate, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Museum, Ramanathapuram, 1610, pp.1-2.

<sup>94</sup>Raghunatha Kilavan Sethupathi, Palisathana Copper Plate, Ramanathapuram Moopanan Community, 1691.

by all the people Manu neethi Sethupathi. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the tendency to render justice without partiality helped them to insist on establishing the social justice and this kind of social contribution was made by all the kings.

During the reign of Sethupathi for the people of Tamil Nadu, Tamil Gurumars and for the people of the North, Nayanmars of Arya Sabbha were appointed to conduct *pujas* and distribute *prasadhams* to gods. Of all the *theerthams* at Rameshwaram, Laxmanatheertham was supposed to be the greatest for all the people. So they used to bathe in the Laxmana Theertham. Since many liked to bathe in this *Theertham* the income was on the increase. With the result a dispute started between the Gurumars of the Maha sabha and the Nayanmars of the Arya Sabha and this dispute was taken to the Sethupathi. Sivamuthu KumaraVijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi (1735-1748) did not investigate the case. On behalf of the king, in front of the higher officials such as *thalakartham, pradhani, periya kattalai, chathira maniakkaran*, the case was enquired by the Naduvars of all kinds of the people belonging to the different castes and religions such as Prohitham, Chinayan, Upasarvadamayan, Devipattinam Venkyiappan, Rameshwaram Thimanachariyar, Subramania Kavirayar, Kadalthurai Ramanatha Pillai, Attavanai Subramania Pillai, Chuvarai Sankaran Chettiar, Thirumalai Chettiar, Suriya Narayanachettiar, Vangaru Chettiar, Rameshwaram komutty Ramu Chetti, Alipuli Rauthar, Uthama Panikkan and Mayileri Nadar were nominated by the king to get the case properly enquired to give justice. The case was related to Hindu temple at Rameshwaram but the Muslim Alipuli Rauthar was nominated as the Naduvar by the king which showed how the Sethupathi was without partiality for any religion. At that time Nadar community was looked down and treated very lower than the Pallars but the king without partiality for any caste nominated Mayileri Nadar from the Nadar community as the Naduvar

(Justice). It showed how the Sethupathi in the 18th century had nominated those irrespective of caste, religion and creed to administer fair justice to the people.<sup>95</sup>

### **Mutts**

Many mutts were established in Sethu Nadu to kindle the flame in the hearts of the people about gods. They expounded the doctrines of Saivism and Vaishnavism. During the period of Sethupathi most of the mutts depended upon Saivism. The mutts which were established at Paramakkudi alone depended upon the religion of Vaisnavism. Mostly from those mutts, water and butter milk were offered to the passersby and the travellers from the Thiruvadudhurai; daily *puja* was conducted for Maheshwar and meals were given to the people. Likewise for all the mutts at Sethu Nadu certain towns were granted as subsidies. Koothan Sethupathi in 1631 had donated Puliangudi as a subsidy for the Masilamanipandara Madam which was located at Rameshwaram. Thirumalai Sethupathi in 1671 had donated all the lands at Kothamangalam such as Puravu, Nanchai, Punchai, Aenthal, Kutham, Mavadai, Pattam, Padugai, Thitu, Maram, Paasi, Pallu, parai and all the rights to the Thevarayan mutt which was located at the village called Melaperungkarai.<sup>96</sup> In 1670 Thirumalai Sethupathi had donated Kamuthi for the Pandarinadha mutt, situated at Siddhartha Neinthai and also for the Annadhana mutt located at Kamuthi.

During the period of Kilavan Sethupathi, called Raghunatha Sethupathi for the Annadhana mutt which was located at Rameshwaram Nallukkurichi was granted as donation including all aenthals water bodies all kinds of lands lying there and the

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<sup>95</sup> Sivamuthu Kumara Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Rameshwaram Copper Plate, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Museum, Ramanathapuram, 1746, pp.1-2.

<sup>96</sup> Thirumalai Raghunatha Sethupathi, Kothankulam Copper Plate, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Museum, Ramanathapuram, 1671, p.2.

revenue income.<sup>97</sup> In 1692 for the Murugappa mutt located at Thiruporkottai, the towns such as Pakaiyani and Pranthani were granted by the king Kilavan Sethupathi as donation.<sup>98</sup> Likewise for the mutt which was situated on the sea shore of the northern side of the Sethumadai in 1693 Kilavan Sethupathi had donated eight villages such as Sudara Pandian Pattinam, Konthalan Kottai, Ponnukku Meendan, Chirukavayal, Karisalkulam, Yetticheri, Marungoor and Udhaiyanatha Samuthiram.<sup>99</sup>

In 1713, Muthuvairavanatha Sethupathi had donated a village called Pinnaniyarenthal to the Moorthy Mutt situated at Alagarkulam and Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi had donated in 1718 a village called Poovali to the Pandara mutt at Utharai and Sivakumara Muthu Raghunatha Sethupathi had donated a town called Chithatti to the Kasi mutt which was situated at the Thalimarungoor.<sup>100</sup> Chella Muthu Vijayaraghunatha Sethupathi had donated a piece of land to sow ten *kalams* of paddy grain to the Pallar Ulaganadi, belonging to that place, in order to make him repair and maintain at the town called Charuvareindhral nearer to Thiruvadana. Besides for every *kudi* or family an order was issued by the king to grant two *padi* of paddy grain to the Ambalakkarrar and the Kanakkar. This was an example to show how the Sethupathi acted without being partial to any caste. It was because the king had issued an order to the one who had belonged to the Pallar community to repair the mutt which showed how the king Sethupathi had acted without showing partiality to any caste.<sup>101</sup> Muthu Ramalinga Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi in 1768 had donated a

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<sup>97</sup>Raghunatha Kilvan Sethupathi, Nallukurichi Copper Plate, Tamilnadu Government Archaeological Museum, Ramanathapuram, 1691, p.2.

<sup>98</sup>Raghunatha Kilvan Sethupathi, Thiruporkottai Copper Plate, Thiruvadurthurai Aathinam, Thiruvaduthurai, 1692, p.2.

<sup>99</sup>Kamal, S.M., Sethupathi Mannar Chepedukal, Ramanathapuram, 1992, p.293.

<sup>100</sup>Ramanathapuram Samasthana Records. Kamal. S.M., op.cit., p.135.

<sup>101</sup>Sellamuthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Saaru voranendal Copper Plate, Saru Kani Sivan Kovil, 1755, p.2, ARE, A, 2 of 1943.

village called Anuchagudi nearer to the Rajasingamangalam to the Annadhanna madam at the village called Vedhalai.<sup>102</sup> In 1782 to a mutt called Nagatchi a town called Periya RamaThevar Aeinthal was granted as donation to Purushothama Pandithar for the purpose of maintenance.<sup>103</sup> This was how the Sethupathi had donated to all the mutts which were under their jurisdiction and with which all the government officials were allowed to carry out the repair work. On some occasions, they granted donation to certain individuals to get the mutts activated very well. It was how the Sethupathi removed the hunger of the poor which was considered as a social contribution made by them.

#### **Annachathiram (alm house)**

During the reign of the Sethupathis the people lived happily without hunger. The Sethupathis had established many inns for the sake of providing food for all the travelers every day who used to come on Sethupathi Yathira to Rameshwaram from the northern part of Chola Mandalam to the eastern way along the sea shore leading to Rameshwaram and from the northern part of Then Nallaichemai called Vembar to the eastern way leading to Sayalkudi, Uttharakosa Mangai and the eastern way leading to Rameshwaram, on the sides of the roads *annachathiram* were established and on every day food was supplied twice to the people. Thirumalai Sethupathi established at Thiruchuli Pidari Chathiram and granted a village called Chithaneinthal as donation in 1665. Likewise Thirumalai Sethupathi established at Rameshwaram a *chathiram* called Ambatta madam and granted as donation a town called Arigudi. Killavan Sethupathi in 1703 established a *chathiram* at Devipattinam and granted the villages

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<sup>102</sup>MuthuRamalinga vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Anichakudi Copper Plate, Government Museum, Egmore, Chennai, 1768, p.2.

<sup>103</sup>Muthu Ramalingavijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Thiruppullani Desikar House, Thiruppullani, 1782, pp.1-2.

like Charuguvarpatty, Thenpothuvakudi Adarnthana kottai as donation; besides in 1710, he established a mutt called Puthumadam and he granted the income from the half of the town for getting it activated. In 1713, Thiru Udaiya Thevar alias Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi granted as donation the towns like Vazhamavoor, Melavayal to the Thonithurai mutt and half of what had to be paid to the government as income was also granted by him.

During the period of Muthukumara Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi in 1734 Kilavaneri a town was offered as donation to SharMusha Bapsha, the son of Sardhar Vesali for conducting *annadhanam* at the mosque called Eesha Pallivasal.<sup>104</sup> It was during the period of Shivakumara Muthu Raghunatha Sethupathi in 1740 the *pradhani* of Sethupathi, Vairavan Servai built a chathiram at Pamban and from the income of the towns like Manakudi, Kaaran, Vellariodai, Iruthira Nadu, Tharavai, Thamarai Kulam and Manarkudi, half had been donated towards the maintenance of the *chathiram*. Siva Kumara Vijayaraghunatha Sethupathi had granted the village called Pethaneindhal in 1743 as donation to the *chathiram* which was established by Natchinagappa Chettiar at Paramakkudi then in 1748 Sethupathi granted as donation the town called Kumari Einthal and the half of what had been got from the village annual income was also offered by him to the Nandhagopal Chathiram built by the Pannaiyars at Rameshwaram. Sivakumara Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi donated a village called Theloor to Akkal Madam, the village Siddharkottai to Melakopuravasl at Rameshwaram, then the towns like Kottaiyur and Thirupalakudi to the *chathiram* established by Sundara doss. The *pradahani* of the Sethupathi had established a *chathiram* at Thirupulani for which ChellaMuthu Raghunatha Sethupathi had donated in 1756 the town called Kanchirangulam. Then the king had established a chathiram

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<sup>104</sup>Kumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Esa Pallivasal Copper plate, Pudumadam Village, Ramanathapuram, 1734, p.2.

called chella Boobalam for which he donated the towns like Vellamarichukatti, China Raghunathapuram, Naiyna Maraikan, Kumbaaram, Irumani, Kodikulam. During his reign a *chathiram* was established at the town called Attrangarai for which a village Nagarikathan was donated,<sup>105</sup> then at Naghanatha Samuthiram a *chathiram* was established for which a village called Elanthai was offered as donation, then a *chathiram* was built at the town called Kaduguchanthai for which the town was offered as donation. The *prathani* of Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi called Pitchai Pillai established at Alanganoor a *chathiram* for which in 1769 the king offered the annual income of a village Kaluvancheri as donation and the half of that annual income of the Alanganoor as donation. Then at Thiruppullani a *chathiram* called Purushothama Pandithar Chathiram was established for which Muthu Ramalinga Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi in 1782 had donated a town called Kaluneer Mangalam for feeding the Brahmins.<sup>106</sup>

The Sethupathi had established many *chathirams* for feeding the Sethu yathira devotees and common people; they also donated many villages to the *chathirams* established by the individuals. This was how all the Sethupathis had established at villages *chathirams* for feeding the Sethu yathra devotees and common people they also donated many villages to the *chathirams* established by individuals for smoothly getting them activated. They not only donated to the Hindu religion but also granted as donation to the mosques of the Muslims without showing any difference for religion. They got the smooth functioning of all the *chathirams* and thus rendered contribution very well for the society. It revealed the rich cultural heritage of the Sethupathis of Ramnad.

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<sup>105</sup>Ramanathapuram Samasthana Records.

<sup>106</sup>Muthu Ramalinga Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, Kaluneermangalam Copper Plate, Thiruppullani Desikar house, 1782, pp.1-2.

*CONCLUSION*

## CONCLUSION

The kingdom of the Sethupathis' of Ramnad once remained an integral part of Tamilakam. The people in Ramnad as elsewhere in ancient Tamilakam were familiar with an occupational division of the society and were not accustomed to the traditional fourfold classification of society or *chaturvarna* system. The increased inflow of Aryans from North India and the consequent Aryan colonization ushered in a new era marked by significant socio-economic and political changes. The social background of South India totally differed from the conventional system of *varnashrama dharma* that prevailed in North India. Upto their migration, the people of Ramnad like the rest of South India appeared happy with their respective professions.

The Brahmin writers on law propounded a model of the caste system which placed them at the top and gave them the privilege of declaring the duties of other castes, including the kings. In order to proclaim their spiritual superiority and temporal welfare, they gerrymandered customs and conventions, administrative and socio-economic systems and brought the entire society under the provisions of the Sastras. The erstwhile Hindu society was divided into Idamkai and Valamkai-Left hand and Right hand groups. The social structure in the Sethupathi region was largely based on the Idamkai and Valamkai groups. The sons of the soil especially who hailed from Dravidian race became the victims of such a stratification. The people so far unaware of such a higher-lower status began to fight each other to secure the sacramental recognition of Brahmins and to come under the fold of Left hand and Right hand groups. The Brahmins kept them above such caste distinctions. The local that stood with the Brahmins emerged as the Right hand castes and the sons of the soil who stood against

the machinations of the Brahmins were treated as Left hand castes. The Right hand castes were socially, communicably, and politically more privileged. The people of the Left hand castes occupied a lower rank in the social ladder were considered inferior and weaker.

In the process of Idamkai and Valamkai disputes the Maravas played the most decisive role by virtue of their heroic and adventurous qualities. The Brahmins and the Vellalas always sought the support of the Maravas and gave them the status of Valamkai and permitted to use the symbols of Brahminhood. There after they were used against the non-caste Hindu communities who came under the Left hand castes. The hierarchy in the caste system was the result of the feeling of the superiority and inferiority of occupation. In other words the rank of any caste as high or low depends on whether the caste belong to an advanced or backward stage of culture.

The kingdom of the Sethupathis' of Ramnad bears the evidence of the rule of the Pandyas, the Cholas, the Marathas and also the British. In the beginning of the fifteenth century the kingdom of the Sethupathis' consisted of Tiruvadanaï, Paramakudi, Ramanathapuram, Kamuthi, Mudukulathur and Rameshwaram taluks under the Pandyas. It remained for a short period under the rule of the Chola Kings when Rajendra Chola brought Ramanathapuram under his territory in A.D. 1063. In A.D. 1520, the Nayaks of Vijayanagara brought this area under their control from the Pandyan dynasty. For about two centuries, the Marava chieftains the Sethupathis as the poligari chieftains of the area reigned over the territory.

In the midst of the political machinations of the internal powers and the external powers including the Pandyas, the Cholas, the Cheras, the Kalabhras, the Pallavas, the Vijayanagara, the Nayaks, the Sultanate of Delhi, the rulers of Sri Lanka, the Nawabs of Carnatic, the Marathas, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the

English, the Marava chieftains especially the Sethupathis of Ramnad succeeded to withstand the trials and tribulations for more than two centuries. The Nayak ruler Muthukrishnappa Nayak appointed Sadaikka Thevar in 1605 as protector and guardian of the pilgrims to Sethusamudram and Rameshwaram. The protector of Sethusamudram was called as Sethupathi. SadaikkaThevar remained a loyal subordinate of the Nayaks. Sadaika Thevar (1605-1621) who continued as a chieftain under Muthukrishnappa Nayaka, the Governor of Madura and permitted him to look after the security of the Maravar region and thereby he became the first Sethupathi of Ramnad. His period of sixteen years of administration became memorable through the peace and tranquility. He emerged as the chief of the poligars and extended protection to the pilgrims who visited Rameshwaram. Apart from giving protection the Sethupathis rendered religious services to the Ramanathaswamy temple at Rameshwaram.

Koothan Sethupathi Sadiaka Thevar's eldest son succeeded to the throne on the death of his father in 1621. His administration from 1621 to 1635 remained comparatively quiet. The reign of Dalavoy Sethupathi alias Sadaika Thever II (1635 – 1646) became an era of civil war and internal disturbances led by Koothan Sethupathi's natural son Thambi Thever with the support of Thirumala Nayak. Sadaika Thevar II gathered a large force assisted by the 72 Palayagars. He sought the help of the Dutch while Thirumala Nayak got the support of the Portuguese. Though Thirumala Nayak succeeded to appoint Thambi Thevar in the place of Sadaika Thevar II but due to the internal compulsions Thirumala Nayak himself was compelled to restore Sadaika Thevar II. SadiakkaThevar constructed a new Chokkanatha temple at Rameshwaram. He continued till his death and was followed by Raghunatha Thevar alias Thirumala Sethupathi.

Raghunatha Sethupathi remained sincere and loyal to the Thirumalai Nayak. He assisted Thirumalai Nayak by defeating the Muslims under Kutb Khan and the poligar of Ettapuram. In appreciation of the help Thirumalai Nayak gave him the freedom of celebrating Navarathri festival at Pogalur, the capital city. Thirumala Nayak with the support of Raghunatha Sethupathi and the Kallar tribes routed the invading force of Bijapur and also stood against the hostile combination of Vijayanagara and Mysore. Raghunatha Sethupathi successfully annexed Devakottai and Aranthangi. He helped the Nayak in his war against Mysore army. Thirumala Nayaka was greatly pleased with his vassal and gave him the title “Thirumalai Sethupathi and also the protector of the Queens *thali* (the sacred string)” because he had saved Thirumala’s life. He also gave him the privilege of using the lion faced palanquin peculiar to the royal house of Madurai, relieved him for ever, from the duty of paying tribute and added to his dominions large villages of Thiruppuvanam, Thiruchuly and Pallimadam.

Sethupathi’s loyalty towards the Nayaks came to an end with the demise of Thirumalai Nayak. Soon Raghunatha Sethupathi recaptured all the forts and places from the Nayaks and became an independent ruler. He patronized art and literature. He made Tamil and Telugu as official languages of his court. He encouraged Tamil poets namely Alagiya Chitramabala Kavirayar and Amirtha Kavirayar. He constructed the Second Praharam of the Ramanathaswami temple in Rameshwaram. The famous poet Thayumanavar spent his last days under the patronage of Raghunatha Sethupathi. After Raghunatha Sethupathi both Surya Thevar and Athana Thevar were in power for a very short duration.

After the death the chief contenders to the throne including Raghunatha Thever, an army chief and Tadiya Thevar, the poligar of Siruvali the ascendancy of

Athana Raghunatha Sethupathi became easy. Raghunatha Sethupathi alias Kilavan Sethupathi (1674 – 1710) was the son of the fifth wife of Rajasuriya Thevar. She was a Kondayan Kottai Marava woman. So Raghunatha Thevar was not allowed to be the legal heir to the throne. But he succeeded to annihilate the oppositions from all quarters and emerged himself as unquestioned ruler of the Marava kingdom.

Kilavan Sethupathi became the greatest ruler among the Marava kings. He was helpful to Chokkanatha Nayak. The Nayak king conferred him a title *Para Rajakesari* (Lion to alien kings). Kilavan Sethupathi liberated the Marava country from the control of Madurai Nayak. After defeating Rani Mangammal's army, he became independent in 1707. He shifted his head quarters from Pogalur to Ramnad. Kilavan Sethupathi established the Nalukottai palayam at Sivaganga and appointed Udaya Thevar as Governor. He served well for the development of Hinduism. He endowed villages to a temple at Thiruvadanaï and Kalaiyar Koil. He constructed a fort around the Ramanathapuram, the capital city. He constructed a dam across the Vaigai. He initiated a series of welfare measures for the betterment of the people. His rule was marked as the golden age of the Maravas.

Kilavan Sethupathi demolished the mudwalls that surrounded Ramanathapuram and erected a stone fortress which consisted of a strong wall twenty seven feet high and five feet thick surrounded by a deep ditch. At the centre of the fort was built the royal palace which still exists with its high extensive buildings. The palace is also surrounded by a high stone wall. He raised the strength of the army considerably and it was possible for him to raise an army of thirty to forty thousand within short notice. After securing his position Kilavan Sethupathi won the admiration of the people by his acts of benevolence and chivalry thus Kilavan became the complete master of Ramnad. Kilavan Sethupathi was succeeded by Bhavani Shankara

Thevar and Thanda Thevar. After Kilavan Sethupathi the kingdom was divided into two new. Sivaganga assumed the status of an independent kingdom. Vijaya Raghunatha was said to have married no less than three hundred and sixty wives and to have had as many as a hundred children born to him by them and by various concubines and yet he left no heirs of his body. His period became memorable through the conduct of a large scale sati of his wives on his funeral pyre.

He was succeeded by his son-in-law Sundraswara Raghunatha Sethupathi popularly known as Thanda Thevar. The Tondaiman sued for peace and obtained it. The victorious general then laid siege to Ramnad and after encountering resistance entered it. Bhavani Sankara Thevar became Sethupathi and Thanda Thevar was put to death. The successful campaign of Thanjavur against Bahvani Sankara led to the partition of the Marava Country. After this success Kattaya Thevar was proclaimed Sethupathi. But Marava Country was parcelled out into five portions in 1733. Kattaya Thever was succeeded by his son Siva Kumara Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Thever in 1736. Racka Thevar and placed on the throne Sella Thevar alias Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi in 1749.

In the Carnatic wars between Mohammed Ali and Chanda Sahib in which the French were bearing Chanda Sahib and the English the former, Sethupathi first took sides with Chanda sahib. But subsequently in 1755 he sent a deputation to the English apologising for his conduct and requested to be received in to an alliance with the English. He offered to cede to the company two settlements on the Marava Coast which would greatly facilitate their communications with Thirunelveli where the poligar wars were being fought. Col. Heron was so convinced about the desirability of accepting the offer that he signed an agreement with the Sethupathi without consulting the presidency authorities.

The Sethupathi of Ramanathapuram and Rajah of Sivagangai paid a visit to Col. Heron of Madurai. They offered to furnish 5000 of their troops for the service with the Nawab and to cede two sea ports to the English as the price of the acceptance of their offer of alliance. The Sethupathi's ideas were to subdue the trouble some palayakkarars of Thirunelveli with English help. But when Thanjavur and Pudukottai had done with the Sethupathi the Thirunelveli campaign had an abrupt end. The Dutch were trying hectically at that period to secure a foot hold in the country. They managed to win the friendship of Sella Thevar and presented to him articles of great value. They sought his permission to establish trading settlemtns in his country. In 1759, Sethupathi granted the required permission by entering in to a treaty with them. Sethupathi's permission to establish a factor at Kilakarai and to pay their customs and duties at a rate lower than that fartories and enclosed them with thorns but built in forts. The Dutch violated this clause after some time and consequently found themselves prisoners of the Sethupathi in his capital. They were released after they apologized for their act. It appeared that the Dutch were maintaining cordial relationship with the Sethupathi. Sella Thevar breathed his last in the year 1762 and was succeeded by his sister's son Muthuramalinga Sethupathi who ruled during 1763 – 1772 and 1782 – 1795. He was barely two months old when he was proclaimed as the Sethupathi. He acended the throne and Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha, the uncle of Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi assumed the office of Regent. His period became very turbulent through the regular conspiracies and machinations of the internal and external powers.

Mohammed Ali, the Nawab of Arcot wanted the assistance against Yusuf Khan. The first Anglo-Mysore war (1767-1769) provided the opportunity for Haider Ali to seek their support. The Dutch East India Company, the bitter rivals of the

English East India Company also sought their support. A treaty was signed on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 1767, granting share of the Fishery Coast from the Madurai Coast. It transferred the possession of Pamban to prohibit the entry of foreigners. In addition to this the Dutch were given permission to repair for some tax concessions.

In February 1771 Thuljaji, the Raja of Thanjavur marched to Ramnad at the command of a large detachment, whose strength was given as 4,000 horses and 50,000 sepoys. Although the march was under the pretext of recapturing the territory around Hanumanthagudi and areas around in his target was Ramnad itself. He won the favour of the Dutch on the eastern coast who became hostile and denied the right of Sethupathi in the pearl rights and ceded the port of Thondi in Sivagangai. But the Madras Governor of Fort St. George suggested restraint from hostilities pointing out to the Raja the impropriety of making himself the judge of the charges he himself made against the Maravas.

Further with a view to winning the favour of the Nawab, the Sethupathi acknowledged the Wallajah overlordship over Ramnad. Mohammed Ali promised his protection and asked the Sethupathi to stand firm, but did nothing perhaps because by mutual rivalry for his taking advantage of the situation. The Thanjavur forces in the disguise of Nawab's marching tried to help Maravas and advanced close to the border post of Vattunatham and made a surprise attack. Haider Ali also promised help for the liberation of the Marava States.

Mohammed Ali could not tolerate the quarrels that went on among the rulers whom he thought were his tributaries. So he attacked Thanjavur and reduced the Raja to submission. Then he turned his attention to Ramnad. The Sethupathi did not send any help to the Nawab in his wars with Thanjavur probably as a retaliatory measure. The Nawab wrote to the council that Sethupathi had occupied circar villages and

harboured the most notorious robbers in their forests and that he had permitted the Dutch to establish factories without his consent and refused to support in his expedition to Thanjavur. He further added that Sethupathi did not pay any tribute and ascended the throne without his consent. Without examining the merits of the case the Madras Government actively supported the Nawab's policy and sent a force under Col. Joseph Smith. He was joined by the Tondaiman's forces also and the combined forces entered Ramnad. In May 1772 the campaign resumed the combined forces of the Nawab and the Company led by Joseph Smith marched on to Ramnad. The fort was equipped with heavy cannon and fifty – eight guns and surrounded by open space and forty – four bastions and a ditch. The combined forces of the British and the Nawab killed Vaduganatha Thever and annexed Sivagangai on 25 June 1772. The massacre of the royal family of Sivagangai echoed in the British parliament in London. Sir Robert Blatcher condemned it and an enquiry was ordered against Major Abraham Bounjour and Col. Smith.

Sethupathi was asked to pay attribute of Rs. 1, 75,000 to the Nawab of the Nawab on the basis of his annual revenues being five lakhs of rupees. In the beginning Sethupathi showed a disposition to be faith full to the Nawab. But once he got control over his territory, he began to show his rebellious tendency. While this tendency was growing, he interferred in the affairs of Sivaganga country, for getting that it was also another Marava state. He fought with the Marathas instead of forming an alliance with them against their common enemies including the Nawab and the English. The reason might be that the Marathas did not belong to the royal house of Sivaganga.

In the course of depradations and lootings of the southern territories Haider Ali had made one Kattu Raja, a Nayak prince as the ruler of Madurai. The Sethupathi

thought that with the help of this prince he could regain his lost independence. But Sethupathi could not give the lead as he was under the constant vigil of him. He could not even count on the support of the Dutch for in A.D. 1785 they had given effect to the treaty of friendship which they concluded with the English on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 1783. So he had to seek the help of the French. On the 10<sup>th</sup> May 1787 Sethupathi's Diwan Sankara Narayana Pillai wrote to the Governor General of the French in India asking for help for the independence of the States of Madurai and Ramnad.

It made Mohammed Ali and the British to intervene in the internal matters of the Sethupathi. Landon, the Company's collector of poligar *peshkush* directed both to stop the war. But Sethupathi who developed an independent spirit did not pay any heed to it. There upon the Nawab warned Sethupathi that his conduct would land him in lasting pain. So Sethupathi had to withdraw from further participation in war. In A.D.1792, Ramnad country was ceded through a treaty to the British government who sent Col.Martinz with forces to occupy the Marava country to maintain order and levy the annual tribute punctually from the Sethupathi. The treaty of 1792 brought the Sethupathi of Ramnad under indirect control of the Company and finally deposed of Muthramalinga Sethupathi. In the year 1795, the British East India Company deposed Muthuramalinga Sethupathi and took over the control of administration of Ramanathapuram.

When the succession question came up the British skillfully played one against the other. Sethupathi had two sisters' Mangaleswari Nachiar and Parvatha Vardhni Nachiar.The Company after a protracted enquiry decided in favour of Mangaleswar Nachiar but it took eight years to install her on the throne. Mean while the British Government at the Fort St. George administered Ramanathapuram directly.

Muthuramalinga Sethupathi, the deposed was sent to Madras. After six years he died there in 1801.

The kingdom of the Sethupathis of Ramnad remained the ancestral home of the Maravas right from the days of the Sangam Age. The people in Ramnad as elsewhere in ancient Tamilakam were familiar with an occupational division of the society and were not accustomed to the traditional fourfold classification of society or *chaturvarna* system. The increased inflow of Aryans from North India and the consequent Aryan led to a new era marked by significant socio- economic and political changes. The Brahmin writers on law propounded a model of the caste system which placed them at the top and gave them the privilege of declaring the duties of other castes, including the rulers. The society in the Sethupathi region was broadly based on caste system. It was divided in to Brahmin and non-Brahmin communities. The higher castes like the Brahmanas, Vellalars or Pillais and the Mukkulathor people were socially, communicably, and politically more privileged.

The Sethupathis of Ramnad hailed from the Mukkulathor community. They were treated as Thevar and commanded the most prominent and significant position. The Mukkulathor community which comprised of the Agamudayar, Kallar and Maravar communities played the most decisive role in the socio-political transactions of Ramnad. The Nadars, Manjaputha Chettiyars, Nattukottai Chettiyar, Vaniya Chettiyars and the Comati Chettiyar formed the emerging communities of the Sethunadu. Nattambadians or Uddaiyans, Pattunulkarar or Sowrashtra, Kavaras and Vadugas, Kavarei, Reddies, Thottians or Kambalathar, Rajus, Kammalars, Keikolans, Saliyans, Saluppans also contributed their share to betterment of Ramnad. The scheduled castes like the Pallars, Parayars, Chakkiliars, Fisherman or Paravars, Vannan, Puthara Vannan, Ambattans, Kusavan, Semman and Melakaran as the the

sons of soil constituted an part of the social fabric of Ramnad. The Sethupathis usually patronised the major religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity besides the role of Jainism and Buddhism. But Kilavan Sethupathi's treatment to Fr. John Britto rather became very harsh and cruel.

Being the land of spices and precious pearls 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.

The Sethupathis best owed special attention for the promotion of agriculture and trade since it decided the economy of the state. The Sethupathis initiated a series of measures for the welfare and betterment of their people. Better irrigation facilities were provided by conserving and preserving the water resources. The system of taxation was not arbitrary. They carried out systematic survey, issued coins and promoted trade. Lands belonging to charities and dharmasasanams including lands of mutt, jeevathana, temples, mosques and churches were exempted from taxation.

The commercial transactions both internal and external trade assumed greater importance by virtue of the goods such as clove, cardamom, jathikkai, jathipathiri, copper, lead, pannier and other kinds of cents or deodorant, sheets, elephants, horses', tobacco camphor and the glass, betel nut, types of coir, coconut, soap nut chukka, tamarind and betal nut. Keelakkarai became one of the international harbours of Sethu Nadu where business men of Arabia, China, Sri Lanka and other European countries

especially the Dutch and the English assembled to partake in the commercial transactions.

The cultural excellence of the Sethupathis with particular reference to their contributions in the field of temple art, architecture, sculpture, painting, fairs and festivals gave them a prominent place in the history of modern India. The social habits like the food, dress, family, cosmetics, ornaments, the family, amusements like music and marriage received the special attention of the Sethupathis. Sati and Devadasi System were popular among the Sethupathis. Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi was said to have married no less than three hundred and sixty wives and forty seven among them committed on the funeral pyre of their dead husband Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi.

The Sethupathis of Ramand excelled in the field of painting, temple art, architecture and sculpture. The murals on the wall represented the Gods and Goddesses and stories from epics and puranas it depicted even war and peace treaties with kings and queens. The scenes from the epics like Ramayana are portrayed in an explicit manner. The Sethupathis tried to give equal justice to all irrespective of their caste and social status. Mutts remained centres of social service. During their reign the common people lived happily without hunger. They had established many inns for the welfare of the people by providing food for all the travelers every day that used to come on pilgrimage to Rameshwaram from the different parts of the country. On the sides of the roads *annachathiram*, free feeding centres were established and on every day food were supplied twice to the people.